

The Negative Double

Suppose you hold 32/K865/K743/Q97. Partner opens 1♣ and RHO bids 1♠. What do you do? Bidding a new suit at the two level requires 10+ points and a 5+-card suit. Bidding 1NT requires a stop in the opponent's suit. Partner may have only 3 clubs, so raising to 2♣ generally requires 5. BUT...you have 8 points and would have bid if RHO had passed.

Fortunately, there is a conventional bid which describes your hand perfectly: the negative double. It gets its name due to the fact that it is NOT a penalty double. It merely means "I have 6+points and the unbid suits".

If the overcall is in a major suit, the negative double will always show at least 4 cards in the other major (you are looking for a fit in the other major).

There are some special cases:

- If the overcall is 1♦, the negative double shows BOTH majors. If you only have one major, bid it.
- If the overcall is 1♥, the negative double shows exactly 4 spades. If you have 5+spades, bid 1♠.
- If the overcall is 1♠, you will always have 4+hearts. You may not necessarily have 4 cards in the unbid minor. If so, you will either have longer hearts (in which case, if partner bids the unbid minor, you will then bid 2♥, showing 5+hearts and less than 10 points) or you will have support for partner's minor (in which case, if partner's rebid is the other minor, you will raise his first minor)

You and partner need to reach agreement on "how high" you will play negative doubles. In the original example, suppose the overcall was 2 or 3 spades rather than 1♠. Most experienced players play negative doubles through 3♠ or 4♥. If partner can respond to your negative double at the 2 level, you only need 6 points to make the negative double. If partner must go to the three level to respond, then you need at least 9 points to make the negative double. If partner must go to the four level, then you need at least 11 points.

On the vast majority of hands, after you make a negative double, partner will "bid something" (i.e., bid one of the unbid suits, rebid her suit, bid NT). Suppose opener has QJ92/A32/K1086/A5, and the bidding goes 1♦-(3♠)-X-(P). You and partner have agreed to play negative doubles through 4♥, so you know she has 4+hearts and 11+points. You have two reasonable choices, 3N or pass. You are likely to win 4-5 tricks, and partner should win at least 2. Your decision might be influenced by the vulnerability. If the opponents are vulnerable, pass (expecting to be +500 or +800). This is called "converting" the negative double to a penalty double.