



Art by Shane McDermott

Bidding Lab

Responding to 2NT

By Marshall Miles

Most systems of responses to 1NT or 2NT furnish a lot of information to the opponents. Suppose responder bids Stayman, opener shows a major and responder bids 3NT. The opening leader knows opener has the major he has bid and responder has the other major.

Also, later in the play, it is easier for both defenders to discard when they know that opener has, or doesn't have, a specific four-card suit.

Few players employ puppet Stayman over 1NT (for several good reasons), but many players use it over 2NT. Players open 2NT with hands such as

♠ A K Q 5 4 ♥ J 6 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A Q 8

or

♠ A J 10 ♥ A K 9 4 3 ♦ Q 10 ♣ A K J

(1) because game could be missed by opening 1♠ or 1♥ and (2) to be declarer in the final contract, rather than putting the strong hand down as dummy.

Puppet Stayman allows opener to bid a five-card major over a Stayman response, but there are problems when responder is 5-4 in the majors.

When partner opens 1NT or 2NT

and you have 4-3-3-3 distribution, no matter what your four-card suit is, you should let partner play the contract in notrump.

When responder has a five-card major with 5-3-3-2 distribution, he will usually gain a trick by playing in the major if there is a 5-4 fit, so he should use Stayman, but if there is only a 5-3 fit, sometimes the major plays a trick better and sometimes it doesn't. I think the "doesn't" is more frequent.

On the other hand, when responder has 5-4-4-0, 5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2 distribution, any eight-card fit is likely to be worth an extra trick. Responder shouldn't show his five-card major with 5-3-3-2 distribution, so when he transfers to a major and bids notrump opener should choose the major-suit contract with three-card support.

These are my other recommendations after a 2NT opener: responder should bid Stayman with 4-4-3-2 distribution, if *one* of the four-card suits is a major. If he has *two* four-card majors, he should bid 3NT! Opener can then bid four of a major, knowing he will find at least four-card support. Responder can also bid Stayman with a three-card holding in a major and a singleton, or with a good three-card holding

and a worthless doubleton—a hand that is likely to play better in a major if partner has the right five-card suit. Over 3♣, unless he has a five-card major, opener automatically bids 3♦. Why tell the opponents whether or not he has the other four-card major? (He is willing to show five because of the likelihood that game in the major will be the best contract). Then, as in standard puppet Stayman, responder bids the four-card major he does not hold. Now, if opener bids 3NT he does not say whether or not he has four of the major bid by responder since he knows responder doesn't have both majors (with which he would have responded 3NT (or 4NT or 5NT with both majors if he wanted to invite or insist upon a slam).

If responder doesn't have both majors and simply wants to raise to 3NT, he bids 3♠ to transfer to 3NT. The 3♠ transfer can also be used when responder has an interest in a minor-suit slam. Over 3NT, four of a major would be a splinter bid showing both minors, while a minor-suit bid at the four level shows a single suiter, and opener can make various rebids to show how well he likes his hand in support of responder's minor(s).

Let's return to the 3NT response. With 5-4 in the majors and 2-2 in the minors, and with a fairly weak five-card suit, responder should respond 3NT. That way, he won't miss a 5-4 or 4-4 major fit. He could miss out on a 5-3 major fit, which may or may not be better than 3NT. If he has 3-1 or 4-0 in the minors, and possibly 2-2 if the five-card suit is strong enough to play opposite a doubleton, responder bids 3♣, then 4♣ over the 3♦ rebid to show five hearts and four spades, and 4♦ to show five spades and four hearts.

When responder transfers to a major and then bids a minor, he shows at least five of the major and four of the minor with slam interest. The more distributional responder is, the fewer high cards he needs to show his two suits. □