

## DOUBLE TROUBLE

Do you know when your partner's double is for takeout and when it is for penalty, or when it simply says that you have more points? All can be avoided if you adopt some simple precepts. Here they are:

- A. If double is your first action, then ALL doubles of their suits at the 1 and 2 levels are for takeout.
- B. If they have bid and raised their suit, ALL doubles up to the 4 level are essentially for takeout.
- C. If your double is meant to be a takeout double it must have takeout shape.
- D. If your double is a responsive double it must have responsive shape.
- E. Never ever double with a stack in their suit.
- F. Never double when your hand is in fact a 1NT overcall hand.
- G. If your first action is double and you then bid a suit, this shows a strong hand with an excellent suit.
- H. If your first action is an overcall and subsequently you double, this shows that you have more than average H.C.P. but no more shape than you first announced.
- I. If double is your first action and they have bid no-trumps, double is for penalty.
- J. If your first action was to open the bidding and subsequently you double, this shows that you have more than average H.C.P. but no more shape than you first announced.
- K. If your first action was a pre-emptive opening or a pre-emptive raise, then a subsequent double shows a desire to bid one more. It is not for penalty.

That first rule A and that second rule B make life very simple. 1 and 2 level doubles are for takeout. That's it. No argument. Nothing to think about.

But those first two rules only work if you also obey rules C and D.

You might need reminding what a Responsive Double is. This is when you open, they overcall and your partner doubles. Something like: 1S – (2H) – DBL. You know it is not for penalty (Rules A & B) so therefore it must be for takeout of the other two suits. It says, I don't have much of a fit if any for your suit, Partner, but I do have a few points and at least 4 cards in each of the other two suits.

C and D are about the fact that a takeout double must have takeout shape. This means that:

- You will be SHORT in their suit (0,1,2).
- You will have a minimum of 8 HCP not vulnerable and 10 HCP vulnerable.
- You will have at least 3 cards in each of the three unbid suits.
- You will NOT have a 5 card major.
- You will generally have 4 cards in any unbid major.

If your hand does not fulfil those expectations, you cannot double and this probably means that you have forgotten to consider an alternative action. (Precepts E and F). Here are some examples:

They have opened 1S and you hold: ♠AQJ875 ♥86 ♦A94 ♣Q6. You cannot double and your proper bid is PASS!

They have opened 1S and you hold: ♠AQJ ♥Q84 ♦A94 ♣QJ86. You cannot double and your proper bid is 1NT.

They have opened 1S and you hold: ♠A6 ♥AJ984 ♦A94 ♣QJ6. You cannot double and your proper bid is 2H.

They have opened 1S and you hold: ♠6 ♥AJ984 ♦AKT94 ♣Q6. You cannot double and your proper bid is 2S.

Precept G: There is only one hand type where you can make a take-out double with a hand that does not meet the criteria for a takeout double. This is when they open 1S and you have a hand like this: ♠A ♥AKJ984 ♦A94 ♣QJ6. You must double on this hand and it is a takeout double because that is how your partner will interpret it and it is as a takeout double that he will respond to it. This hand exemplifies what is known as the Strong Double. You should not use this bid lightly. It too follows some very tight guidelines.

- It must have a very fine (think self-sufficient) suit.
- With a major it must have 17+ HCP.
- With a minor it must have 19+ HCP.

The partner of the Takeout Doubler is also under some very firm obligations. Let us call these sub-precepts a to h.

- a. If they do not bid, he must bid.
- b. If they bid, he should strive to find a bid.
- c. He should generally bid his longest suit.
- d. He should preferentially bid a major before a minor.
- e. With 8-10 HCP he should make a Jump response.

- f. With 11+ HCP, he should Cue-bid THEIR suit.
- g. He must only bid NT if he has 8-10 HCP and a hold in their suit.
- h. If they bid over your partner's double, you must not double yourself expecting him to choose a suit. He has asked you to choose a suit and you have refused, so your double can now only be for penalty.

Sub-precepts a and b are about the necessity of responding to your partner's double. Unless you reply you have invalidated your partner's double. He might as well not have got out of bed in the morning. He is ORDERING you to choose your best suit of the three on offer. If they do not bid, you cannot pass because you are weak. You cannot bid 1NT unless you have at least 8 HCP. You cannot pass for penalty unless you have a real stack in their suit, guaranteeing both to take them light and that this result will score better than making a contract your way. If they bid as in this sequence: 1D – DOUBLE – 2D, you are no longer forced to bid, but you should take every excuse to do so. A free bid here is not associated with a particular point count. 6 or 7 HCP and a 4 card major would do me, and if I had a 5 card major, I wouldn't even wait for 6 HCP.

Sub-precepts c and d are about which suit you should bid. If you are only strong enough to bid once and you have a choice between a 4 card major and a 4+ minor, choose the major. It scores better. Partner is less likely to have only 3 cards in a major than he is to have only 3 cards in a minor. Sometimes you can bid 1 of a major when you would have to bid 2 of a minor. If you have 5:5 distribution in two of the suits that partner is showing an interest in by means of his double, then generally you should bid the higher-ranking of your two suits. This means that if they compete further, you might now get to mention your lower-ranking suit. However if they have opened a red suit and you are 5:5 in the black suits, then I recommend that you respond 2C to your partner's double, because if they now raise the red suit, you can cheaply bid 2S.

A while back I showed you four big hands that you cannot make a take-out double on (or any kind of a double!). Let me elaborate.

Some learners are under the impression that the difference between a double and an overcall is one of strength. This is not the case at all. Both overcalls and doubles have a HCP range of about 8 to 20. The difference between a double and an overcall is one of shape.

If your double promises take-out shape, then obviously you cannot double (hopefully for penalty) with a stack in their suit. Your partner will rightly take

your double out to a suit you promised but don't actually have and your double can't stick for penalty.

If you don't remember to use the 1NT overcall when appropriate, you deprive yourself of the chance to use all your normal responses to 1NT. You should consider whether your hand is suitable for a 1NT overcall BEFORE you consider whether it is suitable for a takeout double.

Precept H is related to precept G. Let's repeat them here for convenience:

If your first action is double and you then bid a suit, this shows a strong hand .

If your first action is an overcall and subsequently you double, this shows that you have more than average H.C.P. but no more shape than you first announced.

In my experience beginners sometimes forget to use both or they remember to use the first one but never the second. Look at these two 17 HCP hands.

♠8 ♥AKJ987 ♦A92 ♣KQ8 and ♠8 ♥AJ987 ♦AK92 ♣KQ8

I have moved just one King, but it makes a world of difference. They both have 17 HCP, but the first hand has a heart suit that you are really proud of, that you would want to be trumps even if partner had only a singleton heart. The second hand has a very grubby, ordinary 5 card heart suit and better honours in the minors. Are you really going to insist on playing in hearts when you might have a 4:4 diamond fit. It is not the high card point count that distinguishes these two hands. They both have the same number. It is the quality of the proposed trump suit that makes the difference.

If they open 1S, on the first hand your action initially is to double (ostensibly takeout) and then a correction of partner's suit to hearts.

If they open 1S, on the second hand your action initially is to overcall 2H and then subsequently to double, showing no better hearts but more strength.

This second course of action has more to recommend it when your suit is a minor. I have already suggested that you should have at least 19HCP and a virtually solid minor to contemplate doubling first and then correcting partner's response to your minor. This is because partner's with a nice shortage in your minor and 5 or more of an unbid major, tend to get very frisky with very few points and drive you up too high with a misfit. Also it is very easy to skate over

a perfectly makeable 3NT en route to a doomed 5 of a minor. Take this hand for example: ♠8 ♥A9 ♦AKQ982 ♣KQ85

If they open 1S and you double, your partner might bid 2H because your double forces him to bid, and if you now bid 3D he could well pass, yet he wouldn't need more than Qxx of spades and either KH or the AC to make 3NT, or just give him 4 or 5 clubs to the Ace and you can more or less guarantee 5C. Double followed by a 3D bid tends to show an exclusivity of diamonds and blocks the approach to other possible contracts. See what happens if your first action is 2D (which already promises at least 5 diamonds and at least 10 HCP). They are unlikely to leave you there and they might now bid 2H or 2S, but now you can double showing the shape you had but more strength. This is more likely to induce partner to bid clubs, or if he bids hearts, you can cue-bid spades asking for a stopper. NO cast-iron guarantees with either approach but to overcall and then double is more flexible.

And this mind-set is what you need to adopt to understand precept J.

Let's now look at precept I. This states that whenever they have bid no-trumps and you double, even at the one and two levels, this cannot be for takeout. Why? Because they haven't bid a suit that you can base your takeout criteria around. How can you be short in their suit, when they haven't actually bid a suit? Ergo a double of no-trumps has to be for penalty. You might not be able to penalize them in fact without just a little help from partner, so most of these doubles of no-trumps have an escape clause. If partner is very weak and has a long suit, he should take the penalty double out to his long suit (even though the doubler will sometimes curse you for having done so.)

Precept J states that if you have opened a suit and subsequently double, your suit has not got longer, but you have more HCP than the average expectation.

Let us say that this is your hand: ♠8 ♥AJ987 ♦KQ2 ♣KQ86. You open 1H. What is your partner's average expectation for your hand. If you are playing Standard American or many other systems that promise 5+ cards to open a major, that expectation is 5 hearts and 13 HCP. They overcall 1S and your partner and the other opponent both pass. Do you feel like competing further? Of course you do. Your hand is about a King better than average expectations (nicely reinforced honours in the minors and a handy singleton), BUT your suit has not got longer. What is your bid? Most definitely NOT 2H! Your heart suit has not grown longer! Your proper bid is DOUBLE. This double is called the reopening

double and it states that your suit is no longer than average expectations, but that you have a stronger hand. It also implies some support for the two unbid suits. For beginners the reopening double is sometimes the forgotten bid, yet it is a marvellously unambiguous and helpful bid.

If by contrast, this were the hand that you opened 1H on: ♠8 ♥AJ9876 ♦K2 ♣AQJ6, then this is a hand you would rebid 2H on after they overcall 1S, because, not only is it stronger than average expectations, but the heart suit is longer than the promised 5 cards. At this point some of you might rightly be deducing that the reopening double is a more useful adjunct to 5 card major systems than it is to 4 card Acol and you would be right. There are three possible solutions to this dilemma: Either you could switch a Standard American OR you could play ACOL with 5 card majors OR you simply assume that the use of the reopening double indicates a 6 card suit. That last agreement involves no real change to the ACOL you already play. In fact it embodies a very hallowed and ancient bridge concept, that mere 5 card suits should never be rebid but only implied. Thus, if you open 1S and rebid NT suggests that your spade suit is 4 cards; if you open 1S and rebid 2S suggests that your spade suit is 6 cards; and if you open 1S and rebid a lower ranked suit implies your spade suit is 5 cards.

Finally precept K which states that if your first action was a pre-emptive opening or a pre-emptive raise, then a subsequent double shows a desire to bid one more. It is not for penalty.

3H: that was a pre-emptive opening bid.

1H – 3H: according to partnership agreement that is probably a pre-emptive raise.

A pre-empt cannot stop being a pre-empt. It cannot miraculously change to a defensive hand when you can double their suit for penalty. So, if a hand that has pre-empted, subsequently doubles, this has a very specific meaning. It says, "Partner, I have a long suit or a long fit with your suit. I have no defence to their suit and my natural inclination is to bid one more of our suit. Just in case you disagree with me and can take them light, I am doubling to give you the option to convert my double to penalty. Please remember that a penalty double is my furthest intention."

A good motto to adopt for all competitive bidding is: A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS. Thus a takeout double followed by a repeat double is still

takeout, just a stronger hand. A takeout double hand can NEVER become a penalty double hand. An overcall hand followed by a subsequent double is still an overcall hand, it is just a stronger overcall hand. A pre-emptive hand followed by a subsequent double is still an entirely pre-emptive hand. A pass followed by a subsequent double must now be penalty, because if it were takeout it would have doubled in the first place rather than passing.

On the next pages you will find examples of doubling situations that occurred in real hands at Hastings Bridge Club.

<p>           ♠ Q 7 2            ♥ K 4            ♦ A Q J 10 8            ♣ A 9 5            ♠ 10 9 5 4    ♠ A K J 6            ♥ 6 2        ♥ A 10 9 8 7            ♦ 4 3 2      ♦ 6            ♣ Q J 4 3    ♣ K 8 6            ♠ 8 3            ♥ Q J 5 3            ♦ K 9 7 5            ♣ 10 7 2         </p>	<p>Board 1</p> <p>North opens 1D, East doubles, South bids 3D, West passes, North passes, East doubles again.</p> <p>What should West do?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>East doubled for takeout. His repeat double even at the 3 level must still be for takeout. West should bid 3S.</p>
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<p>           ♠ A Q J 6 2            ♥ 9 8 5            ♦ A Q 8 4            ♣ 9            ♠ 10 7 5 4    ♠ 8            ♥ 7 3 2       ♥ A K J 10 6            ♦ 5            ♦ K 7 3 2            ♣ Q 10 6 5 3   ♣ A J 8            ♠ K 9 3            ♥ Q 4            ♦ J 10 9 6            ♣ K 7 4 2         </p>	<p>Board 2</p> <p>1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - Pass - Pass - Dbl - Pass - ??</p> <p>East has overcalled 2H and then doubled their 2S.</p> <p>What should West do?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>East has an overcall hand. It is still an overcall hand. It cannot change to a penalty hand. He is simply a stronger overcall (but not quite strong enough to double first and then bid his suit. It also suggests good tolerance for the other two suits. West may bid 3C or 3H.</p>
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See over for further examples.

<p> ♠ Q 10 8 6 5 4  ♥ A Q 10  ♦ 3  ♣ Q J 9  ♠ 7                    ♠ A K J 9 3  ♥ 9 7 4 3            ♥ 8 6 5  ♦ K J 7 4 2        ♦ 9 5  ♣ 6 5 4            ♣ A K 10  ♠ 2  ♥ K J 2  ♦ A Q 10 8 6  ♣ 8 7 3 2 </p>	<p>Board 3</p> <p>1S – PASS – 2D – PASS – 2S – X – PASS - ?</p> <p>What should West do?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>East passed. He did not overcall so he does not have an overcall hand. He did not double so he does not have a takeout hand. He always had a hand that could penalize spades.</p>
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<p> ♠ A Q 7 6  ♥ 10 9 3  ♦ K Q 5  ♣ K 9 5  ♠ 4 3 2            ♠ K 5  ♥ Q 8 7 4        ♥ A K J 6 2  ♦ 10 2            ♦ 8 7 4 3  ♣ 10 8 4 2        ♣ A 3  ♠ J 10 9 8  ♥ 5  ♦ A J 9 6  ♣ Q J 7 6 </p>	<p>Board 4</p> <p>1NT – 2H – X – PASS - ?</p> <p>What should North do?</p> <p>ALL DOUBLES AT THE 1 AND 2 LEVELS ARE FOR TAKEOUT</p> <p>Even though you have opened 1NT and feel you have already expressed your strength and shape, you must still obey this rule and bid 2S.</p>
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<p> ♠ K Q 7  ♥ 8 3  ♦ Q 9 2  ♣ A Q J 7 4  ♠ 8 3 2            ♠ A J 10 9 5 4  ♥ 10 5 2            ♥ A  ♦ A 10 3            ♦ K J 8  ♣ 10 9 5 2        ♣ K 6 3  ♠ 6  ♥ K Q J 9 7 6 4  ♦ 7 6 5 4  ♣ 8 </p>	<p>Board 5</p> <p>1C – 1S – 3H – PASS – PASS – 3S – X – PASS - ?</p> <p>South has made a pre-emptive bid and then doubled.</p> <p>What should North do?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>A DOUBLE BY A PREEMPTOR ALWAYS SHOWS THE DESIRE TO BID ONE MORE OF HIS OWN SUIT.</p>
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<p> ♠ A Q 7  ♥ K 9 5 4  ♦ K 7 5  ♣ J 6 5  ♠ 10 3 2      ♠ K 6 5  ♥ 10            ♥ A Q J 8 6  ♦ Q J 10 8 6   ♦ A 4  ♣ 10 9 3 2      ♣ K Q 8  ♠ J 9 8 4  ♥ 7 3 2  ♦ 9 3 2  ♣ A 7 4 </p>	<p>Board 6</p> <p>1NT – X – XX – PASS – 2H – X – PASS - ?</p> <p>East's double of 1NT is explained as being for penalty based on a long suit. North was not clear what her partner's redouble meant. West could have bid 2C correctable, but decided to pass because East could now bid his own suit if he wished. What should West now do however?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>East has one long suit. His hand shape cannot change to being takeout for hearts. If he wanted to bid his own suit, he would have done so, ergo his suit is actually hearts.</p>
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<p> ♠ Q 6  ♥ A Q 10 9 2  ♦ K 4  ♣ Q J 10 8  ♠ A K 10 9      ♠ J 8 5 4 3  ♥ -                ♥ 8 7 6 5  ♦ A Q J 8        ♦ 10 6 5 3  ♣ A 9 7 6 2      ♣ -  ♠ 7 2  ♥ K J 4 3  ♦ 9 7 2  ♣ K 5 4 3 </p>	<p>Board 7</p> <p>1H – Pass – 3H – X – Pass - ?</p> <p>What should you do as East?</p> <p>IF THE OPPOSITION BID AND RAISE THEIR OWN SUIT, A DOUBLE UP TO THE 4 LEVEL IS FOR TAKEOUT</p>
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More examples overleaf.

<p>           ♠ A Q 5            ♥ K Q 7 6            ♦ 6 3            ♣ Q J 8 4            ♠ J 10 9 6 3 2    ♠ K 4            ♥ J 10 2            ♥ 9 4 3            ♦ J 8                ♦ A K Q 10 9 7            ♣ K 10               ♣ 6 5              ♠ 8 7            ♥ A 8 5            ♦ 5 4 2            ♣ A 9 7 3 2         </p>	<p>Board 8 You are South</p> <p>1NT – 2D – PASS – Pass – X – Pass - ?</p> <p>A 1NT opener has made a voluntary rebid of double. What do you do as South?</p> <p>A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS</p> <p>Your partner still has a balanced 12-14 HCP, BUT ALL DOUBLES AT THE 1 AND 2 LEVELS ARE FOR TAKEOUT</p> <p>You might feel that your partner as a 1NT opener should not be bidding again, but he has and you have to work out what it means. The only explanation that makes sense is that he has a maximum 14HCP with a weak doubleton in their suit. You should bid 3C.</p>
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<p>           ♠ K 6            ♥ A J 7 5 4            ♦ A 10 6            ♣ Q J 10            ♠ A Q J 10 9 7    ♠ 8 3 2            ♥ 8            ♥ 10 2            ♦ K Q 4            ♦ 7 5 3 2            ♣ A 7 5            ♣ 9 6 3 2              ♠ 5 4            ♥ K Q 9 6 3            ♦ J 9 8            ♣ K 8 4         </p>	<p>Board 9 You are South</p> <p>1H – PASS – 4H – 4S – X – PASS - ?</p> <p>You were happy to raise your partner to 4H, but you were in part bidding on your extreme trump fit. What do you do now?</p> <p>A 4-LEVEL DOUBLE BY AN OPENING BIDDER IS FOR PENALTY</p> <p>Partner must be a maximum hand for your system and his values are not only in hearts because he has a maximum of 5 HCP in hearts. You should pass.</p>
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See overleaf for last example.

♠ A 5  
 ♥ K J 9 4 3  
 ♦ A 9 7  
 ♣ J 6 4  
 ♠ K 9 4 2      ♠ Q J 10 8 7 6  
 ♥ 6              ♥ 7  
 ♦ 10 5 2      ♦ K Q 6 3  
 ♣ A 9 5 3 2    ♣ K 8  
                 ♠ 3  
                 ♥ A Q 10 8 5 2  
                 ♦ J 8 4  
                 ♣ Q 10 7

Board 10 You are North

1H – 2S – 4H – 4S – PASS – PASS – X – PASS - ?

What do you do?

A LEOPARD NEVER CHANGES ITS SPOTS

Your partner made a fast arrival bid of 4H. You have no evidence to assume that this is anything other than a pre-emptive raise. Systematically you have to agree that such a bid is treated as a weak HCP, excellent trump fit hand. If you are going to defeat 4S, the tricks will have to come from your hand. You have 2 tricks only in the form of your two aces. Your hearts are worthless in defence. You must bid 5H and do so smoothly and confidently.