

Doubles after Interference to your 1NT Opening Bid

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Your side opens 1NT (15-17 or 14-16) and the opponents compete. What are your rules on penalty doubles vs. takeout doubles vs. optional doubles? What about doubles when LHO balances such as 1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass? Or 1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major? Or 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) - Pass - Pass?

It's very important that you know what doubles mean. Even if you're playing poor methods, knowing what bids mean is 75% of the solution. What you don't want is for partner to pass your negative double thinking that it's for penalties.

Five experts play direct doubles are penalty oriented.

Jeff Rubens---Penalty. A penalty double converts new-suit bids below 2NT to forces. Over a passout balance, I'd still use penalty doubles (but in some of these I can see a stronger case for other treatments than in other auctions). In part, this decision may depend on other agreements. For example, if 1NT - Pass - Pass normally denies a five-card major, then 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ - Pass - Pass, 2♠ suggests a four-card suit, reducing the effectiveness of certain non-penalty doubles. Otherwise, doubling for (say) takeout has attractions. Another aspect of some of these decisions is the form of scoring. Making a close penalty double of two-of-a-major at IMPs is a long-run losing strategy, but that is not necessarily true at matchpoints. System meanings might reflect this.

Karen Allison---My preferred treatment is that at the two-level, doubles are penalty/cooperative. They show Qxx or better in trumps and a minimum of a game invitation. Opener, therefore, needs some trump length (three or more) to pass. I miss some rare juicy penalty doubles, but I get some in return that can't be found by other methods. I use these in combination with Lebensohl at the two-level. At the three-level, I use negative doubles. At higher levels, they are simply penalty doubles.

If they overcall at the four-level, double should just show cards. Unless the notrump opener has a strange hand, he passes and hopes for the best.

Steve Bloom---At the two-level, I like to play a direct double by responder as penalty, while three-level doubles are more optional (card-showing). Once responder has passed, doubles are takeout. Thus, 1NT - Pass - Pass - any - Double or 1NT - Pass - Pass - any - Pass - any - Doubles are takeout.

Two exceptions:

(1) After, 1NT - Double - Redouble - doubles are for penalties.

(2) Doubles of artificial bids are penalties.

Thus, 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♣ (one suiter), double shows clubs, as does 1NT - Pass - Pass - Double (one-suiter) - Pass - 2♣ (forced). Here too, double shows clubs.

Eddie Kantar---Over the bidder, penalty double, under the bidder, takeout double.

Chuck Berger---Penalty doubles of natural bids at two-level. Negative doubles at three-level. Pass and double of artificial bid is penalty. Stayman and transfer over 2♣, opener's double of fourth seat bid is takeout, as is the double of responder. I don't play Lebensohl with Jimmy Cayne but do with most others.

1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout, 2NT is competitive but with focus on minors.

1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major - Double is takeout with at least two of the suit. 2NT is competitive focusing on the minors.

1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout with at least two hearts. 2NT is competitive focusing on the minors.

The rest of the experts play negative or takeout doubles over natural suits.

Steve Landen---My preference is to play the first double by either player is takeout and subsequent doubles are penalty. This applies if the responder has already passed 1NT.

Marty Bergen---Responder's Doubles: Takeout vs. bids that promise suit shown. Cards vs. bids that don't promise suit shown. 1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - Double is cards. 1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major - Double is cards. 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) - Pass - Pass - Double is cards.

Danny Gerstman---Doubles are for takeout. Period. Once one of us has left in a takeout double and they run to a suit that was inferentially implied by the takeout doubler, doubles are for penalties. Needless to say,

almost everyone plays some gimmick these days to compete, such as Woolsey over notrump. Then doubles may have a different meaning when the suits they have bid aren't natural. In those cases, it is my preference that the first double shows cards, and double followed by double by the same hand again is for penalties.

One thing we know for sure. After a strength-showing double or a penalty double, all subsequent doubles are for penalties.

Henry Bethé---Depends to some extent on partner and opponents and on the meaning of the bid! Over 2♣ I play double is Stayman unless 2♣ guarantees both majors in which case I play it is card showing. Over other natural or semi-natural two-level bids (such as a "DONT" 2♦) I play double is cooperative, showing that we have the balance of power and a semibalanced hand. If the bid is purely artificial, such as an Astro 2♦ showing spades and another suit or a multi-2♦ showing a single major, I play double shows values and that we should look for penalty cooperatively. Pass and then double is pure penalty. At the three-level I play negative doubles. I DO NOT play "stolen bid", i.e., that a double of the opponent's bid says they made the bid responder was going to make.

Over 2♦, "stolen" bidders play double is a transfer. Playing "stolen" bids, it is very hard to penalize the opponents. Suppose you hold ♠AK10x♥xx♦xxx♣Axxx and they bid 2♦ showing both majors. Since I play double of both-major-bids as cards, I can double. If opener has four hearts we can penalize them. Playing "stolen" bids, you can't get opener's opinion.

Eddie Wold---If the opponents bid a natural suit or a two-suited bid that includes the suit that has been bid, we play double is for takeout. If the opponents make an artificial bid showing one or two suits, double shows cards and forces the partnership to 2NT. After a card-showing double, a further double would be penalties. If the 1NT opener doubles a balancing bid that is artificial, he is showing that suit.

Chip Martel---Many different auctions. Generally over one-suiters (or suit bid plus unknown) we play negative type doubles, and card showing over two-suiters (suits known) and artificial bids.

Same rules as over direct bids, except 2NT is now takeout instead of Lebensohl.

1NT - Pass - Pass - Any-bid - Pass - Pass - 2NT should be choice of suits, usually minors. If partner bids 3♣ and you bid 3♦, you're showing the red suits. If you hold ♠xxx♥xx♦Axxx♣Kxxx and it goes 1NT - Pass - Pass (you) - 2♠ - Pass - Pass, you could bid 2NT, asking partner to bid a minor. If you hold ♠xx♥Axxx♦Kxxx♣xxx, you could bid 2NT and correct 3♣ to 3♦.

Ralph Katz---Usually do not play penalty doubles except maybe 1NT - Pass - Pass - two-of-a-major and two-of-any that is artificial. Then there is no confusion.

By playing all doubles for takeout except for doubles of artificial bids you eliminate any possible confusion.

Barry Rigal---All first doubles from either side are takeout except of purely artificial calls, e.g. Landy 2♣, or 2♦ for both majors. All subsequent doubles are penalties. I'm not sure if this is best, but it is simple.

Kit Woolsey---Responder's double is negative over natural bid suits, but must have at least a doubleton in their suit. After a passout reopening, doubles by both players takeout of any natural bid, again do not double with a stiff as responder.

By promising a doubleton in responder's suit, opener can pass responder's negative double for penalties if he holds four cards in the opponent's suit.

Richard Schwartz---By 1NT opener, penalty doubles behind RHO, takeout doubles in front of LHO. By responder, I play takeout or negative doubles behind my RHO at the two and three-level. I play takeout doubles in front of my LHO who balanced at two-level and penalty doubles at three-level in front of LHO who balanced.

Larry Cohen---Double of 2♣ overcall is "replacement" unless 2♣=majors. All other doubles are cards/negative. Doubles are never for penalty.

Eric Greco---I am not sure what you mean by rules, but we play takeout doubles by responder and opener. There is no guaranteed strength, although I would say if they preempt to the three-level, double should be game forcing. It certainly may be right to play penalty doubles these days especially against some people, but we don't! Optional doubles seem tricky to me as it seems a bid should either be penalty or not. This way when you penalize them at least either you or your partner has something good in trumps. The obvious downside of negative doubles is when you have a huge penalty double do you pass in the hopes of partner reopening or just bid your game? That just depends on vulnerability and feel. There is no clear

answer here.

Against the passout bidder, these doubles are still all take out. Partner will only pass with very good trumps. The problem with "optional doubles" whatever they mean, is that if we have 22 points between us and a 3-3 fit in their trump suit while we often will beat them sometimes they have some surprise extra shape and we still can't beat them. Penalty doubles in these auctions also don't work great when you have the trumps in front of the bidder.

Kathie Wei-Sender---I like takeout up to 3♠.

Fred Hamilton---I like to play negative doubles (not promising four of the other major) as I play Lebensohl and that's the only way to get to 2NT. This means one must pass with a pure penalty double and hope opener can reopen with a double to get a penalty. So nothing is perfect. It helps to play transfer Lebensohl (Rubinsohl) as that gives responder the most options to show signoff, invitational+ and forcing.

There is a simple way to play Transfer Lebensohl. Two-level responses are natural and non-forcing assuming that you are not bidding a suit promised by RHO. 2NT forces 3♣. Bids at the three-level are as if partner opened 2NT. 3♣ is Stayman. Three-of-a-red suit is a transfer. 3♠ is however you play 2NT - 3♠. 3NT is to play.

Frank Stewart---I seem to recall that in some of my old partnerships, after an overcall of our 1NT opening we played 2NT as artificial and a double as showing the values for a raise to 2NT. If I were playing today, with all the two-suited interventions, I would doubtless have to have a complex structure.

John Wittes---We play a double of 2♣ is Stayman. A double of a natural bid or a two-suited bid where they have bid their anchor suit and the other suit is unknown, is negative. Any other double is penalty. If we want to penalize their natural suit bid, we must pass, and if partner is short in that suit, they are obligated to reopen with a double. I would expect all doubles in the balancing seat underneath the bidder to be for takeout, which partner could convert with length in their suit. If partner opened 1NT and they balanced in front of him, I would expect him to reopen with a double with shortness and a maximum, which I could convert with length in their suit. The one exception would be the majors showing bid - Pass - two-of-a-major. That double should be for penalty, since they are showing two suits that are clearly known.

Ronnie Rubin---My rules are to play doubles are takeout or competitive doubles-not penalty. Over a balancing bid doubles are takeout.

Doug Doub---When an opponent makes a natural overcall, double is negative. It normally shows a doubleton in the opponent's suit, so that opener can pass if he holds four. With fewer than two of the opponent's suit, we try to find a bid. A double by responder of a natural bid is always negative, provided that the 1NT opener has taken no further action. Against passout bids, if the 1NT opener doubles a natural bid, it is takeout. If the 1NT opener doubles an artificial bid, it is penalty. In each of your example auctions, responder's double is negative.

Drew Casen---If they compete directly over 1NT, our doubles are negative from both sides. If they bid after we have bid Stayman, all doubles are penalty from both sides. If we are passed out in 1NT and they balance, all doubles are takeout from both sides. If they overcall after we have transferred, opener's double is penalty but responder's double is cards and opener's is expecting to pull with three trumps with a normal hand. If we are passed out in two-of-a-major after a transfer and the opponents balance with a double, opener's redouble shows three-card support.

1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major - Double is takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) Pass - Pass - Double is takeout.

David Berkowitz---All doubles of natural bids are for takeout I guess since they may be passed, they do show some defense, but I still define them as takeout

1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - (major showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major - Double is takeout but balanced.

1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout

Some experts play penalty doubles by opener sitting behind the bidder. Suppose it goes 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♠. If you play double of 2♠ for penalties, you need to hold six defensive tricks because partner may have nothing. Wouldn't it be better to be able to double 2♠ holding ♠xx♥AKxx♦AJx♣KJxx? If partner has four spades and some strength you will get a number. If partner has fewer than four spades, the opponents have an eight-card or longer spade fit and you don't want to defend against an eight-card fit at the two-level.

John Carruthers---Double by responder is negative, i.e., values for a raise to 2NT at two-level, unbid major at three-level. Any double by notrump under the suit bid (or shown) is takeout, over the suit is penalty (rare) - No 'optional' doubles, they are all either-or. Similar considerations apply in passout bids. Doubles 'under' are takeout, 'over' are penalty in these situations. However, should responder have shown strength already and a desire to penalize them, doubles are penalty, e.g., if you play that Stayman is invitational+, then doubles are penalty after that.

John Mohan---I believe that notrump opener's double of RHO bid should be penalty and essentially have the contract beat in own hand. Obviously this requires a very strong trump holding. All doubles by responder who has passed when an invitational bid was available are simply takeout and limited. However, since these doubles may be converted, factors such as trump length and defensive winners must be considered. As with most expert partnerships, I think initial doubles should be card-showing and at least mildly invitational with exception of 2♣, where most play a double is Stayman and system on. 2♣ and 2♦ for Majors requires a specific defense; I suggest (transfer) Lebensohl including Majors and two of the major showing a stopper with 2NT+ values. This allows double for values and may lead to penalty. My rule is that once we have made our card-showing or balancing double, all subsequent doubles are penalty (all auctions).

Bobby Wolff---A double of a 2♥ overcall is usually four spades and 8-9 points, while a double of a 2♠ overcall is usually four hearts and eight+ points. All doubles through the three-level are takeout, but almost always balanced. Even four-level doubles are optional except that the 1NT opener certainly, with a balanced hand (and hopefully a trump trick), could and would pass. I'm also used to playing Lebensohl but only after a natural two-of-a-major overcall where the overcaller has the bid suit and possibly another. Obviously with only about two 1/2 trump tricks (Q10xx) and not much outside, the partner of the opener should go quietly and pass.

Once 1NT is passed around to the fourth chair and he bids a single-suited balance, such as two-of-a-major, then double by the 1NT opener behind the bidder would be penalties, while in all other of your examples double should better be played, primarily for practical reasons, for takeout. Way short of perfect, but I think, playable. At least both partners will remember and, at least, some part of the time after one partner or the other backs in with a second round double, his partner will be able to convert, by his chunky trump holding, to penalties.

Jill Meyers---By Responder: Penalty doubles if they make a two-suited bid and you know both suits. Negative doubles through 3♥ if one-suited or two suits and they bid anchor suit and other suit is unknown. In balancing seat, penalty doubles over bidder, takeout under the bidder. 1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ - Pass - Pass, double is takeout, but if my RHO bids 2♠ in this auction instead of passing, double is penalty. No optional doubles except common sense. By Opener: Double is takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - Double is takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major - Double is penalty

1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) Pass - Pass - Double is takeout

Kerri Sanborn---In general, opener's doubles are penalty of RHO and takeout of LHO. Responder's doubles are mostly takeout or conventional. Most experts play that doubles by responder are treated as Stayman or competitive, depending on whether the bid is natural or whether it is 2♣ or higher. This makes it safer for competition, since it is more difficult for the person "over" the interference to penalize. It does, however, give opener a chance to pass the double for penalties when he has a stack.

Billy Eisenberg---First double by responder is card-showing not penalty. The notrump opener doubles initially over for penalties, under for takeout.

Ron Smith---Responder's first double is takeout. Opener can only double sitting behind. Over passout bids, responder's first double are 6-8 HCP.

The question is - Do you have 6-8 HCP and four of their suit or two of their suit? Big difference on what Opener does.

Marinesa Letizia---I play two-level doubles show a raise to 2NT or better, opener needs decent trumps to pass. Three-level and higher doubles are negative doubles, game values.

1NT - Pass - Pass - Natural bid - Pass - Pass - major, Double is penalty, minor takeout.

1NT - Pass - Pass - (majors showing bid) - Pass - two-of-a-major, Double is penalties

1NT - Pass - Pass - 2♥ (hearts and a minor) Pass - Pass, Double is penalties.

Mike Lawrence---This is an area that seems to have lots of default agreements and if you are not clear on

which ones apply to your partnership, there will be a mixture of good and bad results. In cases one and three where LHO has bid a suit naturally, I play a reopening double as takeoutish. In the artificial case where LHO shows two majors and I double, the double is just cards. A nice convenient way of telling partner he better make a good decision.

Billy Pollack---Most serious partnerships have several pages of notrump defensive notes. General rules: Immediate double is negative. Doubles are takeout in front of the suit, penalty when over it. After one penalty double, all other doubles are penalty.

Nick Nickell---When LHO balances we play doubles as 6-8 HCP, not penalty.

Steve Robinson opinion > *I like to play the following: In direct seat, my double of 2♣ is Stayman with system on. Opener has to be careful since Responder can have a weak hand with both majors. Use the same logic as if the auction went 1NT - Pass - 2♣. However, if 2♣ shows both majors, double says I want to penalize one of them. Unless 2♣ shows both majors I would double 2♣ holding ♠ Axxx♥ Jxxx♦ xxx♣ xx as well as game-invitational and game-forcing hands with a four-card major. With ten points I usually ignore the 2♣-bid and just bid 3NT.*

Double of 2♦, no matter what it means, is negative or cards. The minimum double of 2♦ would be ♠ Axxx♥ Jxxx♦ xx♣ xxx I try to do something if 2♦ is natural and I hold short diamonds.

If two-of-a-major is a one-suiter, I play negative doubles. If overcaller has a six-card or longer suit, responder is less likely to have a trump stack. On the rare occasion when you have a pure penalty double, you have to bid 3NT with at least nine points and pass with fewer. If two-of-a-major is a two-suited bid, which means it is very unlikely to be a six-card or longer suit, then double is penalties.

At the three-level all my doubles are negative. Since three-level bids are six-card or longer suits, responder is very unlikely to have a stack. I also use the same logic against balancing bids. Opener's double of natural bid suits are for takeout. Opener's double of artificial bid suits are for penalties. If overcaller shows a two-suiter, then responder's doubles are for penalties. If responder bids Stayman or Jacoby, all subsequent doubles are penalty-oriented.