

SECRETS OF NEGATIVE DOUBLES

by Steven Gaynor

Negative doubles are used when the opponents interfere with your auction and make it difficult to bid your suits without misleading your partner about your HCP or length of your best suits. The player using the negative double usually has at least two places to comfortably play the hand with an emphasis on unbid majors.

Example: You hold: 53, KQ98, K875, J54

Partner opens 1C, and your RHO bids 1S. While it can happen, it is an extremely rare event when you want to double 1S for penalties. Much more often, you have enough strength (7+) to enter the bidding, but no suit long enough to bid, or your suit is long, but your hand is too weak (7-9) for a 2-level call. In these situations, you can employ the 'negative' double. The **classic** negative double highlights the unbid major(s) and usually promises another place to play if partner does not fit you there. Maybe you have a fit for partner's opening suit or you have the other unbid suit. You may even be able to bid NT if you can stop the opponent's suit. It is most important to be disciplined in these hands, so your partner knows when to bid again or to pass.

When you have a longer suit, it is tempting to bid at the two level, but you run the danger of misleading your partner about your strength. There is a way to handle it – double, then bid your suit. This shows extra length, but limited point count.

Take this quiz with your favorite partner(s). Discuss your responses and come to agreements. The suggested responses on the next page are based on the most common treatments among experienced Standard American partnerships. Of course, you may play anything you want, but these seem to work best in the long run. If you visit a club out of town and get fixed up with a new partner this is most likely to be the way they play it.

Partner opens 1C and RHO bids Spades. What would you do with:

Over 1S Over 2S

1. 53, KJ98, 854, K965
2. AJT, KJT4, 32, Q654
3. 53, KQ9865, 32, Q54
4. A3, KQ9865, 32, Q54
5. 3, KQ9865, QJ975, 2
6. AJT, KJ3, A5, K9743
7. J8754, Q98, A54, 43
8. KQJT9, Q98, A5, Q54

SUGGESTED RESPONSES:

X = double

P = Pass

- 1. X - P.** You have plenty to double over 1S. If your partner bids 2D you can go back to 3C. If he bids hearts, you pass. If he jumps to 3H you will go on for sure at IMP's and probably would at matchpoints, too. Over 2S this is probably the best hand you could hold and not make a negative double.
- 2. X - X.** With your near opener, you have enough to force to the 3 level. Over 3D you may try 3N with double stops in both majors and the likelihood of 5 Club tricks.
- 3. X - X.** Doubling and then bidding a suit tells partner you do not have enough to bid your suit freely, but you have 5+ cards in it. This is **not** forcing, nor should you **ever** entertain bidding hearts directly without at least 10 HCP, or at least a beefy 9. Changing the CQ to the CA would justify a direct 2H call.
- 4. 2H - 3H.** Here you have your direct heart bids at either level. Partner will appreciate hand #4 for a direct heart call vs. hand #3. A Spade bid now by partner would ask you for a stopper for a NT contract.
- 5. X - X.** If your partner rebids clubs, you bid hearts in either case. Nothing you can do about a diamond fit if you have one.
- 6. 2S - 3S.** Sometimes it is tough to bid good hands with interference. You probably have a play for 6C and should aim for that eventually. First, however, you need to find out more about your partner's hand. The best way to do that is to cue bid and see what happens. If you double, your partner may jump in hearts, since you really should have 4 of them in most cases.
- 7. 1N - P.** Bidding 1N here shows your point count well and gives your partner a clue as to what to do next (probably pass). Over 2S, pass, and if partner reopens with a double, do not leave it in as your spades are not close to being good enough. Over partner's reopening X, 2N is your best call in that shows your values (6-9) and a stopper in their suit. Partner should have a pretty good hand to reopen over 2S and will carry on if appropriate.
- 8. P - P.** Now you are out for blood. If you get to defend a spade contract, you will start by drawing trumps and watch them go down a lot, probably more than the value of your game.

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