



Play & Learn

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Negative doubles – what suits?

As we saw last month, a negative double shows four cards in any unbid major. East could double in the below auction to show both four hearts and four spades.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♣	1♦	Dbl	

When the overcall is at the one level, East can make a negative double with as few as 6 points. Because there is no upper limit on a negative double, East could have an opening hand or better.

Holding only one four-card major in the same auction, East can bid that major on the one level. East could bid 1♥, promising at least four hearts with these hands:

- a) ♠76 ♥AQ95 ♦532 ♣9642.
- b) ♠76 ♥AQ965 ♦532 ♣Q92.
- c) ♠A7 ♥KQ95 ♦A832 ♣J94

With Hand c), East isn't sure wheth-

er the best game is 4♥ or 3NT. Instead of making a negative double, which would show both majors, East can keep both games in the picture by making a forcing bid in a four-card major to explore for a major-suit fit first.

What do you think East is showing in this auction?

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♦	2♣	Dbl	

If you answered four hearts and four spades, your logic is good and it's reasonable to have that agreement with your partner when you are first using negative doubles. However (don't you hate that word?), many players will double with only one four-card major and a place to go when partner bids the wrong major. Because responder's bid of 2♥ or 2♠ in this auction would show a five-card suit, restricting our use of a negative double to hands with both majors can make it difficult to locate a 4-4 major suit fit.

By partnership agreement, East might double with any of the hands below. If your agreement is that double shows *both* majors, only hands (a) and (b) qualify. You might compete to 2♦ on (c) and bid 2NT on (d), but you would have to pass with (e).

- a) ♠A653 ♥KJ102 ♦32 ♣943.
- You'll pass if opener rebids 2♥ or 2♠.

- b) ♠A653 ♥KJ1052 ♦32 ♣94.
- You aren't strong enough to respond 2♥.

- c) ♠53 ♥KJ102 ♦AQ32 ♣943.

You can raise diamonds if opener doesn't bid hearts.

- d) ♠A53 ♥KJ102 ♦32 ♣K943.

You can bid notrump if you don't find a heart fit.

- e) ♠A53 ♥KJ102 ♦J32 ♣943.

You could end up in a 4-3 spade fit with Hand (e) but that's better than selling out to 2♣.

The higher your opponent's overcall, the higher a negative double takes your side. As the level increases, the more strength responder needs to use a negative double. In this auction, the double shows a minimum of about 8 points. We'll talk more about strength next time.

In an auction where there is an unbid major suit, a negative double helps you find a major-suit fit. In auctions where there is no unbid major, a negative double can be used to show the minors.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	1♠	Dbl	

East might hold:

- ♠653 ♥62 ♦KQ32 ♣K1094.

Without a heart fit, a spade stopper for notrump or the medium strength required to bid a new suit on the two level, East's choices are pass or double. Pass should feel bad when East-West have at least as many points as their opponents. A negative double offers the perfect alternative. ■

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