

Trouble With Doubles

It is widely believed that penalty doubles are death blows to weak notrump openings. Doublers envision 800s, 1100s and 1400s falling from the sky. Weak notrumps, like microwave ovens, can be perilous. There is some danger if you drop a microwave on your foot or slam the door on your hand, but if you use it as intended, it is quite safe. The same is true of the weak notrump. If used prudently, the very infrequent successful double is far out weighed by weak notrump benefits.

There are 3 basic types of doubles used against the Weak Notrump. The Capelletti/Hamilton double supposedly is for penalties. It shows the top strength or better of the Weak Notrump. If the doubler's partner does not feel the double will be successful, he pulls the double. There is no way to tell if he is pulling to a 4, 5, or 6 card suit. It is not at all uncommon for the doubler to pull the pull to his 4, 5, or 6 card suit. Neither partner knows what the other has. Unless they hit a 4-4 fit, they often flounder to the 3 level, doubled, of course..

The second type of double is the single suit double, DONT, Brozel, etc. This double is not for penalties, but announces that the doubler has a single suited hand. It can be passed for penalties, but rarely is. The standard response is a relay to 2♣. After which doubler will pass with clubs or bid his suit. There are no high card or suit strength requirements. Some do it with as little as AQxxx and out. Although it is quite possible that there is a game, the doubler's partner rarely takes any further action.

The third type of double is the takeout double. This shows a hand of the same strength range (11-16) of the opening 1NT. This double is

almost harmless. Doubler's partner is required to make a bid, which can be a 4, 5 or 6 card suit with 0 to 16 hcps. He is reluctant to jump in a 4 card suit with 10+ hcp because it may be the doubler's doubleton. Sometimes they find an 8+ fit, but often they thrash around to the 3 level doubled.

The opponents are not alone in having difficulty bidding after their double. Since their point range can be from 6 to 29 hcps, our point range can be from 11 to 34 hcps. A doubled weak notrump must be able to escape severe damage or go to slam. Moreover, this must be doable with both balanced and unbalanced hands. This requires the development of a method to differentiate between high card strengths and suit lengths.

SAWS uses the Cansino convention after an opponent's double. It makes no difference whether the double is penalty, one suited or take out.

Cansino is in effect.

<u>STANDARD CANSINO RESPONSES</u>	
Pass	Requires Opener to reopen with a redouble
Redouble	Relay to 2♣
2♣	Stayman
2♦	Transfer to 2♥
2♥	Transfer to 2♠
2NT	Choose a minor
<u>3m/3M</u>	Preemptive. Alert required.
3NT	Signoff.
4M	Signoff

Responder's bid tends to depend more on his distribution than the type of hand he has. He will still have one of the four basic types of hands: Escape, Competitive, Invitational or Game Going.

It is surprising how often Responder has a Game

Going hand behind the doubler.

With Escape, Competitive and Invitational hands, Responder's action

will be based primarily on distribution. With an Escape hand, given appropriate distribution the Cansino bids of Redouble through 3M should automatically be used. With Competitive or Invitational hands, Responder has to weigh the possible benefits of playing in 1NT Redoubled or doubling the opponent's run out contract, against the possibility of the opponents finding an acceptable fit or even defeating 1NT. All it takes is a 5 card suit and an inopportune lead to beat 1NT. When the opponents find a fit, our fit might have to be found at the 3 level, doubled.

Generally, with distribution for the bids of Redouble through 3M, both the Competitive and Invitational hand should use Cansino, The chances of playing in 1NT Redoubled are not great. When they flee, if the opponents are not vulnerable, they have to be set two tricks to out score any of our partials. When Responder has a balanced hand of 7 to 10 hcps and 1½+ quick tricks, shooting it out at 1NT Redoubled is usually the right call.

Sequences When There Is Double

1NT X 3

1NT Dble Pass Pass A pass of the double requires Opener to redouble at this turn. (On occasion though, opener may bid two of a minor with a 5-6 card suit.) Responder either has an Escape hand without a 5 card suit and wants out of 1NT, or a Competitive or better hand with which he wants to play in 1NTXX.

1NT X 5

1NT Dble Pass Pass Opener's redouble is a required response.
Rdbl Responder will convert it to penalty by passing or run out to his lowest 4 card suit. Opener may bid a 5 or 6 card minor in lieu of the redouble. There is no way to play in 1NT doubled.

1NT X 7

1NT Dble Pass Pass Responder has converted the redouble to a penalty
Rdbl Pass Pass bid. He will have 8+ hcps. With favorable vulnerability, he may have a Game hand.

1NT X 9

1NT Dble Pass Pass Penalty. They are on the run now and will try to find
Rdbl Pass Pass 2x a fit. Unfortunately for them, they can not tell when
Dble a suit is 4, 5 or 6 cards in length. Any further double is for penalty.

1NT X 11

This may be 800 city. Doubler's partner cannot sit for the double and did not have a suit strong enough to run to on the first round. Every effort should be made to double, but since Partner may have opened his usual ragged 11 or the opponents may have stumbled into a good fit, we may have to compete. Responses are as follows:

- Dble Penalty
- 2Z Any suit higher than the opponent's. 5 card suit, no game interest
- 2NT Bid your best minor. If we can make 2NT and not beat 2X, something is wrong. Hence the unusual notrump
- 3m Competitive. Non-forcing
- 3M Forcing
- 3NT Sign off

1NT Dble Pass Pass

1NT X 13

Rdbl Pass 2♣

3 or 4 card club suit. **We are on the run now!** Partner was not strong enough for a penalty pass and does not have a 5 card suit. Since he did not use Stayman, he will not have 2 four card majors and will usually have a doubleton spade. With 3-4 or even 3-3 in the majors, Responder will have usually Staymaned with an Escape hand. He doesn't Stayman with a doubleton spade because if Opener is 4-3-3-3 or 4-2-x-x, play would be in a 4-2 spade fit or at the 3 level, possibly in a very 4-3 fit.

With an Escape hand of 4-3-3-3 or 3-4-3-3 distribution, comes the unfathomable decision as to whether it is best to immediately Stayman after the double or prayerfully wait to see what happens. Waiting has the very real advantage of giving the opponents a chance to rescue you by entering the bidding. This will frequently happen. If they do not enter the bidding, then a choice must be made between bidding the 4 card major or the 3 card club suit. If hearts are bid, then a 4-3 fit is found anytime partner has 4 cards in one major and 3 in the other. If he is 2-3 or 3-2 in the majors, then the contract moves to a 3 level minor suit. Unless you are feeling lucky, do not bid the spade suit with 4-3-3-3

The other alternative is to bid the 3 card club suit. Opener will pass with 3 clubs, but that is not always bad because it makes it easy and tempting for the opponents to enter the bidding. With less than 3 clubs, Opener bids his lowest ranking 4 card suit. The bidding continues until a 4-3 fit is found.