

Whatever Happened to Penalty Doubles?

Are partners pulling your penalty doubles? I don't know exactly why but the penalty double seems to have gone bye-bye and I want it reinstated. But before we can accomplish that we need to review some of the other uses of the word DOUBLE.

Double is a very important call in bridge but it does have a variety of possible meanings depending upon its use. There are two basic kinds of doubles....(1) informative but generally for takeout and (2) penalty or business. Each informative (or takeout) double provides some specific information thus enabling the doubler to add something constructive to the auction. Informative doubles include, but are not limited to, normal takeout doubles, negative doubles, re-opening doubles, balancing doubles, responsive doubles, support doubles, and lead-directing doubles. When an informative double is made, the doubler's partner is expected to bid but on rare occasions may pass hoping to convert the double into a sizeable penalty.

A penalty double is just that.....it expresses an opinion that the opponents have bid too much and that to penalize them is the way to get the best possible result on this hand. Sometimes this double will backfire but it is still an important and necessary part of the game of bridge. Without it, you couldn't keep optimistic and overbidding opponents from bidding too much on every hand. When partner makes a penalty double it's usually best to pass.

I think Edgar Kaplan said it best when he said something like: "We'd all be better off if we took out our partner's takeout doubles and left in our partner's penalty doubles.

Perhaps the best way to learn which doubles are penalty is to review those that aren't. If a double doesn't fall into one of the following descriptions it was probably intended as penalty.

Takeout Doubles. A double that we call a normal takeout double is a bid made at your first opportunity to bid after an opponent has opened the bidding. It enables you to show strength and, at the same time, to ask your partner to name his best suit. It is roughly the equivalent of an opening bid and (1) shows support for all unbid suits with shortness in the suit doubled, or (2) shows a very good one-suited

hand that was too good to overcall, or (3) shows a very good balanced hand that is too good to overcall 1NT. Examples:

<u>Opp</u>	<u>You</u>	(a)	♠AQxx ♥x ♦Kxxx ♣Axxx or
1♥	DBL	(b)	♠Kxxx ♥Kx ♦AQx ♣xxxx

Negative Doubles. A double is negative when made by the partner of the opening bidder after RHO (right hand opponent) has overcalled a suit. In other words, it is a double of an opponent's overcall for takeout rather than for penalties. The negative double indicates one of several kinds of hands: (1) a four-card unbid major suit and an unbid minor suit, (2) a four-card unbid major suit and support for opener's first bid suit, (3) two four-card unbid major suits, (4) two unbid minor suits, (5) rarely, a one-suited hand (unbid major suit) without the values to bid it freely. If you use a five-card major system of bidding, the use of negative doubles is fundamental to the system. Examples:

	Pard	Opp	You	
(a)	1♣	1♦	DBL	♠Axxx ♥Kxxx ♦xx ♣xxx Shows both majors
(b)	1♣	1♠	DBL	♠Kx ♥Axxx ♦Qxxx ♣xxx Shows other Major+minor
(c)	1♥	1♠	DBL	♠xx ♥xx ♦AQxxx ♣Kxxx Shows both minors

Re-Opening Doubles. There are at least two situations in which the opening bidder should strive to reopen the bidding by doubling. (1) If your partnership plays negative doubles, it is extremely important for the opening bidder to reopen the bidding with a double whenever he is short in the suit overcalled by the opponents. (2) It is also important to reopen the bidding with a double in competitive auctions when you have a REALLY good hand (so as to differentiate from competitive hands with long suits.) Generally this second type hand will have at least three-card support for the unbid suits regardless of the opposition bidding. It also indicates either a desire to hear about partner's suit or the desire to show a very good hand and a very good suit of one's own. Therefore in an auction similar to 1♠ 2♣ Pass 3♣ ? reopen with a double on something like ♠ AKxxxx ♥ AKx ♦QJx ♣x but bid 3♠ on something like AKJ10xx ♥ Kxx ♦Kxx ♣x.

Balancing Doubles. Another type of reopening double is also called a balancing double. It applies after the opening bid is followed by two passes and does not promise the same strength and distribution required for a direct takeout double. Thus 1♠ Pass Pass X is for takeout but can be less about an Ace or King less than a double in the direct seat. Therefore, double a 1♥ opening bid in the balancing seat with (a) ♠Kxxx ♥x ♦Axxx ♣Qxxx or (b) ♠xxxx ♥xx ♦AKxx ♣Kxx

Responsive Doubles. A responsive double is used by the partner of a doubling or overcalling partner and tends to show the two unbid suits with minimal (1 or 2 card) support for partner's suit.

(a) <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u>	(b) <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u>
1♥ 1♠ 2♥ DBL.	1♥ DBL. 2♥ DBL.

Support Doubles (and Redoubles). If an opponent overcalls after partner has responded in a new suit at the one or two level, a double by the opening bidder shows three-card support while an immediate raise shows four-card support. If the opponent makes a takeout double instead of overcalling, a redouble shows three-card support.. (a) North East South West (b) North East South West

1♣ Pass 1♥ 1♠	1♦ Pass 1♥ Dbl.
DBL.	ReDBL

Lead-Directing Doubles. A lead-directing double is a double made in hopes of directing the opening lead. These doubles are not necessarily made to increase the size of the set that you might anticipate, but rather to give your side a chance to obtain the best result possible. 1NT Pass 2♣ X is lead directing showing clubs. Lead directing doubles of transfers bids and RKC responses are other examples that often work.

In between the two basic types of doubles are a few that can be construed as both or either. Maximal doubles fall into this category as do cooperative-type doubles. These doubles are made in order to inform partner but at the same time they can be easily be converted to penalty doubles.

Maximal Overcall Doubles. Occasionally, when both opponents' are bidding, it interferes with the ability of the opening bidder and the responder to make trial bids or game tries. It is in such situations that maximal overcall doubles are used. Thus a double when there is not room to make a suit game try becomes a game try of it's own.....but since it shows extra values it can be converted to penalty.

(a) <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u>	(b) <u>North</u> <u>East</u> <u>South</u> <u>West</u>
1♠ 2♥ 2♠ 3♥	1♠ 2♦ 2♠ 3♦
. DBL	DBL.

Cooperative Doubles. Modern bidding has almost become obsessed with doubles that are not clearly penalty but otherwise have no specific meaning. Such doubles have been termed cooperative because they apply in competitive situations (after

you and partner have found a fit) and are an invitation to either bid again or sit for the double as though it were a penalty double. Sometimes these are very subtle in the auction but they are intended to show uncertainty about whether bidding more or defending is best at this particular point. (a)

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
1D	1H	2D	2H
Pass	Pass	<u>DBL</u>	

Penalty Doubles. Almost all other doubles are penalty!! But, there are some specific situations that are by definition penalty. These, then, are rules!!

(1) The double of an opening strong No Trump bid at any level is penalty except when made by a passed hand or when you've adopted a convention to the contrary.

(2) The double of a No Trump overcall at any level is penalty except when made by a passed hand or when you've adopted a convention to the contrary.

(3) If either you or your partner has made a natural strong No Trump call in the auction, doubles of opponents' bids are penalty.

(4) An "out of the blue" double at the three level or higher is penalty. (Doubler has remained silent until then).

(5) If either you or your partner has made an earlier penalty double or made a penalty pass of a takeout double, a double is penalty.

(6) If either you or your partner has made a preemptive bid and the other doubles, it's penalty. (IT IS NOT NEGATIVE). Example: 3♦ 3♥ DBL is penalty.

(7) Generally speaking a rule to remember is that in competitive auctions if the double is over the bidder (or behind), it's penalty. If it's under the bidder (or in front of), it's takeout. And if you think about this for a minute or two it makes sense. Thus in the auction 1NT 2♥ Pass Pass DBL, the double is intended for takeout, but in the auctions 1NT Pass Pass 2♥ DBL or 1NT 2♥ DBL, the doubles are penalty.

Happy Doubling!!

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