

Overcall versus Takeout Double – A Review

By Neil H. Timm

What is your overcall agreement? The overcall range is often 7/8-15/16 HCP at the 1-level and 11/12-15/16 HCP at the 2-level and 13-15 at the 3-level with 17+ one X's and bids since if partner has on average 10 points game is likely with a fit or NT. With a 5-card major or a 6-card minor one should overcall. However, there are more factors than points! One must also consider suit length, vulnerability, and suit quality, among others per your agreement.

My partner's and I prefer to define a simple overcall as 10-15 since then a X of 3-level bids by the opponents is for penalty. If you adopt this agreement/approach, then the bid of 1NT* = 10-15 replaces the takeout X =16+ and becomes a power X. Only the bid of 1NT* needs to be alerted. No need to alert a power X. Why adopt this approach? The 1NT bid now forces the opponents to the 2-level.

What is needed for a "standard" takeout double? Most agree that at the **1-level** it shows 12/13-15/16 points and support for the other 3-suits and with 17+ one doubles and bids (an exception is the Equal Level Conversion (ELC) double with club shortness and diamonds).

Just because you have 12/13+ points and the opponents have opened the bidding, does not mean that you have the appropriate hand for a take-out double.

Take-out Doubles over 1-level suit bids have 3 qualities (1) opening values - 13+ HCP; (2) shortness in the opponent's suit; and (3) tolerance for any suit that partner may bid. If you have a flat hand and the opponent's suit stopped with 16 - 18 points you may bid 1NT. Without any of these criteria, your bid is PASS, unless you have 17+HCP and a 5+ card suit, then you can take-out double and bid.

What does one do if the opponents open the bidding at the 2/3-level?

Recall that to make a 2-level contract (e.g., 2♥/2♠ over 2♦ weak bid) you need 8 tricks and 20/21 total points and for a 3-level contract you need 9 tricks and total 23/24 points. Hence having 13HCP to overcall partner needs 7 points since $13+7=20$ for a 2-level contract to succeed. For a 3-level contract to succeed requires you to have 16 points and partner to have 7 points.

These observations suggest the **Rule of 7 in the direct seat**: If your HCP +7 for partners' assumed points is enough to succeed at the 2/3 (e.g., 13+7/16+7) level overcall with a 5-card suit and X with a balanced hand. However, in the balancing seat use the **Rule of 8** points since $8+13=21$ and $15+8=23$ (Lawrence uses the Rule of 8/9).

The opponent's open 2♦ and you hold: ♠KQ4 ♥AJ87 ♦74 ♣AJ52 or 15HCP and if partner has 7; $15+7=22$ total points; hence you must make a takeout X.

If you replace the hand with ♠K104 ♥KJ8 ♦742 ♣AJ52 or 12+7=19 one should pass 2♦. However, over the bid of 1♦ you have enough to X to play at the 2-level in a 4-3 major fit.

For more on overcalls and doubles see the books by Mike Lawrence:

(1) Mike Lawrence (2012, pp. 237 & 276), “The complete book on Takeout Doubles” 2nd Edition, Master Point Press

(2) Mike Lawrence (2012, p. 285),” The Complete Book on Balancing” 2nd Edition, Baron Barclay.

Responsive Doubles – Used when the opponents bid and raise the same suit, or two different suits and partner has doubled. The convention is played through the same level one plays negative doubles (e.g., 3♠/4♦/4♥ or even infinity) and requires 6-10 points. It is also used when partner overcalls and the opponents have bid the same suit (OBAR). If the opponents have bid two different suits it becomes a **Snap Dragon Double** (e.g., 1♣-1♥-1♠- X*) and show 3-card support for hearts and a 5-card diamond suit. Some play this X as also responsive which shows; lack of fit and others play it as a Rosencrantz X which shows fit with A/K or both.

The “Advancer” uses the Responsive, Rosenkranz, and Snapdragon double after an Overcall; they are card-showing doubles not penalty double. The Support Double is also card showing and not for Penalty; however, the Opening bidder uses it based upon a bid or X by the Advancer by agreement. DO NOT GET THEM CONFUSED and they require discussion.