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This Week in Bridge

(196) Snapdragon Doubles

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Level: 5

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General

Bridge players keep finding more and more ways to use doubles, especially in low-level competitive auctions. The traditional double by the Advancer is the responsive double. This double applies when the opponents have bid and raised a suit and partner has taken some action in the middle (either a takeout double or a suit overcall). But when Left Hand Opponent (LHO) opens the bidding with a suit, partner overcalls a second suit, and Responder bids a third suit, then a double by Advancer is not a responsive double. It is a different kind of competitive double called a *Snapdragon Double* – a fancy name for another double that wants to compete in the bidding. Let's see exactly what this double shows.

Snapdragon Doubles

When LHO opens the bidding (showing values), partner makes an overcall, and Responder makes a freebid at the 2-level (showing 10+ points) then the opponents have most of the points. The most we are going to do in this type of auction is compete in the bidding. We are unlikely to be looking to bid game based on HCP, so the only way we might bid to a high level is if we have an extremely large fit.

Example

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ __?

- A bid of 2♥ would be natural and competitive – showing a 5+card ♥ suit. (Though you may normally play a new suit forcing by Advancer it does not make sense to play it as forcing when the opponents have shown most of the values.)
- A double in this auction is played as a snapdragon double – showing both the 4th suit (in this case 5+card ♥) and tolerance for partner's suit (3-card fit or at least honor doubleton, depending on your partnership agreement).

Having the snapdragon double available to show the 4th suit and at least tolerance for partner's suit means that when you bid the 4th suit you are not interested in partner's suit and you have a poor holding in their suit.



Let's look at the previous auction with some example hands for Advancer.

1♦ 1♠ 2♣ __?

♠ 7

♥ AJT843

♦ 865

♣ K72

Bid 2♥! With this hand, you want to compete in the bidding but only in the ♥ suit – your 6-card suit. This 2♥ bid denies interest in partner's ♠ suit – showing at best two small cards in that suit.

♠ K5

♥ AJT74

♦ 873

♣ 632

Double. With this hand you have only a 5-card ♥ suit and you have King doubleton in partner's suit, so you are not certain which suit would be best for your side to compete in. Double shows a 5-card ♥ suit and tolerance for partner's ♠ suit – leaving it up to partner to choose which is the best place to play at the 2-level or if it is a good idea to further compete in the auction.

With the negative inference that your bid of the 4th suit denies interest in partner's suit, partner will usually pass your suit with a reasonable holding – only rebidding their own suit with a powerful holding in their suit and a poor holding in yours.

The snapdragon double applies when the Responder has bid at the 1-level as well. This is true, even though Responder has not promised as many values with a 1-level response as they do with a new suit at the 2-level. In this case, some partnerships may choose to treat a new suit as forcing, since it is possible for Advancer to have a better hand (this is a partnership agreement).

Example

1♣ 1♦ 1♠ __?

- A double (snapdragon double) shows a ♥ suit (usually at least a 5+cards) and tolerance for partner's ♦ suit – 3-cards or honor doubleton.
- Bidding 2♥ shows a 5+card suit and denies interest in partner's ♦ suit – at most two small ♦.

Note: These bids can be useful whether your partnership plays this new suit as Non-Forcing Constructive or Forcing.



Conclusion

The snapdragon double is a useful agreement to have with your partner. In auctions when partner has bid a suit and the opponents have bid two suits, we usually only have interest in playing in partner's suit or the 4th suit. By having a snapdragon double available to show interest in both of these suits, then bidding the 4th suit strongly implies interest in only playing there – helping partner avoid making a bad decision after our bid. Discuss this double with partner and add it to your growing list of competitive bidding tools.