



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

I like to play "garbage" Stayman in my partnerships. What's your opinion of it?

Kay, Palm Beach FL

Dear Kay,

Garbage Stayman is an extension of the standard Stayman convention. Let's look at an example.

Partner opens 1NT you hold:

♠Q742 ♥Q653 ♦4 ♣9843.

Using standard methods, you can't afford to respond 2♣ as the Stayman convention. If partner were to respond 2♦, you would be stuck. A subsequent bid of 2♥ or 2♠ would be invitational showing a five-card suit. A bid of 2NT would also be invitational showing a good 8 or 9 points. You have to pass 1NT.

Playing garbage Stayman, you can respond 2♣. If partner bids 2♥ or 2♠, you've found an eight-card fit and can pass. If partner bids 2♦ you can bid 2♥. This is where the convention differs from the standard version. Instead of being invitational, 2♥ shows a weak hand with four cards in each major. Opener passes with three-card support for hearts or bids 2♠ with three-card support for spades.

As you might guess, this convention has a big advantage when opener has a four-card major since the partnership will reach its eight-card fit instead of playing 1NT. If opener doesn't have a four-card major,

however, the partnership will have to play in a 4-3 fit instead of 1NT.

I'm not convinced the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Partner might open a perfectly reasonable 1NT with this hand:

♠J5 ♥1074 ♦KQJ103 ♣AKJ.

Playing in either major would be a disaster.

For this reason, I prefer the standard version of Stayman where a 2♣ response followed by any other action at the two level promises a hand of invitational strength.

You can still use Stayman with a weak hand when you have *club* shortness, however, and are prepared to pass opener's response. For example, it would be reasonable to respond 2♣ with either of these hands:

♠8743 ♥10852 ♦76542 ♣—
or

♠Q95 ♥J875 ♦J9643 ♣8.

Whether opens bids 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠, you can pass and expect to be in a reasonable contract.

Dear Jerry,

If partner opens with a strong artificial 2♣ and right-hand opponent overcalls 2♥, would a double be negative or penalty?

Greg, Washington DC

Dear Greg,

The standard agreement is that a double is for penalty after partner opens 2♣. Negative (takeout) doubles apply only when partner opens *one* of a suit and the next player overcalls.

My personal preference, however, is to use a double as "negative" after RHO overcalls when partner opens 2♣! In this context, I mean "negative" in the old-fashioned sense — a really weak hand.

When partner opens 2♣, the only thing I know is partner has values — lots of them. It doesn't seem

appropriate to use a negative double in the same manner as when partner opens 1♣ and the next player overcalls 1♥. I prefer the following agreement when partner's 2♣ opening is overcalled:

- A new suit bid is game forcing, showing a five-card or longer suit.
- Pass is game forcing, showing at least an ace or a king but no good five-card or longer suit.
- Double warns partner that I have a truly woeful hand.

Double says, "Partner, if you start bidding Blackwood, I won't show any aces. If you still aren't discouraged and ask for kings, I won't show any of those either! Don't count on me for anything."

This is a partnership agreement that must be discussed beforehand, but the key is that double is not the conventional negative double. It's the "woeful double." □

MIKE'S BIDDING QUIZ

By
Mike
Lawrence



1. When the opponents are both bidding, is it safe to enter the auction with a double?

2. What do I need in the unbid suits to make a takeout double?

Answers on pages 42-43