

SAN ANTONIO RELAY STAYMAN

By
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INTRODUCTION

A relay bid is a bid that tells nothing about the bidder's hand but requires the bidder's partner to describe his hand further. The relay is usually continued by a bid by the relayer — called the "captain" — bidding the cheapest suit over the suit bid by his partner — called the "puppet." When the captain bids 3NT or breaks the relay chain to bid any game, the relay is broken and the bidding stops.¹ The mechanism is quite simple. **SARS** is specifically designed for minimal complexity.

SARS requires a 1 NT opening have at least 3 controls (Ace = 2, King = 1) and one of four distribution patterns: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2, 6-3-2-2 and no others. If the opening bid was a minor followed by a strong notrump rebid, the same distribution patterns apply, but the control requirement is increased to 4 controls. Responder will have some level of slam interest. ***The only exceptions are responding game forcing hands with 5-4 or 5-5 in the majors. With these major suit hands, responder breaks the relay to bid game as soon as he finds a fit or that there is no fit.***

THE BEGINNING

SARS begins with a 2♦ response² to a 1NT opening bid or 1NT rebid by a minor suit opener. Opener then becomes the puppet and indicates in steps which of the four

¹ There is one exception to this. When Opener has shown a 5 or 6 card minor, skipping a step is a relay asking about the minor suit holding.

² Responder should have least 17 high card points with good trick taking value or a highly distributional hand to initiate the relay sequence to a weak notrump opener. An occasional slam is makable on 16 point hands when the notrump opener has a 5 or 6 card minor suit and responder is rich in controls or has a solid suit of his own.

basic patterns he has. Step one = two four card suits. Step two = a five card minor. Step three = six card minor. With a 4-3-3-3 hand, he bids the four card suit at the three level, i.e., with a four card spade suit, he bids 3♠.

TWO FOUR CARD SUITS

The distribution of a two four card suit hand is established by the puppet responding 2♥, which indicates the puppet hand has two four card suits. The captain first asks what

Two 4 card majors		
Reply Relay		
1NT	2♦	Relay
2♥	2♠	4-4 somewhere
3♣	3♦	equal rank suits
4♣		doubleton club or 4-4-3-2

type of four card suits and then asks for the doubleton.

The puppet initially responds in steps corresponding to CRASH organization. Step one is two suits of the same color (C). Step two is two suits of the same rank (RA). Step three is two suits of the same shape (SH).

He then bids his doubleton or notrump if the doubleton is in the relay suit. For example, this sequence: 1NT,

2♦ - 2♥, 2♠ - 3♣, 3♦ - 4♣, says that the puppet has two four card suits (2♥, step one) that are of the same rank (3♦, second cRAsH step) and a doubleton club (4♣). If instead of 4♣, the puppet had bid 3♥, then he would 3-2-4-4. The doubleton bid self-excludes its rank as being the 4-4 holding. If the puppet has two same rank suits and a doubleton club, two four card minors are excluded. If the puppet had two four card suits of the same color, the bidding would go: 1NT, 2♦ - 2♥, 2♠ - 2NT, 3♣ - 3♦. Here, the puppet's 2NT bid (Crash step one) is for same color and the 3♦ bid is for a doubleton diamond. Partner can not simultaneously have a doubleton diamond and two red four card suits, so he must have the black suits.

FIVE CARD SUITS

The distribution of a five card suit hand is established by first identifying the five card suit and then doubleton in the 5-3-3-2 shape. CRASH is not used. The sequence begins

FIVE CARD MINOR		
Reply Relay		
1NT	2♦	Relay
2♠	2NT	Five card suit.
3♣	3♦	Club suit
3♠		doubleton spade or
		2-3-3-5

with the 2♦ relay. The puppet responds step two, or 2♠, showing a five card suit. The captain relays with 2NT to ask which minor.³ The puppet responds by bidding step one for clubs and step two for diamonds. The captain relays for the doubleton. Puppet bids the doubleton. A 3♠ answer would show a 2-3-3-5 distribution. An answer in notrump means that the

doubleton is in the relay suit. In this example, since 3♦ is the last relay, a 3NT reply would mean a doubleton diamond, or 3-3-2-5 distribution.

SIX CARD SUITS

The distribution of a six card suit is established by first identifying the six card suit and then tripleton in the 3-2-2-6 shape. CRASH is not used. The sequence begins with the 2♦ relay. The puppet responds at step three, or 2NT. The captain relays with 3♣ to ask

SIX CARD MINOR		
Reply Relay		
1NT	2♦	Relay
2NT	3♣	Six card suit.
3♦	3♥	Club suit
3♠		tripleton spade or
		3-2-2-6

which minor. The puppet responds in steps, step one for clubs and step two for diamonds, i.e. 3♦ for clubs or 3♥ for diamonds. If the puppet answers 3♦, the captain relays with 3♥ for the tripleton. Partner answers with his tripleton. A 3♠ answer would show a 3-2-2-6 distribution. An answer in notrump means that the tripleton is in the relay suit. In this example,

³ If the opening bid was a minor suit, the identity of the minor suit is known. The minor suit identification relay step is skipped and the bidding goes directly to identifying the doubleton with a 5 card minor or tripleton with a 6 card minor.

since 3♥ is the last relay, a 3NT reply would mean a tripleton heart, or 2-3-2-6 distribution. With six clubs and a doubleton diamond, the bidding takes a different turn. Over the 3♥ relay for the tripleton, a 4♣ response would show three diamonds. This is slightly puzzling at first, but since opener can not have a six card club suit and a three card club suit a bell rings that this is not the real meaning. Since spades and hearts have already been bypassed as tripletons, the only remaining suit is diamonds. Hence, the 4♣ bid shows a tripleton diamond and saves a bidding step. If partner forgets and bids 4♦, all that is lost is a bidding step. In either case, the next higher suit is another relay.

Where the puppet has a five or six card suit, it might preferable to find out more about the quality of that suit than the remaining distribution. This can be done by skipping a relay step after the suit has been identified.⁴ This asks for more information on the long suit. The responses are: step one = two of the top three honors. Step two = one of the top three honors. Step three = zero or 3 top honors. After the relay response, the relay can be continued for aces/controls in the standard fashion or the auction ended with a break in the relay. Here is a typical sequence: Puppet = ♠K5 ♥86 ♦AKQ654 ♣JT9. Captain = ♠AQJ2 ♥A543 ♦JT9 ♣AK.

PUPPET	CAPTAIN	
1NT	2♦	1. Six card minor
2NT(1) 3♣(2)		2. Relay
3♥(3)	4♣(4)	3. 6 diamonds
4♠(5)	4NT(6)	4. Skip relay. This is a double skip because 3NT is to play
5♦(7)	5♥(8)	5. 0 or 3 diamond honors
6♥(9)	7NT(10)	6. Relay for aces
		7. One ace, so must have AKQ of diamonds
		8. Relay for kings
		9. Two mixed kings which must be kings of spades and diamonds
		10. Grand slam and claim before opening lead. 6 diamond tricks, 4 spade tricks, 2 club tricks and 1 heart trick or 13 tricks

⁴ If the opening bid was a minor, the known when opener show a 5 or 6 card minor. The quality ask would be 2 steps above the length showing response.

BALANCED HANDS

The 4-3-3-3 hand is simplicity itself. After the 2♦ relay, the puppet bids his four card suit at the 3 level, i.e., 1NT - 2♦ - 3♣ = 3-3-3-4, and so on.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Normally the next step would be some form of Keycard Blackwood, but since the puppet has no idea what suit is going to be trumps, Keycard is not available. Either Relay Blackwood or Negative Cue Bids can be used. Both begin with the next relay step. Before going into these subsystems, a caution is in order. When playing an 11-14 notrump, since slam exploration can often reach 5NT, even a 3 quick trick 11 hcp hand will come up short in tricks for this level, particularly if both hands are squarish. As a precaution, an 11 hcp or poor 12 hcp hand⁵ bids the next highest suit above the relay suit. It is a step that is not counted if opener responds with aces or controls. If opener has a hand good enough to respond in aces or controls, it is the second highest suit above the relay suit. Or, in other words, the next highest suit becomes a blank suit and is not counted as an ace/control response. As an example, if the puppet last answered 3NT, a 4♣ relay asks for aces (1430) or controls. If the puppet bids the lowest step, 4♦, then he has 11 points or otherwise poor hand. If he has a better hand, he just skips 4♦ and answers starting with 4♥ as one or four, or 4♠ with zero or three and 4NT with 2. If he by passes 4♦, the blank step does not count. This saves a relay step.

RELAY BLACKWOOD

Relay Blackwood responses are similar to 1430 Keycard, except no provisions can be made to show the king and queen of trumps. CRASH is not used to show aces, but it is

⁵ My Rule of Thumb is that if a 12+ hcp hand has less than 3 jacks, it is a good hand.

used it when showing kings. Here is a typical sequence: Puppet = ♠754 ♥K6 ♦AK654

♣JT9. Captain = ♠AQJ2 ♥A54 ♦QJT98 ♣AK.

<u>PUPPET</u>	<u>CAPTAIN</u>	
1NT	2♦	1. Five card minor
2♠(1)	2NT(2)	2. Relay
3♦(3)	3♥(2)	3. 5 diamonds
3NT(4) 4♣(2)		4. NT = relay suit. Doubleton heart or 3-2-5-3
4♦(5)	4♥(6)	5. I have a poor hand (11 hcp or 12 w 3 jacks)
4♠(7)	4NT(2)	6. I have a good hand so let's keep going
5♥(8)	6♦(9)	7. One ace
		8. Two colored kings
		9. Wrong kings, so just a small slam.

NEGATIVE CUE BIDS

Negative cue bids are a little more complex. After the puppet has shown his exact distribution, the next relay asks about his controls, an ace = 2 and a king = 1. The puppet first shows quantity and then location and quality.⁶ The puppet's first bid show the number of controls in steps. In a 11-14 point notrump the first step is 3, and then so on up to 6, the mathematical limit for a 14 point hand.

After the puppet has shown exactly how many controls he has, the next relay asks where his high cards are located. His answers in steps, and the steps relate to his suits in order of their known length. If their length is equal, the higher ranking suit gets the first step. If partner has shown 2-3-3-5 distribution, the first step would convey information about the puppet's high cards in clubs, then hearts, diamonds and finally spades. The steps are then repeated: step five for diamonds again, step six for hearts again, seven for diamonds and eight for spades, and so on. Notrump is a step just like a suit. If they are the next highest suits, 4NT and 5NT are relay bids. This is awkward sometimes when the last relay response has been 4♠, and there is no longer slam interest. To break the relay sequence, responder must sign off in 5NT because 4NT would just continue the relay. This is why the bad hand step is needed earlier in the sequence.

⁶ The blank step applies here as well.

The method in which a high card is shown in a suit depends on whether the suit is known to be a doubleton or not. If the suit is a doubleton and has an ace or king, that step is bid. If the doubleton does not have a high honor, it is by passed. Three card or longer suits are handled just the opposite. If the suit has an ace or king, it is by passed. If it has neither ace nor king it is bid.

Example

♠ Kx ♥ 984 ♦ AK954 ♣ QJ5

For bidding purposes, the suits by length/rank would be diamonds, hearts, clubs and spades. With this hand, the distributional relay will have ended at 3♠. This is how the bidding would continue:

<u>PUPPET</u>	<u>CAPTAIN</u>	
3♠	4♣(1)	1. Relay, but skipping 3NT, as that would be to play
4♠(2)	4NT(3)	2. One blank step and two real steps, or four controls
5♦(4)	5♥(1)	3. 4NT and 5NT can be used as relays.
5♠(5)		4. Second step, bypassing diamonds but stopping at hearts.
		Promises one or more diamond honors, but denies any heart
		honors. Hearts are the higher ranking of the two three card suits.
		5. Third step. No high clubs
		6. Fourth step. High spade honor.
		5
		N
		T
		(
		3
)
6♣(6)		

While the negative cue bids are somewhat non-specific, they do provide a wealth of information. For example, if you have the spade ace, then the puppet's spade honor can only be the spade king. Without heart or club honors, the remaining honors must be in the diamond suit, specifically the ace and king. The guidelines for showing controls are below:

NON-DOUBLETON SUITS

Bid = no ace, no king

Bid, the bid again = no ace, no king, no queen

Bid, then bypass = queen held, no ace, no king

Bypass at first opportunity = ace or king

Bypass first, bid later = no second top honor

Bypass, then bypass again = two of the three top honors

DOUBLETON SUITS

Bid = ace or king held

Bid, then bid again = ace and king held

Bid, then bypass = no second top honor

Bypass = no ace or king

Bypass, then bypass again = no ace, no king, no queen

Bypass, then bid = queen held, no ace, no king

A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

On Board 90 of the Quarterfinal in the 1995 World Bridge Championship, East-West held the following cards: East (dlr) ♠ K876 ♥ 84 ♦ AJ109 ♣ A95 and West ♠ A10 ♥

1♦	—	1♥
1♠	—	2♣
2NT	—	3NT
Pass.		

1995 WCB Bidding

AK732 ♦7 ♣KQ1042. At both tables the lead was a low diamond to East's Ace. Both tables made 12 tricks. Using **SARS** this 28 point slam is easily bid.

PUPPET CAPTAIN		(1) Relay
1NT	2♦ (1)	(2) Two four card suits
2♥ (2)	2♠(1)	(3) Mixed suits, spades and diamonds or hearts and clubs
3♦ (3)	3♥(1)	(4) Doubleton heart, must be spades and diamonds
3NT(4)	4♣(1)	(5) Five controls. We are missing either the ♠K or ♦K. It makes no difference because either one will take care of the losing spade.
4NT(5)	5♣(1)	(6) ♠ King, ♦ Ace and ♣ Ace, but no heart A or K or second spade honor
6♣(6)	PASS(7)	(7) With a 3-3 break in hearts or the ♥ Queen in partner's hand, there could be 7♣, but that is too many ifs for a grand slam.

Sorting out the Negative Cue Bids can be made easier by physically rearranging the position of the cards. Prior to starting NCBs, the Puppet hand could be in this order: ♠ K876 ♥ 84 ♦ AJ109 ♣ A95. When NCBs start, if the cards are rearranged in bidding order, i.e. ♠ K876 ♦ AJ109 ♣ A95 ♥ 84, the steps are easier to follow.

WHEN THE OPPONENTS INTERFERE

When the opponents interfere at the 2 level, the relay responses are the same steps, but they begin at the lowest possible bid. For example, if the 2♦ relay initiator is doubled, the lowest possible is Pass, which would show the 4-4 distribution. Redouble, the next lowest bid is a 5 card minor and 2♥ is a six card minor. The relay becomes the next lowest bid. If 2♦ is doubled, then passed (4-4) by opener, redouble is the relay bid.

If the interference is at the 3 level, relays are off, but a double by opener shows a stopper without regard to minimum or maximum hand. If the bid is passed back to the 2♦ bidder, a double is Stayman and 3NT is to play with a stopper. Opener may make a quantitative raise with a maximum hand or playing strength (AKJxx/x+ minor). Other

responder suit bids are natural and forcing. A non-raise bid by opener in response to a responder suit bid is a cue bid suggesting slam. A notrump rebid to responder's new suit shows doubleton support, but does not imply a ½ stopper in the overcalled suit.

Enjoy and good luck!!!

EQUAL RANK SUITS

Two 4 card majors

4-4-3-2

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♣ 3♦ equal rank

4♣ doubleton club or
4-4-3-2

Two 4 card majors

4-4-2-3

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♣ 3♦ equal rank

3NT⁷ doubleton diamond
or 4-4-2-3

Two 4 card minors

2-3-4-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♣ 3♦ equal rank

3♠ doubleton spade or
or 2-3-4-4

Two 4 card minors

3-2-4-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♣ 3♦ equal rank

3♥ doubleton heart or
or 3-2-4-4

SAME COLOR SUITS

Two 4 card black suits

4-2-3-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

2NT 3♣ Same color

3♥ doubleton heart or
or 4-2-3-4

Two 4 card black suits

4-3-2-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

2NT 3♣ Same color

3♦ doubleton diamond or
or 4-3-2-4

Two 4 card red suits

3-4-4-2

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

2NT 3♣ Same color

3NT doubleton club or
or 3-4-4-2

Two 4 card red suits

2-4-4-3

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

2NT 3♣ Same color

3♠ doubleton spade or
or 2-4-4-3

MIXED SUITS

Spades & Diamonds

4-2-4-3

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♦ 3♥ Mixed suits

3NT doubleton heart or
or 4-2-4-3

Spades & Diamonds

4-3-4-2

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♦ 3♥ Mixed suits

3♣ doubleton club or
or 4-3-4-2

Hearts & Clubs

3-4-2-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♦ 3♥ Mixed suits

4♦ doubleton diamond or
or 4-3-4-2

Hearts & Clubs

2-4-3-4

Reply Relay

1NT 2♦

2♥ 2♠ 4-4 somewhere

3♦ 3♥ Mixed suits

3♠ doubleton spade or
or 2-4-3-4

⁷ Note that Notrump is bid where the reply suit is the same as the relay suit.

SQUARE HANDS

4-3-3-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
3♠ 4 spades or 4-3-3-3

3-4-3-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
3♥ 4 hearts or 3-4-3-3

3-3-4-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
3♦ 4 diamonds or 3-3-4-3

3-3-3-4

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
3♣ 4 clubs or 3-3-3-4

FIVE CARD MINOR

3-3-5-2

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♦ 3♥ Five diamonds
4♣ Doubleton club
or 3-3-5-2

3-2-5-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♦ 3♥ Five diamonds
3NT Doubleton heart
or 3-2-5-3

2-3-5-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♦ 3♥ Five diamonds
3♠ Doubleton spade
or 2-3-5-3

3-3-2-5

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♣ 3♦ Five clubs
3NT Doubleton diamond
or 3-3-2-5

3-2-3-5

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♣ 3♦ Five diamonds
3♥ Doubleton heart
or 3-2-3-5

2-3-3-5

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2♠ 2NT Five card suit
3♣ 3♦ Five diamonds
3♠ Doubleton spade
or 2-3-3-5

SIX CARD MINOR

2-2-3-6

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♦ 3♥ Six clubs
4♦/4♣ Tripleton diamond
or 2-2-3-6

2-3-2-6

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♦ 3♥ Six clubs
3NT Tripleton heart
or 2-3-2-6

3-2-2-6

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♦ 3♥ Six clubs
3♠ Tripleton spade
or 3-2-2-6

2-2-6-3

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♥ 3♠ Six diamonds
4♣ Tripleton club
or 2-2-6-3

2-3-6-2

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♥ 3♠ Six diamonds
4♥ Tripleton heart
or 2-3-6-2

3-2-6-2

Reply Relay
1NT 2♦
2NT 3♣ Six card suit
3♥ 3♠ Six diamonds
3NT Tripleton spade
or 3-2-6-2