

Puppet Stayman

By Richard Deyerle

Most bridge players are very familiar with the Stayman convention, which is designed to find a major suit fit, which is generally superior to a no trump contract.

Bridge has been around a long time, and many bridge players have learned and use what is called Standard American bidding. There are many fine players who still use Standard American bidding. However, bridge has evolved so that many players are playing the Two Over One bidding system.

There have been many other changes over the years. In prior times one no trump openers had 16 to 18 points and were encouraged to have stoppers in all of the suits and several other restrictions. Very few bridge conventions were used and many could survive successfully playing only Stayman, transfers and Blackwood.

However, many have concluded that Two Over One is a superior bidding system. No Trump openers are having less and less points. Most are encouraged to open one no trump with a five card major, even with two doubletons and 14 and a half points. (I keep running into folks playing 11 to 14 no trump openers).

Puppet Stayman becomes an essential convention for those folks who are trying to apply the last paragraph to their games.

Why should you use Puppet Stayman? Puppet Stayman allows you to find your major suit fits in game going auctions that begin with One no trump.

Please note the following example:

Opener	Responder
♠ AKQ4	♠ J765
♥ A76	♥ KJ43
♦ Q43	♦ AK2
♣ J54	♣ 97
1 NT	3 ♣

The responder has sufficient values for game, but wants to know if his partner has a 5-card Major suit or a 4-card major suit. Puppet Stayman allows you to make those discoveries. In the above hand responder will bid three clubs, which is Puppet Stayman. In other words after you open one no trump a jump to three clubs is Puppet Stayman. Puppet Stayman asks the one no trump opener to tell the responder if he has a five or four card major.

Let us think logically together for a moment. It is commonly known that hands will generally play better when the person with the good hand plays the contract. Puppet Stayman is designed so that the No Trump opener will always get to play the hand in a game going auction.

Now let us describe the responses to Puppet Stayman. The easiest to remember is when the opener shows a five card major. If the opener has a five card major he bids it. Three hearts would tell the responder that the opener has five hearts and three spades would indicate five spades for the opener.

How many bids does that leave us free? The answer is really two since we do not want to go past three no trump if you do not have a fit in most cases.

Let us reason together, what should the no trump bidder say when he has no four or five card major? It seems reasonable to me that the opener would bid three no trump in that circumstance.

Let us go back to the example above. Opener does have a four card major but no five card major. What bid can we use? Obviously only three diamonds is available. So three diamonds must indicate no five card major but one or two four card majors. So now responder has the next bid. Note that the responder has two four card majors. Remembering that we want the no trump opener to play the hand, how can we arrange our next bid for the no trump bidder to play the hand? Another question is do we want to play this contract in a major suit contract or three no trump?

Whenever a major suit fit is available you should lean that way. Can you reason what bid we should make? The answer is four diamonds. Since we can handle whatever four card major the no trump opener has we bid four diamonds to indicate we have two four card majors. Therefore we will be happy with whatever major the no trump opener picks. In the example shown the opener will bid four spades, ending the auction. Look closely at the cards. Is the four spade contract better than three no trump?

Let us change up the responder hand a bit. Please note the responder only has one 4-card Major suit. In this instance the opener would bid three diamonds as before. Remembering that we want the opener to play the hand how can we arrange the bidding for that to happen? To make it happen the responder rebids the Major suit, which he does not have. In this case what will responder bid? the bid will be three spades which indicates to the no trump bidder the responder has four hearts. Now it is the opener's time to bid. Is there a major suit fit? No, so the opener reverts back to three no trump.

Opener

♠ AKQ4

♥ A76

♦ Q43

♣ J54

2 ♦

Responder

♠ J87

♥ KQ43

♦ K72

♣ Q76

The following **Summary** of the rebids of the responder are outlined below and are based on the first rebid of the opener of 2 Diamonds indicating no 5-card Major suit. The responder has several options, depending on held values, to place the contract correctly and to show distribution. The concept allows the responder to use invitational rebids, show distribution, and game-forcing rebids. These rebids should be the guidelines as shown in the examples above.

Opener	Responder	Meaning
1 NT	3 ♣	Asking for a 5-card Major suit or a four card major suit. Promises at least 10 points.
3 ♦		This first response by the opener denies a 5-card Major suit but promises one or two four card major suits.
3 ♥		Shows a 5-card Heart suit. With a fit responder will raise to four hearts, otherwise bid three no trump.
3 ♠		Shows a 5-card Spade suit. With a fit responder will raise to four spades, otherwise bid three no trump.
3 NT		No five card or four card major. Responder will pass.

Opener	Responder	Meaning
3 ♦	3 ♥	Shows four spades
	3 ♠	Shows four hearts
	4 ♦	Shows four hearts and four spades
	3NT	Was looking for a five card major

The above bids are the possible responses after a rebid of three diamonds by opener. Please note that all responses assume that responder does not have enough values to consider a slam contract. If you have found this article useful please let me know. I am considering writing more articles like this one. I would appreciate your input on areas where my writing is unclear for you. Thanks a lot!