

Competitive Bidding—Part V
(October 11, 2021)

Thus far in our study of **Competitive Bidding**, we have looked at the **Takeout Double** and the **Negative Double**. Today's focus will be on other types of doubles which can be used in competitive bidding, i.e., **Balancing (Reopening) Doubles**, **Maximal Doubles**, and **Penalty Doubles**.

Balancing (Reopening) Doubles

I. The auction has gone as follows:

West	North	East	South
(1D)	P	(P)	???

South will rarely pass at this point. The E/W pair has died in a 1D auction. Obviously, East did not have the necessary six points to keep the bidding open. North did not have the necessary points/shape to overcall or make a takeout double.

In the above auction, it is likely that the N/S pair has about one-half of the high card points. South **MUST NOT** sell out at 1D. Note that less strength is required to balance than to bid in the immediate seat (North). South (the pass out seat—balancer) knows that his partner must have some values.

Let's look at some examples of the possible hands South might hold in the pass out position.

Example 1. **K986 Q752 65 A87**

Bidding: (1D) P (P) ???

West has opened 1D. Both North and East have passed. In the balancing (reopening) position, add four point to your hand (borrowing from what you think your partner has) and make a **Balancing (Reopening) Double**.

Example 2. **K76 K63 AQ9 9752**

Bidding: (1D) P (P) ???

West has opened 1D. Both North and East have passed. Bid 1NT showing 11-14 HCP, plus a stopper(s) in the opener's suit.

Example 3. A84 K63 AQ9 AJ86

Bidding: (1D) P (P) ???

Here, you have 18 HCP—too strong for a mere one notrump overcall. You need to double first and then rebid 1NT. This bidding sequence shows between 15-18 HCP, plus a stopper(s) in the opener's suit.

II. The auction has gone as follows:

West	North	East	South
(1H)	P	(2H)	P
(P)	???		

As North, you hold the following hand: QJxx x Axxx J10xx

You did not have enough strength to act over the opening bid of 1H. However, now that the E/W pair has stopped in a part score, it is clear that they did not have the HCP necessary for a game in hearts. Your partner figures to have about 10 HCP. Rather than selling out to 2H, you should make a **Balancing (Reopening) Double**.

Perhaps your partner will bid 2S and go down one for a -50 score. But, if the opponents can make 2H, your side will get -110 on the board.

ALWAYS TRY TO PUSH YOUR OPPONENTS TO THE THREE LEVEL.

III. The auction has gone as follows:

North	East	South	West
1D	(1S)	P	(P)
???			

In situations such as the above, it is probably wise to reopen the hand with a double in the pass out position. East probably can make 1S. Also, your partner (South) may hold spades and will convert your reopening double to a penalty double. **Try NOT to sell out hands at low level contracts, if possible.**

*If North (the opener) is short in spades, he should reopen the hand with a **Balancing (Reopening) Double**, even if he held a minimum opening hand.

*If North (the opener) has length in spades, it is better to pass with a minimum, flat hand. Your partner did not have enough points to make a **Negative Double** over East's one spade overcall. In this situation, you stay out of a lot of trouble by putting down the green pass card!

*If North (the opener) is short in the unbid major (hearts) in the example above, then he should be cautious about reopening with a balancing double. He may risk driving the opponents from their 5-1 spade fit into a terrific 4-4 heart fit!!

The following hand illustrates the reopening (balancing) double in action.

	AJ7		Neither side is vulnerable
	AJ4		
	10843		Dealer: West
	1054		
			Bidding: (1D) P (P) X*
			(P) 1N (P) P
			* = balancing double
Q104		532	
K98		1063	
AQ97		KJ2	
K97		J632	
	K986		Contract: 1NT by North
	Q752		
	65		Opening Lead: 2 of diamonds
	AQ8		

Analysis of the Hand:

Whether East leads the king of diamonds or the two of diamonds, North's 10 sets up for a trick.

1. When North gets in with his 10 of diamonds, he should lead a club to South's ace. Always refuse a finesse that is doomed to failure.
2. Lead South's two of hearts and finesse the jack. Play the ace and four of hearts in that order. West gets in with the king of hearts. He can now take the king of clubs. Or, he can lead the four of spades. Either lead helps you.
3. If he leads the spade, you should play dummy's jack. Play the ace of spades and the seven of spades to South's king. When the suit breaks 3/3, you cash dummy's remaining good spade.

One notrump making two should be the normal result on this hand. N/S will get a bottom board if South does not make a balancing double in the pass out seat. Note that the play of the hand was made easier by the fact that West's partner was marked with less than six points. Thus, all finesses should be on. West must have the missing honor cards for his opening bid.

In Conclusion, it requires substantially less strength to balance than to take action in the immediate seat.

Maximal Double

The opponent opens the hand with 1C/1D. Your partner overcalls 1H/1S. You raise your partner's suit to the two level. The opener rebids his suit. If your partner doubles, it is a **Maximal Double**. It promises that your partner was at the top of his overcall range (See Special Doubles and Simple Overcall on the Convention Card.) Your partner is asking you to rebid either 3H/3S or 4H/4S depending on the size of your initial raise of his suit.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

South	West	North	East
(1C)	1H	(2C)	2H*
(3C)	X**	(P)	???

* = Three card heart support, constructive bid

** = Maximal Double

He probably holds the following type hand: Jx AKQxx Kxx Axx

a) If you hold: Qxxx J10x AQxx xx Bid 4H

b) If you hold: Kxxx Jxx Qxxx xx Bid 3H

Penalty Doubles

In a previous lesson (refer to the August 2nd lesson on Penalty Doubles), I covered the situations in which your side should make a penalty double of a low-level contract. Because it is so important to be able to recognize the situations in which your side should double for penalty, I want to revisit this most important topic.

The penalty double is used when you think that your side can SET the opponents in their contract. But, be very careful if they are vulnerable. The following are examples of penalty doubles of low-level contracts.

1. The classic example of the penalty double in action is when the opponent opens one of a suit. Your partner makes a takeout double. If you hold length in the opponent's suit, you can convert the takeout double to a penalty double by passing.

a) (1H) X (P) **PASS!**

Your Hand: Axx K109xx(x) x Qxx(x)

b) (1C) X (P) **PASS!**

Your Hand: Jxx Qxx x AQxxxx

2. If your partner has opened anything and the next player overcalls 1NT, a double by you is 100% for penalty. It is part of the “Hello” system (see July 12th and August 2nd lessons).

1C (1NT) X (P)

Your Hand: Qxx AQx J10x Kxxx

3. If an opponent opens with a weak two bid (2D/2H/2S) and your partner doubles for takeout, you can convert it to a penalty double by passing. Refer to the lesson on Lebensohl—Part II (July 5th) and the lesson on preemptive bidding (April 5th).

(2H) X (P) P

Your Hand: xx KJ10x Kxx Axxx

4. You have opened a weak-two bid (2D/2H/2S) and an opponent has made a takeout double of your bid. If your partner passes initially and the advancer bids any suit, a double now by your partner is 100% for penalty.

2H (X) P (3C)

P (P) X

Your Partner's Hand: Kxx x Kxx KQxxxx

5. Your partner has opened with 1NT. An opponent, who is playing either DONT, Capelletti, Meckwell, etc., makes a bid of a suit in his system. A double by you is for penalty (refer to the Lebensohl—Part I lesson on June 28). **Always make certain you KNOW what the opponent's bid means before making a penalty double of that bid.**

1NT (2S*) X

Your Hand: KJ9x Kx Qxxx Jxx

NOTE: If the opponents do not alert the bid, always make certain you know what it means prior to doubling for penalty.

6. Please refer to the Special Doubles section on your Convention Card. If a double is made above the levels as specified on your Card, then it is always a penalty double. For example, let's say on your Convention Card that you play Negative Doubles through 3S, Responsive Doubles through 3S and Support Doubles through 2S.

Bidding:	East	South	West	North
	(2S)	X	(4S)	X*

*Because you are playing Responsive Doubles through 3S, a double of the 4S bid is for penalty. Below is the complete hand:

	J7653	
	QJ3	
	KJ	
	1074	
842		AKQ109
AK		1094
Q432		986
Q962		J3
	VOID	
	87652	
	A1075	
	AK85	

N/S should set the contract two tricks.

7. The bidding has proceeded as follows:	North	East	South	West
	1H	(2N*)	X	(3C)
	P	(P)	X	

*2N = Unusual NT showing 5/5 in the minors.

E/W is vulnerable; N/S is nonvulnerable.

North's Hand: Q1094 KQJ1095 105 A

South's Hand: xx x KQxx KJ10xx

North opens with 1H. The next hand makes a bid of 2N which shows 5/5 in the minors. When South doubles, he is showing the ability to double for penalty at least one of the minor suits. When he doubles 3C, it is a penalty double.

In the above hand, E/W is vulnerable and N/S is nonvulnerable. North has to decide whether to pull the double, or not. In the above hand, North should pass.

8. Your partner opens 2D (Flannery) showing 4S/5H and 11-15 HCP. If the next player overcalls and your partner doubles, it is for penalty (see August 16th lesson).

2D*	(3C)	X	(P)
P			

Partner's Hand: xxx x AQxx KJ109x

9. Your partner opens with 1H. The next hand makes a takeout double. You redouble (indicating that you have 10+ HCP and little support for hearts--see October 4th lesson. Should the opponents get the contract at the three level or above, either you or your partner should double for penalty.

Bidding:	1H	(X)	XX	(2C)
	2D	(3C)	X	All Pass

Your Hand: Jxxx x Axxx KQxx

Next Week: We will focus on the **Simple Overcall** (including more on the Mixed Raise bids of which you are more familiar)

