

Double Trouble

Part 1: Takeout Doubles

Introduction

Takeout doubles are a commonly used convention for defensive bidding. When the other side has opened the bidding at a low level, the double is not particularly useful as a natural bid and therefore is assigned as *takeout*, since the doubler's partner must take it out. The typical interpretation of a takeout double is "Partner, please pick an unbid suit." That said, on which of the following hands should you make a takeout double? Suppose the opponents open 1♦ and you hold the following hands. Would you make a takeout double?

- a) Kxxx, QJxx, x, Kxxx
- b) Qxx, AJx, KQx, Jxxx
- c) Ax, AQxx, x, Kxxxx
- d) Qx, Jxxx, AQxx, AKxx
- e) ATxx, KJxx, AQxx, x

What may surprise you is that none of these hands qualify for a takeout double. They all have at least one flaw which disqualifies them from consideration. So, what are those requirements for a takeout double?

- 1) Shortness in the opponent's suit.
- 2) At least an opening strength hand.
- 3) Support for all the unbid suits with emphasis on unbid majors.

This brings up one of the most important concepts in bridge which I dub the Yin Yang of bridge. Believe it or not, your HCP are going to take tricks on defense as well as offense. If you don't have a decent choice for making an offensive move there is no shame in passing and defending, not to mention that defending will likely be the right action!

Now let's take a look at some unusual hands that would be appropriate for a takeout double of 1♦.

- a) Jxx, AKxx, x Kxxxx
- b) KJTx, AJx, xx, Axxx
- c) AKx, KQx, xxx, Kxxx
- d) AQx, Jxxxx, x, KQxx

Responding to a Takeout Double

First, let's define a couple of terms to make our discussion clear. Everyone knows who the "opener" refers to and the "responder" is the partner of the opener. But defensive bidding isn't talked about as frequently but those players have names, too! The first player to enter the auction after the opponents have opened the bidding is called the "overcaller" or "doubler" as we will call them in this section, and the partner of the doubler is called the "advancer".

The weakest action that the advancer can take is a **simple (non-jump) suit bid**. This action shows 0-8 HCP and generally four or more of the suit bid. However, since the advancer has been forced to bid by the takeout double, he may have to bid a three-card suit on occasion, so the doubler should take care if it sounds like the advancer is dragging his feet in later rounds of the auction! For instance, suppose your partner makes a takeout double on the following auction: (1♥)-DBL-(P). You would respond 1♠ with both KQxx, xxxx, Qxx, xxx and the horrible Jxx, xxxx, xxx, xxx.

Advancing with 1NT, in classical theory, was mildly constructive showing 8-10 HCP and a stopper in the opponent's suit. Today theory has changed such that most experts play a 1NT response as showing that this is your best guess as to your side's best contract. Therefore, let's define 1NT as 5-10 HCP with some semblance of a stopper in their suit with the caveat that the stopper may be weak or even nonexistent for the same reason we mentioned above when we said that advancer might bid a three-card suit. Advancer has been forced to bid by the takeout double and is guessing as to the best contract since they have to choose right now from potentially poor options. Generally, you will advance a takeout double with a major suit response if you have four or more of them, so a 1NT response tends to deny four of any unbid major suits.

A **jump response to a takeout double** is a constructive but non-forcing bid showing four or more in the suit and 8-11 HCP. It is a common myth that this bid shows 5+ cards in the bid suit. Why should that be? The doubler has shown support for the unbid suits, so four in advancer's suit should already ensure a fit. What is of paramount importance, however, is trying to determine what range of HCP both the doubler and the advancer have. A typical minimum hand for a jump response of 2♠ to a takeout double of 1♦ would be Kxxx, xx, Axx, Kxxx.

Advancer's cuebid of the suit opened by the opponents shows an even better hand. Although this cuebid shows a good 12+ HCP it is not quite game forcing. It does, however, guarantee that responder will bid one more time so that the doubler doesn't have to jump with a good hand. Take this hand as an example: You hold as the doubler AJTx, KQxx, xx, AJx and the advancer holds Kxx, Qxxx, KJxx, KT. With the opening bid on your right the auction would proceed: (1♦)-DBL-(P)-2♦; (P)-2♥-(P)-3♥; (P)-4♥-all pass. Notice that although the doubler has some extra values and wants to insist on game after advancer makes a cuebid, he does not have to jump when he introduces spades since he knows that advancer will bid one more time and he will get another chance to bid.

Suppose the advancer doesn't raise doubler's suit but cuebids and then bids a new suit. This is a forcing bid where the doubler should make a natural continuation. For instance, suppose doubler has AJTx, KQxx, xx, Kxx while advancer holds Ax, xxx, Kx, AQTxxx. The auction would go (1♦)-DBL-(P)-2♦; (P)-2♥-(P)-3♣. Here, opener must bid again, but doesn't have anything monumental to say. He doesn't have a stopper in diamonds (which isn't surprising since he made a takeout double of diamonds), he doesn't love clubs very much (no singleton and only 3 clubs) and he doesn't have any extra values. In this case I would suggest that doubler bid 3♠. He will be well placed over advancer's next bid to do the right thing.

But what would advancer's cuebid mean as a passed hand? It can't mean 12+ HCP as he would have opened the bidding. In this case, it is a constructive bid; let's say 7-11 HCP, with at least 4 cards in two of the suits implied by the takeout double. If the suit opened was a minor the passed hand cuebid shows both majors. Advancer wants opener to choose his best suit to play in. In this situation, since advancer is limited the cuebid does not guarantee another call by the advancer so the doubler needs to jump to show game forcing values. A typical hand for a passed hand cuebid might be AJxx, Jxxx, Kxx, xx.

A double jump response (but not to game) to a takeout double is a fairly rare beast but it is worth mentioning for completeness. This bid is a preemptive call showing a very weak hand with 6-7 trumps. The reason you feel safe in bidding so high is because of the huge trump fit you expect. If the doubler has a minimum takeout double of 12-14 HCP and you have 3 HCP, it is likely that the opponents might have game. This is even more likely given the 9+ trumps your side is sure to possess. For instance, after a takeout double of 1♦ you might jump to 3♠ holding Jxxxxx, xx, xx, Qxx.

Passing a takeout double is for penalty. It says that the advancer thinks that defending against the opening bid doubled is the best score for their side. Make no mistake; this is generally not a weak action but an expression of values and a long strong holding in the opener's trump suit. When considering a penalty pass of a takeout double, remember that your trumps will be well positioned for declarer so with modest values or modest trumps it is likely right to opt for a notrump contract rather than playing for penalties. A typical pass would be Ax, xxx, KQTxx, Jxx.