

Board of the Week 80

By Dick Chapman

This week we recap methods to show strong hands in competition. The nice dealer gives you this:

♠KQ94 ♥AK976 ♦K ♣AQ10

Both are vulnerable. You are West with this 21 point hand. Your right hand opponent deals and opens 1 diamond. What is your call?

Double sounds right to me, and I suspect everyone in the field would take this action. Now the auctions will diverge. Let's say it goes pass by North, partner bids 1 heart, pass by South. What now?

We generally have agreements that say "no off-shape minimal takeout double." In other words, any takeout double either has shape (shortness in the opener's suit and tolerance for any call from partner), strength, or both. Doubling and bidding opposite a minimum response shows a strong hand. But exactly how strong? This is where judgment comes into play.

Let's divide things up a bit. Remember that partner could have four hearts and zero points. So you have a great fit but don't know the proper level. Your diamond king is worthless, but your fifth heart is a big feature. You can visualize a trump reversal where partner, playing in a heart contract, can ruff diamonds in dummy (your hand) then draw trump out of the closed hand to maximize trick potential.

How do you get this hand across to partner? You didn't get a jump in hearts, so partner has 8 or fewer hcp (you would have heard 2 hearts with 9 or more, trusting you to have a shapely hand, a big hand, or both). You don't want to be in game if partner is flat broke, but you don't want to miss game if partner is sitting on a good 7.

In Board of the Week 79, we discussed a "hierarchy of balanced hand bidding." Perhaps, without being chained to strict point counting, we should adopt a similar hierarchy for takeout doubles. Let's try, remembering that judgment is better than any 4321 counting method:

With "about opening values" up to "about" 16, you would double and pass any non-jump response by partner (partner has 8 or fewer). Doubling then raising partner, or doubling and bidding a new suit, would show more, a very good 16 or better:

(1D)-X-(Pass)-1H-(Pass)-2H

"Or better"? How much better? Let's move into the "much better" area. Pop quiz time. Which is stronger:

(a) Double then jumping a level:

(1D)-X-(Pass)-1H-(Pass)-3H

(b) Double then cue bidding the opponents suit:

(1D)-X-(Pass)-1H-(Pass)-2D.

The answer, per club expert David C, is (b). The strongest possible call is cue bidding. So after a 2D cue bid by the doubler, advancer with a Yarborough can attempt to shut it down with 2H, or with more can invite with 3H, or even more can bid game. Now back to you, Doubler. If advancer tries to shut it down, you can still re-invite with 3H (knowing that partner can be dead broke) or, in the rare case, bid game opposite a possible Yarborough.

Confession time. We didn't get to game with these cards:

♠KQ94	♠A862
♥AK976	♥J542
♦K	♦6
♣AQ10	♣7532

South opened 1D, I doubled, partner bid 1 heart, I bid 3 hearts, partner passed. Oops. I was "certain" that I had communicated a big hand, but once again the question is "how big?" Clearly partner thought "not big enough." To make matters worse, it made 11 tricks when hearts broke 2-2:

	♠J1053	
	♥108	
	♦J843	
	♣J96	
♠KQ94		♠A862
♥AK976		♥J542
♦K		♦6
♣AQ10		♣7532
	♠7	
	♥Q3	
	♦AQ109752	
	♣K84	

In this partnership, we are frankly honest about ATB (allocate the blame). At first I thought partner had failed, but later I agreed that I should cue bid 2 diamonds, then bid an invitational 3 hearts over a 2 heart shutdown or 4 hearts over an invitational 3 heart call, whichever the case might be.

It was a good lesson for me. We paid off with a poor score, but it's better to have this happen in a club game than in the finals of the North American Pairs flight B. Oh wait, I may not make it to the finals...but I can dream. As long as I'm dreaming, I also won't make this mistake in the finals of the Bermuda Bowl.

Meanwhile, it goes "sorry, partner" and we moved on to the next board. Thanks to my (unnamed) partner for knowing that I'm trying to get to the right place and I will get it right next time. Maybe.

See you at the table.

Wait, there's more. See the next page.

♠A862

♥J542

♦6

♣7532

How many readers would bid 1 spade instead of 1 heart after the double? I have mixed feelings about this. Some always go up the line with majors (the word "always" should be removed from bridge vocabulary). Others will bid their best major. I read one expert who contended that you should consider bidding spades first, then if necessary come back in with hearts so as to get both majors across. Of course, if you are strong with both majors you could cue bid 2 diamonds, but with 5 hcp you can't do that.

I know of at least one East who did bid 1 spade after the double. Then when West came back with 2 hearts, the strength of the West hand was made quite clear. East had an easy 3 or 4 heart call (and if 3, West will get the pair to game).

I can't recommend any method over another, but I have been known to bid 1 spade in this situation, for the reason stated (can compete in hearts later, if necessary). Notice this treatment is far different from responding to one of a minor, where spades then hearts promises more spades or at least 5-5 if equal length...we still go up the line in four card suits.

In that one pair where East called 1 spade, it was good by West to not raise or jump in spades. They may or may not get to an inferior 4 spade contract in that case. Here, to make the strength clear, West came back with hearts. Well done.

The traveler:

Bid	By	-Sc	+	-
3 ♥	W	170	11	0
3 ♥	E	200	10	1
5*♦	S	300	9	2
5*♦	S	500	8	3
4 ♥	W	620	7	4
4 ♥	E	650	3	8
4 ♥	E	650	3	8
4 ♥	E	650	3	8
5 ♥	E	650	3	8
4 ♥	W	650	3	8
4 ♥	E	650	3	8
4 ♥	E	650	3	8

Final thought. Did you see why it makes 11 tricks? After the diamond lead, declarer can lose a club finesse and win the next trick. Now draw two trumps and lead four rounds of spades. North is on lead with only diamonds and clubs. This is a classic end play. If North leads a diamond, the club loser disappears on a ruff-sluff. If North leads a club, it's a free finesse into the jaws of the dummy.

IF you get a heart to start, play it the same way: draw trump in two rounds then give up a diamond. Now lose a club finesse and run four spades for the same end play.

What if South starts with a club? You lose a club at trick 1, then a diamond, draw trumps, finesse clubs to clear that suit, and voila, the clubs are 3-3 so the spade loser disappears. Isn't bridge fun? It would be more fun if I had got us to game.

Eight card trump fits are golden, but nine card fits can be platinum...they lead to many ruffs, end plays, and trump reversal plays.