

KNOW WHEN TO DOUBLE

East deals and passes. It's your turn to bid with this hand:

S	South
♠	AQJ95
♥	AJ
♦	1042
♣	J76

You start with 1♠. This is a minimum 13 HCP hand with a good 5-card spade suit. Your LHO overcalls 2♦ and your partner jumps to 4♠. This is okay with you. His pre-emptive jump to game promises 5 spades and a relatively weak hand. He is trying to push the opponents out of the auction and is following the Law of Total Tricks. With a combined 10 spades, your side is protected. Even if you are set, your penalty will not be as great as what the opponents can score.

Suddenly, you are faced with another problem. East raises his partner's overcall to 5♦. Do you rebid 5♠, double for penalty or pass and let your partner decide?

If you bid 5♠ you are violating the Law. You only are protected if you bid to the 4-level. Partner is only showing 5 spades. If you started with 6 spades, you would be protected to the 5-level.

You could pass, but what is partner looking at in his hand. Since you have 3 diamonds, North is probably void in diamonds and would consider 5♦ a makeable contract. He would probably decide to bid 5♠ on the basis of his void. That puts you in the same position as if you had made the 5♠ bid.

Let's consider the penalty double. East, the passed hand, has raised the diamonds to the 5-level based on his diamond holding. But since you hold 3 diamonds, East/West can only have a maximum of 10 diamonds between them. Thus, they themselves have exceeded the Law of Total Tricks. Theoretically, they can only make 4 diamonds. So, bidding will probably result in a negative score; while doubling will give you a positive score. Passing 5♦ will give you a negative score if your partner bids 5♠; but if he also passes, you will get a positive score, but not as high as if you doubled. Doubling is the odds on favorite here.

This is how the bidding should progress:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♦	4♠	5♦	Dbl
All Pass			

Your partner leads the ♠4 and you see this dummy:

E	East
♠	3
♥	8643
♦	J976
♣	A1053

S	South
♠	AQJ95
♥	AJ
♦	1042
♣	J76

You see the two tricks in the majors but how do you plan to get that needed 3rd trick? There is no hope in the spade or diamond suits. If partner holds the ♥K the contract will be set. More probable is that partner holds one of the missing club honors. Then your ♣J might be promoted to take the setting trick. Since East only has 4 diamonds, there is an outside chance that your partner has 1 diamond and that might be he ♦A.

You win the ♠A and if I were you, I would take the ♥A and lead the ♥J. If partner can win the ♥K, he could return a 3rd heart for a ruff.

Unfortunately, the declarer holds the ♥K and he pulls all your trump by leading the ♦AK. Your partner holds the singleton ♦Q which falls under the ♦A. Now you must rely on the club suit to give you your 3rd trick.

The declarer takes your 3rd diamond in the dummy and leads the ♣3. You play low smoothly, and hope for the best. Declarer plays his ♣K and leads a low club up to the dummy. Your partner puts the ♣Q on this trick and declarer wins his ♣A. Now your ♣J is the high club and as long as the declarer holds another club in his hand he will have to give up a club to you.

This is the entire deal:

10 ^D	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ K10642 ♥ Q10952 ♦ Q ♣ Q8	2♦	4♣	5♦	1♠
W West		P	P	P	X
♠ 87 ♥ K7 ♦ AK853 ♣ K942					
	E East				
	♠ 3 ♥ 8643 ♦ J976 ♣ A1053				
	S South				
	♠ AQJ95 ♥ AJ ♦ 1042 ♣ J76				
		5♦x W			NS: 0 EW: 0

Notice that 5♠ goes down two tricks. There is no way to eliminate the 1 heart, 1 diamond and 2 club losers. At 4♠, you would have scored -100. This would be better than the opponents part score of -130, if you allowed them to reach their optimum contract of 4♦.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/m4bfc5q> , or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own. If you click on GIB, the software will analyze the hand and show the result for each opening lead.