

Thinking Bridge by Eddie Kantar

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Stayman, the opening lead, counting your trump tricks.

Dir: South	♠ J 9 4 2		
Vul: E-W	♥ Q 10 8 3		
	♦ 10 9 6 3		
	♣ 10		
♠ K 6 5		♠ A Q 7 3	
♥ 7 5 2		♥ A J 9	
♦ A 5		♦ 7 4 2	
♣ Q J 8 4 2		♣ 9 5 3	
	♠ 10 8		
	♥ K 6 4		
	♦ K Q J 8		
	♣ A K 7 6		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2♣	Pass	1NT
All Pass			2♦

Opening lead: A

Bidding commentary: As North, if you have a terrible three-suited hand with short clubs and partner opens 1NT, it is actually safe to use Stayman! You are planning to pass partner's rebid of 2, 2 or 2. You hope to wind up in a better contract than 1NT. Every so often, when you pass 2 with a 4=4=4=1 pattern, partner turns up with two diamonds and five clubs and is stuck playing a 4-2 fit! Not to worry: You don't have to play this contract, partner does! Besides, playing a 4-2 trump fit builds character – that's what you intend to tell partner when the screaming starts.

Lead commentary: When responder uses Stayman and passes opener's two-level rebid, responder is telling the world of a weak, three-suited hand short in clubs. It is usually right to lead a trump against this sequence.

Play commentary: As South, if West leads the trump ace and another trump, cash the A and K, ruff a club, then lead a heart to the king. When that holds, ruff your last club in dummy. You wind up losing two hearts, two spades and a diamond. If North leads the Q, arrange to ruff two clubs in dummy to take the same eight tricks.

Let's talk about 4-4 trump fits. Assuming the opponents' trumps are divided 3-2, after three rounds of the suit have been played, declarer remains with one trump in each hand. These two trumps can usually be used separately, meaning that you should count two tricks for them. Say your trump suit is the A-K-Q-5 facing 6-4-3-2. If you start with the A-K-Q and the suit breaks 3-2, leaving one trump in each hand, count five trump tricks. However, if you can ruff two losers in the dummy before drawing trumps, count six trump tricks. Knowing how to count trump tricks is important because it determines your line of play.