

Mike's Advice



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Responding to a takeout double of a weak two-bid – part 1

This is the first of a series of articles that will look at responding to partner's takeout double of a weak two-bid. We'll start with the most difficult of these auctions, namely, when the opponents open 2♠.

You are South in this auction:

West	North	East	South
2♠	Dbl	Pass	?

Following is an assortment of hands you may hold and a discussion of the problems you may have. You should be aware when answering these problems that your partner should have a pretty good hand because a double of 2♠ pushes your side to the three level.

♠74 ♥KJ543 ♦Q874 ♣K10

A good hand worth nearly an opening bid in support of hearts. Facing a takeout double of 2♠, you know you have enough for game. Bid 4♥.

♠74 ♥KJ543 ♦Q874 ♣83

This is a hand with some redeeming features, but it is not good enough to bid a game. The correct bid is 3♥.

♠54 ♥Q8764 ♦874 ♣1074

This is a bad hand, but it does have five hearts. Without special agreements, 3♥ is the right bid, but your partner won't know if you have this poor hand or the modest hand you had in the previous example.

♠543 ♥J874 ♦874 ♣Q53

This is a terrible hand. Still, it could be worse. You have two honor cards and you have a four-card suit. Imagine if you had one more spade and one fewer heart. Not pleasant to think about. Without any special

gadgets, your bid with this hand is also 3♥.

Take a quick look at the last three hands. One has 6 useful high-card points, a five-card suit, and some distribution. One has a five-card suit headed by an honor, but nothing else. One has a four-card suit only and terrible distribution. Each has its own flavor, but with each you'd bid 3♥. How can partner judge what to do when a 3♥ bid promises a range of 0–8 support points? Your side is at the three level so there is no room for further discussion. Your partner must make a guess. Your 9-point range makes this very hard for him.

A useful tool

A popular way to handle this situation is to play that if partner doubles 2♠, bidding a suit at the three level says you have a decent hand. You promise 7 support points with a five-card suit and up to 10 support points with a four-card or longer suit. Some judgment will be required, but it is not difficult to judge if your hand is constructive but not quite game forcing.

If you do not have a constructive hand, therefore, bid 2NT. This tells your partner that he is to bid 3♣.

When he does this, you will pass 3♣ if you have a weak hand with clubs or you will bid 3♦ or 3♥ if you have a weak hand with that suit. Some examples:

♠Q103 ♥43 ♦107632 ♣Q53

Bid 2NT. Your partner will bid 3♣ (unless he has a huge hand — more on this later) and you will then bid 3♦. This warns partner that you have a weak hand (0–7 support points) and he will act accordingly.

♠A63 ♥63 ♦K9652 ♣Q104

Bid 3♦. When you bid a suit at the three level you promise mildly invitational values. Your partner knows you are not broke (since you didn't bid 2NT first) and that will help him make an informed decision. He might bid 3NT. He might bid 3♠ asking you for a spade stopper. He might try for a game in diamonds.

Note that when you bid 3♦, promising some points, a 3♥ bid by your partner would be forcing. When you make a positive bid and partner bids again, you are pretty much forced to game.

♠7653 ♥J9 ♦1063 ♣J852

This is a hideous hand. You have to bid because defending against 2♠ doubled rates to be ineffective. They are likely to make it, perhaps with an overtrick. Bid 2NT, asking partner to bid 3♣, and leave him there. At least you have a four-card suit. I have seen hands with no four-card suit to bid. If you have not seen such a hand, consider yourself lucky. It will happen eventually.

What if you bid 2NT and your partner has a huge hand? What does he do then? Tune in next month. □