

Double and Cuebid Trouble [1]

♠ A 6
♥ K 9 7 5 2
♦ A Q
♣ Q J 10 3

West	North	East	South
			1 NT ¹
Pass	2 ♦ ²	3 ♠	Pass
Pass	?		
			1. 15-17
			2. Hearts

This deal is from Frank Stewart's column in the October 2021 ACBL *Bridge Bulletin*. Stewart succeeded Alfred Sheinwold as a syndicated bridge columnist and his work is enjoyed around the world. His preference for more natural bidding is an asset in his writing "for the masses." However, he could have done better on this deal.

Many partnerships have not discussed this situation. The default meaning for a double should be similar to this more basic case:

1 NT - (3 ♠) - Double

Stewart does not say what he and partner had agreed about this double, but here are four possibilities:

1. Penalty - probably Stewart's preference; however, partner "has embraced the idea - and I cannot dissuade him of it - that every double in competition has some arcane meaning."
2. DSI - do something intelligent (possibly pass).
3. Negative - opener should bid, but may pass with significant spades, especially on a minimum. This author plays negative at the 3-level with all partners, and prefers it at the 2-level as well.
4. Thrump - opener should bid THRee notrUMP with a stopper - otherwise DSI. This usually applies, for those who play it, after a one of a suit opening, rather than 1 NT.

* * *

What would you have bid as North in this situation?

Double and Cuebid Trouble [2]

♠ A 6
♥ K 9 7 5 2
♦ A Q
♣ Q J 10 3

West	North	East	South
			1 NT ¹
Pass	2 ♦ ²	3 ♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	4 ♦
Pass	?		
			1. 15-17
			2. Hearts

Over a 1 NT opening, a responder who wants to drive to slam in a 6+ card major should start with a Texas transfer, and then ask for keycards. With that hand ruled out, 4 NT here is the way to show a balanced slam invitation, with five hearts - back into charted waters. Opener may pass or bid suits up the line: 5 ♦ (or 5 ♥), and responder can place the contract in 5 or 6 NT (with weak hearts). [If you use inferior "optional Blackwood" responses to 4 NT, then try 4 ♣.]

Note that ♠ A 6 is a fine holding. One duck should isolate the 7-card spade suit, allowing a notrump contract to be brought in using the other suits.

Stewart chose to double for penalties: "Slam is uncertain, especially when the preempt increases the chance of bad breaks, and surely, we will have a chance to beat this at least three tricks for plus 500, more than the value of a game." He ignored the inclinations of this partner, but he surely had enough strength to adapt, should partner take it out. "Even a noted theoretician such as Eric Kokish ... would pass my double of 3 ♠."

* * *

Partner huddled and bid 4 ♦. In further uncharted waters, what would you bid?

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Double and Cuebid Trouble [3]

South Deals ♠ A 6
 None Vul ♥ K 9 7 5 2
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ Q J 10 3



♠ J 5 2
 ♥ A 8 3
 ♦ K J 9 4
 ♣ A K 5

West	North	East	South
			1 NT ¹
Pass	2 ♦ ²	3 ♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	4 ♦
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	6 ♦
Pass	Pass	Dbl ³	Pass
Pass	6 NT	All pass	

1. 15-17
2. Hearts
3. Lightner double: void in ♥ or ♣

Stewart cue bid 4 ♠. Here is another basic auction:

(1 ♥) - 1 ♠ - (Pass) - 2 ♥

It's essential for a partnership to have an agreement on which of these two ways to play that 2 ♥ cue bid:

1. Good hand, says nothing about suits: could be a raise or a good suit. This makes life harder when advancer has heart fit, but it allows the partnership to play a new suit as non-forcing (constructive).
2. Limit raise or better in hearts. This improves bidding on bread-and-butter deals, with a fit. However, when playing this way, a new suit must be forcing -- and you'll have to pass on lesser hands with a good suit. This author plays this way.

Without discussion, I think the plan for the basic auction translates to the 4 ♠ cue bid. It looks like Stewart was playing (1), while partner was playing (2), expecting something along the lines of:

♠ 6 ♥ K Q J 7 2 ♦ A Q 10 6 ♣ Q J 5

What a great bid 6 ♦ was -- playing with *me!*

These folks should get on the same page.

Plan the play on the lead of the ♠ 3.

Double and Cuebid Trouble [4]

South Deals ♠ A 6
 None Vul ♥ K 9 7 5 2
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ Q J 10 3

♠ 3
 ♥ J 6
 ♦ 10 8 7 6
 ♣ 9 8 7 6 4 2



♠ K Q 10 9 8 7 4
 ♥ Q 10 4
 ♦ 5 3 2
 ♣ —

♠ J 5 2
 ♥ A 8 3
 ♦ K J 9 4
 ♣ A K 5

6 NT by South
 Lead: ♠ 3

Good players often land safely in adversity. 6 NT can be made, if hearts break and West wins the loser; or when East has three or more hearts. Stewart's partner chose to win and play three rounds of hearts - *down six!*

East forgot he would be on lead at 6 ♦ and tipped the play with his Lightner double. The contract cannot be made, if East's void is in hearts. Therefore, play for a void in clubs, which puts East in the running for having heart length.

The clean line that guarantees at worst one down: duck the opening lead, to rectify the count. If East happens on a bizarre heart lead, *keep that ace in hand*; it's your squeeze entry. Untangle nine top tricks leaving you on dummy with:

♥ 9 7 ♣ Q opposite your ♠ J ♥ A 8

On the ♣ Q, East must discard before you, from ♠ K and ♥ Q 10. If you have not seen the ♠ K, discard the ♠ J and take your two heart tricks.

[Stewart described an equivalent squeeze and endplay, without first rectifying the count.]

Swap the ♠ J and ♠ 4, and the same winning lines work - any any third spade works as the threat.

However, holding the ♠ J, East will always score seven tricks (-300) at 3 ♠ doubled. Stewart is a stronger player than me; but I do not like a penalty double on this deal -- even if I had that on my card.

