



Play & Learn

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If they're happy and you know it – part 2

We seldom get a good score for letting our opponents play in two of a suit they have bid and raised. When we find ourselves in the pass-out seat in such an auction, it's wise to consider balancing – acting with fewer points than usual.

Last month we balanced by overcalling in a long suit. A second option is to balance with a takeout double.

Traditional takeout doubles meet these “SOS” requirements:

- Short in the opponents' suit(s)
- Opening strength (including that shortness)
- Support for the unbid suits.

A balancing double still meets the distribution requirements, but can be made with less than opening strength.

With both sides vulnerable, West opens 1♣ as dealer. What action should North take holding:

♠ J 10 3 ♥ K J 6 5 ♦ A J 7 2 ♣ 6 2?

North has the right distribution, but not quite enough strength, to make a takeout double. With no suit good enough to overcall, North passes and the auction continues:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	2♣	Pass
Pass	?		

It's a different story now. North is in the *balancing seat* and doesn't want to let East–West play in their fit at the two level. North needs only club shortness and support for the unbid suits to make a balancing takeout double of 2♣. Here's the full deal:

Dlr: West	♠ J 10 3		
Vul: Both	♥ K J 6 5		
	♦ A J 7 2		
	♣ 6 2		
	♠ A K 8 4		♠ Q 9 6
	♥ 9 7 4		♥ 10 2
	♦ Q 9 5		♦ 10 6 4
	♣ A 9 7		♣ K Q 8 4 3
	♠ 7 5 2		
	♥ A Q 8 3		
	♦ K 8 3		
	♣ J 10 5		

South would have jumped if North had made a takeout double of 1♣. North's double of 2♣ shows the same distribution as a takeout double of 1♣, but not enough strength for an immediate takeout double. South knows there can't be enough strength for game and bids only 2♥.

Now East–West must decide whether to compete to 3♣ or let North–South play in a two-level contract. It doesn't matter which they choose. Once North balances, the plus score East–West would have gotten turns into a minus score. South makes 2♥ by ruffing a club in dummy and leading

up to the ♦ A J to finesse. If East–West compete to 3♣, they should lose two hearts and three diamonds to go down one.

On this deal, North–South were able to stop in two of any suit. Vulnerability isn't a big factor in balancing when our side can stop that low. We're a bit more cautious when our vulnerable balancing call is likely to take us to the three level.

If our opponents have found a fit, chances are very good that we have one, too. Conversely, if our opponents have not found a fit, it's less likely that we will find a fit. Listen to the bidding to know when the opponents have a fit. Balance more cautiously when:

The opponents stop in 1NT.

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	

An opponent rebids his own suit.

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

An opponent takes a preference.

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	Pass	