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Bidding Basics

Balancing seat doubles

Subtract three. That's this month's motto. Compared to the situations covered from January to April, every range will be reduced by 3 HCP. When we are in balancing seat (if we pass, the auction is over), the requirements for a takeout double are lowered. When our pass would leave the opponents in a partscore, we try a bit harder to compete for the contract.

In January, our RHO opened, and we doubled with 12–17 total points and the other three suits. Let's look at the situation where our LHO opens, such as:

West	Partner	East	You
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

We are now in the balancing seat. The 12–17 becomes 9–14. Don't worry too much about the high end. The key is that we can now double with only 9 total points. Still, we want to have support (meaning three or more cards) for all the other suits.

On the auction above, we should double with:

- A** ♠Q1087 ♥2 ♦K1076 ♣KJ76
B ♠KQJ ♥32 ♦A1076 ♣9865
C ♠K872 ♥A ♦Q876 ♣J765.

In all cases, we don't have enough for a direct-seat double (if RHO had opened 1♥). Here, if we pass, the auction is over; we don't want to defend against 1♥. Occasionally, partner will have a "trap pass" (a penalty double of 1♥) and will pass our double. Let's hope that in such a case, partner knows what they are doing!

Could we have more? Sure. The takeout double (in any position) is unlimited. Add an ace (or more) to the

examples above and we'd still double.

Make sure not to double if your hand is more suited towards an overcall. Overcalls in balancing seat can also be light. So, after 1♦–Pass–Pass, consider these hands:

- D** ♠KJ987 ♥843 ♦A10 ♣J32
E ♠K108 ♥QJ98 ♦A102 ♣K98.

With D, prefer to overcall 1♠. With E, bid a natural 1NT (approximately 12–15, because we are subtracting 3 in balancing seat).

What about the "big double"? In March, we discussed that doubling and voluntarily bidding a second time showed 18 or more HCP. Does this apply in balancing seat? The same principle applies, but as you'd guess, the requirements are lower. Does that mean we go from 18 to 15? Not exactly, but that is sort of the idea. Let's consider the auction 1♣–Pass–Pass with these holdings:

- F** ♠AQJ87 ♥A54 ♦KJ2 ♣32,
G ♠A2 ♥AQJ108 ♦A76 ♣J108.

With F, even though it is 15 HCP, a simple 1♠ in balancing seat would be OK. With a little more, like example G, then a double and bid would be more appropriate. I know everyone wants exact ranges, but there really isn't one to give here. Vulnerability, suit quality, what the suits involved are, etc. – those are all factors that prevent me from giving you an exact range for a double and then bid in balancing seat. If you insist, let's call it "approximately a great 15 or more" to double and then bid in balancing seat.

What about after preempts? Again, you can "borrow" a king. After 2♥–Pass–Pass, make a balancing double with either of these hands:

- ♠A1076 ♥2 ♦K1082 ♣Q765,
 ♠KJ76 ♥32 ♦A109 ♣Q1087.

When the opponents preempt and you have shortness in their suit, partner is sometimes foaming at the mouth, hoping you will double for takeout so that they can leave it in for penalties.

Though not technically part of this series on doubles, note here that you can't preempt in balancing seat. A jump in the passout seat is intermediate with a decent hand and a decent six-card (or longer) suit. So, after 1♦–Pass–Pass, jump to 2♥ with something like:

- ♠A2 ♥AQJ1097 ♦432 ♣K2. ♠

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Newer Players

QUIZ

After 1♣–Pass–Pass, what is your call with:

- 1 ♠Q54 ♥Q54 ♦QJ4 ♣J765
- 2 ♠AJ2 ♥Q102 ♦Q765 ♣K102
- 3 ♠KQ76 ♥K1076 ♦J876 ♣2
- 4 ♠A10876 ♥J2 ♦A43 ♣Q65
- 5 ♠AKQ107 ♥A1076 ♦2 ♣A43
- 6 ♠AKJ1076 ♥2 ♦AJ10 ♣J95

After 2♥–Pass–Pass, what is your call with:

- 7 ♠A1087 ♥2 ♦A876 ♣Q765
- 8 ♠KQJ76 ♥2 ♦A1076 ♣432

Answers:

- 1 Pass. Sometimes you defend against a one-level contract.
- 2 1NT. In balancing seat, about a king less than a direct notrump overcall.
- 3 Double. “Borrowing” a king.
- 4 1♠. With a five-card major, prefer overcall to double.
- 5 Double. Too strong for an overcall, especially in balancing seat.
- 6 2♠. Intermediate in balancing seat. Good six-card (or longer) suit.
- 7 Double. Same explanation as 3.
- 8 2♠. Same explanation as 4.