



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.

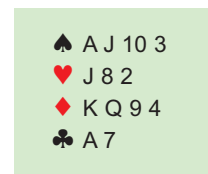
Now consider the following examples:

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



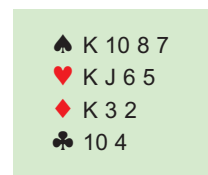
Yuck! This is not worth a double: flat and no intermediates.

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
4♠	1♥ Pass	1♠ Pass	2♣ ?

♠ 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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Your opponents bid to 4♥; what is your call?

♠ 5
♥ J 8 3 2
♦ A K 8 6 5 4
♣ A Q

Give your partner no points; can you be sure of defeating 4♥? No! Worse still, your double will tell declarer that hearts might not be dividing kindly. If you double with hands like this, how will you feel when they ruff the second diamond trick and the king of clubs is on your left?

(3) Do not double if you think that your opponents can find a better contract.

Sometimes your opponents will take a gamble on a particular contract which you know is not going to make; in such cases doubling is not very sensible, for telling your opponents that their bet is going to fail is likely to persuade them to withdraw it!

This field of bidding is of course open to bluff and double-bluff; however, the hand below is a simple example. The bidding has been:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	3NT	?

♠ 5 3
♥ 8 4 3
♦ A K Q J 10
♣ 7 6 2

Don't double. The responder should not really have jumped straight to 3NT, but perhaps holding a hand such as:

♠ K Q 2 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q J 9 8 4, he could not resist it. If you pass 3NT, you get a healthy score of +50; if you double, they may end up in 5♣ and you will finish with -400.

(4) Do not double at a low level just on points. You do need trump length too. A surprisingly high number of tricks can be made on a big fit with very few points.

See page 11, under 'Doubling Partnerscores'. This is a very important principle: do not double for penalties at low levels with shortage in the trump suit.

Doubling in 4th Seat

When a 'pass' would finish the auction, the player whose turn it is to call is said to be in 'fourth seat' or in the 'protective position'. So, when you are the fourth person to call and a pass from you would finish the auction, think seriously before passing. One of your opponents will have shown a very weak hand, which would suggest that your partner must have some strength: this might mean that you should make a bid. A good rule of thumb is to add about three points to your hand ('borrowing a king from partner', as it were) and see if you would then want to make a bid.

This is especially important when you are short in the opponents' suit because your partner will often be sitting with length in that suit waiting to pounce:

Dealer: West. Love All.			
♠ K J 9 5			
♥ K 8 2			
♦ 7 3			
♣ K Q 9 3			
♠ A Q 8 7 4 3 2	♠ 10		
♥ 7 6	♥ J 10 4 3		
♦ 4	♦ K Q J 10 5 2		
♣ 8 5 2	♣ A 6		
	♠ 6		
	♥ A Q 9 5		
	♦ A 9 8 6		
	♣ J 10 7 4		

West	North	East	South
3♠	Pass	Pass	?

West opens with a pre-emptive 3♠ which comes round to you in the South seat. Passing would finish the auction, so think carefully before you do so. You have 11 points and the perfect shape for a take-out double; perhaps you are a little weak, but once you 'borrow your partner's king' you will feel a lot safer. There is no doubt that with 14 HCP you would be making a take-out double and that is what you should do here.

North, your partner, has 12 points but is unable to call because he has length

in their suit; he waits patiently and is rewarded. When West passes your double, so does North! You are asking for your partner's best suit, but North is well placed to know that 3♠ doubled is the best contract. Taking 3♠ doubled four off will give you 800 points – much more than any game might be worth.

Partnership Trust

When your partner makes a penalty double you are likely to be very short in the opponents' suit, so you must trust partner. In fact quite often the shorter you are, the better (although a void is not ideal!) for then your partner will hold more cards in their suit.

Dealer: West. Love All.			
♠ 5			
♥ A K 8 6 4 2			
♦ A Q 7			
♣ Q J 9			
♠ A Q 8 7 4 3 2	♠ 10		
♥ Void	♥ Q J 10 9 3		
♦ 8 6 4	♦ K 10 5 2		
♣ 8 5 2	♣ A K 6		
	♠ K J 9 6		
	♥ 7 5		
	♦ J 9 3		
	♣ 10 7 4 3		

As West, you open 3♠, North overcalls 4♥ and your partner doubles. You *must* pass. You have pre-empted and therefore should not bid again unless asked. Your partner does not expect you to hold a heart and you should feel pretty good because you have the ace of your suit which is just what your partner will want. Rather like limit bids, pre-emptives give a very accurate description of your hand and allow your partner to pick the best contract. North's 4♥ bid was quite reasonable – he was just a little unlucky!

Conclusion

Top-level duplicate players will generally double one contract that their opponents will make one time out of ten. However, the other nine times they will get them down! Double much more often – it is great fun and the more you do it, the more you will get used to it. A large majority of the lessons about penalty doubling have to be learnt the hard way – at the table! The more mistakes you make, the better you will become. ■