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This Week in Bridge

(49) Slam Tries after Stayman

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Level: 4, 5

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General

One of the most common gadgets that we use when partner opens 1NT is Stayman. We primarily use Stayman to search for a 4-4 Major suit fit. After we find such a fit we will usually make one of the following bids:

- Pass Bad Hand (Garbage or Drop Dead Stayman)
- Raise to 3M Invitational
- Bid 4M Game with no slam interest.

These bids cover most of the hand types that we could have, but sometimes we want to have a way to raise partner's suit where they cannot pass. We will want a "Forcing Raise" (similar to *Jacoby 2NT* or *Inverted Minors*) in order to find out more about Opener's hand. This is missing from a standard bidding system. It is a valuable tool for making a slam try while keeping the auction from getting too high.

3-of-Other-Major as Forcing Raise (Slam Try)

Level: 4

When we bid Stayman we usually do not have a 5-card Major. If we do, it is because we have both Majors and we are looking for the 4-4 fit first, and will look for a 5-3 fit only if we fail to find a 4-4 fit. Thus, when an auction begins 1NT - 2♣ - 2M we do not need to have a forcing bid of the other Major as a natural bid. We cannot have the other Major unless we also have a fit for partner's Major. We are free to define 3-other-Major (3oM) as a conventional bid. We will use this bid to be a *forcing raise* in partner's Major. It promises 4-card support, sets trump, and shows interest in slam.

1NT 2♣
2♥ 3♠* 4+♥, Game Forcing, Slam Interest

1NT 2♣
2♠ 3♥* 4+♠, Game Forcing, Slam Interest



Opener then can sign off in game (4-Major) with a bad hand or cuebid a control with a hand interested in slam.

Once we have this 3oM forcing raise convention available then we have a way of setting trump before bidding 4NT. Thus, we can make it clear when we are bidding Keycard and when we are using 4NT as a quantitative bid. If we bid 4NT immediately after partner's Stayman response, it is Quantitative. If we want to Keycard, we use the 3oM forcing raise to set trump, and then bid 4NT as Keycard.

1NT 2♣
2♥ 4NT Quantitative with 4c♠

1NT 2♣
2♠ 4NT Quantitative with 4c♥

1NT 2♣
2♥ 3♠*
4♥ 4NT Keycard in ♥

1NT 2♣
2♠ 3♥*
4♠ 4NT Keycard in ♠

Reverse Baze

Level: 5

This auction is common enough and difficult enough that there is an entire system structure that has been developed to efficiently make slam tries without getting too high. The modern expert approach is called *Reverse Baze*. This builds on the 3oM forcing raise and adds several other conventional bids to describe most slam-interested hands below game.

In Reverse Baze we use the following artificial bids after 1NT - 2♣ - 2M:

- 3oM* Forcing Raise with some shortness (relay asks for shortness information)
- 4♣* Quantitative with a fit
- 4♦* Keycard in Opener's Major
- 4NT Quantitative without a fit



When we bid 3♥* as a forcing raise for ♠ we have more space available below game than when we bid 3♠* as a forcing raise for ♥. This means that we have more room for better describing the type of shortness that we have. In the auction that uses a forcing raise of 3♥ we have enough space to show our shortness and whether it is a singleton or a void. We use the steps Void, Low, Middle, High (VLMH.) In the auction that uses a forcing raise of 3♠ we only have room to show our shortness (LMH.) See the examples below for details.

Reverse Baze is a step-based bidding system. When we use a relay bid to ask partner for information, they do not answer our question with a natural bid. Instead, partner bids in steps where the first bid has a certainly meaning, the second bid has another meaning, etc. This allows us to use our space as efficiently as possible.

Examples

- 1NT 2♣
2♥ 3♠* Forcing Raise with Shortness
___?
• 3NT* Asks for Responder's Shortness (LMH)
 ○ 4♣* Singleton or Void in ♣ (Low shortness)
 ○ 4♦* Singleton or Void in ♦ (Middle shortness)
 ○ 4♥* Singleton or Void in ♥ (High shortness)

- 1NT 2♣
2♠ 3♥* Forcing Raise with Shortness
___?
• 3♠* Asks for Responder's Shortness (VLMH)
 ○ 3NT* Some Void (relay asks)
 ▪ 4♣* Asks for Void (LMH)
 • 4♦* Void in ♣ (Low)
 • 4♥* Void in ♦ (Middle)
 • 4♠* Void in ♥ (High)
 ○ 4♣* Singleton in ♣ (Low shortness)
 ○ 4♦* Singleton in ♦ (Middle shortness)
 ○ 4♥* Singleton in ♥ (High shortness)

Conclusion

Such a sophisticated bidding system as Reverse Baze is not for everyone and should not be played by most players. But the concept of a forcing raise is an important one that every improving bridge player should think about using in their slam try auctions.