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Bidding Basics

Doubles – continued

Direct-seat doubles of 1NT or higher

Last month, RHO opened 1♣, 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ and we doubled (usually showing about 12–17 “total points” and support for the other three suits). This month, our opponents will open with 1NT or higher.

If the opponents open 1NT, there is no such thing as a “takeout double.” Takeout of what? In “standard,” a double of 1NT is penalty. Some say that it shows at least a 1NT opening bid; others might define it simply as “a hand that wants to defend against 1NT doubled.”

Many experienced players use a double of 1NT conventionally. The double can mean something like: “I’ve got a one-suited hand,” or “I have A, B or C.” For now, it is fine to use a double as “natural,” which would essentially mean, “I have a very strong hand.” Just be sure you realize it can’t be takeout.

If the opponents open 2♣, strong (or for that matter if you happen to run into a pair that opens a strong 1♣), the double can’t be takeout. Takeout of what? Such artificial bids don’t show clubs, so there are not “other suits.” To keep things simple, let’s just say that doubling an artificial bid shows that suit. So, double a 2♣ opening with, say:

♠5 4 ♥J 5 4 ♦7 6 5 ♣A K Q 10 2.

What if the opponents open with a preempt? Say they open with a weak 2♦ bid. Double is now takeout. Same as last month, it is assumed to be roughly “12–17” and the other three suits. (Yes, it could be the 18-plus variety which we will discuss next month.) That 12–17 really should be boosted a tiny bit, since you are at the

two level. Still, a double of 2♦ is more comfortable than a double of 2♠ (where partner will have to take it out at the three level). We don’t want to memorize different ranges (like 12–17 over 2♦ but 13–18 over 2♠), so let’s just leave the 12–17 in quotes. Be aware that the higher they preempt, the more you want to have. Don’t double a three-level preempt with a lousy 12 points.

Here are some examples of a double of a 2♠ preempt:

A ♠4 ♥A 10 8 7 ♦K Q J 7 ♣K 10 4 3

B ♠3 2 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦A K 8 7 ♣K 10 2

C ♠— ♥K Q 2 ♦A 10 8 7 6 ♣A J 10 8 7.

Hand A is perfect. On hand B, you have the strength for a 2NT overcall (which shows roughly a hand that would have opened 1NT). However, you don’t have spades stopped, so a takeout double is indicated. That is why hand C is also a takeout double (not 2NT – which doesn’t show minors).

Don’t double with these hands:

D ♠K Q 10 8 7 ♥A 3 2 ♦A 3 2 ♣3 2

E ♠A 2 ♥Q 2 ♦K 8 7 6 5 ♣A 8 7 2

F ♠K Q 10 ♥A Q ♦A 10 8 7 ♣Q 10 8 7.

On D, you have a rare penalty double, but how would partner know? If you double, it will get taken out. Pass and hope that maybe partner doubles for takeout (which you will leave in). On E, guess what will happen if you double? Right, partner will likely bid 3♥ and then what? Don’t ask. So, you should pass (the hand/suit isn’t good enough for a three-level overcall). On F, simply overcall 2NT, which shows a good 1NT opening with their suit stopped.

Against a three-level preempt, all the same principles apply. Double is takeout, but try not to be at the very bottom of the 12–17 range. Gladly double their 3♥ opening with:

♠A 8 7 6 ♥2 ♦A J 7 6 ♣K Q 8 7.

What if they open with a four-level preempt? Double is still takeout. Don’t listen to teachers/writers who tell you a double of 4♠ is for penalty. Do you think you are more likely to hold good spades or short spades when your opponent likely has eight cards in the suit? While a double of a four-level preempt is intended as takeout, partner will usually leave it in, because the takeout would often have to be at the five level. With a flat hand, partner of the doubler will just pass and hope to set the contract. More on that later in the year. For now, double a 4♥ opening with each hand below:

♠A Q 2 ♥3 ♦A K J 7 6 ♣A 10 4 3

♠K Q J 4 ♥2 ♦A 10 9 8 ♣A Q 7 6.

Do not double a 4♥ opening (just pass) with:

♠J 2 ♥A Q 10 ♦A 6 5 4 ♣K 10 7 2

♠Q 3 2 ♥Q 3 2 ♦K Q 6 5 ♣A J 2.

Bidding Basics Quiz

RHO opens 3♥. What is your call with:

1 ♠K Q 10 7 ♥2 ♦A Q J 7 ♣A 10 8 7

2 ♠A Q J 10 8 7 ♥2 ♦K 10 2 ♣Q 3 2

3 ♠K Q ♥A Q ♦A 10 3 2 ♣Q J 8 7 2

RHO opens 1NT. What is your call with:

4 ♠K J 10 6 ♥2 ♦K Q 10 2 ♣A 7 6 5

5 ♠A K Q J ♥A K Q ♦J 10 2 ♣8 7 6 ▶▶

RHO opens 4♠. What is your call with:

6 ♠KQJ9 ♥A32 ♦A32 ♣654

7 ♠2 ♥AQ108 ♦AKQ2 ♣Q1072

8 ♠2 ♥A2 ♦AQ1087 ♣KJ1072

Bidding Basics Quiz Answers

- 1 Double. Perfect.
- 2 3♠. True, you can support the other suits, but this hand is about spades; just overcall.

3 3NT. Natural. If you double, guess what partner will bid.

4 Pass. There is no such thing as a takeout double of a 1NT opening.

5 Double. In standard, this shows a strong hand – you have it.

6 Pass. Double is not for penalty. If you double, partner likely will pull. Don't expect to hold such a hand against a four-level preempt.

7 Double. If partner has shape/offense, he will pull and be happy with your dummy. If partner is flat, he will pass and you will lead a high diamond and hope to set them.

8 4NT. This was unfair since it wasn't covered above and technically isn't part of this series on doubles. A 4NT overcall shows a two-suiter (at least 5-5) and a good hand. The suits are presumed to be the minors. ♣