

Larry Teaches Doubles (and Redoubles)

By Larry Cohen

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INTRODUCTION

Along with my good friend Bernie Chazen, I used to give entire multi-day seminars on doubles. We always started the same way. Bernie would waddle up to the microphone (picture 300+ pounds of man, wearing suspenders) and in his booming voice would announce, “**The penalty double has died and gone to heaven.**” Sadly, he is now in heaven with those penalty doubles.

In modern bridge, very few doubles actually mean, “I double the stakes—let’s play for penalties.” In this book, my goal is to simplify all of the mainstream doubles in the game. I’ve included many quizzes so that the reader can test his knowledge as he works his way through the book.

We’ll start with the two most basic non-penalty doubles: Takeout Doubles and Negative Doubles. Later, we’ll explore the many other doubles (and redoubles) which have permeated modern competitive bidding.

THE TAKEOUT DOUBLE

This is the oldest *non-penalty* double in the game, and has been around since the origins of contract bridge. When RHO (Right-Hand-Opponent) opens the bidding, it makes no sense to use double for penalty; low level contracts are very difficult to defeat, and defenders are harshly punished in the scoring for allowing a doubled contract to make. Therefore, this double has always been played as “takeout.”

<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>YOU</u>
Opening Suit Bid	Double

The normal range is “about an opening bid” (count for shape, especially shortness in the opponent’s suit) up to approximately 17-18 HCP. If the takeout-doubler has more than 17-18, he doubles and then plans to bid again.

A common error committed by inexperienced players is to make a Takeout Double of 1♦ with this type of hand:

♠A2 ♥KJ82 ♦KJ2 ♣J987.

Their partner answers 1♠ (you know how partners are), and they think it is okay to now correct to 1NT. Not okay! Doubling and then bidding again shows 18+. If you double and then bid 1NT it shows more than a 15-17 1NT overcall, so about 18 to 20 (balanced). Passing partner in 1♠ (usually a 4-2 fit) is another disastrous option.

For this reason, a Takeout-Doubler (in the normal 12/13 to 17/18 range) must be able to tolerate all three unbid suits. “Tolerate,” means at least a tripleton. Bottom line: Do not make a Takeout Double without holding either 18+ HCP or at least three cards in every suit outside the suit being doubled. Don’t get too concerned with counting exactly 17 or 18. I would consider this 17-count too good for a 1♠ overcall of 1♣:

♠KQJ1098 ♥AQJ ♦2 ♣A32.

I would start with a double. Notice that support for all three suits is not needed when you have the “big hand” and intend to bid again anyway.

I would simply overcall 1♠ with this 17-count (not quite good enough to double and then bid again):

♠AQ765 ♥KQ2 ♦KQ ♣J32.

Doubling and Bidding Again

While doubling and bidding again shows more than 17/18 (any distribution), it is not forcing. In other words, the partner of the Takeout Doubler doesn't have to bid again.

Here is a typical hand for doubling 1♦ and later bidding spades:

♠AQJ98 ♥32 ♦AK2 ♣AJ4.

This hand is too strong to overcall 1♠ (which would show a maximum of 17 points).

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>YOU</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>PARTNER</u>
1♦	Double	Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	(allowed to pass)

With a really big hand (perhaps a game force), the Takeout Doubler must find a stronger action than a non- forcing spade bid at his second turn.

Versus Preempts

Doubling an opening preempt is still takeout, but requires a little more strength. Against a weak two-bid, a Takeout Double can be made with perfect 1-4-4-4 (one in their suit) shape and only 12 HCP. Without that perfect shape, however, the doubler should have a little more strength. Against a three-level preempt, at least a solid opening bid is required, and even more is needed against a four-level preempt (covered at the end of this chapter).

Doubles After Two Opposing Bids

Takeout Doubles can be made after both opponents have bid. Consider this hand:

♠KQ98 ♥A2 ♦KJ53 ♣632.

After the opponents bid 1♣—Pass—1♥, a player holding length (4 or more cards) in **both** unbid suits (as above) can make a Takeout Double. After 1♥—Pass—1NT, a double would indicate a Takeout Double of hearts. Also, a player with 18+ can double after the opponents have bid two suits and then bid again.