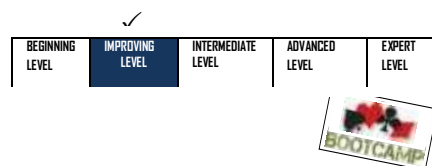


BRIDGE MINI LESSONS

NEGATIVE DOUBLES



“The Quintessential Convention” - Marty Bergen

PENALTY DOUBLES VERSUS TAKE-OUT DOUBLE

PENALTY

A Penalty Double says *“I can take the opposition down.”* If it works your side gets extra points but if it does not work, your side loses extra points.

Technically, a double is always a PENALTY until partner *“TAKES IT OUT”* of Penalty. Partner does this by saying something other than Pass.

Making a double at a fairly low level is probably not saying *“I can take the opposition down.”* More likely, it is saying *“please say something partner”* - please take it out of Penalty.

Improving players might like to have an agreement with partner as to when a double is for PENALTY and when it is for TAKE-OUT. Commonly the partnership decides that if the opposition are in Game, then it is for Penalty, otherwise it is Take-Out. More advanced players will get to know from the bidding which one partner might mean.¹

TAKE-OUT DOUBLES

There are all sorts of take-out doubles including

CLASSIC TAKE-OUT DOUBLE, NEGATIVE DOUBLE, BALANCING DOUBLE, RESPONSIVE DOUBLE, LEAD-DIRECTING DOUBLE, OPENER’S SUPPORT DOUBLE, SNAPDRAGON DOUBLE the list goes on²

You need to know the **type** of takeout double partner is making in order to know what it means and what you should do.

WHAT TYPE OF DOUBLE IS IT? This depends on **WHO** you are in this auction (which hat you are wearing) and **WHAT** has happened so far in the auction (the Context) of the bidding.



OPENER – is the person who has opened.
There is only one opener at the table.²

RESPONDER – is Opener’s partner.

OVERCALLER – is the 1st player to make a call (except pass) after the other side has opened.

ADVANCER – is the Overcaller’s partner.

¹ There is space on your System Card to nominate how high the opposition’s bid can go for your X to still be a Negative Double (and not a Penalty).

² For ease of learning, any double that is not for Penalty is a “Take-Out” double. Some older publications use the term “Takeout Double” to only mean a Classic Takeout Double (Overcall) and refer to the rest by their names. It is much easier to refer to any double that is not a Penalty Double as a Take-Out of some sort.

³ Re-opening is not the same as being an Opener.

NEGATIVE DOUBLE

In DOUBLES 2.1 we looked at a CLASSIC TAKE-OUT DOUBLE

- You are always the OVERCALLER
- You are short in the opposition's suit and can handle any other suit partner says

FOR A NEGATIVE DOUBLE

- ✓ YOU ARE ALWAYS THE RESPONDER
- ✓ PARTNER HAS OPENED ONE OF A SUIT
- ✓ THE OPPOSITION HAS OVERCALLED

WHAT DOES A NEGATIVE DOUBLE SHOW?

- **Four of the unbid Major.**
A negative double shows a 4-card suit in the unbid Major-as simple as that (almost!).
- **6+ HCP.**
There is no upper HCP limit. The word "Negative" is a bit misleading.³

Example

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1C	(1H)	X	

This is a Negative X showing a 4-card Spade suit exactly.

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1C	(1H)	1S	

If Responder has five Spades, then bid 1S instead. This is more descriptive of the hand.

Opener then knows whether Responder has a 4-card spade suit or 5⁺ spades.
This is the purest form of a Negative X.

With Hand 1 , South should X but with Hand 2 South should bid 1S.

Hand 1 Dir: N			Hand 2 Dir: N																																																														
<table><tr><td>N</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td>♠ K876</td><td></td><td>♠ J5</td></tr><tr><td>♥ 32</td><td></td><td>♥ AK987</td></tr><tr><td>♦ A5</td><td></td><td>♦ K107</td></tr><tr><td>♣ KQJ109</td><td></td><td>♣ 863</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♠ 10932</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♥ QJ6</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♦ QJ98</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♣ A4</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>			N		E	♠ K876		♠ J5	♥ 32		♥ AK987	♦ A5		♦ K107	♣ KQJ109		♣ 863	S			♠ 10932			♥ QJ6			♦ QJ98			♣ A4			<table><tr><td>N</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td>♠ K876</td><td></td><td>♠ J5</td></tr><tr><td>♥ 32</td><td></td><td>♥ AK987</td></tr><tr><td>♦ A5</td><td></td><td>♦ K107</td></tr><tr><td>♣ KQJ109</td><td></td><td>♣ 863</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♠ 109432</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♥ QJ</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♦ QJ98</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>♣ A4</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>			N		E	♠ K876		♠ J5	♥ 32		♥ AK987	♦ A5		♦ K107	♣ KQJ109		♣ 863	S			♠ 109432			♥ QJ			♦ QJ98			♣ A4		
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³ The term "Negative Double" was employed simply to distinguish it from a "Positive Double", the old name for a Penalty Double. Originally, Negative X was called "Sputnik" but changed in the USA in the 1950's.

Sometimes a Negative X *might* have a 5-card suit in the unbid Major but not enough points to bid to the two-level. If Responder's first reply to opener is a new suit at the two level (no jump) this shows 10+ HCP. If Responder only has 6-9, then must bid at the 1-level.

Example

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1S	(2D)	2H	

Responder is showing 10+ HCP and at least 5 Hearts.

Example

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1S	(2D)	X	

Responder is promising a 4-card Heart suit (the unbid Major) and 6+ HCP.

With this one though, *maybe* Responder has five Hearts but not enough points to say 2H.

Opener should just assume a 4-card Heart suit to begin with.

Example

North opens 1S and East overcalls 2C. What should South call with the following hands?

1S (2C) ?

Hand 3 Dir: N																																
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Hand 3

South should X.

Negative Double showing four Hearts and 6+ HCP.

Hand 4

South should bid 2H.

South has a 5-card Heart suit and 10 HCP. A new suit at the two-level is fine with 10+ HCP.

2H is more descriptive of South's hand.

Hand 5

South should X.

Although South has a 5-card Heart suit there are not enough HCP's to bid 2H.

Responder needs 10+ HCP to bid a new suit (non-jump) at the 2-level.

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1S	(2D)	2H	

Responder is definitely showing 5 Hearts and 10+ HCP.

OPENER	THEM	RESPONDER	THEM
1S	(2D)	X	

Responder is only showing 4 Hearts and 6+ HCP. Opener assumes 4 Hearts only for now.

Bidding goes is 1H (2C). What does Responder bid with Spades?

Hand 7
Dir: N

	N	
	♠ Q765	
	♥ AKQJ9	
	♦ A6	
	♣ J6	
W		E
♠ J108		♠ 32
♥ 10654		♥ 32
♦ 543		♦ K1072
♣ 954		♣ AKQ87
	S	
	♠ AK94	
	♥ 87	
	♦ QJ98	
	♣ 1032	

Hand 7

N	E	S	W
1H	2C	X	

S has 10+ HCP but only 4-Spades.

Negative X is an excellent bid.

Hand 8
Dir: N

	N	
	♠ Q765	
	♥ AKQJ9	
	♦ A6	
	♣ J6	
W		E
♠ J10		♠ 32
♥ 10654		♥ 32
♦ 543		♦ K1072
♣ 9542		♣ AKQ87
	S	
	♠ AK984	
	♥ 87	
	♦ QJ98	
	♣ 103	

Hand 8

N	E	S	W
1H	2C	2S	

S has 10 HCP so can respond a new suit at the two-level.

2S is promising 5-spades otherwise Responder would have X'd first.

Hand 9
Dir: N

	N	
	♠ Q765	
	♥ AKQJ9	
	♦ A6	
	♣ J6	
W		E
♠ J10		♠ 32
♥ 10654		♥ 32
♦ QJ5		♦ K1072
♣ 9542		♣ AKQ87
	S	
	♠ AK984	
	♥ 87	
	♦ 9843	
	♣ 103	

Hand 9

N	E	S	W
1H	2C	X	

S has 5-spades but only 7 HCP. South needs 10+ to show a new suit at the 2-level.

Negative X is perfect. Otherwise S would have to PASS.

Note that Opener should just assume 4-spades for now and bid accordingly.

WHEN BOTH MAJORS ARE UNBID

If Opener and Overcaller have only bid the minors, then a Negative X shows **both** unbid Majors (4-Spades and 4-Hearts).

Example

OPENER **THEM** **RESPONDER** **THEM**
 1C (1D) **X**
 Responder is showing 4-4 in the Majors.

Hand 10 Dir: N		N
		♠ Q765
		♥ KQJ9
		♦ A6
		♣ J63
W		E
♠ J10		♠ 432
♥ 10654		♥ 2
♦ 543		♦ KJ1072
♣ 9542		♣ AKQ8
		S
		♠ AK98
		♥ A873
		♦ Q98
		♣ 107

Bidding should be :

1C (1D) **X**

The Negative Doubles says "I have a 4-card Heart suit AND a 4-card Spade suit, partner".

Show a 5-card Major if you can

Usually prefer to show a 5-card Major if you have one *and* can bid it at the level of your HCP. It is a usually a better descriptor of your hand.

Just occasionally, Responder might have one very, very bad 5-card Major and one very good 4-card Major. Then Responder might prefer to X even though it shows 4-4 in the Majors.

Hand 11 Dir: N		N
		♠ Q7
		♥ J873
		♦ AKQJ
		♣ J63
W		E
♠ J10		♠ AK98
♥ 10654		♥ 2
♦ 543		♦ 1072
♣ 954		♣ AKQ82
		S
		♠ 65432
		♥ AKQ9
		♦ 98
		♣ 107

BENEFITS of using NEGATIVE X's

1. Responders can take some action after an overcall interferes with their intended call.
 - This is especially useful if Responder would have to make a call at the two-level but does not have 10+ HCP's.
2. Helps to know whether Responder's Major is a 4-card or a 5-card
 - Most of the time. Occasionally Opener has to assume a 4-card until shown otherwise.
3. Helps to find 4-4 fits
 - Opener, with a 4-card Major, does not have to scratch around for a rebid – will know straight away if Responder has a 4-card Major or not.
4. Is cheap – takes up no bidding space.
 - Even with only 6 HCP, Responder's X has taken up no bidding space.

BE A BIT CAREFUL

Opener may not have a fit for you and will still have to take the double out (rebid something else). Take care of how high Opener will need to rebid.

Example

1S (2D) X

If Opener wants to rebid Clubs, it will have to be at the 3-level.

1C (2S) X

If partner does not like your hearts or NT's, her rebid will need to be 3C or 3D. Think about whether this is safe or not.

1S (4C) X

Now partner has to bid at the 4-level.

How High?

Negative doubles are generally safe even if Vul but are two general guides.

Overcall Level	Responder's HCP
1 level	6+
2-minor	8+
2-Major	9+
3 level	10+
4-level ⁺	10+

PLUS HANDS FOR A NEGATIVE X	MINUS HANDS FOR A NEGATIVE X
Can manage Opener's suit if it is rebid	Length in the opposition's suit
Short in opposition's suit	Short in partner's suit
Prime cards - Aces and Kings	Quack Honours – Queens and Jacks

SUMMARY

NEGATIVE DOUBLE

Does not promise all the other suits -

just the unbid Major/s

Can only be made by the Responder.

No upper limit on points

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Overcaller</i>	<i>You (Responder)</i>	
(a) 1C	(1H)	X	= 4-card SPADE holding exactly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If responder has a 5-card spade holding, then bid 1S instead.
(b) 1C	(1S)	X	= 4-card HEART holding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May have five but not enough points to bid at the 2-level (need 10+). 6⁺ HCP.
(c) 1C	(1D)	X	= 4-4 in the Majors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both unbid Majors⁴. 6⁺ HCP.
(c) 1H	(2C)	X	= 4-card ⁺ SPADE holding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6⁺ HCP. You are forcing partner to rebid at the 2-level so will want to be OK with that.
(e) 1S	(2C)	X	= 4-card ⁺ HEART holding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6⁺ HCP. Perhaps you have 5+Hearts but not enough points to bid 2H (need 10 HCP)
(f) 1D	(2C)	X	= a nice cheap way to show 4-4 in the Majors

The great thing about Negative Doubles is they are so cheap.

Opener trusts Responder's promise of the unbid 4-card Major & rebids accordingly.

With a fit, Opener raises the Major to the appropriate level. Responder's rebid will clarify whether the hand was basic or stronger.

⁴ More experienced players might promise only one but for now, agree both four-card Majors is good.

In example (a) above, you can see what a handy call this is.

- How many times do you open a minor, the opposition overcalls 1H and partner bids 1S. You do not know if it is a 4-card spade suit or a 5-card⁺ spade suit.
- Negative Double tells you instantly. If Responder has 5⁺ Spades, she will bid them instead of doubling.

In example (b) above, without 10 HCP you cannot bid unless you play negative doubles

- With a heart holding of AKJxx and nothing much else, you would have to pass
- Negative Double solves the problem.

If used accurately by the partnership, you can see how powerful negative doubles can be.

REMEMEBER – Who you are tells what sort of Double you are making.

There is only one Opener at the table.

There is only one Responder at the table.

OPENER	The person who opened the bidding
RESPONDER	Opener's partner
OVERCALLER	First to call other than pass for the Opposition
ADVANCER	Overcaller's partner

DOUBLES SERIES

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