

TAKE-OUT DOUBLES & RESPONSES TO THEM

by Maritha Pottenger

A take-out double is made when the opponents open the bidding. The bid of “double” asks partner to **bid any of the 3 unbid suits** (with a preference assumed for finding a 4-4 or longer major suit fit). A take-out double promises:

- 1) an **opening hand** (nowadays that is 12 HCP or more)
- 2) **at least 3-card support for all three unbid suits** (although people elect to make “off-shape doubles” at times where this is not true—the most common case being when doubler has a 4-card major and 5 diamonds, but only 2 clubs & doubles the opening in the other major)
- 3) **shortness** (usually two or fewer cards) **in the suit doubled**

A take-out double should NOT be made if you have:

- 1) a one-suited hand unless you have extra strength. (Doubling & then bidding a suit shows a very good hand.)
- 2) A two-suited hand. (Two-suited cue-bids or the unusual 2NT are best—or bid one suit and then the other. If you double first, the bidding will occasionally be at the 5-level before it gets back to you.)
- 3) Length in the suit opened and shortness in an unbid major.
- 4) A balanced hand with a stopper in the suit opened and 15-18 HCP. Overcall 1NT. (If the opening bid was a weak two, overcall 2NT—shows the same 15-18 HCP. Unusual 2NT does NOT apply over a weak two.)

If your partner has not yet bid, most people play doubles are take-out through 3S; many people play through 4H. Over 4S, double tends to be penalty; 4NT is take-out with at least two suits. If you make a take-out double & LHO raises RHO’s suit, partner passes, RHO passes & you double again, it is **still** take-out. It does **NOT** change to penalty. If LHO jumps to game, a 2nd double by you shows values. Partner can leave it in or bid.

Responding to a Take-Out Double:

- 1) **Bidding at the cheapest possible level shows 0-8 HCP.** (Take-out double is a demand bid and cannot be passed—even if you have 0 HCP—unless you have 5 or 6 tricks in the trump suit named in your own hand.)
- 2) **Bidding one no trump denies a 4-card major**, shows a **stopper** in the opponent’s suit, and promises about **6-10 HCP**. With fewer HCP, may have to bid a 3-card suit if only 4-card suit is opponent’s suit.
- 3) **Jumping one level** shows an invitational hand. Guarantees only a 4-card suit with **9-11 HCP** in the hand. The person making the take-out double is allowed to pass if game is unlikely.
- 4) **Cue-bidding** opponent’s suit sets up a **game-forcing auction**. Partnership must continue to bid until game is reached. [I suggest cue bid can also be used to ask Doubler to pick the major when partner of Doubler is 4-4 in majors & doesn't want to guess in case Doubler is only 4-3 or 3-4.]

Making a “Free Bid”

When your 2nd opponent makes a bid, you are “off the hook.” You are NOT obligated to bid and a bid by you is a “free bid.” Some people demand a minimum point count for a “free bid” (e.g., 6 HCP at the one level; 8 at the two level, etc.) Don’t get locked into absolutes. Consider how good your suits is; how well placed whatever high cards you have are; the level at which you would have to bid; and the vulnerability.

Note: **When one opponent has opened the bidding, you can often make game with only 24 HCP** (rather than the usual 25 or 26 HCP) because you know where everything is.

Rebids by Partner Making Take-Out Double:

- 1) If partner made cheapest possible bid (showing 0-8 HCP), you should pass with anything less than a good 16-18 HCP. With a good 16-18 HCP, you can raise partner. With 19-21 HCP, you can jump-raise partner, inviting game if s/he has almost anything.
- 2) If partner has bid one no trump, you can bid 2NT with a good 16-18 and 3NT with 19 or more HCP.
- 3) If partner makes an invitational jump (showing 9-11 HCP), you can invite back with 14 HCP and should probably just bid game with 15 or more HCP. Pass with only 12-13 HCP.
- 4) If partner cue-bids, just bid your hand naturally (showing a 4-card major, etc.) until game is reached.