

Apart from Stayman, Blackwood and Jacoby transfer bids, negative doubles are one of the most popular conventional bids. Many players believe, or have been taught (incorrectly) that a negative double is used when an opponent's intervening bid "has taken their own bid away", but this isn't always the case. Consider the hand below where partner opens One Club and your right-hand opponent overcalls One Heart :

KJ843
J3
QJ103
97

There is nothing to prevent you from responding One Spade, just as you would have done without the intervening overcall. However, if you use negative doubles, you can use Double to show *exactly* four spades and use a response of One Spade to show *more than* four spades. This can be useful in a competitive auction. For example, say that you respond One Spade (showing 5+), the next player jumps to Three Hearts and partner has this hand :

A106
102
A4
KQJ852

Competing with Three Spades looks a bit risky but it's an easier bid for partner to make when he knows you have at least five cards in the suit.

When an opponents overcall at the 2-level, a negative double can help to find a major suit fit that might otherwise go undetected. Consider this hand after partner opens One Heart and the next hand overcalls Two Clubs :

A1086
K4
K962
984

Obviously you want to bid something but what ? Two Spades or Two Diamonds would show at least five cards in the suit, you can't support partner's hearts and you can't bid No-Trumps without a stopper in clubs. A negative double is ideal here – it tells partner you have exactly four spades and enough points to want to compete at the 2-level (at least). Note it does *not* say that you have four cards in diamonds.

Partner held the following hand :

KQ93
AJ1065
75
K6

After your negative double promises four cards in spades, partner has no trouble in rebidding Two Spades. You invite game with Three Spades and partner bids a fourth, aware that his king of clubs is likely to be worth a trick after the overcall on his right.

Negative doubles can also be used after a 3-level overcall and can sometimes be the only method of describing your hand accurately. Consider this hand after partner opens One Diamond and the next hand overcalls Three Clubs :

AQ83
K1095
Q42
105

You might have enough high cards to defeat Three Clubs but it's no certainty. Equally, you might have a laydown game on your way. A negative double tells partner that you have enough points to want to compete but that you don't have a suitable natural bid to make.

If you don't already use negative doubles you might like to add them to your convention card ... after suitable discussion with your partner, of course ! You don't make penalty doubles of low-level contracts very often (when was the last time you doubled an opponent's Two Diamonds contract for penalties ?) so it makes a lot of sense to assign a different meaning to such doubles.

Enjoy your bridge

Mike