

Wasn't it nice and peaceful last week? No arguments, no shouting, no psyches, nobody walking out. I guess putting my foot down has had the desired effect, with the unruly elements either staying away or behaving themselves. Maybe I will start advising Tony Blair on how to deal with his football hooligans. Mind you, Friday was not quite so peaceful – do these people (Thorlief) realise that they are within 5mm of being thrown out? I really don't care who is to blame, if people 'on notice' are involved in loud arguments at the Amari then they are certainly out. This is the **LAST** warning. I will not risk the club's standing at the Amari because of one loud mouthed Norwegian. It is simply more than pathetic. Let's have a look at a hand from last week. First of all, we will discuss Stayman.

Thinking in Defence

How about this play problem? :-

Dealer:	♠ K4	West	North	East	South
South	♥ Q75				
N-S vul	♦ K93	-	-	-	1NT (1)
	♣ QJ1082	pass	3NT	pass	pass
		pass			
♠ Q973	N				
♥ AJ83	W E				
♦ A	S	(1)	15-17		
♣ 7543					

You are West. You lead ♠3, ♠4 from dummy and partner's ♠10 is taken by declarer's ♠J. South then leads the ♦J which you win, what do you play now?

East has at most 3 points. Even if he has the ♣K, declarer makes 5 ♣ tricks via the finesse (South must have at least a doubleton for his 1NT opening of course) and so East can have at most one more ♣ if he has the king. Thus South always makes 5 ♣ tricks and has, after the unfortunate ♠ lead, three ♠ tricks. If East has the ♦Q then South certainly has the ♥K and he develops extra tricks in ♦'s or ♥'s – the contract always makes.

So how can the contract go down? What card must West lead now?

Answer overleaf.

Thinking in Defence – The Solution

The only chance of defeating the contract is if East has the ♥K three or four times with the ♥10 or ♥9! The layout must be something like: -

♠ K4 ♥ Q75 ♦ K93 ♣ QJ1082			Just in case South, as here, has the ♥10 West must lead the ♥J. If dummy covers with the ♥Q the East wins the ♥K and the ♥10 is finessed. If the ♥J is not covered then small to the ♥K also gives E-W 4 ♥ tricks.
♠ Q973 ♥ AJ83 ♦ A ♣ 7543	N W E S	♠ 1082 ♥ K94 ♦ 1087654 ♣ 6	It was unlucky for South that West had to take the ♦A immediately. South suggested a finesse in ♦'s in the hope that West would duck - South would then have 'stolen' his 9 th trick with the ♦K.
♠ AJ65 ♥ 1062 ♦ QJ2 ♣ AK9			

Incidentally, I would not open the South hand with a strong NT, the totally flat shape should deduct one point. But this is a play and not a bidding problem and many players would open a strong NT!

Requirements for Slam

♠ AQ2 So, that's covered Stayman and NT openings/overcalls for now. I will just
♥ K98 comment on a couple of other hands from Monday (18/11/02). This is the
♦ 975 North hand No. 21. Your partner opens 2NT (20-22). What is your
♣ Q1032 reaction? A balanced 11 count with reasonable intermediates. This gives
you a combined 31-33 count, so enough for a small slam? This hand had
been played 3 times before it came to our table. I had absolutely no hesitation in simply raising 2NT to 3NT. The previous 3 times that it had been played, it was in 6NT (-1). I asked one of the partnerships. Apparently, 'the books' say that 32 points is sufficient for a small slam. I have two comments here. First of all, you do not have a combined (average) 32 count – this hand is not worth 11 points. Totally flat hands should deduct 1 point. Also, the requirement of about 32 or 33 points for a small slam only applies if you have a fit for partner and/or a long suit (a source of tricks). One person suggested to me that perhaps the hand should bid 4NT (quantitative) asking opener to bid 6 if max. I do not consider this hand good enough even for this more cautious approach. In actual fact, Opener had a flat 22 count (and probably would have bid slam) and 11 tricks was the limit. So, when going slamming, you need extras if you have no fit and/or ruffing values. For a NT slam, a long suit (source of tricks) is necessary if you do not have a real abundance of points. The hand was played one more time, by Martin and Rosemary. Now Martin is not renowned for cautious bidding, but he got this spot on when he also simply raised Rosemary's 2NT to 3NT. I wonder if the fact that Martin had just read my booklet on hand evaluation had any influence on him being the only other person to get this one right?

Stayman

Now ‘everybody’ plays Stayman, but as with any convention that has been around for years, there are variations – Puppet Stayman, Forcing Stayman, Garbage Stayman etc. The best is, in my view, ‘Garbage’ Stayman – so named because the 2♣ may be bid on garbage. It is what most people play. In it’s simplest form, which I will deal with here, a 2♣ over partner’s 1NT opening (or 3♣ over a 2NT opening) promises at least one 4 card major but does not promise anything in the way of points. Consider the East hand no. 4 from last week. I was asked how this should be bid after partner had opened 1NT.

The answer is answer is that it depends upon what type of Stayman you play.

♠ 987432 If you play a variation which allows a 2NT response (either showing both
♥ A1098 majors or a maximum – schemes that really have no merit whatsoever),
♦ 106 then you simply have to transfer to ♠’s and pass. If you play Garbage
♣ 8 Stayman, then you bid 2♣. You then pass a major suit response and
convert 2♦ to 2♠. This is standard practice and promises a weak hand with
at least 54 in the majors. With a weak hand and 45(♠♥), you would again bid Stayman, but this time convert
2♦ to 2♥. These are weak bids and partner is not allowed to bid on. Let’s have a look at both hands: -

West	East	At the table where I was asked to comment, West had opened 1NT, I guess 16-19? East bid 2♣ and West bid 2NT
♠ AK2	♠ 987432	to show a maximum, although I believe that East did not
♥ QJ6	♥ A1098	understand the bid and did not know that his partner could
♦ AK42	♦ 106	have 19 pts. I do not like either this NT range or this
♣ Q54	♣ 8	variation of Stayman. On the last round, I was sitting out, so I spectated this hand to see what would happen.

This time, the opening bid from Rosemary was 2NT! Needless to say, I don’t really like this bid either (although on this hand it worked out very well and, indeed, Benjamin Acol (Martin and Rosemary play this) does recommend a 2NT opening of 19-21, with higher ranges opened either 2♣ or 2♦). My personal opinion is that 2NT openings are best played as 20-21 or 20-22. You may stretch with a good 19, but this is a bad 19 (totally flat, no intermediates). I am willing to argue (I mean debate) with anybody, including Albert Benjamin. After the 2NT opening, they ended up in 4♠ (-1) which actually earned a top for Rosemary! And, knowing Martin, I think that he would have bid 4♠ no matter what Rosemary had opened. I believe that the hand should be opened 1♦ (with the intention of jumping to 2NT next bid). At our table, Alex (my opponent) did indeed open 1♦, but the rest of our auction really was comical and you need to see the complete deal to appreciate it. Bear in mind that my partner (Don) is really just learning (I am giving him lessons) and we have only just covered Stayman. We have not yet fully covered competitive auctions, especially overcalls of 1NT! I am sure that Chuck would say that anybody receiving lessons from me needs all the help they can get.

Before we look at the complete deal, a word about NT overcalls, Stayman and transfers in competition. First, I would like to clarify exactly what is meant by playing a Weak NT. A Weak NT is an *opening* bid with a balanced 12-14 pts. Playing a Weak NT, a 1NT overcall of an opponent’s 1 of a suit is still 15-18 etc (less in the balancing seat). The 1NT overcall is totally independent of whether you play a Strong or Weak opening NT. Now I mention this because a few people our club (even an experienced American) were unfamiliar with the Weak NT and thought that it also applied to a 1NT overcall. Incidentally, common practice is that if your side opens 1NT (either Strong or Weak), if the next hand overcalls or doubles then Stayman and transfers are all off. I like to play Lebensohl in this situation with a cue bid as Stayman but it depends upon exactly what the overcall was, and means (there are a lot of artificial overcalls). You need to discuss this with your partner.

Anyway, the point I am making is that the 1NT overcall has nothing to do with the strength of your 1NT opening. And what do you bid when your partner has overcalled with 1NT? Easiest is simply to play transfers and Stayman just as if he had opened 1NT.

So, let’s look at the infamous hand 4 again. At our table the bidding took a slight twist, with NT and ‘Stayman’ again featuring, but this time by the opponents!

Dealer:	♠ -	West	North	East	South
West	♥ 32	(Alex)	(Terry)	(Thorleif)	(Don)
Both vul	♦ 98753				
	♣ AK9762	1♦ (1)	pass	1♠ (2)	1NT! (3)
		dbl (4)	2♣ (5)	pass	2♥ (6)
♠ AK5		♠ 987432	dbl (7)	3♣ (8)	pass pass
♥ QJ6	W E	♥ A1098	dbl (9)	pass	pass
♦ AK42	S	♦ 106			
♣ Q54		♣ 8			
	♠ QJ106				
	♥ K754				
	♦ QJ				
	♣ J103				

Now of course, this auction needs explaining! It may seem like an exert from a Victor Mollo (Hideous Hog, Rueful Rabbit etc.) novel, but it is what really happened last week!

- (1) The correct (in my opinion) opening bid. Well done Alex.
- (2) I believe that this is correct, better than pass. Playing weak jump shifts, 2♠ (2-5 points, 6 card suit) is an alternative, although most people would frown upon this with decent a 4 card ♥ suit.
- (3) At the same time as bidding, Don alerted this as a weak NT(!) – toooo true (but he did have a ♠ stop)! Although, of course, you should not alert your own bids! The opponents may take advantage of this free information (at their peril) but as far as partner (North) is concerned, this is unauthorised information and he must bid as if he had not heard the explanation.
- (4) Especially with the gratuitous information, Alex was clearly looking for 800 or so.
- (5) I suspected that my partner may interpret this as Stayman, (it is not after a double) but I am not allowed to know that my partner has a weak hand, I must bid as though he had said nothing. Either way, I have no other bid.
- (6) I have 4 ♥'s.
- (7) What is 5 or 6 down, doubled, vulnerable?
- (8) Let's try again
- (9) I've run out of red bidding cards, are you going any higher?

You cannot really criticise the E-W bidding, nor the ♦10 lead (it makes no difference anyway). With a more than fortunate lie of the cards, and a ♦ 'suit' headed by the nine that produced 3 tricks! N-S chalked up +830 (+1). E-W may have considered calling the director but he was sitting at the table! and nothing unethical happened anyway. Sometimes you are just really unlucky, ask Karapet ..., I mean Alex.

What should the auction (assuming no interference) on this hand be?

1♦ - 1♠ - 2NT - 3♠ (weak) - 4♠. Or maybe just simply 1♦ - 1♠ - 2NT - 4♠,

although the former really is better, just in case opener has little tolerance for ♠'s. East could also try 4♥ at his 2nd turn. 4♠ is very unlucky to go down, and earns a good score anyway. Of course, even the best laid plans may be thwarted by dynamic Dons. Just one more point. Playing a strong NT, the 2NT rebid here is 18-19. Playing a weak NT it is normally 17-18 (with 3NT as 19). Most expert weak NT players (I can hear Chuck saying – are there any?) play the jump rebid as 17-19 these days, leaving the 3NT rebid to show a strong hand with a long semi-solid suit (as it is with the strong NT). After a strong 2NT rebid, it is simplest to play any subsequent bid a game forcing.

Hand Evaluation

This brings me to what I consider to be a very important point – hand evaluation, and how it may change during the auction. Consider this hand, a nice shapely 10 count.

Partner opens with 1♠. Things are looking pretty good. Depending upon your methods, you will either bid 4♠, or make a rather cautious game try or even a mild slam try by showing your singleton. Whatever you choose, your hand has suddenly become worth more than 10 points. But what if partner had opened 1♥? Not so good now! So you bid 1♠ and partner rebids 1NT(12-14) or maybe 2♥. Either way, you should simply pass.

So a hand that can think about slamming when partner bids one suit is a load of junk opposite another suit! This is what hand (re)evaluation is all about.

Now I would not have inserted the last paragraph if it was not relevant to a hand from last Monday. This hand which I will mention was a relatively minor affair. At our table I

was playing against Chris and Ian. Ian held this hand (West No. 24) and passed as dealer and Chris opened 1♥ against silent opposition. An 11 count, so obviously 2NT? Since you are a passed hand, it is preferable not to bid 2♣ (if you thought that that was a reasonable alternative) as partner may pass it. In this situation 2♣/♦ are not forcing (unless you play Drury) and should be 5+ card suits. With no fit for partner and 11 points,

2NT is ‘clear-cut’? I do not think so. This is another (slightly less obvious) hand for re-evaluation. It is a great hand opposite a 1♠ opener (or anything except 1♥). Opposite a 1♥ (five card) opener, the hand is simply not worth 11 points. As I mentioned above, the generally accepted rule is to deduct 1 point for a totally flat (4333) hand. In this situation, your hand is even worse! with a doubleton in partner’s suit. Now I know that Ian is always eager to hear any comments that I have (as is everybody else? ho, ho) and so I mentioned that, although you cannot really say that 2NT is wrong, I considered 1NT to be a far better bid (having re-evaluated). Chris agreed, saying that he would award 60 Brownie points for a 1NT bid and 40 for 2NT (you cannot say it is wrong). Just out of interest, I polled a few of our leading players. Gerry said that he thought 1NT to be a bit of an underbid, but there really was no alternative as it was not worth 2NT (my sentiments exactly, although I do not consider 1NT to be much of an underbid). Both Hans and Paul, on the other hand, were of the opinion that 2NT was the only plausible bid, ‘bid 1NT and you may miss game’! I disagree. Remember, we are playing a strong NT. 3NT is probably only going to make if opener has 15 or more points. With such a hand and a decent ♥ suit, he will bid again. If the ♥ suit is not too good, Chris would have opened a strong 1NT (5 card majors are OK). You may occasionally miss 3NT when opener has a decent 14 count, but you will go down in 2NT far more often. Obviously opinion is divided. What do you think?

One final hand. You are dealer and playing a strong (15-17) NT. What do you open? 1NT? A balanced hand with 15 points, seems obvious?! I do not agree! When you first pick up your hand you evaluate its strength initially by adding up the points.

- ♠ KQ5 You then make adjustments for long suits, intermediates etc. This hand has
 - ♥ KJ a long suit, but unfortunately most of the points are outside the suit. Also,
 - ♦ A54 KJ *doubleton* is not worth 4 points. In my opinion, this hand is not worth a
 - ♣ Q7532 strong 1NT opener. I can write pages (indeed I have) on hand evaluation.
- It really is much more complex than simply adding up your points!

Playing a weak NT, either 1NT or 1♣ would be an acceptable opening, a question of style? I would choose 1NT (weak). Playing a strong NT, open 1♣ and rebid 1NT (12-14). If you hold this hand and your RHO opens (say 1♦) do not overcall 1NT (15-18). This is far too dangerous and as I said, the hand is not worth 15 points. Best is simply to pass (this is a good defensive hand), the ♣ suit is really too ropey for a two level overcall and it is not a suit that you would particularly want partner to lead in defence. A double of an opening 1♦ bid is, of course, out of the question with just 5 cards in the major suits. Pass is the only bid. What happened in real life? The hand overcalled a 1♦ opening with 1NT, next hand doubled and it was 500 away on a partscore hand. These are the kinds of swings that you cannot afford in a teams event or when playing for money.

If you have any interesting hands or bidding questions, then please ask me and I will cover them. If an interesting hand occurs at the club, tell me the bidding and I will note down the deal at the end of the session. You will get my verdict in a following news sheet. Does anybody have a topic that they particularly would like covered? Stayman? Transfers? Weak twos? Negative (Sputnik) doubles? Roman Key Card Blackwood? Splinters? Opening 1NT with a five card major? Reverses? You name it.

West	East	Just to fill up the space, how about a 'controversial?'
♠ 2	♠ 43	pre-empt? I held the West hand and opened 3♣, 1st in
♥ A62	♥ 85	hand and vulnerable. East passed of course (3♦ would be
♦ 42	♦ AK987653	strong and forcing). LHO led ♥K and I ducked (with the
♣ AJ107632	♣ 8	♥6). Clearly a trump is in order, but it is far better for LHO

to go over to partner's '♥A' so that he can lead the trump. LHO (Hans) was somewhat peeved when I turned up with the ♥A and got a ruff in dummy. When I subsequently turned up with ♣A (thus making 3♣), Hans was rather more verbal; saying that I should not pre-empt with two aces, especially opposite a non-passed partner, as game may be missed. Of course he was correct and game may have been missed. Had I passed, who knows how the bidding would have developed? 5♦ by East is unlikely to be reached opposite a passed partner and fails on a trump lead (or 3-0 split) so should go down. 4♠ by N-S will fail if E-W find their ♣ ruff. So who missed game? When I am vulnerable and playing for money, my pre-empts are up to strength. Am I right or am I right? Anyway, making 3♣ and hearing the adverse comment(s) was much more fun. *'I don't mind the abuse, it's waiting for it that is so trying'* – The Rueful Rabbit.