



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

I think that a takeout double of 1♥ or 2♥ should guarantee at least four spades. My partner does not buy in. What say you?

Arthur

Hi Arthur,

Suppose your right-hand opponent opened 1♥ and you held:

♠ A J 7 ♥ 6 ♦ J 8 7 3 2 ♣ A K 6 3.

How could you possibly pass, suggesting that you held 13 cards with nothing you could say that says what you have? Surely an overcall of 2♦ would be repulsive, so the alternative, which seems clear to me, would be double: three or more cards in each of the unbid suits, along with values that resemble at least an opening bid in support of any suit partner selects. Over an opening bid of 2♥, holding:

♠ K Q 5 ♥ 7 2 ♦ A K 3 2 ♣ A 8 4 2,

would you suggest a pass? I hope not! I have found it a very good idea to act immediately if there is any action available that actually resembles the cards that you hold. In each of the above cases, while I would like to have four spades, I would refuse to wait for the perfect hand. My contention is that looking for a reason to bid should take precedence over finding an excuse to pass, especially when the action to take is clear-cut.

Sadly enough, I've even seen written material supporting your assertion about guaranteeing four spades in order to double a heart opening bid. Although it might be on the internet like this, that doesn't make it true!

Dear Jerry,

One of my partners insists that a takeout double of a minor suit must include four cards in each major. Is this true?

Rick

Hi Rick,

Since there is a common thread to both of these questions, I decided to link them together. A less wordy person would simply say no, and suggest that you "see above" for guidance. Alas, I am not capable of doing that!

Suppose your RHO opens 1♣ and you hold:

♠ A Q J ♥ K J 5 ♦ K 7 6 3 2 ♣ 6 5.

While I truly wish that I held 4-4 in the majors, contemplating pass or overcalling and emphasizing the diamond suit does not appeal to me. Sometimes I think players who seek perfection in the bidding process should have considered chess as their game of choice rather than bridge. Words like "always," "never," "must," generally do not apply to the game of bridge as they might apply to a move on a chess board. Better are words like

"generally," "usually," "tends to be," etc.

An immediate takeout double of a suit opening bid by your RHO strongly suggests three or more cards in all the unbid suits, and dummy strength of 13 or more points. One exception is when the takeout doubler first doubles, then corrects to his own suit, to show a powerful hand and a strong suit. After 1♣ on your right, holding:

♠ A K J 9 6 4 ♥ J 4 ♦ A K Q ♣ 8 2,

the plan should be to first double, suggesting an interest in the suit partner likes best, followed by converting to your own suit – nonforcing, but describing a good hand and a good suit.

Recall that I said a normal takeout double implies three or more cards in the unbid suits. If you are 4-4 in the majors, a certain amount of leeway is advisable. If RHO opened 1♦ and I held:

♠ A J 4 3 ♥ K Q 8 4 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ A 5,

an immediate double would be my first choice. Advancer in these auctions should strain to respond in a major, and if they do bid clubs, ♣ A x might be as useful as ♣ J x x, which you could easily hold. Also, if your partner does bid clubs, and you're forced to table the dummy, be sure to put a small spade in with your clubs so that your partner will think you thought you had three clubs! ■