

# Boehm on Bridge



## Matchpoint / IMP strategy — part 9

### Penalty Doubles

In Part III we discussed penalty doubles of partials, concluding that hair-trigger doubles are supremely ill advised at IMPs but logical in certain situations at matchpoints, particularly when there is a plus score to protect. A different type of decision arises in the following problem. Neither side is vulnerable, and you are dealt

**♠8 7 2 ♥10 4 ♦A 8 7 5 ♣K J 10 3.**

Your right-hand opponent opens 1♣, you pass, LHO raises to 2♣ (6–9), partner doubles and RHO passes. What's your call, and does it vary with the scoring method?

The options are 2♦ and pass. 2♦ is a safe, conservative action. Passing for penalty is dynamic. If the club honors are at your right, your hand alone rates to produce four tricks — the penalty could be juicy. Of course, other layouts are not so favorable. At matchpoints, if 2♣ doubled makes, expect a near zero for minus 180.

If you beat them one, plus 100 will matchpoint well when your maximum partial is 90, but not so well if 110 or more is available. In other words, if a diamond partial makes exactly eight tricks, the penalty pass garners the biggest plus, but if diamonds makes at least nine tricks (or a major suit partial is on), passing the double finishes with the smallest plus. Passing aims at a narrow target, while taking out to 2♦ gains in numerous situations, making it a clear matchpoint favorite — it creates more ways to win.

At IMPs, the picture changes. Any plus on a part score deal is sufficient, so if 2♣ is likely to

be set, we needn't worry whether diamonds will score 90 or 110. What if 2♣ can't be beaten? At matchpoints, that's usually a disaster. At IMPs, it isn't good, but minus 180 isn't tragic, particularly if the deal belongs to the opponents.

If our teammates achieve a small plus, minus 180 loses only a few IMPs. On the upside, the penalty pass contains considerable potential when 2♣ doubled goes down more than one. IMPs, like rubber bridge, rewards big sets, and this is an optimum opportunity to go for the jugular.

Two of a minor and 1NT are the ideal partials to double aggressively at IMPs, because if something goes wrong we haven't doubled them into game. In this problem, pass looks better at IMPs — either a break-even action or a big gainer.

Doubling game contracts alters strategy. It is still folly to double for a one-trick set at IMPs because the gain/loss ratio is so adverse. Let's say you double 4♥ and it goes down one. Depending on vulnerability, you have doubled 50 points to 100 or 100 to 200, gaining either 2 or 3 IMPs. If, however, 4♥ doubled makes, you lose an extra 170 points (the 120 trick score is doubled, plus the 50-point bonus for making any doubled contract). That translates into a loss of 5 IMPs, already a bad bet, but it gets worse.

If the opponents score an overtrick or redouble, the loss is considerably larger, and if the double inspires declarer to make a contract that would ordinarily have failed, perhaps warning him of a bad trump split, the loss is well into double digits.

At matchpoints, these valid arguments are diluted by the scoring method. If 4♥ is a normal contract,

fated by losing finesses or a trump stack, there is much to commend a close double. If you defeat 4♥ doubled by a trick and the field is playing the same contract undoubled, you stand to turn an average score into a top, a 50% matchpoint gain. Of course, you had better be sure of your ground. If declarer executes an endplay instead of a finesse because the double located the missing honors, it costs you 50% (average to bottom). It's a judgment call, and there are non-technical factors that may tilt the scale.

For instance, suppose you are a respected, feared player doubling an inexperienced declarer in a close contract. Your odds are favorable — a less-experienced player, intimidated and under pressure, is apt to declare at less than full capacity. If the equation is reversed, an average player should be reluctant to double an expert when the contract is touch-and-go.

Suppose you are dealt **♠6 3 ♥Q J 10 7 ♦A K 2 ♣A 9 8 3.** LHO opens 1NT (15–17), RHO bids 3♥, Altered as showing both majors, 5–5 and invitational strength. You pass, awaiting developments. LHO studies, shrugs and bids 4♥, passed back to you. How do you evaluate double?

In my view, it is highly dubious, ▶



*Marty Bergen*  
Mbergen@mindspring.com

## Finesses — part 2

Examine this deal and see if you can figure out how to take nine tricks in notrump.

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

## ► Boehm on Bridge

especially at matchpoints. Of course we expect 4♥ to go down, often more than one. Still, I would pass at matchpoints. If the opponents have grossly overbid or misbid (and they seemed uncertain), we are headed for a good score. Double greedily aims to increase average-plus (70%) to a top, a matchpoint gain of about 30%. However, double risks chasing them to 4♠. Opener could be 3–3 in the majors. Perhaps he was in doubt of which major to bid. We may not be able to beat 4♠ — two heart tricks reduce to one on a

# Better Bidding with Bergen

| West | North | East     | South |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| 1♦   | Pass  | Pass     | 2NT   |
| Pass | 3NT   | All Pass |       |

In the balancing seat, South's jump to 2NT should not be treated as the unusual notrump. It should show a strong hand of 19–21 high-card points, inviting partner to raise to game with some help.

There is nothing wrong with the auction. You brushed aside West's opening bid and reached 3NT with 26 HCP and all suits stopped. Unfortunately, your chances of taking nine tricks are not all that good.

West leads the ♠Q. You have seven obvious winners: three diamonds, two spades, one heart and one club. There is no hope of winning any extra tricks in the major suits, so you must hope to make something out of the minors.

After winning the spade lead with the king, you lead a diamond to the king and a diamond to your ace. East discards a spade on the second diamond, confirming that West started with four diamonds. So much for that suit. At this point, your only hope is to try to develop

fourth-round ruff, perhaps a minor-suit winner gets ruffed. Our 70% result becomes a zero, especially if we double 4♠.

Bridge logic makes this a shortsighted double, yet there is a greater temptation at IMPs. When all goes well, double often turns a small gain into a big one, deciding a Swiss match. In a knockout match, a big board may provide momentum, leading to a slew of favorable results and a knockout punch. It might boil down to a poker proposition as much as a bridge decision. □

two additional tricks in clubs.

The normal play of leading a club to the ace and a club toward your queen is hopeless because West needs the ♣K to justify his opening bid.

Your best chance is to hope that West started with a doubleton or singleton ♣K. Lead a low club from your hand. When West plays low, insert the ♣9, allowing East to win the 10.

When you regain the lead, play a club from hand, capturing West's king with the ace. It is now easy to lead dummy's ♣5 and finesse through West's remaining ♣J 7 to your ♣Q 8.

For those interested in bridge lingo, this is called an intra-finesse. **Waste not, want not**

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

South is in 3NT. West leads the ♠Q, taken in dummy perforse.

South has seven tricks off the top. His only chance to make 3NT is to win two additional tricks in hearts. He needs to finesse, so he leads the ♥J at trick two. When East covers, South has only the ♥A, the ♥K and the ♥10 as winners.

South should lead dummy's ♥2 and finesse the 10. The queen falls under the ace on the second round of the suit, and declarer wins tricks with both the ♥J and the ♥K. □