

## **Esther Discusses "A Variation on Conventional Stayman: *Garbage Stayman*"**

**Bruce Thompson**

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**Bruce:** Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss, "**A Variation on Conventional Stayman: *Garbage Stayman***." Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

**Esther:** D\*\*n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther!

**Bruce:** Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

**Esther:** Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

**Bruce:** Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, first, before you talk about the variation on "Conventional Stayman" called "Garbage Stayman," would you first briefly review "*Conventional Stayman*"?

**Esther:** Of course, my *malodorous misanthrope*. In "Conventional Stayman", when Partner opens 1NT, and your RHO Passes, you can bid 2C as Stayman when you hold (1) 4 cards in one or both Majors and (2) 8-10 HCPs and (3) **your hand is not "flat"**,<sup>1</sup> such that your hand is *less able* to ruff with your trump cards. I personally prefer that I hold 9-10 HCPs, in case with ~16 + 9 HCPs we hold 25 HCPs and may end up finalizing a 3NT contract. If Opener/Partner bids 2D to deny holding a 4-card Major, if I have bid 2C Stayman possibly holding 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors, I can then bid my Major involving 5 cards to show my Opener/Partner the extra card in the bid Major. Otherwise, I can bid 2NT as invitational to a game contract of 3NT, or I can bid 3NT straightaway.

**Bruce:** Great, Esther. Well, what then is this "Garbage Stayman" variation on "Conventional Stayman"?

**Esther:** Well, my *simpering simpleton*, some players play such that a 2C Stayman bid shows at least one 4+ card Major, but **may show even zero HCPs!** Some people call this "**Garbage Stayman.**"

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, *why* in the world would people bid 2C Stayman in this alternative way?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, the "Conventional Stayman" bidding system lets Opener/Partner bidding 1NT know that a Game contract is a possibility, and that you hold at least 4 cards in at least one Major. The primary purpose of this system is to find Game contracts of either 3NT, 4H, or 4S, when they are possibly makeable. That is certainly, to be sure, an admirable objective! But there are other considerations, too!

**Bruce:** Ummmm. OK. What other possible purpose could a different form of Stayman possibly have?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, another possibility is that *you might want to rescue Partner from a disastrous 1NT contract!* In his immensely popular book, Points Schmoints!, Marty Bergen

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<sup>1</sup> A 4-3-3-3 or a 3-4-3-3 distribution is **great** for a NT contract, but not for a *suit contract!*

describes your holding something like the following Hand when Partner opens 1**NT**, and your RHO Passes:

**S:** T, 9, 7, 6    **H:** T, 9, 6, 3    **D:** T, 9, 8, 5, 4    **C:** --

Thus, you hold exactly ZERO HCPs, and with your Partner's assumed ~16 HCPs, your Partnership holds a meager total of  $16 + 0 = 16$  HCPs. That does not bode well for Partner making a 1**NT** contract! Remember that, at least in bridge folklore, "1**NT** is the hardest bid to make!" Especially dire is that your hand is not "flat," and will not play well in **NT**, but may well play better in a suit contract! Plus Partner may hold only 2 Clubs, and Opponents may hold **a total of 11 Clubs!!!** In a **NT** contract, that is going to be "unfavorable"! Yikes!

**Bruce:** Well, are there any **special requirements** for Partners playing "Garbage Stayman?"

**Esther:** Well, yes. Unlike in "Conventional Stayman," in "Garbage Stayman", if Partner does not hold a 4-card Major, Opener/Partner may not under any circumstances bid 2**NT** or 3**NT** in response to your 2**C** Stayman bid! In "Garbage Stayman," Opener/Partner who originally bid 1**NT** may only respond to the 2**C** bid by bidding only 2**D**, 2**H**, or 2**S**! In Marty Bergen's view, when you play "Garbage Stayman," "Never, Never, NEVER respond 2**NT** to [Garbage] Stayman." And whichever of these 3 suits Partner/Opener bids, Responder Passes, and the contract will be set at the 2-level!<sup>2</sup>

**Bruce:** But, Esther, in this scenario Partner/Opener may well go down at the 2 level!

**Esther:** Well, that may be true, Bruce. But even if Partner goes down, the result will probably still be *more favorable* than playing a 1**NT** contract with Responder's (1) 0 HCP Hand and (2) a Club void. Other Pairs sitting in your direction will most likely also bid 1**NT**, and go down, unless they also play "Garbage Stayman." And given the "Law of Total Tricks," and ~16 HCPs, maybe the result will still be a positive score rather than a negative score for going down, or at least a *less negative* score than that realized by Pairs not playing "Garbage Stayman"! In this "Garbage Stayman" approach, in Bergen's words, "**Stayman is an asking**

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<sup>2</sup> There are more complex variations, not covered here, on this "Garbage Stayman" system.

**bid, not a telling bid.**<sup>3</sup> The only time [R]esponder [bidding 2C Stayman] guarantees eight [or 9-10] points is when he follows [his] Stayman [bid] with a second bid." [Italics and underling and bracketed content added.]

**Bruce:** So, Esther, do you recommend the "Conventional Stayman" or the "Garbage Stayman" approach?

**Esther:** Well, there are trade-offs. There is no clear-cut correct choice. You and Partner will have to talk these issues out, make a choice, and try out your choice in actual play. And you can always change your decision later if you think the other system works better for you.

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, are there any other considerations in considering playing "Conventional Stayman" versus "Garbage Stayman"?

**Esther:** Well, remember that first, "Garbage Stayman" *only* helps you when you have a genuinely dismal point count. That will be *relatively rare*. For example, if Partner opens **1NT** as Dealer, the most likely HCP count for the remaining 3 hands is 8 HCPs each, and not 0 or 1 or 2 points. Second, the "Garbage Stayman" bid will also *only* help you when Responder holds shortness only in Clubs, because otherwise you may end up in a 2-level contract with many fewer than the 8 trump cards that would normally be required to make your contract!

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<sup>3</sup> While "Garbage Stayman" is *only* an "asking" bid, "Conventional Stayman", on the other hand, is *both* an "asking" and a "telling" bid, because in "Conventional Stayman" (1) you are "asking" Partner if Partner bidding **1NT** holds a 4-card Major, but (2) you are also "telling" Partner that you hold (a) at least one 4+-card Major, (b) 8-10 (or preferably 9-10) HCPs, and (c) not a "flat" 4-3-3-3 or 3-4-3-3 distribution.