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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 2 SA | Contract: 4S |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: North | Board #: 1 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: None |

North
 ♠ QJ65
 ♥ AKJ2
 ♦ 763
 ♣ 84

West
 ♠ 742
 ♥ 96
 ♦ AKJ98
 ♣ Q73



East
 ♠ 83
 ♥ T8543
 ♦ QT5
 ♣ A62

South
 ♠ AKT9
 ♥ Q7
 ♦ 42
 ♣ KJT95

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

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 otherwise have to Pass.

Remember that his Negative Double is both *forcing* and *unlimited*. You will know much of partner's hand and, between the both of you, you should be able to find the perfect contract.

Hand 1 has you finding a trump fit – but that's not all you have to find...

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| - | P | P | 1♣ |
| 1♦ | X | 2♦ | 2♣ |
| P | 3♠ | P | 4♣ |
| P | P | P | |

Lead: ♦ A

We like our (South) hand - lots to like with the shape and texture, all those *honorettes* (intermediate cards, if you prefer), points placed in our long suits, few wasted values. Naturally, we open with 1♣.

West's 1♦ overall promised a nice Diamond suit, although not necessarily an opening bid. Partner (North's) **Negative Double** is perfect, just perfect. He's bidding *both* majors, forcing for one round, and showing us where eight of his cards are.

East shows some spirit, and raises his partner's overcall. And now it's our turn.

We have two jobs to perform with our next bid. We need to tell partner we have a Spade fit, but equally important, we need to show our point count. We have a hand in the **minimum** range for an opening bid (12-14 points or so), and thus we respond with a minimum Spade bid: 2♠. If we had 15-17 (or thereabouts), we'd invite with 3♠, and with 18-20, we'd go directly to game. Note that we don't *have* to bid over 2♦, we could Pass, but we bid because we know we have a trump fit.

We've done our bit, so we expect partner to do his. No, he passes the buck with 3♠. We have a tight call now but are swayed by the Tens and Nines of the hand. Pass could easily be the right bid but winning strategy at bridge is to bid close game contracts. (Perhaps we ought to add that making these tight contracts adds to the success of this strategy).

Now the fun starts as the play in 4♠ begins. Our **Count** shows our losers to be: two Diamonds off the top and possibly two Clubs to lose later. Our **Plan** is to find a way to keep the club losers to **one**. This will involve us in counting.

The easiest person to count is going to be East. His response suggests 6-9 points. Since West overcalled, he can have as low as 8 points (ish) with a decent suit, so we're not too sure about him. Let's keep our eye on East.

Tricks 1 and 2 go to the enemy's Diamonds, with us ruffing in on trick 3. We notice that East

has played the ♦Q, worth two points.

At tricks 4, 5 and 6 we pull trumps. We do not plan to ruff any losers in dummy, so there is no reason to hold off this play. Now we go after the Hearts. We end in dummy, take a deep breath and think.

East has only shown up with the ♦Q. The Clubs out against us are the ♣A and ♣Q. East surely must have the ♣A. He might have both, but he HAS to have the ♣A in order to have had enough points to raise his partner to 2♦. We are going to lead the Club from dummy and (barring the appearance of the ♣A) insert our ♣K.

And we are right. The ♣A is in East, right where we needed it to be and right where we reasoned it to be.

Let's review what we have done here. It all began with our **plan**. We knew the contract depending on bringing the Clubs home with no more than one loser. We played out as many cards as we could, keeping our eye on East.

(A little digression and a confession. We find it very difficult to count **everything**... and we expect you're the same. The key is to pick the **one** thing, that if you can count it, will save you. On this hand, the easiest thing to count was East. We know he had 6-9 points. We just count them as he plays them.)

East showed up with the ♦Q. Nothing else as the hand went on. We know East ought to have 6 points. Ergo, he must have the ♣A. Our plan, to locate the ♣A, worked.



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| | |
|--|-------------------|
| VB#8 Negative Doubles SA | Contract: 3N |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: East | Board #: 2 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: N / S |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| - | - | P | 1♦ |
| 1♠ | X | P | 3NT |
| P | P | P | |

Lead: ♠ K

We (South) have an obvious 1♦ opening bid. Over West's 1♠ overcall, North chooses to make a *Negative Double*. East Passes mournfully and we have to make a decision with our seven certain tricks.

Well, many players would try 3♦ at this point – and they could well be right to do so. However, we do have a Spade stop for No-trumps and six running Diamonds and hands like these often provide nine tricks in No-trumps. (Yes, they often provide just seven tricks as well – we have the bruises and scars from previous escapades). Nonetheless, the brave action is to take a punt on 3NT and hope the sun shines. If partner displays two Aces or just the ♥A K we would be in business.

3NT ends the auction (no surprise there!) and West leads the ♠K. How should you play?

Well, in fact, the hand is simple enough to analyze. If West has the ♥A together with his five-card Spade suit then 3NT is going down. If East has the ♥A then communications between East and West must be broken by means of a **hold-up**.

You must duck the first Spade lead and you may decide to duck the second (just in case West does something silly). No – a third Spade knocks out the ♠A. You could cash your Diamonds now but that would only delay the inevitable. You may as well play a Heart to the ♥K Q so that you can learn your fate. If West has the Ace he will play it and cash his Spades. Instead the ♥Q wins. Weird...

Should you come to hand and play another Heart? No!! You have nine tricks and should take them, pronto. East has laid a trap for you – if you play another Heart to the ♥K he will take his three Heart tricks and you will go down.

When the ♥Q wins you have your contract. Overtricks are for the birds.

North
♠ 642
♥ KQ94
♦ 82
♣ A983

West
♠ KQJT3
♥ 872
♦ 5
♣ KJ76

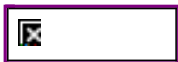


East
♠ 87
♥ AJT6
♦ 9743
♣ T52

South
♠ A95
♥ 53
♦ AKQJT6
♣ Q4

On some deals you have a trump fit and should bid to the appropriate level.

Then there are other types of deal...



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| | |
|--|-------------------|
| VB#8 Negative Doubles SA | Contract: 4S |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: South | Board #: 3 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: E / W |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| - | - | - | 1♦ |
| 2♣ | X | P | 2♠ |
| 3♣ | 4♠ | P | P |
| P | | | |

Lead: ♣ A

The bidding, if only we pay attention and visualize, throws up all sorts of cautions.

North
 ♠ KJ75
 ♥ AQJT
 ♦ 854
 ♣ Q7

West
 ♠ 6
 ♥ 76
 ♦ KJ9
 ♣ AKJT952



East
 ♠ T842
 ♥ 985432
 ♦ Q6
 ♣ 6

South
 ♠ AQ93
 ♥ K
 ♦ AT732
 ♣ 843

We (South) open 1♦ and West enters the fray with a 2♣ overcall. Our partner (North) makes a lovely *Negative Double*, which gives us a choice of two suits, the majors. We like Spades, and wisely make a bid of 2♠, showing the fit and just as importantly, our minimum hand. North raises to game.

Our **count** shows two Club losers and two Diamond losers. However, some of the Diamond losers can be **dumped** on dummy's long hearts.

We however have two red flags. First, the most Clubs East can have is two. That means we must trump the third round of Clubs high or expect to be over-ruffed.

The second red flag is this: If West is very long in one suit, he's going to be short somewhere else. 68% of the time trumps will split 3-2. However, bad splits show up frequently when one hand is known to be very distributional. The worst wrench in our plans would be a 5-0 trump split. We have no protection against that, but we **can** protect against a 4-1 break by playing carefully.

Careful planning includes at the first round of pulling trumps to go to the closed hand's ♠A, lead back to dummy's ♠J. That leaves us with the perfect cards to capture anything East has left.

So... Tricks 1 and 2 go to enemy Clubs, and this reveals the 7-1 Club break. Trick 3, we ruff high with the ♠K (all right, the ♠J would have done just as well). At trick 4 we begin our trump manoeuvres. We lead the ♠5 to our ♠A, then at trick 6, our low Spade to dummy's ♠J.

We were right to take care! West shows out of Spades on the second round. Now we are in the perfect spot. We have East's ♠10 surrounded by our ♠Q and ♠9.

It's a simple matter to pull the rest of the trumps (via a *marked finesse*), then play on Hearts

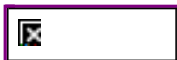
My father always used to say, "When it looks too good to be true, it is." This hand proves that dad was right.

As you make your plan and it looks like things will fall nicely into place, keep that in mind.

dropping Diamond losers all over the place. Of course, we have to overtake the ♥K to cash all the Hearts as dummy is entryless.

At the last trick we concede that losing Diamond, heaving a sigh of relief.

Folks, it cost nothing to go through those trumps gyrations. Had they split 3-2, it wouldn't have mattered. But see what a difference anticipating a bad split did? The bidding did indeed tell the whole story, and once again my old dad was proved right.



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| | |
|--|-----------------|
| VB#8 Negative Doubles SA | Contract: 4S |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: South | Board #: 4 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: All |

| | | |
|----------|---|---------|
| | North | |
| | ♠ JT76 | |
| | ♥ K43 | |
| | ♦ J43 | |
| | ♣ QJ5 | |
| West |  | East |
| ♠ 954 | | ♠ 32 |
| ♥ 7 | | ♥ Q952 |
| ♦ AKQT92 | | ♦ 75 |
| ♣ AT6 | | ♣ 98742 |
| | South | |
| | ♠ AKQ8 | |
| | ♥ AJT86 | |
| | ♦ 86 | |
| | ♣ K3 | |

When the entire hand depends on your locating a queen, you need to pay attention to every card played, and try to get a count on the hand.

This sounds scary to the less experienced player (and let's face it, to some experienced ones also!), but like most things, the anticipation is worse than the reality.

Let's see what you can do with this gem.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| - | - | - | 1♥ |
| 2♦ | X | P | 4♠ |
| P | P | P | |

Lead: ♦ A

Our (South) hand is a nice one – a full 17 points. Over the opening bid of 1♥ West overcalls 2♦ and North Doubles, promising four Spades. He is probably minimum for that action with 8 points and a flat hand, although you will find some brave souls making such bids on weaker hands than this.

With such magnificent trumps and all-round good hand we decide to have a shot at game – 2♠ would be a poor choice of call and 3♠ would leave partner betwixt and between, wondering what to do.

When we see dummy, we know this isn't going to be easy. The opponents have the ♦A K and the ♣A; our **Count** also shows we have a potential Heart loser. Making the contract will depend on our ability to locate the ♥Q. To make it worse, we have a two-way finesse.

A two-way finesse is one you can take either direction. We could play the Hearts by leading the ♥J from the closed hand toward the ♥K or by leading the ♥3 towards our ♥A J.

We could make a blind guess. Or we can make an **educated** guess. Our **Plan** is to play down as many cards as we can before playing our Hearts. We are looking for clues as to who holds the ♥Q.

We need to be able to **count a hand**. The easiest hand to count is the one with the known long suit. We are going to keep track of West. We trump the third round of Diamonds (high, by the way, just to maintain communications with dummy) and play a Club. Why? Because we need to set up Clubs and this will help us count the hand. West takes his ♠A and exits with another Club – leaving us to do our own dirty work.

So that puts us on lead in dummy. We pull three rounds of trumps and we play dummy's other Club. Now, what have we learned?

Well... quite a lot, in fact. West started with six Diamonds (proved when East showed out at trick three), three Clubs and three trumps. There isn't room in his hand for more than one Heart so we are now bomb-proof. We can cash

the ♥K and now we know all of West's cards – he was originally 3·1·6·3 in shape.

A Heart to the ♥10 is certain to win (you'd have been astonished if it had lost to West's fourteenth card!) and you can claim your game.



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| | |
|--|-------------------|
| VB#8 Negative Doubles SA | Contract: 3N |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: North | Board #: 5 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: N / S |

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

Lead: ♠ 9

This is a slightly different sequence for *Negative Doubles* than some of the others we have seen. Let's look:

North
 ♠ 632
 ♥ T
 ♦ QJT98
 ♣ AKQ6

West
 ♠ 94
 ♥ J7532
 ♦ K76
 ♣ 974



East
 ♠ KQT87
 ♥ Q64
 ♦ A4
 ♣ 832

South
 ♠ AJ5
 ♥ AK98
 ♦ 532
 ♣ JT5

We will struggle a little on this hand to end up in the right place.

Just like real life, maybe?

Our partner (North) opens 1♦ and we plan to respond 1♥, but when East overcalls 1♠, that ruins that idea. As you should know by now, to bid 2♥ now would promise five. We don't have them, so bidding 2♥ would mislead partner.

We *could* jump to 3NT, showing 13-15 points and secure Spade stops, but we could miss our possible Heart fit. Best is to temporise with a *Negative Double* which shows the Hearts but does not guarantee Clubs. We have a fall-back position of bidding No-trumps later with our one-and-a-half Spade stoppers.

When North rebids 2♣, we aren't totally delighted. We know that we have no Heart fit now (and North surely has five Diamonds) but we hate the thought of game in Diamonds. Surely the Diamonds will be a huge asset in a No-trump game. So, we bid 3NT. Note – in passing – that 5♦ would be hopeless. It's the old, old story: nine tricks are easier than eleven.

And when dummy comes down in 3NT we are pleased. Our count shows we have one Spade trick, two Hearts and four Clubs. The rest will have to come from Diamonds. We will have to play them twice to set them up, we need to break the communications in Spades and we need the Diamond honours to be split (which they will be most of the time). This is our 75% solution wearing a different dress... The only position that can really hurt us is if both of the ♦A K are in the Spade hand – East.

Knowing that the ♠K, ♠Q and ♠10 are in East is hugely helpful. We visualize that if we **duck** the ♠Q on the first trick, we develop a second Spade trick and in effect **freeze** the suit. When East leads them again we now have two stoppers, which gives us the edge we need to develop Diamonds.

So, trick 1, duck the ♠Q. East continues the suit at trick 2 which we win with the ♠J. We immediately tackle Diamonds at trick 3. West plays second-hand-low and East gains the lead again. He knocks out our last Spade stopper. Ouch.

At trick 5, we lead a Diamond again, into West's ♦K, but West has no Spades to lead back. We win any return and collect the rest of the tricks. When the dust has settled, we only lost one Spade and two Diamonds for a deserved overtrick.

So... Our ability to Negative Double helped us get to a great contract and we played it astutely.


[Editor's note. You bid this hand well and played it properly. However, the defenders misplayed their cards. Can you see how? No, we are not going to tell you. Elsewhere in this edition, guess what? You'll have the East cards and you will be defending 3NT...]



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| | |
|--|-------------------|
| VB#8 Negative Doubles SA | Contract: 5H |
| Date: 17/06/2014 | By: South |
| Dealer: East | Board #: 6 |
| Play this hand online! | Vulnerable: N / S |

| | | |
|-----------|---|--------|
| | North | |
| | ♠ 75 | |
| | ♥ K953 | |
| | ♦ J7642 | |
| | ♣ A9 | |
| West |  | East |
| ♠ KQJT842 | | ♠ A963 |
| ♥ 8 | | ♥ QJT2 |
| ♦ 93 | | ♦ QT8 |
| ♣ T72 | | ♣ J8 |
| | South | |
| | ♠ | |
| | ♥ A764 | |
| | ♦ AK5 | |
| | ♣ KQ6543 | |

Sometimes at this game you get pushed around by the opponents – especially when they have Spades.

Here is a case in point – just how far are you prepared to bid to win the auction?

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| - | - | P | 1♣ |
| 3♠ | X | 4♣ | 5♥ |
| P | P | P | |

Lead: ♠ K

This is a difficult, competitive deal. You open 1♣ with your powerful 6-4-3-0 hand and West makes an instant nuisance of himself with a 3♠ overcall. North has just about enough to scrape up a Negative Double (these things apply even after pre-emptive jump overcalls) and East makes things really awkward by raising to 4♣.

This is a good defensive barrage by East-West – they are quite happy to see you Double and collect 300 points or so in lieu of a vulnerable game. Feeling cheated out of your due you decide to try 5♥ and play for the vulnerable game bonus.

Dummy is about what you might expect, four Hearts and enough to want to compete. You ruff the Spade lead and try your luck in trumps by cashing the ♥A K. Nope – not today, they break 4-1. This leaves you with two trump losers, meaning that you cannot afford to lose another trick.

You ruff dummy's last Spade and then set about your side-suit – Clubs. Leading off a long suit to force out opponents' winning trumps is a common ploy. Here, East can do little to stop you making your contract. He tries punching dummy with Spade leads but you can withstand that attack. All you do is keep leading winning Clubs, allowing East to take his ♥Q J at his pleasure.

There is nothing the defenders can do to stop you from making your adventurous contract.