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Bidding Basics

Taking out doubles to notrump and “the chart”

Last month we gave point-count ranges for taking out a takeout double to a suit:

Non-jump = 0–8

Jump = 9–12 invitational

Jump to game (or cuebid) = 13 or more

That will be in the chart below, but as promised, let’s examine the remaining possibility for taking out a takeout double: notrump.

Whereas taking out to a suit could be zero points, we certainly don’t want to take out to notrump with zero! Partner could have some shapely 11-count and there we would be in 1NT (likely doubled), severely outgunned. Because the takeout double is often light on high-card points, we want to have our fair share to dare to bid notrump (which is not usually what the takeout doubler had in mind). What are the exact ranges for taking out to 1NT, 2NT and 3NT?

There is no official range in the literature, so I like to define the numbers as something players are already familiar with. I suggest that 1NT is 6–10, 2NT is 11–12 and 3NT is 13–15. Of course, a stopper in the opponent’s suit is required. Also, a notrump bid shows a balanced hand, unlikely to have four cards in the other major(s). Let’s look at some examples after 1♦–Dbl–Pass–?

♠J 4 3 ♥10 7 ♦K J 9 8 ♣A 4 3 2

Take out the double to 1NT. Showing 6–10 balanced with diamonds stopped is much more descriptive than bidding any number of clubs. Passing for penalty could work, but more defensive tricks would be desirable.

♠Q 10 2 ♥K J 2 ♦A Q 7 6 ♣10 8 7

Take out the double to 2NT. Show 11–12 balanced and invite partner to

go to 3NT with some extras like:

♠A K J 5 ♥A Q 7 6 ♦4 ♣J 5 4 2.

With a good minor suit and a balanced 13–15 (or a little more), take out the double to 3NT:

♠8 6 5 ♥Q 2 ♦K Q 10 ♣A Q J 7 6.

3NT shows 13–15 (it could be a little more), a balanced hand and a desire to play the notrump game, which is more practical than trying for a club contract here.

♠A 10 7 6 ♥4 3 ♦Q 10 2 ♣6 5 4 3

Take out the double to 1♠. True, you have diamonds stopped and 6–10 HCP, but facing a takeout double, trying to play in a suit (especially a major) is recommended. Picture partner with a typical:

♠9 8 5 2 ♥A K 7 6 ♦5 ♣A 10 8 2,

and appreciate how superior spades is to notrump.

OK now that we have spent a

month-plus explaining the logic of taking out a takeout double, here is the dreaded chart:

Reminder/disclaimer: Don’t get too hung up on memorizing exact point ranges. The numbers in the chart are all approximate. Factors that might cause you to shade one way or the other:

Level: Don’t be in a hurry to jump from 1♠–Dbl–Pass to 3♣ with a lousy 9-count such as:

♠7 6 5 4 ♥Q 2 ♦Q J 2 ♣K J 3 2.

Shape: Upgrade for five-card or longer suits and shortness when your side likely has a fit.

Spot cards: 10s, 9s and even 8s are important. Upgrade for holdings such as A–J–10–9 or 10–9–8–7.

Quality of honors: Upgrade for aces and kings. Downgrade for queens and jacks in the opponent’s suits.

Next month, we will take out some more takeout doubles, specifically against preempts. ▶▶

Action after partner's direct seat takeout double	Meaning
Pass	Usually a mistake; should be at least five good trumps in their suit and a desire to defend.
Non-jump in a suit	0–8 and four or more cards (rarely three if stuck).
Single jump in a suit	9–12 and four or more cards.
Double-jump in a suit	Highly invitational (example: 1♦–Dbl–Pass–3♥). This is somewhat superfluous and rarely used (some even define it as weak with a long suit).
Jump to game	Good hand (roughly opening bid strength). Usually five or more cards and a belief that this is the correct contract.
Cuebid	Strong hand, unsure where to play. More on this down the road.
1NT	6–10 balanced with their suit stopped (usually denies four cards in an unbid major).
2NT	11–12 balanced with their suit stopped (usually denies four cards in an unbid major).
3NT	13–15 balanced with their suit stopped (usually denies four cards in an unbid major).

Newer Players

Bidding Basics *(continued)*

QUIZ

What is your call after 1♣-Dbl-
Pass with:

- ① ♠A 2 ♥J 7 6 ♦10 4 3 2 ♣K J 9 8
- ② ♠K Q 10 9 ♥Q 8 7 ♦3 2 ♣A 8 7 6
- ③ ♠10 2 ♥A 10 2 ♦Q J 9 8 7 ♣A Q J
- ④ ♠K J 10 9 8 7 ♥2 ♦A Q J 9 ♣3 2

What is your call after 1♠-Dbl-
Pass with:

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

ANSWERS

- ① 1NT. More descriptive than bidding diamonds.
- ② 2♠. Don't skip a very playable major to show points and stoppers.
- ③ 3NT. Where you want to be. Shows opening bid strength (and their suit stopped).
- ④ 4♠. Make sure to reach game.
- ⑤ 1NT. Same explanation as No. 1.
- ⑥ Pass. A rare "penalty pass."
- ⑦ 2♠. You could guess to jump to 4♥, but the cuebid allows more exploration (picture partner with:
♠8 7 ♥K 7 6 ♦K J 9 2 ♣A K 7 4,
where 3NT or 5♦ are better contracts than 4♥).
- ⑧ 3♥. Invitational. ♣