

# Boehm on Bridge



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## Wielding the ax — part 6

To get the feel of penalty doubles, it is useful to decide whether you are contemplating a matchpoint double or an IMP (rubber bridge) double. The former may be razor-thin in the right circumstances; the latter should be sound (envision at least a two-trick set). Let's see what develops as we open the bidding 1♦, vulnerable, holding:

♠ A 10 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ A J 10 6 5 4 3 ♣ K.

LHO intervenes with 1♠, partner passes, and right-hand opponent raises to 2♠. You compete with 3♦, LHO chimes in with 3♥, partner bids 4♦, and RHO passes. Do you bid on?

You have something in reserve for your 3♦ call, but is it reasonable to stretch for an 11 trick game? Instead of counting points (seldom helpful on distributional hands), count your losers: one spade, two hearts, one diamond after partner's raise, and one club. Can partner be expected to cover three of your five losers?

Not likely, I'd say, given partner's initial pass. If partner held as much as the ♦ K and ♣ A (two perfect cards that probably provide 11 tricks), he might have jumped to 5♦. Other combinations of two working high cards, such as the major suit kings, leave you with three losers, unless partner also supplies a doubleton heart. Partner, of course, might hold only one covering card. Where does this lead?

At IMPs, if vulnerable, a case can be made for 5♦, where a 40% chance for game is generally enough to back. (You win 10 IMPs when you score 600 instead of 150, a gain of 450; you lose 6 when you go minus 100 instead of plus 130, a loss of 230.) Not vulnerable at IMPs, the odds ought to be around 50%.

(You win 6 IMPs when you score 400 instead of 150, a gain of 250; you lose 5 when you go minus 50 instead of plus 130, a loss of 180.) All IMP calculations assume that you won't be doubled. If the opponents are aggressive doublers, your odds diminish.

At matchpoints, the odds ought to be at least 50%. You don't have to bid all the close games. If you win 11 tricks through expert play, you score above average on deals like this, even if you stop in a partial. Experienced matchpoint players covet plus scores.

Let's say that you are playing matchpoints and decide to pass 4♦. It's not over. LHO bids 4♠, passed around to you. Do you act?

First of all, do you think LHO is bidding 4♠ to make or as a sacrifice?

West	North	East	South (You)
			1♦
1♠	Pass	2♠	3♦
3♥	4♦	Pass	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	?

West ostensibly tried for game with the 3♥ bid, received no cooperation from partner, and bid game all by himself. Either he was always intending to reach 4♠ and bid 3♥ to prepare for the possibility that your side would compete to 5♦, or he was intending to subside at 3♠ if East signed off. Well, East did sign off by passing 4♦ — he could have bid 4♥ or 4♠. What can you conclude?

Nothing is compelling, unless you pick up a hint through the opponents' table action. Counting three-plus defensive tricks in your hand and some small assist from partner, it must be at least 50–50 that they are going down. If you expected to make 4♦, you should double to protect that plus position. Certainly you expected

to make 4♦; you almost bid 5♦. It behooves you, therefore, to assume the role of demon doubler. If they make it, you usually lose only a few matchpoints, going from average-minus to zero. (Not many East–West pairs will reach game with the high-card points divided approximately 20–20.) If 4♠ goes down, your double improves both your score and your reputation as a demon doubler. The full deal:

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

  

West	North	East	South (You)
♠	K Q J 9 2		♠ A 10
♥	K 7 5 3 2		♥ A 9 8
♦	2		♦ A J 10 6 5 4 3
♣	A 3		♣ K

4♠ is down one — two if you find the heart ruff. 4♦ is the limit for North–South, assuming the normal lead of the ♠ K. North is one entry short of establishing the club length. All four players judged the auction well. □