

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 the Responder's pass 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 the opener 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 the low level contract to hold) when holding a minimum hand, is called **balancing**. If you have the power you are 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. But if Partner couldn't support your suit or show his suit perhaps it is because his suit was the one bid by the opponents. 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 they 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 for you 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. **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. See #3.
2. **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 a chance that Responder's Pass was a Trap-Pass.
3. **Any other bid** by Opener means they have the values to possibly 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 their Partner is put on the spot. Should the

Double be accepted 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:

$1\spadesuit - 2\heartsuit - \underline{P} - P$; $X - P - P - ?$ \underline{P} implies no \spadesuit support and not 4-4 in Minors (Negative Double)
 $X \rightarrow$ is a re-opening double

You (\underline{P}) are holding $\spadesuit xx \heartsuit AQxxx \diamond xxx \clubsuit xxx$ Apply the Rule of 9

Start with the current level : 2, Opponent bid $2\heartsuit$
 Add the number of Cards held: $5 + 2 = 7$, Cards in Opponents suit
 Add the number of Honors in suit: $2 + 7 = 9 \rightarrow$ Pass and play $2\heartsuit$ Doubled. The Re-opening double was indeed suggesting it was for penalty because we arrived at 9 or more.

If your holding had been $\spadesuit Ax \heartsuit Q987 \diamond xxxx \clubsuit Qxx$

Add the current level : 2,
 Add the number of Cards held: $4 + 2 = 6$,
 Add the number of Honors: $1 + 6 = 7 \rightarrow$ Bid $3\diamond$