

TRAVIS-T(ip) #14

by Barbara Travis

DOUBLING WITH BIG HANDS

I've spent Tips 12 and 13 discussing takeout doubles and responding to takeout doubles. I've been trying to convince you NOT to double just to say you have opening points (and any hand), but to double to say that you have an opening hand with no obvious bid, and support (3+ cards) for each of the three unbid suits. Furthermore, I've said that when responding to your partner's takeout double you should bid the maximum value of your hand immediately, because you are being forced to bid, rather than making a forcing bid yourself.

Here's an example of both my opponents offending my sensibilities about takeout doubles – both the double and the response:

Me	LHO	Pard	RHO
1H	X	P	1NT
4H	5C	All Pass	

The first hand I saw was RHO's who had responded to the takeout double with 1NT, which should surely show some stopper in my heart suit (where I held KQJ109xx). His hand was:

Qx
8xxx
KJ9
Axxx

His comment to his partner was something along the lines of having bid 1NT to show his points. That is simply incorrect (and long-term losing) bridge. To bid 1NT you should have something in the opponent's bid suit [and I can't say that enough times!] He should have bid 3C to show his values and longest suit.

Partner led the SJ which I overtook (with AKxx) so that I could lead the HK through declarer's HA, given the lack of heart lead. Imagine my shock when declarer trumped the spade. Here's her hand:

void
Ax
Axxx
KJ10xxxx

Under no circumstances will I be playing with that person because that simply does not constitute a takeout double in any way! That is a lovely hand for a 2C overcall, planning to bid again to show the length of the suit. Imagine if you doubled on that hand and partner responded 4S?! Instead, they'd had a crazy auction to a great contract, making 12 tricks!

Anyway, the point of this article is that if you double and then bid your own suit, as happened on the hand above, you don't just show opening values and your suit – because with that sort of hand, you would just overcall.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DOUBLE THEN BID YOUR OWN SUIT?

Given that overcalls are usually limited to approximately 17/18 HCP, you will sometimes hold a hand that is too big to make a 'normal' overcall. On these hands you have to start by making a takeout double.

This double can be done with:

- 17/18+ HCP and a very good 5+ card suit - too good to overcall the suit at the minimum level (and, of course, higher level overcalls are weak). You start by doubling and then, if partner makes a minimum response, you bid your suit.
- 19+ HCP and a balanced hand - too good to overcall 1NT. A 1NT overcall is 15+ -18 HCP with a stopper in their suit, so if you double and then, after partner's minimum response, you respond 1NT you show 19-20 HCP.

If partner makes a minimum response to your double, there is no need to jump the bidding!

- Partner has shown a weak hand with a minimal response – so with a minimum double you would PASS. Bidding again guarantees 16+ HCP, so if you introduce your own suit you must be saying you have more points and a long suit of your own – hence a hand that was too good for an overcall.
- Similarly, if you now bid 1NT (or NT at the minimum level) – you would have passed with a minimum double, you would have overcalled 1NT with 15-18 – hence you must have a hand that was too big to overcall 1NT immediately.

(Now you can see why I disapprove of the double then bidding on the hand cited above!)

EXAMPLES:

The opponent opens 1D and you hold:

Ax
AKQJxx
Axx
xx

This hand is too good for a 1H overcall – you have 8 playing tricks in your own hand.

You double, then introduce your hearts over partner's minimum response. If partner has a few values, they should bid again, especially if they have any trump support. A King and a doubleton is plenty for game!

The opponent opens 1D and you hold:

Ax
AKQJxxx
Axx
x

This hand is too good for a 1H overcall – you have 9 playing tricks in your own hand.

You can't bid 3H (weak) or 4H (weak) so you start with a double. After partner's minimum response you bid 3H – nearly game in your own hand.

On this hand, I suspect most people would want to bid 4H, but your partner might hold nothing and did, in fact, have:

xxxx
xx
xxx
Jxxx

This is the sensible route to playing in 3H and, by bidding 3H after a double, you are saying to partner that they should bid game with anything that resembles a trick in their hand – an Ace or a King or a ruffing value.

The opponent opens 1D and you hold:

KQJx
Axx
AJx
AJ10

This hand is too good for a 1NT overcall. Furthermore, you do not wish to overcall 2NT in case partner has 0 HCP. So you double first, then rebid 1NT over partner's minimum response. This shows a hand better than an initial 1NT overcall.

If partner has 0 HCP, you can play in a sensible 1NT contract. Should partner have 6-7 HCP, they should understand that you have a big balanced hand and bid to game (whether 3NT or in a long suit).

WHEN YOU DOUBLE AND, AFTER A MINIMUM RESPONSE, YOU BID A NEW SUIT OR 1NT, YOU ARE SHOWING A HAND TOO GOOD TO MAKE A 'NORMAL' OVERCALL.