



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Yesterday at the local club, my partner opened 1♣ and my right-hand opponent overcalled 1NT. I held 4-4 in the majors with 7 HCP and made a negative double. It went all pass, and they made an over-trick. I don't think partner should have passed, and she doesn't think I should have doubled. Advise!

Sara

Hi Sara,

It's rare that I can provide a definitive answer without seeing anyone's actual hand. Unfortunately, in this case, you are the offending party. A quick review of negative doubles, and specifically their purpose, should be a good start.

The negative, or Sputnik double, as it was originally known to the expert community, was first recommended by Alvin Roth in the mid-1950s. It was a direct offshoot of moving from four-card-major opening bids to five-card majors. The basic intent was to uncover a secondary potential fit, especially in a major, after a minor-suit opening was met with an overcall. A classic example:

1♣ 1♠ ?

♠7 5 3 ♥K J 6 4 ♥K J 6 5 ♣7 2

The shift to five-card majors means that in this auction, opener could hold four strong hearts and three low clubs,

something that would be unlikely if partner could have opened a four-card major. Using double in this sequence as takeout for the unbid suits was a much-needed change to previous methods, allowing you to compete. The basic premise was to use double as a search for alternate contracts rather than for penalties.

In your auction, between your partner's opening bid and RHO's announced 15-18 points, there is little reason to fish for a potential two-level alternative contract that may not exist. It is standard practice to play that your double is 100% penalty with zero indication of shape. Your values are typically in the 10-plus category.

Think about it. Opener generally holds 12 or more points, RHO around 16, and you hold at least 10. What do you think dummy might look like? Worthless would be a good start. Your double in this sequence announces ownership of the hand, and strongly suggests that either we play the hand, or the opponents play a doubled contract. After your partner opens one of any suit, and your RHO overcalls 1NT, each of the following qualify for a penalty double:

♠K Q J 7 6 ♥8 3 ♦A 7 4 ♣8 6 4
 ♠7 6 ♥A K 3 ♦Q 10 7 4 ♣J 10 8 6
 ♠A 7 6 3 ♥K 9 8 3 ♦7 4 ♣Q J 6

While each of these examples have exactly 10 HCP, it would be perfectly acceptable to hold more!

The flip side of this is that if responder does not double 1NT, he does not hold a good hand.

That doesn't mean he shouldn't bid. With any long suit or any shapely two-suited hand, responder should tend to bid. His failure to double denies a good hand, therefore any bid he makes is non-forcing.

After: 1♣/1♦-(1NT)-?

- 1) ♠Q J 10 8 5 3 ♥4 ♦J 6 5 4 ♣6 3
- 2) ♠10 5 ♥K J 8 5 4 3 ♦6 4 ♣9 6 3

With both hands, responder should get his long suit involved.

After: 1♣/1♦-(1NT)-?

- 3) ♠K 8 7 5 2 ♥A 7 6 4 2 ♦3 ♣9 4
- 4) ♠A J 10 8 ♥Q J 9 6 2 ♦9 5 4 ♣3

It is often a good idea to bid on these types of hands. There are a number of conventional treatments which could be useful in this situation. Any artificial bid that shows both major suits would be preferable to pass by my standards.

After: 1♥-(1NT)-?

- 5) ♠7 ♥Q 6 4 2 ♦J 10 7 5 4 ♣7 6 2
- 6) ♠7 2 ♥K Q 6 4 2 ♦10 5 ♣9 7 6 2

Following my long-standing advice of looking for reasons to bid before settling for excuses to pass, with both of these, a preemptive jump to 3♥ would be in order. Remember, all good hands start with a double. ■