



Ask Jerry

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Hi Jerry,

We had a terrible result on a hand the other night, and I realize I have no idea how to handle the situation when it comes up again. I'd appreciate your advice.

Partner opens 1NT (15–17) and my RHO doubles (equal value hand). My hand was:

♠ 4 3 ♥ Q 7 ♦ 8 7 5 4 ♣ J 9 7 6 5.

I thought my choices were either pass or redouble (SOS). I passed. LHO smiled as he passed. Partner shrugged and passed. We were down three. My hand might have been:

♠ 4 3 ♥ J 7 ♦ 8 7 5 4 ♣ A Q 9 6 5,

in which case we would be fine.

Because the most I could hold would be 10 points, how do I tell partner whether I have zero, 10, or somewhere in between? I've been told that I should always pass the double, but that doesn't seem right, because that leaves partner totally in the dark. Is a redouble by me really SOS or does that bid belong to the notrump? Have I overlooked another possibility?

Final question: Why do we torture ourselves with this game?

TF

Hi TF,

As always, any partnership agreement is always superior to no agreement! Some of your opponents, including many top-flight players, do not think a penalty double of a strong notrump occurs with enough frequen-

cy to merit its inclusion, preferring instead to use double as some type of conventional takeout. Since others, including myself, do like the double as penalty, it may be relevant to point out what a penalty double of a strong notrump should actually look like. After RHO opens 1NT, holding:

♠ K J 9 ♥ A Q 5 ♦ K J 8 4 ♣ Q 5 3,

I would not consider doubling unless partner winked at me and told me which of my four suits he held five cards or more including one of the high honors. Just pass, and hope to go plus.

However, holding:

♠ K Q J 10 6 3 ♥ A 3 ♦ Q 10 7 ♣ A 6,

I would consider this a clear-cut penalty double. The opponents are unlikely to sit for 1NT doubled, but if they do, I'm pretty sure they're going down. If they run to a new suit, I can always bid spades now, clarifying the nature of my very strong hand.

Notice on the first example, with no clear-cut lead, why would I double, announcing where the strength was? If partner has something, they're going down. If partner has nothing, at least we don't enter the auction and get doubled in whatever contract we end up in.

When you do face a penalty double, there are many different options available, but a relatively simple agreement is as follows, which is basically Systems On:

1) An immediate bid of 2♣ is Stayman-ish. For instance, holding:

♠ 7 6 4 2 ♥ Q J 5 ♦ J 8 6 4 3 ♣ 5,

bid "Stayman," and pass any response opener makes. We might be in trouble but we are probably in less trouble playing in a suit contract.

2) The immediate bids of 2♦ or 2♥ remain as transfers. With a weak hand, and a five-card or longer major, scamper to the hoped-for safety of your five-card or longer suit. Holding:

♠ 8 5 3 ♥ Q 7 5 3 2 ♦ 10 8 7 4 ♣ 3,

transfer to hearts.

3) A redouble asks the opening notrump bidder to bid 2♣, which you will either pass, holding long clubs, or convert to 2♦, holding long diamonds. If the opening notrump bidder has a good five-card suit of his own, he is permitted to bid it, but does so at his own peril. The hand in your question would qualify for a redouble, planning to pass partner's 2♣ bid.

If you hold moderate, balanced values, you can pass and hope the opponents have made a mistake. Perhaps something like:

♠ J 10 7 ♥ Q 7 6 ♦ J 10 4 ♣ Q 6 4 3.

You may be going down, but you have no clear path for escape. Even better:

♠ Q J 10 ♥ K 3 ♦ J 10 8 4 ♣ Q J 5 3.

If it were permissible (it is *not*!), I would smile and pass, because I strongly suspect they have made a mistake.

Final answer to your Final Question: Ritual floggings were practiced by the Spartans and other religious sects as a type of catharsis. Perhaps bridge is simply a modern extension of this! ■