



Doubles of Part-scores: Avoiding Disaster

IMAGINE THAT you are North holding:

♠ K 5 4 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ A 7 3 2 ♣ K 6 2

The opponents are vulnerable, you are not, and the auction begins thus:

West	North	East	South
		1NT ¹	Dble
2♥ ²	?		

¹ 12-14
² Weakness take-out

What now? A lot depends on whether you are playing pairs or teams.

When the deal turned up in a *pairs* event, one partnership had the following common understanding in this situation:

- a) double for take-out;
- b) pass forces partner to bid again (this is sensible because West has advertised a weak hand).

On this basis, North passed, South re-opened with a take-out double and North took the calculated risk of passing again. The final contract became 2♥ doubled.

North's reasoning was that 2♥ was likely to fail, purely because of the preponderance of high cards in the North-South hands. Meanwhile, although the values for game were present, it was not clear which game could be made: the hearts seemed too weak for 3NT and there was no certainty of an eight-card trump fit.

The full deal is illustrated below:

E/W Game. Dealer East.

♠ K 5 4		
♥ 7 4 2		
♦ A 7 3 2		
♣ K 6 2		
♠ 7 3		♠ 10 8 6 2
♥ J 10 8 5 3		♥ A K Q 9
♦ 6 5		♦ J 8 4
♣ J 9 7 3		♣ Q 10
		♠ A Q J 9
		♥ 6
		♦ K Q 10 9
		♣ A 8 5 4

The defence to 2♥ was straightforward, declarer having to lose two tricks in each side-suit. North-South chalked up +200 for a near top, with most North-South pairs failing to bid 5♦. Indeed some pairs had tried 4♠ but went down when hearts were led, declarer's trumps were shortened and East gained trump control.

By altering the East-West hands slightly, one can see that the outcome might have been different:

	(A)	
♠ 7 3 2		♠ 10 8 6
♥ J 10 8 5 3		♥ A K Q 9
♦ 6 5		♦ J 8 4
♣ J 9 3		♣ Q 10 7
	(B)	
♠ 7 3		♠ 10 8 6 2
♥ J 10 9 8 5 3		♥ A K Q
♦ 6		♦ J 8 5 4
♣ J 9 7 3		♣ Q 10

With (A), N/S can achieve +500, but 2♥ would make on (B) for a disastrous score!

So, North's actions were risky but was the risk worth taking and would it be any different at teams?

In order to answer these questions, consider each of three results and the likely (approximate) outcomes (*table below*). The decision to defend is risky but one can see from the table that it might be justified at pairs (as long as your partner is understanding when such decisions go wrong).

However, at teams it is a very different story, the point being that +200 will not set the world on fire and even +500 is only 2 or 3 IMPs better than the game available. At teams, the rewards for such an action are not great but the risks are considerable.

At pairs, the risk is similar but the rewards are greater.

The advice when playing teams is **do not risk doubling the opponents into game!**

From the point-of-view of the prospective defenders, such part-score contracts should only be doubled when their failure is *certain*. Do not hope for one down – sometimes you will be wrong.

Indeed, at the two level, in order to achieve a worthwhile penalty, you will need most of the high cards and *good trumps*. On the above deal, South would be prepared to pass a take-out double of 2♦ or 2♠ but would be wary of converting a double of 2♣ (the trumps are too weak) and as for passing a take-out double of 2♥ on the North hand . . .

So, at teams, North would choose to look for a possible game (by cue-bidding 3♥ at some point). In fact, the best game is 4♠, if it is played properly. Returning to the theme of the first article (playing safely for the contract), how can South ensure that 4♠ makes unless the spades break 5-1?

Remembering that overtricks are of little consequence at teams, South should count winners: there are ten. So the only way to go down is by losing trump control. South can maintain control by *refusing to ruff* the second and third rounds of hearts, *discarding clubs* instead. A fourth heart can be ruffed in dummy and all other continuations can be won, trumps drawn in four rounds and ten tricks claimed; no risks in the bidding – no risks in the play!

Note that this line works on the featured deal and also the variations (A) and (B). By considering this, one can see that, at teams, choosing to defend 2♥ doubled is far from a good idea! □

Score	Pairs	Teams
+500	Top (maybe shared).	Good result: +2 or +3 IMPs against game.
+200	75% of the match-points.	+5 IMPs against game going down, +2 IMPs against a part-score, -5 IMPs against game making.
-670	Calamity!	Calamity . . . -14 IMPs!