

Negative (or Sputnik) Doubles

When partner opens and RHO overcalls in a suit then a double by you is generally played as negative these days – in principle promising the two unbid suits but many players (including me) prefer to play that it just promises an unbid major. Look at this hand: -

- ♠ 75
 - ♥ AJ96
 - ♦ Q4
 - ♣ 98732
- Your partner opens 1♦. No problem, you simply bid 1♥ (you would not, of course, even dream of bidding 1NT and suppressing the 4 card ♥ suit). Unfortunately, life is not always that simple, and RHO intervenes with 1♠. So what do you bid now? You cannot support partner's ♦'s with a doubleton. 2♥ would show a 5 card suit and 11+ (or 9+ if you play a weak NT) points.

The ♣ suit is too anaemic to bid and you are not strong enough to make a forcing bid at the two level. So 1NT? Does not seem right with a small doubleton in the opponent's suit and with an undisclosed ♥ suit. So that just leaves pass? Now it really would be sad to sell out to 1♠ when you know that your side has *at least* 19 points. There is no sensible solution unless you play negative (Sputnik) doubles.

So with this hand you double, and what that means is that you have 4 cards (or more) in the unbid major, so ♥'s here. And what are the points requirements? Exactly the same as for 1♥ if there had been no overcall, so 6+.

Note that if partner then bids 2♥ then that is not a strength showing reverse – in fact it is the opposite. He is simply supporting your suit at the lowest level.