

## When to Double (Penalize) the opponent's contract EBC *Last update: Jan 19 2023*

Review: A good (but not perfect) guideline is that a double of a suit (first bid by your side) made at the 1 or 2 level is for TAKEOUT. A double at the 4-level or higher is for penalties (3-level could go either way). A takeout double asks partner to bid one of the unbid suits, be it 3 or 2 unbid so far. The lesson, however, is specifically about making PENALTY doubles.

- When **to** double, when **not** to – Hand attributes

### Double makes more sense with ...

- Trumps splitting badly (4-1 or 5-0)
- Sure trump tricks (QJ98)
- Shortness in partner's suit
  - You have xx and partner has AKxxx, very likely cashing 2 ht tricks
- Quick tricks – Aces, Kings
- High cards placed behind suits bid
  - You have perhaps S KJT<sub>x</sub> behind S AQ<sub>xx</sub>
- High cards overall behind the hand with most of their points
- Flat hand

### Less sense with ...

- 2 or 3 trumps
- no sure or uncertain trump tricks (K8xx)
- length in partner's suit
- slow tricks - Queens, Jacks (QJx)
- High cards in front of suits bid
- Shapely unbalanced hand = better on offense

Make a penalty double when .....

- you have sure tricks in the trump suit and know you can beat contract one or think you can beat the contract by two tricks
  - Opponents bid to 4 Spades and you hold
    - S KQJ10 H xx D xxxx C Axx = 3 Sure Trump tricks (and a horrible trump split to manage) + 1 almost sure A = Double
- **Opponents have “crept” to a game, showing no extra values, and you know they are getting a very bad trump split**
  - Consider holding S QJT9x H Axx D xx C xxx
    - (1S) P (2S) P
    - (3S) P (4S) X = penalties;
    - ( I would suggest double even w QJT9 trumps = 4 trumps)

Opponents have “crept” to game and you know they are getting a horrible trump split. Opponents are expecting to make contract with a reasonable, ie 3-2, trump split. They won't have any extra values on this auction and they have to play their 5-3 spade fit with a 5-0 break including 2 (or 3) sure trump losers. Since they have just 25 pts, partner is also marked with about 40-25-(your 7) = 8 HCPs. Note that almost all others will double with this hand, so you need to, just to stay with field

- **When opponents are sacrificing**

- N E S W  
1S (2D) 3S (P)  
4S (P) P (5D)  
X AP

and you (North) hold, for example S AKxxx H KQx D xx C Axx

- **Your partner opens 1NT or RHO overcalls 1NT**

- 1N (2H) X = penalties; your partner is known to have 16ish pts, you have points and some trumps, good time to penalize
  - Perhaps you have S xx H QT9x D A9xx C Kxx
    - Partner must have 2+ hts, so declarer is in at most a 7-card fit and getting a bad split (4-2). Your side has 16+9=25 HCPs, so dummy coming down with only a few pts and short in trumps. You also have the declarer surrounded
- Partner opens 1H, then right-hand opponent bids 1NT
  - you have 9+ pts
  - Declarer will not make 1NT opposite at most 4 pts in dummy (40-12-15-9 = 4)
  - This is an exception to the 1 or 2 level double, this one is for penalties

- **Your partner has opened and their double has been redoubled.** This XX shows 10+ HCPs and an interest in defending. After the XX, either player is encouraged to double any subsequent bid by their side. Holding a mini-stack (4 cards) is often sufficient to penalize

- 1H (X) XX (2C)  
P (P) X holding S Axx H xx D Kxx C KJT9
  - Your side has (12+11) at least 23 HCPs and you have a healthy trump stack (clubs) over the doubler. Consider dummy coming down with AQxx of clubs, guaranteeing the defensive side 3 trump tricks to go with lots of high card tricks
- Opener should
  - double himself with trump stack
  - bid with a very offensive, poor defensive hand
    - For ex., over 1S by advancer, opener has S x H KQJTxx D KQxx C xx.
    - Stiff spade means they have found a decent fit
    - Hand has lots of tricks on offense, ie in hearts, but very few defensive tricks
    - Otherwise pass and allow partner to consider doubling or bidding on

- **In MATCHPOINTS (Not Swiss teams) When opponents have probably overbid, more so than the field, and you have little to lose**

- Consider auction  
1S (2D) 2H (3D)  
3S (4D)
- If only a few pairs will push to 4D, and they make it, you are already headed for a bad board (say 2 out of 10 matchpoints). Double it as a good risk:reward - if they make it, you only lose a few more matchpoints – if you put them down you get a top (10) or close to it.

- **Opponents have taken you out of your sweet spot partscore and you need to penalize (punish) them for doing so**
  - You and your partner bid to a comfortable partscore and expect a good result. Your opponents bid one more and take you out of that ideal contract. With good defensive hand, double them to restore your positive score. Again, you have little to lose if they make their aggressive contract.
  
- **Common sense 1: your opponents have clearly overbid**, your side has too much for their contract to make sense. Consider...
  - 1H (P) 2C (2S)  
P (2N) X = Dear opponents, you are overbidding, I (penalty) double you.  
You might be holding S AQTx H xx D xx C AJT9x.  
Consider that ....
    - Your side has 12+11=at least 23 HCPs They are in 2N with 17 HCPs !
    - Opponent has bid 2N (wrongly) because they don't like spades, and dummies long spades are not coming good, as you have a stack
    - You are behind declarer and partner should be leading a club for you, sitting over declarer's club holding
    - If 2S bidder tries to rescue 2N.X to 3S, you have another red card for them, and one level higher.
  
- **Partner opens with a preempt and opponents enter the auction.** The logic here is opener will tend not to have support for other suits, so no point in responder making a takeout double.
  - 2S (3D) X when you hold S x H Axxx D AQTx C KQxx.
    - Your side has at least half HCPs (5+15=20) and opps are in 3-level contract with a bad trump split and several trump losers. You also have shortness in partner's good suit, hence partner should make some defensive spade tricks, or give you ruffs
  
- **Your side has found a fit, hence no reason to ask for another suit, this double is penalties.**
  - 1S (2C) 2S (3C)  
P (P) X = penalty; You hold S Jxx H Txx D AJT C KJ9x  
Your side has 12<sup>+</sup> +10 = 22<sup>+</sup> HCPs, opps are at 3-level (usually needs 23 pts), trumps are breaking 4-1, and you have good club cards behind declarer's good clubs
    - Note that open players use a new suit to invite game. Here they could bid 3D or 3H to invite a game so double is available for penalties as described above. Note one exception to above is if no suit available for game try, a maximal game try means a double becomes a game try, not a penalty double
      - ie, 1S (2H) 2S (3H)  
X = game try, (since no suit below 3S available for game try)



- You have a mini-stack of 4 clubs including the J9 which may be a trick. Not the ideal sure tricks holding such as QJT8 but still adequate
- You have 9 HCPs (top of your range). Partner's "quiet" bidding implies at least 12 HCPs (ie, only 5 hts) so your side has 9+12 =21 (or more) HCP and opps have 19 or less. Since a 3-level suit contract takes about 23 total points, they are under-powered.
- Even if you win no trump tricks, your 4 trumps are a major nuisance and declarer is getting a 4-1 or maybe even 4-2 trump split, not easy to handle. Declarer will not be able to get the tricks he needs and handle your 4 trumps and with only 19 HCPs, all at the same time.
- You have only 2 cards in partner's suit, a good thing. The less cards in partner's suit, the more the opponents have and they must do something with them. Here it appears partner has 5 hts, you have 2, so the opps have 6 hearts to process, not pretty. Hence the honours in partner's (and your) hand will be very useful. Compare this to your side having an 11 card heart fit, and opponents can trump your high hearts easily

Here is the entire hand; North's balancing 3C bid is an overbid; they do not have enough for this bid or a 2C overcall earlier (vulnerable, weakish 5 (not 6) card suit, flat-ish hand). John Rayner recommends balancing 80% of the time when opps have found a fit at the 2-level, but not this time. However, a big part of bridge is taking advantage of opponents' mistakes, so sit back and enjoy generating the defense for down 3 doubled for +800, a cool top!

**Board 2**  
East Deals  
N-S Vul

Satisfaction: A PartScore Penalty Double

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

## Quiz

**Determine if the double (X) is for takeout (T) or penalty (P)**

(Answers are at bottom of this page)

1. (1H) P P X T or P
2. 1D (P) 2N 3C  
X T or P
3. 1D (1S) P (2S)  
X T or P
4. 1N (2S) X T or P
5. 1C (1N) X T or P
6. 1C (P) 1N (2H)  
X T or P
7. 1D (P) 1S (X)  
P (3H) X T or P
8. 1D (1S) P (P)  
X T or P
9. (1D) 1S (2D) X T or P
10. 1S (2D) X (2N)  
X T or P
11. 1H (4C) X T or P
12. 3D (3S) X T or P

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# What a Game!!

Quiz

Answers:

1. T

2. P

3. T

4. P

5. P

6. P

7. P

8. T

9. T

10. P

11. P

12. P