

Take-Out Double Dilemma

(Friday mini-lesson – 5 July 2019)

How well do you understand responses to take-out doubles?

Today we'll look at a situation that I find catches many players out.

Your LHO opens 1♥, then your partner doubles and the next player passes. Over to you holding the following hand:

♠ J 4 3 ♥ J T 8 6 5 ♦ 7 5 ♣ J 6 5

It's a bit of a dilemma. What do you bid?

Your choices here might conceivably be among the following four possible options:

Pass
1NT
1♠
2♣

Advancing a take-out double, especially with very weak hands, is an under-appreciated art form. Let's look at the four options presented above in turn.

Pass

This is a very poor choice. About 70 years ago the great bridge player and writer, Alvin Roth, famously said: “**Take out take-out doubles!**”

Possessing that long ♥ suit, some of you, perhaps, might yield to temptation and pass, converting partner's intent of take-out into a penalty double. This rates to be a *very* bad idea, because at best you might be able to contribute just two defensive tricks – so you are counting on partner for at least five more just for a one-trick set. Quite probably, the opponents will make 1♥ doubled, possibly with overtricks, giving your side a very poor score.

To pass a take-out double of a suit at the one-level guarantees you hold *five or more very strong trumps* – something like A-K-Q-x-x-x might persuade me to pass the double.

1NT

This also is a very bad choice with the hand above. Most often, your partner's double is effectively like bidding all three of the other suits, suggesting 13 or more dummy points if one of those suits is bid by you.

It is both normal and advisable that the doubler value her hand with the expectation that you will advance by picking a suit. For instance, over the 1♥ opening bid, partner might hold as little as:

♠ K T x x

♥ x

♦ Q J x x

♣ A T x x

This hand only has 10 hcp, and would not be a sound opening bid. But its 13 *dummy points* qualifies it as a light, but perfectly acceptable take-out double. I would have no hesitation doubling with this hand over a 1♥ bid on my right.

With this type of dummy combined with your meagre hand of 3 hcp, how well do you think a contract of 1NT will fare?

Thus, a 1NT advance of a take-out double should be a *constructive, value-showing action*, that is, showing significantly more hcp than the scant three that your hand holds. A 1NT bid in response to a take-out double **should show 7-11 hcp with at least one stopper** in the opponent's bid suit.

The only alternative, when holding a poor hand, is to *make a minimum bid in one of the unbid suits*. This action doesn't promise any points at all, and simply says you have somewhere between zero and about 8 points, because with more than that you should choose a more constructive action, typically by jumping in one of the unbid suits.

Having eliminated pass and 1NT as sensible options, the only alternatives are either 1♠ or 2♣, which represent your longest unbid suits.

While many players might choose 1♠ here because it keeps the bidding lower, I would actually bid 2♣. If partner has a minimum take-out double, then I doubt either one of these bids is going to be the final contract anyway, since the opponents will surely bid again as they must have close to enough points between them for game – do the math.

But if partner has quite a strong take-out double hand, which is now quite possible given your weak hand and the fact that RHO did not bid, a 1♠ advance is far more likely to excite partner and we will probably end up getting too high. On the other hand, the 2♣ advance sometimes tosses a bit of a wet blanket on the game prospects dancing before partner's eyes, since one needs somewhat more values to make game in a minor suit.

So my take on this situation would be:

1. First choice – 2♣
2. Second choice – 1♠
3. I would never, ever consider a 1NT or pass with this hand – so my only possible third choice is throw the hand in and ask for a redeal! 😊