

HALMIC DEFENCE TO 1NT DOUBLED -RESPONDER'S RESCUE

Unlike the opponent's double of a suit for take-out, their double of a 1NT opening bid is usually for penalties. This puts more of an onus on responder to 'get things right'. In many instances this involves a rescue attempt to minimise losses. Also it can be more difficult for the defence to double if they think you have found a fit. It's akin to rescuing a drowning man from heavy seas. You may be able to bring him to calmer waters, but not necessarily to dry land.

Initially players are probably taught that with a weak hand and a five-card suit, bid the suit (possibly via a transfer); with other weak hands re-double and hope that you might find a fit. However after playing in a number of 3-3 spade fits (doubled for -800), you eventually realise that there must be something better.

At the other end of the scale, you can use 'wriggle re-doubles', but these require a lot of partnership understanding, and I've still seen many an expert pair land in silly contracts.

There are practical alternatives, and a commonly used one is Halmic (sometimes Modified). In describing this method, you should remember that basically responder needs to be able to describe five types of hand:

- a) - a single-suited weak hand (i.e. 5 or more cards).
- b) - a two-suited weak hand (4-4, or 5-5).
- c) - a perfectly balanced weak hand (4-3-3-3).
- d) - a non-weak hand prepared to play in 1NT doubled.
- e) - a non-weak hand distributional (5-5 majors).
- f) - a non-weak hand distributional (5-5 major/minor)

(I would class a 'weak' hand as 7 or less points opposite a 12 – 14 no trump)

Responses After 1NT Doubled

Remember that in all these situations it is assumed that opener cannot have more than one doubleton.

- a) with a **weak hand and any 5-card** (or more) suit, **re-double**. Opener must bid 2♣, and responder then leaves or converts to the relevant 5-card suit.
- b) with a **two suited weak hand** (equal length), responder bids the **lower of the suits**. Opener should pass with a three-card suit support, or bid the next suit up with a doubleton of responder's suit or any 4-3-3-3 shape. This ensures a 4-3 fit.
- c) with a **weak 4-3-3-3** hand, **pass**. Opener must re-double, and responder bids 2♣. Opener should bid his four-card suits in an attempt to escape un-doubled.
- d) with a hand prepared **to play in 1NT doubled**, responder should **pass**, forcing opener to re-double (as in case c)). The re-double is then left in.
- e) with a **5-5** major prepared to **play in game (8 – 10 points) – bid 2♠** (rarely occurs). Partner bids his better major at the three-level. With a maximum 10 points and a suitable suit, you can convert to four. The opposition are possibly doubling on a long minor.

((f) - a further refinement that I like is a 2NT bid shows **8 – 10** points with **5-card minor and 5-card major** (similar conditions to (e). Being non-standard, you would need to agree this with partner)). Partner with only one, three or more card major bids 3♣. With at least 3-3 in the majors he bids 3♦. Responder bids accordingly (3-level minor; 3 or 4 level major), and opener will pass.

Examples: (assume partner is opening a 12-14 1NT and next opponent doubles. The point ranges need to be amended for alternative NT openings).

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a) ♠ 85
♥ A9532
♦ J75
♣ 952 | b) ♠ K963
♥ 832
♦ 74
♣ Q952 | c) ♠ K963
♥ Q832
♦ 74
♣ 952 | d) ♠ K83
♥ 963
♦ J852
♣ 1097 | e) ♠ K94
♥ K93
♦ QJ5
♣ 10952 |
| f) ♠ A9863
♥ AQ932
♦ 53
♣ 9 | g) ♠ A9863
♥ 53
♦ AJ932
♣ 9 | | | |

- a) re-double, after which opener must bid 2♣. Responder then converts to 2♥ showing the five-card suit.
- b) bid 2♣ - with two four-card suits bid the lower. Opener will pass unless he has two clubs or a 4-3-3-3 hand (without four clubs), in which case he will bid 2♦. Responder will bid 2♠ if opener doesn't pass.
- c) bid 2♥ - as above. Opener now knows that his partner has four hearts and four spades (he's bid the lower of two four-card suits), so will bid accordingly.
- d) pass. Opener must re-double, over which you now bid 2♣. Knowing your shape (but not the four-card suit), opener will probably continue to bid 4-card suits at the two-level hoping not to get doubled – you might find a 4-4 fit, but you'll be no worse than a 4-3 fit.
- e) pass. After opener's re-double, pass hoping to make, even opposite a minimum.
- f) bid 2♠. The opponents are possibly doubling on a long minor suit. Partner will bid 3♥ or 3♠, and in this case you will bid four.
- g) bid 2NT. If partner bids 3♣, just bid 3♦. If he bids 3♦, you can choose to play in either 3♠ or 4♠ (since you've foregone the option of playing in 1NT**, it's probably best to bid 4♠ on this hand). I'll emphasise that this bid is non-standard, so agree with partner.

Note: - Halmic as stated only applies after an immediate double of 1NT. The overall structure breaks-down if used after a fourth-seat double – you've basically lost the forcing pass.