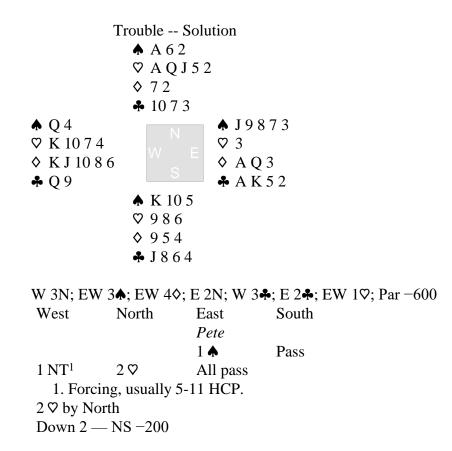


Take my seat in a Swiss Team event in Westwood. What would you do? What do experts play in this situation?

Board 10
East Deals
Both Vul



The choices are Pass, Double and  $3 \clubsuit$ . The last is off the charts - partner will expect five cards for  $3 \clubsuit$ ; should he go back to spades on a doubleton, you are likely to get doubled. So Pass and Double are the viable options.

Partner and I had played the day before, after a lengthy hiatus. Both of us privately thought that double by either of us would be treated by the other as penalty. Accordingly, I passed. Partner was fearful of doubling them into game. Despite all those points, he passed as well. At the other table, the opponents bid and made 3 NT, so we lost 9 IMPs on the board. We would have been OK (lose 3) if we had doubled, and would have pushed the board by bidding and making 3 NT. Of course, going down in 3 NT would have been worse.

When 3 NT is played by West, North must not lead a heart, or declarer gets the ninth trick. A spade lead blows up that suit, and hearts cannot be run. The only chance to set the contract is to lead a minor suit and hope that declarer misguesses spades (defense gets three spades and two hearts). This great defense is unlikely.

Multiple national champion Adam Grossack told me he plays a double at my second turn as takeout. With this agreement in place, I would indeed double (great shape and 14 HCP). Partner would either convert for penalties or make a move toward game.

The flip side of this, as with negative doubles, is that partner's double would also be takeout. So if I had hearts behind the overcaller, I would pass, and hope partner would reopen with a double.

Conclusion: This is a low-level competitive auction where our relative strength and fit is largely unknown. Experts play doubles as takeout. On the other hand, we would have been OK, had West acted over  $2\heartsuit$ , so this is not a strong endorsement of the expert method. As usual, understanding your system is most important.