

# The Penalty Side of the Negative Double

## The Re-Opening Double

When your Partnership decides to use the Negative Double you lose the option of *Doubling an OverCall for Penalty*. For Example: You hold ♠AQTx ♥x ♦xxx ♣AJxx and Partner Opens 1♦. You were already to bid 1♠ but RHO bids 1♣. Huh? You can't Double, that would show 4♥'s, so you are forced to Pass; it is called a **Trap Pass**.

Next, anytime your Partner passes your Opening bid after an OverCall you should think **Trap Pass** and consider Doubling if RHO passes as well. Think of it as a **Forcing Pass**. The Double in this case is called a **Re-Opening Double**, some refer to it as a Balancing Double; Here's the bidding situation we are referring to: 1♦ – 1♥ – P – P; ? Note the ? is in the Pass out seat. Most times, when a player bids in the Pass-Out seat his Partner has to try to decide if it is indeed an attempt to seek Balance or a strength showing bid. Seeking Balance refers to the idea that if every one is passing at a low level, the HCP's are likely to be even so that it may be anybody's part-score to have. So bidding something in the Pass-Out seat, even a Double, rather than passing ( and allowing opponent's low level contract to hold) when holding a minimum hand, is called **balancing**. What a minimum hand? If you have the power your going to bid anyway. If you Double it is called a re-opening Double – and that usually shows a big hand, but not always.

Some players say a Re-Opening Double should always be exercised in this situation, however, the person in the Pass-Out seat has to use some judgment. For example if he, as opener, is holding a minimum hand and some values in the opponents suit the likelihood of Partner's Pass being a Trap is far diminished. If he and the another bidder are holding 8 or 9 Cards in that suit, Partner is not likely to have a Trump Stack – i.e. a lot of the opponents suit. But if Partner couldn't support your suit or show his suit perhaps it is because his suit was the one bid by the opponent. The Opener and his Partner have been put 'on the spot' by the OverCaller. So If holding a minimum hand the Opener can't bid a second suit should he sell out or Double forcing Partner to Respond? In fact we have another rule to help the Responder make the decision: *is my partners Double forcing or should I really Pass?*

**The first question for the player in the Pass-Out seat:** To or not to exercise the Re-Opening Double. Lets look at another example of the decision that confronts the Opener who is now in the Pass-Out seat. The bidding has gone 1♠ – 2♥ – P – P; ? Partner's Pass may have been for two reasons:

1. Partner has no values! This is what we usually think when Partner passes our Open.. or
2. Partner has a ♥ Stack and wanted to Double but that bid would have been interpreted as offering at least 4-4 in the Minors. He didn't have the 4-4 or support and so is forced to Pass.

**What to do?** How can we find out which is the case? Is it #1 or #2? Here's the guideline for Opener:

1. **Exercise a Re-Opening Double**, Opener holds 2 or less Cards in OverCallers suit. Since Advancer didn't support the OverCall he likely doesn't have 3-Card support. If that is the case then there is an excellent chance that Responder's Pass was a Trap-Pass.
2. **Pass**. Completing the auction on the inference that your holding of 3-Cards lessens the chance that Partner exercised a Trap-Pass and doesn't have values. This is the normal option if Opener has a minimum hand and no second suit.
3. **Any other bid** by Opener means he has the values to go it alone (she's independently wealthy). i.e. has some extra values and a good second suit.

### Rule of Nine – for Partner of Re-Open Doubler

Once an Opener executes the Re-Opening Double Responder is put on the spot. Should she accept the Double as a Penalty Double or a true Re-Opening Double? This is where the Rule of 9

comes into play. To determine the 'what to do now' one employs the Rule: which states Take the current level of the bid; Add to that the number of Cards held in Opponent suit; Add to that the number of Honors held in that suit. If the sum of those three items is 9 or more Pass and accept the Double as a Penalty Double. If the sum is less than 9, find a bid, either support Openers suit or bid your best suit. Here's a concrete example using the last bidding sequence:

1♠ – 2♥ – P – P; X – P – P – ?     P implies no ♠ support and not 4-4 in Minors (Negative Double)

You are holding ♠xx ♥AQxxx ♦xxx ♣xxx     Apply the Rule of 9

Start with the current level :                      2, Opponent bid 2♥

Add the number of ♥ held:                      5 + 2 = 7,     Cards in Opponents suit

Add the number of Honors in suit:     2 + 7 = 9 → Pass and play 2♥ Doubled. The Re-opening double was indeed suggesting it was for penalty because we arrived at 9 or more.

If your holding had been ♠Ax ♥Q987 ♦xxxx ♣Qxx

Add the current level :                              2,

Add the number of ♥ held:                      4 + 2 = 6,

Add the number of Honors:                      1 + 6 = 7 → Bid 3♦

## Other Kinds of Doubles

Players over the years have invented numerous uses for low-level Doubles that have nothing at all to do with Penalties. It takes a very strong hand and great Partnership defense to survive low-level Doubles consistently, so most players use these Doubles for special purposes. We have already seen the Take-Out, the Negative, the Re-Opening Double. There are many more but we want to show you two more since they are on your Convention Card. All low-level Doubles are Conventional since they really don't serve the purpose of what Doubles are suppose to mean, Penalty. Convention they are but the three we have seen are so common they are neither Alert-able or Announce-able. Of the following two, only Support Doubles are Alert-able. Responsive Doubles are not.

### Responsive Double

The Responsive Double is the Advancer's counterpart to the Responders Negative Double. We are looking at bidding sequences that start like 1♦ – X – 1♥ – ?; or 1♥ – X – 2♥ – ?. In any such sequence if the Advancer doesn't have 5-Card suit to show Partner he might have two 4-Card suits and it would be nice if there was a way to show them. There is – the Responsive Double. There are three possibilities:

1. Opponents bid a Major and a Minor with Partner executing a TOD in-between. A double by the Advancer shows at least 4-4 in the two unbid suits.
2. Opponents Open and show support for a single suit:
  - If Opponents suit is a Minor – Responsive Double shows 4-4 in the Majors 1♦ – X – 2♦ – ?
  - If Opponents suit is a Major – Responsive Double shows 4-4 in the Minors 1♥ – X – 2♥ – ?

Note: There is no way to show 4-4 in a Major and a Minor in single suit response cases.

How can I remember this? A Negative Double is the tool for Opener/ Responder

The Responsive Double is the OverCall/Advancer's tool.

**Both show similar type hands!! – 4-4 in unbid suits or Majors or**

**Minors**

**In effect the Responsive Double tells Partner: “You Choose between my two suits.”**

### Support Double

Consider this sequence 1♦ – P – 1♥ – 1♠; ?. The Responder's 1♥ bid only promises a 4-Card suit (he might indeed have 5 but who's to know?) The Opener ♠xx ♥AQ9 ♦AKxx ♣Jxxx could have Rebid 1NT if he had a ♠ stopper, but without the stopper and not having 4♥'s to support his Partners Response Opener is in a quandary. The almost ubiquitous bid, the Double, to the rescue. In this position, i.e. a rebid of *Double* by Opener shows exactly 3-Card support for Responder's suit. Of course, if Opener had held 4♥'s the Magic-8 has been found but with 3♥'s the Opener is only sure that there is a 7-Card fit. With the availability of the Support Double, if the Responder holds a 5-Card suit he now knows that the Partnership has the Magic-8 and continues appropriately else with 7-Card fit he has a decision to make. We can now note that the support Double can be used even if Opener has a (in this example) a ♠ stopper,

### Maximal Double

Consider this situation. You have a good but minimum hand (14-15 PP) and open 1♠, your LHO OverCalls 2♦ then your partner shows support by bidding 2♠ and RHO bids 3♦. It appears that the HCPs are about evenly divided; your suit is solid but you can't see how you can defeat the

3♦ contract to get a better score than you would for making 3♠. You want to be competitive but if you bid 3♠ Partner is likely to assume that your hand is better and take you on to Game; but you just want to be competitive without suggesting Game – you can't bid 3♠. How can you force Partner to bid 3♠? You **Double**, of course! It's a low-level Double (low-level usually means below 3♠) but it's not a negative Double – you're not responding to Partners Open; it's not a Takeout Double – you Opened; it's not a Support or Responsive Double – your Partner didn't bid a different suit; it's not a re-opening Double – Partner supported your suit. If LHO doesn't remove the double, by Passing, Partner is obligated to bid (the bidding is still below 3♠). You are telling, really forcing, Partner to bid 3♠. The Maximal Double asks Partner to bid what you wanted to bid yourself; you have said “*I have a minimum hand and not interested in Game, I just want to be competitive.*” Watch vulnerability, this bid is particular effective in favorable vulnerability conditions (you no, them yes). Another example: Opponents open 1♥ – and you OverCall 1♠: 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♥ – P; P – 2♠ – P – 3♥; P – X – P – ?.

In both examples if our intent was to invite Game, we would bid the 3-level ourselves. The fact that we exercised a low-level Double implies it is a maximal Double.