



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(50) Competitive Doubles

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Level: 1

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General

In most auctions, a double shows the values to compete in the bidding, but no clear opinion about what to do: we are “non-committal.” There are many different names for these doubles: takeout, negative, responsive, etc. These doubles are similar in that they are used to compete in the bidding and search for a fit or a *better* fit. In this lesson, we will examine some more complex situations where we might use double to try to better understand what partner is showing.

More Doubles - A Common Case

On some hands we start with a takeout double and then end up with a chance to make another double. These auctions come up more often than one would think - my partners never bid the suit I want them to when I make a takeout double! When we make a takeout double, we promise 3-card support for all the unbid suits. If partner bids one of the suits we have “good support” for (4+ cards) and the opponents continue to compete, then we can raise if we have extra values. But if we have extra values and only 3-card support for the suit that partner has bid, we use a second takeout double to show this kind of hand.

1♥ X P 2♣
2♥ X

This second takeout double shows extra values (about 14+ pts) with only 3-card ♣ support.

Example

♠ AK85

♥ 4

♦ KT972

♣ AJ6

This is a perfect hand for making a second takeout double in the above auction.

General Double Ideas: Direct Seat

Let's continue our discussion with a detailed look at the meaning of our doubles in different competitive situations in theory. Our direct seat doubles tend to have very specific meanings. Let's look at the different situations and the meaning of double in each of them.

- With no known fit, a double is for takeout.
 - It is looking for a fit.
 - It shows enough values (combined with what we know about partner's hand) to compete to this level.
- With a known fit, a double is generally "card-showing".
 - Double is cooperative and shows some defense. It says that we want to either compete in the bidding in our suit or double the opponents for penalty and that we want input from partner in making this decision. We have "convertible values" - cards that are good for both offense and defense.
 - We usually do not have extra length in our fit - that would violate the Law of Total Tricks (LOTT.)
 - We do not promise a trump stack (actually we deny one), but we like to have some values in their suit. A holding like Hxx is perfect for this double.
 - If their suit is immediately under our suit, then we no longer have room to make a game try. In this situation we use double as our game try (called a Maximal Double.) The maximal double takes precedence over the cooperative card-showing double - it is more important for us to bid game in our own suit than to penalize the opponents.

Examples

1♠ P 2♠ 3♣
—?

- 3♠ Competitive. To Play. Offensively-oriented Hand. Generally, Law of Total Tricks.
- X Cooperative. "Card-showing." Some defense and some offense.
- 3♦/3♥ Help Suit Game Tries. Offensively-oriented hand with extra values.
- Pass Minimum hand with only 5-card ♠ OR a trap pass.

1♠ P 2♠ 3♥
—?

- X General Game Try. Maximal Double.
- Pass Minimum hand with only 5-card ♠ OR a trap pass.

Penalizing - Trap Pass

With a pure penalty double (trump stack) in the direct seat, we make a “trap pass” and wait for partner to reopen with a double. The general idea is that we have them where we want them – so we leave them there. If partner passes the hand out, then we are fine with that – we will take our plus score. But if partner has some defense and can reopen with double, then we will take a very large plus score!

General Double Ideas: Balancing Seat

When we make a balancing seat double we are often striving to compete and we are using double as our last resort. These doubles are more flexible in their shape and meaning. Let’s look at some of the different situations and the meaning of double in each of them.

- With no known fit, a double is for takeout.
 - It is looking for a fit and showing more values than previously shown.
 - We may double in the balancing seat with fewer points or with less than perfect shape because this is the final chance for our side to compete in the bidding.
- With a known fit, a double is generally “card-showing.”
 - Double is cooperative and shows defense.
 - Double denies having additional trump (LOTT.)
 - It promises some defense, but does not promise a strong trump holding. In fact, it will frequently have trump shortness if we are underneath the long suit.

Conclusion

Compete, Compete, Compete. This is the motto of modern bidders, especially in matchpoint events. If you are going to accomplish this then becoming comfortable and proficient with the double card is the most important thing you can do. Spend some time thinking about how you can expand your use of the double card to help you further compete in the bidding.