

When considering a penalty double of a suit below game, you need length and strength in their suit.

The rule of 10 and 12 indicates the minimum requirements for your holding in the enemy suit if the double is to be profitable.

The most rewarding penalties can occur at the 1-level, 2-level or 3-level if you have the right requirements :

1 strength and length in their suit

2 20+ HCP between you and partner

3 a misfit with partners suit

The rule of 10 and 12:

(a) Add your expected trump tricks to the number of tricks the opponents are trying to win. For a good double, the answer should be 10 or more. If below 10 the double is unsound.

(b) Add the number of trumps you hold to the number of tricks the opponents are trying to win. If the answer is 12 or more, you have adequate trump length. If below 12 the double is unsound.

Part (a) measures the trump strength needed :

Doubles at the 1 level: $10 - 7$ tricks = 3 trump winners needed

Doubles at the 2 level : $10 - 8$ tricks = 2 trump winners needed

Doubles at the 3 level : $10 - 9$ tricks = 1 trump winner needed

How do you assess winners in their suit? Assume declarer leads the suit from the top and estimate how many tricks that will give you. These are not sure tricks but potential winners. For example :

Q 10 8 5 3 : estimate 3 tricks. If declarer starts with the ace and king, you have Q 10 8 left against declarers presumed J 9 7.

K Q 9 6 : estimate 3 tricks. After ace and jack, which you win, you have K and 9 left against declarers presumed 10

K Q 7 6 : estimate 2 tricks. After the ace and the jack, which you win, declarers 10 9 against your K 7 gives you just one more trick.

Part (b) measures whether you have sufficient length in their suit :

Doubles at the 1 level : $12 - 7$ tricks = 5 trumps needed

Doubles at the 2 level : $12 - 8$ tricks = 4 trumps needed

Doubles at the 3 level : $12 - 9$ tricks = 3 trumps needed

It follows that :

To play for penalties at the 1 level you need at least 5 trumps, including 3 tricks in the trump suit

To play for penalties at the 2 level you need at least 4 trumps, including 2 tricks in the trump suit

To play for penalties at the 3 level you need at least 3 trumps, including 1 trick in the trump suit

It pays to be conservative at the 1 level. If you can defeat them, you are making a contract of at least one with a known bad trump split.

Dealer West : Both vulnerable

West North East South

1S Dble Rdbler 2C

East's redouble shows 10+ HCP and an interest in penalties. Should West double with :

♠ A 10 9 7 5 2 ♥ A 6 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K J 4

Applying part (a) you have 2 expected trump tricks and they are bidding for 8 tricks. $8 + 2 = 10$ so your holding satisfies part (a)

You have only 3 trumps. $3 + 8 = 11$, less than the 12 needed to satisfy part (b) about trump length.

West should therefore pass and let partner clarify the redouble.

Summary ; if you do not learn to double part score contracts your opponents will get away with over bidding when non vulnerable. A score of + 100 for getting them down 2 will be worse when you could have made +110 or +140 . If you double them you will get a healthy +300!

If they were vulnerable you can take it a step further : + 100 for one down is often not enough but doubled + 200 will give you a top score.

In order to double a low level contract you need the majority of the points plus length and strength in their suit....note both these requirements must be met... don't double at the low level just because you are strong!