

**Balancing Double** – A balancing bid is a bid that is made to keep the bidding open at a low level. If after a bid(s), two passes have immediately preceded your turn to make a call and if you now pass there will have been three successive calls in rotation, then you are in the ‘pass-out seat’ or ‘balancing seat’. If you now make a call you are keeping the bidding open.

Typically this position arises in two auctions: one, the bidding goes 1♠, Pass, Pass and now if you Pass the opponents play the contract at the 1-level; or two, the bidding goes 1♥, Pass, 2♥, Pass, Pass and now if you pass the opponents get to play a weak 2-level contract.

**Full Opening** – You may bid in the balancing seat with two different kinds of hands. In example one above, you may have a full opening hand (or better). This is a hand that you would have opened or overcalled in any preceding seat. In such case your bid is keeping the bidding open at a low level, and subsequent bidding will describe your hand to partner. This is not typically the hand we talk about as a balancing bid.

**Balancing** – You may have a hand that looks promising and you want to be competitive or just don’t want to let the contract go cheaply. In this case your bid is balancing.<sup>1</sup> You can balance by bidding a suit naturally (no cue-bids) or doubling. If you balance by doubling, this is a Balancing Double.

So what do you need to make a Balancing Double? The Balancing Double is similar to the Takeout Double in that it asks partner to describe his hand, but a Balancing Double does not promise the same strength and distribution required for a direct seat Takeout Double. Like the ‘Takeout Doubler’ the ‘Balancing Doubler’ does not have a suit of his own to bid and shows reasonably support for the unbid suits, but not necessarily good support, in the balancing seat you must be more aggressive.

Most bidding agreements are subject to different usage and interpretations. When and how to balance is a judgment that does not always fit a mold. In application, it is imperative to discuss and have a partnership agreement on the application of Balancing Doubles.

As far as the size of the hand, “There is virtually no hand that you would have made a positive bid in second seat that you would pass [in the balancing seat] ... however, [there are] hands that you should bid on in balancing seat that you would pass automatically if partner still had a chance to bid.”<sup>2</sup>

Often what happens is that one of the opponents has an opening hand and the other has a weakish hand. In auction two above: 1♥-Pass; 2♥-Pass; Pass-?, it looks like one opponent has a 12-14 hcp hand and the other has 6-9 hcp for a combined total of 18-23 hcp or roughly half the points in the deck. If the opponents have half of the points divided 12/8 or 13/7, this means that you and partner have the other half, but the points are most likely evenly divided 9/11 or 10/10.

You should not worry too much in this auction that your side only has 17 points split 10/7. If the opponents have the balance of points they will bid again. You will have pushed them 1-level higher than they were comfortable and perhaps they will go down.

A good rule of thumb is that the balancer borrows a K from his partner to make his bid. If balancer has 9 or 10 points, he borrows a K from his partner to give him 12 or 13 points. The balancer's partner now has to remember when he bids that his partner has borrowed one of his Kings and discount his hand ... *i.e.*, don't go crazy and punish partner for balancing-in.

If your agreements are that after a Takeout Double you would jump with 10 points, after a Balancing Double you jump with 13 points (remember partner has borrowed one of your Kings to make his Balancing Double). With 10 or 11 hcp (don't forget about the King) you can make a simple response. If partner held sufficient strength to have acted in the direct seat, he will bid again.

**Rebidding Notrump** – Remember when partner doubled he wanted you to pick a suit. Rebidding some level of notrump says you have the opponents' suit well stopped. Over partner's Balancing Double a jump to 2Nt shows a good opening bid and a jump to 3Nt shows a strong opening 1Nt hand.

See Barbara Seagram and Marc Smith, *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* (Toronto: Master Point Press, ISBN 1-894154-07-X) 21-32.

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<sup>1</sup> In the U.K. the general term balancing is called 'protecting'. In America the term 'Protective Double' is a specific version of a Balancing Double.

<sup>2</sup> Seagram, *25 Bridge Conventions*, p.101.