



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Recently, my partner and I got a poor result when I held:

♠ J 10 6 ♥ Q 5 4 3 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ K 5.

The auction:

	Partner		Me
1♠	Dbl	2♠	3♥
All Pass			

With 10 HCP, I of course wanted to compete, and feeling sure that partner's double guaranteed four hearts, I bid 3♥. He actually held:

♠ Q ♥ K 10 7 ♦ A Q 9 8 ♣ Q J 7 6 3.

Hearts divided 4-2 and I was down one, but we could easily have made 3♦. Where did we go wrong?

Clara

Hi Clara,

You are off to a good start by noticing that 3♦ was a superior contract and having the curiosity to find out if there was a sensible way to actually reach the top spot.

Another good start would be to read my January column in the Bridge Bulletin, where I went to great length to explain that a takeout double of either major suit can never *guarantee* four cards in the other major. Words like, "implies," "suggests," "tends to show," are all much better than "guarantee."

Although I do not like to overload my students' bridge brains with excessive conventions, there is one I suggest you

adopt to help minimize results like you received on the deal in question. Think about the following auction:

1♠ Dbl 2♠ Dbl?

Your partner's takeout double suggests three or more cards in all of the unbid suits along with support points equaling at least a minimum opening bid. How often would you expect an advancer to want to make a penalty double of spades where the opponents have announced at least eight of them, with at least five of those sitting "over" whatever spade holding advancer has? Although it is possible that advancer wants to make a penalty double of this two-level contract, I doubt this would occur very often. When contemplating dropping the natural meaning of a bid and substituting instead a conventional one, frequency of occurrence between the two options should be a major consideration. I suggest your problem is a classic example for the need to play responsive doubles rather than penalty doubles in auctions similar to this.

Let's set the ground rules. Any time your partner makes a takeout double or an overcall sandwiched between the same suit bid and raised (as in the auction above), advancer should have the option to make a responsive double. This responsive double shows the values to compete, and tends to show two possible places to play.

If this conventional tool was available, you would double on the cards you held. The doubler is expected to bid his lowest-ranking four-card or longer suit. If you get a match with one of your four-card suits, pass. If on the deal above the doubler bid 3♣, an advancer would now bid 3♦, showing both diamonds and hearts. This does not guarantee anything, but it does give you a two-way shot to find an eight-card or longer trump fit. Your hands would be a classic example of how to reach 3♦. Yes, the first doubler could hold four diamonds and four hearts, and when he bids 3♦, the heart contract would be lost. In competitive auctions, don't insist on perfection – just try to survive!

With the following hand, note how well a responsive double works out:

♠ J 6 5 4 ♥ 9 ♦ A 7 5 2 ♣ K 9 7 4
1♥ Dbl 2♥ ?

In yesteryear, 2♠ would be the popular choice, and sometimes this would result in playing a 4-3 fit when a minor suit would be a much better landing spot. Double! If your partner holds four spades, he will bid them, and if not, his cheapest four-card suit ... surely he holds four cards in one of the three suits!

There's more to this topic, so we'll continue discussing it next month. ■