IN DAYS OF OLD

It is often said that there is nothing new under the sun. That can be surprisingly true of Bridge. The term *Informatory Double* was developed for *Auction Bridge* in or about 1911 in the USA. It was so-called because its primary purpose was to “inform” partner of a specific holding, as opposed to a *Business Double* which was strictly for penalties. All the non-penalty Doubles of today really fall under the umbrella of the Informatory Double, in that they are describing some particular holding.

Even when the then standard weak NT (11+ points into today’s terms) was doubled (showing 14+ points) the situation was dominated by the idea of take-out \(^1\). This probably explains why the name *take-out* has stuck, and superseded the word Informatory. In the 1920s, however, there was a school that thought a better title was the *Negative Double*. How about that! Indeed, it was usually the case that if you had opened the bidding with 1 Club, and left-hand opponent had overcalled 1 Diamond, then a Double from partner showed both 4-card Majors. I wonder if Messrs Roth & Stone were aware. I suspect so: they used the word “Sputnik”.

A certain Mr. E. E. Denison of Portland, Maine did not like the idea of abandoning the low level *Business Double* so he developed his own idea of an “Informatory” or “Negative” Cue Bid. The bid of 2 Diamond in the above sequence would show both Majors. Others took the idea further and used an immediate cue bid of any opponent’s simple overcall to ask opener to bid another 4-card, sometimes merely the longer, unbid suit. So the sequence:

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1 Heart (opening) - 1 Spade (overcall) - 2 Spades (cue bid)
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would show holdings in both minor suits.

Those were the days, remember, before formal systems or conventions were so widespread, but it is salutary, and humbling, to find that people were exploring ideas that still seem *avant garde* to modern beginners. (Weak Twos were common, if deprecated by experts, in the early 1920s.) This informatory cue bid is in use today, in a somewhat similar fashion. It shows “values”, which covers a multitude of sins. The older (or should I just say previous) idea of only using cue bids of opponents’ suits to show super fits and controls just did not happen often enough.
Another use of such a cue bid was in response to partner’s Informatory Double of a Minor suit. This meant that responders only 4-card suit was the opponent’s, but the hand was too weak to bid 1NT, because even those 4 cards would not provide a stop, and there were no high cards elsewhere. It was usually 4-3-3-3 shape and a virtual Yarborough. For example:

1 Diamond - Double - Pass - 2 Diamonds.

The 2 Diamonds bidder would be expected to hold exactly 3 poor cards in each Major, and no Diamond stopper even though having 4 or more. Any 4-card Major, or even good 3-card Major, would of course be biddable at the one level.

So if you think of a bright idea for a new use of Doubles, or Cue bids, or any other bid or sequence, check the archives. It is hardly possible to boldly go where no-one has already been.

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[1] This was and still is a source of confusion. Of all “Informatory” Doubles this still is regarded as somewhat “optional”, whatever the primary emphasis, which nowadays tends to be for penalties.