

Negative Doubles

Basic Structure and Theory

Presented by Mike Savage

After your partner opens the bidding and your right-hand opponent overcalls, sometimes you can't bid a suit and correctly show your length and strength. **Negative Doubles** were created to help more accurately describe these hands. Playing them, after partner's opening bid and an overcall by the next hand, a double is *not* for penalty but is takeout for any unbid major(s) or if both have been bid, the minors. **Negative Doubles** are usually played through **2S**, **3D** or the popular **3S**. Penalty doubles of **4C**, **4D** or **4H** *may* have values in the opponents' suit, but will always have enough tricks to expect a set. Doubles above **4H** just show tricks.

When partner opens **one of a minor**, followed by a **1S** overcall: **2H** shows five or more hearts and 10+ HCP. What do you do then when you have the 10+ HCP but only four hearts (or you have the five or more hearts but only 6-9 HCP)? The answer is to play **Negative Doubles**, which are for takeout. In this sequence **Dbl** would guarantee four (could have more) hearts—the unbid major—and 6/7+ HCP. Responding to this, Opener can show a fit and his strength by bidding hearts at the appropriate level or lacking a fit, bid whatever is most descriptive of his strength and distribution. Over **one of a minor-1H: Dbl** shows a four-card spade suit and the bid of **1S** shows five or more. Over **1C-1D: Dbl** shows exactly 4-4 in hearts *and* spades and over **1C-1D: 1H** or **1S** only promises a 4-card suit. Over **1H-1S: Dbl** is takeout for both minors.

Negative Doubles at the 1-level:

1C-1D: Double = Shows four cards in both majors and 6-20 HCP.

1C-1D: 1H or 1S = Shows a four or more card suit and 6-20 HCP.

1C or 1D-1H: Dbl = Shows four spades and 6-20 HCP.

1C or 1D-1H: 1S = Shows five or more spades and 6-20 HCP.

1C or 1D-1S: Dbl = Shows four hearts and 7-20 HCP (you also could have five or more hearts *without* the required 10+ HCP to bid **2H**).

1H-1S: Double = Shows at least four-four in the minors and usually 8/9+ HCP.

Negative Doubles are always meant as takeout for the unbid suits at any level. They show the unbid major(s) or often the unbid major *and* the unbid minor. If both majors have been bid, they show both minors. When you make a **Negative Double**, the weaker your hand, the better fit you need with partner. The higher you force your partner to bid, the stronger your hand should be. With a good 4-card holding in the opponents' suit, partner may choose to convert your **Negative Double** to penalties and pass, so you must have appropriate values. Point ranges shown here are good guidelines, not an absolute rule.

Negative Doubles at the 2-level:

1 of a minor-2 of the other minor-Dbl = One or two 4-card majors, 7/8+ HCP & a fit or able to pass *any* bid, or 10/11+ HCP with or without a fit.

1 of a minor-2H-Dbl = Shows 4 spades with 8/9+ HCP *and a fit if you have a minimum*.

2S-Dbl = Shows 4 hearts with 9/10+ HCP *and a fit if you have a minimum*.

1 of a major-2 of a minor-Dbl = Shows 4-cards in the other major with 7/8+ HCP & a fit or able to pass *any* bid, or 10/11+ HCP with or without a fit.

1 of a major-2 of the other major-Dbl = Shows at least 4-4 in the minors, 10+ HCP and somewhere to go, or 5-5+ and about 9 or more HCP.

Negative Doubles at the 3-level (if played):

- 1 of a minor-3 of the other minor-Dbl** = Usually shows both majors (or just one and a fit) and 11/12+ HCP, or game-going values and a rebid.
- 1 of a minor-3 of a major-Double** = Shows 4 cards in the other major and enough values for game or four of partner's minor.
- 1 of a major-3 of a minor-Double** = Shows 4 cards in the other major and enough values for game or four of partner's minor.
- 1 of a major-3 of the other major-Dbl** = Shows the minors (5-5, 5-4, 4-4) and game values.

Sometimes you may have a six-card major suit and not enough points to bid your suit at the two or three level. If your suit is spades or there is only one major suit that hasn't been bid yet, and you have a good suit, you can make a **Negative Double** and bid your major at your next turn to bid. Partner will know you have denied 10 HCP since you didn't bid it directly at your first opportunity but merely have a good 6+ card suit, similar to a weak-two opener. Some samples follow:

- 1S-2C-Dbl-P-2D-P-2H** = Shows at least a 6-card (or good 5-card) suit and less than 10 HCP.
- 1D-2S-Dbl-P-2NT-P-3H** = Shows at least a 6-card suit and less than 10 HCP.
- 1C-2H-Dbl-3H-P-P-3S** = Shows a very good 6-card or a 7-card suit and less than 10 HCP.

In most partnerships playing **Negative Doubles**, there's a *flip side*. You can't make a penalty double anymore, as double is now for takeout through your range of **Negative Doubles**. When you're long and strong in the opponent's suit and want to double for penalty, now you can pass with a good expectation that partner will re-open (with a double, you hope).

Playing **Negative Doubles**, after an overcall-P-P, opener should logically re-open with a **Dbl** with 5-4-3-1, 4-4-4-1 or 4-4-3-2 distribution, when short in the opponents' suit, through the two level (and often the three level) through your range of **Negative Doubles**, regardless of HCP. What if the bidding proceeds **1S-2C-P-P** back to you and you have a normal minimum opener? Where are all the points? Why isn't anyone else bidding? If you have a singleton or small doubleton in the their suit, there is a good chance your partner is loaded for bear and is waiting for your re-opening double to pass with a smile! It's usually best not to re-open with a double when you're void in the opponents' suit or if you have a hand more suitable for offense, such as a 5-5, 6-5+ two-suiter or a 7/8+ card suit, especially after a low level overcall.

The longer you are in the opponents' suit or if you have two or three cards with an honor or two in their suit, the better chance your partner is not lying in wait for a re-opening double by you. Then you should only bid on the merits of your *own* hand. With a minimum, with length and/or strength in the opponents' suit, just pass. With a balanced hand and 18-19/20 HCP you can bid no-trump or if you have more than a minimum but you can't bid no-trump, you can re-open with *whatever* bid best describes the strength and distribution of your hand.

There are also other hands with minimums or near minimums that you might consider re-opening with a **Dbl** or a suit bid. You must always use your judgment and consider what possible gains there are to balancing and what risks—and then decide whether to bid or pass.