## When to Double (Penalize) the opponent's contract EBC Last update: Jan 192023

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


## Less sense with ...

2 or 3 trumps
no sure or uncertain trump tricks (K8xx)
length in partner's suit

- You have $x x$ and partner has AKxxx, very likely cashing 2 ht tricks
- Quick tricks - Aces, Kings
- High cards placed behind suits bid
slow tricks - Queens, Jacks (QJx)
High cards in front of suits bid
- You have perhaps S KJTx behind S AQxx
- High cards overall behind the hand with most of their points
- Flat hand

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 ) $=8 \mathrm{HCPs}$. 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)
$4 S \quad(P) \quad P \quad$ (5D)
$X \quad$ AP
and you (North) hold, for example S AKxxx H KQx D xx C Axx

- Your partner opens 1NT or RHO overcalls 1NT
- $1 \mathrm{~N}(2 \mathrm{H}) \mathrm{X}=$ penalties; your partner is known to have 16 ish pts, you have points and some trumps, good time to penalize
- Perhaps you have Sxx 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 1 H , then right-hand opponent bids 1NT
- you have 9+ pts
- Declarer will not make 1 NT 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
- 1 H (X) XX (2C)
$P \quad(P) \quad X \quad$ 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 Sx 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)
$3 S$ (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 2 N with 17 HCPs !
- Opponent has bid 2 N (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 $2 S$ bidder tries to rescue $2 N . X$ to $3 S$, 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.
- $2 S$ (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 $12^{+}+10=22^{+} \mathrm{HCPs}$, 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

0 ie, $1 \mathrm{~S}(2 \mathrm{H}) 2 \mathrm{~S}(3 \mathrm{H})$
$X$ = game try, (since no suit below 3 S available for game try)

- This type of double is more about the auction than the particular cards you hold

Did not double before, would not make sense as a takeout now
-
(1D) $P$
(3D) $X$
or (1D) $P$ (2D) $P$
(3D) $P$ (P) $X$

You could not double at the 1-level, but now wish to do so at the 3-level?? Too risky to ask partner for best suit at 3 -level (and he has not bid), so this must be a penalty double. Rare double but must be a big trump stack (D QJT98) and Quick tricks.

## What do you do if you wish to make a penalty double but cannot because it would be a takeout double?

- Partner opens 1 H and your RHO overcalls 2D, they VUL, you NVUL.
- You hold S Axx Hx D KQJT9 C xxxx
- You really want to make a "penalty" double because....
- Your side holds ( $12+10=22^{+} \mathrm{HCPs}$ ), opps are at 2-level
- You have a monster trump stack behind 2D bidder (declarer likely to be $=6$ diamonds A87xxx)
- You have shortness in partner's suit, which means partner's high hearts will likely be tricks on defense
- What can you do? Answer = make a (trap) pass, hoping partner reopens with a double
- Next player Passes
- Partner must be short in diamonds, so should bid making a (reopening/takeout) double.
- Partner's hand = S Kxx H AQJxx Dx C KQxx and she Xs (your heart skips a beat). Pass by 2D bidder. Now PASS by you, licking your chops.
- You lead the KD and the carnage begins (best to "draw" declarer's trump so she cannot make some ruffs with low trumps)
- Defense wins 4Ds, 2Ss, 2Hs, 1C for down $4=+1100$
- Auction was
- 1H (2D) P --- trap pass, dieing for a (reopening) $X$ from partner
$X \quad(P) \quad$ PASS (P)

Doubling their Part-score, love those 200s and 800s !
A great way to get a top board is to double the opponents in a part score. Either your opponents have pushed too high or they are getting some bad luck such as a 4-1 trump split. Remember (from above) if your opponents have overbid, most of the other pairs with their hands won't be in that contract and if it happens to luckily make, you are not getting a good score anyway, so DOUBLE them! If the max of a hand is a part-score for either side (best=140) then +200 (Down 1 VuL doubled, say) is a great score.
Remember, if you never double a contract that makes, you aren't doubling enough. And, if you double four times, and three are successful, you are having a $75 \%$ game, not too shabby !!

- Consider holding as W: S KJxx H ATx D Txx C J942 and hearing the auction
- $N$ E S W

P 1H P 1S
P 2S P P
3C P P ?

- The answer is to Double, with no hesitation because
- You have a mini-stack of 4 clubs including the 19 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 underpowered.
- 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 A 9

- J 76
- 842
* KQ963

AK J 72

- A 10
- 1073
* J 852

- K43
- J 965
* A 10

| West | North | East | South |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  | $1 \boldsymbol{\psi}$ | Pass |
| $1 \boldsymbol{*}$ | Pass | $2 \boldsymbol{\uparrow}$ | Pass |
| Pass | $3 \boldsymbol{\star}$ | 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) $P \quad P \quad T$ or $P$
2. $1 \mathrm{D} \quad(\mathrm{P}) \quad 2 \mathrm{~N} \quad 3 \mathrm{C}$
$X \quad T$ or $P$
3. 1D (1S) $P$ (2S)

X
$T$ or $P$
4. $1 \mathrm{~N}(2 \mathrm{~S}) \mathrm{X} \quad \mathrm{T}$ or P
5. 1C (1N) X T or P
6. $1 \mathrm{C} \quad(\mathrm{P}) \quad 1 \mathrm{~N} \quad(2 \mathrm{H})$
$\mathrm{X} \quad \mathrm{T}$ or P
7. 1D (P) 1S (X)
$P \quad(3 H) X \quad T$ or $P$
8. 1D (1S) $P$ (P)
$X \quad T$ or $P$
9. (1D) 1S (2D) $X \quad T$ or $P$
10. 1 S (2D) $\mathrm{X} \quad(2 \mathrm{~N})$
$X \quad T$ or $P$
11. 1 H (4C) $\mathrm{X} \quad \mathrm{T}$ or P
12. $3 D$ (3S) $X \quad T$ or $P$

Email Steve with any questions etobicokebridge@gmail.com


