

# NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

## Chapter 05: Basic Continuations

Let us now look at the most basic ways to continue bidding once you or your partner has opened 1NT. It does not matter whether the 1NT opening is weak or strong or in between. What matters of course is the strength of the RESPONDING hand, because it is the responding hand that makes most of the important decisions. That is because the 1NT opening is fairly well defined, both in shape, and strength. Let us first cover STAYMAN again, because that is common to all the systems. The continuations after Stayman, however, may vary depending on whether you play transfers or not. Discuss that once you decide to play transfers.

Responding to 1NT. We have covered the WEAK takeouts, both when you play a natural takeout system, and when you play transfers. Now we need to cover the situations when you are strong enough, as responder, to at least invite game. In Acol, with a weak 1NT opening, that means at least 11 HCP. With a 15-17 1NT, that means at least 8 HCP.

Firstly, if you have a four card major, you should always use Stayman in preference to anything else. That is because you will find that playing in a 4-4 major suit fit will make at least one trick more than playing the same hand in No Trumps. So, if you're going to go to game, or invite game, look for your major suit fit first. Otherwise it may be lost, as you will observe for yourself if you choose NOT to use Stayman.

### **INVITING GAME**

**Stayman:** If you use Stayman, and partner does not show a fit for the major you are interested in, a bid of 2NT now implies that you had enough to raise No Trumps as an invitation to game, but wanted to know if you had a fit in your major suit or suits. That is why you should NOT bid Stayman unless

- a) you have one or more four card majors, and
- b) you won't get too high if you get the response you don't want.

Generally, a sequence involving Stayman and then a bid of 2NT indicates a balanced hand with only a FOUR card major rather than five. However, with a five card major and an INVITATIONAL hand, playing natural bidding, you have no option but to use Stayman, and then bid your five card major at the THREE Level. Thus, a sequence like 1NT-2C-2S-3H shows, in basic Acol, 11-12 HCP and a balanced hand with FIVE hearts, inviting game in hearts or No Trumps.

With a balanced hand and no interest in either major, a bid of 2NT is invitational to 3NT, asking the opener to go to 3NT with a maximum, or pass with a minimum. That is if you are playing a natural system and NO transfers.

**Extended Stayman.** While you can probably live without it, extended Stayman is not a difficult concept to learn and remember, and can be a useful tool when the need for it arises. In the sequence 1NT-2C-2D, what would you understand if the responder now bid THREE DIAMONDS? As you can be forgiven for thinking, such a bid, in the context of Stayman and continuations, does not make sense. First of all you asked for a major, partner denied one with a 2D bid, and here you are raising partner's artificial bid! Surely if you wanted to play in DIAMONDS, you would have passed 2D, if you wanted to invite game you would have bid 2NT, and if you wanted to look for a diamond fit in the first place, you would have bid 3D immediately over 1NT.

Since it has no logical meaning, the bid of 3D has been added in as 'Extended Stayman'. Yes, you STILL want to know about the opener's majors, but you want to find their THREE card major now, since they must have ONE of them for them to open 1NT (otherwise the hand can not be balanced). 3D, then, is a repeat ask for the majors, and the opener shows the three card major in the normal way, 3H if hearts, 3S if spades and only two hearts. This can be further extended to a bid of 3NT to show both majors and a maximum if you want to do that. Whatever extensions your PARTNERSHIP want to add is fine, as long as both of you know what you're doing!

## **TRANSFERS:**

When playing transfers over a 1NT opening, it is still useful to keep Extended Stayman as an option. That won't go astray, but there are other ways to bid hands once you play transfers, which is why most of the so called experts play them. Plus many others who, I am afraid to say, really haven't a clue what transfers are about.

### **Inviting with transfers:**

The invitational bidding using STAYMAN as a priority, and a 2NT bid after the response, is the same whether you play transfers or not. However, with balanced hands and a FIVE card major, the difference between natural bidding and transfers becomes apparent. With an invitational hand and a five card major, when playing transfers, you simply transfer to the major and bid 2NT. That specifically shows a balanced hand with a five card major and a game invitation.

When responder bids 2NT after the transfer has been made by opener, opener can PASS with a minimum, choose to play in the major suit with a hand more suited to trump play, or raise to game in No Trumps or the suit with a maximum. Generally the 1NT opener SHOULD choose to play in the 5-3 major suit fit, and in No Trumps with only a 5-2 fit. Simple, really, but it is astonishing how many people who think they play transfers don't even know this much!

Other invitational sequences can occur when playing transfers, some sequences which are not possible when playing a natural system over 1NT. But then again, sometimes it's better not using transfers, and not only that, there are other things that CAN be developed that can help your bidding when you open 1NT. So, don't take it as gospel truth that transfers are the answer to all your prayers. They are not, but if you decide to try them, then I suggest you use them properly.

More on transfers at a later stage.

## **FORCING TO GAME**

Forcing to game when partner has opened 1NT is a very straightforward exercise, but even so, seems to go wrong for some people!

Stayman we have already covered earlier. It is the same in game forcing situations as it is in invitational sequences.

**The ‘natural’ way.** Without a transfer system, if you have a five card major and enough points for game, just jump to the Three Level in it and opener will either raise it to game with three or four card trump support, or bid 3NT with only two of them. As simple as that! With SIX or more hearts or spades, jump to game in your suit and forget about looking for support, you know opener has at least two. If your long (6+) card suit is a MINOR, just raise to 3NT and hope for the best! With 5-5 in both majors, jump to 3S and if partner bids 3NT, bid 4H because partner **MUST** have three hearts to have only a doubleton spade. **STILL** very simple and logical.

With five hearts and four spades, jump to 3H. If opener does not have four hearts but has four spades, opener should bid 3S. Otherwise, opener raises hearts with three cards or bids 3NT with only two. A bit more complicated but still logical. The only problem arises when responder has five spades and four hearts. Jumping to 3S may elicit 3NT from opener and you won’t know if you have missed a possible 4-4 heart fit! Therefore with five spades and four hearts, use Stayman. Over a 2D response, use extended Stayman to look for three spades in partner’s hand. Such hands do not occur often enough to warrant too much thought or learning, and simple logic will enable you to bid most of them very accurately.

## **With TRANSFERS**

Bidding to the best game should be just as easy with a transfer system. With a five card major suit, just transfer to that and then bid 3NT. Opener **SHOULD** the return to the major at game level if they have three or four of them, or pass 3NT with only two. Yet I have seen this very simple sequence end in a disastrous 3NT despite a 5-4 major fit, and many, many 5-3 major suit fits ending in 3NT as well.

**MOST** 5-3 major suit fit hands that have game values should be played in the suit and not No Trumps. That is the benefit of having a trump suit. And that is why you use the transfer system in the first place, otherwise you might as well use Stayman or just jump to 3NT. I know that **SOME** hands will still fare better in No Trumps despite the 5-3 major suit fit, and that some of our experts (schmexperts) will argue black and blue that No Trumps is better. That is their prerogative, and it is also your prerogative to believe them or not. Ultimately you will make an intelligent observation for yourself and act according to what you and partner agree is best.

5-4 and 5-5 major suit hands are very easily handled using transfers. With 5S and 4H, just transfer to spades and then bid 3H. This is **FORCING**. Opener should raise to 4H with four, bid 3S with three spades and not four hearts, and bid 3NT with two spades and three hearts. You can also do that with 5-5 in the majors, or you can transfer to spades and jump to 4H. With five hearts and four spades, transfer to hearts and bid 2S. This, also, is forcing and shows five hearts and four spades. **ALL** very logical. After that, you can extend your bidding in any way you like if you want to look for anything further than game. You can also do so with the natural system as well.

I won’t be covering slam bidding in these chapters, because slam bidding is important enough to merit coverage in a separate book dealing with just that topic alone.

To finish off this chapter, let’s have a look at just one recent deal that many pairs had difficulty in bidding and playing.

Board 5 Dlr N NS VUL

♠ Q 6 2  
♥ A Q 8 3  
♦ K 9 3  
♣ J 8 5

♠ 10 7 5 4  
♥ 9 6 4  
♦ Q 6 4  
♣ A 9 3

♠ J 9 8  
♥ 10 5  
♦ J 7 5 2  
♣ Q 10 7 6

♠ A K 3  
♥ K J 7 2  
♦ A 10 8  
♣ K 4 2

This hand was badly mishandled by a number of pairs who played it. Playing Acol, North has no choice but to open 1NT. Just imagine getting doubled in a 1NT opening with THAT hand! But all was well, since it was SOUTH who had the powerhouse. In fact some Souths thought it was such a powerhouse that they immediately went into the 4C, 5C routine, some eventually managing to sign off in 5NT, others going on to 6NT. Some Souths did have the intelligence to use Stayman, and when they found the heart fit, THEY went through the 4C, 5C routine and mostly ended up in either 5H or an impossible 6H.

Then there were those Souths who added their 18 to a possible maximum of 14 and knew that with a 1NT opening in one hand and a balanced hand opposite, a combined point count of 32 at most would not be enough to make a slam a good proposition.

They therefore did NOT look for slam at all. Unfortunately, some of them reasoned that with such a strong hand and every suit covered, and the balanced nature of their hand, why bother with Stayman at all? Those Souths just bid 3NT and waited to see partner's ecstasy at seeing such a great dummy. There were just one or two Souths who knew their basic bridge and knew that masterminding the situation was not over to them. These Souths used Stayman and found that North had four hearts. They then chose what might appear to be the most timid of all the actions, by simply raising North to 4H.

Now let's see what happened with the two flat hands opposite each other, in fact the worst possible scenario for any contract, a total mirror image. Those in No Trumps received the lead of the six of clubs, and that ran to West's ace. A club was returned and when declarer hopefully tried the jack, East covered and the club suit was set up for the defence whether declarer ducked or not. The wise declarers in fact did duck and the third club was then led, removing the king. All that declarer was then able to do was cash the ten available tricks. Those who were higher than 4NT were in trouble. That, despite the fact that they had been given a club trick by the defence. Note that if the defence start with a heart or spade lead and declarer has to open up clubs, there is NO club trick for declarer at all!

You might say: what's wrong with 3NT making ten tricks? Well, have a look at the hand and see how YOU might have played it. On the same lead of a club to West's ace and a club return, declarer wins the king when East plays the queen on declarer's jack. No difference between the play so far, except that in a heart contract you would be silly to duck the queen of clubs. You could get your king ruffed out next, couldn't you?

After drawing three rounds of trumps, declarer can cash up the three spades and now give up a trick to the ten of clubs. So far, declarer has lost two tricks and can only possibly lose one more, in diamonds. But this is now the situation:

Board 5 Dlr N NS VUL

	♠	
	♥ 8	
	♦ K 9 3	
	♣ 8	
♠ 10		♠
♥		♥
♦ Q 6 4		♦ J 7 5
♣ 3		♣ 10 7
	♠	
	♥ J	
	♦ A 10 8	
	♣ 4	

When declarer exits with the eight of clubs, it really does not matter who wins the trick. The defenders have no choice but to open the diamond suit. The chances of finding the diamond honours in OPPOSITE hands are 75% so declarer plays for 'split honours'. If a LOW diamond is led by the defender on lead, declarer lets it run and covers the other defender's honour. Then, declarer finesses against the other honour. If a defender is smart enough to LEAD an honour, declarer wins that in the hand that allows a finesse against the other defender. If the defender left on lead chooses not to open up diamonds, then declarer will be on a 100% shot and able to ruff in either hand while discarding a losing diamond from the other, a simple 'ruff and slough'.

So, we see that on a CLUB lead, declarer has near enough to a 75% chance of making 5H, with NO chance of making more than 4NT. Without a club lead, and without a diamond lead, declarer can still make 100% sure of making the 4H contract, with a slightly different variation. This time, declarer draws trumps, clears spades, and cashes the top diamonds and gives up the lead by leading a third diamond. Now, the defenders must open up the CLUB suit, and whichever defender starts by leading a low club, ducking it round to either the jack or king ensures a certain club trick.

If you're still not convinced that you should look for a 4-4 fit in a major whenever you want to invite or force to game, at least it won't have been for want of trying on my part.