

DOUBLES

This series is all about adding to your armoury to make your bidding more efficient. It's not about adding obscure agreements that come up every few years which get forgotten. If you take up anything new, then it needs to be agreed, it needs to be remembered and it needs to be more efficient than what went before. There is a sad story about a regular pair who played a 2NT response to an Acol 2♣ as showing a six-card suit with two top honours. They waited patiently for it to come up and it duly did after a number of years. The opening hand bid 3♣ to find out which Suit his partner had and then... it came out one of them thought they bid the suit and one of them thought they Transferred into their suit. Some time in 2030 they may get another, more successful, board for this convention, but It will be longer than that before it shows a profit! Take up the ideas in this series, learn them and play them with your Regular partner and you should see an improvement in your club score.

The double is one of the most powerful weapons in your armoury and agreeing with partner how you use it is key to getting more hands right. If you ask someone who had been playing in 1955 he would be astonished, maybe appalled, at how many doubles are no longer for penalties.

Time for a hand. You hold:

♠ K Q 7  
♥ 9 3  
♦ A Q 5  
♣ K Q J 9 8

West North East South  
1♣ 1♥ Pass 2♥  
?

What to do next? You are too good to pass, you can't bid no-trumps because you have no heart stop, to rebid clubs would show more clubs and few points, so what is left? The answer is to double. This is for take-out and shows the values for a strong no-trump or more. Partner might hold:

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ 5 4 2  
♦ K J 10 7 6 4  
♣ 5

He couldn't bid over 1♥, he wouldn't enjoy your bidding 3♣, but he would be delighted to know you had a good hand and some diamond support. You don't have to have four and partner should bear that in mind.

On the other hand, he might have:

♠ 8 6 3  
♥ 5 4 2  
♦ K J 7  
♣ 10 7 6 5

Now partner has an easy 3♣ bid over the double.

**To double in an auction will often save your having to guess what to do, and involves partner in the discussion.**

Suppose the auction starts:

West North East South  
1♣ 1♥ Dbl 2♥  
?

You hold the following:

♠ K 10 7  
♥ 7 4  
♦ A K 4  
♣ A Q 9 4 2

Partner has shown four spades for his negative double, but you have no idea how good his hand is. You don't have any clear bid, so once again you double to suggest better than a minimum opening, not a four-card spade suit, else you would have supported, and no ability to bid notrumps. Partner might hold:

♠ Q J 8 4  
♥ J 8 3  
♦ Q 9 8 5  
♣ J 3

He can bid 2♠ hoping to get out at the cheapest level. He has already denied five spades else he would have bid 1♠ instead of doubling.

On the other hand, he might hold:

♠ Q J 8 4  
♥ A Q 5  
♦ 5 3 2  
♣ J 10 3

In which case he would be delighted to bid 3NT knowing you had approximately strong no-trump values. One reason some players are not keen on many take-out doubles is that they fear they will miss large penalties, but this need not happen.

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♥	Dbl	3♥
?			

You hold:

♠ K J 5	
♥ 7	
♦ A K 9 4 3	
♣ K Q 5 2	

You don't support spades as you know partner has only four, you can't bid no-trumps with no stop in hearts and you don't want to bid 4♣ because that rule out 3NT if your partner has a suitable hand. So you double to say you are not sure what to do, but have a decent hand and, lo and behold, partner holds:

	♠ A 9 4 3
	♥ K J 10 9
	♦ 7 6
	♣ 4 3

Partner will be delighted to pass or bid 3NT, depending on the vulnerability. With only eight hearts between them the opponents probably should not be on the three level, but as long as they are, you have an opportunity to collect a penalty. If your partner is going to use doubles as a flexible tool, then he expects you to be flexible as well. Try to find some sort of fit. You won't always find the best fit, but as long as you find a playable one, the opponents find it relatively hard to double (unless they have read this article) and may be pushed up a level.

**Pushing them one level higher is a principal aim of using the double in a competitive auction.**

Suppose the auction starts:

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♣
Dbl	2♣	Dbl	Pass
?			

and you hold:

♠ 7 5	
♥ A J 9 2	
♦ Q 8 4 2	
♣ 10 9 7	

What should you do? Partner already knows that you have four hearts. You could bid 3♦ to show your second four-card suit and ask him to choose what if he had

	♠ K 4 3
	♥ Q 7
	♦ A 10 5
	♣ A Q J 6 2

3♣ is the most flexible bid. If you look at the two hands, you don't mind 3♣ too much. It has some chances of making. 3♦ on the other hand could be a bad contract if the trumps do not break. Couldn't you, however be missing a 4-4 diamond fit? Yes, you could, but first you might ask yourself what partner opens if he is 4-4 in the minors with a decent hand. If you don't know then perhaps that should be written down for a discussion. |

## In summary

- Don't sell out too easily, particularly in pairs events.
- The most flexible tool at your disposal is a double to show some extra values and no clear action.
- Sometimes you will collect a penalty as a bonus.
- Be flexible when you double: you can't always have ideal shape, but also be flexible in response and recognise that partner is trying to keep your side in the auction.
- Occasionally, it will go wrong and you may go for -200 or worse, but remember, at pairs, it is the frequency of gain not the size of the gain that is important.