

The Coolest Gizmos and Gadgets



Billy Miller
dearbilly@aol.com

Range Stayman

Almost everybody plays strong 1NT overcalls with systems “on.” With much less discussion, we also assume that a balancing 1NT is natural, but the range can be wider than a direct notrump overcall and is usually much weaker. Because of these factors, many issues need to be addressed, including possible continuations.

Let’s clarify the actual ranges of the balancing 1NT (one of a suit–Pass–Pass–1NT). I propose that there should be two different ranges depending on what was opened. If a minor is opened, it is common to limit the balancing notrump to 11–14 HCP. If a major is opened, however, a wider range is needed because there is less room to operate. Playing 11–16 HCP works very well, especially if you are playing “Range Stayman.”

LHO opens one of a minor

When LHO opens 1♣ or 1♦, you should double first and then rebid 1NT with a hand in the 15 to 17 range if you play that a balancing 1NT bid shows 11–14. With 18–19 HCP, a balancing 2NT is used. (With 20–21, double and rebid 2NT.) Note that this balancing 2NT bid is not “unusual”! Your partnership should clarify that unusual 2NT bids showing the two lower unbid suits apply only in the direct seat. Did you know that?

LHO opens one of a major

After LHO opens 1♥ or 1♠ and it

is passed around to you in the balancing seat, it is necessary to stretch the upper limit of the 1NT bid to 16 HCP to accommodate all the likely hands without getting too high. When this occurs, using Range Stayman helps. Here is how it works. A bid of 2♣ by your partner is not only Stayman, but asks you (the balancer) to define which high-card range your hand falls into. With 11–14 HCP, just make your normal response, either 2♦ with no major or two of a major if you have one. If, however, you have 15–16 HCP (the upper range of your bid), simply rebid 2NT, delaying your normal Stayman response. At that point, partner can continue with 3♣ (“re-Stayman”) if he wants to know if you have a major. Frequently, partner (with, say, a semi-balanced 10-count) may not have any interest in whether or not you have a major, just simply whether you are at the top of your range, making game possible. Here is an example auction:

<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>	<i>You</i>
1♠	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♦ ⁽³⁾
Pass	3NT ⁽⁴⁾	All Pass	

- (1) I have 15–16 HCP.
- (2) I am “re-Stayman-ing.”
- (3) I don’t have four hearts (we’re not trying to play in spades, obviously).
- (4) I must have four hearts or I would not have bothered with this exercise.

When you rebid 2NT showing a maximum, partner chose to bid 3♣ as re-Stayman. On the example auction, he had four spades. If partner did not have a major, he would have just raised to 3NT, knowing you have the 15- to 16-point hand.

One of the many benefits to playing Range Stayman is when the 1NT bidder makes a two-level response showing a minimum-range hand. Now responder will know not to invite game, since partner is limited to 11–14. It’s a sensible way to try for a plus score by keeping the bidding low. If the range of the response to Stayman is still 11–16, guessing where you belong is a daunting task.

Holding 17–18 HCP in the balancing seat after a major-suit opening, double and bid notrump as cheaply as possible. With 19–21, balance with 2NT.

Just to clarify, do not use Range Stayman after the auction begins with one of a minor. System is on, but 2♣ is basic Stayman, not a range finder. □