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# Bidding Basics

## Negative doubles, continued

**T**his month, we will discuss what to do on the rare occasions when responder wants to make an old-fashioned penalty double of an overcall. Suppose your partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♠. Neither side is vulnerable, and you are holding:

♠K Q 10 8 7 ♥A 2 ♦3 2 ♣10 7 6 5.

You could bid 1NT (letting the opponents off the hook), but wouldn't you like to double for penalty?

You can't. Double would be negative (not for penalty). But you can, sort of. Playing negative doubles, there is a way to have your cake and eat it, too. Simply pass. You are hoping (expecting, really) that *your partner* will double. Yes, your partner. Let's say you pass and your LHO passes and your partner holds a hand with shortness in spades (not surprising) such as:

♠5 ♥K 10 8 7 ♦A K 6 5 4 ♣Q 3 2.

Even though partner has a minimum in high-card points, he should double. His double is not penalty (it would be unusual for opener to have a hand that wants to penalize their overcall). It is takeout. You will now smile (well, don't do that – maybe drool a little?) and pass. They will be in 1♠ doubled, as you hoped. This strategy of passing and hoping/expecting opener to double for takeout is referred to as a “trap pass.”

When the opponents overcall (on any level) and you have an old-fashioned penalty double, the key is to pass – don't make the mistake of doubling and thinking partner will magically read it. Try to do this without breaking tempo or looking surprised. Don't ask questions like, “Do you play sound overcalls?” Trust that opener

will almost always double, because it is his duty to do so with shortness in their suit. As opener, I recommend “always” doubling with a singleton in their suit. Opener should usually double with a doubleton in their suit. Only if he has three or more cards (unlikely if you and overcaller have length) will opener let you down and not reopen with a takeout double.

Examples:  
All vulnerable.

*Partner*

♠A Q 8 7 6 ♥2 ♦A Q 3 2 ♣J 9 2

*You*

♠5 ♥K 10 8 7 6 ♦J 8 7 6 ♣A 5 4

West	Partner	East	You
	1♠	2♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

*Partner*

♠2 ♥K Q J 10 8 ♦A K 8 2 ♣Q 10 4

*You*

♠A Q 9 7 ♥3 2 ♦J 7 6 5 ♣9 7 2

West	Partner	East	You
	1♥	2♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

Our side vulnerable against not vulnerable:

*Partner*

♠K Q 10 8 7 ♥K Q 5 ♦2 ♣K 7 6 5

*You*

♠A J ♥A 10 2 ♦Q J 8 7 ♣Q 10 4 2

West	Partner	East	You
	1♠	3♦	3NT
All Pass			

More practical to take the likely 600 or so than to first hope for a reopening double and then to need to set them four tricks at this vulnerabil-

ity (down three doubled for +500 will be a bottom if everyone else bids and makes a vulnerable 3NT our way).

*Partner*

♠K Q J 10 9 7 6 ♥— ♦Q 6 5 2 ♣K 2

*You*

♠5 ♥K J 7 6 5 ♦K 9 8 7 ♣J 5 4

West	Partner	East	You
	1♠	2♥	Pass
Pass	2♠	All Pass	

Opener “knows” you have a trap pass, but he has negative defense and ▶▶

## Newer Players

would want to pull an old-fashioned penalty double, so he reopens with 2♠ instead of double. When opener is void in their suit, he should be leery about doubling and having to defend with no trumps at all.

We'll spend the next two months examining opener's rebid after partner's negative double.

### QUIZ

As opener, what is your call (none vul) after 1♦-(1♥)-Pass-Pass?

- ① ♠A 10 8 7 ♥2 ♦A 8 7 4 2 ♣K J 3
- ② ♠K Q 10 8 7 ♥— ♦A J 9 8 7 4 ♣4 2
- ③ ♠A K Q 2 ♥— ♦A 10 8 7 6 ♣A 7 6 4

As responder, what is your call (none vulnerable) after 1♦-(1♥)?

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

As responder, what is your call (both vulnerable) after 1♣-(4♥)?

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

### Answers

- ① Double. And don't be surprised if partner leaves it in for penalty.
- ② 1♠. Your plan was to open 1♦ and bid spades twice. Yes, partner probably wants to defend against 1♥ doubled, but that is not what you have in mind.
- ③ Double. Not thrilled to be void in their suit, but you have lots of defense.
- ④ Pass. Not enough for a negative double. If partner reopens with a takeout double, take it out to 1♠ (you are not dying to defend on the one level).
- ⑤ Pass. And hope (expect) partner to double for takeout, which you will leave in.
- ⑥ Pass. Same reasoning as No. 5. Notice that Nos. 1, 2, 3 are paired with 4, 5, 6 and observe how the actions of responder and opener will work out.
- ⑦ Pass. You'd like to defend, but if you double, partner will often take it out (what you don't want).
- ⑧ Double. Whatever partner decides, you'll be content.