Negative double

One of the most commonly used treatments in modern bidding is the negative double. The negative double is an extremely broad topic, far beyond the scope of a single article to describe fully, but following are some important points.

In its simplest form, the negative double’s objective is to express values and length in the unbid suits — particularly the unbid major(s) — in a competitive auction. For example:

West North East South
1♣ 1♠ Dbl

Defining East’s double as penalty is impractical: a “business” double of a one-level overcall occurs too rarely to worry about. It’s much more common to have moderate strength inference involved. Whereas a two-level negative double could show as few as 8 HCP as described above, a direct two-level bid such as your 2♥ shows at least the same number of number of points required for a two-over-one response in “standard” bidding — 10 HCP. (Note that some players would treat 2♥ as a game force, so their two-level bids would promise even more — an opening hand.) An easy way to remember this is to consider what you need to bid 2♥ if North had not interfered. Most systems require a minimum of 10 points to make a new-suit two-level response.

This is a big help to opener, because it immediately tells him something about your strength and heart length. For example, say you held:

♠ K 7 ♥ A 9 4 ♠ Q 9 7 2.

With a good fit for partner’s first suit, some players would do it on even less.)

If the double would force partner to bid at the one level — in an auction such as:

West North East South
1♠ 2♥ Dbl

— East should have at least 10 high-card points. The higher you force partner to bid, the more you should have.

As opener, partner’s negative double can help you choose your rebid. Say you hold:

♥ A 7 ♥ Q J 6 3 ♦ 8 7 6 ♣ A Q 6 2.

After opening 1♣, left-hand opponent overcalls 1♥ and partner doubles (negative). This strongly suggests at least four hearts and appropriate values. If RHO passes, you have an easy 2♥ rebid. (Note that this does not promise extra values; you’re just “raising” partner’s hearts.)

Using the negative double, what would this auction mean?

Partner RHO You LHO
1♥ 2♦ 2♥

If you had doubled, the double would have shown exactly four hearts. The 2♥ bid, therefore shows five or more. There is also a