



Play & Learn

BY PAT HARRINGTON ✉ ppharr@gmail.com

What a negative double shows

Last month we saw that responder's double in the following auction shows at least four hearts:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Dbl	

Because responder needs medium or better strength and at least five hearts to bid 2♥, hearts is the likeliest suit to get lost when players do not use negative doubles. But negative doubles can also be useful in other circumstances.

1. ♠A J 6 4 ♥A 6 2 ♦9 5 3 ♣K Q 3.

What is your bid if:

- Partner opens 1♦ and right-hand opponent passes?
- Partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 2♥?
- Partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♥?

(a) 1♠ by you shows only four spades after RHO's pass. 1♠ is forcing, so you are sure to have another chance to show your game-going hand. By showing four spades now, you can reach 4♠ when partner has a fit, or 3NT when partner doesn't have a fit.

(b) RHO overcalled on the two level. Here, 2♠ by you would show five spades. Players who use negative doubles must decide how high the convention is in effect. The higher the bidding, the more strength you need for a negative double. As long as you and partner agree to use negative doubles this high (and you should), you can afford to double to show spades, keeping

both 4♠ and 3NT as possible games.

(c) After RHO's 1♥ overcall, you could still respond 1♠, a forcing bid, but players who use a negative double to show four cards in any unbid major would double. Because it doesn't make sense to have two ways to show four spades in this auction, using the negative double to show exactly four spades lets you find a 4-4 spade fit. Read on to see how you can immediately find your fit when responder has five spades.

2. ♠A J 6 4 3 ♥6 ♦Q J 9 ♣K Q 3 2.

What is your bid if:

- Partner opens 1♦ and RHO passes?
- Partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♥?
- Partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 2♥?

(a) You have another game-going hand, but it's difficult to show that you have five spades. After RHO passes, your 1♠ response promises only four. If partner doesn't raise spades, you shouldn't rebid spades immediately because that tends to show a six-card suit. You'll have to bid clubs next.

(b) If you use negative doubles, RHO's 1♥ overcall can make finding a 5-3 spade fit easier. Because you'd make a negative double with exactly four spades, 1♠ shows at least five spades. Holding three-card spade support, partner is assured of a fit. No worry about how to let partner know

you have that fifth spade now.

(c) You have no need for a negative double here because you have sufficient strength (a medium response or better) and sufficient spade length (at least five spades) to bid 2♠. With only 9 or 10 total points, you'd use a negative double despite your five spades and, with only four spades, you'd use a negative double even with a strong hand.

We've looked only at auctions involving a minor-suit opening bid and a major-suit overcall. Recalling that a negative double shows four cards in any unbid major, what is East showing in this auction?

3.	West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	Dbl	

East shows *both* unbid majors – four hearts and four spades.

What if East has only one four-card major? East bids that major. East shows only four hearts here:

4.	West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	1♥	

It's important to keep in mind that responder can bid a four-card major on the one level after an overcall. Without that ability, East might have to pass and East-West could miss a major-suit fit. East needs both majors to double in this auction.

Hopefully, negative doubles seem pretty logical to this point. Tune in next month to find out what to do with only one major. ■