



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

We play negative doubles. I was told opener should strain to reopen the bidding with a double in the following type of auction:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	Pass	Pass
?			

I don't think I really understand.
MC

Hi, MC,

One of the advantages of using negative doubles is that it allows responder to express values in contested auctions where otherwise he would not be able to. For example, on the auction above, say responder (East) holds:

♠9 5 ♥A Q 7 3 ♦K 8 6 4 ♣6 5 4.

His double is like bidding 1♥. Without the negative double, he has to pass because he lacks the values to respond in a new suit at the two level.

Worldwide Bridge Contest update

In the report on the top scores from the Worldwide Bridge Contest (August issue, pg. 28), we failed to include the great result of Bermudians Annalies Scheland and Heather Woolf. The duo scored a 69% game on Saturday, June 6. This result was the eighth-best ACBL-wide on that date and the 13th best worldwide.

Adopting a convention means that you generally have to give up the natural meaning of a call. Prior to playing negative doubles, the simple solution would be to make a penalty double with a hand such as this:

♠5 ♥A 7 6 ♦J 10 3 2 ♣K J 9 7 5.

Playing negative doubles, however, you no longer have that option.

Because of responder's inability to make an immediate penalty double of an overcall, opener – holding the right hand – should indeed strain to reopen with what is effectively a takeout double after LHO overcalls and partner passes. The double allows responder to either pass for penalties with the appropriate holding, or otherwise take out the takeout double.

As opener, consider each of the following:

♠A K 8 5 4 ♥A 7 5 ♦Q 10 8 7 ♣3

♠A 8 6 5 3 ♥A K 6 5 ♦J 9 6 ♣6

♠Q J 10 6 4 ♥A K 5 ♦A 9 3 ♣8 7

The auction proceeds as yours did. With these hands, opener should make what is effectively a delayed takeout double. Notice the pattern: shortness in the opponent's suit with tolerance for the unbid suits.

Consider the reasons East passed originally over 2♣. Either he held a limited hand or he wanted to penalize the overcaller. With length and strength in the overcalled suit, he has an easy answer: pass, converting his partner's takeout double into a penalty

double.

What happens when responder holds a limited hand with no convenient bid? Examples:

♠6 4 ♥J 8 6 5 2 ♦8 6 5 ♣A 8 7

♠7 ♥9 4 3 ♦K 10 6 5 2 ♣9 6 5 2

♠9 3 ♥8 7 6 ♦9 8 5 ♣Q 7 5 4 3

With the first example, bid your heart suit. With the second, bid 2♦. With the last hand, take your partner back to 2♠ and be glad you don't have to play it!

All of this being said, opener should not reopen with a double in most cases where he knows his partner cannot possibly hold a penalty pass or when he doesn't have at least three-card support for all of the unbid suits:

♠Q J 8 7 4 ♥A K ♦9 7 ♣K 10 6 2

In this example, opener's club holding makes it unlikely that his partner has a penalty double of the 2♣ overcall. What's the only other holding he could have? You guessed it ... either a weak hand or one with no convenient bid.

If opener is distributional, he doesn't have to reopen with a double.

♠A J 9 8 5 4 3 ♥A K ♦J 5 4 ♣2

♠Q J 7 6 5 ♥A K 10 8 6 ♦A 5 ♣3

Bid 2♠ on the first hand, and 2♥ on the second. Both actions suggest extra playing strength since partner has passed and could hold a terrible, misfitting hand. ■