

Countering the multi

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The multi two diamonds is assumed to be a weak two in either major or a strong balanced hand. The looser, free-spirited version used by some mad dogs and Englishmen has demonstrated a striking capacity to disrupt the auctions of its victims.

It is not just that the multi throws a pair into uncharted waters. The theoretical merit of the multi is that the opponents must begin a constructive auction at an uncomfortably high level with no cue bid available. Some have tried to counter this difficulty by passing initially with good hands so that the opener will reveal their suit, but such defensive methods are subject to violent pre-emption by responder, who knows more about the deal than anyone else.

A sensible defensive framework must define second hand's character and strength while it is (relatively) safe to do so. Because the multi will, like any pre-emptive action, have its triumphs, it is worthwhile to gear the defensive mechanism to punishing the opener on occasion.

The proposed system takes advantage of the extra level offered by the opener's bidding below their suit. The basic idea is that suit bids below three notrumps are transfers. All immediate bids are defined as showing the values with which one would normally overcall a weak two bid; it does not pay to worry that opener has one of the strong possibilities inherent in most versions of the multi. The immediate double is a two-way bid (isn't that fitting?) showing either hearts or a big balanced (18+) hand. This double is the means by which opener can be caught. If the opening was based on hearts, the jeopardy is immediate; if spades was opener's suit, perhaps advancer can apply the axe. A second double of the retreat to spades by the 'overcaller' indicates the balanced hand.

The structure is easy enough to remember:

Double = either a heart suit or any balanced hand with 18+. If advancer has a weak hand with a moderate heart fit, it is tactically sensible to bid hearts at the appropriate level rather than allow opener to bid two spades. Then if 'overcaller' has the

2♥ =
2♠ =
2NT =

3♣ =
3♦ =
3♥ =

3♠ =

3NT =

Pass followed by double shows a normal takeout double of the major bid. This shows full values, as partner will have had a turn. The double will not, of course, be needed for one or two-suiters.

Responses to the overcalls are natural; accepting the transfer is the weakest call. A bid of a new suit is a natural call, forcing for one round, except for the case in which overcaller has shown a major. Then the other major is a cue bid. A jump shift is a splinter raise. Two notrumps, if available, is a natural game try. If overcaller bids again after responder merely accepts the transfer, that is natural but not forcing unless opener cues the 'other' major. Thus with two-suiters, overcaller transfers to the first suit, then shows the second suit if it seems wise.

Initial actions by fourth hand are natural, and doubles of the suit bid by responder are for takeout.

2♦ Pass 2♥ Dble

A takeout of hearts.

2♦ Pass 2♠ Dble

A takeout of spades.

If after a pass by fourth hand, opener converts to the other major, a double by either defender is again a normal takeout double of the suit bid. This agreement allows fourth hand to express its character whichever suit opener has.

To illustrate the value of the method, I show some deals taken from high calibre matches. The

balanced hand, it is a simple matter to correct to two notrumps

spades
clubs
balanced 15-17 (any structure may be used. I recommend Wolff signoff: 3♣ forces 3♦; 3♦ = Stayman; 3♥, 3♠ = forcing diamonds
strong heart one-suiter
strong spade one-suiter
solid unspecified minor; responder should stop both majors to bid three notrumps
natural, but not balanced

actual auction is given, and then the recommended auction using the proposed methods. The recommendations do not encompass the often atrocious openings, which did however achieve fine results.

Deal 1

DLR: North
VUL: NS

♠ 10 5
♥ 10 8 3
♦ A Q 9 4 2
♣ K 10 9

♠ K 6
♥ A K 4
♦ 10 8 7 6
♣ A Q J 3

♠ A Q
♥ Q 9 7 5 2
♦ 5 3
♣ 8 6 4 2

♠ J 9 8 7 4 3 2
♥ J 6
♦ K J
♣ 7 5

Actual auction:

WEST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH
	Pass	Pass 2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass 2♠
Dble	All pass	

Here the at-the-table disaster was caused by lack of agreement, although East would have had to be a good guesser even if West's double had been interpreted correctly.

Recommended auction:

WEST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH
	Pass	Pass 2♦
2NT	Pass	3♥ Pass
4♣(1)	Pass	4♥ All pass

(1) Cue agreeing hearts

Deal 2

DLR: South
VUL: NS

♠ 9 8 7
♥ -
♦ K Q 9 7
♣ K Q 9 4 3 2

♠ K Q 5 4 3
♥ A
♦ 8 6 3
♣ A J 10 8

♠ A 2
♥ J 10 9 8 7 5
♦ A 10 5
♣ 6 5

♠ J 10 6
♥ K Q 6 4 3 2
♦ J 4 2
♣ 7

Actual auction:

WEST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH
	Pass	3NT 2♦
2♠	Pass	3NT All pass

At the table East clearly overbid, but West might well have accepted an invitation. Using transfers, East can afford to bid only two spades with a moderate, fitless hand. West

will bid again on some of the hands on which a game is playable.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♥ Pass 2♠ All pass

Deal 3

DLR: North
VUL: EW

♠ J 7 4
♥ 8 5 3
♦ 7 6 2
♣ K 9 4 3

♠ K 8
♥ K Q J 6 4
♦ 10 9 8
♣ A Q J

♠ Q 9 5
♥ A 10 7 2
♦ A J 5 3
♣ 6 5

♠ A 10 6 3 2
♥ 9
♦ K Q 4
♣ 10 8 7 2

Actual auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
Pass Pass 2♦
2NT Pass 3NT All pass

The actual result shows lack of system. The recommended auction allows East to construct an invitational sequence. If North were to pass instead of bidding two hearts, East's best call is an invitational three hearts. It is interesting, but coincidental, that Morton's Fork makes four hearts impregnable if East is the declarer, while a diamond lead from North is too tough if West declares.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
Pass Pass 2♦
Dble 2♥ Dble 2♠
Pass Pass 3♥ Pass
4♥ All pass

Deal 4

DLR: South
VUL: NS

♠ A Q 4
♥ J 7 5
♦ K J 2
♣ 6 4 3 2

♠ 8 7 2
♥ A K Q 8 6 2
♦ 10 9
♣ Q 10

♠ 6
♥ -
♦ A Q 8 7 6 5 3
♣ A K 9 7 5

♠ K J 10 9 5 3
♥ 10 9 4 3
♦ 4
♣ J 8

Actual auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
Pass 2♥ 3♥ Pass
3NT Pass 4NT Pass
5♣ All pass

At the table, West was apparently forced by system to pass, and there was no good way to sort things out. The recommended auction makes it easy for West to see that a promising hand is not worth much, and incidentally to settle in the proper trump suit.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
Dble 2♥ 3♦ Pass
3♥ Pass 5♣ Pass
5♦ All pass

Deal 5

DLR: South
VUL: All

♠ Q 10 7
♥ Q 6 5
♦ A J 10 7
♣ A K 8

♠ A K J 9 3
♥ -
♦ 9 8 5 4
♣ Q 7 5 3

♠ 8 5 4 2
♥ A K J 4
♦ 6
♣ J 9 6 2

♠ 6
♥ 10 9 8 7 3 2
♦ K Q 3 2
♣ 10 4

Actual auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
Pass 2NT Pass 3♣
Pass 4♥ Dble All pass

East was in my opinion quite fortunate to survive the snap double. The result for the recommended auction depends on South leading hearts, but at least the nine-card fit is in the game.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
2♥ 4♥ 4♠ Pass
Pass Dble All pass

Deal 6

DLR: South
VUL: EW

♠ 10 8 3
♥ 9
♦ A J 9 5 4 2
♣ 10 8 2

♠ A K 9 4
♥ A K 10 8 4
♦ Q
♣ Q J 7

♠ Q J 7 2
♥ 6
♦ K 10 7 3
♣ A K 6 4

♠ 6 5
♥ Q J 7 5 3 2
♦ 8 6
♣ 9 5 3

Actual auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
Pass Pass Dble Pass
3♦ Pass 3NT All pass

While the bold interference makes it too difficult for East-West to find their slam, the recommended defense at least achieves a respectable result. South will probably take three tricks in two diamonds or two hearts.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
Dble Pass Pass 2♥
Dble All pass

Deal 7

DLR: South
VUL: EW

♠ A J 10 8
♥ K Q 6 3
♦ 9 5 2
♣ J 7

♠ K 7
♥ A 10 9
♦ A Q J 6 4 3
♣ 9 4

♠ Q 9 3
♥ 5
♦ K 8 7
♣ A K 10 8 5 2

♠ 6 5 4 2
♥ J 8 7 4 2
♦ 10
♣ Q 6 3

Actual auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
2NT 3♥ 5♣ All pass

At the table, East-West managed to find the only rational game which might fail, rather than bid the reasonable slam. In the recommended auction, East should bid four hearts at their first turn (as a splinter raise) even if North stays out of the bidding.

Recommended auction:

WEST NORTHEAST SOUTH
2♦
3♣ 3♥ 4♥ Pass
4♠(1) Pass 6♦ All pass
(1) Cue bid

David Weiss feels that less experienced players may not be so intimidated by multi's etc if they have defensive mechanisms at their disposal. With this article he hopes to remove some of the fear of playing against those 'tricky expert conventions'.