

## The Strong Double.

If you liked what you saw in the article about the 1NT take-out device, you need to know about the Strong Double. So, the double of an opening bid of 1 of a suit shows 16+ points and any distribution. This is another unusual method but it works hand in hand with the 1NT take-out device and the standard overcall. The greatest advantage of this bid is that it limits the strength of the other defensive bids at our disposal and so partner is often best placed to know exactly what is going on in a contested auction. This works well for those of us who use a strong club system because, sometimes, we can continue as if the doubler had opened with 1♣. However, it works rather well with natural systems as well. Take a look at the hand below, for example :-

				North					
				♠	9				
				♥	QJ108				
				♦	AKQJ10				
				♣	1098				
		West						East	
♠	J10542					♠	AKQ87		
♥	AK97					♥	3		
♦	9					♦	762		
♣	K53					♣	AQJ7		
				South					
				♠	63				
				♥	6542				
				♦	8543				
				♣	642				
		North		East		South		West	
	1♦		double		pass		1♠		
	Pass		2♠		pass		3♥		
	Pass		4♣		pass		4NT		
	Pass		6♥		all pass				

To be honest, the auction above is not the one that I would have conducted because Ralph and I use transfers after the strong club as in Precision Club after a 1♣ opening bid. But, playing a natural system, 1♠ would show a 5+ card suit, 2♠ shows spade support and a minimum, 3♥ is a cue bid showing 1<sup>st</sup> round control in hearts and slam interest. 4♣ is another cue bid and 4NT is RKCB.

Ralph and I also use a negative response just as we would over a 1♣ opening bid. This is not absolutely necessary and natural systems users may well prefer to manage without one. In fact, if you were considering using something like this, I invite you to consider carefully the possible subsequent continuations after the strong double and design them to cater for your own requirements.

Now, in a previous article I suggested that the intermediate jump overcall is not very useful because it is quite a rare bid. However, East's hand in the example above is practically the type of hand that the intermediate jump overcall was designed for. Usually, you would expect a 6-card suit but it is similar. Also, you might have been wondering how we show the type of hand that would normally overcall with 1NT. The strong double can cover this type of hand as well and is more flexible. For instance, what would you do with even distribution and 15-17(18) points but with no stop in the opponent's suit? With the strong double, you can double and wait to see what your partner has to say.

I am no expert in the use of this bid as used in a natural system, but I offer it as something to think about. Here is another hand that I played and I am not quite sure how we would have bid it without the strong double :-

West		East	
♠	AKJ7	♠	Q10954
♥	A1095	♥	8
♦	AQ5	♦	J87
♣	94	♣	AK105

  

South	West	North	East
1♦	Double	pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	pass	4♥
Pass	6♠		

Again, this is not how I would bid it, but it is quite logical. West's raise to 3♠ shows slightly better than a minimum and good trump support and invites East to cue bid. 2 more cue bids follow and so West is happy to go to 6♠. To be honest, slams are rare when an opponent has opened the bidding but these hands did happen and they are easier to bid using the strong double. Usually, we will be looking for game and often having to settle for a part-score but it is comforting to know that you have the tools to reach slams when they occur.

But what if the opener had bid 1♣ rather than 1♦ and you were using traditional methods? From West's point of view, he has a problem to deal with. He would not be able to overcall with 1NT. He has the values but no club stop. He could double but you run a couple of risks if you do. If North is able to enter the auction, East may not be able to compete, particularly if North bids 3♦. Even if he only bids 2♦, if East passes what does West do then? He could double again but will East read that as being this strong? And what can West do if East passes again?

This problem does not occur if the double shows 16+ points. If East passes now, he is very weak and, if West doubles again, he probably has half the points in the pack. This does seem to spend a lot of time determining strength, but it can make things easier. At least, East will know who has the balance of strength.

So, just to show you what is actually possible, let us look again at the first example above. This was how Ralph and I would bid the hand :-

North	East	South	West
1♦	double	pass	2♥
Pass	2♠	pass	3♣
Pass	3♦	pass	3NT
Pass	6♥	all pass	

We use a negative response to the strong double just as we do if partner had opened the bidding with 1♣. Therefore, 1♥ would be the negative response but the other bids are transfers and acceptance of the transfer is the Shortage Asking Bid (ShAB). So, 3♣ shows a diamond singleton and 3♦ asks for controls, a king = 1 control and an ace = 2 controls, and responses are in steps. However, with a positive response, the first step shows 0-2 controls and, therefore, 3NT shows 4 controls. 4 controls can either be 2 aces or 1 ace and 2 kings. In either case, 6♥ has good chances of success.