

Mike's Advice



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Doubling after your partner overcalls at the one level and your RHO bids 1NT

Your left-hand opponent opens with one of a suit, and your partner bids at the one level. Your RHO bids 1NT, natural and showing a stopper in your partner's suit. Here is an example sequence:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♣	1♥	1NT	?

Most players play that 1NT shows 8–10 points (a wise choice) and a stopper in your partner's suit, hearts in this case. One conclusion from this is that your side does not rate to have many game contracts available. Game in hearts is not likely because your RHO said he has a heart stopper — may have four of them, too. This means that a heart contract is going to start with at least some bad luck. If your side has a game, it is more likely to be in one of the unbid suits. Spades is the most likely candidate on this auction.

For now, however, the question is what your chances are of beating 1NT and whether you should double it. Which of these hands would be worth a penalty double of 1NT?

1. ♠Q875 ♥84 ♦KQ84 ♣Q105
2. ♠KJ73 ♥9 ♦AJ83 ♣K963
3. ♠AJ63 ♥73 ♦KQJ ♣QJ53
4. ♠KQ73 ♥Q73 ♦KJ83 ♣106
5. ♠QJ873 ♥4 ♦KQ984 ♣Q5

Here are some thoughts that should help guide your judgment.

1. The first thing to realize is that if your RHO has a sane 1NT bid, he rates to have at least 8 points. His 8 and his partner's 12 (or more)

means that they have half the deck and may have more. Further, your RHO has something in hearts and whatever it is will be good for him because his heart values are behind your partner. If your partner has ♥A Q 10 9 3, that nice holding will be partially compromised if RHO has ♥K J 5 2. Since you can expect this to be true, you should be less impressed with your defensive chances. Note, too, that your ♣Q is in front of the club bidder. If declarer needs some tricks in clubs, it is possible that he can get them.

Remember this. If your partner had *opened* 1♥ and your RHO bid 1NT, you would double and expect to set it quite a few. When your partner *overcalls* 1♥, he promises only 9 or 10 points (your choice), which is way less than he promises when he opens the bidding.

2. Your nice 12-point hand looks like it is going to bother them in 1NT, but again, you should consider that your side has a maximum of about 20 points. You know that the heart suit will usually be hard to set up, and you have no other obvious suit to attack. In fact, your 12 HCP guarantee that your partner has a minimum overcall. I expect that their side will make 1NT more than half of the time.

Note, however, that if your partner has a weak hand with a four-card side suit, your side might be able to take eight or nine tricks in his second suit.

3. This looks really good, and for once it is likely that you will set 1NT doubled if that should be the contract. This conclusion looks good on paper, but it is virtually impossible that you will ever have a hand this good. If you do have it, your partner must have stretched his credit card to the limit to find a bid. He will hate your double. I cannot recall having this good a hand on this auction.

4. Here you have a bit of a heart fit. You could double 1NT but I would still bet against your setting it. Only if your opponents were vulnerable would it be reasonable to try to set them, doubled. Much better would be to raise hearts and allow your partner to play in a normal contract. It is a lot easier to play a decent contract than it is to defend against 1NT doubled.

5. Finally, a hand that offers some potential. You have two nice suits, and given that your partner has some points, there is no reason to assume a total misfit. Make the layout something like this:

<i>You</i>	<i>Partner</i>
♠Q J 8 7 3	♠9 2
♥4	♥K Q 10 7 2
♦K Q 9 8 4	♦J 5 3
♣Q 5	♣K 8 2

Your partner has a tolerance for diamonds but little else of clear value. 2♦ has a play and it is unlikely that your side can get a plus score anywhere else.

Since experience has shown that doubling 1NT for penalty and getting a successful result out of it is rare, I cast my vote for using the double as takeout, showing both of the unbid suits: 5–5 pattern is expected, but I can see doing it with 4–5 if your are reasonable.