

AN EXCERPT FROM MARTY'S BERGEN'S NEWEST BOOK,

**NEGATIVE DOUBLES**  
**The Quintessential Convention**

It is very important to know the difference between a negative double and a takeout double. This chart should give you a leg up on the subject.

<b>Negative Double</b>	<b>Takeout Double</b>
Partner opened	An opponent opened
The double is made by the responder	The double is made by the overcalling side
Overcaller's suit is doubled	Opener's suit is doubled
6+ HCP are needed at the one level, more at higher levels	11+ HCP are needed at the one level, more at higher levels
Emphasis is on the unbid major(s)	All unbid suits are promised
You need not be short in the opponent's suit	You must be short in the opponent's suit
A negative double followed by a bid in a new suit is weak	A takeout double followed by a bid in a new suit is strong (17+ HCP)

**Points Needed for a Negative Double**

Take a look at the following chart to get an idea of the minimum high card point (HCP) requirements needed to make a negative double.

<b>Level of Overcall</b>	<b>HCP Needed</b>
One of a suit	6
Two of a minor	8
Two of a major	9
Three of a suit	10
Four or higher of a suit	10

Now we have some numbers to work with. "Ah, but Marty Bergen doesn't bow to the point count gods," I hear you cry. Agreed. There is definitely an element of *points*, *schmoints* in the air. Read on to learn more.

## What's the Point?

When I talk about points in this section, I am referring basically to HCP. However, good players know that:

### Aggressive action is called for when:

- ✓ You are short in the opponent's suit, and/or
- ✓ You know you have a fit, and/or
- ✓ You have tolerance for opener's suit, and/or
- ✓ You have ideal distribution in the unbid suit(s), and/or
- ✓ You have prime cards (aces and kings).

### Discretion is recommended with:

- ✓ Length in the opponent's suit, and/or
- ✓ Shortness in partner's suit, and/or
- ✓ Flawed distribution in the unbid suits, and/or
- ✓ A hand that is dominated by minor honors (queens and jacks).

Now, take a look at one specific auction, 1♦ - (2♣), and see these principles at work. In general you should have at least eight HCP to make a negative double after a two-of-a-minor overcall.

You would be happy to double with:

♠ A765 ♥ KQ96 ♦ 832 ♣ 43

(Four cards in each major, enough points, perfect.)

However, I would also double (imperfectly) with the next two hands. Although they are sub-par in the HCP department, their positives outweigh their negatives:

♠ KJ96 ♥ Q9863 ♦ 874 ♣ 2

(We do not have eight points, so if partner bids notrump this hand will be a disappointment. However, the singleton club and nice major-suit distribution make the double correct.)

♠ K983 ♥ A96 ♦ 10954 ♣ 53

(You have only seven HCP and lack a fourth heart, but the diamond fit and prime cards cover you.)

On the other hand, I would not double 2♣ with:

♠ 10865 ♥ QJ54 ♦ K ♣ Q742

(Pass. You have club length and a singleton in partner's suit.)

♠ QJ ♥ 98754 ♦ Q73 ♣ QJ4

(Pass. You are unprepared for a 2♠ response and hate those overrated queens and jacks.)

## How High?

One of the questions that many players ask about negative doubles is: how high should they be played? I am guessing that the most popular answer would be 3♠. The majority is stating that they treat doubles at higher levels as penalty.

Right or wrong, we will make that assumption and run with it. When I think of penalty doubles, the following comes to mind. We are happy to make a penalty double when:

- We have a trump stack.
- We have no interest in bidding on.

I do not think anyone would have a problem with those. Now, take a look at a typical auction where the “3♠ majority” mentioned above would regard responder’s double as penalty.

1♠ - (4♦) - Dbl

Notice that this double is extremely unlikely to meet either of the necessary conditions. When a player jumps to the four level, there is almost no chance of another player having length and strength in that suit. A realistic hand for responder is:

♠ AJ ♥ KJ72 ♦ 53 ♣ K9643

As opposed to:

♠ 8 ♥ A63 ♦ KQ108 ♣ Q8762

Therefore, responder’s doubles at high levels should not be defined as penalty: they are also negative. Opener is free to pass, but he should not regard the double as the end of the auction.

Watch opener in action on the following auction:

1♥ - (4♠) - Dbl - (Pass)

Opener’s hand is:

♠ — ♥ KQJ984 ♦ AQJ107 ♣ 65

It would be crazy to pass. Bid 5♦. Your partner has points, not a spade stack. Your hand screams offense, not defense. That would be 100% true even if you did not play negative doubles this high.

I am going to define responder’s double as negative through 5♦. If you think that what you name the double is not the key issue here, you are on track. The fact remains that the higher the level of the double, the more likely that opener will leave it in. Opener’s pass, however, is far from automatic. Usually, neither opener nor responder will be salivating at the thought of defending the contract that was doubled.

### Non-Negative Doubles

In order to be able to play negative doubles effectively, it is crucial to identify which auctions are excluded. **Negative doubles do not apply when the opponent’s overcall is in notrump or is a two-level cuebid (such as Michaels).**

Non-negative doubles show general strength. They are similar to responder’s redouble after partner opens and an opponent makes a takeout double. The usual minimum is 10 HCP, although doubles after a 1NT overcall can be made with slightly less strength.

Here is a complete list of auctions where responder’s double is not negative.

1 of a suit - (1NT) - Dbl

1 of a suit - (2 of same suit) - Dbl

1 of a suit - (2NT) - Dbl

1 of a suit - (3NT) - Dbl

## Unbid Suits

### Four Spades or Five?

Do you regard these auctions in the same light?

1♣ - (1♦) - 1♠

1♣ - (1♥) - 1♠

“Yes,” is a very understandable answer to that question. The two auctions certainly appear to be similar. However, they must be regarded differently. Please read on.

I will begin with the second auction, which is more straight-forward. Here's the scoop. Responder could have made a negative double of 1♥ to show four spades (the only unbid major). Therefore, **the 1♠ response after 1 of a minor - (1♥) guarantees at least five spades.**

After 1♣ - (1♦), there are two major suits which opener will be eager to bid after responder has made a negative double. Why should responder encourage his partner to show a major that he may have no interest in? You would feel silly if you doubled after 1♣ - (1♦) with:

♠ Q3 ♥ KQ63 ♦ 8653 ♣ 942

and heard the auction proceed:

1♣ - (1♦) - Dbl - (1NT)

2♠ - (Pass) - ?

The solution is simple, just bid 1♥ in the first place.

Here are four more hands where you should bid your major, rather than double, after 1♣ - (1♦).

♠ 7 ♥ Q1086 ♦ 7543 ♣ AQ95

♠ AJ108 ♥ 74 ♦ Q5 ♣ J7532

♠ 84 ♥ A985 ♦ 8543 ♣ KQ6

♠ K654 ♥ 842 ♦ 83 ♣ AK73

There really is no problem defining 1♣ - (1♦) - 1 of a major as promising only four cards in that major. Responder is taught from the cradle that the requirements for bidding a major at the one level are very gentle: a four-card suit and six HCP.

Does every bridge player in the world bid this way? Of course not. (Do you and your peers agree 100% on any topic?) However, I feel comfortable recommending the following:

**After 1♣ - (1♦), a negative double guarantees four cards in each major.** There is no other auction involving a negative double that makes the same promise.

If anyone tries to tell you that responding in a major promises five cards here, tell them no, No, NO.