

## Really? A Penalty Double????

How often are you dealt a hand like: ♠Q1062 ♥8762 ♦5 ♣KJ83, and with partner passing throughout, you get to make a penalty double of 2NT?

This hand happened at the Honors Bridge Center in Manhattan on February 26, 2007 in the evening duplicate. I was playing with Justine Cushing, an advanced student of the game. Our opponents were average club players.

Everyone was vulnerable, and after two passes my RHO opened the bidding with 1♣. I passed and my LHO responded 1♠. My partner passed and my RHO rebid 1NT, showing 12-14HCP and balanced distribution. I passed again, and my LHO now raised to 2NT. It is rare for a passed hand to invite game opposite a balanced 12-14HCP. Since most players at this club open hands with 12 HCPs, I felt that my LHO likely only held 11HCP, and was trying to reach a 25HCP 3NT contract. My partner passed and so did my RHO.

	<u>RHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>LHO</u>	<u>Jeff</u>
	Pass	Pass	1♣	Pass
	1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
	2NT	Pass	Pass	Double

My choice of doubling was aggressive, but I expect it to be successful 80% of the time, or even greater. And, for matchpoints, that is good odds. At IMPs it would be riskier to double, because if the opponent's make the contract, I would have doubled them into game.

Let me explain how I estimate that the contract was going to fail. There are lots of ways to analyze bridge hands. Let's start by analyzing the opponent's distributions.

Dummy does not have 4 hearts and rates to have exactly 4 spades since he didn't checkback for a 5-3 spade fit. Since I have long clubs and declarer bid the suit, dummy probably has 2 or possibly 3 clubs, and could have 3 or 4 diamonds. Dummy is probably 4333 or 4342, but could be something like 5-3-3-2 with weak spades.

Declarer has 2, or possibly 3 bad spades. Declarer probably has 3 or 4 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 4 or 5 clubs. 2-4-3-4 or 2-3-3-5 would be most likely, but 3-4-3-3 or 3-4-2-4 are also possible.

In the bidding, especially on balanced hands, everyone relies on high-card-points. In this auction the opponents have shown around 23, possibly 24 HCPs. Normally those points would be enough to take 8 tricks, and on a lucky day, 9 tricks. Let's assume that those HCPs would normally produce 8.2 tricks. Now, let us deduct from that total what we estimate will go bad for the opponents.

In the spade suit, my ten of spades should go a long way towards keeping the opponents from running the spade suit. The ten is supported by the queen, and the suit does not break 3-3. Except on strange days when the dummy has AKJ9 or the equivalent in spades, the

opponent's don't rate to produce long-suit tricks in spades. Since partner will have around 10 HCPs, I don't expect dummy to have such strong spades. If partner has the king of spades perhaps with the 8 or 9, the opponent's might only get 1 spade trick from as much as 5 HCPs in spades. I rate that the declarer's actual trick-taking-ability in spades compared to his high cards in spades to be about a third of a trick less, say .3 tricks. That brings declarer estimated trick total down to 7.9 tricks, just by analyzing the spade suit.

Now, let's look at the red suits. The heart suit also will not break evenly for the opponent's, and if there are scattered heart honors in the other 3 hands, my heart spots could easily keep declarer from developing a trick with a fourth heart, if declarer indeed has 4 hearts. And if declarer only has 3 hearts, I should be able to develop a long heart trick.

And, partner rates to have around 5 diamonds, perhaps behind dummy's 4-card diamond suit, so that suit will break badly for declarer. I think declarer's trick-taking-potential in the red suits, will be at least two-thirds of a trick less than his high-card-total would have him expect. That will bring declarer's estimated trick total down to around 7.2 tricks, at best.

Now let's look at the club suit. Dummy might produce a key queen in the club suit, and possibly also the club ten. But declarer bid the suit and dummy only has two clubs about half the time. If dummy is weak in clubs, when declarer tries some finesses in clubs, they will lose. There are no guarantees, but I expect that declarer's estimated trick-taking potential from the club suit will be close to a trick less than his high-card-potential might lead him to believe. If he loses an average of 8/10th of a trick in clubs, his estimated tricks that he will win will be around 6.4 tricks, at best.

A lot of this is speculative, as I don't know who has what specific honors and if finesses will actually be sitting favorably for declarer. That is why I think my double is only close to 80% to defeat the contract. Instead of winning 8 tricks, I estimate that they, on an average day, will only win 6.4 tricks, at best. I would have felt a lot more confident with my double if I held KJ109 of clubs and J1098 of spades. In that case declarer would certainly be struggling. In actual fact, the cards sat a lot worse for declarer than I estimated.

I led the heart 8 on opening lead, and declarer struggled and went down 2, for 500 points for us. Perfect defense might have scored 800, but we didn't know that we could attack safely in spades. My double was important, as several pairs our direction had scored 200 or 300 points our direction. 500 points was a cold top. This was the entire hand:

<u>All Vulnerable</u>	<u>Dummy</u>	
	♠AJ43	
	♥K43	
	♦K986	
<u>Jeff</u>	♣42	<u>Justine</u>
♠Q1062		♠K98
♥8762		♥QJ10
♦5		♦AJ1042
♣KJ83	<u>Declarer</u>	♣97
	♠75	
	♥A95	
	♦Q73	
	♣AQ1065	

As you can see, declarer had no source of tricks, once the club suit didn't behave. I suspected that in the bidding, and doubled to get the top score. It was fun. I think it was just a good example of being at the table - nothing special, but a good awareness of the situation.