

The Smolen Convention
(April 12, 2021)

The **Smolen Convention** is used by a responder when his partner has opened 1NT **and** he holds 5/4 in the majors, i.e., 5 spades/4 hearts or 4 spades/5 hearts. The convention can be used with either a game forcing (GF) hand or a game invitational (GI) hand.

Using Smolen with a Game Forcing Hand

Your partner opens 1NT (15-17) and you hold the following hand:

AJ542 KJ87 2 J103

The bidding: 1NT (P) 2C (P)

a) If your partner bids 2H or 2S, bid game in that major.

b) If your partner bids 2D, denying a four-card major, then the contract of four hearts is no longer in play. However, your side could still have a 5-3 fit in spades. The responder should rebid three hearts which shows 5 spades and 4 hearts and a minimum of 10 high card points (HCP). The opener will then place the final contract in 3NT or 4S depending on his spade holding.

NOTE: If responder had held the same hand with the spade and heart holdings reversed, he would have jumped to three spades, showing 4S and 5H and a minimum of 10 HCP.

The advantage of jumping in the four-card major is that the opener will always be playing the final contract, either 3NT or four of the major, if he should hold three cards in the major not bid by the responder.

So, 1NT-2C-2D-3M of one of the majors shows five cards in the other major suit.

Using Smolen with Game Invitational Hand

The Smolen Convention can be used when holding five/four in the majors and between 8 and 9 HCP. Let's look at the following two illustrations:

a) Q10852
 K742 (8 HCP)
 6
 K62

The following bidding sequence has occurred: 1NT-2C-2D-2S. The opener should expect his partner to hold five spades and four hearts and 8/9 HCP. He can make one of the following bids:

PASS = minimum NT with 3 spades

2NT = minimum NT with 2 spades

3NT = maximum NT with 2 spades

4S = maximum NT with 3 spades

b) KJ74
A8632 (9 HCP)
732
J4

The following bidding sequence has occurred: 1N-2D-2H-2S. The opener should expect his partner to hold five hearts and four spades and 8/9 HCP. He can make one of the following bids:

Pass = minimum with four spades

2NT = minimum with three spades/two hearts

3H = minimum with three hearts

3N = maximum with three spades/two hearts

4H = maximum with three hearts

4S = maximum with four spades

Garbage Stayman

By now, we should all be familiar with the following bidding sequence:

1NT-2C-2D-2H

This sequence is the Garbage Stayman sequence showing the 4-4, 4-5, 4-5 major suit holding and a very weak hand (0-7 HCP). The opener should PASS 2H if he holds 3 hearts or correct to 2S should he hold two hearts and three spades. The responder is trying to reach a safer place than leaving the contract in 1NT.

5/5 Major Type Hand

If you are 5/5 in the majors, one way to show this holding is first to transfer to 2S and then rebid 3H. The opener should expect at least 5 spades and at least 5 hearts. If you had held 5 spades and 4 hearts, you would have used the Smolen bid described above.

Other bids can be used to show the 5/5 major suit holding. I use the bid of 3D to show this type of holding and a game invitational hand.

Puppet Stayman

Puppet Stayman is used by the responder when he has game values and wants to see if the one notrump or two notrump opener has either a four or five card major. Three situations exist when Puppet Stayman can be most useful:

2N - 3C (Puppet)

2C – 2D – 2N – 3C (Puppet)

1NT – 3C (Puppet)

Looking at the 2N-3C sequence, the responder may hold one or two four-card majors. Or, he may just have three-card support for one or both majors. The opener's responses are as follows:

3D = one or both four card majors

3H = five hearts

3S = five spades

3NT = no four or five card major

The advantage of all these bids is that the strong hand is always the declarer. Once the opener defines his hand, responder will pass or launch in a slam try depending on the strength of his hand. Let's look at the following examples in which your partner has opened 2NT:

| | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|--|
| Hand One: | xx AQ86 xxx Qxxx | Bid 3C (Puppet) to see if your partner holds 4 hearts. |
|-----------|---------------------------|--|

| | | |
|-----------|----------------------------|---|
| Hand Two: | Jx 9xx xx KQ109xx | Bid 3C (Puppet) to see if your partner holds five hearts. |
|-----------|----------------------------|---|

Hand Three: KJxx
 xxx
 xxx
 K10x

Bid 3C (Puppet) to check for either
the 4-4 spade fit or the 5/3 heart fit.

If the 2NT opener responds with “3D” which shows either one or two four card majors, the responder bids as follows:

3H = four spades
3S = four hearts
3NT = he does not have a four card major
4D = he holds both four card majors

Hand Four: Jx
 Kxxx
 xxx
 Axxx

If your partner bids “3D” in response to your 3C (Puppet Stayman) bid, he is showing one or both majors. In the above hand, you should bid 3S which shows that you hold four hearts. Reverse the above spade and heart holdings and you would have bid 3H which shows 4 spades.

Hand Five: Axxx
 Kxxx
 xxx
 xx

If your partner bids “3D” in response to your 3C (Puppet Stayman) bid, he is showing one or both four card majors. In the above hand, you hold both. Thus, you should bid 4D which asks the opener to set the contract in either 4H or 4S.

Many play a bid of 4C shows both majors and slam interest.

Hand Six: Axxx
 K10xx
 KQx
 10x

If the 2NT opener bids four diamonds over your 4C query, he too is interested in making a slam try. He is asking you to bid 4 hearts. Then, a bid of 4S = key card for hearts; a bid of 4NT = key card for spades. The bidding proceeds naturally to 5H/5S or to a 6H/6S slam. But, if he merely bids 4H or 4S, then he is showing no interest in slam. You should pass unless you hold a rock crusher!

Hand Seven: Kxx
 K10x
 1098
 AQxx

In response to your 3C (Puppet Stayman) bid, if the opener shows either a five card heart or five card spade suit, the bidding should proceed naturally. You can sign off in 4 hearts or 4 spades. Or, in the hand above, you should make a slam try. A bid of 4S over 3H is keycard for a heart slam; while, 4NT over a response of 3S is keycard for a spade slam.

NOTE: If the bidding sequence is as follows: 2C – 2D – 2NT, a bid of 3C is Puppet Stayman asking for a 4/5 card major. The bidding proceeds as in the above examples for the 2NT – 3C bid.

Finally, Puppet Stayman is quite useful after your partner opens 1NT (15-17 HCP) if you hold one of the following type hands. NOTE: your hand must hold a minimum of 10+ HCP to make this bid.

- 4-3 in spades and hearts
- 3-4 in spades and hearts
- 3-3 in spades and hearts
- 3-2 in spades and hearts
- 2-3 in spades and hearts

NOTE: If the 1NT opener holds 15-16 HCP and a five card major, he usually opens with 1NT. If he holds 5H or 5S and 17 HCP, he normally opens with one of the major. **If you hold both four card majors, it is better to use Regular Stayman (2C).**

The 1NT opener can make one of the following responses* to your 3C Puppet Stayman bid:

3D = 1 or both four card majors
3H = five hearts
3S = five spades
3NT = no 4/5 card major

*All of these bids must be alerted.

Once the responder knows his partner's holding, he will proceed as in the above examples.

Let's finish up today by looking at the following hand:

| | |
|---------|-------|
| PARTNER | YOU |
| AQ | K86 |
| AJ5 | K76 |
| KJ1075 | Q9 |
| KQ5 | AJ843 |

| | | |
|--------------|-----|-----|
| The bidding; | 2NT | 3C |
| | 3NT | ??? |

Partner opens 2NT. When you bid 3C (Puppet Stayman which must be alerted), he responds 3NT (which also must be alerted), denying a four or five card major. With 13 HCP, you should bid 6NT. You know your side has a minimum of 33 HCP. No lead by the opponents should keep this hand from making 6NT.

Next Week: Trump Suit Contracts—an Overview