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From Al Kimel by e-mail

1. Assume you are playing weak notrumps. Also assume that you have agreed to play penalty doubles after a two-level overcall (do you agree with this?). What guidelines do you recommend to influence responder in his decision to double the overcall? Should he have, say, a minimum of two trump tricks and four trumps, or would you be more flexible than this? (I am assuming that the balance of power lies with the opening side.)

2. Consider the following competitive sequences. Does the delayed raise show a weaker or stronger hand? How do the raises differ?

- a) 1♣-(1♠)-Dbl-(2♠)
- b) 1♣-(1♠)-Dbl-(Pass);
1NT-(Pass)-2♣-(2♠)
- c) 1♠-(Dbl)-2♠
- d) 1♠-(Dbl)-Pass-(2♥);
Pass-(Pass)-2♠

1. I prefer negative doubles by a wide margin, but if playing penalty doubles, the minimum trump holding would to a large extent depend on the form of scoring and the vulnerability. As opener is *expected* to pass a penalty double (this is a high-frequency appeals-committee issue

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when the double is not made in tempo), there is always risk. I'd double aggressively at matchpoints if there's a lively chance for plus 200, more conservatively at IMPS (i.e., better trumps). The best penalty doubles occur when you lack the high-card strength for game and can see excellent chances for a bigger plus than you could achieve in a partscore. It's not the 1400-point windfalls that should convince you that penalty doubles are your best option, but rather the 200s, 300s and 500s that present themselves more frequently, often with the opponents doing nothing silly.

2. In general, passing first and bidding later denies the support required for a direct raise, although there are exceptions.

The first auction in each pair shows (typically) three trumps and modest values, although bidding over a negative double might be based on a stronger hand than the other case. Many play artificial raises in both those sequences, just to show a bit extra.

The second pair in each group needs definition. (d) is commonly played as honor-doubleton, about 7 to 10 high-card points, but (b) would be unattractive with only two trumps, so it might be treated as "weaker with three" or "weaker with no top honor."

From Bob Reed by e-mail

I have a question concerning a proper rebid to a Jacoby 2NT response following a major-suit opening bid. Holding a singleton ace, should the singleton be the next bid?

- ♠ K 8 7 4 2
- ♥ K 9 3
- ♦ A
- ♣ Q 8 6 4

- ♠ A J 5 3
- ♥ 8 4
- ♦ K Q J 7 4
- ♣ A K

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♦	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

Spades broke so we made seven against a club lead. What should North bid over 4♠? Would 5♦ show an ace and encourage slam? I know you don't splinter with a singleton ace, but I am not sure of the correct bid over 2NT.

The main question is a good one, although South's bidding was not very good regardless. If North had been dealt (say),

♠K Q x x x ♥A x x ♦x ♣Q x x x, slam would have been virtually cold, and I once played with a partner who had more than 11 HCP when he opened. Apart from that (4♣ was indicated over 3♦), it is usually better to respond 2♦ with a hand like South's to show the source of tricks and develop the auction more slowly.

It's really a guess whether to treat a singleton ace as a singleton. If you have a good hand you can get away with it because you intend to bid again but when you're weak (as here) you are truly torn. If you don't show the diamond singleton you are supposed to jump to 4♠ in standard Jacoby 2NT methods because you don't have anything extra, and it may be that the diamond holding is crucial. Showing it, however, causes partner to devalue some of his chunky diamond holdings and gets him to look elsewhere for your high cards.

With the actual North cards, I'd elect to show a balanced minimum by bidding 4♠ (there are much better rebid structures on the market for opener these days, including an artificial 3♣ to indicate a minimum: responder can still check for singletons after that). Here South will (or should) now regret having started with 2NT but will probably not pass, so you might well get to the acceptable (hardly laydown) slam anyway. □