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This Week in Bridge

(51) Double After Notrump is Bid

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Level: 1

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General

When the opponents have bid a suit and we double, we are usually asking partner to bid (with a few exceptions - e.g., after a preempt by partner, a double is for penalty.) There are many types of these doubles that ask partner to bid:

- *Takeout Doubles* -- When our RHO has opened the bidding, this double shows that we have the other three suits (at least 3-card support) and asks partner to pick the best one for their hand.
- *Negative Doubles* -- When partner has opened the bidding and our RHO has overcalled a suit then double is generally takeout and asking partner to look for a better fit (often in the unbid Major.)
- Responsive Doubles, Support Doubles, Reopening Doubles, etc...

These doubles after the opponents have bid a suit are searching for a fit.

When the opponents have bid Notrump, the meaning of our double becomes more ambiguous - sometimes it is penalty, sometimes it is card-showing, sometimes it is takeout. Both the level where the double occurs and the position we are in will be valuable in helping us discern the meaning of our double.

Double After They Have Bid Notrump

Let's look at the meaning of double when the opponents bid Notrump. We will break these down into two different cases: when we have previously bid and when we have not yet entered the auction.

Our Side Has Not Yet Bid

- (1NT) X
 - This double is a conventional double in most 1NT defensive bidding systems these days (DON'T, Meckwell, Woolsey, etc.) Some still use it as penalty, but this has become less and less common.
- (1Z) P (1NT) X
 - This is a takeout double showing shortness in the opening bidder's suit. This is true whether it is a natural Notrump bid (as in response to a minor suit opening) or a 1NT Forcing bid (as in response to a Major suit opening.)

Our Side Has Bid

- 1Z (1NT) X
 - This is a penalty double, showing 10+ points and a desire to defend.
- (1X) 1Y (1NT) X
 - This is a penalty-oriented double - usually denying support for partner's suit and showing 10+ points. This double is cooperative since partner's overcall is so wide-ranging in its strength. If partner has a good overcall, they will sit for the double and if their overcall is weak, they will pull it and look for another place to play.
- 1X (P) 1Y (1NT) X
 - This is a penalty double (not a support double.) It shows a very strong opening bid: usually a balanced 18-19. *If this 1NT overcall is a conventional two-suited bid (called "Sandwich Notrump") then this double returns to being a support double, searching for a fit.*

Double After We Have Bid Notrump

Now let's examine the meaning of doubles after our side has bid Notrump.

- 1NT (2Z) X
 - If the overcall is 2♣ then we use this double as Stayman and continue as if the opponents have not interfered with us.
 - If this overcall is 2♦-2♠ then this is a "card-showing" double. It generally shows values and no clear direction about what to do next. It asks partner for input - should we play offense or defense?
- 1Y (P) 1NT (2Z) X
 - This is a takeout double, showing shortness in the opponent's suit. The most common shape will be 5431. If RHO bids our secondary suit, then we *trap pass* and wait to see if partner can reopen with a takeout double.

Conclusion

As you can see, low-level doubles of Notrump are more complicated than doubles of suits. If you think through the situations, you can understand how to effectively use double in these competitive auctions.