

What is Your Agreement? A Bridge Tip

By Neil H. Timm

Many club bridge players play 2/1 and not Precision. Playing 2/1 most also play the bid of 1NT as 15-17, a strong NT range. Not able to double the 1NT bid for penalty with an equivalent hand, they play DON'T where the X of 1NT denotes a takeout bid. However, over a weak NT any range that does not include 15 (e.g. 12-14), played by many Precision pairs, many 2/1-bridge players play Cappelletti where now the X of 1NT shows an equivalent hand and partner may pass the X or leave the X in for penalty.

If this is your agreement, when should you leave the X of 1NT in for penalty and when should you PASS?

The bidding goes:

West	North	East	South
1NT*	X*	Pass	??

As south you hold the following semi-balanced hand: ♠J10652 ♥1054♦Q10♣1086.

Your partner north doubles west bid of 1NT* (12-14).

Do you pass and leave in the X in for penalty or do you bid 2♠ with your 5-card suit and 4 dummy points?

Lets assume you bid 2♠ so the bidding goes:

West	North	East	South
1NT*	X*	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	X	Pass
Pass	Pass		

South was not happy with his two-spade contract. He made only five tricks and losing three tricks for an E-W score of 800.

If he passes, the double of 1NT west makes 7 tricks for an E-W score of 180 and not 800!

Vulnerable, South must PASS a penalty double when Vulnerable and not bid with a balanced or semi-balanced hand.

Recall that a bridge hand that has the distribution 4333/4432/5332 is **balanced** and a bridge hand distribution: 5422/6322 is **semi-balanced**.

The entire deal follows. Dealer West and N-S Vulnerable

		♠	A		
		♥	A983		
		♦	J842		
		♣	AK92		
♠	K93	N W E S		♠	Q874
♥	KQ6			♥	J72
♦	K9763			♦	A5
♣	Q4			♣	J753
		♠	J10652		
		♥	1054		
		♦	Q10		
		♣	1086		

Even if N-S were not Vulnerable, E-W would obtain a score 300 instead of 180 because East doubled the bid of 2♠. So as East do you double or Pass? Does the Rule of 9 apply? NO!

Recall that the Rule of 9 says that when partner doubles add the level of the contract to the number of trumps to the number of trumps honors (AKQJ10) and if that total is 9 or more, leave the X in for penalty or pass.

It only applies over suit contracts when partner doubles not 1NT.

However the Rule of 10 applies: if the number of winning trick is 10 or more the contract must be doubled.

The number of winning tricks = 2 from Partner (he opened the bidding) + your ace = 3 tricks + the 7 (from the rule of 9) = 10. So east must X the 2♠ bid?

If East does not double, East-West scores only 180 vs. 150.

Note that E-W has 21HCP and N-S has 19HCP, which occurs 16.094% of the time, while 20-20 occur 8.222% of the time. Yes more frequently that a 20-20 hands. Even hands that split: 22-18, 23-17, 24-16, and 25-15 occur more frequently with 15.132%, 13.662%, 11.184%, 9.784%, respectively. As shown by Julian Laderman (2020), Useful Probability for Bridge Players, Maser Point Press, Page 160.

The decision to X or pass is clearly more critical using IMP vs. Match Points scoring.