

The Panther Double

By Zia Mahmood (Pakistan)

you know they are about to get lucky and make: DOUBLE. The fear of a large number will help remove them to a 'safer' resting place.

I was playing with David Berkowitz, the American champion, in the Vanderbilt tournament. He held:

<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px;"> <tr><td style="border: none;"></td><td style="border: none; text-align: center;">N</td><td style="border: none;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="border: none; text-align: center;">W</td><td style="border: none;"></td><td style="border: none; text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: none;"></td><td style="border: none; text-align: center;">S</td><td style="border: none;"></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 4 3 ♥ K 10 3 ♦ J 10 4 ♣ J 10 9 5
	N									
W		E								
	S									

Sitting East, with South the dealer, he heard the following auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
1 ♥	2 ♥ ¹	Dbl	2 ♠
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥ ²
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
Pass	Pass	Dbl ³	5 ♣
Pass	Pass	Dbl ⁴	All pass

1. club fit, forcing but denies 4 spades
2. looking for 3NT
3. complete bluff
4. much happier

David could see that four spades on the 4-3 fit would make with the friendly trump break. He also knew that the opponents did not know this, so he doubled. A bad break might mean declarer losing control and conceding a large penalty, so South reasonably ran to the 'safety' of the known club fit.

Brilliant — yet all he needed to do was listen carefully to the auction and have the courage to make a Panther Double. You don't need to look as sleek as a panther to bid like one.

3. Invitational auctions

This is my personal favorite. Whenever a limited hand accepts an invitation, the Panther should be ready to pounce at the slightest excuse. That excuse may be as flimsy as the fact that the last bid was made after a lengthy hesitation, strongly suggesting an overbid, or at least a tight contract.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT ¹
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All pass

1. after a pause

The double, by increasing the stakes, places considerable pressure on the declarer who will proceed to misplace the high cards. In addition his mind, filled with images of ghosts and bad breaks, will be unable to function clearly.

If the sequence above is for the more adventurous, the more common limited auction where the defender can foresee bad lies for breaks for declarer is impossible to resist. Now the prey is helpless; it almost feels unsporting to pounce.

Armed with your new toy you decide to sit in on a high-stake rubber bridge game. Naturally you pick up your typical hand:

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N	♠ 6
W	♥ J 9 8 2
E	♦ Q 10 6 3
S	♣ K J 9 8

and hear this auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			Pass
Pass	1 ♣	Pass ¹	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♦
Pass	3 NT	Dbf ²	4 ♠
Dbf	All pass		

1. The boring collection becomes a little less boring when North bids clubs
2. The Panther Double: the auction is limited and more, both suits break badly. It's time to pounce, maybe they will run

This is fun because the complete hand is:

♠ A 7 2		
♥ A 3		
♦ J 8 4		
♣ A Q 10 3 2		
♠ Q 10 9 4	N	♠ 6
♥ Q 7 6 5 4	W	♥ J 9 8 2
♦ A 5	E	♦ Q 10 6 3
♣ 7 4	S	♣ K J 9 8
		♠ K J 8 5 3
		♥ K 10
		♦ K 9 7 2
		♣ 6 5

Partner leads the seven of clubs and declarer finesses, losing to the king. South wins the heart return in hand to play the ace of spades and another spade. When you show out he wins the king while you throw a diamond. He now tries the ace of clubs and a club ruff and partner overruffs. West cashes the queen of spades and exits with a heart to dummy's ace. Declarer, desperate, and with no more entries to dummy, tries a diamond to his king. West wins and South's only other trick is his last trump.

South ends up making three spade tricks, two hearts and one club; down four and +800 for East-West. Perhaps declarer could have done better but most humans don't perform well under pressure.

Now be honest. If you had picked up that insignificant looking East hand before reading this article would you have allowed your 800 to slip by? Life has no guarantees and I admit that sometimes the Panther Double can backfire. But you don't have to worry. If your partner screams at you after such a disaster, blame me.

BOLS TIP: *When the opponents have an impossible-sounding auction, or when you want them to run or when they have an invitational auction and the cards do not lie well for them, try a Panther Double.*