

**How You Can Play  
Like an Expert  
(Without Having to Be One)**



**Mel's 21st Century Rules  
and Other Guidelines  
for Playing Winning Bridge  
at Your Level and Above**

*by*

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# Mel's Rule of 9

How You Can Play Like An Expert  
(without having to be one)

By Mel Colchamiro

Your left hand opponent open 1♥ and partner makes a takeout double.

Right hand opponent passes.

You hold:     ♠8 4 2  
                  ♥9 6 5 3  
                  ♦K J 42  
                  ♣7 6



One thing we all have been taught at one point in time is that **when partner makes a takeout double and RHO passes, we must bid something.** We can not pass - ever!

**WRONG!**

Under the right circumstance, **the partner of the takeout doubler can pass---** but only if he/she has sufficient length and strength in the opponent's suit that he/she thinks the contract can be set.

**Mel's Rule of 9** is a simple guideline to go by in making that decision.

	# cards in the opponent's suit
plus	# honor cards in opponents' long suit ( including the 10)
plus	level of contract

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If 9 or more **PASS**

If 8 or less **BID SOMETHING**

**This rule is not used to make a unilateral penalty double!**

For example: 1♣ P 1♠ P  
4♠ P P ?

If you double here, please do not use Mel's rule of 9 to make a penalty double.

Bidding:

W	Partner	East	<u>You</u>
P	1♥	1♠	P
2♠	X	P	?

Partner's Hand

♠6
♥K Q J 5 2
♦A K 9 3
♣K Q 8

YOU

♠J 8 5 3
♥6 2
♦8 4
♣J 9 7 3 2

This example comes from *The Bridge World* ( January, 2006). Thirty experts were asked what they would do at matchpoints with both sides vulnerable:

Bidding:

W	Partner	East	<u>You</u>
	1♠	2♥	P
P	X	P	?

YOU

♠	10	6
♥	A	10 4 3
♦	9	7 6 4 2
♣	3	2

Mel's Rule of 9 says to ??????

4 hearts plus 2 honors at the 2 level = 8

Only 2 of the 30 passed, most bid 2♠!

Janet

♠K 9 5 3

♥7

♦A Q 9 7

♣K J 8 4

Mel

♠7 2

♥K J 8 6 2

♦J 8

♣9 7 6 2

**Bidding:**

Mignocchi

Janet

Bathurst

Mel

1♦

1♥

P

P

X

P

?

Mignocchi

♠Q J 10 6

♥Q 5

♦10 5 4 3

♣Q 10 5

Bathurst

♠A 8 4

♥A 10 9 4 3

♦K 6 2

♣A 3

**Mel Rule of 9 ?**

5 hearts plus 2 honors  
at the one level= 8

**BID!**

# What About Points???

If you satisfy Mel's rule of 9 there are 3 basic situations:

1. Besides being strong in their trump suit, you have solid outside points. **The opps are in BIG trouble.**
2. Your hand is weak, not counting your strength in their trump suit, but it turns out partner has lots of points for the takeout double. **You'll be OK.**
3. Your hand is weak, not counting your strength in their trump suit, but partner is relatively weak and may have stretched to make the takeout double.

**In this situation, you may be in trouble no matter what you do! If you pass, they might well make their doubled contract. But if you bid, they may double you and you may be the one going down a million. As they say, S—t happens! Sometimes, it is best to just pass and they might go down!**

# Exceptions to the Rule of 9

There are 4 exceptions to Mel's Rule of 9  
We will cover those next week.



# Four Exceptions to Mel's Rule of 9

The first exception we covered earlier but because it is imperative you remember this we are going over it again.

***The rule of 9 is not used to make unilateral penalty doubles.***

For example:

1♥ - 2♥

4♥ by the opponents. You **X** because you have the rule of 9. That is NOT what Mel's rule of 9 is intended.

# Exception #2

It's when you have 2 card and 2 honor in the opponent's suit or when you have 3 cards and 3 honor in their suit.

These are dangerous holdings.

A) KQ and KJ and QJ

B) QJ10 and KQJ

Your defensive prospects are overvalued, treat them as if they were:

1) One honor and two cards

YOU

2) Two honors and 3 cards

♠64

♥QJ10

Bidding:

♦854

West

Partner

East

You

3♥

X

P

?

♣K8763

Mel's normal rule of 9 would tell you to pass. (cards + 3 honors + the 3 level = 9.) However, use the exception and make the 3 cards count for only 2 cards and your total = 8. BID 4♣.

# Exception #3

If you calculate Mel's rule of 9 and come up one short (8), it is sometimes ok to pass if you have at least 2 unexpected outside tricks.

Bidding:				<u>YOU</u>
<u>West</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>YOU!</u>	♠AK
	1♥	2♦	P	♥5
P	X	P	?	♦9 8 7 6 4 2
				♣9 8 6 3

Mel's rule of 9?     6 diamonds + 0 no honors + 2 level = 8

Go ahead and pass because you are only 1 short and have 2 surprise sure tricks.

# Exception #4

The final exception occurs when the opponents open in a game bid of 4♥ or higher. At this time, it is very often right to pass partner's double even if you don't come to satisfying the Mel's Rule of 9.

LHO open 4♥ or 4♠ and partner makes a takeout double, you should pass even though your Rule of 9 count is only seven. The higher the level of the opponents contract, the less important it is for you to be loaded in their suit for a pass. To bid 5♦ in the above situation, you should have solid prospects of making your contract. Your best chance for a plus score is to take 4 tricks on defense. Being able to take 11 tricks in a diamond contract is really a very long shot.

♠8 4 3

♥5 3 2

♦A 7 4 2

♣7 6 3

♠7

♥8 6 4

♦A Q 7 6 4 2

♣K 6 3

Same count (7) but you have good chance to make 5♦. **BID!**

# Final Thought!

The odds at IMPs!

When the Rule of 9 decisions are close, it is always safer to pass partner's takeout double when the double does not "put" the opponents in game. That is why it is okay "to go for it" when thinking about letting them play:

1NT X

2♣ X

2♦ X

But if the contract is:

2♥ or 2♠ X

2NT X

3♣ , 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠ X

4♣ or 4♦ X

you are at great risk! In this scenario even MPs, you only want to remove partner's double of a game bid if you have good prospects of making your contract. Otherwise, take your chances on defense.