

PENALTY DOUBLE

The most common situation for a penalty double is when the deal is "your hand" (meaning that your side has 23+ HCP). In this case, if the penalty indicators are present, you would like to double for penalty, then defend maximally:

Penalty Indicators

- Tricks in the enemy trump suit (often a lopsided trump break)
- Poor or moderate fit with partner
- Quick tricks in the side suits
- Strength over their side suit

If your side holds 23 or more HCP "your hand", you should never allow the enemy to play undoubled. Either play the hand or double the opponents. Example:

1H <1S> 2H <2S>
4H <4S> Pass Pass
?

<--- Opener has a problem: Pass? Bid 5H? Double?

Opener

4 2
A K Q 10 5
A K 4
Q 4 2

Responder

5 3
J 9 8 2
8 2
K J 10 7 3

Opener assumes Responder has at least 6 HCP (though Pard is a point short, as usual) to account for 24 HCP. Therefore he must double 4 Spades, or else push to 5 Hearts (which would be poor judgment with such a flat hand and no extra Heart length).

Their Hand

If your side holds 17 or fewer HCP, it is dangerous to penalty double. Declarer will be tipped off and might play the hand to better advantage.

20-20 Deal

You may choose to compete, double, or retire gracefully. With few penalty indicators, bid on or pass; with many penalty indicators, double.

WHEN IS A DOUBLE FOR PENALTY?

There are many types of doubles these days (takeout, negative, support, responsive, maximal, and others). How does one recognize when a double is for penalty?

A double of an opponent's bid is for penalty if:

- Partner has bid or doubled (excluding agreed upon negative etc. double situations)
- There is no unbid suit (e.g. an opponent's 1NT opening bid or overcall)
- The doubled suit is artificial (this is often also a lead-directing double)

Doubling an Opponent's Opening Preempt Bid

Do you have an agreement with your partner when the enemy opens with a preemptive bid? How high can the opponent's bid before the double means penalty? Most play that a double is for takeout through 4H or 4S. Doubler's partner will, however, often pass a high level takeout double, if no offensive contract appeals.

Doubling a Notrump Bid

An direct double of 1NT is for penalty. It shows 15+ HCP with a good suit to lead (very important) or a random 18+ HCP.

A double of a 1 No Trump overcall is a Penalty Double (not a Take-Out Double). This double is usually made with a hand containing 10 high card points or more. Example:

1D <1NT> Double

Opener

K Q J 4
A 7 4
Q 10 7 5
J 2

Responder

A 8 2
K 10 8
J 8 2
Q 9 7 4

Responder has 10 HCP and he figures Opener has 13ish by his opening bid. This makes it "our hand" so the opponents (if they declare) must be doubled. It would be foolish for Responder to bid; his hand is very suitable to play in notrump.

Lead Directing Doubles

The double of an artificial bid (Stayman, Jacoby Transfer, control-showing bids) asks partner to lead that suit. (I LOVE IT when partner makes a lead directing double.)

Penalty Doubles

Board 1

North Deals

None Vul

♠ 9 3
 ♥ K J 9 2
 ♦ A 8 6 4
 ♣ A K 8

♠ 4
 ♥ 10 8 5
 ♦ 7 5 3
 ♣ J 9 5 4 3 2



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

♠ Q 8 6 5
 ♥ A 7 3
 ♦ J 10 9 2
 ♣ 7 6

West

North

East

South

1 NT

2 ♠

Dbl

All pass

East's 2♠ bid is sound (but will likely run into trouble this time).
 South has penalty indicators: a nasty trump surprise and the balance of power.
 West might consider 3♣, but correctly passes.

Lead: ♦ J

North-South cash six side winners, then North leads ♥ or ♣ to promote South's second trump trick.
 To cash *three* ♥ winners, North must lead the ♥Jack (surrounding Dummy's ♥Ten).
 After cashing side-suit winners, North leads a round suit -- East trumps with an intermediate ♠.
 South builds *two* trump tricks by discarding instead of over-ruffing. The ♠8 promotes into a winner

Penalty Doubles

Board 2

East Deals

N-S Vul

♠ 8 7 5 2

♥ 6 4

♦ 10 7 6 5

♣ Q J 10

♠ 10

♥ A Q 8 3

♦ Q J 9 3

♣ A 6 5 4



♠ A K J 9 6 4

♥ 2

♦ 8 4 2

♣ 7 3 2

♠ Q 3

♥ K J 10 9 7 5

♦ A K

♣ K 9 8

West

North

East

South

2 ♠

3 ♥

Db1

All pass

East has a normal weak-two bid (although some desperados would open "Three ♠" 1st seat fav).

South's 3♥ bid is sound and normal (but will likely run into trouble this time).

West has penalty double indicators: a nasty trump surprise and a misfit with partner.

Lead: ♠ 10

E-W must play three rounds of ♠s, West discarding two minor-suit cards (two small ♣s are best).

South will trump the third round of ♠s with a ♥ intermediate (J, T, or 9); West must *not* over-ruff.

When defending with a trump stack, you can often promote a high trump spot (such as an Eight)

into a winner by preserving larger trumps. Be reluctant to over-ruff with a natural trump winner.