



Responsive and Competitive Doubles

WHEN I was a lad (yes – many moons ago!) I was fascinated to hear of all sorts of different exotic-sounding doubles. Some of these were as follows:

- 1) Take-out doubles
- 2) Penalty doubles
- 3) Negative doubles
- 4) Responsive doubles
- 5) Competitive doubles
- 6) Lead directing doubles
- 7) Consultative doubles
- 8) Lightner doubles

In addition there were various others that popped up most unexpectedly (not to mention redoubles of course as well!)

As time has moved on these doubles have become more and more understood and widespread with a real trend towards using most doubles in a more ‘take-out’ rather than ‘penalty’ capacity. Good partnerships incorporate many of the above list into their armoury. This does not, I repeat *not*, mean that they cannot still extract some nice juicy penalties – of course they can, it is just that their bidding vocabulary has widened.

In this article I will concentrate on Responsive and Competitive doubles.

Responsive Doubles

These are often misused and even mis-described by tournament players. A responsive double specifically applies when a suit has been raised by an opponent following a take-out double from partner. Thus:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♦	Dble	2♦	Dble

And:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♦	Dble	3♦	Dble

Are both responsive doubles. Note in both cases that the opponents have bid and raised a suit. Therefore:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♦	Dble	1♠	Dble

This is *not* a responsive double!

I personally play this as a penalty suggestion, usually showing four cards in spades, whereas with five or more spades I bid 2♠. The theory here is that if we double one suit for take-out then doubling another becomes a penalty double. This is, however, a matter for partnership agreement; playing it for take-out is certainly possible *providing* both members of the partnership are on the same wavelength, of course!

Requirements for a Responsive Double

1. If the suit the opponents bid and raise is a *minor*, then the double suggests both majors (therefore no need to guess one, inevitably hitting partner’s three- not four-card holding!), with a smattering of points. Maybe about 6+ at the two level and 8+ at the three level as a rough guideline. E.g. holding Hand 1, after:

Hand 1
♠ Q 10 6 5
♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ 7 5 2
♣ K 8

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♦	Dble	2♦	?

A responsive double would be perfect here. The ‘risk factor’ is effectively removed since the odds are extremely high that you have a fit once partner doubles 1♦. If instead you just guess to bid one major or other, your partner may well only hold three card support making your contract not very secure or – even more importantly – partner may be unable to compete at the next level.

2. If the suit bid and raised is a major,

then the double suggests minor-suit length, since here you should strain to bid the other major if at all possible. Thus in this auction:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♥	Dble	2♥	Dble

Here your double usually denies four spades, unless they are very poor, and so suggests both minors, e.g. something like Hand 2.

Hand 2
♠ Q 5
♥ 6 2
♦ Q 7 6 5 2
♣ K Q 8 3

Similarly, in the sequence:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♠	Dble	2♠	Dble

Again your double shows the minors, since you would strive to bid hearts if at all possible.

3. Responsive doubles also apply at the three level. Thus:

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♣	Dble	3♣	Dble

Here your double is still responsive, suggesting both majors. Since a fit is more or less guaranteed, the strength required can still be as low as 7 or 8 HCPs.

4. Responsive doubles should also apply at the four level (by partnership arrangement as to how high to play them – I *strongly* recommend playing them up to the four level). In practice, the higher the level of the double, the less precise are the guarantees in terms of shape that you make to partner.

Thus these higher level responsive doubles just tend to show some high

cards rather than being pure take-out or even pure penalties as some die-hards still insist on playing! It follows therefore that with a pure penalty double you have to pass, otherwise partner will remove the double assuming it to be more of the take-out or responsive variety.

5. A variation on responsive doubles which is well worth playing for everyone is that if an opening bid is overcalled (*not* doubled but overcalled this time) then raised, then a double should also be for take-out and not penalties. E.g.

<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>	<i>You</i>
1♣	1♥	3♣	Dble

Your double should be responsive, showing spades and diamonds with some heart tolerance. A typical hand might be Hand 3:

This trades once again on the idea that a) it is safe to double for take-out when the opponents have found a fit without being misinterpreted and b) if they have found a fit we nearly always have one too!

Hand 3
 ♠ K J 6 5
 ♥ J 2
 ♦ K Q 7 6 3
 ♣ 8 3

Summary of Responsive Doubles

The theory is that if the opponents find a fit in competitive auctions, the responder to the doubler/overcaller can essentially always have a responsive/take-out double available. This is so much more frequent than the old-fashioned treatment of playing that double for penalties if partner has already spoken in the auction.

Competitive Doubles

These are based on theories very similar to those described above; thus if the opponents bid and raise a suit, then a double up to the level of 3♠ should be described as

'competitive' not penalty.

If the opponents have just bid a suit *without* it also being raised, then the double should be for take-out (competitive) up to 2♠. I teach all my own students that this falls within the rule 'all low level doubles should be for take-out' and not for penalty, e.g.

<i>You</i>	<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>
1♦	Pass	1♠	2♥
Dble			

This double is now competitive, or take-out essentially. Also:

<i>You</i>	<i>Oppo 1</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Oppo 2</i>
1♦	1♥	1♠	3♥
Dble			

Your double here is also competitive since the opponents have bid and raised a suit.

A precise set of requirements for making these calls is virtually impossible. However, my preferred definition of a competitive double, certainly at the three level, is to suggest extra values, without a clear-cut bid to make. It leaves room for partner to exercise his judgement; he can pass, bid no-trumps or describe his hand further, e.g.

♠ A 7	N	♠ K 9 8 6 3
♥ 8 6	W	♥ K 5
♦ A K Q 7 6 3	E	♦ J 2
♣ A 9 5	S	♣ 8 7 4 3

If the auction started as above: 1♦ – (1♥) – 1♠ – (3♥), what on earth should opener do? Bidding 4♦ gets you nowhere, bidding 5♦ just seems wild, you can't bid no-trumps without a stopper... jeez, it looks like you are stuck!

With competitive doubles, opener can double to show extras and responder can try 3NT with his guarded king of hearts. Right contract – right reasons!

I hope I have persuaded you to think long and hard about broadening your use of the double in competitive auctions. I may return to this subject at a later date. □

2013 CHANNEL TROPHY

CONGRATULATIONS to the England Under 25s who won the Channel Trophy in Ostend. The team of Alex Roberts, Shivam Shah, Kyle Lam, Simon Spencer, Toby Nonnenmacher and Michael Alishaw, with NPC Mike Bell, won five of their six matches – the only defeat being by 1 IMP. Both the 'Girls' team (Laura Covill, Alex Birchall, Katy Lee and Carina Negreanu), and the 'Youngsters' team (Freddie Illingworth, Ben Norton, George Siddons, Oliver Powell, Jonathan Derrick and Nick Dean) finished fourth in their events. Report in the April issue.

CAPTION COMPETITION



When I said 'green versus red', I wasn't expecting to have to play against all three of you!

THE winner of our December competition, with the caption above, is Tony Morgan of Taunton, Somerset, who will receive an elegant bridge mug from our sponsors, Bridge and Golf Gifts Direct (see page 5). Other good captions were: *Playing bridge is good for one's elf* (Catherine Thorp, Wootton Bridge, Ryde); *Humming 'We Three Kings' counts as unauthorised information!* (Rosemary Goodacre, Sevenoaks); *Christmas cards with Santa's little helpers at North Pole Bridge Club (unaffiliated)* (Michael Wilkes, Worcester); *One more mistake and you'll be working for Amazon next Xmas!* (Pat Rose, Chester); and *You can't pass my Multi!!!* (Nes Charles, Whitfield)

The cartoon for our new competition is below. Please send your bridgy captions (multiple entries accepted) to Caption Competition, *English Bridge*, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or by e-mail to elena@ebu.co.uk not later than 20th February 2014. **Don't forget to include your full postal address!**



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