BUSINESS DOUBLES OF OVERCALLS

The business double of an overcall is a cooperative double, a suggestion to partner, not a definite command. See *Why You Lose at Bridge*, by S. J. Simon, for a good discussion of the principles involved: when to double, when to leave the double in, when to pull the double. Marshall Miles has good words on this subject in his book *How to Win at Duplicate Bridge*.

Here are the general rules Simon provides for deciding whether to pass the double or not:

-- With three or more cards in the suit doubled, always pass.

-- With a doubleton, pass unless you have opened with a minimum hand and a six-card or longer suit, or have a five-card second suit that can be shown cheaply (i.e., at the same level as the doubled contract).

-- With a singleton, don't pass unless you have four defensive tricks.

-- With a void, don't pass--period.

Isn't partner likely to have a lot of trumps when you are void? Perhaps, but the dummy is probably going to have some trumps, too. When you play a low level doubled contract, it is the same as playing the contract yourself. You hope to take seven or more tricks, and do you really want to play a suit contract when one hand is void of trumps?

You can count a high honor (A, K, Q) as two cards when following the above rules.

When vulnerable vs non-vulnerable, lean toward bidding if you are confident of game. To show a profit you would have to beat them four tricks, which may not be possible. If you are pretty sure of slam, then of course you would remove the double regardless of your trump holding.

South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Dbl	Pass
1NT			

South must have a three-suited hand, 0=5=4=4 or 1=4=4=4. No other holding makes sense.

If the overcaller gets rescued, a pass by opener is forcing:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♥	Dbl	3♦
Pass - forcing, theoretically			

If North has nothing but hearts, then he should have passed (hoping opener doubles) instead of doubling. At this level, however, the doubler may not be able to find a safe bid and therefore may choose to violate system and pass.

If opener pulls the double, a new suit by responder is forcing:

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

The same principles for passing or pulling a double apply when higher-level overcalls are doubled. Partner is very unlikely to have good trumps when the overcall is at the three level or higher, and it is sometimes necessary to double with as little as three small in the opposing suit (never fewer). Accordingly, opener should pull when in doubt, especially if he has a reasonable bid to make.

If the doubler on the next round bids a major suit that he has doubled, it shows the suit and is forcing. If opener bids the doubled suit immediately, that is a strong cue bid showing first-round control of that suit. If he bids it after passing the double, that is natural, exposing a psych:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	Dbl	Pass
2♠ - strong cue bid, probably a void			

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

Doubles of a notrump overcall are pulled only with a highly distributional hand.