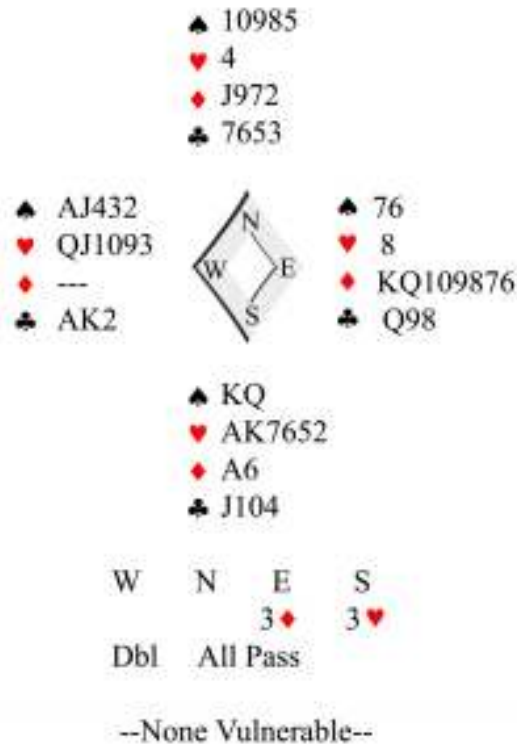


81. Penalty Double After A Pre-empt

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Penalty Doubles

Takeout doubles are usually doubles at the one or two-level, higher if opponents pre-empt, while the following doubles are for penalty:

1. Doubles made by doubling over and not doubling under;
2. A double made by your partner when you have already told him your hand (1NT or a pre-empt does this);
3. A double after one's partner has already answered (by a bid not a pass) a takeout double;
4. A double made when the partnership knows they have the balance of power;
5. A double made after the partnership has agreed on a suit;
6. Any takeout double may be passed not for lack of a better bid but for penalty (conversion).
7. Any double made after a takeout double has been converted to penalty (passed); and
8. any double after the partnership makes a redouble.

This week's column is an example of 1 and 2.

The bidding:

East opens the bidding with a diamond pre-empt. He is essentially telling partner his hand is really only fit for diamonds and could be suitable for a diamond sacrifice if partner's cards are right.

Regarding suit quality, could East have a seven card diamond suit to the jack with an outside ace or king? It is unwise. Especially in a situation where one could get doubled, one needs reasonable control of the trump suit.

Here, this is a first-seat pre-empt. However, in third seat, a weak two could be undisciplined. One does not have a suit quality asking bid such as Ogust over a weak three bid or higher like one has for weak two's. Nevertheless, in first or second seat, partner is an unknown hand so discipline is needed.

Regarding suitability for being a good dummy, East does not have three card support or better in either major. Most people relax this condition, but not having either a four card major or a two-suited hand is very important.

This hand may also be good for a sacrifice because of the singleton. A 7222 distribution is never ideal in what could turn into a sacrificing situation, but a 7321 is good.

Over a pre-empt, with a minimum opening and without good shape, South would just pass in direct seat. However with 17 high card points and a six-card suit headed by the ace and king, he can venture a three heart call.

Unfortunately, although South's call is very reasonable, he is faced with an unfavorable lie of the cards. West doubles for penalty. West is not showing four spades, because his partner's pre-empt denies a four card major. If West had a fit with his partner's pre-empt, a penalty double would not be wise.

The contract: Three hearts doubled by South

The opening lead: The ace of clubs

Leading from ace empty (any holding of the ace without the king) is often a terrible lead, but when accompanied by the king, it is an exceptional lead. One can look at the board and get a signal (by the size of the card with which partner follows suit) from one's partner.

The play:

On the ace of clubs, East signals encouragement with the nine. There is no need to lead trump because dummy's only shortness is trump. The defense take the first three clubs and East exits with the king of diamonds. South covers and West ruffs.

West can't get into East's hand but South will eventually have to play a losing diamond. Defense gets three clubs, one diamond, three hearts and one spade for down four doubled.

The result: Three hearts doubled down four for -800.

Note: It is always better to get 500 or more doubled than it is to struggle with a hand of bad breaks. If someone has a seven-card suit, the distributions are likely to be very uneven.