



Play & Learn

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Gotcha!

East–West have agreed to use negative doubles. With nobody vulnerable, the auction proceeds:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	?	

East can make a negative double holding:

♠A Q 4 3 ♥8 3 ♦Q 9 7 ♣6 5 3 2.

What if East has:

♠A 4 3 ♥8 ♦Q 9 7 2 ♣K J 9 8 4,

a hand that screams for a penalty double with four likely trump tricks on defense plus shortness in partner's suit and an outside ace? Remember, East's double would show four spades, and it's not easy to play a misfit in notrump. The best score is likely to come from penalizing North, but can East–West punish North when they use negative doubles?

The trap pass

Using negative doubles doesn't preclude penalizing overcaller when responder has a "trump stack," but it takes cooperation. East has to have enough faith in partner to make a *trap pass* in tempo. When South passes, the onus is on opener (West). With shortness in overcaller's suit in the pass-out seat, opener bends over backwards to reopen the bidding with a double. This double is for takeout.

In today's duplicate bridge world, where negative doubles are considered standard, opener can reopen after a one- or two-level overcall with a minimum hand and shortness in overcaller's suit. When opener has more than two cards in overcaller's suit, a trap pass is unlikely, so opener needs a bit extra to reopen the bidding.

Here are some possible hands West might have for his 1♥ opener.

a. ♠K 7 5 ♥K Q 10 5 2 ♦A J 6 3 ♣3

West doubles. Lacking a trap pass, East takes the double out. East might bid an unbid suit expecting some support from opener or can support hearts with a doubleton or even with a fit and a hand too weak to have raised initially.

b. ♠9 7 5 ♥K Q 6 5 2 ♦A K ♣10 3 2

Opener's club length makes it unlikely that partner has a trap pass and less likely that East–West will find a safe resting place when East takes out a reopening double. With length in overcaller's suit, a minimum opener passes.

c. ♠7 5 ♥K J 10 5 4 2 ♦A K 8 6 3 ♣—

Opener rebids 2♦ despite the shortness. Lacking ideal shape, doubling with a void is too dangerous.

Here's a new auction, still with nobody vulnerable:

West	North	East	South
1♣	2♠	?	

This time East has:

♠A Q 10 8 ♥7 4 3 ♦A 7 2 ♣9 5 4.

If East–West have agreed to use negative doubles through 2♠ or higher, East cannot make a penalty double, even with five likely tricks opposite an opening hand! West will interpret the double as negative and will bid. East doesn't want to bid notrump when doubling for penalty is likely to yield the best result.

Here are some possible hands West might have. The auction has continued with East and South passing.

d. ♠2 ♥A K J 5 ♦K 6 3 ♣Q J 8 7 2.

West reopens with a double. When East doesn't have a trap pass, the bidding will go to the three level, but West has reasonable support for any suit East might choose.

e. ♠7 2 ♥A 5 ♦K J 6 3 ♣A J 7 6 2.

West is short in spades, but a double risks 3♥ from East, who could have four hearts and a hand too weak for a negative double. Selling out might be your best option. This hand is a good reason why many teachers suggest not using negative doubles too high. The higher you get, the more you have to consider the ramifications of a reopening double. ■