



Pass Partner's Take-out Doubles More Often

ONE of the nice things about pairs is that a bottom is only a bottom. If you salvage an overtrick on the next board, you are potentially back to average. Take doubling the opponents in a making contract – probably into game. Yes – it's a bottom. But if you think they'll go down a trick or so most of the time, doubling them may well be good long-term tactics.

Here's a classic situation where recent computer simulations have radically changed modern players' views:

West	North	East	South
		1♦	1♥
Pass	3♥	Dble	Pass
?			

North has made a level-of-the-fit preemptive raise to 3♥, showing four hearts but not great values and East has made a take-out double. Here are three possible hands for you to hold as West. Let's leave the vulnerability unspecified as that is not my central theme.

Hand A	Hand B
♠ 8 5 2	♠ Q 8 3
♥ 8 7 5 2	♥ J 10 8 6
♦ J 8 5 2	♦ 9 2
♣ J 6	♣ J 9 7 6

Hand C
♠ 9 7 4
♥ J 9 7
♦ 9 7 2
♣ A 9 3 2

Hand A: 4♦. This is clear-cut. You have four cards in partner's first suit and he has asked you to bid. You actually have a rather good hand for him and certainly should not apologise as you table your assets. If he has, say:
♠ A Q 6 ♥ 4 ♦ A K 7 6 3 ♣ K Q 10 5
you may even make eleven tricks if all goes well (although he would pass 4♦). Don't even consider passing – this is a fit deal.

Hand B: Pass. Your heart holding – one almost certain trick in defence, worthless in offence – is strongly telling you to pass partner's take-out double. Plus, you have no obvious bid. You would pass this double at teams, pairs, rubber – whatever form of bridge. Yes, the opponents might occasionally make, but you'd hope to nip them at least a trick the majority of the time (and anything your side bid is likely to be torrid).

Hand C: here is where it gets very interesting. A few years ago, 4♣ would be considered reasonably normal, with 4♦ a close second choice (even 3NT as 'pick-a-

minor?'). And those are probably the correct options at teams or rubber, where doubling the opponents into game is very, very bad. A 4♣ contract does not rate to do very well, but the opponents are unlikely to double, and down a couple of tricks undoubled is much better than passing and seeing them make 3♥ doubled – into game.

At pairs, however, passing the double is the long-term match-point winner. Without a trump trick, I'd estimate you'd only defeat 3♥ about 60% to 65% of the time, but any other action gives you a lower match-point expectancy, particularly if you are vulnerable.

A Law of Total Tricks analysis is perhaps helpful here. Give partner an expected four spades, one heart, five diamonds and three clubs shape. The opponents have nine hearts and you have eight diamonds (assuming, charitably, you find diamonds, perhaps via a 'pick-a-minor' 3NT removal of the double, or a guess to bid 4♦ not 4♣): 17 total trumps means (using the Law) 17 total tricks. Quite likely, they make eight tricks in hearts, you make nine tricks in diamonds: both relevant contracts, namely 3♥ and 4♦, failing by one trick.

This is all too nail-biting at teams or rubber (especially as the Law is frequently out by a trick), but at pairs, you have

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