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Bidding Basics

Doubles

Direct-seat doubles at the one level

The takeout double is the oldest convention in bridge. Soon after the concept of the double was introduced in 1925, the theorists realized that it didn't have to be used only to double the score (the original purpose). In today's game, it is rare that a double is used as penalty ("let's play for double the points").

The basic takeout double

Note: This month, we are addressing takeout doubles with 12–17 HCP. Another possibility is 18 or more HCP, which will be discussed in future articles.

This month we will deal only with the situation where your RHO opens the bidding with one of a suit and you double.

So, this month it will go: 1♣/1♦/1♥/1♠ on your right, and you double.

In future articles, we will explore the possibility that this double might be made with 18 or more HCP. How will partner know if it is 12–17 or 18-plus? With 18-plus, the doubler will bid again. That will also be addressed in the future.

For now, we will assume the double is in the 12–17 range. We will home in on exactly what is meant by 12–17 a few paragraphs down.

The double guarantees support for the other three suits

What is meant by support? Ideally it would be four cards in each of the unbid suits, but we can't wait around for that. It is acceptable to double if we have *at least three cards in each of the other suits*. Or, put another way,

don't have a doubleton (or shorter) in one of the unbid suits.

So, let's say RHO opens 1♦. You would make a takeout double with any of these hands:

A ♠KQ10 ♥A1054 ♦32 ♣K1087

B ♠AQ87 ♥KJ76 ♦92 ♣A65

C ♠K1087 ♥Q1065 ♦2 ♣AJ54

We count all of these hands as 12–17 total points. When partner takes out to a suit, we will be the dummy, so we can add 1 for a doubleton, 2 for a singleton and 3 for a void. Accordingly, Example A is 13 (12 HCP plus 1 for the doubleton), Example B is 15 (14 HCP and 1 for the doubleton), Example C is 12 (10 HCP plus 2 for the singleton). Don't be a slave to these exact point counts. Holding lots of 10s and 9s, you might double with only 11 total points. Vulnerability (be more aggressive if not vulnerable) is also a factor. A double of 1♣ need not be as stout as a double of 1♠ (where partner would have to answer with a suit at the two level). I would double 1♣ not vulnerable with:

♠J1098 ♥QJ107 ♦AJ108 ♣3,
even though it technically isn't "12–17."

Where your honors are located is also relevant in close decisions. If RHO opens 1♠, I'd gladly double with:

♠54 ♥QJ65 ♦AK7 ♣K1076.

All my points are outside of spades. Conversely, I'd choose to pass over their 1♠ with:

♠QJ8 ♥J54 ♦KJ76 ♣KJ2.

That meets the definition of "12–17," but it is ugly, with the ♠QJ8 much better suited for de-

fense than offense. One other factor on borderline decisions is your holding in the other major(s). Partner will strive to take out your double to a major, so if borderline, prefer to have four (as opposed to three) in the major(s).

Don't double 1♦ with the following hands, because they don't have support for all three unbid suits:

D ♠K2 ♥QJ87 ♦A32 ♣K542

E ♠KQ2 ♥A2 ♦K102 ♣J7654

F ♠K ♥Q765 ♦A876 ♣A654

You should pass with all three of those hands (don't overcall a so-so four-card suit). Why not double? After all, you have an opening hand. We will see down the road that you would be stuck if partner answered your double by bidding the suit you have shortness in (and that's the way partners are). Partner might have only four cards to take out the double and your side could have fewer trump than the opponents (not a good idea). For example, if you double with Example D and partner bids 1♠, he could have ♠J874 and would not be happy in a 4–2 fit. If you are thinking that you will just bid something else if partner chooses spades, stay tuned (we will learn later in this series that if you double and then bid again, you are promising a BIG hand, roughly 18 points or more). With hand E, don't overcall at the two level with such a lousy suit. With hand F, you have no suit worthy of an overcall and can't double, so you should pass.

If you have 12–17 HCP and the other three suits, but one of those suits is a five-card major, prefer to overcall in the major rather than make a takeout

double. For example, if RHO opens 1♥, and you hold:

♠K Q J 8 7 ♥3 2 ♦A 10 2 ♣K 9 2,

you do have 12–17 total points and at least three in all the unbid suits, but it is more descriptive to overcall 1♠ rather than to make a takeout double. Also, if you have their suit stopped and the strength for 1NT (roughly 15–18 HCP), prefer the 1NT overcall. Over RHO's 1♥, bid 1NT (not double) with:

♠K J 2 ♥K Q 2 ♦A 10 9 8 ♣K J 2.

Next month we will explore doubles of openings above 1♠. 🔄

Bidding Basics Quiz

RHO opens 1♣. What is your call with:

1) ♠K Q 10 7 ♥A J 9 8 ♦J 7 6 5 ♣2

2) ♠J 2 ♥K 8 7 6 ♦A 7 6 5 ♣A 10 2

3) ♠K J 2 ♥K Q 10 ♦J 7 6 ♣A Q 10 8

RHO opens 1♦. What is your call with:

4) ♠A Q 10 7 6 ♥A 4 3 ♦3 2 ♣Q 7 6

Bidding Basics Quiz Answers

1) Double. Perfect

2) Pass. You can't support spades. Don't overcall in a lousy four-card suit.

3) 1NT. A 1NT opening with clubs stopped.

4) 1♠. The five-card major is the main priority.

5) Pass. You don't have support for spades.

5) ♠K 2 ♥J 6 5 4 ♦A K 2 ♣Q 10 8 7

6) ♠A Q 10 ♥A Q J ♦5 4 ♣J 8 7 6 5

RHO opens 1♠. What is your call with:

7) ♠Q J 9 ♥Q 7 6 ♦Q 6 5 4 ♣K Q J

8) ♠2 ♥A 10 8 7 ♦A 10 8 6 ♣K 10 8 5

6) Double. Prefer to bring all three suits into play rather than overall in a five-card minor (and a lousy one at that).

7) Pass. This hand is "12–17" but is ugly with wastage in the opponent's suit. Your holding in the other major is poor and partner will have to show his suit at the two level.

8) Double. Only 11 HCP, but perfect shape. 🔄