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This lesson continues the series about doubles, and talks about cooperative (or “do something intelligent”) doubles. The options available in these situations are either to bid on, or to pass for penalties. These are the hardest to define because they constitute a range of situation from those that are more takeout oriented, to those that are more penalty oriented. It may be helpful to review our past notes and list those doubles that are well defined:

1. If it is partner’s first opportunity to call, then a double is takeout.
2. If it is at the 1 level (except a double of 1NT), then it is takeout.
3. If partner has doubled LHO’s overcall in direct seat, the double is negative.

In general “cooperative” doubles at the two level will be more takeout oriented, at the three level about even, and at the four level tending more towards penalty. In general the doubler should have a hand with good defense, and will usually have a larger part of their assets outside of the partnership’s own suit. At the four level partner may with a very offensively oriented hand bid on, but you need to have excellent defense as partner is likely to pass.

Let’s look at some examples.

1. 1H – 2C – 2H – 3C
X(?)

This double is cooperative. Partner is unsure about the three level, and should have at least a trump control (although a stack is unlikely). Something like:
S-Qxx H- Axxxx D-Kx C-AQx. Note that most of this hand is defensive in nature, and even the heart A is useful on defense.

If your hand is defensively oriented, such as:

S-Kxx H-xxx D-AJxx C-xx, probably best to pass when partner doubles 3C. But if your hand is offensively oriented, such as:

S-xx H- Kxxx D-AJxxx C-xx, bid 3 hearts. Your length in hearts make it less likely you can beat 3C, and more likely you can make 3H.

1H – 2C – 2H – 3C
?

With: S-Qxx H-AKQxxx D- x C-Qxx. Bid 3 hearts instead of doubling. Your hand is very offensive with most of your values in hearts; you might only take one trick on defense.

2. South	West	North	East
1D	P	1H	1S
P	2S	?	

North's hand: S-xx H-AKJxx D-xx C-Kxxx.

Partner opened the bidding and you have a nice 11 count with a good 5 card major, so it looks like the hand belongs to your side. However, the opponents spirited interference has given you a problem. Pass and partner may assume you have a 6 count with a ratty 4 card heart suit. If you pass, partner may also pass and allow the opponents to play 2 spades. On the other hand, partner has not shown a fit for your heart suit. You have no spade stopper so bidding NT would be wrong. You do not have support for partner's suit. To show your second suit you will have to bid your anemic 4 card suit at the three level. The solution is to double and ask partner to do something intelligent.

South has many options:

With three hearts and a minimum hand, South could bid three hearts.

South could rebid 3D with a 6 card or strong 5 card diamond suit.

South could bid 3C with four or more clubs

South could bid 2NT with a spade stopper.

South could pass and defend 2SX with some length and strength in spades. (Note that North's hand will be good for defense particularly if South has only 2 or 1 hearts.)

Note that if South has spade cards the decision to pass for penalty or bid NT will depend in part on the relative vulnerability. If EW are vulnerable, the penalty pass becomes more attractive as a 1 trick set scores more than any North South partscore.

3. South	West	North	East
1D	1S	X	2S
P	P	?	

North's hand: S-xxx H-AKJx D-xx C-Kxxx.

This is almost the same hand but North has only 4 hearts and one more spade. North's first double is negative showing hearts and clubs. North has too much defense to allow EW to play 2S unmolested, but the best contract is unclear. A second double tells partner you have extra strength. With a fit for one of your suits, South can take the double out, rebid diamonds, or potentially choose to defend.

4. Direct double of a NT.

This is the one case where a direct double of a one level bid is cooperative. The double should show a relatively balanced hand with equal or greater value to the NT opener.

After 1NT – X – P - ?

you can look at your hand and pretty accurately assess which side has the balance of strength, and whether 1NTX is likely to make. The general rule is that the weaker you are, the more imperative it is to take out partner's double! If you are quite weak opener is likely to make 1NT doubled, giving you a terrible result. On the other hand, with 9+ points it is likely that your side can make game, and the decision will depend in part on the relative vulnerability.

A few examples:

S-Qxxxx H- xx D-xxx C-xxx

Bid 2 spades. 1NT is likely to make, maybe with an overtrick. Partner will be end-played from the opening lead. 2S may or may not make, but will be better than passing. The theory here is very much like partner opened 1NT.

S-xxx H-xxx D-xxx C-xxxx

Bid 2 C with a straight face and hope opponents balance back in. The opponents can probably make 3NT.

S-Qxx H-Axxx D-Kx C-Jxx

If the opponents are vulnerable and you are not, pass for penalty. Opener's partner has at most 3-4 HCP. If you are vulnerable, consider bidding 3NT yourself! Partners big hand is sitting behind opener, and any finesses you need will probably work.

S-xxx H-Axxx D- Kx C-xxx

Pass for penalty. You are likely to beat 1NT

S-xxx H-AKxxx D- Kx C-xxx

Bid 3H if vulnerable, allowing partner to choose between 4H and 3NT. Note that 2H could be much weaker. Partner has shown ~16, so it is likely your side has a game. If opponents are vulnerable and you are not, a penalty pass could work out well.

