

DOUBLES

By Larry Matheny

The double has been part of bridge since the game was first played. But perhaps no other bid has grown from its original meaning into the huge number of ways it is employed today. Any contemporary book on the topic will contain dozens of different applications for the double. In fact, its original use to penalize the opponents may not be its most frequent use. In our lesson today I will review the takeout double and its cousin, the negative double.

THE TAKEOUT DOUBLE

As stated above, the double's original meaning was to penalize your opponents. However, sometime around 1912 in the game of Auction Bridge, it was decided it made no sense to use it for that purpose on the first round of bidding. This was the birth of the takeout double that we use today.

This bid is an option after the opponents have opened the bidding and you want to intervene. Your choices are to bid a suit, bid notrumps, or ask partner for help by making a takeout double. Your action will depend on the strength of your hand as well as your distribution. A typical hand for the T/O double will have shortness in the opponent's suit and length in the other three. This hand is a classic T/O double after a 1♣ bid by your right hand opponent:

♠AK97 ♥K987 ♦A1093 ♣5

Everyone uses the takeout double, but many partnerships have not fully discussed the highest level at which it applies. Most experts play a double of an opponent's bid as takeout through 4♠. Some players choose a lower level, but the agreement is what is important.

Like all bids, the higher the level, the better your hand needs to be. Here is a guideline of high card points (HCP) needed to make a T/O double:

<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>HCP</u>
One	11
Two	13
Three	15

Assuming you use them through 4♠, the following are for takeout:

OPP	YOU	OPP	PARD		OPP	YOU	OPP	PARD
1♠	DBL				1♥	P	2♥	DBL
3♣	DBL				1♥	P	4♥	DBL
4♥	DBL				1♠	P	2♣	DBL

While the partner of the doubler may choose to pass and defend, the primary purpose is to find your best fit at the proper level.

Here are guidelines for responding to partner's takeout double:

OPP PARD OPP YOU
1♣ DBL P ?

Non-jump in new suit	0-8 points, usually a 4+ card suit
Jump in new suit	9-11 points, non-forcing, a 4+ card suit
Cue bid of opp. suit	12+ points, forcing
1NT	7-10 points, stopper in opponent's suit
2NT	11-12 points, stopper(s) in opponent's suit, invitational
3NT	13-15 points, stoppers in opponent's suit
Pass	Strong holding in opponent's suit; asks for a trump lead

So now we know how to make a takeout double and the responses. However, there are always exceptions in this complicated game. Another use for a T/O double is to show a hand that is too strong to make a simple overcall. For these hands, you first double and then bid your suit.

Here is an example:

♠AKQ1097 ♥K87 ♦AQ3 ♣5

After your right hand opponent opens 1♣, this hand is too strong to simply overcall 1♠. First you must double and then bid spades. The normal overcall point range at the one-level is around 8-17, so with more it's usually best to double first.

However, there are hands that require different treatment. Here is a hand beyond the normal overcall range of 8-17 where the overcall is still the best action:

♠void ♥AKJ987 ♦AQ93 ♣KJ9

OPP YOU
1♣ ?

The problem with doubling first and bidding your heart suit later becomes clear when an opponent (or your partner) jumps to 4♠. It's best to overcall in hearts and try to show a stronger hand later.

Here's an example that shows a hand worth a second T/O double:

♠AK97 ♥void ♦AQJ3 ♣AQ1065

OPP YOU OPP PARD
1♥ DBL 3♥ P
P DBL

The first was for takeout and after the weak jump in hearts by responder, the second is also for takeout and shows a great hand.

Sometimes you hold values but it's best to pass:

♠AK97 ♥98 ♦AQJ3 ♣1065

OPP YOU OPP PARD
1♣ ??

With no heart support you cannot make a T/O double. While an overcall in a 4-card suit might be right, it's better to wait and see how the auction develops.

Here are some exercises:

OPP PARD OPP YOU
1♥ DBL P ?

- | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) |
| ♠J976 | ♠6 | ♠J97 | ♠J8 |
| ♥632 | ♥632 | ♥Q10932 | ♥KJ98 |
| ♦5 | ♦A10765 | ♦87 | ♦K1076 |
| ♣K10872 | ♣Q765 | ♣832 | ♣J73 |

(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)
♠632	♠KQ53	♠AK76	♠7
♥Q63	♥75	♥8763	♥KQJ1083
♦A106	♦A1076	♦5	♦K65
♣Q542	♣854	♣KQ97	♣Q97

- a) **1♠** Help locate a major suit fit.
- b) **2♦** Bid your best suit.
- c) **1♠** A poor choice, but the least of evils. Your hand isn't strong enough for 1NT and your hearts are too weak for a penalty pass.
- d) **1NT** If your side has the values, game is much more likely to be in no-trump than in diamonds, and you are strong enough for a constructive 1NT response.
- e) **2♣** Your hearts probably won't be an adequate stopper opposite partner's implied shortness. You should also discount the poorly placed heart queen.
- f) **2♠** Jump to show a hand worth 9-11 points.
- g) **2♥** Game is probable, especially since none of your values are wasted in hearts, so cue-bid to show at least 12 points. If partner now bids 2♠, bid 4♠
- e) **Pass** Allowing the double to stand and commanding a trump lead from partner. If he doesn't lead one, he doesn't have one.

THE NEGATIVE DOUBLE

Unlike today, in the early days of contract bridge it was very difficult for an artificial bid to be accepted by the organizations that governed the game. For example, in 1933 Easley Blackwood wrote an article for a convention that showed the number of aces in a hand. The Bridge World magazine, then and now an important publication, refused to accept it because it was so radical. In 1944 George Rapee suggested a method to show four-card majors over partner's 1NT opener. He gave credit for this idea to his partner, Sam Stayman. This too was opposed and considered almost cheating.

After Blackwood and Stayman, the arena of bidding stayed pretty much the same for several years until 1957 when Al Roth came up with a new idea. It was first called Sputnik since the Russians had just launched the first satellite, and the negative double was born.

The T/O double is used when the opponents bid while the negative double is used after your partner has opened the auction. Even though the negative double has been around for many years, it is still not completely understood by many of the players who use it. Let's first look at why it is needed.

♠AK43 ♥KJ72 ♦742 ♣53

PARD	OPP	YOU
1♦	2♣	?

In 1956 an expert panel chose the following bids:

2♦ - 8
2♥ - 9
2♠ - 8
3♣ - 18

Today we can't imagine introducing a four-card suit in this auction. Since its inception, perhaps more than any other convention, the negative double has changed the way we bid. With the hand shown above a negative double seems so obvious today that no other bid is probably considered. Let's take a closer look at the different ways the negative double is used and why it is so valuable.

One reason the negative double has become popular is because it solves this difficult -- and common -- bidding problem:

♠762 ♥KQ75 ♦94 ♣KJ93

Partner opens 1♦ and your right-hand opponent (RHO) overcalls 1♠. The overcall has taken away your 1♥ response, so you have no way to accurately describe your strength and distribution. You can't bid 1NT (which promises a spade stopper) and you can't bid a new suit at the two-level (which promises 10+pts and a 5+card suit).

The solution is, of course, the negative double. To use this convention, you and partner agree that if you open the bidding and the opponent makes a direct suit overcall, a double by responder is **NOT** for penalty. Instead, it shows at least fair values (7+ pts.) **AND four-card length** in at least one of the unbid suits -- usually the unbid **major** suit. A common agreement is for 1♣ by partner, 1♦ by RHO -- a negative double promises 4 cards in **both** suits.

In the problem above, you would double to show the values for a response and a four-card heart suit. This tells partner that you would have responded 1♥ if the opponent had passed. If opener also has four hearts, he'll "raise" your response by bidding hearts himself. If not, he can choose another descriptive bid.

Here are some other examples of how you can use negative doubles:

♠K1063 ♥762 ♦K72 ♣AJ7

If partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 2♣, make a negative double to show at least one four-card major. If partner bids 2♥, you can bid 2NT -- this shows an invitational-to-game hand with a club stopper, but without four hearts. Since you started with the negative double instead of 2NT, partner will also know that you have a four-card spade suit.

♠96 ♥KQ82 ♦J2 ♣AJ762

If partner opens 1♣ and RHO overcalls 2♠, make a negative double to show four hearts. In this auction you promise hearts and you **MAY** have diamonds. If partner doesn't bid hearts, you can later support clubs.

Responder's New Suit bids

Playing negative doubles also offers you the advantage of assigning a more specific meaning to the bid of a new suit. After an opponent's overcall, if responder bids a new suit (instead of making a negative double), he promises a **5-card suit**. A new-suit bid at the 1-level shows 7+ pts, at the two-level or higher shows 10+ pts.

♠QJ1073 ♥874 ♦AJ2 ♣74

If partner opens 1♦ and your RHO overcalls 1♥, bid 1♠. The overcall hasn't taken away your one-level response, so you have **two** ways to show spades in these situations. Use the negative double to show a **four-card** suit and bid 1♠ to promise a **five+ card** suit (partner will know he can raise with three-card support). **However**, if partner opens 1♦ and your RHO overcalls 2♣, this hand isn't strong enough for a 2♠ free bid. In this case, you'll have to use a negative double. If partner bids 2♦, you'll pass. If he bids 2♥, you can correct to 2♠ which shows extra length and is not forcing.

Penalizing the Opponent's Overcall

What do you do when you have a "real" penalty double of RHO's overcall? As responder, you can't make an immediate double for penalty, so you must pass, and hope partner will bid again:

♠3 ♥K43 ♦KQ1087 ♣A754

If partner opens 1♠ and your RHO overcalls 2♦, your best option is to pass (in tempo). If partner is short in diamonds (very likely), he'll reopen with a takeout double and you can pass this double for penalties. More on this later.

When is the Negative Double "off"?

You and your partner can decide at which levels of bidding you'll use negative doubles. One popular agreement is that negative doubles are "on" if the opponent makes a suit overcall through 3♠. If you use this agreement, negative doubles are "off" (responder's double is for penalty) if the overcall is 4♣ or higher.

No matter how you choose to play negative doubles, they apply only if the opponent overcalls a **suit**. Responder's double of a 1NT overcall is **always** for penalty.

The higher the level of the overcall, the more strength responder needs to make a negative double. If partner opens 1♣ and the opponent makes a jump overcall of 2♠, you'll want to have a little extra playing strength (not necessarily extra points) to make a negative double, which will force partner to the three-level.

Opener's Rebids

After responder's negative double, opener must make a rebid that describes both his strength and his support for the suit partner has shown with the double. In most cases, you'll bid your hand just as if partner had made a one-bid in that suit:

- With a **MINIMUM** opening (13-15 pts.), make your natural suit or notrump rebid at a low level. If you have four-card support for the suit partner has shown with the double, you should always show it.
- With an **INVITATIONAL** hand (15-17 pts.), **jump one level** to show extra strength (1♣ by you - 1♥ overcall - DBL by partner - P - 2♠ by you).
- With a **FORCING-TO-GAME** hand (18+ pts.), **jump to game**. (Or, if you're not sure of which game to play, **cuebid** the opponent's suit to force responder to tell you more about his hand.)

Reopening the Bidding

This is the part of the convention many new players are not taught. Remember that responder cannot make an immediate penalty double of an opponent's overcall. If you open the bidding, your LHO makes an overcall and your partner passes, he may have a hand with strength in the opponent's suit. If you're short in the overcaller's suit, it's imperative you "protect" partner by reopening the bidding for him.

♠AJ9 ♥KQ72 ♦A10542 ♣9

You open 1♦, your LHO overcalls 2♣, and it goes Pass-Pass back to you. You should keep the auction open with a balancing double, which is takeout. If partner wanted to make a penalty double of 2♣, he can pass. If he didn't, he'll bid 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠.

Be careful about reopening, though, if you have length in the opponent's suit:

♠A3 ♥K5 ♦AQ1087 ♣10754

You open 1♦, your LHO overcalls 2♣, and it goes Pass-Pass back to you. With this hand, you should pass. Your club length tells you partner isn't waiting to make a penalty double of 2♣. It's more likely he passed because he's very weak. Your shortness in the majors should make you suspicious that the opponents have a better trump suit, so don't give them a chance to find it.

We end with a quiz showing other examples.

Assume you use negative doubles through 3♠.

PARD RHO YOU LHO

1♥ 2♣ ??

1. ♠QJ98 ♥K2 ♦K1098 ♣654
2. ♠QJ1098 ♥K2 ♦Q108 ♣654
3. ♠Q98 ♥6 ♦A9832 ♣KJ102

PARD RHO YOU LHO

1♣ 1♠ ??

4. ♠84 ♥AQJ87 ♦J43 ♣876
5. ♠9 ♥KQJ2 ♦AKJ987 ♣54
6. ♠KJ2 ♥6542 ♦K87 ♣K53

PARD RHO YOU LHO

1♠ 3♥ ??

7. ♠72 ♥65 ♦AK1098 ♣KJ76
8. ♠8 ♥KJ932 ♦A876 ♣Q109
9. ♠KJ3 ♥9 ♦A765 ♣Q8762

YOU LHO PARD RHO

1♣ 1♠ P P
??

10. ♠52 ♥AK87 ♦K87 ♣Q1096
11. ♠A1082 ♥K65 ♦65 ♣AQ87
12. ♠AQ3 ♥AK6 ♦K65 ♣K1098

ANSWERS

1. Double – This is the classic negative double.
2. Double – You are not strong enough to bid 2♠.
3. Pass – You will pass your partner's reopening double and penalize the opponents.
4. Double – You are not strong enough to bid 2♥.
5. 2♦ - Show your good diamond suit. If you make a negative double and partner rebids 2♣, you have no good rebid.
6. 1NT – Yes, you can make a negative double but 1NT is a perfect description of this hand.
7. Double – You may not have a fit, but you must try. Perhaps partner will pass for penalties. Remember: sometimes preempts work.
8. Pass – Remember your double is for takeout. You hope that partner can make a reopening double
9. 4♠ – Forget the minors and bid the major suit game.
10. Double – Partner may have a spade stack. You must not lose the ability to penalize the opponents.
11. Pass – You have too many spades and partner didn't bid.
12. 1NT – A trick question. This has nothing to do with negative doubles. You show a hand too good to open 1NT.