

UNDERSTANDING THE RULES

Doubling and Alerting Part I

by Jeremy Dhondy

THE EBU's Club Committee, set up last year, met and discussed members' feelings about the alerting of doubles and came to two main conclusions after consulting with members at county and club level. They were:

- any change to the rules would be unwelcome, and
- that there should be more emphasis on communicating what the rules are and how they work.

The Laws and Ethics Committee have accepted this advice and this is the first of two articles designed to assist players with the regulations. Comments and questions are welcome to ebuproblems@btopenworld.com

In this first article I'll set out the overall rules and look in more detail at what should happen when a suit bid is doubled. No-trumps, high levels and a few specific cases will be covered in the second article.

A place to start is the basic set of rules. These are found in the *Orange Book*, Section 5E2 and 5E4

The rules for alerting doubles are:

- Suit bids that show the suit bid**
Double of these bids is not alertable if for take-out; alertable otherwise.
- Short, Nebulous, Prepared and Phoney Minor openings**
Double of these bids is not alertable if for take-out; alertable otherwise.
- No-trump bids**
Double of these bids is not alertable if for penalties; alertable otherwise.
- Suit bids that do not show the suit bid**
Double of these bids is not alertable if showing the suit doubled; alertable otherwise.
- Above the level of 3NT the only double (or redouble) that is alerted is one that calls for a suit *other* than the one doubled.**

That's it! Anyone who tells you there is more is wrong. Here are some examples of rules A and B:

- 1♥ – (Double)
- 2♥ (Weak) – (Double)
- 2♥ (Strong) – (Double)
- 3♦ – (Double)
- 1♠ (May be two cards) – (Double)
- 1♦ (Precision) – (Double)

In all these cases a double, if for take-out, which for nearly all players it is, requires *no* alert. If it means something else, then it is alertable. One example which *does* require an alert is a *penalty double* of a Weak Two or a three-level pre-empt. Although once quite common to play the double for penalty, most players these days double for take-out.

Most players are comfortable with what to do after an opening bid and also an intervention. It is later in the auction that some difficulties can arise. To take the intervention first, these doubles, if for take-out, are *not* alertable:

- 1♦ – (1♠) – Double
- 1♥ – (2♣) – Double
- 1♠ – (2♠) – Double
- 1♦ – (3♥) – Double

So far, if you play fairly standard bridge you won't need to alert any doubles. If you have a simple set of rules, then you will find some counter-intuitive positions arise. Take a simple sequence like 2♠ – (3♦) – Double. The same rules apply, so if the double is for take-out, there is no alert; however, many players would play that after a pre-emptive bid by one of their side all doubles are for penalty so you need to get used to alerting these doubles if they are for penalty. This has led to criticism of the current rules but it does have the advantages of simplicity and consistency. You can have the rule above which is simple but on the occasions when a double occurs which is penalty you need to alert, or you can have an exception which has the demerit of making the overall procedure more complex or, of course, you could go for the 'never alert any doubles' route. Although superficially attractive as there is

nothing to remember, it will force players to ask in all except very common situations and now there will be no wake up bell if a double is unusual.

If the auction proceeds over several rounds, it can be more difficult to recall what you should do but if you bear in mind Rule A, you won't go wrong. For example:

| Partner | Oppo 1 | You | Oppo 2 |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1♠ | (Pass) | 2♠ | (Pass) |
| Pass | (3♣) | Double | |

How do you play this double? My personal rule says it would be for penalties because we have come to rest and the opponents have protected. I've doubled a natural suit bid for penalty, so my partner should alert.

| Oppo 1 | You | Oppo 2 | Partner |
|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| (1♠) | Double | (2♠) | Pass |
| (Pass) | Double | (Pass) | 3♣ |
| (Pass) | Pass | (3♣) | Double |

Should this be alerted? It doesn't matter that the auction has gone on for three rounds. If double of 3♣ is for take-out, then do nothing. If it is for penalty, then you do alert it. Again, see Rule A.

Thus far you may find yourself needing to alert a few penalty doubles but the rules that govern this are relatively straightforward. In practice, of course, in the last sequence above it is very unlikely that whatever the double is the spade bidders will ever remove it, so whether it is alerted or not just ask at the beginning of the play if it makes a difference, for example, as to how you play a trump suit.

In summary: if you follow Rule A, you should know what to alert and what not to alert when a suit is bid naturally but you might find yourself alerting a few penalty doubles that you did not use to.

Of course you and your partner may not have agreed what meaning a double has but that's another story.

In the next issue: Doubles of No-trumps, Artificial Bids and High-level bids. □