

Two Over One

NEGATIVE, SUPPORT, MAXIMAL, RESPONSIVE

One little word, so many meanings

Of the four types of doubles covered in this lesson, one is indispensable, one is frequently helpful, and two are highly useful in the uncommon situations in which they arise. Your focus of learning should certainly be directed to the negative double, which you probably know fairly well, and then on the support double. When you feel comfortable with these, then learn the maximal double, and finally the responsive double.

NEGATIVE DOUBLES

The negative double arises when partner has opened and the opponent has overcalled. Your double in this sequence is a negative double. It is a takeout double by responder.

The expected meaning of the negative double is that you hold 5+ or more points and 4 or more cards in each of the unbid suits.

Regarding Point Count

Regarding the points, note the absence of any upper limit. Your points are 5+ and UP. Even a very powerful hand can make a negative double. Opener will suppose that you have 5+ to 9-. If you have values exceeding these, then it is up to you to take appropriate action on your subsequent bids. Bidding again in an invitational manner will express 9+ to 12-. If you don't invite, but go directly to game, you express 12+ to 15-. If you have even more points, you could go into RKC, or you could cuebid the opponent's suit to express strength, asking partner to somehow

act accordingly.

You also need to adjust your expected point count for the level of the opponent's overcall. For instance, if partner has opened 1 diamond and the opponent has overcalled 3 spades, then your negative double would certainly not be a mere 6 points. Since you are pushing partner into a 4-level response, you would like to have 12+ points. However, as a practical matter, you may need to make your double with somewhat less, perhaps with as few as 9+ if you feel that you must act. Likewise, if you are forcing opener to respond to you at the 3 level, you should hold something like a minimum of, say, 8 points. The higher bidding levels are requiring greater point count, while the need to compete is putting a blur on the exact number of points you may in fact possess.

Regarding Shape Differences

The expected meaning of your negative double is that you possess the two unbid suits. But you may in fact hold something slightly different. For instance, if partner has opened 1 diamond and the overcall is 1 spade, instead of holding hearts and clubs you may hold hearts and diamonds. The important suit is the major suit. When the opponent overcalls one of the major suits, the negative doubler guarantees the other major. His holding in the minor suits may not always be perfect.

If opener and overcaller have each bid a minor, you are expected to hold both majors. Generally speaking, you will honor this

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expectation. But the need to compete will not always allow us to wait for the perfect hand. You may on occasion have to make a negative double with one 4-card and one 3-card major suit.

Another shape variance arises when you have just one suit and that suit is the higher ranking unbid suit. For example:

104 AJ8742 Q3 963

Partner has opened 1 diamond and the opponent has overcalled 1 spade. You need to express your nice heart suit, but you lack the 10 points needed to make a freebid. But you can express this hand using a negative double. Partner will probably bid nearly anything else but hearts, and then you bid hearts outright at your next turn. Note that your suit must be the higher ranking suit so that you can always correct without raising the level. Partner will need to remember that a negative double followed by a bid shows one suit, 6 cards or perhaps a very good 5. He also must remember that you hold less than 10 points, because with 10 or more you would have simply bid your suit instead of doubling.

When the Overcall Has Been 1 Heart

When the overcall has been 1 heart, a special agreement arises. If responder has just 4 spades, he makes a negative double, but if responder has 5 spades, then he bids 1 spade outright. This agreement always informs opener immediately what to expect in spade length in responder's hand. This is important because the overcaller's partner may raise the heart bid to 2 hearts, and if opener doesn't know how many spades partner has, he cannot

make an accurate rebid. Alert responder's bid of 1 spade in such an auction. If asked, reply that it shows a 5-card spade suit. Point count is 5+ and UP.

How High to Play Negative Doubles

Your convention card asks you what level you play negative doubles through. The recommended level is through 3 spades. So, after partner opens, any overcall or jump overcall which is 3 spades or less can be met with a negative double. Under this agreement, if the opponent were to overcall at the 4 level, your double is for penalty.

Nonetheless, if the second player leaps immediately to 4 hearts, play the negative double on, promising 4 spades. This is your last chance to find a 4-4 spade fit and a spade game in the face of the heart preempt. The heart bidder is going to have his suit, so you'll win few if any heart tricks, and you won't get rich picking off your sidesuit winners. If you make the negative double and show the 4 spades, partner is advised that you have game going strength. He can take appropriate action, which may be to pass, converting your double to a penalty double.

Any Negative Double Can Be Converted

When you make any normal negative double, you are expecting partner to bid, either selecting from the 2 suits you are showing, or rebidding his own long suit, or even bidding in notrump. Nearly always, your partner will meet your expectation and make one of these bids. But partner is not absolutely compelled to bid. If partner judges that defending would be better than playing, he may pass your negative double, converting it to a penalty

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double, preferring to defend. This conversion is very unlikely at lower bidding levels, but as the level moves up, opener's freedom in converting a double to penalty becomes increasingly feasible.

How Responder Plays for Penalties

Imagine that partner has opened 1 spade and the opponent bids 2 clubs. What if you hold a hand like this one:

K7 542 J62 AJ1063.

You may be aching to double the 2 club overcall for penalties, but you can't. Your double would promise hearts and diamonds, and you have neither.

To defend for penalties, you must pass the overcall and wait for opener to reopen the auction with a double. You will then pass his balancing takeout double and convert it to a penalty double.

How do you know that partner will balance with a takeout double? Well, you can't be perfectly certain he will. First of all, the other opponent may act in front of your partner, who will then be taken out of balancing position. But if partner does acquire the balancing seat, then he should feel highly obligated to double.

The balancing double by opener is an important dimension of negative doubles. If opener does not feel highly obligated to double in balancing seat, then your partnership can never profit from any opportunity to punish the overcaller. When you open the auction and the left hand opponent overcalls, you should expect to hear a call from partner. He

may raise you, bid in notrump, take a freebid, or make a negative double. If your partner fails to act, then you should expect a call from your right hand opponent, who should have some values to support the overcaller. If that hand passes also, then check out your holding of the opponent's suit. Chances are you are on the short side, so double. Your partner will probably pass for penalties.

Is there any time when you don't have to double in the balancing seat? Yes, there are two cases:

1. You hold length in the overcaller's suit. If you hold length, then your partner doesn't. Since your partner does not have length, he was not planning on defending for penalties. Your partner just wasn't able to bid. He may have been too weak to bid, or he may have values and no bid..
2. You may bid instead of double if your hand wants to insist on playing. You would have a hand that isn't really suitable for defending such a low level contract. Either you are too shapely, and you need to declare, or else you are too strong, and the penalty doubles won't yield enough points.

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SUPPORT DOUBLES

A support double is a double made by opener. Support doubles arise when you have opened, your partner has responded with one of a major, and the right hand opponent overcalls. A double or redouble by you shows that you have 3-card support for partner's major suit. Look at these auctions:

	opener	opp	responder	opp
1.	1♦	P	1♠	2♣
	dbl			

Opener has exactly 3 spades.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
2.	1♦	P	1♠	2♣
	2♠			

Opener has 4 spades.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
3.	1♦	P	1♠	2♣
	pass			

Opener has less than 3 spades.

Although the negative double is now considered standard, and requires no alert, the support double is not considered standard. The support double must be alerted. Moreover, since the direct raise promises 4 cards, it too is alerted. And finally, since the pass denies 3 spades, it must be alerted as well. Therefore, in hands 1 – 3 above, responder must alert opener's rebid in every case. You might find it unusual to alert partner's pass, but it is an alert.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
4.	1♣	P	1♠	dbl
	redbl			

This is a support redouble. Opener has redoubled to show 3-card spade support. The support redouble requires an alert.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
5.	1♣	1♦	1♠	2♦
	dbl			

Opener's double is again a support double. In our previous examples, only opener's right hand opponent has bid. This time the left hand opponent has bid also. The critical feature is the action taken by the right hand opponent. It is the bid standing between responder and opener that sets up the support double.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
6.	1♣	1♥	1♠	2♥
	2♠			

This auction is different. Responder has bid 1 spade directly over 1 heart, thereby showing a 5-card spade suit. Opener can raise to 2 spades holding just 3 spades. So this raise indicates 3 or 4 spades. It does not require an alert.

	opener	opp	responder	opp
7.	1♣	1♥	1♠	2♥
	dbl			

Alert this support double. It shows exactly 2 spades.

Therefore, if opener passes, alert! It would show a singleton or void in spades!

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Support doubles are played through 2 spades.

8.	opener	opp	responder	opp
	1♣ dbl	P	1♥	2♠

Here again is a support double showing that opener holds 3 hearts.

9.	opener	opp	responder	opp
	1♣ dbl	P	1♥	3♠

This is a penalty double. Support doubles are played only through 2 spades.

Look at your convention card. In the upper left hand corner is a box labeled "Special Doubles." Now find "support double" and check the box next to it.

What should responder do when he hears opener make a support double? Simply speaking, he does the right thing. Here are a few possibilities:

1. Take a suit preference between opener's minor and responder's own major, staying at the 2 level to show a minimum, jumping to show invitational values. Jumping in the major would require a 5-card suit. Simply preferring the major suit at the 2 level can be done with just 4 trump.

2. With a minimum, responder can rebid 1NT, if there is still room for this bid. It would show that the major suit was only 4 cards long. Or, responder can bid 2NT showing invitational values and a 4-card major. Or, responder can

bid 3NT showing game points and a 4-card major.

3. If the opponent who bids after opener makes a call, responder can pass to show minimal values and only a 4-card suit. The key concept is that responder would compete with a fit, so failing to compete means the suit was just 4-cards long.

4. With extra values, responder can bid a new suit, or he could cue bid the opponent's suit to show extra values, perhaps as Western Cue Bid. Responder can move to RKC or even splinter. Actions that imply a fit describe 5 or more trump in responder's hand, while other bids either deny an 8-card fit or are temporarily ambiguous.

MAXIMAL DOUBLES

Maximal doubles arise in competitive auctions when the opponents' suit is the suit just below your major suit. In other words, if your suit is spades and the opponents are competing in hearts. Or, if your suit is hearts and the opponents are competing in diamonds. Consider the following situation:

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♥

If opener wants simply to compete in spades, he can bid 3 spades. Responder should not take this as an invitation to try game. Quite the contrary. Opener is not showing any interest in game nor even any extra values. He has simply formed the opinion that outbidding the opponents at the 3 level is the

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right action.

But what if opener DID want to invite a game? There aren't any bids available to do that! Oh, but yes there is. The bid remaining is "double." This double is the maximal double.

The doubler has extra values and is inviting 4 spades. Responder will accept the invitation by bidding 4 spades. He will decline the invitation by bidding 3 spades.

The same situation arises when the 2 suits are diamonds are hearts.

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♥	2♦	2♥	3♦

If opener bids 3 hearts, he is simply competing and does not invite game. But if opener doubles, he is not suggesting defense, he is inviting responder to bid 4 hearts if responder holds maximal values.

Here are a few other auctions using the maximal double:

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♠	dbl	2♠	3♥
dbl			

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♣	P	1♠	2♥
2♠	3♥	dbl	

opener	opp	responder	opp
1♣	P	1♥	2♦
2♥	3♦	dbl	

RESPONSIVE DOUBLES

Responsive doubles arise when your left hand opponent has opened the bidding, your partner has overcalled, and then your right hand opponent has raised the opener. See the auction below:

opp	partner	opp	you
1♥	2♦	2♥	dbl

This is the model for a responsive double. Your bid shows 5+ to 9- points and 5 – 5 or 5 – 4 distribution in the two unbid suits. You are inviting partner to join either of your suits with as little as 3-card support.

The responsive double doesn't arise very often simply because so many elements must be present: the overcall, the joining of responder with opener's original suit, and you with a 5 – 5 hand, or at least 5 – 4. But when it does come up, you will be glad you play it. Imagine that you hold:

KJ652 84 6 A10943

The responsive double is perfect for your hand. Without it, you would be showing too many values if you bid at all, and if you choose to bid spades, you might be bidding partner's singleton while missing out on a great club fit.

Responsive doubles are similar to negative doubles, except that negative doubles respond to partner's opening bid, while responsive doubles respond to partner's overcall.

Responsive doubles are clear cut when partner has overcalled because there are just two suits left for you to indicate with your

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double. But a responsive double can also arise when partner has made a takeout double.

opp	partner	opp	you
1♥	dbl	2♥	dbl

This responsive double means that you have values in the range of 5+ to 9-with cards in the unbid suits, but you don't know which should be selected as trump. Therefore your bid does two things at once: it allows partner to select his best suit, and it limits your point count. Your hand may look like:

J109 964 QJ84 K97

Your hand isn't much to look at, but the opponents have a fit at the 2 level and partner has invited competition. You have warned him of limited values, and he can make the best decision available.

Like negative doubles, you should play responsive doubles on through 3 spades. On your convention card, see "Special Doubles". Responsive doubles require alerts.