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A double by responder, called a "Negative Double", enables the responder in a competitive auction to bid four-card suits. Enormously useful, this bid keeps you in auctions where you might have to Pass.

VB#8 Negative Doubles 1 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

North		
♠ KQT8		
♥ J943		
♦ 42		
♣ QJ6		
West		East
♠ AJ2		♠ 76543
♥ A5		♥ T87
♦ Q6		♦ AT53
♣ KT9743		♣ 8
South		
♠ 9		
♥ KQ62		
♦ KJ987		
♣ A52		

**This series of six deals is all about the Negative Double and how we can use it when the opponents are eating up the bidding space in a contested auction.**

**In general, if we open the bidding and an opponent overcalls then a Double from partner says that he wants us to bid. It is usually more specific than that – it says that he has the other major or (if no one has bid a major yet) both majors. This weapon allows us to compete successfully on some deals where otherwise we would sell out cheaply.**

Hand 1 sets the scene. First you have to bid to the right contract and then you have to get a very nasty guess right.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♦
2♣	X	P	2♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ T

On this deal you open 1♦ after two Passes and West overcalls 2♣. Now, looking at North's hand, what do you suggest that he bids? It may be obvious now – after the event – but if you have no weapons in your armory you are a little stuck.

We know now that a Double by North (a so-called *negative Double*) shows the other two suits and is admirably suited to that North hand. And if that weren't available...? Well, North would be in a hole. A deep hole. He couldn't risk 2♥ or 2♠, firstly because that would guarantee at least a five-card suit and secondly because it might force the bidding to the three-level if you hated the suit and were obliged to rebid 3♠. North would, in fact, have to Pass and take his medicine, leaving you to battle on unaided. Not good.

As it is, though, a Double of 2♣ works very well. Knowing of Hearts and Spades opposite you can bid 2♥ and there the matter rests.

Now, it's worth pointing out that 2♥ is not a strength-showing *reverse* after this bidding. Had the auction been uncontested and started with 1♦ by you and a response of 1♠ or 2♣ from North you wouldn't dream of bidding a speculative 2♥, not knowing if there is a fit. This bidding (inviting preference at the three-level) is called *reversing* and *always* shows a strong hand. It is also *forcing*.

Compare and contrast that with the case here. The auction is contested, partner's Double shows that there is a *fit*, you are entitled to bid your suit and the bid is *not forcing*. Note that North, having done his bit, Passes 2♥ happily. There is no point in raising Hearts – even 2♥ may prove hard enough.

The play of the cards bears this last assertion out. With a horrible choice of leads West opts for the ♠10 (top of an *internal sequence*). You are pleasantly surprised to find that the ♣J in dummy wins trick one but then things turn a little sour. West takes the ♥A on the first round of trumps and the play proceeds Club ruff, ♠A, Club ruff. East now leads a low Diamond with an innocent air and you have to guess what to do with the ♦K J. Which to play?

These are hard choices – much of bridge is guesswork. However, West has turned up with the ♠A, the ♥A and the ♣K. Deciding that he is unlikely to have a third Ace you try the ♦K and are relieved to guess correctly. Eight tricks precisely.



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VB#8 Negative Doubles SA	Contract: 3H
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♦
1♠	X	2♣	3♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠K

This hand is a refresher on our skills, both bidding and playing. These part-score contracts are what separates winners from the rest of the pack.

We (South) open our minimum hand with a 1♦ bid. After West's 1♠ overcall, our partner chooses a Negative Double. Look how perfect that is. He cannot risk naming the Heart suit at the two-level without five of them. With the *Negative Double*, he can alert us that he has precisely four Hearts – he doesn't actually promise Clubs. Since his bid is unlimited and forcing, we plan our reply.

Meantime, East raises his partner's Spades. (By the way, that's a very nice defense against a Negative Double. If you can raise your partner's overcall, think seriously about doing it, just to be obstructive). As South, we now can Pass over 2♠ if we really want to.

We are, however, provisional members of the Clint Eastwood School of Bidding, and are looking for reasons to bid rather than to Pass. We have shortage in Spades and some very nice Hearts to go with North's and we do not wish to sell out to the opponents at the two-level. Note that 3♥ down one would be preferable to 2♠ making by the opponents.

We need to show a minimum hand along with our Hearts, so we bid as cheaply as possible: 3♥, which seems to be fine with partner. That's our contract, and – surprise! –we get a Spade lead.


Our **Count** and **Plan** is straightforward. We have two Spade losers and two Diamond losers. That's great so far. But we need to take care. We only have eight obvious winners: **five** Hearts (that's four in the dummy and a Spade ruff in hand), the ♣A K and the ♦A. Where's the ninth trick?

The answer comes from a Club ruff in hand – making a total of **six** trump tricks. It's unusual to ruff cards in the closed hand rather than in dummy but here you are leaving dummy's trumps intact to draw trumps later.

At trick 3, after three rounds of Spades, we are finally on lead so we play three rounds of Clubs

and ruff. Then we draw trumps, cash the ♦A and concede two Diamond tricks.

This was not a fancy hand, but a very good one for reminding you of your basic skills. We stopped bidding just in time (well, partner did!), we planned well and prevailed.

North		East
♠ T54		♠ A76
♥ AJT9		♥ 632
♦ 963		♦ Q5
♣ K53		♣ QT874
West		South
♠ KQJ32		♠ 98
♥ 54		♥ KQ87
♦ KJ4		♦ AT872
♣ J62		♣ A9

This hand is in similar vein to the last one.

Do you have the values to bid or should you keep schtum?



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VB#8 Negative Doubles SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♣
1♠	X	P	2♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠K

A tricky deal, this with an ungainly 4-4-4-1 shape. These hands often prove awkward, both in the bidding and in the play.

We (South) open the bidding with 1♣ (the classic *suit below the singleton*) and await further developments. When North makes a Negative Double over West's 1♠ overcall, we know partner has precisely four Hearts. If he had five, he would have bid them (providing he had the point-count for bidding at the two-level).

We must bid, and luckily we have four Hearts. To show the Heart fit and a minimum hand, we bid 2♥, showing that we have four cards there and that we are minimum. Don't be tempted to upgrade this 4-4-4-1 type – this sort of hand does not play well in general. Over 2♥ partner does the math and realizes we need to stop there.

When North exposes the dummy, his hand is exactly what he promised. Our **Count** reveals two Spade losers, a possible Heart, a Diamond and a possible Club. Also, the Spades are known to be 5-1 so allowing West to play another round of Spades could prove embarrassing.

We could save a loser if the ♠K is in East, or if the ♥K is in West (but it would have to be only once guarded).

The problem with the Hearts is that the *Honorettes* (essentially the ♥10 9) are also out against us.

Well, with all these options, we have to make a choice. A little hint: we need to pull trumps anyway, so that's the suit we should address first. Our dream lay of the cards (lie?) would be if we could find the ♥K in West, doubleton.

So at trick 1, we snatch the lead (we don't want to hold off, another Spade lead might get ruffed on the next trick if we do), and go right after the Hearts, leading low from our hand to dummy's ♥J. Nope – East takes that and switches to a Club (we know why he does that – he can't have any more Spades).

Taking the Club finesse now would be poor play – West would win the ♠K, play off the ♠K Q

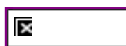
and play another Spade and we'd be in trouble. Best is to take the ♠A and to draw trumps. When these prove to be 3-2 we can proceed with confidence. Our next move is to attack the Clubs, leading the ♠Q to force the ♠K and setting up the ♠10 9

As we fully expected, the ♠K is in West (hey, he did overcall, right?) Now we sit tight while they take their Spade and Diamond winners. When we regain the lead, we take the rest of the tricks. We end up losing two Spades, a Diamond, a Club and a trump.

<p>North</p> <p>♠ T85</p> <p>♥ AJ83</p> <p>♦ K863</p> <p>♣ J8</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 4</p> <p>♥ KT7</p> <p>♦ A9754</p> <p>♣ 6542</p>
<p>West</p> <p>♠ KQJ92</p> <p>♥ 95</p> <p>♦ QT2</p> <p>♣ K73</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ A763</p> <p>♥ Q642</p> <p>♦ J</p> <p>♣ AQT9</p>

Another hand where the points are fairly evenly split around the table.

These hands are tough to bid, play and defend. What will happen here? Stay tuned...



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A double by responder, called a "Negative Double", enables the responder in a competitive auction to bid four-card suits. Enormously useful, this bid keeps you in auctions where you might have to Pass.

VB#8 Negative Doubles SA	Contract: 1N
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♣
1♠	X	P	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ T

"The best place to play an indifferent hand is 1NT"

Charles H Goren (1901 – 1991), World champion.

On several occasions, we've suggested to the bridge authorities to increase the bonus for successfully making 1NT. This suggestion has so far been ignored, perhaps not surprisingly. Personally, we like to play in 1NT, because if we don't make it, the opponents did, and they should have had the bid..! Some players, however, really dislike playing in 1NT. It takes all sorts...

So, anyway, this is a digression. Our 15-point opener is overcalled by West. His suit is a tad tatty, but for a one-level overcall, just about acceptable. Also, he is a Passed hand so East isn't going to go mad in the auction and raise to the skies.

Partner can't bid either of his red suits at the two level, due to lack of funds and length, but the *Negative Double* again proves to be the perfect bid.

Then it comes to us. We don't particularly care for either red suit, but we have a No-trump shaped hand and a Spade stopper. While we aren't delighted to do so, we don't see a better bid. Let's give 1NT a try.

Dummy cheers us up quite a bit with the ♠K. We start counting to see where we stand. With two Spade tricks, one Heart and two Diamonds we have to scrounge two more tricks.

Well, there's a Diamond finesse available, but if it doesn't work, we will be no further ahead. Plus if it **does** work, we still will need another trick. (And we know it won't. It just is not our destiny to make a finesse – if there's a better way!)

The Clubs are surprisingly exciting. We are going to lose the ♠A and ♣K no matter what we do, but once they've been played, we've uncovered the two needed winners underneath those inevitable losers.

So our plan is to keep playing Clubs until they

North	♠ K63	♥ JT42	♦ KJ43	♣ Q9
West	♠ QT982	♥ 76	♦ 86	♣ AK62
East	♠ J5	♥ KQ98	♦ QT97	♣ 753
South	♠ A74	♥ A53	♦ A52	♣ JT84

What is the right contract here?

The play should be easy enough – unless temptation is going to get in your way...

grow up, accepting that the opponents will get their Spade tricks going before we get the Clubs set up.

Now, I've noticed that less experienced players often become paralysed trying to figure out what to discard, and we're going to have to make a couple of discards – on West's winning Spades, and North is going to have to discard on both Spades and Clubs.

A little tip to make your life easier (and like the government, "We're here to help." The difference being: we mean it...) We have counted our winners. If it isn't a winner, don't worry about the card, just chuck it. We are going to struggle to make the contract, don't add to your woes.

We duck trick 1, and take trick 2 in dummy with the ♠K. On this lie of the cards ducking the Spade lead isn't really important but it usually helps to *disrupt the opponents' communications*. We want to preserve entries in our South hand where the good Clubs are going to be, so we win the second Spade on table. We lead a Club at trick 3. (By the way, notice that if East had a Club winner, he might help us with a red lead. Another reason to stay away from those suits and focus on the Clubs).

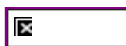
West takes the Club and keeps hammering away at his Spades. After regaining the lead with our ♠K, we force out the other winning Club and put up our umbrella for the Spade storm. When it ends, we are back in!

We take our winners, which include the two Clubs, and the two Diamonds, and the ♥A. Give them a Diamond at the last trick.

Now, lessons learned: If you have losers you can't avoid even by paying a bribe, look beneath them for promotable winners. Our Clubs are a great example.

Next, if you throw the lead back to the opponents, they will often do your work for you. And finally, did you see how the Diamond finesse would have failed? Thank goodness we had another plan.

See why we think there should be a bigger bonus for 1NT?



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VB#8 Negative Doubles ACOL	Contract: 2S
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	1♥	1♠
2♥	2♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Here, as South, you watch as your partner opens 1♦ and East wades into the auction with 1♥. You have an obvious bid of 1♠ now but need to bear in mind that this strongly implies a five-card suit. Why? Because with four Spades you'd make a *Negative Double*.

This information is important to partner as he can raise you to 2♠ with three very tatty trumps after West has raised the ante to 2♥. Whether East-West should compete further to 3♥ is moot. They might make a lot of tricks on their cards in Hearts – but not if you were astute enough to find a trump lead.

Anyway, that's by-the-by – 2♠ it is and West starts off with his singleton Diamond.

Now, these part-score deals are not so easy to analyse when dummy appears as much depends on the splits of the suits. Still, it is possible to see at least one trump loser, one Heart loser and two Diamond losers (the ♠A Q are marked in the East hand after the opening lead).

You must cover the ♦J with the ♦K to help promote the ♦10 and ♦9 for later. East cashes the ♠A Q and plays another Diamond, hoping his partner can over-ruff you. He can – so you pitch a losing Heart instead. West switches to a Heart so you take the ♥A and play the winning ♦9, throwing the last – losing – Heart. This allows West to make a second trump trick, true, but prevents you from losing any Heart tricks. Fair exchange is no robbery...

After this the hand is easy. You ruff the ♥K, cross to table to lead a Spade. East optimistically plays low (maybe West has the ♠K, he thinks) and you score the ♠Q. That's it – you have to lose to the ♠A but everything else is yours. 2♠ made on the nose.

North		East
♠ 643		♠ A2
♥ A3		♥ QJ986
♦ K97652		♦ AQ83
♣ AJ		♣ T3

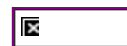
  

West		South
♠ JT7		♠ KQ985
♥ KT7		♥ 542
♦ J		♦ T4
♣ Q96542		♣ K87

This deal is here to make a small point about bidding in these competitive auctions.

A small point but an important one.

Not that the play is in any way trivial – as you will see...



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VB#8 Negative Doubles SA	Contract: 3S
Date: 14/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♦
1♥	X	3♥	3♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ A

Here, as South, you open with the obvious call of 1♦ and West overcalls 1♥. North makes a by-now familiar *Negative Double* and it comes to East.

Many players would make your life easy by raising gently to 2♥ on those cards (you'd then have a simple bid of 2♠ to make and everyone would live happily ever after). Nope – this East is made of tougher stuff and he gums up the works with a pre-emptive bid of 3♥. Good bridge!

This makes your life that much harder – as East fully intended. You have the charming choice of Passing – and allowing East-West to steal the hand in 3♥, possibly making – or bidding 3♠ on a feeble suit and just 13 points. Decisions, decisions.

Well, when you know of a fit it is often right to take the push and bid. It could be wrong (both 3♥ and 3♠ might be failing contracts) but it could be very right (both 3♠ and 3♥ might be making contracts). Anyway, we try 3♠ and North knows enough not to fall into the trap of bidding game.

Against 3♠ West kicks off with the ♥A lead. This may appear odd but his partner has supported the suit to the three-level and there is nothing else that appeals to him.

Having studied the dummy, West finds an awkward Club switch. Awkward because the defence of the ♠A and a Club continuation threatens to derail your train via a Club ruff. The counterplay is to cross to a Diamond and to ditch a seemingly winning Club (!) on dummy's ♥K before playing trumps.

The defenders can do nothing now. Eventually you can draw trumps and run off your long Diamonds.

North		East
♠ QJ92		♠ K54
♥ K72		♥ T854
♦ QT		♦ 9532
♣ T982		♣ A4

West		South
♠ A3		♠ T876
♥ AQJ63		♥ 9
♦ 74		♦ AKJ86
♣ J653		♣ KQ7

Here you are pressured in the auction into a difficult decision by an aggressive opponent.

The play isn't easy either...