

low contract, he is not looking for a game contract. His principal objective is to push the enemy to the three-level where they may be defeated; secondarily, he may hope to fulfill a low part-score contract of his own. So do not get excited when partner balances; do not raise his overcall or jump in response to his double. Partner based his action not on his own values alone, but also on what he can count on you to have. Nine times out of ten, he has already bid every point in your hand.

Responding to Balancing Overcalls

When partner balances with an overcall, *pass* even when you have a good fit and quite a lot of points. On this auction:

OPENER	YOU	RESPONDER	PARTNER
1 ♠	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	?	Pass	?

pass with each of these hands:

♠ x x	♥ K J x x	♦ A Q x x	♣ x x x
♠ A x x	♥ K x x	♦ A x x x	♣ Q x x
♠ x	♥ Q J x x x	♦ Q x x	♣ Q J x x

Do not say to yourself, "If partner can bid three hearts without hearing from me, then I can raise him to four." The opponents' auction told him of your strength just as surely as if you had bid; in each example, your hand is what partner hoped you had—enough to give him a play for his contract. If partner had game ambitions, he would have overcalled directly over *one* spade.

What is more, if responder bids three spades after you pass three hearts on the auction above, you should pass again! Do not compete further or double the opponents with any of the example hands. Partner has succeeded in pushing the enemy one higher; try not to punish him for his daring. If you defeat three spades, the balancing over-

call shows a profit, and if three spades makes, the reopening bid cost nothing. So you cannot lose and may well gain. Leave it at that.

Responding to Balancing Doubles

When partner balances with a double, respond at the cheapest level in your longest unbid suit, and then retire from the auction. Do not pass the double for penalties; do not jump in response; do not bid twice. On this sequence:

OPENER	PARTNER	RESPONDER	YOU
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
Pass	Double	Pass	?

if you hold:

♠ K Q x x x	♥ x x	♦ K J x x	♣ x x
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bid two spades. Had partner doubled *one* diamond, you would have *jumped* to two spades, trying for game; but now game is not in view, since neither of you could bid directly. Note that you do not pass the double for penalties. The opponents can probably make that contract, for partner was not strong enough to double on the first round.

And if the opponents go to three diamonds over two spades, let them play it there. Do not bid three spades; do not double. Once again, partner has accomplished his objective—pushing the enemy one higher. If you defeat three diamonds, thank partner for getting them up high enough. He will not thank you for doubling even if they go down one—the strain on his heart will have been too great. If you continually put partner back in jeopardy by bidding again or doubling after his reopening bid has done its work, he will soon stop balancing with you. And then the enemy will steal far too many part-score hands.

WHEN NOT TO BALANCE

Misfit Auctions

Do not reopen the auction simply because the opponents have stopped at a low contract. They have given up on game for one of two reasons: because they do not have enough high cards, or because they do not have a fit. When they have found a fit but stay low, it is safe to compete—partner is marked with a respectable point-count and your side has a fit also; but when the opponents have a misfit it is often suicidal to reopen, for then you have no fit either and there is no presumption at all that your side has a fair share of the high cards. Consider this auction:

OPENER	PARTNER	RESPONDER	YOU
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	Pass	?

Suppose you hold the hand cited earlier as a typical balancing overall:

♠ K J x x x ♠ x x x ♠ K J x ♣ x x x

Do not even consider reopening with two spades on this auction! Responder has announced a strong hand, and has passed under game only because he fears a misfit. The enemy hands could well be:

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ Q 10 x	♠ A x x x
♠ A K J x x x	♠ x
♦ A x x	♦ x x x
♣ x	♣ A Q 10 x x

This leaves partner with:

♠ x ♠ Q 10 x x ♦ Q x x x ♣ K J x x

You will be doubled and set from 3 to 5 tricks whenever you play the hand. Note that the opponents have a misfit, so that you have a misfit also. They stopped at a part-score with enough high-card strength to warrant a game bid *because they had a misfit*; therefore, it would be a disastrous error for you to assume that partner has a strong hand.

Here are two more examples of auctions in which the enemy have passed out at a low contract, but in which you should not reopen regardless of your hand:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1 ♠	1 ♣
2 ♠	Pass

and

1 ♣	1 ♠
2 ♣	2 ♠
Pass	Pass

The key factor is that no suit has been supported. This means that you cannot assume that your side has either the fit or the points to make competition safe. So if you were not strong enough to bid directly, you are not strong enough to balance.

After One-Notrump Response

There is a type of auction in which the opponents clearly limit their hands even though no fit has been found. Both opponents have minimum values; it would be surprising to find them with more than 22 points in combined high cards.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1 ♠	1 NT
Pass	

or

1 ♠	1 NT
2 ♠	Pass

If you were in the pass-out position on either auction with a hand like:

♠ K x ♡ x x ♦ Q J 10 x x x ♣ Q x x

you could safely overcall in diamonds. Partner is marked with enough points to provide safety. But if you were sitting in the balancing position on either auction with some hand such as:

♠ K x x ♡ A x x x ♦ K x x ♣ J x x

you must pass, not reopen with a double! Since the opponents have not found a fit, there is no presumption that you have a playable trump suit. It is safe to reopen only when you require points from partner, not fit.

When you do reopen with a double on an auction in which the opponents have not supported a suit, for example:

OPENER	YOU	RESPONDER	PARTNER
1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	Pass
Pass	<i>Double</i>		

this double is for penalties. It means that you were trapping. You are not bidding values in partner's hand; you, yourself, have the best hand at the table. A second- or third-round reopening double is for takeout *only when the opponents have found a fit*. Then, you could not possibly want to double for penalties; but otherwise, you could not possibly feel safe in doubling for takeout.

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OVER PREEMPTIVE OPENINGS

♠ ♡ ♦ ♣

Occasionally, your opponents will open the auction with high bids—three-bids or four-bids—in an effort to shut you out. When you have a lot of strength, this is frustrating. You know that the hand belongs to your side, but you have very little room in which to find your best contract. If you stab, you are likely to guess wrong and wind up losing points even with most of the high cards. Yet if you stay out of the auction, the opponents have picked your pocket. Inhumane!

It is important to realize that there is no sure-fire defense against preemptive openings. There is no fancy gadget which will allow you to bid as accurately in one round of bidding as in four; the best bidders in the world will sometimes be crowded into poor contracts by pre-emptis and will have hands stolen from them once in a while. That is why preemptive bids continue to be made. You must accept the fact that you are unlikely to reach

a perfect contract after a preemptive opening! Concentrate on getting any reasonable return for your high cards. And, above all, be willing to be shut out by a shut-out bid—your opponent's weakness does not make you any stronger. A bridge player who cannot bear to let the enemy steal a hand from him is like a poker player who is never bluffed—a sure loser.

PASSING OVER PREEMPTS

This means that if you do not have the values to enter the auction at a high level, you pass. Over a one-spade opening bid, this hand:

♠ x x ♡ A Q x x ♢ K J x x ♣ K x x

is a sound takeout double. Over a *three-spade* opening bid, it is not. You can afford to force partner to bid a suit at the two-level, but you cannot make him bid at the four-level. It is true that you could conceivably miss a game by passing, but if you double with hands of this strength you will have three disasters for every one makeable contract you reach. Common sense indicates that the higher the level at which you plunge into the auction, the more strength you must have.

TAKEOUT DOUBLE OVER PREEMPTS

Point Count Requirements

The point-count requirements set up for takeout doubles in Chapter 2 allow for this—11 points is the minimum if partner can respond at the one-level, and 2 points extra is required for each additional level. Applied to the takeout double directly over a preemptive bid, this means that you need at least 15 points to double a three-club, diamond or heart opening; at least 17 points to double any preemptive opening from three spades to four hearts.

Another way to look at it is to assume that partner has about 8 points (this is his fair share of the remaining cards) and will respond in an unbid major suit. Thus, if you double a three-spade opening bid, you will be in a four-heart contract opposite 8 points, and you had better have at least 17 points yourself. If you double a three-heart opening bid, you will be in a three-spade contract opposite 8 points, and need 15 points yourself to be reasonably safe. Never double with a hand under the minimum requirements—even when you have your values you are taking a calculated risk, since you will go down if partner has a really bad hand; the risk becomes prohibitive when you have less.

Distributional Requirements for Double

The distributional requirements for the double of a preemptive opening are in one way more rigid than for the double of a one-bid. *The double of a major suit preempt promises at least four-card support for the other major.*

Suppose the bidding is opened with three spades on your right and you hold:

♠ x ♡ J x x ♢ A J x ♣ A K J x x x

You should overcall four clubs instead of doubling. It would be reasonable to double a *one-spade* opening, for you can stand a two-heart response, but you dare not force partner to bid hearts at the four-level.

Any takeout double begs for a major-suit response. If partner answers in a four-card major suit when you have only three-card support, you are not likely to be in trouble at the one- or two-level; but at the three- or four-level, you can be headed for disaster. This is particularly true since a preemptive opening warns of a bad trump split. So be sure that you really want to hear the most likely response when you double a high bid for takeout; there

is no room at the four-level to probe for a better trump suit if you cannot support partner's reply.

In contrast, you must take greater liberties with your minor suit holdings when you double a shut-out bid. If your right-hand opponent opens three spades and you hold:

♠ x x ♡ K Q x x ♦ K x ♣ A K J x x

you should double, begging partner to bid hearts. Were the opening bid *one* spade, you would overcall in clubs. Partner will not pass if you have game, and you can show hearts secondarily if he bids—you have plenty of room, and there is no need to promise diamond support which you cannot deliver. But the preemptive opening leaves you no opportunity for such delicacy. You must keep your eye on the main chance—the major-suit game. And if partner responds in diamonds, you will have to pass, accepting what may be a poor contract. You cannot hope for complete accuracy against opponents' preempts; all you can do is proceed in the right general direction.

Quiz

What would you do over your right-hand opponent's preemptive bid in these situations?

(a) The opening is three diamonds. You hold:

♠ K Q x x ♡ Q J x x ♦ A x x ♣ x x

(b) The opening is three hearts. You hold:

♠ J x x x ♡ x ♦ A Q x x ♣ A J 10 x

(c) The opening is three spades. You hold:

♠ K Q 10 x ♡ x x ♦ A K x x ♣ K x x

(d) The opening is three spades. You hold:

♠ x x ♡ A K x ♦ A Q 10 x ♣ A K x x

(a) *Pass*. It is not your club holding which stops you from doubling—you expect a major suit response. But your point-count is insufficient to force partner to respond at the three-level. As we will see later, if partner has enough strength to make three of a major opposite your hand, he will jump to four when you double. And if he is good enough to make *four*, he will bid himself even though you pass.

(b) *Double*. You have 15 points (adding 3 points for the singleton in the enemy suit) and four cards in the unbid major, so you can force a response at the three-level. This is the rock-bottom minimum for the action.

(c) *Pass*. It would be profitable to blast partner speechless with a vicious DOUBLE! and penalize your opponent for his gay opening bid, but this is unethical. A double in a normal tone of voice is odds-on to get you a four-heart response and a substantial minus score. If you pass, you are sure of a small plus score even if partner does not reopen; and, as we will see, you have not given up all chance for a big set.

(d) *Double*. This is a bad bid, since you have only three-card support in the unbid major. But there is no good bid available; you have no long suit in which to overcall, and it is more than flesh and blood can bear to pass 20 points. Your overwhelming strength may bring four hearts home even with only seven trumps. And, after all, there is no law against partner holding five hearts, or responding in a minor, or bidding notrump. What is more, since you are short in spades partner may be long, and decide to pass your double for penalties.

RESPONDING TO PARTNER'S DOUBLE

Penalty Pass

You may have heard that partner's double of a preemptive opening bid is an "optional" double, half for takeout