Support Double

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The support double is a double by opener to show 3-card support for responder's suit. It was originally invented by American expert Eric Rodwell.

The double is used when opener starts with one of a suit, responder makes a new suit reply, and the next player interferes. The goal is to help you distinguish 3- and 4-card trump support, which can be invaluable. Here's the type of bidding accident that the support double can prevent:

West	East
♠KT	♠65
♥AJ8	♥KQ952
♦K97	♦A852
♣QT963	♣KJ

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
1NT	3♠	3NT	All Pass

East's 1♥ only promises a 4-card suit. So when South overcalls 1♠, West's options are limited. Pass feels conservative and 2♥ would promise 4-card support, so she settles for 1NT given her balanced hand and spade stopper.

Now East is stuck over 3♠. He wants to probe for 3-card support but can't. Consequently, he guesses to bid 3NT instead of doubling for penalty. Unfortunately this fails when the opponents lead a spade to knock out West's king, and then regain the lead with the ♣A to run spades.

This is where support doubles come into play. Imagine that West could have doubled 1♠ to show 3-card support:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
Dbl	3♠	4♥	All Pass

What a difference in the auction. West's double shows exactly 3 hearts. East, now aware of the 8-card fit, simply bids 4♥, making.

What do East-West lose by using a support double? A natural penalty double of 1♠, which is a paltry price to pay. As seen in the example above, the value of differentiating 3-card and 4-card support can be a game swing.

When to Play Support Doubles

Some fine print when support doubles apply:

1. Opener and responder must have bid two different suits at the 1-level.
2. Responder must have bid a major.
3. Support doubles are on through 2♠. However, some partnerships limit this to 2♥ so that responder can always sign off at the 2-level.
4. There is no point count minimum or maximum to make a support double.
5. Making a support double is opener's first priority. This is more important than rebidding no-trumps to show an enemy stopper, rebidding a 6-card suit, bidding a new suit, etc. Opener denies 3-card support if she makes any call other than double. (Excluding natural raises of responder's suit, of course.)
6. If the opponents' interference is in the form of a double, a redouble by opener shows 3-card support. This is called a support redouble.

And now, some more fine print when support doubles might NOT apply:

1. Support doubles are off when opener or responder has bid no-trumps.
2. Support doubles are also off when advancer (opener's RHO) bids a strong no-trump.
3. Opener isn't necessarily required to make a support double. She may be allowed to pass holding 3-card support with a weak balanced hand. This is open for partnership discussion.

This is a lot to digest, so hopefully the ensuing examples will help.

Examples

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♥	1♠	2♣
Dbl			

Double shows exactly 3 spades. It does not matter 1) whether North has bid or not, or 2) whether North-South bid the same suit.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥	2♦
2♥			

2♥ guarantees 4 hearts. West would have doubled holding only 3-card support.

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
2♣			

2♣ shows 6+ clubs and denies as many as 3 hearts. Making a support double is opener's first priority.

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	1♠	Dbl
Redbl			

Support doubles can also be used if the opponents double responder's bid. In this case, West makes a support redouble.

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1NT
Dbl			

If South's 1NT is natural and strong, then West's double is for penalty. A support double would risk landing in a 4-3 heart fit after South has advertised strength with a heart stopper.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	1♠	1NT
Dbl			

...If you really want to get nuanced, however, you can play support doubles when responder guarantees a 5-card major and the next player bids a strong 1NT. Here East has promised 5 spades because he could have made a negative double with only four. Depending on your faith in the Law of Total Tricks, it might make sense to bid up to the 2-level with 8 trumps.

Responder's Rebids

Weak Rebids

In each of the following auctions, responder has roughly 6-10 points. Opener is allowed to keep bidding with extras.

West	East
♠AK7	♠QJ532
♥9543	♥A92
♦9	♦Q65
♣AK876	♣T9

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♠	2♦
Dbl[1]	Pass	2♠[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 points, possibly only a 4-card suit.

West	East
♠QT8	♠A87
♥753	♥A942
♦A9	♦T875
♣AQJ76	♣T9

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
Dbl[1]	Pass	1NT[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 balanced points, only 4 hearts. Tends to promise a spade stopper.

West	East
♠JT85	♠9
♥Q53	♥A942
♦A92	♦K8753
♣AQJ	♣T95

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
Dbl[1]	Pass	2♦[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 points, only a 4-card major. Promises 5 diamonds. Opener can pass or correct.

Compare this next auction to the previous one. A new suit rebid carries a different meaning when responder holds both majors.

West	East
♠KQJ	♠A8763
♥KQJT	♥A942
♦AQ42	♦5
♣84	♣T95

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♠	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	2♥[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 points, showing 5 spades and 4 or 5 hearts. Here responder is checking for a 4-4 fit, which might play better than a

5-3 fit.

West	East
♠JT85	♠9
♥Q53	♥A942
♦A9	♦K753
♣AQJ7	♣T954

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
Dbl[1]	Pass	2♣[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 points, only a 4-card major. Promises 4+ card support for opener in case clubs are a better fit. Note that East is too unbalanced to bid 1NT, while 2♦ would promise a 5-card suit.

West	East
♠AQ	♠T983
♥K53	♥QT76
♦KJ754	♦Q62
♣976	♣AJ

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	2♦[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 6-10 points, only a 4-card major. Unlike the prior example, this only promises 3+ card support for opener at the 2-level. Note that East can't bid 2NT which would be invitational.

Invitational or Better Rebids

If responder jump-rebids her suit at the 3-level, then she has 10-12 points with a 5+ card suit. Opener is invited to bid game.

West	East
♠AQ	♠T98
♥K53	♥AQJ84
♦KJ754	♦A62
♣976	♣J5

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	3♥[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 10-12 points with 5+ hearts. Invitational to game.

If responder rebids or jump-rebids 2NT, then she has 10-12 balanced points and only a 4-card suit.

West	East
♠AQ	♠432
♥K53	♥QT84
♦KJT54	♦A62
♣976	♣AQ4

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	2NT[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 10-12 balanced points, invitational to game. Shows only 4 hearts.

If responder jump-raises opener's suit, then she shows 4+ card support with only a 4-card major. This tends to imply the lack of an enemy stopper; otherwise responder would have bid 2NT.

West	East
♠AQ	♠J32
♥K53	♥AQJ4
♦KJT54	♦A962
♣976	♣T2

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	3♦[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] 10-12 points, 4+ card support with only 4 hearts.

If responder makes an artificial cue-bid, then she has a good 12+ points. This is forcing to game.

West	East
♠K53	♠AQJ42
♥AQ	♥K32
♦KJT54	♦A62
♣976	♣T2

West	North	East	South

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	1♠	2♣
Dbl[1]	Pass	3♣[2]	

[1] Support double
[2] Game-forcing, may only have 4 spades.

References

Rodwell, Eric. Bidding Topics. Louisville, Baron Barclay Bridge Supply, 2017.

See also

Lightner Double
A lead-directing double of an enemy slam contract.

Low-Level Penalty Double
A double of an enemy partscore that isn't artificial, e.g. takeout.

Maximal Double
A conventional double used as a major suit game try.

Negative Double
A conventional double used by responder after opener starts the bidding with one-of-a-suit and the next player makes a suit overcall.

Optional Double
A conventional double made after an opponent has opened the bidding with a preempt.

Responsive Double
A conventional double used when partner makes a takeout double and the next player raises his partner's suit.

Snapdragon Double
A conventional double by fourth seat after the first three players bid three different suits.

SOS Redouble
A conventional redouble that asks partner to bid a new suit.

Stripe-Tailed Ape Double
A double of an enemy game contract, in hopes of stopping the opponents from continuing on to slam.

Takeout Double
A conventional double that asks partner to bid one of the unbid suits.

Thrump Double
A double of a 3-level preempt asking partner to bid 3NT with a stopper.

About

Bridgebum began in 1999 and covers a large set of descriptions of bidding conventions, declarer play and defense, and more.

Latest Update

Fast Arrival by Danny Kleinman
Fast arrival is the theory that when a forcing bid is available below game, a jump to game denies, but a forcing bid implies, slam interest.

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