



Mike Lawrence

Some questions regarding negative doubles — part 4

Is opener *required* to reopen if left-hand opponent's overcall is passed back to him?

I have heard a number of statements made at the table that border on the ridiculous. One of them is: "In our partnership, if there is an overcall and it is passed to opener, he *must* reopen." This statement is too awful for words. This might be good advice for a slightly stupid computer, but not for a bridge player.

(For the record, another of these awful statements is this one: "We never let the opponents play at the two level." This article is not devoted to that topic, but hearing that little speech makes me cringe.

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Mike's Advice

which is why I brought it up.)

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	Pass

♠K1032 ♥2 ♦A87 ♣KJ1097

Let's assume you would open this minimum hand. I would because you have quality values (such as they are), good shape and you have an easy rebid with 1♠.

When North overcalls 1♥ and the auction is passed to you, you have to decide if your hand is worth another call.

The values say that you should pass, but your singleton heart tells you that partner is likely to be waiting with a lot of hearts and is hoping that you double. He cannot double for penalty directly, remember, because a direct double would be negative.

So you double. On a good day this is the layout:

♠	A J 4		
♥	K J 9 7 5		
♦	10 5		
♣	A 6 4		
♠	K 10 3 2	N	♠ Q 8 7
♥	2	W E	♥ A Q 8 6 4
♦	A 8 7	S	♦ Q J 9
♣	K J 10 9 7		♣ 8 2
	♠ 9 6 5		
	♥ 10 3		
	♦ K 6 4 3 2		
	♣ Q 5 3		

East is content to pass and South puts his hand down as dummy in 1♥ doubled.

The defense may go in different directions, but declarer basically has to lose two spades, two diamonds, two clubs and quite a few heart tricks.

Did North do badly by bidding? No. He just chose an unlucky moment to do so.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	Pass

♠K1032 ♥Q82 ♦A87 ♣KJ5

A few days later, West opens 1♣ and North overcalls 1♥, passed back to opener. West, remembering

their motto (which says that opener *must* reopen), does so. "Double," he offers. This time the bidding goes a little differently. Instead of passing 1♥ doubled and collecting a few hundred points, East does some thinking and bids 2♣.

How will West enjoy that contract? Consider this layout. How do you think West will do in a club contract?

♠	A Q 4		
♥	K J 9 7 5		
♦	10 5		
♣	A 6 4		
♠	K 10 3 2	N	♠ J 8 7
♥	Q 8 2	W E	♥ A 6 4
♦	A 8 7	S	♦ J 6 4
♣	K J 5		♣ 9 8 7 2
	♠ 9 6 5		
	♥ 10 3		
	♦ K Q 9 3 2		
	♣ Q 10 3		

Not a pretty sight. Offhand, it looks like West will lose a couple of spades, a couple of hearts, a couple of diamonds and who knows how many clubs. Since East and West may be able to defeat 1♥ if they defend well, their result for down a few in 2♣ won't be much to talk about.

West's decision to reopen should not be based on some rote rule, but because (a) his hand is big enough that it is clear to reopen or (b) West has a hand that suggests that his partner may be making a penalty pass.

On the first hand, West has a singleton heart, so he knows there is a good chance that East wants to defend.

West has the ♥Q 8 2 on the second deal, which suggests that East does not have a heart stack. West should conclude that if East does not have a stack in hearts, he would have bid if he had something to bid with. East rates to have a poor hand. In fact, the one he has is not too bad; East has an ace and two jacks and four clubs. East is, as they say, maximum for his bad hand. □