

## Wriggling from 1NT doubled (The DONT Wriggle)

An abstract from "Understanding the Competitive Auction"  
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### The penalty double of 1NT

If South opens with a weak 1NT either defender can double with 16 points. It can sometimes be a worthwhile gamble to double with less if you are on lead and you have a lead that is likely to be successful.

|     |         |         |                |         |
|-----|---------|---------|----------------|---------|
| (a) | ♠ K J 6 | ♥ Q 8 5 | ♦ A Q 8 3      | ♣ K 8 4 |
| (b) | ♠ A 7 4 | ♥ 5 3   | ♦ A K Q 9 7 5  | ♣ 9 7   |
| (c) | ♠ A 8   | ♥ K 8 6 | ♦ K Q J 10 8 6 | ♣ 8 6   |

With hand a) you should pass whether you are East or West. There is probably no lead you can make without giving away a trick and if declarer knows who holds all the missing points you are likely to be endplayed continually. If you hold b) or c) you can make a good case for doubling, but only if you are on lead. If partner has to make the initial attack he has no reason not to lead his own suit and it may well then be too late to establish anything from your attractive diamond suit.

The possibility of a long running suit should be in North's mind as he considers whether or not to sign off over the double.

|     |         |             |       |               |
|-----|---------|-------------|-------|---------------|
| (d) | ♠ Q 8 6 | ♥ Q 7 5 3   | ♦ 7 5 | ♣ K 8 6 4     |
| (e) | ♠ Q 7 6 | ♥ Q J 8 6 4 | ♦ 7 5 | ♣ K 8 6       |
| (f) | ♠ 6 5 3 | ♥ 9 7       | ♦ 8 6 | ♣ A K J 9 7 2 |

With hand d) he has no sensible alternative but to pass but if he has a five-card suit it is usually wise to sign off. If he passes with hand e) because his side have at least half of the points he is playing Russian roulette. His tricks are slow. By the time the defenders have cashed a long suit it will be aces and kings that take the remaining tricks, not queens and jacks. A 2♥ bid is clearcut. (Note that even if you play Stayman and transfers normally, if 1NT is doubled Stayman and transfers are not a good idea. The double has changed your priority. You are now concerned solely with finding a cheap and safe resting place and you need to be able to sign off in 2♣ or 2♦.

With f) the decision is close. A sign off in 2♣ is the safe course. Alternatively a vulnerable pass could result in +580 or -500. How strong are your nerves?

If North passes, the traditional theory that East removes his partner's double with any hand lacking five points is patently absurd. Much depends on the vulnerability. Let me quote two extreme cases.

|     |                  |         |         |         |
|-----|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| (g) | ♠ 6 4 3 2        | ♥ 9 8 6 | ♦ 7 5 3 | ♣ 6 4 2 |
| (h) | ♠ K Q J 10 8 6 3 | ♥ 6 3   | ♦ 4 3 2 | ♣ 7     |

At red vulnerability it would be unthinkable for East to remove West's double with g). Firstly West may be able to beat 1NT on his own. Secondly even if 1NT doubled is laydown with two overtricks it is better to concede 380 than 800 (quite likely if West has a doubleton spade). Even if North redoubles for business East should allow West to rescue at the two level into a five-card suit if he considers it desirable. Removing a penalty double requires at least a five-card suit.

Conversely with h) East should aim for the vulnerable game by bidding 4♠ rather than struggle to extract a small penalty from non vulnerable opponents. His lack of entry cards may make the establishment of his spades impossible unless they are trumps.

Unfortunately there are no easy rules to guide East. In each case he must balance the likely consequences of the alternative actions before deciding.

Let me look at hands (d) and (e) again. Don't you have a foreboding with (d)? Your side may have half the points but what if they cash lots of diamond tricks and then their aces? You may well have an 8-card fit, and even if the best you can do is to play in a 7-card fit your opponents might find it hard to make a penalty double. In fact your opponents have made another call available to you with their double: redouble. Many pairs give up using redouble for business and use it instead as part of a conventional scramble to find a fit. This idea is called a wriggle: you are wriggling from 1NT doubled into what you believe to be a safer haven. There are a number of wriggles available: I will describe the most common one.

1) After 1NT is doubled, redouble is the start of a rescue into a 5-card suit. Opener is obliged to bid 2♣. Responder passes if his 5-card suit is clubs, otherwise he signs off in his 5-card suit.

(d)        ♠ Q 8 6        ♥ Q 7 5 3        ♦ 7 5        ♣ K 8 6 4  
 (e)        ♠ Q 7 6        ♥ Q J 8 6 4        ♦ 7 5        ♣ K 8 6

With (e) the bidding might go as follows:

|       |      |       |          |
|-------|------|-------|----------|
| South | West | North | East     |
| 1NT   | Dbl  | Redbl | P        |
| 2♣    | Dbl  | 2♥    | All Pass |

2) After 1NT is doubled, responder bids a suit to show that suit and equal length in a higher ranking suit.

With (d) the bidding might go:

|       |      |       |          |
|-------|------|-------|----------|
| South | West | North | East     |
| 1NT   | Dbl  | 2♣    | P        |
| 2♦    | Dbl  | 2♥    | All Pass |

2♣ shows clubs and a higher ranking suit. South clearly doesn't like clubs, he would rather play in North's other suit whatever it is. He bids 2♦ in case North has clubs and diamonds. North bids 2♥ to show he has equal length in clubs and hearts.

Here are some other examples:

|           |            |       |      |       |      |
|-----------|------------|-------|------|-------|------|
| (i) West  | East       | South | West | North | East |
| ♠ Q J 6 5 | ♠ 10 4 3 2 |       | 1NT  | Dbl   | 2♦   |
| ♥ K Q 6 5 | ♥ J 10 4   | Dbl   | 2♥   | Dbl   | 2♠   |
| ♦ 5 2     | ♦ 8 7 6 3  | etc   |      |       |      |
| ♣ A 9 8   | ♣ 5 2      |       |      |       |      |

When North doubles West's 1NT East really is desperate. 2♦ shows diamonds and a major. West prefers the major and bids 2♥. East now bids 2♠ and the 4-4 fit is found. The opponents may double or bid their own contract, but 2♠ is likely to make 7 tricks and fears of a huge penalty have gone.

The wriggle doesn't always find the best fit as seen below. This is a worse case scenario:

|           |            |       |          |       |      |
|-----------|------------|-------|----------|-------|------|
| (j) West  | East       | South | West     | North | East |
| ♠ Q J 6 5 | ♠ 10 4 3 2 |       | 1NT      | Dbl   | 2♦   |
| ♥ A 9     | ♥ 5 2      | Dbl   | All Pass |       |      |
| ♦ 9 5 2   | ♦ 8 7 6 3  |       |          |       |      |
| ♣ K Q 6 5 | ♣ J 10 4   |       |          |       |      |

2♦ shows diamonds a major. West dares not bid 2♥ in case East has the red suits so they play in the poor 4-3 diamond fit rather than the far better 4-4 spade fit.

It must be said that some West players would gamble with 2♥ when 2♦ is doubled, hoping either that opponents won't double or that East has spades. Often that works. One of the main reasons why a wriggle works is that as the auction becomes more complex most opponents don't know whether double is for takeout or penalty. One doubles for penalty and the other, not being sure, takes it out to be safe. Or since he doesn't know whether double is for takeout or penalty he doesn't double, bidding instead 'to be safe'

Some players exploit such confusion among opponents to an extreme degree. For example,

|           |           |       |      |       |      |
|-----------|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|
| (k) West  | East      | South | West | North | East |
| ♠ Q J 6 5 | ♠ 10 9 3  |       | 1NT  | Dbl   | 2♦   |
| ♥ A 9 8 7 | ♥ 5 3 2   | Dbl   | 2♥   | P     | P    |
| ♦ 9 5     | ♦ 8 7 6 3 | Dbl   | P    | P     | 2♠   |
| ♣ K Q 2   | ♣ J 10 4  | etc.  |      |       |      |

2♦ is pretty outrageous. West bid 2♥, looking for East's major suit. East passed but when that was doubled he tried 2♠. Eventually opponents got confused and settled for 3NT: cheaper than 1NT doubled. I am not recommending this type of Russian roulette. This is here more to persuade you that you need clear countermeasures if opponents take such liberties with you.

You can wriggle with 5-5 shape. The wriggle shows equal length in two suits, not necessarily

|           |              |       |      |       |      |
|-----------|--------------|-------|------|-------|------|
| (k) West  | East         | South | West | North | East |
| ♠ A Q 3   | ♠ J 9 7 6 5  |       | 1NT  | Dbl   | 2♥   |
| ♥ 8 5     | ♥ Q 10 4 3 2 | Dbl   | 2♠   | etc   |      |
| ♦ A 9 5 4 | ♦ 3          |       |      |       |      |
| ♣ K 7 6 2 | ♣ 5 4        |       |      |       |      |

You might as well play in your best major fit! If opponents double and defend carelessly 2♠ doubled could well make

### Dealing with opponents' wriggles and escape mechanisms

|       |      |       |      |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1NT   | Dbl  | 2♦    | Dbl  |

Whatever the meaning of 2♦, sometimes a substantial penalty is available. You need a firm understanding as to the meaning of the double of 2♦, otherwise they can escape penalty just by causing confusion. Opinions differs as to the meaning of this second double.

Some pairs play that the second double is for takeout, showing scattered values. East/West may still get a penalty because West might pass for penalty. Any subsequent (ie third) double would be for penalties.

My preferred method is to play an overriding principle that after any penalty double (or penalty pass of a takeout double) all doubles are for penalties. East might make such a penalty double on a holding like ♦K x x (ie three-to-an-honour). West will always remove it with a singleton. The result of this is that they might occasionally be doubled in an 8-card fit but never in a 9-card fit.

**Principle: After a penalty double, or a take-out double that is converted to penalties, all subsequent doubles are for penalties**

An opponent opens 1NT. You double. What happens next? Nowadays most pairs play wriggles so that opener's partner can run with 4-4-3-2 shape, so the odds are that if

your side has the majority of points 1NT doubled won't be the final contract. They may still be in serious trouble, but do you succeed in penalising them? In far too many cases they run from one suit to another and finally you get confused as to whether double is for take-out or penalties and let them off the hook. This is precisely why wiggles are so effective.

In (l) North's 2♦ escape showed equal length in diamonds and a higher ranking suit. How should you play East's double? My guess that half of experts would play it for takeout and the other half for penalties, while most club players simply wouldn't know. Playing it for takeout is quite reasonable: often partner will be able to pass for penalties. However I play it as suggesting penalties, in line with my principle. It confirms that East/West have the majority of points and that East will have a minimum of three trumps to an honour. If West has a singleton diamond or a very shapely hand he will remove the double. In this case South bids 2♥ and West's double suggests at least a similar holding. North's only high card was the ♦Q and a vulnerable North/South conceded – 800.

| (l) West  | East      | South | West | North | East |
|-----------|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|
| ♠ Q 10 3  | ♠ K 7 4 2 | 1NT   | Dbl  | 2♦    | Dbl  |
| ♥ A J 7 3 | ♥ 10 4    | P     | P    | P     |      |
| ♦ A 7 5   | ♦ K 8 4   |       |      |       |      |
| ♣ A K 8   | ♣ 9 7 5 3 |       |      |       |      |

The nature of the penalty double might be of surprise to viewers who learned in their cradles that a low-level penalty double should be based on long, strong trumps. The point is that after a 1NT opening there are quite a lot of hands where all four hands are relatively balanced and if opener's partner is weak there is nowhere to run, the only hope being to confuse opponents.

| (m) West     | East      | South | West | North | East |
|--------------|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|
| ♠ Q 10 9 8 3 | ♠ K 7 4 2 | 1NT   | Dbl  | 2♦    | Dbl  |
| ♥ A K 7      | ♥ 10 4    | P     | 2♠   | P     | 3♠   |
| ♦ 7          | ♦ K 8 4   | P     | 4♠   | P     | P    |
| ♣ A K Q 2    | ♣ 9 7 5 3 | P     |      |       |      |

In (m) West cannot stand East's penalty double because he has a singleton diamond. He bids his longest suit and East/West end up in their correct game contract.