

Learning Points – Doubling Opponent’s Indiscretion

By Steve Moese (Mike Purcell, ed.)

July 13, 2010

Declarer Play Level: Intermediate

West Deals	♠ 87
Both Vul	♥ K6543
MPs	♦ 108
	♣ QJ53

♠ AK3	N	♠ Q109
♥ Q	W 7 E	♥ AJ1072
♦ AQ32	S	♦ 4
♣ A10764		♣ K982
Steve		Bruce

♠ J6542	EW:5N,6♣
♥ 98	
♦ KJ9765	
♣ -	

Tuesday Club Game, July 13, 2010 Ms. Kay Mulford, Director.
Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . Bruce Parent is my partner. We play 2/1 Game Force.

Doubling low level contracts can be rewarding. Often you find more value than your game. Less often you find less value than a possible slam. Decisions, decisions.

The Bidding

West chose to open ♣s - the longer minor, content to reverse into ♦s at the next opportunity. North made a speculative weak jump overcall and East passed in anticipation. South passes as expected, and West obliges with a double. When playing negative doubles, we reopen with a double when we hold takeout shape. West certainly has the right shape. East happily converted the reopening double to a penalty double by passing. South had no more to say, expecting an 8 card fit at the 2 level (the Law of Total Tricks suggests this should be safe at equal vulnerability).

West	North	East	South
1♣	2♥!!?	Pass	Pass
Double ¹	All Pass		
1= Reopening Double (Negative Double)			
South leads the ♦4			

A weak jump shift by North should show a hand with 5 certain tricks (Rule of 2-3-4-5). Here North should be 3 tricks away from making 8, or have 5 winners with ♥s as trumps. While North does indeed have only 8 losers, the anemic trump suit bodes ill for this choice.

West has an important decision to make about the hand – with 19 HCP and 3=1=4=5 shape, slam could be possible. The ♥Q appears wasted in a minor suit contract for East West, but is an asset defending against 2♥ Doubled by North. This is a close decision and West gets only one chance to make it.

The Play

Declarer sees only a 7 card trump fit and 10 HCP between the 2 hands. With the opponents holding 30 HCP, down 2 doubled for minus 500 will be a better score than any game. If East West can make slam then there’s more leeway, but slam on 30 HCP is not necessarily a good bet.

East leads the ♦4, ducked to West’s ♦Q. North wants to kill ♣ ruffs in Dummy so the switch to the ♥Q comes next. Declarer ducks (a critical play). West then cashes 2 high ♠s (revealing the ♠ break) and the ♦A followed by a small ♦. North ruffs this with the ♥3 and East over ruffs with the ♥7. East cashes the ♥A to extract dummy’s last trump, then leads the ♣2 (suggesting a high ♣ honor). West wins with the ♣A. South pitches a small ♠ and North follows low. East West win the first 8 tricks. The ♣6 forces North to split honors and East wing the ♣K. The ♠Q now shortens declarer and ensures down 4. Note if declarer covers the ♥Q then NS will go

Position after Trick 8 - East to lead		♠
		♥ K6
		♦
		♣ QJ5
♠ 3	N	♠ Q
♥	W 5 E	♥ 102
♦ 3	S	♦
♣ 1076		♣ K9
Steve		Bruce
		♠ J6
		♥
		♦ KJ9
		♣ -

down 6 – try it! 2♥ Doubled down 4 for plus 1100 was worth 11 of 11 Match Points. No one bid the ♣ slam. North succeeded in keeping us out of our slam at too high a price.

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
MPs	2	4	4	7.5	11	10		1	4	7.5	7.5	0	7.5
Result	600	630	630	660	1100	800		500	630	660	660	-200	660

Post Mortem

While weak jump shifts on a 5 card suit can work well, we recommend more strength in the suit than North had here, and some useful shortness that will allow winning small trumps as ruffs. A better hand would be: ♠ 87 ♥ KQJ43 ♦ 108 ♣ 7653. Were North to hold this hand on this auction, minus 500 would likely be the limit of the hand. Likewise the ♣ slam for East West would be more likely, making the low level weak jump shift even more attractive.

Many players new to competition who use the negative doubles fail to reopen frequently enough to reap the benefits from penalty situations. In general, a singleton or doubleton in opponent's suit merits a reopening double as long as you have 2 quick tricks for your opening bid. If partner takes this double out, be happy that you have raised the auction one level. If partner passes, be prepared to defend for a top.

Holding 3 or more cards in their suit in pass-out seat, PASS. You cannot double here. The opponents will have a hard time (and partner rates to be short in their suit. When partner is short in their suit and passes twice, partner is very weak or very inebriated). A plus score for your side will likely be a good result.

That leaves us with what to do with a void opposite a passing partner. Voids tend to make defense hard (you can't initiate drawing trumps from the "safe" hand). They are also extremely valuable on offense. The odds favor bidding one more time (rebidding a 6-card suit or bidding a side 4-card suit). When a good partner hears a reopening bid instead of a double they will suspect a void in opponent's suit. With super strong hands that can make game opposite little from partner, a cue bid of opponent's suit, and not a reopening double, is called for.

The ♣ slam is difficult to find as this strong field showed. Even if one were to bid it, the slam requires the ♦ finesse, and a strategy to lose only one trump when they break 4-0 missing the ♣QJxx, losing no ♦s. Declarer has to time the play well to have a chance. The a priori odds for this slam to make require a finesse (50%), and that declarer guesses which opponent has the 4-0 split. With a weak jump overcall from North, not many would play North for 4 ♣s to the ♣QJ! I rate this slam to be less likely than 25%. In the long run, 25% of 1370 (or 342.5) is much **much** less than +1100.

Choose what rates to win in the long run.

Learning Points

1. When you have reopening shape opposite a partner who passes when a negative double was possible be sure to reopen with a double. More often than not partner will have a weak hand. When s/he doesn't, you will hit paydirt.
2. When declarer will have to ruff in dummy to promote tricks in the short trump hand, hurry up and lead trumps early and often.
3. When the defenders lead a trump honor and you have an anemic 5-card suit headed by a King or Queen, do not rush to cover. You might be giving up more than one trick.
4. Leading a very low card to signal a high honor is very helpful to the defense.

Keywords: Reopening shape, negative double, penalty pass, slams after opponents interfere