

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy Tax Day! Well, it may be happy if you get a small refund. But, if not, bridge can be an outlet for releasing your financial frustrations. You want to improve your (bridge) form to tax your opponents for a change. You want to use your bidding deductions to find the best play. If you play well, you want to accumulate your fully qualified dividends.

This month's mini-lesson is scheduled for the coming Saturday (April 19). We'll meet at 2:00 – either in the Children's Room or the main meeting room. The topic for the mini-lesson is "**Basic Doubles**".

In addition, as an advanced heads up, the **April 26 practice session will run from 3:00 – 5:00**. The library has an event until 2:45.

In coming weeks, please be cautious anytime you feel even somewhat ill. Reports of flu and covid infections are still high (although starting to trend downward). We are an older group – don't come if you are sick at all. We'll have plenty of Saturdays to play this year.

As our club continues to grow, please be supportive of all our club members. Our club is very new and many of the current players have only a few months of experience. Help them when you can; be patient otherwise. We'll all get better together.

As always, practice, practice, practice! Our message to the community: bridge is fun and intellectually stimulating – come join us! All ages are welcome!

Next Mini-Lessons:

- Basic doubles – 4/19
- Play signals – 5/17
- Negative doubles – 6/21

2:00 – 2:30 – Olney library (Children's Room or main Meeting Room).

Ongoing Practice Sessions:

Every Saturday from 2:30 – 4:30 at the Olney library (main Meeting Room).

Note: next Saturday (4/26), the practice session will run from 3:00 – 5:00. The library has an event until 2:45.

Penalty Doubles

Given that the 4/19 mini-lesson is primarily focused on so-called "takeout doubles", we will discuss when a double is really a double (a penalty double, that is). Note: I have discussed takeout doubles in the January 2024 newsletter. I briefly mentioned penalty doubles in the February 2024 issue. This article will elaborate further.

First, a recap on what a double is and what it does. A double is actually a "call" rather than a bid and can be made only after an opponent's bid (with intervening passes, but no other bids). The double ostensibly increases all the penalties and rewards for a contract. If you review the scoring summary sheet, you'll see that the effect is often to double the points involved, but many times the effect is even greater (see, for example, the penalties for setting a contract more than one trick, doubled).

Now that we know what a double is, the next question is when is it used? This is actually a quite complicated question. In modern expert-level bridge, doubles are used in a variety of special situations. There have been a number of books dedicated to the exploration of the uses of “double”. But, for our purposes, doubles are used for **takeout** or for **penalties**.

We explored the basic guidelines for a takeout double in previous newsletters. To summarize, the following are considered takeout doubles:

- Any double of a 1-level suit bid
- Any double of a single raise of opener’s suit
- A double of a 2-level response to opening bidder
- Any double of a weak two opening bid
- Any double of a preemptive bid at the 3 level

Note: this is a fairly conservative scheme, but appropriate for beginners.

But once a beginning player hears about takeout doubles, their most frequent follow-up question is: “How do I tell when a double is considered for penalty rather than for takeout?”. The glib answer is “any other double not on the takeout double list will therefore be for penalty.”

However, just because you could double doesn’t mean you should double. So, what are some specific cases when a penalty double is called for?

First, if the **opponents open the bidding with 1NT** (15 – 17 high card points), at the beginner level, any double is for penalties. But you should double only with a strong hand – 16+ high card points. With your 16+ and opener’s 15 – 17, you are hoping that partner has half the remaining points.

Similarly, if your partner opens the bidding, and **your right-hand opponent overcalls 1NT** (15 – 17 high card points), a double is for penalties. The bidding might be 1S – 1NT – double. An example hand:

♠ T4 ♥ KQ52 ♦ QJT94 ♣ A8

where your partner’s 12+ points plus your 12 points indicates a difficult time is in store for the opponents.

After you and your partner **agree on a trump suit**, if the opponents bid, any subsequent double is for penalty. Example: 1H – pass – 2H – 2S – double. You’ve agreed on a trump suit (hearts). There is no need to explore other suits (via a takeout double). Instead, the opening bidder could simply rebid hearts. So, this double is definitely for penalties.

In that same vein, a sequence like 1H – 1S – 2H – 2S – 4H – 4S – double indicates a penalty double. You agreed on your suit (hearts), you bid to your maximal level (in this case, 4H), and opponents carried on (probably a sacrificial bid). If you double, it’s for penalties. **Once you’ve agreed on a suit, there is no need to takeout to find other suits.**

If **there is no unbid suit**, any double is for penalty. Example: 1C – 1D – 1S – 2H – double. Opening bidder could rebid clubs, support your spades, or bid NT. Therefore, there is nothing to learn from a takeout double – diamonds and hearts were bid by the other team! So, in this case, partner has a strong hand with heart winners, and they think they can set the contract even if partner has only 6 or so points.

Finally, if the opponents “escape” to another suit/NT **after your penalty double, any subsequent double is for penalty**. Example: 1H – pass – 2H – 2S – double – 3C – double. The first double is for penalties, so the second double is too.

Finesses

We discussed finesse briefly in the beginner class. There are many variations for taking finesse. In this article, I'll talk about three of the most common situations:

- Simple finesse (honors in one hand)
- Simple finesse (split honors)
- Double finesse

A **simple finesse with honor cards in one hand** comes about when one player is missing one high card in a sequence. For example, AQ is missing the king, Kx is missing the ace, and AKJ is missing the queen. If you play the cards from that hand, you will automatically lose a trick (e.g., when leading ace and then queen from AQ, you will win the queen only in the low-probability case where the ace captured the king).

To play the finesse in each of these cases, lead **toward the card you want to win**. In the AQ example, win a separate trick in partner's hand and lead a small card toward the AQ. If the intervening player doesn't play the king, play the queen. That will win 50% of the time – when the intervening player holds the king.

A **simple finesse with split honor cards** is similar to the above case, except the honor cards are split between the two hands. For example, the ace is in one hand and the queen is in the other hand.

♠ J4 ♥ Q52 ♦ QJT94 ♣ A82

♠ AK2 ♥ A43 ♦ K53 ♣ J643

Here the ace and queen are in the heart suit. If you play the ace and then the queen, you will usually win only one trick in hearts.

However, if you play a small card from the hand containing the ace, you may win the queen as well if the intervening hand holds the king. Again, this is a 50% probability.

Finally, the **double finesse** occurs when you can finesse twice through an intervening player.

♠ A4 ♥ 652 ♦ Q94 ♣ AK2

♠ K2 ♥ AJT ♦ AK3 ♣ 7643

Assuming the contract is 3NT, you have 8 sure tricks. You need one more, and the heart suit looks promising.

If you win in the top hand and lead a small heart, insert the J (or ten) unless the right-hand opponent plays a higher honor. Assuming that the left-hand opponent wins (either the king or the queen), return to the top hand to lead another small heart, playing the J/T unless the intervening player inserts the last high honor (K or Q).

In this case, you will win two tricks in hearts unless the left-hand opponent holds both the king and queen. That works out to a 75% chance of success.

Before we leave finesse for today, one more adage: "Eight ever, nine never". This means that with eight cards in a suit (between the two combined hands) and holding AKJ, plan to finesse when you are missing the queen (50% chance). With nine cards in the suit, plan to play the ace and king, hoping to drop the queen (about a 52% chance).

As with all rules of thumb, there are exceptions in certain cases (e.g., when the bidding gives you more info about how to finesse).

More on finesse in a future article.

Try to Bid (and Play) It

This is variation on a hand from Frank Stewart's February 1, 2024, column. Try to bid and play it. What do the doubles mean?

		♠ A 9 5 4					
North Deals		♥ 4					
E-W Vul		♦ 8 7 4 3					
		♣ A K 4 3					
		♠ J 8 7 3	♠ K Q 10				
		♥ 8	♥ Q J 10 9				
		♦ Q J 9	♦ A K 10 5				
		♣ Q 10 9 7 5	♣ J 8				
		♠ 6 2					
		♥ A K 7 6 5 3 2					
		♦ 6 2					
		♣ 6 2					
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>				
	1 ♣	Dbl	1 ♥				
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	3 ♥				
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All pass				
Lead: ♦ Q							

After the 1C opening bid (probably a bit aggressive, but several aces and kings), East doubles with a) short clubs, b) 13+ points, and c) 3 or more cards in the other three suits (and at least 4 cards in either major). This is exactly what is needed for a **takeout double**.

South shows their heart suit. At that point, West went off the rails. After South's intervening bid, West was off the hook – they didn't have to respond. Typically, one will respond after an intervening bid if they have 8+ points and/or a long suit. West had neither, but bid anyway. Note: we'll discuss another option (a negative double) at a future mini-lesson. I also had an article in the March 2024 newsletter.

Subsequently, East raised to 2S with three very strong trumps. South was impressed

by their strong, 7-card heart suit and jumped to 3H. Again, this was a bit aggressive. After the two passes, East was definitely **doubling for penalty**. East and West had agreed on a trump suit (spades), so there was no need to "take out", looking for another suit.

The play was also nonoptimal. After West led the queen of diamonds and followed with the jack of diamonds, East should have overtaken with the ace and led a high spade. South would undoubtedly gone down one, for a penalty of 100 points.

Instead, West continued with the 3rd diamond, which South ruffed. South subsequently took the AK of hearts, led to the ace of clubs, ruffed another diamond, returned with the king of clubs, and ruffed a club. If East ruffed, South would discard a low spade loser.

South then played to the ace of spades and led the last club. Again, if East ruffed, South would discard the spade loser. In either case, South won nine tricks and made the doubled contract, scoring a game when the double was included. Ouch.

Moral of the story: Be cautious when doubling for penalties, particularly when the double may allow the opponents to score a game. Be fairly sure that you can easily set the contract by at least one trick. And make sure that you and your partner are good card players!

Famous Bridgies

Eddie Kantar was a character. If you've read the "Famous Bridgies" articles religiously, you might notice a theme – a lot of bridge experts are strange but interesting personalities.

Kantar won two world championships (Bermuda Bowl teams), fifteen national

championships, and many other tournaments. He was a bridge theoretician: he developed many treatments of the Roman Keycard Blackwood slam convention. And he also played in a world championship in table tennis! What a guy!

But his fame comes primarily from his writing and teaching skills. He wrote for decades at the *ACBL Bridge Bulletin* as well as the *The Bridge World* and *Bridge Today*. He has published over 30 books, including the *Bridge for Dummies* volume that many of you have read. Most of his works were focused on the beginner or intermediate-level player. He taught classes in the Los Angeles area (his residence city), at resorts, and on bridge cruises.

The April 2022 *Bridge Bulletin* tribute article described Kantar as a “Player, Writer, Jester, and Mensch.” Indeed, he was.

Bridge Quotes

*If you have the slightest touch of masochism, you’ll love this game. **Eddie Kantar**, quoted in the *Bridge Bulletin*, April, 2022.*

*Bridge is a great comfort in old age. It also helps you get there faster. **Eddie Kantar**, quoted in the *Bridge Bulletin*, April, 2022.*

Olney Bridge Club

The primary purpose of the Olney MD Bridge Club is to teach and encourage social bridge in the areas including and surrounding Olney, Maryland.

We meet regularly (Saturdays from 2:30 – 4:30) at the Olney library for practice playing sessions.

Please feel free to send email to bridgeinfo@bridge.careytutor.com with any questions, comments, recommendations, or other correspondence for the editor. In particular, if you have a bridge article to include in a future newsletter or a suggestion of a possible topic, any such submission would be much appreciated.

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