

Intermediate- Lesson 19

More on Doubling- the “Cheat Seat”

In Lesson 18, we talked about 4 main uses of the double card.

1. The take-out double.
2. The penalty double.
3. The lead-directing double.
4. The negative double (sometimes called the “sputnik” double).

We explored how each is used, and how we can recognise what the  card means when partner uses it, ie which type of double it is.

Here is our summary

- Double of an opponent’s NT bid is for penalties, and
- Double of an opponent’s escape bid, after you’ve already doubled their NT bid, is for penalties.
- Double of an opponent’s bid in a competitive auction, above 3♣ level, is for penalties. (In a competitive auction, you and/ or your partner will have already shown a suit)
- Double of an opponent’s overcall of what would otherwise be your final contract is for penalties.
- Double of an opponent’s suit bid, early in the auction, is for take-out. This includes opposition weak 2, and pre-emptive 3 level opening bids.
- Double of an opponent’s *conventional* bid is lead directing.
- Double of opponent’s suit overcall, after partner has made a suit opening bid, is a negative double, showing the unbid major.

In this lesson we’re going to concentrate on the most common use of the  card – the Take-out double, and say a bit more about when we can use it.

In most situations, the take-out double gives partner the following information

- I have an opening strength hand
- I have SHORTAGE in their suit
- I have tolerance for the other suits, especially unbid major(s)

and it says “**Please bid your best suit**”

If you make a take-out double, you are telling your partner those things.

Therefore, you shouldn’t make a take-out double if

- You have a hand weaker than opening strength
- **You DON’T HAVE A SHORTAGE IN OPPONENT’S SUIT** (if they open a suit you have a good holding in, and you aren’t strong enough to overcall 1NT (16+ needed), you just have to pass.
- You don’t have tolerance for the other suits. If they have opened a major, you should have a decent holding in the other major, ie 4+ cards, or 3 with an honour.

But today we are going to look at an exceptional situation, where those rules are relaxed.

It arises when there have been two passes round to you. You are then said to be in the Protective seat, or “cheat seat”, because unless you make a bid of some kind, that will be the end of the auction.

Why the “cheat seat”? It’s not about cheating, it’s about being permitted to break the usual rules of bidding. It refers to the position in a **low level auction** (1 or 2 level), where there have been two passes round to you, and if you pass as well, that is the end of the auction, and the opposition are then declaring in a low level contract. There is pressure on you to find a bid, and you might well not have a valid one if you stick to the constraints of the normal rules of bidding.

You are in the “cheat seat” – which is more properly called the “protective seat”, as you are “protecting” partner, who might well have a nice hand but one unsuitable to bid - you are giving her another chance to bid. However, you might find “cheat seat” is easier to remember.

EXAMPLE:

Here you are South, both sides non-vulnerable, and the bidding goes

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

You are in the “**cheat seat**”, or “**protective seat**”. If you pass, that’s the end of the auction and West declares in 1♥.

You hold ♠ Q 6 5 4 ♥ A 6 2 ♦ Q 10 5 2 ♣ J 8

You have no 5-card suit to bid. You have only 9 points and no heart shortage, and only a doubleton club, so not really tolerance for clubs. Under normal rules for a take-out double, your hand does not qualify. So must you pass?

Let’s think about it. Your partner, North, couldn’t bid. She could have reasonable strength – she might have quite a good hand but no 5-card suit, and no heart shortage so she couldn’t double. And with East’s pass showing fewer than 6 points, you strongly suspect your partner has some values.

In the cheat seat, the normal rules for a take-out double are relaxed! You can double with 3 points fewer than you’d need for a normal double, and you don’t need the ideal shape. Here, you double!

This is called a **PROTECTIVE DOUBLE**.

Both you and your partner recognise that you were in the cheat seat (aka the protective seat). She will NOT assume your double necessarily means you have a normal qualifying hand, so will proceed with caution.

Let’s say opener ventures 2♥, so the auction is now

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	♠
2♥	?		

Here is North’s hand

♠ K 10 3 ♥ Q 8 7 ♦ A 9 ♣ A 7 5 4 2

You can see North’s problem, with West having opened 1♥. She has 13 points, an ideal 1NT opener, but not strong enough to overcall 1NT. She does have a 5-card suit, in clubs, but not a suit which satisfies the SQOT test for a 2 level overcall. She doesn’t have a heart shortage, and also has only two diamonds, so she cannot double the 1♥. She had to pass.

But now you have made a protective double, she has options. Because your double was in the cheat seat, she can’t count on you having opening points or tolerance for all suits. Over a normal take-out double she would respond, even though partner has another bid after West’s 2♥ rebid, but here, her club suit is too poor to bid at the 3 level. She can pass, or, knowing partner has some values (say at least 9 points) for the protective double, can bid 2NT.

The auction is now

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	♠
2♥	Pass, or 2NT		

Here is the full deal. Dealer West, all non-vulnerable

	♠K 10 3	
	♥Q 8 7	
	♦A 9	
	♣A 7 5 4 2	
♠A J		♠9 8 7 2
♥K J 9 5 4 3		♥10
♦J 8		♦K 7 6 4 3
♣K 6 3		♣Q 10 9
	♠Q 6 5 4	
	♥A 6 2	
	♦Q 10 5 2	
	♣J 8	

Without South's protective double, West is left to play in 1♥, and rolls in 7 tricks for +80. But as soon as South makes a protective double, EW are doomed to a negative score. If West plays in 2♥, she goes 1 down for -100. If NS play in 2NT, they make 8 tricks. This time it's -120 for EW. If East doesn't bid 2♥ over the double, N will bid her clubs, and S will convert to 2NT. (although here 2♣ also makes). Any which way, the protective double is winning bridge!

With a different layout, it's possible EW can make their 2♥, but wouldn't you far rather defend against 2♥ than 1♥? The protective double often just pushes the opposition up a level, where it's harder, or impossible, for them to make their contract.

TIP 1 If you're in the protective seat in a low level auction (ie if you pass the auction is finished) don't be afraid to double, if you have some values (say 9 points or more), even if the shape of your hand isn't quite suitable for a normal take-out double. Your double is still for take-out, of course.

TIP 2 If your partner makes a double in the protective seat, don't get carried away. She might not have the values and/or the shape for a regular take-out double.

"Don't punish the protector"

Here's another example. You are South, neither side vulnerable

West (dealer)	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	♠	Pass	?

What on earth is your partner, North, playing at? She didn't have a bid over their 1♥ first time, yet here she is doubling opposition's 2♥. The clue is that first time, she wasn't in the protective seat, so she doesn't have a genuine take-out double. But now she *has* doubled, in the protective seat – if she had passed, the bidding would have been over, and the opposition would simply play in a low-level contract of 2♥. It's clear EW have no interest in going on to game, so **your partnership objective should be to push them up to 3♥ and let them play there.**

You are called upon to bid in response to your partner's take-out double. Bid cheaply and confidently. In this auction, try to bid 2♠ if you possibly can, rather than 3♣/3♦. The opposition are far more likely to bid on to 3♥ over 2♠, and far more likely to double your 3♣/3♦.

The key thing for you here, after partner has doubled their 2♥, but not doubled their 1♥ first time round, is to realise what's going on, and to cooperate as a partnership.

Think "partner has doubled in the protective seat, but not before. Why?"

The reason is partner doesn't want to let them play in an easy 2♥, but wants to force them up a level. If she had a genuine hand to double, and hopes to genuinely compete for the contract, she'd have done it first time round. You must play along.

Even with this sort of mediocre 10-point 4-3-3-3 hand

♠KQ5 ♥Q32 ♦QJ54 ♣863

Don't bid 3♦. You might well get doubled and go off. Bid 2♠ and do it quickly and confidently. The opposition don't know you have only 3 spades, and will probably think you've located an 8-card spade fit. They will probably bid on to 3♥, and that is job done! Your partner knows she has forced you to bid and **will not** go on over your 2♠ bid.

The bidding has now gone

West (dealer)	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	✘	Pass	2♠
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

The outcome of North's protective double is that EW are now playing in 3♥, not 2♥. When the heart contract makes only 8 tricks, you will get a great score.

TIP 3 Do include protective doubles in your system: a double of opposition's low level suit contract when you are in the "protective seat" or "pass-out" seat, ie if you pass, that's the end of the auction. They are really useful in making life difficult for the opposition.

But make sure you and partner agree that you are doing this. Recognise when partner has doubled IN THE PROTECTIVE SEAT; **don't** get carried away, assuming it is a "normal" take-out double, and overbid.

Health warning!! It usually pays to be bold, but sometimes caution is advised.

TIP 4 WHEN TO BE CAUTIOUS

- Have the opposition found a fit? If they have, your side is much more likely to have one too. If you make a protective double where opposition haven't found a fit, ie you venture into a misfit, you are more likely to come unstuck- partner's hand will probably misfit with yours.
There's a general concept here worth recognising: when the opposition has a fit, you often will too, and vice versa; in hands where the opposition don't have a fit, you probably won't either.
- Does your protective double require a response at the 3 level? It is much safer if it doesn't. Protecting over opposition's 2♣ is a lot safer than protecting over their 2♠.
- Are you vulnerable? If so, beware! Think twice about making a protective double if you are vulnerable. You will need more strength and shape.

