

Earls Pearls #15 - Doubles and Positioning

Let's first deal with doubles. There are several basic doubles which most players need to be aware of even if they don't play them:

But first, a *caveat*: ***all of the following doubles provide you and the opponents with information. You may convert any of them into a penalty double, by passing; you can choose not to act on the information when there is an intervening bid; or you can in the case of #5 below rebid your suit or another suit, telling partner that you do not want the opponents to play in a doubled contract.***

- 1) **Negative doubles**—show other two suits, or at least other major
- 2) **Support doubles***-show 3 card support for partner's suit. (*alert it)
- 3) **Responsive doubles**---usually show minors
- 4) **Maximal (aka game try) doubles**—indicate a willingness to play game.
- 5) **Under/over double**—either for penalty or take out depending on whether the doubler is in front of the original bidder of the suit or behind the original bidder of the suit.

- 1) **Negative doubles**. Not usually made by the opening bidder. Most often guarantees two places to play the hand, if not the other two suits. Usually promises other major.

1D 1S X=negative double. Usually promises 4 hearts and may have diamond support or clubs. Because partner is forced to the two level, you need to have a decent hand, 8+ points. If you had the same 8+ points and five decent hearts (3 of the top five honors or two of the top 3 honors), you would bid 2 hearts over one spade.

- 2) **Support doubles*** (*alertable). Always made by the opening bidder. It shows 3 card support for partner's suit. If opening bidder has more than 3 card support, she will raise partner's suit.

1D X 1H 1S X . This double by the opening 1D bidder, indicates 3 card heart support. With 4 or more hearts, opening bidder would bid 2 hearts or with 16+ points 3 hearts

- 3) **Responsive doubles**. This double is made by the partner of the first doubler. It usually shows two minors but on rare occasions can show both majors. Let me give you two auctions:

1H X 2H X or 1D X 2D X. In the first instance, your partner doubled 1H. Your double of 2H shows both minors. If you had four spades and 8+ points, you would just bid 2S. So with the same 8+ points, your double would indicate both minors. In the second instance, partner has doubled 1D and you have doubled

2D. This shows both majors and 8+ points. If you only had only one major, you would have bid it.

- 4) **Maximal (game try) doubles.** Usually made by the opening bidder whose hand is stronger than a 12-14 point opening bid either due to distribution or point count. It invites partner to bid game. It occurs whenever partner has no bid to make to invite game. Some examples 1S 2H 2S 3H or 1H 2D 2H 3D.

1S 2H 2S 3H

? The question mark indicates the problem. How do you invite partner to bid game? If you bid a new suit over 3H, partner will be forced to bid game. So, the solution is to make a maximal double. A double of 3H indicates a willingness to play 4S, a bid of 3S says you are not interested in game. So here are the two auctions with the question mark removed:

1S 2H 2S 3H

X = the 1S bidder has made a maximal double, inviting partner to bid game

1S 2H 2S 3H

3S = the 1S bidder has bid 3S. This bid is competitive. You are not interested in playing 4S.

- 5) **Over/under doubles.** Okay, so far? Here is where it gets a little more difficult. One more type of double. It is often called an over/under double. The double of 3H in the previous example sits in front of the original heart bidder. His double is a maximal double inviting partner to bid game. But if the partner who bid 2S doubles 3 hearts, she is behind the original heart bidder. This double is usually for penalties.

1S 2H 2S 3H

P P X= this double by the 2S bidder is usually for penalties. You sit behind the original heart bidder. You may hold AQx of hearts or KQ9 of hearts or some combination similar to the above examples. You are not interested in playing game but if you can penalize the opponents two or three hundred, it is worth more than the 140 you can receive for making 3S.

POSITIONING

This leads us to **positioning**. Position is very important in bridge. If you sit in front of the strong hand or if you sit behind the strong hand makes all the difference. In the previous example, the 2S bidder sits behind the first heart bidder—the one with the stronger hand, so his double of 3H is based on the fact that he is sitting behind the stronger hand and that partner has opened the bidding.

Let me give you an obvious example. The opponents open:

1NT followed by two passes to you. What do you bid? With a stronger hand, 8-12 points, you pass. If the one no trump bidder can get to dummy, your points are finesseable. But if you have a decent five-six card suit with 5 or 6 points you bid because partner has points behind the one no trump bidder. Okay?

1NT p p ?

Here is your hand: AQxxx Kx Qxx xx---don't even think about bidding. Your partner has very little. How do you know? The one no trump opener has 15-17 points. You have 11 points that leaves approximately 13 points between your partner and the one no trump opener's partner. (40 point deck -27 = 13). Your points are finesseable and you are probably going down.

1NT p p ?

Here is your hand AJ10xxx xxx xx Jx. Here is a hand where you might bid 2S. Partner has the majority of the outstanding points behind the one no trump bidder. How do you know? The partner of the one no trump bidder, didn't invite game, didn't bid Stayman or make a transfer bid. So she has a minimal number of points with no long suit. So your partner has the majority of the outstanding points (40 -22 =18) At least 10 of those points are in partner's hand. So now the one no trump bidder is finesseable.

Your position in the auction either in front of the strong hand or behind the strong hand determines what kinds of risks you are willing to take. In front of the strong hand beware. Behind the strong hand, take chances. I could give you several more examples, but I hope you understand the importance of positioning in bridge. Okay one more example.

1H 2D 2H ? Do you bid three diamonds? Who has the strong hand, the one heart bidder or the two heart bidder? Obviously, the person who opened one heart. Your partner bid 2D behind the opening bidder. So whatever points your partner has are less likely to be finesseable since the strong hand is in front of him. So you can bid 3D on much less (6 points (including four good diamonds 2 of the top five honors or five diamonds to the ace and a singleton heart) than ordinary because partner sits behind the opening bidder.

But in this auction be careful:

1H p 1S ? Do you bid 2C? You are in front of the strong hand (the one heart bidder). The partner has bid 1S, she is not a passed hand. You are bidding 2C in front of the strong hand and between two hands that have not limited their

point count. This is the time to be cautious unless you have a very good hand (16+ points or a good suit (3 of the top 5 honors) or a very distributional hand (0-2-6-5). The best bid here is a pass and hope that partner can bid when the auction dies down because partner sits behind the strong hand. It would be slightly different if the opponent had bid 2H instead of 1S, but not much different. You now know that the person you sit behind has under 10 points (the 2H bidder), but you still must understand that you are sitting in front of the strong hand

My wife and I played the other day. She opened the bidding on each of the following hands and doubled 2H for 500, 1S for 800, and 3C for 500. Be careful bidding in front of the strong hand.

Finally, one more double. It is often called **“do something intelligent partner because I don’t know what to do.”** (It is also called an action double.) You think it is your hand, partner opened the bidding and you have 9 points but you don’t know what to do. You hate to pass. After all, you have the majority of points. But too often at least for me, I do something not very intelligent after partner has made this type of double.

1D 1H 1S 2C

P P X ---well you, (the one spade bidder) are sitting in front of the 2C bidder so it can’t be for penalties. You don’t have 5 spades, so you can’t bid 2S and you don’t have four diamonds so you can’t bid 2D. And you don’t have both a club stopper and a heart stopper so you can’t bid 2NT. So what to do? It can’t be a **negative** double...all 4 suits have already been bid. It can’t be a **support** double, partner didn’t double 2C to show three card support. It can’t be a **responsive or maximal** double –since partner opened the bidding, you can’t make a responsive double. Partner can always bid 2D so no **maximal** double is needed. What is it? It is **“do something intelligent partner.”** Good luck being intelligent. I guess I’m not intelligent enough to know what to do over this double.

And..... another. I have no name for this kind of double. It is warning partner not to bid to the next level. Let us suppose your bidding goes 1H P 2H P 4H and all of a sudden one of the opponents bids 4S. If you, the next bidder, double it warns partner not to bid 5H. But if you pass, it tells partner you are willing to play 5H. After you have passed, the decision, whether to double or bid 5H, is up to your partner. **BUT, YOU CANNOT LET THEM PLAY 4S UNDOUBLED.**

Here are the two auctions:

1H P 2H P

4H 4S X tells partner you do not want to play 5H. Your partner can certainly choose to bid 5H, but you have warned her.

1H P 2H P

4H 4S P—your pass here leaves the decision to partner. You're willing to play 5H if partner thinks that is the right decision. But, partner must do something, either bid or double.

Do keep in mind that you and your partner have bid game freely. This is not a competitive auction where you took the push to 4H. If it is a competitive auction, the above explanation does not apply. Example:

1H 1S 2H 2S

4H 4S—here you are in a competitive auction. You have not bid 4H freely but bid it to try to keep the opponents from bidding 4S. A pass in this situation does not express a willingness to play 5H. You and your partner may even decide to let them play 4S undoubled or one of you may decide to sacrifice by bidding 5H.

NB. Only the support double is alertable.

As always, you paid your money, enjoy the game.