

Support Double

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The support double is a double by opener to show 3-card support for responder's suit. It's used when opener starts with one of a suit, responder makes a new suit reply, and the next player interferes. The purpose of the support double is to help you distinguish 3- and 4-card trump support, which can be invaluable. Here's the type of bidding problem that the support double can solve:

West	East
♠ KT	♠ 653
♥ AJ8	♥ KQ952
♦ K97	♦ A85
♣ QT963	♣ KJ

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥	1 ♠
1NT	2 ♠	3NT	All Pass

East's 1 ♥ only promises a 4-card suit. So when South overcalls 1 ♠, West's options are limited. Pass feels conservative and 2 ♥ would promise 4-card support, so she settles for 1NT given her balanced hand and spade stopper.

Now East is stuck over 2 ♠. He wants to probe for 3-card support but can't. Wanting to reach game, he guesses to bid 3NT. Unfortunately this fails when the opponents lead a spade to knock out West's king, and then regain the lead with the ♣ A, to run spades.

This is where support doubles come into play. Imagine that West could have doubled 1 ♠ to show 3-card support:

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥	1 ♠
Dbl	2 ♠	4 ♥	All Pass

What a difference in the auction. West's double shows exactly 3 hearts. East, now aware of the 8-card fit, simply bids 4 ♥, making.

What do East-West lose by using a support double? A natural penalty double of 1 ♠, which is a paltry price to pay. As seen in the example above, the value of differentiating 3-card and 4-card support can be a game swing.

When to Play Support Doubles

Now, here's the fine print when playing support doubles:

- Support doubles are only in effect when opener begins the auction with 1-of-a-suit, and responder bids a new suit. In other words, don't play support doubles when your side bids no-trumps.
- Making a support double is opener's first priority. This is more important than rebidding no-trumps to show an enemy stopper, rebidding a 6-card suit, bidding a new suit, etc. Opener denies 3-card support if she makes any call other than double. (Excluding natural raises of responder's suit of course.)
- Support doubles are on through all competition up to and including 2 ♥. It does not matter if opener's LHO bids or not. It only matters if RHO bids.
- There is no point count minimum or maximum to make a support double.
- If the opponents' interference is in the form of a double, a redouble by opener can be used to show 3-card support. This is called a support redouble.

This is a lot to digest! Some illustrations of these principles are below.

Examples

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♣
Dbl			

Double shows exactly 3 spades. It does not matter 1) whether North bids or not, or 2) whether North-South bid the same suit.

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 ♦	1 ♥	2 ♦
2 ♥			

2 ♥ guarantees 4 hearts. West would have doubled holding only 3-card support.

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	1NT
2 ♣			

2 ♣ shows 6+ clubs and denies as many as 3 diamonds. Making a support double is opener's first priority.

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠	Dbl
Redbl			

Support doubles can also be used if the opponents double responder's bid. In this case, West makes a support redouble.

Additional Considerations

- Responder's rebids are natural.
- Support doubles can be extremely easy to forget, especially when the opponents bid and raise a suit. Don't forget them!

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