TIPS FOR TOPS

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All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on March 29th , (Game #57792). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- Redouble
- Take all your chances

There's a card in the bidding box that doesn't get used very often, and that's the "Redouble", or "XX". There were a few opportunities to pull it out today; let's have a look.

The first, simplest, application of XX comes immediately after your opponent makes a takeout double. Without further agreement, the XX simply indicates that you have at least 10HCP in your hand. It doesn't say anything about support for your partner's suit, but suggests that the hand belongs to your side, and that the opponents may be getting into hot water. And the usual agreement is that, after this start to the auction, the opponents should not be allowed to play the hand undoubled; our side will either double or bid again. Because we're the side with the points.

The other side of this is that, if responder doesn't redouble, it typically indicates they have less than 10HCP. So, 1S X 2D would tend to show a hand of less than 10 points and 5+ Diamonds. With a stronger hand and a Diamond suit, you would XX first, and rebid the Diamonds on the next round. After the redouble, any new suit by opener or responder is forcing, and double is for penalty,

As for the advancer (the partner of the doubler), they are guaranteed to have a pretty weak hand. After all, if two players are showing opening hands and the third is promising 10HCP, there aren't many points left in the deck. Does that let the advancer off the hook? Yes and no. If the advancer passes, the doubler is going to have to bid; even with bad distribution, the opening side is likely to have enough strength to make 1 of their suit. So, if advancer passes, it says they don't have a clear preference for which suit their partner runs to. If they have a clear choice among the unbid suits, they should bid it. But bidding isn't promising any points, strictly a preference.

Bd: 5 Vul: N/S Dlr: North	♠ QT842 ♥ 3 ♦ Q95 ♣ KQ72	Optimum EW 1H+2: -140
♠ K7 ♥ K942 ♦ K83 ♣ A985	N W 5 E S	♠ AJ653 ♥ Q865 ♦ A ♣ 643
9 13 HCP 11 7	♠ 9 ♥ AJT7 ♦ JT7642 ♣ JT	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 1 - - - S - 1 - - - E 2 - 3 2 2 W 2 - 3 2 2

On Board 5, let's see how the XX allows EW to punish NS for an injudicious double. Most Easts opened the bidding 1S with 11HCP. It's skimpy, but meets the rule of 20 and fits into the modern trend of light opening bids. One South made a takeout X - very skimpy, especially vulnerable, and with support for only two of the unbid suits. West has an opening hand. Without the X, they would expect to land in a game somewhere; in fact, they will probably find their Heart fit and play in 4H, which doesn't make. But they don't have support for partner's suit, and the X seems to indicate that, even if there was a Heart fit, they would expect a bad split. So, West might just use the XX here, and see what happens. Poor North - they love the Spade suit, but their cards are badly placed in front of the opener. Partner asked them to choose a suit; they have a clear preference among the other suits, so they must bid 2C.

East has no reason to make another call; in fact, a bid by opener at this stage would show a light, freakish hand that was opened more on shape than on strength. West has a tough choice, but with lots

of defence against Clubs, might just decide to double, and, with best defence, will take 8 tricks for +800 - a clear top.

Bd: 9 Vul: E/W Dlr: North	♠ T84 ♥ KQ ♦ KJT32 ♣ Q97	Optimum NS 1N+1: +120
♠ A976 ♥ 32 ♦ A987 ♣ AJ3	N W 9 E S	♠ QJ ♥ 7654 ♦ Q65 ♣ T864
11 13 HCP 5 11	♠ K532 ♥ AJT98 ♦ 4 ♣ K52	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - 2 2 2 S 1 1 2 2 2 E - - - - - W - - - - -

Board 9: South opens 1H and West has a good takeout double, with full opening points and support (at least 3) for each unbid suit. With less than 3-cards in partner's Heart suit, North can redouble. East has the expected weak hand, but doesn't want to see West pulling to Spades, so she should bid 2C. This time it's not as easy for NS to find their best spot. With each of them holding only 3 Clubs, they will be hesitant to double for penalty. North might decide to show a decent doubleton raise with 2H, or might show their Diamond suit (forcing), which would allow South to bid 2NT.

The follow-up bidding after a redouble can sometimes be tricky. I will look for more examples in the next few weeks to try to make it more clear, but the points to keep in mind are: redouble promises 10+HCP; a new suit tends to deny 10. After the redouble, a new suit is forcing, and a subsequent double is for penalty.

Board 17 is interesting both from the point of view of the declarer, and the defence. East opens 1NT and plays 3NT; some will have had a Diamond overcall from South, but all get a Diamond lead - the K. ALWAYS lead the TOP of a sequence of three or more. Leading the K tells your partner you have the Q and probably the J; leading the J - as some did - DENIES the Q. Clear communication with your partner is the key to good defence.

East has only one stopper in Diamonds; before even deciding whether or not to duck she should count her tricks and make a plan. There are 8 sure tricks; 3Cs, 1D, 3Hs, and 1S. Where can the 9th trick come from? There are several possibilities. The Hearts might split 3-3 and give you a 4th Heart trick. The Clubs offer the same possibility, with the added chance that the J might fall and set up your 10. You can finesse the Spades, hoping the K is in the North hand. And there's one more possibility: if you could force South to lead the Spades, you are guaranteed to make two tricks there. What's important to realize is that the finesse is very risky, because if it loses, South has Diamonds to cash. So try your other chances first, but make sure you end up in the West hand to be ready to try to finesse as your last resort.

Bd: 17 Vul: None Dlr: North	♠ J652 ♥ JT ♦ 65 ♣ J8532	Optimum EW 3N+1: -430
♠ 984 ♥ K74 ♦ A73 ♣ AT76	N W 17 E S	♠ AQT3 ♥ AQ82 ♦ T8 ♣ KQ9
3 11 HCP 17 9	♠ K7 ♥ 9653 ♦ KQJ942 ♣ 4	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - - - - S - - - - - E 4 2 4 4 4 W 4 1 4 4 4

It's usually best to duck at least once when you have only one stopper in a suit; here the only advantage is to learn a bit about the distribution of the Diamond suit. If you duck once, you will see North follow twice, meaning South started with a maximum of six. I'm leaving one Diamond in the West hand for a reason.

When you play your three top Hearts, you get the bad news there, but take note of where the 9 is - it's in the South hand with the long Diamonds. So South started with 9 or 10 red cards, and only 3 or 4 black. Now work on the Clubs, and watch what happens. After the first Club trick, South has to find discards - and it's very uncomfortable for her. She has to hold onto her boss Heart, because pitching that gives you your ninth trick immediately. If she pitches two Diamonds, she won't have enough left to set you. If she does that, throw her in with that Diamond we left on the board for that purpose; she can take three tricks, but then she has to lead a Spade, and your AQ takes the last 2 tricks

Are any of our South defenders brave enough to pitch a Spade and bare their K? That's the winning defence; if you hold onto all your red-card winners, East will have little choice but to try the finesse for two Spade tricks; with South known to have short Spades, it's the odds-on favourite. When it loses to the now-singleton K, they just have to congratulate South for their bold move.

The point here is - don't try the finesse until you have exhausted your other options. And watch what your opponents discard when you run your winners - they may give you just the help you need. In fact, if you tried the Club suit first, South is unlikely to be aware of the necessity of holding on to her Hearts, and you will have a much easier time of it. But I can't think of any reason to try the Clubs first, so my analysis assumed the other, more difficult way. ♠