

LEAD DIRECTING DOUBLES by Maritha Pottenger

Most players use doubles of artificial bids as **lead-directing**. It is important to distinguish between two different circumstances. In one case, the **opponents are exploring the possibility of a no trump game**. A lead-directing double under those circumstances shows **length, but strength may not be terrific**. For example, the opponents bid 2C (Stayman, asking for a 4-card major) and you hold: Kx Axx xx K1098xx. You should double 2C, asking partner to lead a club against 3NT. You have the majority of the strength that your partnership will possess, so it is important to get your suit on the table right away. Without your double, partner will lead anything but a club, and a heart or a spade could take away one of your possible entries immediately.

You can make a lead-directing double of all the artificial bids that opponents make when one of them opens 1NT: clubs, diamonds (transfer), hearts (transfer) and even spades if they are playing 2S as minor suit Stayman or a transfer to 3C. [Incidentally, here are Kantar's suggestions if you open NT, partner bids Stayman and RHO doubles for the club lead:

- 1) Bid 4-card major if you have one.
- 2) Pass with no major and a club stopper.
- 3) Bid 2D with no major and no club stopper.
- 4) Redouble with 4 or 5 good clubs and no major.]

When you make a lead-directing double at the two level, you should have a 6-card suit, or a very, very good 5-card suit. Do NOT make a lead-directing double of 2C holding something like A9xxx in the suit. (I saw this happen at the table once. The no trump opener had KQJ10x of clubs and promptly redoubled to play.) You can also double **Drury** (artificial) to show clubs and double **splinter** bids to ask partner to lead the suit & indicate a willingness to sacrifice there. Double **4th-suit-forcing** if you want that suit led (usually against 3NT).

Because you promise length, **partner is allowed to sacrifice in your lead-directed suit** if s/he also has length and believes that sacrificing is the right thing to do.

The **second situation that can arise is when the opponents are merrily bidding their way to slam**, and they make artificial bids in response to Blackwood, Gerber, or they make cue-bids in exploring for their slams. At these times, **lead-directing doubles show strength and may not have length** at all. Thus, for example, holding the KQx of diamonds, you would double for the lead if RHO bids 5D in response to a Blackwood inquiry. If RHO cue-bid diamonds, you would double even with the Kx(x)(x) because you know your King is behind the Ace and you want partner to lead the suit to knock out the opponent's Ace right away. Because you are bidding strength, not length, partner is **never** invited to sacrifice in response. Sometimes you double for a lead because you cannot stand anything else (e.g., 8xx QJ108 8xxx Jx) & hope to prevent partner from making a terrible lead. If you double with only a King (or Ace) in a suit, you may tell opponents how to play the hand or that a finesse is working.

One other caution: if one opponent has opened the suit in which you can make a lead-directing double, you may not want to risk it. The opponents might be able to redouble and make a redoubled contract at the 4 or 5 level (if you only have one trick in that suit)—perhaps even scoring doubled and redoubled overtricks. Ditto if you are thinking about doubling a help-suit game try. Be sure they cannot end up playing it there!

When partner is deciding what to lead against a slam, your lead-directing double can be helpful. **Partner should also consider the fact that you did NOT make a lead-directing double over certain bids.** That implies you are not eager to have partner lead those suits and may help partner make a better choice of opening lead.