



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(279) The Takeout Double

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Level: 1

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General

In the early days of bridge, the most common meaning of a *double* was for penalty. But it is rare for us to hold a hand that is both strong enough and has the right shape to penalize the opponents when the auction is at a low level. With a *penalty double* rarely being used at low levels, players quickly realized that there must be a better use of this double. The *takeout double* was one of the first conventions in bridge and is one of its most valuable bidding tools. The takeout double is a convention that is aptly named - we are asking partner to bid, to “take the double out, do not leave it in.” The general idea is that when an opponent opens the bidding with a suit, and we have shortness in that suit and a decent hand, then we want to have a way ask partner to compete in the bidding and suggest the best place to play. This is how we use a takeout double: to ask partner to help us make a decision on where to play the contract. Let’s take a look at what type of hands we should have for making a takeout double.

The Takeout Double

A traditional takeout double is used to compete in the bidding after our right-hand opponent (RHO) opens the bidding with a suit. The takeout double shows the following type of hand:

- Approximately opening bid values,
- Shortness in the opponent’s suit,
- At least 3-card support for all the unbid suits.

If the opponents open the bidding with 1♠, here are some examples of hands that would make a takeout double:

Example 1

♠ xx
♥ AKxx
♦ KJx
♣ QTxx

This is a hand that we would have opened 1♣ if we were the first player to act. But with our RHO opening the bidding 1♠ in front of us, we compete in the bidding using a takeout double.



Example 2

♠ xx
♥ KQx
♦ AJxx
♣ Kxxx

Though we often have 4-card support for the other Major when we make a takeout double of the opponent's Major-suit opening bid, it is not required. With this hand we would make a takeout double of 1♠.

With fewer HCP we can still make a takeout double if we have more distribution.

Example 3

♠ x
♥ KQxx
♦ Axxx
♣ Qxxx

Though we have only 11 HCP, because we have 4-card support for all of the unbid suits, we have an excellent hand for making a takeout double of a 1♠ opening bid.

Example 4

♠ --
♥ Axxx
♦ Qxxxx
♣ Axxx

With even fewer HCP and more distribution (a void in the opponent's suit) we may still make a takeout double. This 10 HCP hand is reasonable for making a takeout double because we have excellent honors - two Aces and no Jacks.

Borderline Decisions

As is the case for all decisions in bridge, there are difficult borderline choices to make.

Example 5

If our RHO opens the bidding with 1♥ and we hold the following hand, we have a difficult decision:

♠ Jxx
♥ AK
♦ Qxxx
♣ Jxxx

With a hand like this there is not a perfect answer to the question - Do we make a takeout double? Some of this is a bit of personal bidding style – how aggressive are you? But this is not a *good hand* for making a takeout double because we have minimum shape, minimum HCP, poorly located honors (too many points in the opponent's suit), scattered values, and too many Jacks.



Another hand type that produces a bidding problem for us is a flat hand (4333). If we have a hand with the values for a takeout double but not shortness in the opponent's suit, should we still make a takeout double?

Example 6

If RHO opens the bidding 1♥, with this hand should we make a takeout double?

♠ AQxx
♥ xxx
♦ KTx
♣ KTx

The modern style is to make a takeout double with this hand. Though we do not have shortness in the opponent's suit, with these values and their location it is often better to make a takeout double now than wait to see what may happen later. The key is that we have no values in the opponent's suit. If we switched our ♥ and ♦ holdings, then we would be best suited not to make a takeout double.

Other Uses of the Takeout Double - *Double and Bid*

The takeout double can also be used to start the description of other extremely strong hands.

If we have an extremely strong hand, then we can start with a takeout double and later take some other action to further describe the hand. If we do this, then we tell partner that we did not have the traditional takeout double type hand (shape).

Example 7

RHO opens the bidding with 1♦ and we have the following hand:

♠ AKJxxx
♥ x
♦ AQx
♣ AJx

This hand is too strong to make a simple overcall of 1♠. Instead, we start by making a takeout double and then later bid our ♠ suit (assuming partner does not bid ♠). This *Double and Bid* auction shows a long suit (at least 5-cards, usually 6+cards) and an extremely strong hand (usually 18+ HCP).

We describe a similar strong balanced hand by doubling and bidding Notrump. If our RHO opens the bidding and we have a hand that is the right shape and has a stopper to bid Notrump, but is too strong (19+ points) then we start by making a takeout double and later bidding NT.



Conclusion

A takeout double is one of the most valuable competitive bidding tools in bridge. It allows us to compete in the bidding with a three-suited hand that is short in the opponent's suit. Part of the value of this bidding tool is that it gets partner involved in the decision of where we should play by getting them to bid and give us some input about where to find our best fit. Work to improve your judgement in making takeout doubles and strive to use this tool to improve your competitive bidding.