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This Week in Bridge

(286) Other Types of Doubles

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Level: 5, 6

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General

It may seem that every time we learn about a new use for double, we discover that there is another one to learn as well. This is because players are constantly creating more and more uses for double. Here we discuss some of these doubles that are “modern” creations but have become standard amongst experienced players.

Snapdragon Doubles

Level 5

When LHO opens the bidding (showing values), partner makes an overcall, and Responder makes a freebid at the 2-level (showing 10+ points) then the opponents have most of the points. The most we will do in this type of auction is compete in the bidding. We are unlikely to be looking to bid game based on HCP, so the only way we might bid to a high level is if we have an extremely large fit.

Example 1

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ __?

- A bid of 2♥ would be natural and competitive – showing a 5+card ♥ suit. (Though you may normally play a new suit forcing by Advancer, it does not make sense to play it as forcing when the opponents have shown most of the values.)
- A double in this auction is played as a *snapdragon double* – showing both the fourth suit (in this case 5+card ♥) and tolerance for partner’s suit (3-card fit or at least honor doubleton, depending on your partnership agreement).

Having the snapdragon double available to show the fourth suit and at least tolerance for partner’s suit means that when you bid the fourth suit, you are not interested in partner’s suit and you have a poor holding in their suit.



Let's look at the previous auction with some example hands for Advancer.

Example 2

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ __?

♠ 7

♥ AJT843

♦ 865

♣ K72

Bid 2♥! With this hand, you want to compete in the bidding but only in the ♥ suit – your 6-card suit. This 2♥ bid denies interest in partner's ♠ suit – showing at best two small cards in that suit.

Example 3

♠ K5

♥ AJT74

♦ 873

♣ 632

Double. With this hand you have only a 5-card ♥ suit and you have King doubleton in partner's suit, so you are not certain which suit would be best for your side to compete in. Double shows a 5-card ♥ suit and tolerance for partner's ♠ suit – leaving it up to partner to choose which is the best place to play at the 2-level or if it is a good idea to further compete in the auction.

With the negative inference that your bid of the fourth suit denies interest in partner's suit, partner will usually pass your suit with a reasonable holding – only rebidding their own suit with a powerful holding in their suit and a poor holding in yours.

The snapdragon double applies when the Responder has bid at the 1-level as well. This is true even though Responder has not promised as many values with a 1-level response as they do with a new suit at the 2-level. In this case, some partnerships may choose to treat a new suit as forcing, since it is possible for Advancer to have a better hand (this is a partnership agreement).

Example 4

1♣ 1♦ 1♠ __?

- A double (snapdragon double) shows a ♥ suit (usually at least a 5+cards) and tolerance for partner's ♦ suit – 3-cards or honor doubleton.
- Bidding 2♥ shows a 5+card suit and denies interest in partner's ♦ suit – at most two small ♦.

Note: These bids can be useful whether your partnership plays this new suit as Non-Forcing Constructive or Forcing.



Equal Level Conversion Doubles

Level 5

When the opponents open the bidding with a Major suit and we have 4-cards in the other Major and a long (5+card) \diamond suit, then we may have difficulty describing our hand. If we are 1/4-5-3 we make a takeout double (having at least 3-cards in the all the suits). But if we are short in the \clubsuit suit (something like 2/4-5-2, 3/4-5-1, or even 4cMajor-6c+ \diamond) then we cannot make a traditional takeout double of the opponent's Major suit opening. A common way of trying to describe this hand is to overcall \diamond and then either bid \heartsuit later or reopen with a takeout double. Unfortunately, the auction does not always allow for such bidding to occur. So experienced players often use a different approach.

In an effort to get the other Major involved earlier in the bidding, some partnerships choose to double with a hand like this. If we double with this type of hand and partner bids \clubsuit , then we cannot leave them there. Instead, we correct to \diamond . But this sounds like we have a strong hand with a long \diamond suit. If we play *Equal Level Conversion Doubles (ELC)* this double does not show extra strength, since it is converting one minor to another (\clubsuit to \diamond) at the same level.

Example 5

1 \spadesuit —
 \spadesuit 9
 \heartsuit KQ87
 \diamond AK7643
 \clubsuit 73

If we play equal level conversion doubles, then we can double with this hand.

If partner bids \clubsuit , then we correct to \diamond .

1 \spadesuit X 2 \spadesuit 3 \clubsuit
P 3 \diamond !

In this auction, if we play ELC, 3 \diamond does not show a strong hand.

If we adopt ELC, we give up the “double and bid” auction to show a strong hand with \diamond (at a low level). But a hand that is strong enough to double and bid a suit is somewhat rare after the opponents have opened the bidding. This hand with \diamond and the other Major is certainly a more common holding than an extremely strong hand with \diamond . This seems like a reasonable tradeoff to help us handle a somewhat difficult bidding situation.

Note: ELC is only when we correct \clubsuit to \diamond . It does not apply to other situations.



Lead-Directing Doubles

Level 6

A double of an artificial bid is normally a lead-directing double, asking partner to lead that suit. When we make a lead-directing double, it helps partner get off to a good opening lead, but it also helps the opponents by giving them a couple of extra calls (redouble and pass) to use to communicate with their partner at a low level. In slam auctions, this may help them clarify their controls, and in lower-level auctions, this may help them play 3NT from the best side by helping them show a positional value.

Example 6

1♠	2♥	P	3♠
X	P	P	XX

When we make a lead-directing double of a splinter, the next player can redouble to show first round control or pass this around to partner to see if they can redouble to show first round control (usually a void by the splinter bidder).

Example 7

2♠	3♦	P	3♠
X	P	P	3NT

Here a double of 3♠, asking partner to lead a ♠, allows the Overcaller to pass and keep the auction below 3NT, even when they do not have a ♠ stopper. This gives Advancer a chance to show a ♠ stopper with a 3NT bid.

We would like to be able to help partner make a good opening lead (tell them to lead our suit vs. try another suit) while not helping out the opponents so much. This is done by the use of *Anti-Lead-Directing Doubles*.

Anti-Lead-Directing Doubles

The idea behind *Anti-Lead-Directing Doubles* is that when we bid a suit, it is most likely that we want that suit led. Since we have determined that when the opponents cuebid our suit a double is likely to help them if we play normal lead-directing doubles, we are likely to make bidding easier for them. Instead in this situation, we want our most frequent auction (the one where we ask for the lead) to not help the the opponents. We accomplish this by changing our agreements and switching the meaning of pass and double. Playing anti-lead-directing doubles then:

- A double asks for partner to lead something else.
- A pass asks partner to lead our suit. (This is the most common action).



Example 8

1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 3♠
—?

- Pass asks for a ♠ lead.
- Double asks for a lead other than ♠ (anti-lead-directing double.)

Issues with Anti-Lead Directing Doubles

One issue with playing anti-lead-directing doubles is that since passing a cuebid of our suit shows a good holding in that suit, we must double a cuebid to show a poor holding in that suit. Doubling a suit that we have few honors in can be dangerous. For example, we do not want to be forced to double a low-level bid (say at the 2-level) if we have an extremely poor holding in the suit we are doubling (like 3 small cards). In this case, the opponents might play in this 2-level doubled contract and our chance of beating it with a holding like 3 small is very low.

Example 9

1♣ 1♠ P 2♣
X?

We do not want to play anti-lead directing doubles in this low-level cuebid auction because we can not be certain of defeating a 2♣ contract.

Rules for Anti-Lead Directing Doubles

Since anti-lead-directing doubles have this danger, it is important to have good agreements about when they apply. A good set of rules for playing anti-lead-directing doubles are:

- Only apply at 3-level or higher.
- Apply in a 5-card or longer suit of your own
 - A 1-level overcall is considered a 5-card suit.
 - Do not apply if we open 1♣ or 1♦ and have not rebid the suit.
- Do not apply in a suit bid by partner.

Low-Level Double of Our Own Suit

A double of a low-level bid that is a suit that we have bid is not a lead-directing double (or anti-lead-directing double). Instead, a double in this situation shows extra length in this suit (usually 6+cards) and extra values – if we opened the bidding, then it's not a horrible opening bid.

Example 10

1♣ 1♠ P 2♣
X

This double shows a decent opening bid (or more) and usually a 6+card ♣ suit.



Conclusion

Even through just a few examples, we can see that doubles are a living and growing part of the game. Players are constantly finding more interesting ways to make use of the double in complicated competitive auctions. Do not try to memorize or master all the doubles. Instead, slowly integrate new uses of double into your agreements with your regular partners, giving you a new bidding tool for these competitive auctions.