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This Week in Bridge

(281) Responsive Doubles

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Level: 2

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General

When our left-hand opponent (LHO) opens the bidding and we are the fourth player to act, we often struggle to know how or when to get into the auction. In this situation, the time that we most want to act is when the opponents have bid and raised a suit (they have found a fit) and partner has taken some action in the middle (either an overcall or a takeout double). Since this is a situation where we may want to act with many different hand types, it is useful to have good agreements about the meaning of our most valuable competitive bidding tool – double. A double in this situation is called a *Responsive Double* and is used by Advancer similarly to the way Responder uses the negative double. Let's look at some example to see with what types of hand Advancer can make this responsive double.

Responsive Double Opposite Partner's Overcall

When LHO opens the bidding, partner makes a simple overcall, and RHO raises Opener's suit, we are in a position where we want to compete in the bidding with a variety of different types of hands. If we have a fit for partner's suit, no interest in looking for another fit, and enough values to compete in the bidding, then we can simply raise partner. But there are many other types of hands where we may want to compete in the bidding. When we are not sure where to compete in the bidding but have enough values to take some action, then we need to involve partner in the decision-making process. We do so by using the double: this is a responsive double.

Note: "Enough values to take some action" is dependent upon how many values our partner has shown. When our partner has made a 2-level overcall (showing roughly an opening hand) then we need far fewer values to compete in the bidding than when partner has made a 1-level overcall (and could have as few as 7-8 HCP).



Responsive Double with Both Unbid Suits

One of the most common uses of the responsive double is when we have length in both of the unbid suits.

Example 1

1♠ 2♣ 2♠ __?

♠ xx

♥ KQxx

♦ KJxxx

♣ xx

Here we make a responsive double. With this hand we do not want to defend 2♠. We have enough values to take some action (9 HCP opposite partner's 2-level overcall) but no clear choice. We do not have enough ♣ to raise partner's suit, and we do not have enough values to freely bid our long suit at the 3-level (a 3♦ bid would be forcing). A responsive double gets partner to tell us more about their distribution and helps us find a fit if one exists in either ♥, ♦, or ♣.

Responsive Double with an Unbid Major and Support for Partner's Minor

Here is another hand where we may use a responsive double.

Example 2

1♠ 2♦ 2♠ __?

♠ xxx

♥ KQxx

♦ Kxx

♣ Jxx

With this 9 HCP and a fit for partner's ♦ suit, we could simply raise to 3♦. But we could still have a 4-4♥ fit and we should take responsibility for searching for it. (This is similar to when partner opens the bidding with 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♠: we make a negative double when we hold a 4-card ♥ suit, even if we have a ♦ fit for partner.) When we make a responsive double here, if partner bids ♥ we have accomplished our goal of finding the ♥ fit. If partner makes any other bid then, like 3♣ in the auction above, then we simply return to partner's ♦ suit by bidding 3♦.



Responsive Double with an Unbid Major and a Stopper in the Opponent's Suit

When we have a strong hand, we can use a responsive double with even more types of hands.

Example 3

1♠ 2♦ 2♠ ___?

♠ AJTx

♥ KQxx

♦ xx

♣ Kxx

With this hand we make a responsive double, hoping to hear partner bid ♥. But if partner does not show ♥ with their second bid then we will bid 3NT, showing our values and a good stopper in the opponent's suit.

The responsive double is a flexible tool for competing in the bidding. When partner makes an overcall at the 1-level then we need more values to compete in the bidding (because partner has not promised an opening hand). But if partner makes an overcall at the 2-level then we can compete in the bidding aggressively once the opponents have found a fit. With some values and at least two places to play we should get into the auction and frequently we will need to do so by using this responsive double.

Higher-Level Responsive Doubles

When Responder raises to a level higher than the 2-level (either because they make a jump raise of Opener's suit or because Opener preempted the bidding and Responder raised) then we need more values to make a responsive double than in our previous examples. Just as is the case with takeout doubles and negative doubles, we are forcing partner to bid. The higher the level at which we are forcing them to bid, the more values we need in order for them to have a chance to make the contract.

Responsive Double Opposite Partner's Takeout Double

Just as we used a responsive double to compete in the bidding when partner made a 2-level overcall, we can similarly use a responsive double to compete in the bidding when partner has made a takeout double.

Example 4

1♠ X 2♠ ___?

S xxx

H KQxx

D KJTx

C xx



Here we have enough values to compete in the bidding, but we are not sure which of our two suits (♥ or ♦) to bid. Often when we bid ♥ here, we are in a 4-3 fit and miss a large ♦ fit (and vice versa). Instead of guessing which suit to bid, we should try to involve partner in the process. We do so by making a responsive double (implying that we have at least two places where we are interested in playing). If partner bids either of our suits, we can happily pass. If partner bids ♣, then we correct that to ♦, letting partner know that ♣ was not one of our suits, and asking them to choose between the other two suits (♦ and ♥). This involves partner in the decision-making process and helps us not have to guess which suit is our best fit.

Conclusion

The responsive double is one of Advancer's best tools for competing in the bidding. As you can see from the discussion above, this tool can be used with a large number of different hand shapes. The strength required to use a responsive double is dependent on what values partner has shown and to what level the auction has already progressed. If you start looking for opportunities to use this bidding tool you will find that they are more plentiful than you think. Add this to your competitive bidding arsenal and do not allow the opponents to buy the contract as low levels when they have found a fit!