



Take-Out Doubles

In the good old days a double was a call made when you thought that the opponents' contract was destined to fail, and thus you wanted to up the stakes.

Things have certainly changed, as at the higher levels of the game the majority of doubles carry some specified meaning. Even at club level there are plenty of 'take-out' doubles to be found.

What is a Take-out Double?

Basically, the double asks partner to bid his longest suit – it is almost the opposite of a penalty double, tending to show shortage in the doubled suit.

Why would we want to use a Take-out Double?

The answer is because we have two or three suits of similar length and we would like to ask partner to choose the one with which he has the best fit. It is especially useful when you do not hold a five-card suit, because without five cards in a suit you cannot make an overcall, and therefore would be unable to make a call without the help of a take-out double.

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When do we use a Take-out Double?

In the following situations:

- 1 All doubles of natural suit bids on the first round of bidding when partner has not bid are for take out (up to the four level).

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♦ | Dbl | | |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♥ | Dbl |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 2♥ | Dbl | | |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 3♥ | Dbl | | |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♥ | Pass | 3♥ | Dbl |

All of the doubles above should be for take out; it is very rare that we hold a hand that can penalise with authority in these situations.

- 2 When the opponents have found a fit and neither of our partnership have bid, then double should be for take out (especially at the two level).

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♥ | Pass |
| 2♥ | Pass | Pass | Dbl |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Pass | 1♥ | Pass | 2♥ |
| Dbl | | | |

Both of these doubles are for take out – making an effort to compete for the deal is very important when your opponents have found a fit because so often if they have a fit, then you are likely to have one too.

- 3 I would also suggest that you play the *Negative Double*. This is a take-out double of an immediate suit overcall such as:

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | Dbl | |

NOTE: both bids must be *suit* bids.

(The negative double is not like the usual take-out double and therefore needs to be dealt with separately – we shall do so in a subsequent article.)

What kind of hand do we need for a Take-out Double?

A hand with support for each of the unbid suits with *opening values*. Of course, if only one suit has been bid, then you need to have length in the other three suits and therefore you should have *shortage* in the bid suit. Ideally we would like to have four cards in each of the unbid suits but as this is not always possible, you should have at least three cards in each of the unbid suits unless you are very strong.

The perfect shape for a take-out double is 4-4-4-1 with the singleton in the bid suit. When you hold a hand of this sort, you can be pretty sure that you will have a fit with your partner. In fact you are allowed to assume that you will find a fit, and are therefore able to add on points for your singleton, which means that you can double on slightly weaker hands. Let me summarise the requirements for a take-out double:

- (1) *Shortage* in the *bid suit*.
- (2) At least three cards in each of the unbid suits, but preferably four.
- (3) 13 High-Card Points or 14 total points (including shortage, i.e. 11 HCP + 3 for a singleton)

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If you are very strong (18+ HCP) you can sometimes make a double and then follow up later with another bid to describe your hand. Generally the stronger you are, the more flexibility you have.

Which of these hands might double a 1♦ opening bid?

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ K 8 5 3
♦ 4
♣ Q 10 8 6

NO. This hand fits criteria 1 and 2, but is simply too weak.

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ K Q 4
♦ 4 2
♣ Q 10 9 6

NO. Once again this hand fits criteria 1 and 2, but without a singleton you are still too weak to double.

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ 4
♣ Q 10 9 6

YES! You have a singleton in the diamond suit, good support for the three unbid suits, and finally you are just strong enough with 11 HCP and 3 points for a singleton (= 14 total points).

♠ A Q 8 7
♥ K Q 4
♦ 4 2
♣ Q 10 9 6

YES! You have shortage in diamonds, at least three cards in each of the unbid suits and 13 HCP.

♠ A K 9 8 7 6
♥ K 4
♦ 4
♣ Q 8 7 6

NO. You should overcall in spades. You have one suit much longer than the others and do not have adequate support for hearts.

♠ 7
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ Q 10 9 6

NO. Remember you must have shortage in the bid suit (diamonds). If you make a take-out double on a hand like this, your partner is likely to respond in spades. You should *pass* with this hand. (You need at least five hearts to overcall with 1♥).

Weak No-trump hand types

This brings us to the *Weak No-trump* type of hands. Too often club players pick up a weak no-trump, hear their right-hand opponent open in a suit, and because they want to make a call of

some sort they eventually decide to double. The thing to remember about the weak no-trump is the first word: *weak*. You do not have to make a call and therefore if you do not have shortage in the bid suit and you do not have a five-card suit, you should simply pass.

Both these hands should pass over 1♦:

♠ 7 2
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ A Q 4
♣ Q 10 9 6

This hand has a stop in diamonds, but you need extra strength to overcall with 1NT after 1♦ (usually 15-18 points). Therefore you cannot bid 1NT, you certainly cannot overcall and without shortage in diamonds and with scant support for spades you must not double. You should simply *pass*.

♠ K J 3
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ 5 3 2
♣ A J 9

This hand is even stronger than a weak no-trump (15 points); do you have to make a bid over 1♦? *No!* Once again you should *pass*. With no diamond stop you cannot overcall with 1NT, and with no shortage in diamonds you should not double.

Obviously the level of the opening bid makes a difference to the values needed for a double. At the two and three level you need a little more strength. However, the shape tends to be the important aspect of the hand: if you have the perfect 4-4-4-1 type of hand, it pays to be aggressive because you are highly likely to have a fit with partner:

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ Q J 10 2
♣ 6

Over 3♣ it is perfectly reasonable to double for take out with this hand. Just 12 HCP but, with a singleton, you can account for your shape and therefore have 15 total points. Another way of

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evaluating the hand's strength is by using the Losing Trick Count, which gives a tally of six losers – a better than minimum opening hand. The reason we can use the LTC is because we assume that we have a fit.

The Protective Seat

A player is said to be in the *protective seat* when a pass from him would finish the auction. When you are the fourth person to bid and a pass from you would finish the auction, think seriously before passing. Frequently one opponent will have shown a very weak hand, which would suggest that your partner must have some strength; this might mean that you should make a bid. A good rule of thumb is to add about 3 points to your hand and see if you want to make a bid, or, put another way, you can 'borrow a king' from your partner.

Why would you want to do this? Because on hands like those weak no-trump hands we discussed above, when your partner was unable to make a call with as many as 15 points, you want to *protect* him, so that you do not let your opponents win the auction easily.

The idea is that the player with the shortage in the opponent's suit has the easier call and therefore should try hard to bid.

After the auction 1♦ – Pass – Pass:

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ K 8 5 3
♦ 4
♣ Q 10 8 6

This was the first of the example hands on page 13, one on which we decided to pass rather than make a take-out double. However, this time the situation has changed somewhat, since the opener's partner has passed, thus showing less than 6 points. Where are all the points? Some are probably in your partner's hand, so you 'borrow a king' and then see if you can make a call. If you add ♣K to the hand above, you would certainly make a double and so that is what you should do.

Your partner held the following hand which, as we saw, was unable to make a call over 1♦:

♠ K J 3
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ 5 3 2
♣ A J 9

But since you protected him by borrowing a king, you have re-opened the auction and allowed your side to reach 4♥.

Remember, though, that you do need shortage in the bid suit to make a take-out double.

After the auction 1♦ – Pass – Pass:

♠ A 9 8 7
♥ 4
♦ K 8 5 3
♣ Q 10 8 6

This hand should *pass*. With length in the opponent's suit, it is more likely that your partner has shortage and therefore he would have been able to make a bid over 1♦ had he had enough strength.

Just one more example before we move on:

Dealer: South. Love All.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| ♠ J 10 8 5 ♥ K Q 9 2 ♦ 9 7 ♣ J 10 8 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ A 7 6 2 ♥ 7 6 ♦ Q 6 5 3 2 ♣ K 2 | ♠ K Q 9 4 ♥ A 10 5 ♦ A 10 ♣ Q 9 5 4 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | | |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| Pass | 2♠ | Pass | 1♠ |
| ? | | | Pass |

South opens 1♠ and North raises to 2♠ which finishes the auction . . . or does it? When 2♠ comes round to West, he should think very carefully before passing. Where are all the points? Why have North-South stopped below game?

It seems that your partner must have some strength and since he probably has

some length in spades he has not been able to make a call.

Borrow a king from his hand and see if you would make call. Put the king of hearts in your hand and there is no doubt it is worth making a take-out double – so go ahead and do it!

In duplicate bridge it is important to remember that even if you bid to a contract and go down, you can get a good score. If South can make 2♠, as seems likely, he will score 110. However, if East-West go down in their own contract they will give away only 50 and even two down is just 100. I hope that when you realise that you do not have to make your contract, you will find it easier to change your style and call more aggressively.

Over the double East will respond 3♦ which will make nine or ten tricks. South might compete to 3♠ but he will not be able to make nine tricks. That makes quite a difference to the score; West gets +50 for defeating 3♠ instead of –110 for letting 2♠ make. Competing for part-score deals is very important and using take-out doubles wisely is an integral part of duplicate.

Responding to a Take-out Double

It is all well and good knowing when and how to double, but you also need to know how to respond.

You are being forced to make a bid; your partner wants you to bid your best suit. It is important to note that even with zero points you do need to make a response and therefore with a stronger hand of 9-12 points you should be making a jump response as laid out below:

- 0-8 Bid a suit cheaply.
- 9-12 Invite (by jumping in a suit).
- 13+ Bid the opponents' suit, or jump to game.

0-9 is a large spread of points for the simple response but, in reality, if you have only 0-5 points the intervening player will usually make a bid (see below) or the doubler will be stronger and can bid again.

The 1NT response shows 7-9 points, just a little more than the response to an opening bid because, as we have seen, the doubler can have a little less strength (11 HCP and a singleton).

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Important things to note when responding to a Double

1. You should include points for *shortage* when you evaluate your hand, since you can assume that you have some kind of fit with your partner. (He has suggested that he has a fit for each of the unbid suits.)
2. If there is an *intervening* bid, then hands with 0-5 points should *pass*, but otherwise continue as above.
3. When responding, generally favour the *major* suits.
4. Assess your holding in *opener's suit* – a queen or king is likely to be wasted opposite your partner's singleton, whilst an ace will carry its full value.
5. Be *very careful* before passing a take-out double. At the one level you need exceptionally good trumps (Q-J-10-9-5 or K-J-8-6-4-3), whilst at the three-level you need four good trumps and a reasonable hand. The point is that your partner has asked you to bid, so before you disobey him, you should make absolutely sure you are doing the right thing.

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After the auction 1♦ – Double – Pass, what would you call on the following hands?

♠ 10 8 7 4
♥ 8 7 6
♦ 10 4 3 2
♣ 10 4

1♠. You must make a response and so you bid your best suit at the cheapest level.

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 8 7 6
♦ K 4 3 2
♣ 10 4

1♠. Once again, just bid your best suit at the lowest level.

♠ K 10 8 7
♥ 7 6
♦ 10 4
♣ J 9 8 7 6

1♠. When responding with a weak hand, tend to favour a response in a four-card major, since the doubler will tend to have better support for the unbid major(s) rather than the minor(s).

♠ K Q 8 7 4
♥ K 7 6 3
♦ 10 4 3
♣ 4

2♠. Remember to include distribution when counting your points. This hand is worth 11 points, not just 8 points: 8 HCP and 3 for a singleton.

♠ A J 8 7
♥ A Q 5 4
♦ 10 4 3 2
♣ 4

2♦. Once again this hand is worth more than just its High-Card Points. 11 + 3 for

a singleton = 14, comfortable enough for game – but which game? Whenever you have enough strength for game but are not sure which is the best game, try using a bid of the opponent's suit. This shows a strong hand and asks partner to bid again. Consider your partner's hand:

♠ K Q 9 2
♥ J 7 6
♦ 7 6
♣ A K 9 8

The auction progresses:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♦ | Dbl | Pass | 2♦* |
| Pass | 2♠ | Pass | 4♠ |

Rather than guessing in which major to play, you give partner the choice; he bids his best major, and now you can be sure that spades is the best strain and therefore confidently bid to game.

Here are two more examples; after the auction 1♠ – Double – Pass:

♠ J 8 4 3 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 10 8
♣ K 10 4

Bid 2♣. There is a temptation to pass 1♠ doubled, but this would not be a good idea. Your partner wants you to call so do the best you can and respond 2♣. It is not ideal, but at least you are doing what your partner told you to do. Remember also that you should only pass at the one level with very good trumps.

♠ A 10 9 7
♥ 10 5
♦ K J 4 3
♣ 7 6 3

Bid 1NT. Rather than responding 2♦, showing 0-9 points, you do better to bid 1NT, showing your excellent stop in the opponent's suit and 7-9 points.

We will consider hands on which to pass take-out doubles in a future article on penalty doubles.

Using doubles successfully is difficult and takes practice. ■