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Bidding Basics

Negative doubles after our notrump opening

Should we use negative doubles when our side has opened 1NT (or 2NT)? Yes. A penalty double is much less likely than a negative (“takeout”) double. Opener has at least two cards in the suit overcalled, and the overcaller usually has six or more. Responder is probably 10 times more likely to be *short* as opposed to long in that suit.

Negative doubles should be used when your 1NT opening is overcalled with a natural bid. For example, after 1NT–(2♥), you would want to double with a common hand like:

♠Q 8 7 6 ♥4 2 ♦A 10 3 2 ♣J 4 3.

A hand that wants to make a penalty double, such as:

♠A 2 ♥Q 10 8 7 6 ♦5 4 3 ♣8 7 6,

is unlikely (more on that below).

A double of the opponent’s overcall (of our notrump opening) should show “cards” and “the other suits.” Let’s see if we can home in on those vague quote marks with some examples.

After 1NT–(2♥*)–?

*Assume 2♥ is natural; later, we will mention the possibility of it being conventional.

Double with:

♠A 10 3 2 ♥2 ♦J 9 8 7 ♣J 7 6 5.

Perfect, because it is always nice to have four cards in the unbid major.

But also double with imperfect hands such as:

♠K J 7 6 ♥6 5 4 ♦Q 10 2 ♣J 9 3

or

♠Q 10 2 ♥3 2 ♦K 8 7 6 ♣Q 10 7 2.

Without the availability of a negative double, you would not be as well placed with any of those hands.

Can the doubler have more points?

Sure, double a 2♠ overcall of 1NT with:

♠5 ♥A 10 3 2 ♦Q 10 7 6 ♣K Q 3 2

or

♠A 2 ♥K Q 6 5 ♦K 10 3 2 ♣Q 3 2.

Of course, you are planning to insist on game with these hands.

Note: There is a convention called *lebensohl* that can be used here, but it is beyond the scope of this “newcomers” column.

Second note: If your opponents use conventions after your 1NT opening, it can get complicated. But, as long as they show the suit they bid (for example, 2♥ to show hearts and a minor), you can and should use negative doubles.

Negative doubles are even more handy at higher levels.

1NT–(3♥)–?

Without negative doubles, you’d be stuck with hands such as:

♠Q x x x ♥x ♦K 10 x x ♣A J x x

or

♠x x ♥x ♦A J x x x ♣A J x x x.

A double of any natural overcall of a 1NT or 2NT opening simply is not for penalty. It is up to opener to choose a suit or retreat to notrump. With lots of cards/strength in the opponent’s suit, opener could choose to pass and play for penalty. For example, suppose you open 1NT with:

♠A x ♥Q J 9 8 x ♦A x x ♣K J x.

Surprisingly, the overcall is 2♥.

Partner doubles and you can smile and pass (well, try not to smile).

What if the responder wants to double for penalties? As stated, this is most unlikely, but the same principles as discussed earlier in this series

apply. Responder can pass and hope opener doubles for takeout – and then leave it in. Let’s say the 1NT opener has:

♠A 10 x x ♥x x ♦A Q x x ♣A Q x.

There is a 2♥ overcall, passed back to opener. The correct call is a double. This is takeout. Responder will leave it in with, say, an unlikely:

♠K x ♥Q 10 x x x ♦x x x ♣J x x,

(he was hoping, probably expecting, opener would double) or pull to 2♠ with, say:

♠Q 9 x x ♥x x x ♦J x x x ♣x x.

The 1NT opener should balance with a double any time he holds a doubleton in the suit overcalled (but not with three or more).

A double of an (unlikely) overcall of our 2NT opening should also be “negative.”

Newer Players

QUIZ

What is your call as responder after 1NT-(2♠) with:

1) ♠Q 4 3 ♥J 7 6 5 ♦J 4 3 ♣Q 3 2

2) ♠4 3 ♥A 10 8 7 ♦K 4 3 ♣J 10 7 2

3) ♠2 ♥A 8 7 6 ♦K 7 6 5 ♣J 10 8 7

4) ♠K J 9 7 5 ♥2 ♦9 7 5 ♣K 6 5 4

What is your call as responder after 1NT-(3♦) with:

5) ♠K 10 2 ♥Q 8 7 6 ♦2 ♣Q 7 6 5 4

6) ♠Q J 3 ♥Q 10 ♦Q 5 4 ♣A J 7 6 5

What is your call as the 1NT opener after 1NT-(2♠)-Pass-Pass?

7) ♠5 4 ♥A 10 8 7 ♦A K 2 ♣A J 8 2

8) ♠Q 10 7 2 ♥K 8 7 ♦A Q J ♣K Q 2

Answers

1) Pass. Lots of garbage with more defense than offense.

2) Double. Negative/takeout.

3) Double. Negative/takeout. Imagine playing penalty doubles?

4) Pass. The rare case where you want to double for penalties. Likely, partner will be short in spades and reopen with a takeout double which you will leave in.

5) Double. Negative/takeout (on any level).

6) 3NT. The same as you would have bid without the overcall.

7) Double. Takeout (“automatic” with a doubleton in their suit).

8) Pass. A maximum in high-card points, but no alternative. Double would not be for penalty. ■