

DOUBLES

26 DEC 2017

Penalty Double

A hundred years ago, 100% of doubles were for penalty. Now, with the advent of numerous conventional treatments for Doubles, that number appears to have been reduced to about 1%.

Anyway, it's fair to say that we don't double enough, particularly when our opponents are playing in part scores. Nobody likes to see their scorecard bespattered with ugly results such as -570 and -730. But aggressive (and well-judged) doubling provides big dividends, and helps keep the opponents in line in competitive situations. Occasionally the opponents will be doubled into game and make it, but that's the price to be paid for lots of other boards where we score juicy numbers such as +200, +800, etc.

South West North East

1♥ 1♠
1NT Pass 2♣ 2♦
??

Your hand is: ♠ A 10 8 7, ♥ 6 5, ♦ K J 10 7 6, ♣ 8 2. You double, of course, and then when they run to 2♠ you double that. Here is the full deal:

	<p>♠ 6 5 ♥ K J 10 9 2 ♦ 5 2 ♣ A Q J 3</p>	
<p>♠ J 2 ♥ Q 8 7 4 ♦ 4 3 ♣ K 9 7 6 5</p>	<p><i>North</i> <i>West</i> <i>East</i> <i>South</i></p> <p>♠ A 10 9 8 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 10 7 6 ♣ 8 2</p>	<p>♠ K Q 8 4 3 ♥ A 3 ♦ A Q 9 8 ♣ 10 4</p>

Looking just at the E-W hands, 2♠ might not seem such an awful contract. After all, E-W have a combined 21 HCP, and a 7-card fit, with most of the high trumps. Added to that, they are only at the two-level. What could possibly go wrong? Well, on this deal, as South can clearly see, everything will go wrong, hence the Double. If South leads the Spade Ten, then this could be the greatest massacre since February 14th, 1929. Below are the factors which make this a safe Double.

- Spades over their Spades
- Diamonds over their Diamonds
- South has two valuable Tens (each of which are probably worth a trick)
- It looks like both sides have nothing but 7-card fits, so the Law of Total Tricks is working against whoever declares this hand.
- South expects to score four tricks on defense, surely North (who opened the bidding) can supply a few.

Take-Out Double

The original Take-out Double was over RHO's opening one-of-a-suit bid, and it showed:

- Opening values
- At least three-card support for the unbid suits (some even went as far as to require 4-card support for the unbid majors.)
- Take-out Doubles applied only at a low-level.

Nowadays:

- We make Take-Out Doubles at fairly high levels, let's say up to 4♥
- We rarely make a Take-out Double, with less than three cards or more than four cards in an unbid major. The exceptions would be a very strong hand (17+), or high-level Takeout Doubles (as in preemptive auctions).

Responsive Double

Articles on Responsive Doubles always seem to start with this auction:

South West North East

1♥ Dbl 2♥ Dbl

Yes, the second Double is Responsive. East does not have four Spades, he would have bid the suit directly. So he generally has both minors and let's say about 7+ HCP. A typical hand might be: ♠ A 8, ♥ 4 3 2, ♦ K 10 4 3, ♣ J 10 9 4.

The Responsive Double is played up to a pre-defined partnership-agreed level. 4♥ is a popular choice, so 1♥ Dbl 4♥ Dbl would also be Responsive, and a typical holding for that bid is: ♠ A 10 7, ♥ 7 3, ♦ A J 5 3, ♣ J 10 8 4. You might think that committing the partnership to the 4-level with just a 10-count is a bit ambitious, but sometimes one has to stretch when preempted. And if there is no fit then partner always has the option of making a penalty Pass.

Another auction: 1♥ 1♠ 2♥ Dbl. Yes, generally played as Responsive. No support for Partner's suit, but a few values, and support for the unbid suits.

Finally, try this one: 1♦ Dbl 1♠ Dbl. It used to be popular for this to be a Penalty Double, as that 1♠ bid was a common psyche. But psyching has gone out of fashion and nowadays more players seem to favor playing this as a Responsive Double.

So the partnership questions are:

- Do you play Responsive Doubles?
- How high?
- Is 1♦ Dbl 1♠ Dbl a Responsive Double?

Negative Double

Partner opens one of a suit, your RHO overcalls, and you Double. It's your basic Negative Double, known to all. Here are a few points which are not known to all.

South West North

1♣ 1♦ Dbl Here there are two unbid majors, and this Double shows *both* of them, usually 4 cards in each. This is the only Neg Double sequence that guarantees both majors.

South West North

1♣ 1♦ 1♠ Because of the above, it follows that 1♠ (or 1♥) can be bid on a 4-card suit.

South West North

1♦ 2♣ Dbl Two unbid majors again, but this time the Double does not guarantee both, but at least one is required. Also, North's major suit(s) can be *longer* than four in length. This is a general rule when the unbid major(s) are at the two-level or higher.

South West North

1♣ 1♥ Dbl Shows exactly four Spades, no more, no less.

South West North

1♣ 1♥ 1♠ Shows 5 Spades

South West North

1♣ ?? Dbl There's a limit to how high you should play Neg Doubles. 4♥ is quite popular nowadays.

Support Double

The Support Double is made by Opener to show precisely 3-card support for Responder's suit, as in:

South West North East

**1♣ Pass 1♥ 1♠
Dbl**

If Opener, instead of making a Support Double, raises Hearts directly, he is showing 4-card for Partner's suit. And that Double would still be support, even if West had taken a call (such as 1♦ in the above example). A Support Double says nothing about hand strength, which could be minimum all the way up to very, very strong.

South West North East

**1♣ Pass 1♥ 2♠
Dbl**

Some play that this too would be a Support Double. The problem with this is that we are now forcing Partner to the three-level, which might be perilously high if Hearts are

a 4-3 fit. For that reason, the prevalent treatment is to play Support Doubles up to two of Responder's suit. So, if East had bid 2♦, then the Support Double is on, but after 2♠ it is off.

South West North East

1♣ Pass 1♥ 1NT
Dbl

If East's 1NT is of the Sandwich variety, then this Double is Support. If 1NT is natural (say 15-18), then there is a case for the Double being Penalty. But perhaps there's a bigger case for sticking with the program and making it Support. There's a lot to be said for being consistent. But discuss this one with your Partner.

South West North East

1♣ Pass 1♥ 1♠
2♣

South fails to make a Support Double, so denies 3-card support. Making the Support Double takes precedence over other bids.

South West North East

1♣ Pass 1♥ Dbl
Rdbl

That's a Support Redouble, also showing three cards in Partner's suit.

Maximal Double

“Maximal” is not a helpful name, better to call them “Game-Try Doubles”, which is what they actually are.

Suppose you open the bidding 1♠ holding:

♠ A Q 10 9 6 5, ♥ 9, ♦ A J 5, ♣ 5 3 2.

The auction goes:

South West North East

1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 3♥

At this point you would like to compete to 3♠ on account of that 6th Spade and the singleton in the enemy suit. But if you bid 3♠, might not Partner think that you are interested in game? No, he won't, at least not if you are playing Game-Try Doubles. In that case, a Double of 3♥ is a game-try, allowing a direct 3♠ to be purely competitive.

Note that Game-Try Doubles occur only at the three-level, and are only required when our suit ranks one higher than their suit. To see why, look at this auction:

South West North East

1♠ 2♦ 2♠ 3♦
??

Here there is a gap between our suit and their suit, so if South wishes to make a game-try he can bid 3♥. That is a bid which says nothing about Hearts, it merely invites game in Spades.

Rosenkranz Double

Here are two Rosenkranz situations:

South West North East
1♦ 1♠ 2♣ Dbl

South West North East
1♦ 1♠ Dbl Rdbl

East's Double in the first auction and his Redouble in the second auction are both Rosenkranz, typically showing 3-card Spade support and at least one of the top three Spades. A possible hand for either auction: ♠ Q 7 3, ♥ 9 4, ♦ K 7 5 4, ♣ K 7 6 5

It follows that a direct raise to 2♠ would show support but none of the top three honors.

Rosenkranz Doubles are played through the two-level.

If the East hand is good enough to invite game, he won't use Rosenkranz, he'll cue-bid the enemy suit.

Snapdragon Double

Consider this auction:

South West North East
1♦ 1♠ 2♣
??

The first three bidders have bid three different suits, putting us in a Snapdragon situation. We hold: ♠A 4, ♥A Q 8 7 5, ♦9 8 4, ♣8 4 2. Now, a Snapdragon Double shows 5+ cards in the unbid suit with tolerance for Partner's suit. As Partner's suit was bid via an overcall, showing 5+ cards, "tolerance" is normally considered to be two-card support, preferably with an honor. The bid shows about 8 or more HCP.

What's the point? Partner might have: ♠K Q 10 9 7 2, ♥2, ♦A 7 6 5, ♣7 5. She won't be thrilled to know that we have Hearts, but knowing that we have Spade tolerance will allow her to compete to the three-level. Change her hand to something like ♠Q J 10 6 2, ♥K 9 6 4, ♦A 2, ♣7 5 and we can make lots of Hearts.

A couple of points:

- Snapdragon Doubles are only used at the one- or the two-level.
- If we bid the fourth suit directly, then our failure to make a Snapdragon Double denies tolerance for Partner's suit.
- Some players prefer to use a Rosenkranz Double in these situations.

Stripe-Tailed Ape Double

Here's an interesting hand! And a *really* interesting auction!

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None Vul

South	West	North	East
1♠	3♣	4♣	
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♠
Dbl!	Pass	Pass	Pass

Most human beings holding the South hand would have taken a bid over 4♣, probably 6♣, letting E-W guess about slam. But our South cannily passed. That was strange enough, but what about the Double? Bizarre indeed. When the dust had cleared, 5♠ doubled made an overtrick, and non-vul that was +650.

South was obviously a rank novice. Or was he? E-W were cold for slam which would have scored +920. Yes, South's antics got him a good board! Should E-W have bid the slam anyway, notwithstanding the Double. Maybe, but that was not obvious. A better tactic would have been to redouble. 5♠ redoubled making six scores a whopping +1200, better even than bidding and making the slam!

But our stripe-tailed ape would have been ready for a Redouble. His plan was to flee from 5♠ redoubled to 6♣. That is down four (doubled of course) and -800, putting the pressure on E-W to bid the slam if they want to save the board.