

THE SAN ANTONIO
WEAK NOTRUMP SYSTEM

by Ray Hooks

Introduction

The San Antonio Weak-Notrump System is an adaptation of Kaplan-Sheinwold. Major additions include Graded Major Suit Raises, Trumpwood, Handwood, Notrump Cue Bids, Transferless Transfers, Negative Cue Bids, SAFS¹ and SARS². One notrump is opened more aggressively and with reduced quick trick requirements, particularly when non-vulnerable. Forcing and non-forcing Stayman variations have been added. It is now easier to find part score 4-4 major fits after a one notrump opening. This text is intended for the intermediate to expert player who has a similar partner.

BASIC TENETS

SAWS recognizes that bidding has two purposes. The first is to arrive at the most optimum contract when we bid. The second is to prevent the opponents from finding their optimum contract when they bid. The achievement of either leads to a successful game. SAWS accomplishes this by applying the two standard Kaplan-Sheinwold principles:

1. ***Every Sequences of Bids Must Have a Narrowly Defined Meaning.*** This allows us to arrive at our optimum contract.

Anyone can bid and make a 33-35 point small slam. It is the makable 29-32 point slam that is difficult to bid. The same can

¹ San Antonio Forcing Stayman.

²San Antonio Relay Stayman. A Stayman like convention which uses relay bids to obtain Openers exact distribution. It is exclusive to SAFS..

be said for the 27-28 versus 23-24 point game. SAWS starts with narrowly defined opening bids and extends this precision to all subsequent bidding. It quickly sorts out competitive, game and slam hands and then applies special bidding rules to each. SAWS places a strong emphasis on determining trump strength.³

2. *Where Safety permits, High Bids Must Be Used to Describe Weaker Hands, Low Bids to Describe Stronger Hands.*⁴ This is to rob the opponents of bidding room in competitive auctions, while leaving ourselves maximum room to explore hands that belong to us. As soon as the maximum of the hand is known, it is bid. Slower auctions show stronger hands.

Organization of Material

The material is organized by opening bid subsystem, e.g., 1NT. These are the (1NT) 1NT Opening, (2NT) 2NT Opening, (MAJ) Major Suit Openings, (MIN) Minor Suit Openings, (PRE) Preemptive Openings, (SAFS) San Antonio Forcing Stayman, (CON) conventions and (SPE) Special Bids. Each “subsystem” is treated separately and has its own defined sequences. These sequences are numbered by the sequence

³ In the text, the term “good trumps” in a known 5+ card holding means four trumps, or two of the top three honors, or three of the top five honors. In a known 4 card holding, it means four trumps, or two of the top three honors, or three of the top five honors.

⁴ This is known as the “*Principle of Fast Arrival.*”

title, thus the notation "MAJ 23" would be a major suit opening sequence. The sequence numbers are staggered to leave room for future additions.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout.

"M" for "either major suit" or "the first one bid"

"m" for "either minor suit" or "the first one bid"

"OM" for "the other major suit"

"Om" for "the other minor suit"

"X" for any other suit

"Z" for any suit

EXAMPLE: 1 M - 2 m Opener bids one in a major. Responder bids 2
 2 OM - 3 M in a minor. Opener bids two in the unbid major.
 Responder bids three of Opener's first suit.

SAWS can be used with either SAFS or SARS. SARS is by far the easier and superior to use. SAFS is included for those who are phobic about relay systems.

1NT OPENING

The Weak Notrump is opened with 11+ to 14 high card points. The 11+ hands will contain at least 2½ quick tricks and/or a 5/6 card minor. Non-vulnerable third seat 2½ qt, 10 hcp hands can be opened 1NT. When SARS is used with Negative Cue Bids, three controls are required to open in first and second seat. Otherwise, virtually all distributionally correct (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2, and 6-3-2-2) 12 hcp hands are opened. Rarely open

with a 5 card major. Freely open with 5 or 6 card minors⁵. When playing SARS, open 5-4-2-2 patterns only in 3rd and 4th seat.

RESPONSES TO 1NT

1NT 1

- 2♣ - Nonforcing Stayman. Does not promise a 4 card major.
- 2♦ - Forcing Stayman. (Not used with SARS.)
- 2♥ - Natural, **non-forcing**, 5+ hearts.
- 2♠ - **NATURAL, INVITATIONAL TO GAME**
- 2NT - **ARTIFICIAL INVITATION TO GAME IN HEARTS.**
- 3m - Preemptive sign off with 5 or more *m*.
- 3M - Game force in M. No slam interest. Raise with 3 card support or signoff in notrump with 2 card support. If 3M is 3♥, a 3♠ bid shows a 3-3-4-3 hand and gives opener the option of playing in 3NT.
- 3NT - Sign off.
- 4♣ - Gerber. (Not used with SARS.)
- 4M Absolute signoff
- 4NT Quantitative. (Not used with SARS.)
- 5m Absolute signoff.

⁵ Six card minors are included because weak 6-3-2-2 hands have little preemptive value when simply bid and rebid. Two of a minor will never be the final contract. It does not even have the preemptive value of a 1NT opening. Six card minors do provide a safe haven if red cards start flying. If SARS is used, a minor suit game or slam will rarely be missed. The rebid of a minor usually shows a 6+ minor with a singleton, or 1-3-4-5, or a 1-2-4-6 distribution..

- 5M Need A-K of trumps. Pass with neither, raise with one, cue bid king with both. (Not used with SARS.)
- 6X Absolute signoff.

NON-FORCING STAYMAN

1NT 2

1NT - 2♣ Initiates non-forcing Stayman sequences. Responder will have one of four types of hands.

Escape Hand Responder has 0 to 5 high card points and is trying to bail out before the doubling starts. He may not have a four card major and will pass any bid Opener makes.

Competitive Responder has 6-10 points and **two four card majors**. Particularly at match points, the 65% chance that Opener has a major justifies a competitive Stayman bid. If Opener bids 2♦, Responder moves to 2♥. Opener corrects to 2♠ if he has only two hearts. See Endnote ¹

Invitational Without a four card major, Responder always bids 2NT over Opener's rebid. If he has a four card major and Opener bids it, he invites with a simple raise, otherwise Responder bids an invitational 2NT. If Responder has only spades, and Opener bids hearts, Responder must bid 2NT, not 2♠. A 2♠ bid would be a signoff in spades. If Opener has four spades and accepts the 2NT invitation, he will bid 3♠, which is forcing to 3NT or 4♠.

Game Going Responder can use non-forcing Stayman with a game going hand. If Opener bids his suit, Responder raises to game. If Responder has only spades, but Opener bids 2♥, a jump to 3♠, shows four spades and is forcing to 3NT or 4♠.

1NT 3

1NT - 2♣ Non-invitational. Responder either has 5 hearts and 4
2♦ - 2♥ spades or is looking for a better spot with 4 hearts and 4
spades. With a weak 5 heart hand, Responder would have
bid 2♥ directly. **With a doubleton heart, Opener must
convert to 2♠ to avoid playing in a 4-2 heart fit.**

Sometimes the contract will be moved from a 5-2 fit to a 4-3
fit, but partner will be grateful for never having to play a 4-2
fit. With a weak hand with 6 hearts and 4 spades, bid 2♥
directly lest partner correct you from your 6-2 heart fit to your
4-3 spade fit. **See Endnote 1 for an explanation of the
theory behind this sequence.**

1NT 5

1NT - 2♣ Non-invitational, since a direct 2♠ response would have been
2♦ - 2♠ invitational. This sequence does not suggest Responder has
a 4 card heart suit. **An alert that no heart suit is implied is
required to this departure from standard bidding.** A
typical Responder hand for this sequence might be: ♠AJ832
♥JT ♦632 ♣T97. Change Responder's hand to ♠AJ832
♥KT ♦632 ♣KT9, and he would respond 2♠ directly over
1NT.

1NT 7

1NT - 2♣ Invitational to 3NT. Responder may or may not have a 4
2♦ - card major. **Since 1NT - 2NT is an invitation in hearts, to
2NT make a notrump invitation, Responder must first
Stayman and then bid 2NT over any opener response.**
This does not require an alert. **See Endnote 1 for a more
detailed explanation of this sequence.**

1NT 9

1NT - 2♣ Invitational in M. 4 cards in OM. Had Opener responded 2♥,
2♦ - 3M the jump to 3♠ would forcing with 4 spades.

1NT 11

1NT - 2♣ Non-invitational. Responder has a four card major and a
2d - 3m five+ minor and lacks invitational or better values.

1NT 13

1NT - 2♣ 5+ spades and non-invitational. A direct 2♠ is invitational.
2♥ - 2♠ **See Endnote 1 for a more detailed explanation of this sequence.**

1NT 15

1NT - 2♣ Invitational. **Responder can have 4 spades, but could not**
2♥ - 2NT **bid 2♠ over 2♥ because he may be passed opposite a**
doubleton. Or he may have a notrump invitational hand that
would have normally gone 1NT - 2NT. **See Endnote 1 for a**
more detailed explanation of this sequence.

1NT 17

1NT - 2♣ Opener accepts the notrump game invitation based on
2♥ - 2NT strength, but checks back to see if Responder has 4 spades.
3♠ Forcing to 4♠ or 3NT. **See Endnote 1 for a more detailed**
explanation of this sequence.

1NT 19

1NT - 2♣ Forcing with 4 spades and less than 4 hearts. No slam
2♥ - 3♠ interest. Opener raises with 4 spades or bids 3NT with less.
When SARS is used, this is the game forcing Stayman
sequence. If opener has 4 hearts, when he rebids 2♥, he is
raised to 4♥. Since opener may also have 4 spades, the
jump to 3 spades is a check back for a 4 card spade suit.
This is not to be confused with the case where opener rebids
2♦ and responder jumps to 3M. Since opener has denied a
4 card major, the jump to 3M is invitational in M and maybe
passed, raised or converted to notrump.

1NT 21

1NT - 2♣ Invitational in M. A 3NT bid by Opener shows weak trumps
2M - 3M and suggests a 9 trick notrump game.

1NT 24

1NT - 2♥ Sign off. May be a 4 card suit in desperation.

1NT 27

1NT - 2♠ Game invitation in spades. Responses are:
Pass - Minimum hand with 3 spades.
2NT - Doubleton spade and minimum hand.
3♣ - Average plus hand with 4 trumps. Passes buck to
Responder.

- 3♦ - Average plus with 3 good trumps (2 of top 4 honors). Passes buck to Responder.
- 3♥ - Average plus with 3 trumps (best holding is 1 of top 4 honors). Passes buck to Responder.
- 3♠ - Preemptive with 4 card support. **Requires an alert.**
- 3NT - Doubleton spade and maximum.
- 4♠ - Sign off

See Endnote 1 for a more detailed explanation of the Invitational 2♠ bid.

1NT 29

1NT - 2NT **TRANSFERLESS TRANSFER/ARTIFICIAL INVITATION TO GAME IN HEARTS.** Playing Jacoby Transfers, with an

invitational heart hand, Responder transfers to hearts and

1NT - 2♦
2♥ - 2NT

Jacoby Sequence

bids 2NT. The SAWS 1NT - 2NT sequence

announces a 5+ card heart suit with

invitational values and ends up at the same

place, 2NT. It just does not go through the

physical transfer. It is a Transferless Transfer. Opener's

rebids are:

- Pass - Doubleton heart or very weak hand
- 3♣ - Average plus hand with good trumps. Can be 3 or 4 trumps. Passes buck to Responder.
- 3♦ - Average plus with 3 trumps (1 of top 3 honors best holding). Passes buck to Responder.
- 3♥ - To play. Signoff.
- 3♠ - Game force with 3 bad trumps. Suggests 3NT as alternative contract. **Requires an alert.**
- 3NT - Doubleton spade and maximum hand.
- 4♥ - Sign off

See Endnote 1 for a more detailed explanation of the Transferless Transfer bid.

1NT 32

1NT - 3m Preemptive sign off with 5+ in *m*. Mandatory with 5+ minor and less than 6 hcp. My preference is to bid 3m with singleton om or M, 5+ minor and up to 9 hcp, but pass can work out well. Denies a 4 card major.

1NT 34

Game force in M. No slam interest. Opener's rebids are:

1NT - 3M 3NT - Doubleton M
4M - Sign off

1NT 36

1NT - 3NT Sign off

1NT 38

1NT - 4M Sign off

Bidding by a Passed Hand

Bidding by a passed hand is straight forward. The Non-forcing Stayman sequences are the same. **Since 2♦ is no longer needed for a game force, and the notrump opener will almost always be the stronger hand, Jacoby Transfers are now useful.** If Responder invites

by transferring to a major and removing to 2NT, Opener should remember that all good 11 point hands with a 5 card major have already been opened. Opener needs a good trump holding as well as maximum strength to consider game.

When The Opponents Double

On the surface, it appears dangerous to open 1NT with only 11 to 14 hcp's. Everything has a danger attached to it. Microwave ovens can be dangerous if they are dropped on your foot or the door is slammed on your hand. Like microwave ovens, weak notrumps have very little danger if used properly. The primary danger is when the opponents pass and set you 2 vulnerable or 3 non-vulnerable, not when they double. Actually a double is helpful, because it gives an extra bid, redouble, to help find a safe contract.

ENDNOTES

1. The original version of Kaplan-Sheinwold allowed for only the Escape, Invitational and Game Going Stayman sequences. There were no competitive sequences. All Stayman bids had to have invitational strength or better. After Stayman, if Opener responded 2♦/2♥, Responder's subsequent 2♥/2♠ bid was a five card invitation. (If Opener responded 2♠, there was no way to invite in hearts, because a 3♥ bid was forcing.) This syntax sort of worked for an invitational strength hand, but was very uncomfortable when trying to bid a 6-10 point hand with 2 four card majors.

When Responder passed a 6-10 point hand with 2 four card majors, 65% of the time, a major suit fit was missed. When that hand Staymaned and Opener responded 2♦, Responder would Pass or bid either 2♥, 2♠, or 2NT. The Pass could lead to a 3-2 diamond fit, which would not make partner/declarer happy. A 2♥/2♠ bid over Opener's 2♦, easily induced Opener to bid 4♥ or 4♠. A 2NT bid lead to 20-24 point 3NT contracts. Meanwhile, with the same hands, the Strong Notrumpers were comfortably playing in 1NT or 2 of a major 98% of the time.

To counterbalance this deficiency, SAWS has added competitive Stayman sequences. To achieve this, the KS invitational sequences were changed to be strictly competitive.

1NT	- 2♣
2♦	- 2♥/2♠
	or
1NT	- 2♣
2♥	- 2♠

SAWS Competitive

This solved, there now remained the problem of how to invite with a 5 card major. A popular method, which I have used myself, was the Stayman and Pray method. In this method, you

Stayman and pray that Opener responds in your suit so

1NT	- 2♣
2♦	-
	3♥/3♠
	or
1NT	- 2♣
2♠	- 3♥

Prayer Bids

you can give an invitational raise. If Opener's Stayman response is 2♦ or misses your major, your remaining option is to jump to or bid 3 of your major and pray you do not end up with two 11 point hands playing in a 5-2 major suit fit at the 3 level. It did, however, keep partner happy because he was not the one who had to play the contract.

The SAWS solution, while not 100% straightforward, is nonetheless fairly simple. First, a 2NT response to an opening 1NT is an artificial game invitation in hearts. It is in effect a transferless

1NT	- 2NT
	or
1NT	- 2♠
	or
1NT	- 2♣
2X	- 2NT

SAWS Invitational

transfer. Second, a direct 2♠ bid over a 1NT opening is invitational in spades. Third, bidding Stayman and then rebidding 2NT over any Opener response is an invitation in notrump.

Fourth, Stayman followed by a 2♠ rebid shows a 5+ spade suit and is to play. This competitive sequence brings with it a slight problem. When Responder Staymans with ♠AT87 ♥K4 ♦KJT4 ♣983, is no way to show his 4 card spade suit over Opener's 2♥ response. Since a 2♠ bid

1NT	- 2♣
2♦/2♥	- 2♠

SAWS Competitive

would be a signoff in spades, Responder must bid 2NT over Opener's 2♥ bid. If Opener is 4-4 in the majors, a spade fit can be missed. If Opener is

1NT	- 2♣
2♥	- 2NT

Possible Spade Fit

4-4 in the majors, and accepts the invitation based on strength, he can bid 3♠ on the way to 3NT. While not without risk, the SAWS method achieves more and presents less risk than other approaches.

NOTES