

## MARVIN VS WEAK NOTRUMP OPENINGS

### Overcalls

Overcalls have the same meanings as against a strong notrump opening, except that 2♠ is no longer a natural bid. It replaces the conventional double, showing clubs-diamonds-hearts or diamonds-hearts or just hearts. See section 12-2, Marvin Vs Strong Notrump Openings.

### The Business Double

The weak notrump opening is an overbid that should be penalized more often than it is. Anyone who contracts to take seven tricks at notrump with only 12-14 HCP (or even less) must be punished for impudence, lest it become a habit. The instrument for punishment is the penalty double.

To double a weak notrump for penalties you need a hand that figures to take more tricks than the opening hand. This is not just a matter of points, but also of playing tricks, stoppers/entries, and opening lead considerations. You can double with 9 HCP when holding seven spades to the AKQ! A weak notrump opener should be able to take about four tricks, so you need 4-1/2 or more to double. A good strong suit is especially desirable, to make the opening lead an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

This hand, with 14 HCP, is a pass over a 1NT opening that shows 12-14 HCP: ♠A32 ♥AK8 ♦K542 ♣764. Not enough playing tricks, few honor cards, no good lead. This hand, with 13 HCP, five playing tricks, many honors, and a good lead, is a minimum double: ♠QJ1097 ♥AJ9 ♦KJ8 ♣J10. If the notrump opening shows 13-15 HCP, you need a slightly stronger minimum.

If the hand contains a singleton, it is wise to have a little extra, especially if the singleton is higher ranking than any long suit you may have. Partner may bid the singleton, and you don't want to go to the three level with a doubtful hand. A simple (artificial) overcall may be a safer action with an unbalanced hand.

### Reopening Doubles

A double in the reopening position must be stronger, considering that the notrump bidder is sitting over the doubler. Tenaces and isolated honors should be reduced in value, while sequences are desirable. A marginal double should have something in every suit, to support partner's opening lead (or runout bid). A singleton or void is particularly undesirable, since partner is sure to lead (or bid) the suit. If you do double with a very short suit, you should have a place to go if partner bids it.

An alternative sort of reopening double is the artificial double, always used by a passed hand, described in section 12-2, Marvin vs Strong Notrump Openings. Its use makes a 2♠ bid natural. There are two reasons for an alternative: 1) Penalty doubles with distributed strength are less frequent in this position, with the notrump bidder sitting over the doubler; 2) A third hand who passes a weak notrump opening will have some strength if their policy is to always bid with bad hands.

I recommend playing both ways, choosing the approach that is suited to the opponents' methods. Double for penalties with distributed strength if they tend to pass 1NT with bad hands; otherwise use the type of reopening double you employ against strong notrumps.

If a pass shows strength it is supposed to be Alerted, so in the absence of an Alert assume that a pass doesn't show strength. It doesn't hurt to ask when you intend to take some action.

### Partner's Action After a Business Double

Although the double of 1NT is primarily for business, partner may bid for one of two reasons: 1) Fear that the opponents can make 1NT doubled when the doubling side has a satisfactory contract of its own or 2) fear that the penalty for beating 1NT will not compensate for the points that could have been made by playing the hand.

A bust hand is not sufficient reason in itself to run from the double. The doubler's hand is unlimited, after all. With a bad hand and no five-card suit, just pass and hope partner can beat 1NT. Bidding a four-card suit is unlikely to improve things. Minus 180 or 280 or 380 is better than minus 500 or 800. It is murder to have partner pull a double of 1NT with a suit like J432 (opposite your A5) when you could beat them in your own hand.

With a five-card or longer suit it is okay to bid if you're very weak or think that you can score more (or lose less) in your own contract. With a bad five-card suit and a balanced hand, a pass is probably better. With a singleton you can bet partner will lead that suit, so it may be better to bid in that case. With a six-card suit you can hope to make something your way, so go ahead and bid with a poor defensive hand.

A cue bid of 2NT in response to the double is a two-way bid, either 1) asking for a minor suit preference or 2) a general game force, usually based on a very distributional hand, often a two-suiter. The 2NT bidder shows the type 2) hand by bidding again (but a raise is only invitational):

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣/3♦	Pass	3♠ - game forcing
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♣/4♦/4♥ - second suit

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣	Pass	4♣ - invitational

A jump in a new suit is invitational, and 3NT is natural:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	3 any - invitational
			3NT - solid minor, or equivalent

East is afraid that West will not lead East's suit against 1NT doubled, or that the penalty will not make up for a likely game.

### When the Opponents Run

Weak notrumpers are very adroit at escaping from dangerous situations. Whether doubled or not, opener's partner will often run from 1NT with no long suit and a weak hand. He knows that defenders usually have

difficulty making a penalty double stick at the two level. A common ploy is to use a fake Stayman response with a bust hand:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2 any	Pass	Pass	?

North has ♠10843 ♥J87 ♦543 ♣Q32. For some reason defenders have a hard time penalizing this tactic. They are confused about the meaning of doubles (takeout? business? optional?) and often end up bidding or passing when they could have doubled for a big penalty. The proper defense against such conventional escape bids is discussed later.

### When an Escape Bid is Natural

There are two methods for handling natural escape bids in an auction such as this:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	2♦	?

The first approach says that a double of 2♦ by either partner is a business double. Moreover, all passes are forcing; North-South cannot play the hand undoubled. If East passes the 2♦ bid, West must act. East must therefore double 2♦ with a hand like ♠3 ♥10832 ♦J973 ♣Q842. She dare not pass (forcing), because West is likely to bid 2♠. If a pass is not played as forcing, East would have to bid with a good hand and short diamonds. That would allow the opponents to escape too often, since West could be loaded in diamonds.

The second approach says that a double by East only shows general strength, 6 HCP or more. She does not promise more than a doubleton in the opposing suit. With just a doubleton, she should have an extra point, and with four cards she might double with just 5 HCP. A pass by East is not forcing, and a repeat double by West is for takeout, not business. If West is long in the opposing suit, he may just pass and accept an undoubled penalty. With this approach, neither partner can make a business double of the first escape bid. That is not too serious, since a double can be converted to business when partner chooses to pass a double with good defensive potential.

There are pros and cons to both approaches. The first approach never misses a good penalty double, but the opponents will make more doubled contracts. They will also penalize you more often. The risk is not great, since a partnership that is running from 1NT doubled is not likely to have much in high cards. There is a danger that some smart operator will "run" from 1NT doubled with a fairly good hand. You are then likely to double the opponents into game or be heavily penalized yourself.

The second approach is more conservative. You can judge the partnership's assets better on many hands, but you will miss some good penalty doubles. Alfred Sheinwold and Eddie Kantar favor this method, but they are experts. What is good for them may not be good for everyone. An expert figures he can win if he avoids disasters. Other players must not miss a chance for a good result, to make up for the inevitable disasters on other hands.

It might be sensible to play the conservative approach in IMP games or rubber bridge, and the aggressive one in matchpoint pair games. Or you could combine both approaches at IMP's or rubber bridge, playing doubles of 2♣ or 2♦ as business doubles (and passes forcing), but doubles of higher contracts (which

produce game if made) as optional. I recommend this compromise approach, along with the aggressive approach for matchpoint games.

Whether the runout bid is doubled optionally or for business, subsequent doubles are for business and subsequent passes are forcing:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	2♣	Dbl - optional/business
2♦		Dbl - business	
		Pass - forcing	

If the double has been passed around, the same principle holds. Doubles are for business and passes are forcing:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	Pass
2♣		Dbl - business	
		Pass - forcing	

In all these situations, it is better not to pass a business double with only a singleton or void in the opposing suit. Also, one must not be bashful about doubling with just three good trumps.

Even when playing the "aggressive" defense, a defender who has had two chances in a row to act subsequent to the original double (passing a double counts as an "act"), and has failed to do so, can neither make a forcing pass nor be subjected to a forcing pass:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	2♠	Pass - forcing
Pass	3♥	3♠	Pass - not forcing

East must bid or double at his last turn if he has some stuff. When doubler's partner has shown some strength, however, all of his subsequent passes are forcing:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	Pass
2♦	Pass	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	3♦	Pass - forcing

West has passed twice in a row, but East's pass is nevertheless forcing, in view of his pass of the double and the 2♠ bid.

A defender who has run from partner's double with a weakness takeout cannot be subjected to a forcing pass:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass	2♣
2♠		Pass - not forcing	

Simple competitive bids by the doubler's partner are not at all invitational. Jumps are not forcing, since you can cue bid with a game-going hand:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	2♣	2♦/2♥/2♠ - weak bids 3♦/3♥/3♠ - invitational 3♣ - game forcing cue bid

West can treat 3♣ as Stayman for the moment, although East might have something else in mind.

### When There's a Natural Redouble

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Rdbl	?

If the redouble promises 9-10 HCP or more, you may have to scramble, but East should not bid immediately in the above auction unless he has a five-card or longer suit. Let West, who could have seven or more fast tricks (e.g., seven clubs headed by AKQ and nothing else!), do any running.

### When the Escape Call is Conventional

Most players use some conventional escape mechanism after their 1NT opening has been doubled. In one version third hand redoubles with a one-suited hand other than spades, forcing opener to bid 2♣. The redoubler then passes (with clubs) or bids a red suit. With spades only, he bids 2♠ immediately over the double. With a two-suited hand, he bids 2♣ over the double with hearts and clubs, 2♦ with hearts and diamonds, 2♥ with hearts and spades (but better hearts). Or, he can pass the double around to partner, who must redouble. Assuming he doesn't want to play 1NT redoubled, third hand then bids 2♣ with clubs plus a pointed suit (diamonds or four spades), 2♦ with diamonds and four spades, 2♥ with hearts and spades (but better spades), 2♠ with five spades and a five-card minor.

When third hand makes such a forcing pass or redouble (which must be alerted), doubler's partner can safely pass with a good hand, knowing that opener must bid. This freedom enables fourth hand to describe his strength more accurately. Immediate action denies a strong hand, delayed action promises a good hand unless it comes under pressure (i.e., opener's redouble is passed around).

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Pass*	2♣/2♦/2♥/2♠ - weak 2NT - minors, weak 3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ - weak, preemptive

\* forcing

The "weak" actions are not too weak, however. With a hopeless hand it is better to pass until you are forced to rescue. Often the opponents will bid you out of trouble. With the unlikely good hand, just pass and await developments.

South	West	North	East
1NT	Dbl	Rdbl*	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Dbl - business 2♥/2♠/3♣ - invitational 2NT - invitational 3♦ - game force 3♥/3♠ - forcing Pass - forcing

\* artificial

In this auction the artificial redouble asked South to bid 2♣, whereupon North showed a one-suited hand with diamonds. East's second bids are all strong because he would have acted immediately, if at all, with a weaker hand. His pass is forcing for the same reason that a pass over an immediate "escape" bid is forcing when partner doubles 1NT: If you must bid with a good hand but short diamonds, the opponents may have evaded a serious penalty. Had North bid 2♥ or 2♠, the meaning of a double or pass would depend on whether East-West are playing the "conservative" or "aggressive" defense. That is, either action is the same as if North had bid 2♥ or 2♠ as a natural bid over the double.

When opener's partner makes a conventional bid that shows two suits, the standard defense against such conventions is used (see section 12-7, Defense Against Two-Suited Conventions).

If the opponents use transfer bids over a double, next hand can use the same approach as against voluntarily bid transfers (see section 12-5, Defense Against Transfer Bids).

### After a Voluntary Takeout

When the weak notrumper's partner responds voluntarily (i.e., over a pass), her response may be natural or artificial:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2 any	?

-- If the takeout is natural, a non-forcing signoff, then a double by East is not a takeout double. Rather, a double shows a balanced hand, one with which he would have liked to double 1NT for business. It is an optional double, in that West needs a little something in the opposing suit, but not a lot, to pass the double. If this double is played strictly for takeout, as it is following a strong notrump opening, you will miss some good penalties.

But how do you make a takeout call? The answer is that a bid in the ranking suit is for takeout, and a 2NT bid shows an overcall in the ranking suit:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♠	3♣ - for takeout Dbl - optional 2NT - clubs

In this auction East's 3♣ might be based on a hand like ♠3 ♥KJ32 ♦AJ4 ♣K10873 This may seem like a daring takeout, but West probably has some strength in view of North's 2♠ signoff. West should not go leaping to game because of a few high cards, with which she is marked by the bidding. She can bid game

if she has more in distribution or high cards than East could count on. Since 3♣ is not forcing, East can bid 3♠ with a monster takeout sort of hand, which might alternatively be based on a good two-suited hand. If East removes West's next bid to another suit (forcing), that tends to show a two-suiter without support for West's suit.

All jump overcalls by an unpassed hand are strong:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♥	3♠/4♣/4♦ - invitational

If the natural signoff is a jump to 3♣ or 3♦, which many play as weak bids, then the double still shows a balanced hand but the cheaper minor becomes the takeout call:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	3♣	Dbl - balanced hand
			3♦ - for takeout

If the jump is to 3♦, then 4♣ is for takeout. When the jump is invitational or strong, then a bid in the cheaper minor is a natural bid.

Reopening actions by the hand sitting over the notrump opener are as might be expected:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl - for takeout		
			2NT - unusual notrump, both minors or hearts-diamonds

West's hand is limited by the initial pass, so the reopening 2NT bid must be unusual notrump.

-- If the takeout is a forcing artificial bid, such as Stayman or a Jacoby transfer, the situation is different. A double of Stayman 2♣ shows clubs, as in a strong notrump situation, and denies the ability to bid 3♣. It is primarily a lead directing double. For appropriate action over transfer bids, see section 12-5, Defense Against Transfer Bids. Jump overcalls by an unpassed hand are strong in a major, preemptive in a minor. The strong type is particularly invitational, since the standard defense against transfer bids says that immediate simple overcalls should be sound.

With a good notrump hand or a takeout sort of hand, just pass the artificial bid and act on the next round if the bidding stops:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣/2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl - notrump hand
			3♣ - for takeout
			2NT - clubs

East's double or takeout bid is not merely a balancing action, since his hand is not limited by the first round pass. A double of 2♣ would only show a good club suit. He must pass a transfer bid with some strong hands because an immediate double, cue bid of a known suit, or 2NT bid shows two specific suits (per section 12-

5). West should therefore not be nervous about passing the delayed double with a little defense, and over 3♣ can jump to game in hearts with good values. Note that this policy nails the "fake Stayman" response and ultra-weak transfer responses, as West will pass the double with a hand that is suitable for defense against 2♠.