(14) Doubles: A Call for Any Occasion

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General Philosophy

The modern approach to the meaning of doubles in low-level auctions is to use them to help our side compete in the bidding when no other explicit call is appropriate. There are many different types of doubles and many special names for them, but in general they are basically the same – these doubles show enough values to take some action and a desire to compete in the bidding.

Primary Types of Doubles

- Takeout
- Negative
- Responsive
- Support

Other Doubles (further explanations of these will come in later lessons)

- Card Showing
- Maximal
- Balancing
- More Takeout
- Snapdragon
- And there are even more…

Primary Types of Doubles

What different kinds of doubles are there?

A good way to remember the basic types of doubles is to think about which player can make which type of double. This is a general guideline:

- Interferer (first opponent to act, often LHO of Opener) can make a *Takeout Double.*
- Responder (partner of Opener) can make a *Negative Double*.
- Advancer (partner of Interferer) can make a *Responsive Double.*
- Opener can make another type of takeout double called a *Support Double*.

Note: Opener and Responder can also make "re-opening" and other types of doubles that are generally for takeout.

Doubles Diagram

North is the opening bidder in our diagram. These are the types of doubles than can be made by each of the following players:

		Support		
Responsive		TABLE		Takeout
		Negative		
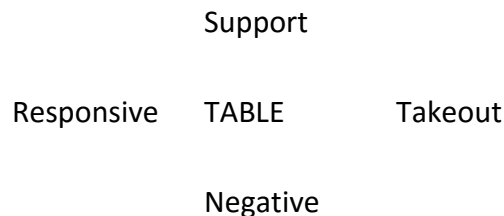
Note: The Takeout Double and Responsive Double can be switched so that if the first opponent to act with a double (Interferer) is the 4th player, he will make a takeout double and his partner (the Advancer) can make a Responsive Double.

Takeout Doubles

What is a Takeout Double?

A Takeout Double can be made by many different players, but it is usually done by the Interferer (the first opponent to act.) A takeout double shows about an opening hand and support (at least 3c support) for each of the unbid suits. Partner is asked to "take the double out" – that is, to bid his best suit. Many players mistakenly believe that a takeout double promises 4-cards in the unbid Major, but this is not correct.

Notes on Takeout Doubles

The ideal shape for a takeout double is 4441 with a singleton in the opponent's suit. With this shape it shows at least 10 HCP. With a less shapely hand like 4432 (with a doubleton in the opponent's suit) you'll need more HCP to make a takeout double – about 12 HCP. Also, the more points you have in your long suits, the better your hand is for making a takeout double and the more points you have in your short suits, the worse it is for doubling.

Negative Doubles

What is a Negative Double?

A Negative Double is made by the Responder. It can show many hand types. It occurs when partner has opened the bidding and your RHO has made an overcall. A negative double tends to show the following:

- Values to compete to the level of bidding (Game Forcing at 3♠+)
- No other obvious action.
- Usually length in at least one of the unbid suits.

Generally, a negative double denies the ability to make a forcing free bid. This double is often the "I'm not sure what to do?" bid for a partnership.

Note: A negative double is often used to find a 4-4 Major suit fit, but it does not promise (in general) 4 cards in the other Major.

Trap Pass

Once you begin to play negative doubles you will no longer be able to make a "penalty double" at a low level. Thus, you should ask yourself what to do when you want to penalize the opponents.

Example

The auction starts 1♠ (2♦) and you hold the following hand:

♠ xx

♥ Axx

♦ KQ109x

♣ xxx

What do you do?

The answer is that you pass. The reason that you pass is that you want to defend 2♦, preferably doubled. The only way to defend 2♦ is not to bid. You pass and wait for your partner to make a "reopening double" – for takeout. Instead of "taking the double out" as your partner wants, you leave it in, converting it to a penalty double! This pass, which you make hoping to penalize your opponent by converting partner's takeout double, is called a *Trap Pass.*

Responsive Doubles

What is a Responsive Double?

A Responsive Double is made by the Advancer. It occurs when the opponents open the bidding, partner acts (with an overcall or double,) and Responder raises the Opener's suit.

Example

(1♠)   2♥   (2♠)   X

The Responsive Double is for takeout and shows the following:

- Values to compete to the level of the bidding (similar to a Negative Double)
- The unbid suits (especially the unbid Major)
- Tolerance for partner's suit – 2 or 3 cards (if he has bid a suit.)
- No other obvious action.

Support Doubles* (require an alert)

What is a Support Double?

When you open the bidding, your partner responds with 1M, and the opponents interfere in the bidding at a low level (below two of Responder's suit), then a double by you, the Opener, is now a conventional double – called a "Support Double" – and it shows exactly 3-card support for Responder's suit. If you had 4-card support for partner's suit, you would raise directly and with fewer than 3-card support, you could pass or bid your hand naturally (bid another suit of your own or NT if appropriate.)

Example

1♣   (P)   1♠   (2♥)   X*

When you make a Support Double, you know that partner will be forced to bid again. Therefore, you will get a chance to bid again, so a support double is unlimited in value.

A double by the opening bidder can be a support double only at or below two of Responder's suit. Here are the cases under which Opener's double is a support double:

- one opponent has bid,
- the opponents have bid and raised a suit, or
- one opponent has made a takeout double and the other one has bid a suit.

Generally, a double is not a support double if the opponents have bid two different suits. Then it is either takeout or penalty by the preference of your partnership (the modern approach is to play it as card-showing.)