

When opponents double our Stayman, Fourth-Suit or other asking bids

By Tuğrul Kaban

“When an opponent doubles an asking bid of ours, usually for lead-directing purposes, this does not have to be a disadvantage.

At high-level cue bidding, the usual counter-measure is to redouble to show first-round control or pass to deny it. A pass allows partner a turn to redouble it with a first-round control there.

What about their lower-level doubles? I have in mind our everyday asking bids such as:

- Stayman enquiry, our 2♣ over 1NT, or 3♣ over 2NT
- Any Fourth Suit Forcing enquiry at 2 or 3-level
- Checkback or New-Minor-Forcing 2♣/♦ over 1NT, or 3♣/♦ over 2NT

We can turn their double even in these cases into an advantage for ourselves if we establish some general parameters (in addition to any specific counters against specific doubles).

The first thing to say is that their double of our artificial bid gives our responder extra bids, namely pass and redouble, as well as our normal system responses to the enquiry.

Pass is an interesting one. After the opponent has doubled, our enquirer will now get another bid whether or not our responder passes the double. But it would be a waste of a call if responder just uses his pass to mean ‘I have nothing to say’. He has a free bid and whatever he calls the bidding will continue. What’s more, after passing the first time, he will still get another bite at the cherry when our enquirer bids to keep the bidding still open.

So, pass may as well mean something useful on the part of our responder and it works best if, as a counter to the double, pass in fact shows a stopper in the attacked artificial suit. As a corollary, if responder bids on ignoring the double this now denies a stop. So, we have:

- Pass: Stopper(s) in the artificial suit
- Bid on: No stopper and bidding on as if opponent did not double

If responder is passing then how do we get back on track, you might ask. Assuming that the next opponent is also passing, all our enquirer needs to do is simply redouble, which now enables responder to resume the sequence!

So, having additionally clarified his position in the attacked suit, responder now gets to respond to the original enquiry as well after all.

Responder should pass originally to show the attacked suit position in preference even when he has a positive response to the original enquiry, such as a major suit to disclose in response to Stayman. This is because he will still get a turn to give the system response the next time.

This detour to indicate the presence or absence of a stopper in the attacked suit may later enable the hand to be played in no-trumps or in any event allow us to better judge our prospects in marginal game-going situations even in suit-contracts.

If responder bids on after opponent’s double, the implicit denial of any stopper in the attacked suit is also very useful information. So, for example, the enquirer will now be unlikely to choose no-trumps as a final contract, or do so only in the full knowledge that responder will not be contributing to stopping that suit.”

Tuğrul’s book also lists specific follow-on bidding ideas for various different responder hand types in these situations.

A Complete System for the Tournament Bridge Player is available from *Chess and Bridge* and *Amazon* and most other usual bridge outlets.