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Bidding Basics

The power (“big”) double

In the first two months of this series, our RHO opened the bidding and we doubled with 12–17 points. To do so, we had to have at least three cards in each of the unbid suits. This month, we will remove that “three of each” requirement.

How so? It won’t be cheap. We will need 18 or more total points. When we double with 18 or more points, anything goes as far as our distribution. We no longer need support for the other three suits. We could even have a void in one of the other suits! We could have our own seven-card suit! We could have a big balanced hand. Or, we still might just happen to have support for the other three suits.

How will partner know?

In January and February, with our “12–17” total points, our plan was to double and leave it up to partner. If partner didn’t show any values (let’s say partner just took out our double without jumping), then we were done. We showed that we had 12–17 by simply passing for the rest of the auction. When partner took out to a suit without jumping, he was limited to 0–8 (more on this down the road), so we had no need to bid again with only 12–17. No game would be missed.

When we have 18 or more, we let partner know by taking a second call. We double and plan to bid again. For example, let’s say RHO opens 1♣ and we have any of the following hands:

- A ♠AKJ87 ♥—♦AK32 ♣K632
 B ♠A ♥AJ2 ♦AJ98732 ♣A2
 C ♠KJ2 ♥AKJ ♦A1076 ♣K102
 D ♠AQJ2 ♥AKQ2 ♦Q1032 ♣2

With A, we will double and then bid spades (no doubt partner will bid hearts, but when we double and bid again, we are not promising support for all suits). With B, we will double and then bid diamonds. With C, we will double and then bid notrump (we won’t jump in notrump; just by doubling and then bidding notrump we are showing more than a 1NT overcall). With D, we will double and raise partner.

Each of these examples are too strong for a simple overcall. An overcall is limited to about 17 HCP.

To help cement this concept, let’s revisit a few hand types from previous months. RHO opens 1♦ and we have:

- E ♠A2 ♥Q102 ♦A1042 ♣K432
 F ♠AKQ32 ♥A1032 ♦2 ♣J32

On E, you should pass (yes, with a full opening bid). What would you do if you doubled and partner took out the double to 1♠, with say,

- ♠Q875 ♥K43 ♦876 ♣J76?

You would have to pass and would be in a silly contract. And if you think you would “correct” 1♠ to 1NT, you would be showing more than a 1NT overcall and partner would raise to 2NT, invitational, or 3NT. What a mess! On F, if you double and partner takes it out to clubs, you have lost your chance to show your five-card spade suit. You would have to pass 2♣, and partner might have:

- ♠J87 ♥K4 ♦J85 ♣Q8765.

You would be in the inferior 2♣ contract as opposed to the higher-scoring spade contract. Furthermore, who is to say partner doesn’t have:

- ♠J87 ♥K54 ♦765 ♣Q875?

And if you think you will “correct” 2♣ to 2♠, you would be showing 18 or more HCP, and partner would raise you.

Bottom line: Doubling and voluntarily bidding again shows 18-plus. If you don’t have enough to bid a second time, make sure you can support all three suits.

What about over a preempt? Same concept. Doubling and bidding again shows a big hand. Suppose RHO opens 2♥ and you hold:

- G ♠AKJ76 ♥654 ♦AK102 ♣A
 H ♠AQ10 ♥KJ2 ♦KQ5 ♣AJ32
 I ♠KQ102 ♥2 ♦AQJ2 ♣AK43

With G, you are too strong to simply overcall 2♠ (limited to about 17). Double and plan to bid spades later. With H, you are too strong for a 2NT overcall (which shows roughly a good 15–18, balanced with hearts stopped). Double and plan to bid notrump next (but don’t jump in notrump). Doubling and then bidding notrump shows about 19–21 balanced with their suit stopped. On I, you plan to double and raise any suit partner bids.

Is it forcing when you double and bid again? No. The range is roughly 18–21, maybe 22. If partner of the doubler is really broke, he can pass after you double and then bid. So, if you have even more, you must do more. For example, let’s say you double their 1♥ opening with each hand below and partner takes out the double to 1♠.

- J ♠AKQ ♥AK2 ♦AQ107 ♣J32
 K ♠AK10 ♥32 ♦AKQ2 ♣AK84

Newer Players

With J, jump to 2NT (double and then 1NT is up to about 20, maybe a bad 21; doubling and then jumping in notrump is a decent 21 to about 24 and invitational).

With K, cuebid 2♥. This is forcing and says nothing about hearts (partner will likely bid notrump with hearts stopped).

QUIZ

What is your call after RHO opens 1♣ and you hold:

① ♠KQ10 ♥AQ102 ♦KJ ♣Q1087

② ♠AK10 ♥AQ102 ♦KJ ♣Q1087

③ ♠AQ876 ♥1042 ♦AK54 ♣3

④ ♠KJ8762 ♥A ♦AQ2 ♣AJ2

What is your call after RHO opens 2♠ and you hold:

⑤ ♠87 ♥AKQ10 ♦AKJ2 ♣Q87

⑥ ♠K82 ♥K2 ♦KQ108 ♣AQ76

What is your call after RHO opens 3♥ and you hold:

⑦ ♠AK10876 ♥2 ♦A65 ♣K65

⑧ ♠AKQJ10 ♥32 ♦AKQ10 ♣54

ANSWERS

① 1NT. You have a hand that would have opened 1NT and you have their suit stopped; overcall 1NT.

② Double. Too strong for 1NT. Double and then bid notrump.

③ 1♠. A simple overcall. Not strong enough to double and then bid again.

④ Double. Too strong for a 1♠ overcall. Double and then bid spades.

⑤ Double. You have both 18-plus and support for all three unbid suits.

⑥ 2NT. This shows the high end of a 1NT opening with their suit stopped.

⑦ 3♠. Not strong enough to double and then bid spades.

⑧ Double. Too strong for a simple overcall of 3♠. ♣