

DOUBLE TROUBLE

In the three previous months, we reviewed the two hugely important topics of takeout and negative doubles. We then moved on to Responsive Doubles made by Advancer (the partner of the Takeout Doubler or overcaller).

This month, we cover what I consider the most-forgotten convention: Support Doubles. For some reason, players using this method either forget to double, forget to alert, or forget that their partner used this convention.

Let's first make an important distinction: A Support Double can be made only by the Opening Bidder (at his second turn to bid). This will be the 5th action taken in the bidding—after four players have taken a call. Contrast that to the three doubles earlier in this series:

Takeout Double (which is made usually by the 2nd player in the auction)
Negative Double (which is made only by the Responder—the 3rd player to act)
Responsive Double (made by advancer; the 4th player in the auction).

SUPPORT DOUBLES

Opener's Support Double shows 3-card Support for responder's suit. For example:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	1S
Dbl			

The double says: “**Opener has exactly 3 hearts.**” Period. It says nothing about strength. It could be a dead-minimum opening, or could be a 20-count. The opener will describe his strength later in the auction. For now, the double shows nothing other than possession of exactly three hearts. If opener had four hearts, he'd raise (to 2H with a minimum, to 3H to invite, or to the 4-level with enough for game). If opener had fewer than three hearts, he'd either pass or make some other call (all of which would deny three hearts).
So:

There is no shortcut for newer players wishing to master all of these doubles. They require study, practice and patience. Just a quick-read is not sufficient and likely to lead to confusion and frustration.

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	1S

Dbl=exactly 3 hearts, any strength

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	1S

2H=4 spades, minimum opening

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	1S

2C=Natural, both minors, **fewer than 3H**

What's alertable? Nobody can ever be sure what the ACBL alert-rule du jour is; especially when it comes to doubles. I hope my editors allow me to leave in my thoughts here. I believe that a pair playing Support Doubles should alert *all* aspects. I would alert every action by opener in the three auctions above. Surely the Support Double is alertable (though ACBL generally advises that doubles are not alertable—go figure!). If the raise promises four-card support, I'd say "ALERT." If asked, I'd explain that it *guarantees* four-card support. If opener does something else, such as rebidding a new suit or notrump—or even passing—he has categorically denied three spades. Why not let the opponents in on the secret? On the final auction above, I would alert 2C as natural, but denying three spades. So, I alert every single action by opener. If asked what the ALERT to "Pass" means, I just say: "Denies three spades." I can't see how it can ever be a problem to "over-alert" when you have information which your opponents are entitled to know.

WHEN ARE SUPPORT DOUBLES ON?

Certainly, after any opening bid and any one-level response, Support Doubles are on (if the partnership has agreed to use this convention). While there might be a few pairs who have "exceptions" (such as not after a one-diamond response, or not with minimums), I prefer to keep it pure and simple. Any time the auction begins:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1 of a suit	Anything	1 of a suit	Any 1-level bid

Double shows exactly three-card support and any strength. Notice that it doesn't matter what the first Opponent does (he can pass or double or bid), but it is the

second opponent who has to bid (even in notrump). To test your understanding, try this quiz:

QUIZ

As Opener, in which of these auctions would your double show 3-card support for Responder?

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
A) 1D Dbl	Pass	1H	1S
B) 1C Dbl	Pass	1D	1H
C) 1D Dbl	Dbl	1H	1S
D) 1H Dbl	Pass	1S	1NT
E) 1C Dbl	1H	1S	1NT

Answer: All of them! (In E, note that the 1S response promised 5—see previous article on negative doubles—but still, the Support Double is used to show 3-card support and a raise to show 4-card support).

As opener, would you make a Support Double after:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D ??	P	1H	1S

with:

- F) 832 A2 AQ876 Q103
- G) KJ3 A43 KJ765 32
- H) AQ10 432 KQJ7 Q76
- I) A2 KQJ AQJ76 J32

F) No—You don't have 3-card support (you should pass).

G) Yes—Even with a minimum.

H) No—You could systemically double, but 1NT would be a much better description. You are allowed to use judgment (partner will not expect 3-card support—you can say you had a heart in with your diamonds). There will be other occasions where you intentionally suppress three-card support (maybe the opponents overcall on the two-level and you have AQ108 in their suit and 643 in partner's suit). Even though your system dictates doubling with three, you can use sound reasoning to break system (your partner just won't know).

I) Yes—There is no upper limit for Support Doubles. You will show strength later.

THROUGH WHAT LEVEL?

All of the Support Doubles so far have come on the one-level (even if Opening Bidder's RHO has bid 1NT). What if they overcall on the two-level? I suggest you use Support Doubles as long as the bidding is not above 2-of-responder's suit. So, if it goes:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1S	2H,

Support Doubles are on. Even on the two-level, they can be made with a minimum (though, if you'd like to eschew a Support Double on the two-level with a really awful-looking minimum, your partnership can agree to do so). If they overcall above two-of-responder's suit, Support Doubles are still on, but show extras. For example, after:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	3C

Opener can double to show three hearts, but it is not mandatory. Such a double would announce extra values (more than a weak notrump type of hand). If your partnership prefers to use double as something else (such as "extras—but not promising three trump"), that's an acceptable alternative agreement. Just make sure you agree and write on your convention card through what level you play Support Doubles.

SUPPORT REDOUBLES

What if instead of overcalling (after the response), the opponents make a Takeout Double. For example:

<u>OPENER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>RESPONDER</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>
1D	Pass	1H	Double
??			

You can't make a Support Double (bridge doesn't allow doubles of doubles—though at times, I've thought it would be a great idea). But you are allowed to Redouble, and for that reason, pairs who use Support Doubles also use Support Redoubles. In the auction shown, Opener's Redouble would announce 3-card heart support and say nothing about strength. Just as with Support Doubles, Support Redoubles (and the negative inferences) should be alerted.

Support Redoubles can occur only on the one-level. After a two-level response, Support Doubles or Redoubles are never used. For example, if the auction begins by your side 1S P 2C, and the opponents now overcall, a double would be for penalty (not showing three-card club support).

Warning: In all my years of teaching experience, I've never seen a convention that causes more brain-freeze and confusion than Support Doubles. Players constantly forget to use them, forget to alert them, forget to realize partner has used them and forget the negative inferences. I recommend this convention only for players with strong concentration abilities who play frequently.

Next Month, we will....