

The Rule of Nine

Described by Bob Denby

The rule of nine is a concept used in competitive bidding situations, variations of which are described below. Whilst not unknown in the USA, players this side of the Atlantic may be aware of the main variation but not really conversant with it:

Low Level Overcall

The opening bidder, after a low-level overcall has been made which has then been followed by two passes, needs to determine whether to continue to compete. The rule of nine allows the opening bidder to judge better the possibility of continuing to compete or whether to defend. An example should help to clarify.

The question for North, the opener in this auction, is whether to reopen the bidding with a double after the two passes. There could be two reasons why South passed:

North	East	South	West
1 ♠	2 ♥	Pass	Pass
?			

1. South has insufficient values to compete
2. South has values and wanted to make a *penalty double*, but could not since a double would have been interpreted as having a specific partnership agreement, such as showing the minors.

In determining the correct reason as to why South passed, the inference made by North is that South has values in the suit of the opponent, if North is short, that is two or less. In the case that North holds three or more cards in hearts, then the inference is that South has no values, with which to bid.

Therefore, North should follow the guidelines below when deciding to reopen the auction with a double:

1. **Reopen the bidding with a double if the number of cards held in the suit of the opponent is two or less.** This guideline holds true even if the holding of North is not up to standard for a takeout double or a reopening double.
2. **Pass**, completing the auction, in order to defend based on the inference that holding three cards or more in the suit of the opponent, partner has no values. This is the normal guideline. In the case that North has substantially more values to continue the

auction independently, then North should take such action by bidding an unbid suit or a cue bid as per partnership agreement and allowing partner to make a preference bid. A double should not be employed, in this instance.

When North reopens the auction with a double, then South should take some action. The rule of nine assists South in determining the correct course of action as follows:

- Bid his/her best suit, or
- Raise partner's suit, in this case North, with a minimum of two or more if playing 5 card majors, but no fewer, or
- Pass for penalty when holding defensive values including length in the suit of the opponent.

The rule of nine can assist the partner (who has been forced to respond), in arriving at the best course of action. The concept is explained below:

1. The partner, in this case South, adds:
 - a) the level of the contract plus
 - b) the number of cards held in the opponent's suit, and
 - c) the number of honors (includes the ten) held in the opponent's suit.
2. If the calculated number is nine or more, then the partner, South, passes for penalty.
3. If the calculated number is eight or fewer, then the partner, South, should bid.

For example, if South held ♥AQ976, then the calculation is as follows:

The contract level is 2, hearts held is 5, with 2 honours, totaling 9, so South should pass for penalties, if it is **unlikely** a better score can be achieved. If holding is ♥AQ97 and thus a total of 8 South should compete.

Partner doubles a weak two for takeout

For this lesser known variation, the same concept applies whether to pass the double or compete.