

Bidding in the Sandwich Seat

- Hand A Consider this hand.
RHO opens 1♣ or 1♦, what do you do?
- ♠ 85 Clearly a 1♥ overcall is fine.
 - ♥ KJ943 But what if LHO had opened 1♣ and RHO responded 1♦?
 - ♦ A4 Now to bid 1♥ is very dangerous – both opponents are unlimited and partner may well be bust. Bid 1♥ here and you may well be doubled for penalties.
 - ♣ J874
- Hand B And how about this hand?
RHO opens 1♣ or 1♦, what do you do?
- ♠ 85 A pre-emptive weak jump overcall of 2♥ is fine.
 - ♥ AQ10743 But what if LHO had opened 1♣ and RHO responded 1♦?
 - ♦ Q4 Now to bid 2♥ is very dangerous – both opponents are unlimited and partner may well be bust. Bid 2♥ here and you may well be doubled for penalties.
 - ♣ 984
- Hand C And how about this hand?
RHO opens 1♠, what do you do?
- ♠ 5 A pre-emptive jump overcall of 3♥ is fine.
 - ♥ AQ107432 But what if LHO had opened 1♣ or 1♦ and RHO responded 1♠?
 - ♦ K4 Now to bid either 2♥ or 3♥ is very dangerous – when both opponents have bid then a bid in the sandwich seat has little pre-emptive value. 2♥ may perhaps be reasonable but 3♥ is asking for trouble.
 - ♣ 984
- Hand D And finally, how about this hand?
RHO opens 1♠ what do you do?
- ♠ KJ9 Clearly a 1NT overcall, 15-18, is fine.
 - ♥ KJ9 But what if LHO had opened 1♣, 1♦ or 1♥ and RHO responded 1♠?
 - ♦ AQ94 Now to bid 1NT is very dangerous – the opponents have advertised at least a combined 18 points and partner may well be bust – you are very likely to get doubled for penalties.
 - ♣ KJ4

In fact, since the 1NT bid as natural in the sandwich seat makes no sense, many players play it as unusual – weak and at least 5-5 in the two unbid suits – the Sandwich No Trump is described in a separate document

So bidding in the sandwich seat is totally different from the direct seat; and also a double by the next player (so opener) is also different. It is usually penalty orientated, but there are a few exceptions: -

Doubling a Sandwich seat overcall

Now let's come on to what opener should do when RHO does indeed bid in the sandwich seat. So you open 1x, partner responds 1y and RHO overcall one or two z. What is double by opener? – take out or penalties or negative?

In general a double should always be penalty orientated – usually showing a four card suit and saying that that is what you would have bid had RHO not bid it in front of you.

But there are a couple of exceptions. For these two hands you are dealer: -

Hand E You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♥. You would normally respond 1♠, but what if RHO had overcalled 2♦?

♠ KJ97 Playing double as similar to a negative double – showing 4 cards in the
♥ Q7 unbid major – makes a lot of sense; but this needs to be agreed.
♦ J4
♣ AQ762

Hand F You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠. You would normally respond 1NT, but what if RHO had overcalled 2♥?

♠ KJ7 Raising partner to 2♠ seems more prudent but will partner expect 4 card support?
♥ Q7 There is actually a solution to this, and it's called a Support Double.
♦ J94 Playing Support Doubles, a double in this situation, when partner has
♣ AQ762 responded in a major, shows three card support whereas a direct raise would promise four cards.

So, in principle, double by opener is usually penalties. I have no time for people who say it's 'optional' – that's just another way of saying that you have no idea what you are doing. But let's summarise a few of these doubles by opener: -

A 1♣ - pass - 1♥ - 1♠ - double	This is penalties.
B 1♠ - pass - 2♥ - 3♦ - double	This is penalties
C 1♣ - pass - 1♥ - 2♦ - double	This is penalties unless you agree to play it as similar to a negative double, so showing four ♠'s.
D 1♥ - pass - 1♠ - 2♦ - double	This is penalties unless you play support doubles.
E 1♣ - pass - 1♠ - 2♦ - double	This one is up to you. Standard is that it's penalties, but if you play Support doubles then it shows 3 ♠'s and if you don't play Support doubles you could agree that it shows 4 ♥'s.
F 1♥ - pass - 1♠ - 1NT - dbl	If 1NT is natural then double is penalties. If 1NT is the Sandwich NoTrump then double expresses a desire to penalise the opponents in at least one of the unbid suits.

Remember, opener is under no obligation to bid and can pass with nothing to say, so double is either penalties or a specific agreement. It is most certainly not some sort of wishy-washy two-way 'optional' double.

And consider a sequence like sequence A, the double of 1♠ is penalties – showing 4 ♠'s, but at the one level responder is very likely to bid, quite possibly No Trumps. But with sequence B responder would virtually always leave the double in.