



Penalty Doubles

Penalty doubles are an integral part of all forms of bridge, especially Duplicate Pairs. Not only do they generate some very large scores, they also play an important role in the part-score battle.

Wielding the Axe

If you do not learn to double part-score contracts, your opponents will get away with over-bidding when non-vulnerable: a score of +100 for getting them two down will be worse than +110 or +140 for making your contract; if you *double* them, you will collect a healthy +300!

When they are vulnerable, you can take it a step further: +100 for one down is often not enough but, had you doubled, +200 would get you a top score.

When to Make a Penalty Double

There will be times when you get muddled up and are doubled, losing 1100 points! It is important that you are able to repay these compliments to your opponents.

Doubling for penalties is not easy – one learns from experience.

To start off with, most players would improve their results if they doubled three times as often as they do now – and perhaps even more often! A good player will not mind the opponents making their contract every now and then, for although you get a bottom on one board out of ten, the other nine times your double will get you a top.

There are three basic types of penalty double we shall look at:

- (1) Doubling No-trumps
- (2) Doubling Part-scores
- (3) Doubling Sacrifices

Finally, we shall consider bidding in the fourth seat.

We looked at take-out doubles in the

last issue and discovered that many doubles early in the auction are for take-out. However, there are two important exceptions:

- (a) Doubles of no-trump bids
 - (b) Doubles after limit bids or pre-empt
- These types of doubles are for *penalties*.

(1) DOUBLING NO-TRUMP CONTRACTS

Almost all doubles of no-trump bids are for penalties, with one exception. Points to bear in mind are:

- (i) To double a 1NT opener you need 15 or more points.
- (ii) To double other no-trump bids (later in the auction) your side needs the majority of points.
- (iii) 1♥ – Pass – 1NT – Double: this double is for *take-out*, not penalties (your opponents' minimum strength is 18, so going for penalties is highly unlikely)

Doubles of 1NT openers are for penalties: whatever their strength, you need 15 or more points to double, although with just 15 points you should have a good lead, or a few tens and nines.

Another common opportunity for a penalty double is when your opponent makes a 1NT overcall and you know that your side has the majority of the points.

Doubling a 3NT contract is unusual, but if your side has reasonable strength (14 or 15 points) and you know the suits are all breaking badly, then go ahead.

Now consider the following examples:

Over an opening 1NT (12-14), holding:



Yuck! This is not worth a double: flat and no intermediates.

Over an opening 1NT (12-14), holding:



This is a good hand for a penalty double: honours together and two good suits.

After 1♦ – (1NT) – ?



Another good hand for a penalty double. Your partner should have at least 12 HCP, so you can be sure of the majority of the points.

Whenever your partner opens and you hold 9+ points, then no-trump contracts are generally your property and thus you should punish anybody who tries to steal one. You can get some very healthy rewards from doubling no-trump contracts.

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(2) DOUBLING PART-SCORES

In order to double a low-level contract, you need:

- (i) The majority of points, *and*:
- (ii) Good trumps (either six trumps between the partnership or four good trumps in one hand).

Note that *both* these conditions must be fulfilled; do not go doubling just because you are strong – it is amazing how many tricks can be made with few points but a good fit. However, if you know that your side has length in trumps *as well as* overall strength, then double: without points and without a fit how can the opponents possibly make their contract?

This is not easy, but always remember that you expect to take the contract down, so do not worry about doubling the opponents into game: they are not going to make it, so the problem does not arise!

The easiest situation for this type of double is after your partner has opened 1NT (promising at least two cards in each suit) and your right-hand opponent overcalls:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	2♥	?

♠ A 8 7
♥ K J 8 3
♦ 10 4
♣ K 8 7 6

This is a good hand for a penalty double. Your partner has at least 12 high-card points and you have at least six hearts between you.

The number of players who would automatically bid 2NT on this hand is extraordinary. Opponents will overcall on some terrible hands and it is very important to punish them for doing so! The more you double them, the less they will bid against you and the easier your auctions will become.

Do you see how simple it is to judge whether to double when your partner has made a 'limit bid'? He has described his hand neatly for you, so you can decide the final contract.

So, after the same auction but holding the following hand:

♠ A K 8 7
♥ 8 3
♦ 10 4
♣ A K 8 7 6

Do not double. You have plenty of points but very few hearts.

Bid 3♥, the opponents' suit, to force your partner to bid, aiming for game in spades or no-trumps. Your side may well have an easy game in 4♠, but there is no certainty that your opponents cannot make 2♥. If they have an eight- or nine-card fit, they will be able to cross-ruff and make many more tricks than you might expect.

(3) DOUBLING SACRIFICES

If the contract belongs to your side (you have the strength for game) you must double or bid.

It is important to identify situations when your opponents are 'sacrificing' – that is, when your side has the points and your opponents are bidding on trump length. At game level, you need more than just a big trump fit to make the contract, so make sure you double the opponents or bid on.

For example:

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	2♣
4♠	Pass	Pass	?

♠ 7 6
♥ K 5 4
♦ A 3 2
♣ A Q 7 5 4

Double. You and your partner have the strength; you have to do something: 4♠ is a sacrifice bid.

Yes, one out of six times 4♠ will make – in which case you should congratulate your opponents; however, on the other five occasions you must get as much compensation as possible for them vandalising your auction and ruining your game! Too often players will allow themselves to be outbid on such hands without reaching for the red double card. You do not need length in

their suit to double at high levels – that would be nice, but strength is more important.

When Not to Double

There are four main situations in which you must refrain from making a penalty double, as discussed below.

(1) Never double a freely-bid slam – except to ask for an unusual lead.

If you get a slam down you are normally going to get a good score, so you have no reason to double. Take this hand from actual play, for example:

♠ 9 7
♥ K 8 3
♦ K J 8 6 5 4
♣ 7 6

Your opponents bid up to 6♦, followed by two passes and you have the final call. Your thoughts should be: "I am going to get a good score here because my opponents have bid to slam and are going down; I do not need to double." At the table, 6♦ was doubled but instead of netting +200 for 6♦ undoubled minus four, the doubler scored –980 for 6♥ making. This is rather like Point 3 on page 12, but at slam level the consequences are much more serious: if you think you can get a slam down, be happy but don't double! The only time you might double a slam is for an unusual lead – a Lightner Double.

(2) If you have 15 points and your opponents bid to game, it does not mean you should double; the chances are that they have compensating shape and your partner has a Yarborough!

This is perhaps the most common 'bad' double. (Having a Yarborough is bad enough, but to have a partner who always doubles the opponents' games when you have zero points is much worse – somehow he manages to blame *you* for holding no points!) If your opponents bid confidently to game and you have 15 points, how many points do you expect your partner to have? *Zero!* Thus you should only double if you can defeat the contract from your own hand.

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