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This Week in Bridge

(300) Positive Freebid vs. Negative Double

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Level: 2

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General

When partner opens the bidding at the 1-level in a suit and RHO makes an overcall, then we have two ways to compete in the bidding and search for a fit (or a better fit if we already have a fit for their suit). We can make a double or bid a new suit. In this situation Responder's double is a negative double and bidding a new suit is a freebid (a positive freebid). The values required to make each of these actions vary based on the level of the opponent's overcall. Here we look at some of Responder's hands and discussion how to choose between reasonable options in a variety of different situations.

What is Needed to Make a Negative Double

A negative double of a 1-level overcall shows at least 6 points. The higher the opponent's overcall, the more values we show when we make a negative double (because we are forcing partner to bid at a higher level). The values we promise progress linearly from about 6+ points to 12+ points:

Values Promised for Making a Negative Double

1♦	1♠	X	6+ points
1♦	2♣	X	7+ points
1♦	2♥	X	8+ points
1♦	2♠	X	9+ points
1♦	3♣	X	10+ points
1♦	3♥	X	11+ points
1♦	3♠	X	12+ points, Game Forcing

The shape that we need to make a negative double varies dramatically. A negative double at low levels generally promises specific holdings, but the higher the opponents overcall, the more we use a negative double with a variety of different holdings. The classic example holds length in both the unbid suits, but the modern style is to use a negative double *whenever we have enough values to take some action but aren't sure what else to do*.

What We Need to Make a Positive Freebid

A freebid, Responder bidding a new suit after an opponent makes an overcall, shows a variety of different values and length based on the level of Responder's actions.

Values Promised for Making a Positive Freebid

1♣	1♦	1♠	6+points, 4+card ♠
1♣	1♥	1♠	6+points, 5+card ♠
1♣	2♥	2♠	10+points, 5+card ♠ - 2-Level Freebid shows this!
1♣	3♥	3♠	12+points, 5+card ♠, Game Forcing -- 3-Level Freebid shows these extra values!

Choosing Between a Positive Freebid and a Negative Double

When the Responder has a hand that qualifies for a positive freebid (having both the length and the strength needed) and has the right shape for a traditional negative double (length in both of the unbid suits) then we must choose between these two actions. Let's look at some examples.

Example 1

1♣ 1♦ __?

With 5/4 in the Majors, we make a freebid of our longest suit, not a negative double.

Example 2

♠ xx

♥ AQxx

♦ xx

♣ AQJxx

1♦ 1♠ __?

Here we have a hand that is well suited for making a traditional negative double (length in both unbid suits) or for making a freebid of 2♣ - showing a 5-card ♣ suit and 10+ points. When faced with this choice it is usually best to make the freebid - showing 10+ points and our long ♣ suit.

The freebid is preferable to a negative double because it lets partner know that the hand belongs to us - we have 12+ points opposite 10+ points, so it is likely our hand and after the freebid partner will know it. In contrast, if we make a negative double, we may have as little as 12+ points opposite 6+ points. We may have only 18 combined points and the opponents may have as many as 22 points (an Ace more than us!).

Example 3

♠ xx
♥ AQxx
♦ xx
♣ AQJxx
1♦ 1♠ 2♣ 2♠
P P ___?

Here we make a freebid in our longest suit, ♣, and later show our 4-card ♥ suit by bidding 3♥.

Making a freebid, letting partner know that the hand belongs to our side, is particularly important if the fourth player preempts the bidding.

Example 4

♠ xx
♥ AQxx
♦ xx
♣ AQJxx
1♦ 1♠ 2♣ 4♠
___?

When the Advancer preempts the bidding, we are likely to want to compete to a high level when we have a large fit (usually at least a 9-card fit). Our best chance of finding such a fit is in the ♣ suit, not the ♥ suit, and making a freebid in ♣ will help us do that. If we had started with a negative double, that would increase our chance of finding a ♥ fit, but the chances that we should be bidding to 5♥ (in only a 4-4 fit) are much smaller than the chances we should be competing in ♣ (in a potential 5-4 or even 5-5 ♣ fit).

Example 5

♠ xx
♥ AQxx
♦ xx
♣ AQJxx
1♦ 2♠ ___?

Again, we strive to make the freebid instead of making a negative double. This time our 3♣ bid is game forcing and allows our side to know that we cannot pass the auction out without bidding game or doubling the opponents.

Conclusion

Our priority as Responder is to focus on finding a Major suit fit, but when the auction becomes competitive, we need to plan ahead (especially if the opponents preempt the bidding) and think about what information is most likely to help Opener make a good decision if their second bid ends up being made at a high level. A freebid of a new suit (especially at the 2-level or higher) lets partner know our strength (that our side has more values than the opponents) and our longest suit (giving us the best chance of partner discovering a large fit if we have one). Bidding choices like this do not work on every hand, but most of the time if Responder has a choice between a freebid or a negative double – the freebid will be the winning action.