

292. Double, Double

Playing matchpoints online against unknown opponents, I hold:

♠ A J 5 2 ♥ A K 10 7 3 ♦ 7 ♣ 9 3 2

With no one vulnerable, South, on my left, opens **one club**. Partner overcalls **one diamond**, and North **doubles**, presumably showing both majors. I have an opening bid with prime values and a good suit. The only drawback, aside from North having four cards in each of my suits, is my shortness in partner's suit. Nevertheless, I can bid a natural and descriptive **one heart**. South now bids **two clubs**. Partner and North pass, and it is once again my turn.

My choices are pass, two hearts or double. Pass simply cannot be right. We have at least half the outstanding high-card points. South has long clubs; he is slated either to make this contract or to go one off. Two hearts is a much better choice. I doubt if partner has three-card support (our style is for him to raise), but my hearts are positioned well, as are my spades. Two hearts is preferable to selling out to two clubs even if North has five hearts.

The last alternative is to double. In traditional methods, double is by definition for penalty. However, partner and I have an agreement that all one- or two-level doubles are takeout unless

- our side has bid notrump,
- we have agreed on a suit,
- we redoubled or made a penalty double or penalty pass, or
- some special circumstance applies: an artificial bid was doubled, partner made a takeout double and you doubled the new-suit response (the anti-psych), or the opening bid was a two bid or a strong club.

If none of these situations applies, two-level doubles are competitive.

We are still searching for a fit and partner should be able to recognize my meaning, so I **double**. South passes, and partner bids **two spades**. I silently congratulate myself because we have likely reached our best spot. North and I pass. South sits for a moment and bids **three clubs**. Partner and North pass, and I have another decision. My choices are three spades, pass, or double.

I like my chances in spades because of the position of my high cards. On the other hand, the defense will surely begin with three rounds of clubs and I may be three tricks down before I even get started. I have chances for nine tricks but a lot may

happen along the way. What about defending? I think I can make two spades, so my choices are between doubling and bidding three spades. Passing and scoring 50 points an undertrick is not an option. In judging these decisions, the key factor is the nature of the defense tricks. Here my tricks are gilt-edged—prime cards in suits likely to cash. If South has a second suit, it is virtually certain to be in diamonds, leaving partner's values well positioned. I decide that this is the proper time for a matchpoint **double**. Everyone passes. This has been the auction:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♦	Dbl	1♥
2♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All Pass			

West leads the jack of hearts and North puts down a disappointing dummy for declarer:

	♠ K 9 7 3	
	♥ Q 9 8 5	
	♦ 9 8 6	
	♣ 10 4	
♥J led		♠ A J 5 2
		♥ A K 10 7 3
		♦ 7
		♣ 9 3 2

It must be right to lead diamonds early, so I overtake partner's ♥J with the king, and shift to the ♦7. Partner wins the queen and ace of diamonds, and returns the ♦2 for me to ruff. I cash the ace of hearts as both declarer and partner play low, and reach for another heart. Just in time it occurs to me that I am risking our second undertrick by not cashing my other ace. I replace the heart and cash the ♠A, which survives. Now a small heart. Declarer ruffs high and claims, but he is down two for -300 for hardly any matchpoints.

The full deal:

	♠ K 9 7 3	
	♥ Q 9 8 5	
	♦ 9 8 6	
	♣ 10 4	
♠ Q 8 6 4		♠ A J 5 2
♥ J 4		♥ A K 10 7 3
♦ A Q 4 3 2		♦ 7
♣ 8 7		♣ 9 3 2
	♠ 10	
	♥ 6 2	
	♦ K J 10 5	
	♣ A K Q J 6 5	

- Most of the card reading on this deal took place during the bidding.

- A competitive double is one that does not fit into the normal parameters for takeout or negative doubles. It is a low-level double treated as takeout because the context of the double is more useful as exploratory than penalty. Practiced partnerships would find it profitable to study these situations carefully to increase their competitive options.

- Once a fit is found in spades, the rules for the double of three clubs change. In matchpoints a penalty double is mandatory. Even at IMPs, the expectation of +300 suggests a penalty double.