



Marty Bergen

When in doubt, double for takeout

Everyone agrees that preempts can be deadly. Deciding what to bid over them is often difficult and annoying. It is necessary to accept the reality that even experts are forced to guess when the bidding escalates.

Since we can't always know what to do, we would like to at least maximize flexibility. When I think about flexibility, a takeout double is the action that immediately comes to mind. After all, if you don't know what to do, perhaps your partner does.

If you believe that all doubles at high levels are for penalties, you are definitely mistaken. In fact, level plays only a minor role in determining the meanings of a double. Here is a general rule: *When partner has not yet made a bid, most doubles are for takeout.*

East's intention after opening 1♥ with

♠6 ♥AK932 ♦AK742 ♣A2 was to next show his diamonds — what could be more obvious? Sometimes, unforeseen developments call for a change in strategy. As case in point:

Dlr: East
Vul: None

♠ 5	♠ 6
♥ Q J 10 8	♥ A K 9 3 2
♦ Q J 9 8	♦ A K 7 4 2
♣ K Q 8 7	♣ A 2

♠ A Q J 9 8 7 4
 ♥ 6 5
 ♦ 6
 ♣ J 10 3

West North East South
1♥ 3♣
Pass Pass Dbl All Pass

The vast majority of players would have rebid 4♦ over 3♣ with the East hand without considering any other alternative. After South's preempt, East wasn't thrilled about showing his second suit at the four level. For example, if partner held a hand such as

♠K54 ♥64 ♦953 ♣KQ865, wouldn't 3NT prove to be the best spot? East realized that there was no rush to show his second suit — that could be done later, if necessary.

East's takeout double of 3♣ would certainly not be found in any textbook, but let's reconsider. If partner bids 4♦ after the double, you can still bid 4♥. You're obviously no worse off than if you had bid 4♦ directly after the preempt. In addition, doubling opens up several attractive options for partner that were not available after a 4♦ bid.

What are those options? As I mentioned earlier, one is the opportunity to play in 3NT. Another is that the double can be used to penalize the opponents. The average player, unfortunately, doesn't think enough about this. If partner has the right spade holding, East's five quick tricks will clearly come in very handy.

And so it came to be on the example deal. West was delighted to pass partner's double. Taking five tricks on defense seemed a lot easier than trying to make nine or 10 with his hand, especially given his spades. 3♦ doubled went down two

tricks. East took only four tricks, but West's trumps were good for an additional two. Meanwhile, East-West cannot make game.

East's double, even at the three level, was not for penalty and did not promise spades. In fact, the double denied spades. East's double announced that he was not content to accept South's trump suit and needed West's opinion in selecting the best contract. West was welcome to convert the double to penalty by passing if he held spade length and strength. West did a great job of making his feelings known.

If West held a different hand, he would not have passed his partner's takeout double. With the following hands, West would bid.

- ♠J54 ♥Q104 ♦J8 ♣Q9765.
- 4♥. Partner did open 1♥.
- ♠975 ♥84 ♦Q95 ♣J8764.
- 4♣. If partner bids 4♦, West will pass.
- ♠K54 ♥64 ♦953 ♣KQ865.
- 3NT, as previously noted.

Cherie McAllister



Cherie Rae (née Wheeler) McAllister of St. Paul died peacefully at home in late February. She was born on July 14, 1963 in Frederic, WI. She leaves one son, Ardin. She worked with computers for several years prior to her illness and was also a bridge player and tournament competitor. At age 12 she had won over 50 master points at duplicate bridge and became the youngest player to ever reach the level of Junior Master in the ACBL. A rainbow was her special symbol and her rainbow touched all her friends and family in a special way.

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