



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

www.jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

My partner opened 1NT (15-17 HCP), and I was planning to pass holding 3 high-card points and four low spades. Before I did, however, my right-hand opponent overcalled 2♥. I had two low hearts and passed the bid around to my partner, who doubled. When it came back to me, I passed. I assumed this was a penalty double, since we play "mirror" doubles and I could have handled any positive response on the first round if I had the values. They made an overtrick and I was in the dog house with partner, who said the double was for takeout. He didn't want to sell out to 2♥ and wanted my input. He said I should have bid 2♠. I argued that my pass told the story of my hand and if he wanted to take the contract, he should have just bid something. What do you think?

Doubled Troubles

Hi DT,

Without a specific agreement to the contrary, the standard treatment is to play that if the 1NT opener doubles an overcall by his LHO (the opponent he is "underneath"), the double is intended as takeout. For example, holding:

♠KQ87 ♥82 ♦AK4 ♣AJ94,

West could bid in this manner:

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♥	Pass	Pass
Db!			

Doubling for takeout is the best option for further competition. If, as East, your 3-point hand was something such as:

♠9643 ♥103 ♦986 ♣K1063,

reaching 2♠ is likely superior to defending 2♥. In 2♠, with reasonable breaks, you rate to lose two spades, two hearts, one diamond and perhaps a club. In 2♥, the opponents appear to have a maximum of five losers (one spade, two diamonds and two clubs). On a good day, you would play 2♠ and make it or go down one. Alternatively, the opponents, who are cold for 2♥, would push to the three level and go down one.

As an additional point, it should be more important for double in this sequence to be played as takeout because of your agreement to play responder's doubles as "mirror" or "stolen" bids. If the auction started identically, except this time as responder, you held:

♠K92 ♥KJ943 ♦986 ♣63,

in your system, double would be a transfer to spades, making pass the only option. Wouldn't you be a happy camper if partner could reopen the bidding with a takeout double?

Now consider this auction:

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	Pass	2♥
Db!			

The standard treatment is to play that if the notrump opener doubles an overcall by his RHO (the opponent he is "over"), the double is penalty. This would be justified holding something such as:

♠AK ♥AQ106 ♦A93 ♣9852.

With what appears to be six defensive tricks, it seems reasonable to take a chance!

As always, partnership agreement is the final answer. Some partnerships may opt to play both of these doubles as takeout. Without discussion, however, the standard treatment is this: "Under" doubles are takeout, "over" doubles are penalty.

Have a question for Jerry? Contact him at askjerry@jerryhelms.com