



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

**My partner and I had a tremendous disagreement on this hand. My LHO opened 1♥, partner doubled, it went pass, and I bid 1NT which, with 18 HCP, he raised to 3NT. Down several. My hand:**

♠ J 4 3 ♥ J 10 8 6 5 ♦ 7 5 ♣ J 6 5

**He insisted my 1NT bid showed 7–8 points. With my holding, I knew I had hearts stopped, and did not think there was any other alternative. Your take?**

Clara

Hi Clara,

Advancing a takeout double, especially with very weak hands, is an under-appreciated art form. For starters, I commend you on following the advice of Alvin Roth, as first offered up about 70 years ago when he said, “Take out takeout doubles!” I suspect somewhere in the universe, there would be someone who might yield to temptation and pass, converting partner’s intent of takeout into a penalty action. This rates to be a very poor choice, because at best you might contribute two defensive tricks – so you’re counting on partner for at least five to get a one-trick set! Pass would guarantee that you held five or more strong hearts, i.e., several trump tricks.

Most often, your partner’s double of 1♥ is effectively like bidding “one club/diamond/spade,” suggesting 13

or more dummy points. He is requesting you to bid your longest unbid suit in a manner that somewhat reflects your values. It is both acceptable and advisable that the doubler value his hand with the expectation that you will advance by picking a suit. For instance, over the 1♥ opening bid, he might hold as little as:

♠ K 10 x x ♥ x ♦ Q J x x ♣ A 10 x x.

Only 10 HCP. Not a good opening bid, but 13 dummy points qualifies it as a light, but perfectly acceptable, takeout double.

Because of this, your partner is entirely correct that a 1NT advance of a takeout double should be a constructive, value-showing action. As a matter of fact, any notrump advance should be predicated on at least a stopper and more high-card points than the 3 you held, since the doubler’s values could include a healthy dose of distributional ones. Your 1NT bid should have shown 7–11 HCP with at least one heart stopper, justifying your partner’s leap to 3NT.

The only alternative, when holding a poor hand, is to make a minimum bid in one of the unbid suits. This action says that you have somewhere between 0 and perhaps 8–9 points, because with more than that, you should choose a more constructive response – typically by jumping in one of the unbid suits.

On most occasions, when I don’t feel sure about what to do, I start by decid-

ing what I know I should not do. Now, back to the hand in question. Keep in mind that the best available bid may be the least bad alternative! Having eliminated Pass and 1NT, the alternatives are either 1♠ or 2♣, which represent your longest unbid suits.

This is a point that I think escapes many players. Looking at a trio of jacks, it just feels like my partner holds more than a minimum takeout double. I would like to respond in a fashion that is least likely to incite partner to bid more. While many players would choose 1♠ because it keeps the bidding lower, I would actually bid 2♣! A 1♠ advance starts us lower, but it is far more likely to excite partner, who may be holding extra values and end up getting us too high. On the other hand, the 2♣ advance sometimes tosses a little bit of a wet blanket on the game prospects dancing before partner’s eyes.

So my take:

- First choice – 2♣.
- Second choice – 1♠.
- Perhaps best choice – throw it in, and get a redeal! ■