

Support Doubles

W	N	E	S	
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥	This double by West is a SUPPORT DOUBLE and shows 3 card support for partner. Thus a 2♠ bid would guarantee 5 ♠'s.
dbl				

In general, a support double only applies when you could have raised partner to the two level. However, if partner has promised a 5 card suit, then you can still (by agreement) play a support double; thus distinguishing between 3 and 4 card support.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	1♠	2♥	2♠	This is a support double, showing 3 card ♥ support.
dbl				

If responder bids a minor suit at the two level, there is little point in playing a support double because
(a) responder does not guarantee a five card suit and
(b) Who's interested in minor suit fits?

Now this situation is also slightly different as the ♥ suit has not been mentioned. Some players play that double here is negative, showing ♥'s; but I can't really see the point. Partner has 'denied' ♥'s and if he indeed has a 4 card ♥ suit (and thus more ♠'s) he will presumably bid ♥'s next go. So I think it's best to play dbl as a Support Double.

W	N	E	S	
1♦	pass	1♠	2♣	
dbl				

Responder's double when playing Support Doubles

Now we all know, I hope, that opener should normally re-open with a double in the pass-out seat when playing negative doubles. An analogous situation exists for responder when playing Support Doubles. Now it is not as likely that opener has a stack (he usually cannot have more than 4 cards in the suit) but that is no reason to simply bid without thinking about the possibility of partner having a penalty hand.

♠ 7	You hold this hand at favourable vulnerability. You open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠. I would then bid 1NT - one of those rare occasions where you bid 1NT with a singleton in partner's suit as there is no other sensible bid. But before you bid, RHO bids 2♥. Obviously you would double playing standard methods, but what do you do when playing Support Doubles?
♥ AKJ2	
♦ 86542	
♣ KJ7	

♠ AKJ62	Now let's look at this hand. Partner opens 1♦ and you respond 1♠. LHO then overcalls 2♥ and this is passed round to you. What do you do? Playing 'standard' it is not clear; partner is minimal and it's also not clear if game is there. Either double, 2♠ or 3♣ could be best but most experienced players would choose an 'Action Double'. But playing Support Doubles it's as easy as pie. Double! This is not penalties, but simply showing values and a willingness to defend 2♥ doubled if that's what partner had in mind when he passed. If partner actually has a weak heap then you don't mind if he bids 3♣, 3♦ or 2♠. Double gives him the choice, keeps the bidding low, and enables partner to punish the opponents if he has that hand type. Remember, double takes up no bidding space whatsoever! The complete deal is on the next page.
♥ 105	
♦ Q10	
♣ Q864	

Let's have a look at the complete example. It's from club play, board 12 from Wednesday 8th March.

Dealer: ♠ 108543
 West ♥ 83
 N-S vul ♦ 93
 ♣ A953

♠ 7	N	♠ AKJ62
♥ AKJ2	W E	♥ 105
♦ 86542	S	♦ Q10
♣ KJ7		♣ Q864
	♠ Q9	
	♥ Q9764	
	♦ AKJ7	
	♣ 102	

Table A - What actually happened

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥
pass (1)	pass	3♣ (2)	pass
3NT (3)	all pass		

Table B - Playing natural methods

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥
dbl (1)	pass	pass (4)	pass

Table C - Playing Support doubles

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥
pass (1)	pass	dbl (5)	pass
pass (6)	pass		

- Table A: (1) E-W play Support Doubles and so double here would simply show exactly 3 ♠'s. It would be silly to bid No Trump with this hand (especially at this vulnerability) so it's clearly best to pass and hope that partner can balance with a double.
 (2) Unfortunately East did not see it that way and woodenly bid his second suit. This is a very poor bid. East knows that West has less than 3 ♠'s and so there is no fit there. If West had a reasonable holding in ♥'s it's likely that he would have bid NoTrump. So he either has a poor hand with nothing much in ♥'s (in which case there is no easy game for E-W) or he's sitting there with the penalty ♥ hand. Either way, double has everything to gain and nothing to lose. Bidding 3♣ has no merit whatsoever and is a no-no with this hand type when playing Support Doubles - especially at this vulnerability!!
 (3) With a resigned smile, West had no option but to unhappily plonk the 3NT card on the table.

- Table B: (1) This is a penalty double using standard methods.
 (4) And East has no reason to remove it.

- Table C: (1) As at Table A, West has to pass when playing Support doubles.
 (5) This double is clear when playing Support Doubles.
 (6) Thank you, partner.

And what happened? 3NT went one down at the two tables where it was bid. 2♥ doubled went minus 3 for 800 to E-W. Note that even if 3NT made it would be a poor result compared with the easy 500 or 800 on offer.

The bottom line: -

- The Action Double is valid even if you do not play Support Doubles; it shows around 9+ points with no clear bid.
- If you play Support Doubles, then the Action Double is analogous to the Automatic re-opening double by opener when playing Negative Doubles. Responder should strive to make an Action Double, especially if holding just one or two cards in the overcalled suit.

The Action Double

Here is a Max Hardy extract (Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century) when Support Doubles have not been agreed: -

When responder has bid and there has been an overcall, opener will often have no reason to bid. Opener will not have a fit for responder, a suit that should be rebid, or a two suited hand that calls for a rebid in the 2nd suit.

After opener passes and if advancer also passes, responder may have a problem. When responder's values are at least enough to invite game (9+ HCP or more), it will be clear that pass is not a logical alternative. The opening side will have most of the high card strength. Responder may not have a clear-cut call, but will know that pass cannot be right.

Responder should double to express that the hand belongs to the opening side, but that responder has no idea of the correct action. Opener should understand that this double is not for penalties, but is made to keep the auction alive. Responder asks opener to make an intelligent decision.

This double is an intelligent bridge action. Experienced players understand that the double is not for penalties. However, inexperienced players may have no such understanding. An alert is technically required for this double for that reason.
