



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

I recently picked up this collection:

♠92 ♥8753 ♦J1098 ♣652.

LHO	Partner	RHO	Me
INT	Dbl	Pass	Pass
Pass			

INT was 15–17. We were playing penalty doubles of INT so I passed. Many “experienced” players criticized me for not pulling the double, despite the fact that we defeated the contract three tricks. Worse yet, I was virtually accused of having prior knowledge of partner’s hand, which turned out to be a 22-count. I was told that the double shows “an equal or better hand,” and that I should bid when my hand is so weak. My understanding is that partner had a hand that expected to beat INT regardless of my hand. Help! Am I that far off base?

Flummoxed in Florida

Dear FF,

Methinks not! I also think the “experienced” players in your area were totally off base with such an unfounded accusation especially when your action was the one I agree with 100%! I have expressed the following opinion many times: It is acceptable to be wrong, but unacceptable to be wrong *loud*! It is even worse to be wrong by questioning someone’s ethics in a public fashion.

In HELLO, my convention of choice for competing over INT, we define direct seat doubles of INT as penalty. Here are two examples from my book *Helms to HELLO*. Years ago, playing in a club game, I held:

♠94 ♥AKQJ432 ♦87 ♣65.

The auction went INT–Dbl–Redbl–All Pass.

In my early youth, I was a bit more mischievous than in my current youth, so I led the jack — fourth best! After the first seven tricks, we were plus 400, despite the opponents’ 25 HCP. I did not expect to defend INT, but felt I had too many tricks to simply bid hearts. This is my idea of a penalty double.

If, however, I held:

♠KJ3 ♥AQ5 ♦K64 ♣KJ75,

I recommend passing if RHO opens INT. With no clear lead to make, you have no earthly idea if INT is going down. By my standards, this is not a penalty double of INT. For those who play doubles of INT as penalty/cooperative, why would you ever double if partner might pull to a four-card major suit?

When, by agreement, playing penalty doubles of INT (HELLO, Hamilton, Cappelletti, etc.), the double should always be based on values, and a source of tricks such as:

♠KQ1096 ♥AJ10 ♦K105 ♣A7.

This is a marginal double. You know what to lead, and have enough entries to expect a reasonable, though not guaranteed, chance to defeat INT. This is a far better hand for doubling than the previous 17-pointer.

I suggest that if you play penalty doubles, advancer (the doubler’s part-

ner) should pull only when very weak and very distributional. If they do choose to pull the double, they should act as if the doubler has opened INT, therefore, 2♦ and 2♥ would be transfers. (If the doubler does not accept the transfer, it means he had a long suit of his own.)

To restate my position, a penalty double of INT should primarily be based on tricks or, if balanced, the high-card point count should start at the top of the notrump opener’s range. With your example 1-count, I would pass and await partner’s opening lead. Sounds like you and your partner did just fine without me. □