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This series shows how to extract penalties when opponents make overcalls and run into bad breaks. This involves the idea of re-opening Doubles. It also details hands where re-opening with a Double is not a good idea.

VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2DX
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ T63	
	♥ J4	
	♦ KQT86	
	♣ K97	
West		East
♠ K2		♠ 9754
♥ 753		♥ K92
♦ AJ974		♦ 52
♣ AQ4		♣ 8653
	South	
	♠ AQJ8	
	♥ AQT86	
	♦ 3	
	♣ JT2	

**This series is all about low-level Doubles and how they can be used to extract penalties. Essentially we focus on the problems faced by the opening bidder when an overcall on the left has been Passed back to you. Here you are in the reopening seat. What should you do? Surrender gracefully or continue the fight? If you decide to battle on what is the most effective way to do so and how might you punish an injudicious overcall by your opponents?**

Hand 1 contains a cautionary lesson for the unwary. We are going to put you in the pleasurable position of teaching the opponents a sharp lesson

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

Lead: ♥ J

You might not recognise this deal but it has been used in a previous edition of V-Blue. In that occasion you sat with the North cards but you also defended 2♦ Doubled for a thumping penalty. The point of repeating this deal is to show you how injudicious overcalls can still be taken to the cleaners even if you are playing low-level Doubles as take-out.

**Bidding.** You (South) open 1♥ and West makes a very poor overcall of 2♦ (of which, more later). North should simply bide his time and Pass this; there is no point at bidding anything at this stage. When the opponents bid your best suit your optimum strategy is to *lie low and say nuffin'*.

When 2♦ floats round to you as South you shouldn't just sit there and take it – it is your duty to compete for the part-score. Many would bid 2♥ but that is a very poor bid. 2♠ (a reverse, requesting preference at the three-level) would be far too ambitious. Vastly superior is a take-out Double – much the best call when you are short in the opponents' suit. Remember, partner already knows you have Hearts – he wasn't asleep on the previous round of bidding!

The re-opening Double allows partner to compete in any of the other three suits. The extra gain is that it also allows him to Pass when he has (as here) a *trump stack*. With four potential trump tricks (he is sitting over declarer, remember) North is delighted to convert your take-out Double into a penalty Double. Technically speaking he is making a *Penalty Pass*. East can do nothing but watch the carnage.

**Play.** This is just too excruciating to go through in detail. It is, in short, a nightmare for declarer who manages just three tricks (the ♦A, the ♠K and the ♣A). That makes a 1400 point penalty. North mutters something under his breath as he writes down the score. It sounds like, "I've had shorter telephone numbers" but you can't be sure.

**Post-mortem.** Now, was West unlucky or did he do something wrong? Take a careful look at his hand – was that worth a 2♦ overcall after you had opened 1♥? After all, think of

some of the hands that we have suggested that you overcall 1♥ or 1♠ on in previous series. Here, you have overcalled on as little as 8 points and a good suit – in this layout West has a robust opening bid, a whole 14 points.

The truth is that West was (a little) unlucky to run into such a firestorm but it is certainly true that his overcall was a fairly awful bid.

Why? Well, an overcall at the two-level is very different animal from a one-level overcall. This may need some explanation.

*Firstly* you cannot realistically expect to contest the auction when your suit is a minor and theirs is a major. If the opponents have Hearts or Spades they will simply outbid you. The great American player and writer Eddie Kantar put it succinctly when he said, “You can’t fight tanks with toy soldiers”. Brilliant.

*Secondly*, you should be very wary of bidding on poor suits. Here, ♠A J 9 7 5 has more holes than a proverbial Swiss cheese. In the play of this deal it made precisely one trick. Ugh.

*Thirdly*, no experienced player likes to make a two-level overcall on a 5-3-3-2 hand. Such stubby-shaped hands simply contain too many losers to be suitable to contest the auction. Even if not Doubled you won’t take many tricks with this type of hand.

In conclusion it is a truism that there are certainly hands that would open the bidding but not overcall and there are certainly hands that would not overcall but would open the bidding.


The world of competitive bidding is a dark and difficult one. Don’t expect to learn all its secrets immediately. However, you should learn to stay out of trouble on hands like these.



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VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2CX
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ AQT82		
	♥ KQ94		
	♦ K62		
	♣ 2		
West		East	
♠ K97		♠ J64	
♥ T862		♥ A75	
♦ J984		♦ QT	
♣ 53		♣ AQT87	
	South		
	♠ 53		
	♥ J3		
	♦ A753		
	♣ KJ964		

What do you do when the opponents bid your suit...? You sit quietly and you wait for something good to happen.

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

Lead: ♠ 5

This hand is similar to Hand 1, this time seen from the perspective of the player with the *trump stack*.

**Bidding.** North has an obvious opening bid of 1♠ and East decides to go swimming in shark-infested waters by overcalling with 2♣. This is an untutored overcall, showing that East-West have learned nothing at all from Hand 1. The 2♣ bid is presumably based on the old (and largely worthless) excuse of "I had to bid – I had 13 points!"

The actual overcall is very poor – there are a lot of losers in that hand, the suit is a minor, it is lousy (well, full of holes) and – crucially – the shape is the dreaded 5·3·3·2 pattern. Still, if all of our opponents played the game to a high standard it would be hard to win – we need opposition like this...

As South we are delighted by this turn of events but we can do nothing but Pass and we must do so without a flicker – it is against the rules of the game to give unauthorised information to partner.

2♣ gets Passed to North and that player has an obvious re-opening Double. It is almost always right to re-open the bidding in these positions when you are short in the opponents' suit and Double is the most flexible call. Part-scores must be contested! Now you can reap the benefits of East's generosity by leaving the Double in; a Pass converts a take-out Double into a penalty Double.

**Play.** To go through this in detail would be intruding on private grief. East manages just four tricks, going four down Doubled. As he is not vulnerable that costs his side 800 points. You don't need to point out that this is a rotten result for East-West – West will do that (loudly!) as he is writing down the score.

**Post-mortem.** It is worth noting that you were destined to play this hand in 2♠ if East had had the sense to keep his mouth shut. The likely (uncontested) bidding would have been 1♠ – 1NT – 2♥ – 2♠ – Pass. 800 is a better result than 110 any day of the week. West, you notice, is making that point to East – with some


irritation...



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VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2HX
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ T2	
	♥ AJ93	
	♦ 653	
	♣ KQ93	
West		East
♠ 865		♠ QJ4
♥ KQT42		♥ 87
♦ KT		♦ J982
♣ AJ8		♣ 7542
	South	
	♠ AK973	
	♥ 65	
	♦ AQ74	
	♣ T6	

Here you have a decision to make as the opening bidder. Do you reopen the bidding? If so, with what?

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

Lead: ♠ T

**Bidding.** You (South) have an obvious 1♠ opening bid in second seat. West overcalls 2♥ and this is Passed back to you. Do you stick or twist? In other words, do you Pass or do you bid? If you choose to contest the auction how should you do it?

Well, the usual guidelines here are that you should strain to bid when you are short in the opponents' suit so, with a doubleton Heart, you should bid. Now, although there are risks in the action, the most flexible bid is Double. True, partner might bid 3♣ leaving you awkwardly placed but it is still the best way of competing. Partner knows you have Spades so will try to bid 2♠ if he has garbage; he won't introduce a poor Club suit into the auction for no good reason. The upside of the action is if partner has been lurking with decent Hearts behind the 2♥ bidder (as here). Now 2♥ Doubled will be Passed out and the holocaust will begin...

**Play.** West will learn exactly what Schopenhauer meant when he described pleasure as the absence of pain. Pain is what West will get and, frankly, it is what he has asked for. The hand is a nightmare for declarer and he can take no more than three (count them, **three!**) tricks. That totals a cool 1400 points to the good guys and East-West must be close to tears as they write down the score.

**Post-mortem.** Was West unlucky? Well, as you are beginning to realize by now, the answer is both yes and no. Yes, he was unlucky to run into such a ghastly firestorm but really his bid of 2♥ was a high risk effort that stood to gain little. True, his suit is a major (on Hands 1 & 2 the overcalls were futile efforts on five-card minor suits) but as against that West is facing a Passed partner, vulnerable.

What can he hope to gain by overcalling? To compete the part-score? Maybe, but the downside is very, very bleak. Notice that West is 5:3:3:2, the dreaded shape that should really refrain from a two-level overcall without armor-plating. There are an awful lot of losers in that West hand – and West duly lost an awful lot of tricks.


Think of it this way. On a very good day West might just win the auction and record 140 points. On a bad day like today he might get socked for a penalty of 1400. Do the odds justify taking such a risk? The answer is an emphatic **NO!**



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VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ 3		
	♥ AJ42		
	♦ 865		
	♣ K8632		
West		East	
♠ A4		♠ 8752	
♥ KQT983		♥ 75	
♦ A4		♦ T973	
♣ 974		♣ AQT	
	South		
	♠ KQJT96		
	♥ 6		
	♦ KQJ2		
	♣ J5		

Again, you are faced with a decision in the reopening seat. Do you give up in disgust or carry the fight to the enemy?

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

Lead: ♥ K

**Bidding.** You (South) have an obvious 1♠ opening bid. West overcalls 2♥ and this is Passed back to you. Do you stick or twist? In other words, do you Pass or do you bid? If you choose to contest the auction how should you do it?

Well, the usual guidelines here are that you should strain to bid when you are short in the opponents' suit so, with a singleton Heart, you should bid. Now, caught up in the excitement of Hands 1, 2 & 3 you might think that you should reopen the bidding with a take-out Double but that would be the wrong choice on this hand. Certainly you should bid (Passing is for wimps) but the right call is 2♠.

You have very little in the way of *defensive* tricks (this usually means Aces, in fact) but plenty of *offensive* tricks (also known as *playing tricks*). If Spades are trumps you expect to make a fair number of tricks even facing tripe in the dummy. On the other hand, you wouldn't care to defend 2♥ Doubled if partner Passed your take-out Double so it is unwise to put such temptation in his path.

**Play.** Having avoided the pitfall of defending 2♥ Doubled – a fate that might well have befallen you had you decided to reopen with a take-out Double – 2♠ is relatively easy to make. You can always force five Spade tricks, the ♥A and two Diamond tricks for eight in all. A 3-3 Diamond split would have allowed you nine tricks but that wasn't happening today.


**Post-mortem.** East-West have learnt something about overcalls. That 2♥ overcall, with a good six-card suit and two Aces, is perfectly respectable. Perhaps they have taken too much of a battering in previous deals and are starting to respect us...



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VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2D
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: South	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J9	
	♥ A62	
	♦ 976	
	♣ J8632	
West		East
♠ 64		♠ QT82
♥ KQ9		♥ JT8743
♦ AQT852		♦ 4
♣ A4		♣ QT
	South	
	♠ AK753	
	♥ 5	
	♦ KJ3	
	♣ K975	

Well, it's the same old dilemma. Do you carry the fight to the opponennts or do you give it up?

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

Lead: ♠ J

**Bidding.** You (South) have an obvious 1♠ opening bid as dealer. West overcalls 2♦ and this is Passed back to you. Do you stick or twist? In other words, do you Pass or do you bid? If you choose to contest the auction how should you do it? Well, the usual guidelines here are that you should strain to bid when you are short in the opponents' suit. So, should you bid?

All the signs here are that you should **Pass**. You have a singleton Heart (so who has that suit?) and values, not to mention length, in the suit bid on your left. This hand looks like it's a misfit – in such cases you should let sleeping dogs lie.

**Play.** Partner leads the ♠J against 2♦, which you can read as being the top of a doubleton or a singleton (partner would lead his lowest card from ♠J × ×). Best defence is to switch to the singleton Heart. Partner obliges by winning the ♥A and returning a Heart for you to ruff. You now play the ♠A and another Spade. Declarer desperately ruffs that with the ♦10 and tries the effect of playing the ♦A and another Diamond but a further Spade lead from you allows partner to make his ♦9 for one down.

**Post-mortem.** The best spot for East-West is undoubtedly in Hearts, in fact they may well be able to make 4♥. Who is to blame, though? East doesn't really care to introduce 2♥ into the auction on a feeble suit with a weak hand on a deal that looks to be a misfit.

From the North-South point of view, defending 2♦ is certainly best for your side. Incidentally, bidding 2♠ on your cards would not have been a good idea. That will certainly go down (so you will get a minus score instead of a plus score) and there is an outside chance that East-West would wake up and bid Hearts.





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VB#10 Re-opening Doubles (ACOL)	Contract: 2S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

West		East
♠ T4		♠ 6532
♥ KQJT8		♥ 32
♦ K3		♦ Q954
♣ AJT8		♣ K76
	South	
	♠ AKQ97	
	♥ A5	
	♦ A87	
	♣ Q42	
	North	
	♠ J8	
	♥ 9764	
	♦ JT62	
	♣ 953	

Some hands can be very difficult to judge - should we bid on?

To game?

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

Lead: ♥ K

**Bidding.** You have an obvious opening bid of 1♠ and West is worth an overcall of 2♥. Note that he only has five of them but he has compensation for that – a very good Heart suit (no Swiss cheese here!) and a chunky side-suit in Clubs. 2♥ comes back to you in the South seat – do you reopen the bidding?

Well, with 19 points and a shortage in the opponents' suit it would be craven to Pass the hand out in 2♥ so of course you bid – and the most flexible call is Double. You'd be delighted if partner Passed that holding a string of Hearts – West must be booked for a penalty the size of a City trader's salary. However, North doesn't Pass 2♥ Doubled. He bids 2♣. What now?

Well, you should appreciate that you have put a gun to partner's head and screamed "**Bid!**" at him. What is the poor fellow supposed to do holding used bus tickets? He has to do *something* and 2♣ is the cheapest way out. It shows nothing, promises nothing. Bearing that (and the fact that partner did not bid over 2♥) in mind you should Pass. Bidding again (what? 2NT? 3♠?) would be over-optimistic.

**Play.** When dummy appears you can appreciate North's predicament. What should he do after your take-out Double? Passing the Double is very risky – 2♥ is very likely to make and no one wants to *Double the opponents into game*; that would be very expensive. 2♣ is the least of all evils.

West leads the ♥K and you survey dummy with little enthusiasm. You have, it appears, one Heart loser, two Diamond losers and three Club losers. One too many. In terms of winners the answer is the same – you have five Spades and two Aces – one too few.

Your only chance is to dredge up an extra trick in Diamonds – and that can only be done if West has ♦K × or ♦Q × (All right, you could play either opponent for ♦K Q alone, but how likely is *that?*)

With this in mind you take the ♥A and immediately lead a low Diamond. West, caught in a tricky position, takes his ♦K and continues

Hearts. You ruff, cross to the ♠J and run the ♦J. When that holds you hasten to draw trumps and cash the ♦A. It wouldn't have helped West **not** to take his ♦K – you would have had no option but to cash the ♦A later in the hand and drop his majesty. Now the ♦J would score the decisive eighth trick.

**Post-mortem.** When you hold a good hand be very aware that partner may hold peanuts. When you make a take-out Double and partner makes the minimum response you should also be aware that partner is forced to bid and may have nothing. Don't assume "support" in auctions like the one in this deal. If North had had Spade support and enough to allow you to make a game he would have bid 2♠ over 2♥ or maybe made a negative Double.