

Bidding After A Takeout Double

Last week we examined some aspects of the negative double. (By the way, the ACBL said that an alert of a double is never necessary “unless the meaning of the double is highly unusual or unexpected,” so if you want to play negative doubles when partner is an overcaller, no alerts are needed.) This week we’ll look at ideas on what to do when partner opens and our RHO doubles.

As always, what is most important is that you have a system that *you* like, but if you haven’t gone through this with your partner(s), here are some ideas in current use.

Partner opens 1NT

When the opening is in no trump, things are more wide open, because the double can have a variety of meanings. For example, in DONT, it shows a one-suited hand; in Cappelletti, it is for penalties. My partner and I play forcing Stayman and four-suit transfers, and we play systems on over interference. Therefore, we would make our normal bid over the double with the following exceptions:

1. With a square, positive hand that would have raised to two or three no trump *without* the double, we redouble, saying we can make our bid or double them wherever they play.
2. With a bad hand and a weak five-card suit, we would pass if the double showed a suit. There’s no reason to fight for the contract when you have nothing to fight with.

Partner opens in a suit

It doesn’t matter that much whether partner’s opening is in a major or a minor other than needing more trumps to raise or jump raise a minor suit. Of course, the preemptive value of raising a spade opening is worth doing so on 4-5 support points, so you can be pushier when holding the master suit. Other responses will be based on what type of hand you hold and whether you have a fit with partner.

Preliminary Idea: Remember, opponents sometimes double with mediocre hands because either they are aggressive or bored, or they may have a weak hand with crazy distribution. Do not assume game is out of the question because of a double. Evaluate your hand as you would normally do, keeping in mind that *usually* the doubler will tend to be short in partner’s suit and will hold many of the missing face cards. This should help in the play of the hand if you win the contract.

Bidding With Good Hands (10+ HCP)

Main Principle: With two exceptions, all strong hands of 10+ HCP begin with a redouble. This does not necessarily deny trump support or that you hold a decent suit of your own. It just tells your partner that you are not broke and that you can be counted on to act again later in some way. The two exceptions are (1) hands that contain two suits of at least five cards each; (2) hands with 4+ card trump support for a major (there is an optional way to bid these as I will explain). With a two-suited hand, the redouble takes up bidding space. Simply bid your higher-ranking suit as cheaply as possible and, at your next turn, bid the

other suit. Remember, both suits must be at least five cards in length! Partner will know you have 10+HCP and that he can raise one of your suits with three-card support. As for good hands with support for partner's major, expert Eddie Kantar offers this way to bid them:

1. With 4+ trumps and 10-12 support points, bid 2NT. This is an artificial bid (to show 10-12 without support, redouble and then bid two no trump) and allows partner to bid three on a minimum, four on a maximum, and even to make a game or slam try.
2. Holding 13-15 support points and trump support, bid 3NT. Partner can leave it in with bad trumps and goodies elsewhere, bid game in the major, or make a slam try by bidding a new suit.

Note 1: I have never used this artificial system, but I might like to try it. It eliminates the ambiguity of redoubling with the intention of later raising partner, then having the opponents mess things up with leaping in their suit!

Note 2: With more than 15 support points, Eddie says to "redouble and then work it out from there." This situation is so rare that there is no system for it.

Bidding With Weak Hands (4-7 HCP)

1. With nothing to show, pass. One-level doubles are rarely left in, and partner may have a great hand that can take 6-7 tricks with little help. Do not be afraid to use the green card!
2. Bid a new suit of 4+ cards at the one level. This should be a holding of decent strength because the double infers that RHO holds 4+ of this suit and there is little reason to show ten-high trash. This bid is forcing for one round as this same bid might be made with a good hand (see bidding a two-suited hand above), so partner must keep the bidding open if your LHO passes your bid. Obviously, you don't bid again with 4-7 HCP unless partner does something to force you, and you would never omit a raise of partner's major in favor of your own suit if you have at least three-card support.
3. With support for partner (3 in a major, 4 in a minor), raise his suit. With longer trumps (4+ in a major, 5+ in a minor), especially if holding a singleton, jump raise. This is preemptive, not forcing or invitational!
4. With a weak two in a major, jump to the two level. This denies 10 or more points and promises six or more in the suit. It is neither forcing nor invitational.
5. With a one-loser or running seven-card minor, bid at the three level. This *is* invitational to three no trump if partner has the stoppers for it.
6. A non-jump response at the two level shows 5-8 HCP and a six-card suit or a strong five-card suit. It is a weaker response than a redouble or a bid at the one-level. For example, if partner's 1♠ opening is doubled, bids by you of 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥ are showing weak hands with good suits and are not forcing or invitational.

Bidding With Medium Strength Hands (7-10 HCP)

1. Yes, there is some overlap here. As George Orwell put it, some pigs are more equal than others. Some seven-point hands (see #6 above) are better than others, and some 10-point hands are not worth a redouble (flat distribution and lots of “quacks” for example). This is where your judgment and experience go to work.
2. With support for partner, passing and *then* raising (assuming partner has not bid again) promises 8-9 support points, occasionally 10 with only three trumps and bad shape. If partner *does* bid again, you must then jump raise to show this hand. For example, if the bidding is 1♥(partner), DBL, Pass (you), 1♠ (LHO), 2♥ (partner), you should now jump to 4♥.
3. Make a non-jump bid of your own suit or bid it at the two level (see #6 again). Plan to bid again or double the opponents if circumstances permit.
4. Bid 1NT. Kantar advises that this should not be done with a singleton in partner’s suit. He says in that case to “pass and let the opponents get into trouble.”

If you have questions, suggestions, or additions to make to this discussion, see me at the club or Email me at the address on the home page. And squeeze in a few hands of bridge while you watch March Madness for the next three weeks!