

Q. What are Support Doubles (and Redoubles) and Why Would I Play Them?

Support doubles are one of the special doubles that are commonly used in today's game. Having determined that penalty doubles are generally useless at lower levels of bidding, a better use can be found for most doubles at the one- and two-levels.

Consider the following scenario: You open a semi-balanced hand with 1♦. After your left-hand opponent passes, your partner responds 1♠. Holding 3 spades, you are prepared to rebid 1NT when your right-hand opponent overcalls 2♣. Do you raise partner's spades? If you do, your partner will assume you have four-card support, and you will possibly forego 3NT for an impossible 4♠ game. But if partner has 5 spades, you may miss a great spade game. Don't you wish you had a way to find out more about partner's holding?

It is this frequent occurrence that leads to the use of the Support Double. The Support Double promises partner **exactly three-card trump support**. Since it is enacted by the opening bidder, there are no (further) restrictions on the Doubler. This permits partner to steer the bidding away from a 4-3 trump suit, but permits partner to go on when an eight-card fit is found. In this way, a direct raise of responder's suit always promises four- (or more) card trump support. A double is a Support Double when made by an opener after partner responds with a new suit at the one-level and the opponents interfere. It is not usually used by an opener after partner responds with a new suit at the two-level (already promising a five-card suit) and the opponents interfere, but can be done so following a partnership discussion.

In the same vein, if the opponents double after an opening bid and a one-level response, a redouble promises the same 3-card support, whereas a direct raise would promise at least four-card support. Since you now can show four-card support with a raise, and three-card support with a double, it follows that a pass in this seat would usually signify a doubleton (or less) in partner's suit.

Most players treat a double (or redouble) in that situation as a Support Double through opponents' bidding of 2♣. You give up the ability to punish the opponents at lower levels of bidding, but this is not likely to occur with great frequency. Doubles above this agreed level should be treated as penalty doubles.

Examples:

- 1 Holding: ♠ AT ♥ K764 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 2♦ - 2♥ (you)
- 2 Holding: ♠ AT4 ♥ Q76 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 2♦ - **Double** (you)
- 3 Holding: ♠ AT62 ♥ Q6 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♠ (partner) - 2♦ - 2♠ (you)
- 4 Holding: ♠ AT4 ♥ Q76 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♠ (partner) - 2♦ - **Double** (you)
- 5 Holding: ♠ AT ♥ QT63 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 1♠ - 2♥ (you)
- 6 Holding: ♠ AT4 ♥ Q76 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 1♠ - **Double** (you)
- 7 Holding: ♠ AJT4 ♥ Q7 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 1♠ - 1NT (you)
- 8 Holding: ♠ AT5 ♥ Q7 ♦ AQ8 ♣ J742
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 2♦ - Pass (you)

9 Holding: ♠ AJ5 ♥ Q7 ♦ 8 ♣ KQ9742
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - 2♦ - Pass (you)

In the latter two examples, you will wait for your partner to reopen the bidding. If partner reopens with a double, you will pass or bid 2NT with hand #8 (depending on who is vulnerable), and will bid 3♣ with hand #9.

Let's see what happens when the opponents make a takeout double after your partner's response...

10 Holding: ♠ AT ♥ Q764 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - Double - 2♥ (you)

11 Holding: ♠ AT4 ♥ Q76 ♦ A8 ♣ KT974
1♣ (you) - Pass - 1♥ (partner) - Double - **Redouble** (you)

This treatment, allowing an important distinction when trying to determine the proper denomination in which to play a contract, is an integral part of most of today's 2/1 Game Force players, and would be a useful addition to your game as well.