

Double Trouble

IMPs
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A 8 7	♠ K Q 10	♠ 9 6 4
♥ A 7 6 3	♥ K Q 10 9 5 2	♥ J 4
♦ A 9 8 5 4	♦ K	♦ J 10 7 6 3
♣ Q	♣ 8 4 2	♣ J 7 3
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 0 5px;"> W N S E </div>	
	♠ J 5 3 2	
	♥ 8	
	♦ Q 2	
	♣ A K 10 9 6 5	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	1 ♥	2 N	Pass
3 ♦	Pass	3 N	Pass
6 ♦	All pass		

6 ♦ by West

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen!

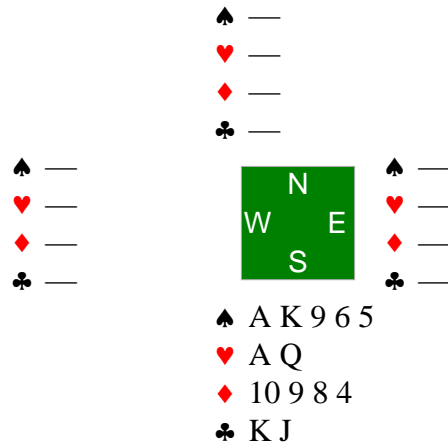
A number of you have asked me to talk about doubles. One of the most difficult judgments in the game is to decide when to double or not to double, and when to pull your partner's double or sit. I know this is the weakest part of my game, and I feel a little uncomfortable preaching about this. Nevertheless, I have had more than 50 years of bridge brilliance and blunders that have helped me develop some thoughts on this topic, and hopefully what I will be sharing today may prove helpful to some of you.

Let me start with the above shown hand...

A few weeks ago, I was playing in a high-level online invitational IMP Pairs game. East was the young superstar, Adam Grossack. His partner opened the bidding 1D, my partner, red against white, overcalled 1H and Adam made the rather creative bid of 2 NT. There was no alert, so my assumption, after seeing the dummy, was that he psyched. I passed, his partner bid 3D, and after my partner passed, Adam could have passed, but furthered the psyche by bidding 3 NT. I passed, Adam's partner, who was not in on the joke, now bid 6D! EW's ridiculous 6D contract was down 4! There's an old saying that a Jack never scored a trick in a postmortem! As you can see, it is quite possible that E might score a trick with each of his Jacks, but if North guesses correctly, NS can actually make 10 tricks in hearts. The truth is that most EW pairs played in a partial, and +200 was actually worth 1 or 2 IMPs. On the other hand, +800 was worth a ton!.

Let's look at another hand.

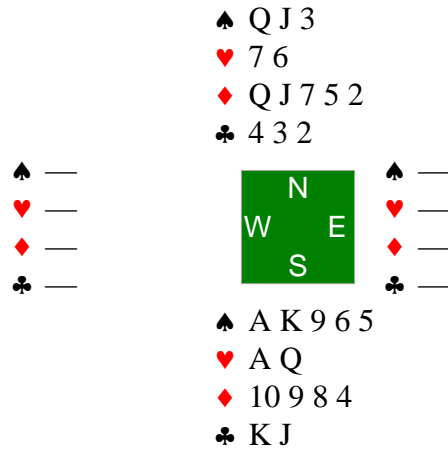
Double Trouble



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	?

In the same event, I held the above depicted South hand. This time, my RHO was another young star - Finn Koleski. Finn is just a high schooler, but he recently finished 3rd in the prestigious Blue Ribbon Pairs. Well, I wasn't going to be conned again! It sure looked like I had 2 trump tricks, at least 1 spade winner, and more than likely a club trick. So I doubled! If partner pulls my double to 4S, I might even be ice cold!

Double Trouble



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Dbl
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

4 ♠ by South

This is what the dummy might have been. On a heart lead, looks like we should lose only 2 diamonds and a club - assuming E started with the Ace.

Unfortunately, this is what partner's hand actually was, and what happened at the table...

Double Trouble

East Deals
None Vul

	♠ Q 4 3											
	♥ 9 2											
	♦ 5 3 2											
	♣ Q 9 5 3 2											
♠ J 10 8 2	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 7	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ K 8 6 5		♥ J 10 7 4 3										
♦ J 7		♦ A K Q 6										
♣ 10 8 7		♣ A 6 4										
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	♥ A Q											
	♦ 10 9 8 4											
	♣ K J											

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Dbl
All pass			
4 ♥ × by East			

...here was the rest of the hand.

Double dummy, the K of clubs lead could hold EW to 10 tricks, but as it was, declarer made an overtrick! So, with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, how might I have avoided this disaster?

The field was +200 EW, 3H making 5. 4Hx making 5 was a huge disaster. Even passing, which would have saved several imps, still would have been a big loss. So, the question is not so much as to whether or not the double was reasonable or correct, but rather, how to have avoided having to make the decision in the first place.

My suggestion is that I bid 1N not 1S immediately! If West now bids 2H, this will be passed around to me, and now I can bid 2S. It might go p-p-3D-p-3h, but I'd bid 3S and there is no way that EW will bid game now. So, once again, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The main similarity is we can force the opponents to make the last decision. I often say, that forced with making a 50-50 decision, the opponents will make the wrong one 90% of the time! The same thing applies to ourselves. If we have to make a 50-50 decision, we'll go wrong 90% of the time as well.

Now let's revisit the first hand.

Double Trouble

IMPs
West Deals
N-S Vul

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	♠ J 5 3 2	
	♥ 8	
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<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
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6 ♦	All pass		

6 ♦ by West

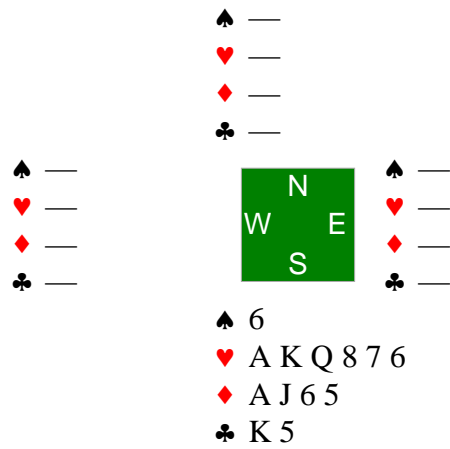
As you can see, had I bid 3C over 2N, the auction would have gone a lot differently. I'm sure the opponents wouldn't get to 6D, but the might bid to 5D that I would have felt quite comfortable doubling.

So, the parallel is clear. Bid early and often. Sometimes you have to take a big risk early, so you won't be faced with an impossible decision later.

Let's now, in the minutes remaining, take a look at a couple of fairly common bidding sequences that are close, but very, very different!

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul

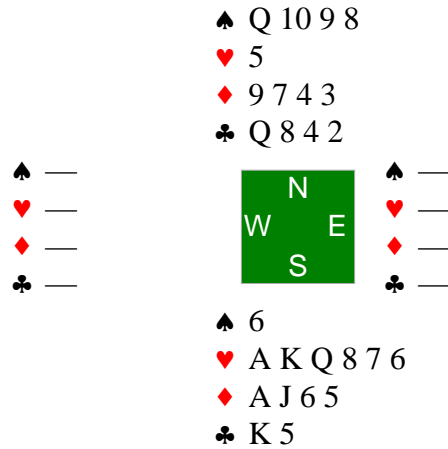


<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	Dbl	Pass	?

What is North's double? Your bid?

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

3 ♠× by West

What would you bid?

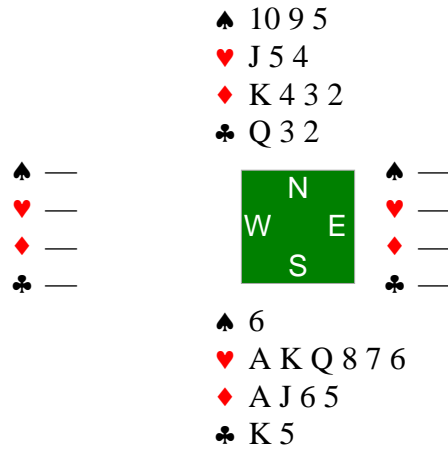
I'd suggest that X is the correct bid. What it says is "Partner, I would like to bid again. I am close to bidding 4H. Please pass or correct, depending upon your hand."

Here's what a pass of 3Sx by partner should look like.

Now, let's look at what a pull of 3Sx should be...

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

4 ♥ by South

What would you bid?

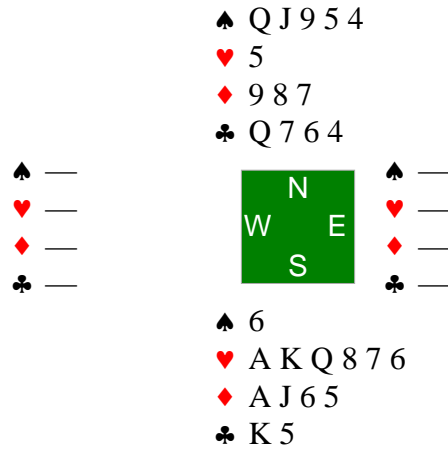
I'd suggest that X is the correct bid. What it says is "Partner, I would like to bid again. I am close to bidding 4H. Please pass or correct, depending upon your hand."

Here's what a pass of 3Sx by partner should look like.

Now, let's look at what a pull of 3Sx should be...

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	Pass	2 ♥
2 ♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
3 ♠	Dbl	All pass	

3 ♠× by West

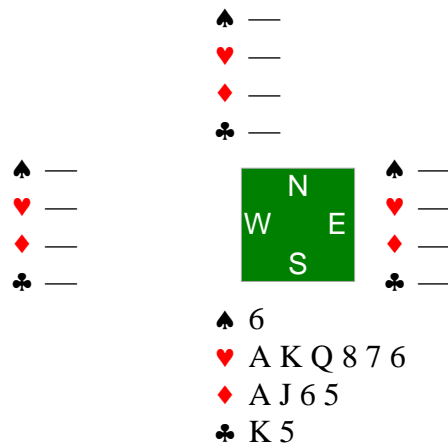
On this sequence, the double is 100% penalty, and I would expect partner to have 2-3 sure trump tricks.

See the difference?

In this sequence, only West is showing spades!

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	Dbl	Pass	?

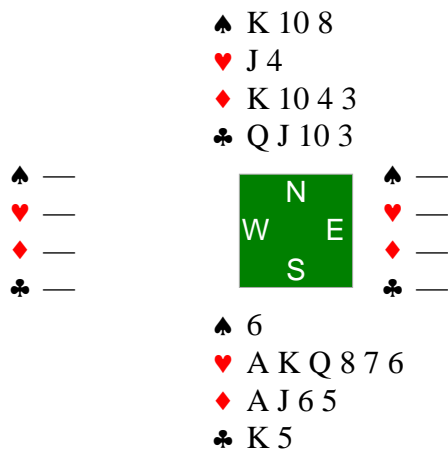
What is North's double on this sequence? Your bid?

With both opponent's bidding, it is unlikely that North's double makes sense to be for penalties. As in the earlier example where I doubled 4H, the location of trump honors is uncertain. A penalty double might give away the location of our honors, etc. So, it makes much more sense for this double to be card showing - but denying 3 hearts, but showing some heart tolerance.

Here's a possible hand:

Double Trouble

West Dealer
NS Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥
3 ♠	Dbl	Pass	?

On this hand, South has an easy 4H bid at this vulnerability - fully confident that partner will have a couple of useful cards - as well as a doubleton heart.

Here's a quick summary of today's Shark's Pointers

- 1) Doubles can be trouble - failure to double hopeless contracts can be just as bad as doubling cold contracts.
- 2) An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Think ahead and make bids early that will make later decisions easier.
- 3) Doubles behind a bidder known to have a long suit are clearly penalty - except the obvious first round takeout double.
- 4) Doubles in front of a bidder known to have a long suit are clearly for takeout.
- 5) Doubles between two sides bidding the same suit are best - especially at lower levels in competitive auctions - to be viewed as card showing. These should guarantee 2 cards in partner's suit and show about 10 hcp. NOTE: If you have a singleton or void in partner's suit and really want to make a penalty double in this sequence, be patient and fight the urge. Take a small plus. Sometimes, you will be afforded an opportunity to double for penalties at a higher level.