

BARBU

1. Dealer's Choice

Some hand types are significantly higher risk than others. I will list here the hands in descending order of risk. You should always try to get rid of risky hands as early as possible in the game as being forced to choose them at a late stage could cost a great deal. Choosing misere early on a hand which is risky for all negative types is normally not a good strategy. Not only will you score poorly on the hand but opponents will use up their forced doubles and you won't have the security of a relatively safe choice at the end.

NO HEARTS

This is the highest risk hand. A hand which is safe for No H should always make that choice however good it is for others.

The safest hands for No H are hands with long hearts (4 or more) including at least two low cards (lowest should be the 2 or the 3 with just a 4 card suit)

Hands with short hearts (2 or fewer) are very dangerous unless you have a good prospect of discarding any high hearts you may have (for this purpose a high heart is any higher than the 3) and your side suits are safe.

See below, Principles of Card Play, to understand the concept of safe suits.

These are good hands for No H

S: A K 7
H: A Q J 5 4 2
D: 8 7
C: A 6

This hand is also very good for NL2 and for Hearts trumps, but you should choose No H if possible.

S: A K 7 4 2
H: J 2
D: 8
C: A 6 5 3 2

This hand is also good for No H because, although you have short hearts, you intend to discard the JH on the 2nd round of diamonds and your black suits are safe.

S: K Q 8
H: A Q 7 5 4
D: Q 7
C: J 9 3

Although not perfect, the length in hearts makes No H a safe choice. You would lead the KS and might have to take some hearts on the last trick if you are unlucky.

S: A J 4 2
H: 8 6
D: K 7 5 4 2
C: K 7

This is a very poor hand for No H. Although your side suits are good, the danger is that when hearts are first led you will have to win and you may have 2 or 3 more tricks to make with your remaining diamonds and possibly even the 13th spade.

S: Q J 10 8 7 3 2
H: 2
D: J 10 7
C: A 6

Another bad hand for No H. The danger is your bad diamond suit and the risk is that the spade suit will be cleared early and after winning the 2nd or 3rd round of diamonds, you will be forced to cash 4 or 5 more spades before you can play your 2H.

S: A J 10 7
H: K 8 6 2
D: Q 10 2
C: 9 6

This hand is not particularly good for No H, but it won't be terrible. You plan to clear spades (taking some heart discards) but then your hand will be OK

NO LAST TWO

This is the second most dangerous hand mainly because the same person generally takes both making it a -30 hand (which, as dealer, can be doubled up to -120).

The key to this hand type is Controls and Exits. This means that the best cards to hold are Aces and twos. The only safe exit in any suit with more than 2 cards is the 2 and therefore any suit of 3 or more cards missing the 2 must be treated as a potential danger.

The suits in which you hold exits are best if you also hold controls there (the Ace is the safest control, Kings and Queens possible controls). The benefit of such a control is that you can stop the opponents clearing your good suits and at the same time regain the lead to clear your bad suits. NL2 is often a race to see who can clear their bad suits first and as dealer you have the advantage in that you are the first to go.

S: J 9 6 5

H: A K 2
D: A K Q 4 2
C: 8

This is a good hand for NL2. Your spades are terrible but your red suit controls and exits are so good that you will have time to clear them. You lead a spade and each time you win one of your red suit tricks you will lead another spade until all the spades have gone (or at least all lower than the 5).

S: Q J 10 5
H: A K 8
D: A 3 2
C: A 7 2

Another good hand for NL2 although it is not easy to see that you should lead a high spade, not the high hearts. Start with the QS, when you win one of your Aces in clubs or diamonds you continue with the JS. Now, when you win the other Ace you can cash the 10S, cash the 5S also (unless it is an exit) and then play AK and 8H. You will still have one of your 2s left as an exit.

S: 10 5 4
H: 6 4 3
D: 9 5 4
C: 10 8 7 6

Although you have very few high cards, this hand is very bad for NL2. Your bad suit (clubs) cannot be cleared because of lack of controls so on this hand you are favourite to take both last 2 tricks.

BARBU

Although this hand is only -20, it is a relatively dangerous hand type because of how easy it is for the person holding the KH to target a specific individual. Our rules state that this can only be done if there are doubles or redoubles which would make this to the players advantage.

The best hand for Barbu is a hand with 5 or more hearts including the King. 3 or 4 hearts including the King is reasonably safe as long as you have a short suit elsewhere (fewer than 3 cards).

If you do not hold the KH yourself, then the best hands are hands with long hearts (5 or more) and side suits which are short (<3) or have at least one low card (3 or 2).

You will often have hands which are good for Barbu and also good for No Hearts. If you have both choices available, you should prefer No H.

Sometimes you will have a bad hand with one good suit.

S: A 4 3 2
H: Q 8 7

D: K 10 7
C: A J 6

This is a bad hand for everything but a choice of BARBU can be effective. What you will hope is that the person holding the KH also holds short spades so you lead the AS followed by another. When you next win a trick you will play a 3rd spade and, if necessary, later still a 4th spade. No guarantee of success but you have a fair chance.

S: A Q 6
H: K 10 9 8 7
D: 10
C: K 8 6 3

This is a good Barbu choice. Lead the 10D and discard the KH when a second diamond is played.

Sometimes you will have a hand where you are holding the KH but your hand is awful for all choices. Early in the game, it is sometimes advisable to choose Barbu because the other players will be fearful of doubling you in case you are able to target someone. You might then get out for -20 or better on a hand like this which is bad for all choices:

S: 9 7 4
H: K 10 7
D: A Q 2
C: Q 10 8 4

DOMINO

Almost by definition domino hands tend to be bad for the negative choices (except very low dominos). If you are left with domino at the end and have a very bad hand, then one or two doubles can become very costly. For this reason I place Domino 4th in the risk list.

The best hands for domino are those which hold longish sequences within a suit and do not have extremes (Aces and 2s). In this respect, a good domino hand is just about the exact opposite of a good NL2 hand.

The choice of starting card is very important and should be one which will permit you to retain your hold in a suit for as long as possible. It is often right to choose, as a starting card, one where you hold the card as a singleton and enough controls to enable you to keep this card till the end.

S: A 10 4
H: 10
D: Q J 10 9 7 5
C: J 8 7

This would be a good domino from the 10. Lead the 10S and keep hold of the 10H for as long as possible.

S: 8 5 4 3 2
H: 8 7 6
D: J 2
C: 10 7 6

I would rather choose domino from the 2 here than either No Q or Misere (it is quite unsuitable for No H, NL2 or Barbu because of the bad suits in hearts and clubs)

You are almost sure of your +45 here.

NO QUEENS

This type has the reputation of being the least predictable and you will often have a good hand which unexpectedly takes 2 Queens or a bad hand which takes none. Good features are safe suits (any suit with 4 or more cards needs the 2), high cards (A, K and Q) only in long suits (4 or more cards) and at least one short suit (1 or 0 cards). This is a good hand for No Q:

S: A Q 8 7 4 2
H: J
D: Q 9 3 2
C: 9 5

This leaves TRUMPS and MISERE for the last two choices. You should always aim for this position if at all possible. Both these hands are generally relatively inexpensive. It matters little in which order you choose them if you but if you are obliged to choose them before the last two, choose trumps if you expect to take at least 5 tricks otherwise choose misere.

2. The Strategy of Doubling

There are two reasons for doubling:

- a) To comply with the rule that you must double dealer twice
- b) For Profit

You must always be conscious of the number of doubles you owe dealer.

Follow these rules about dealer doubles.

If dealer chooses misere and you owe one or two doubles, you should double dealer even if you expect to take 6 or 7 tricks. This is a relatively cheap double (if you take 6 tricks and the dealer takes only 1 trick the double still costs you only 20 points). Even this hand is worth a double of dealer only:

S: A J 10
H: 9 7 6
D: Q 9 8 7 4
C: K 4

Double dealer on No Q if you expect to take one Queen (with an outside chance of taking 2). So, double dealer only on a hand such as:

S: Q 10 8
H: A J 7 5 4 3
D: J 7 5
C: 10

You can double dealer on a late trumps choice if you have 4 or more trumps and expect 4 or more tricks.

You can double dealer in No H when you have a hand with some length in hearts even though you expect to take some heart discards. For example:

S: A Q J 9
H: J 4 3
D: A 8 3
C: J 10 7

This is not a very good hand but you will probably find yourself taking hearts as discards but not as heart tricks. Your expectation is to take about 6 hearts, so a dealer double would cost you only 24 points (assuming dealer takes none). Sometimes it might go better.

Whatever you do don't leave yourself in the position of owing doubles at the end of the game when dealer has only positives or expensive hands like NL2

or No H left. A forced double of trumps could easily cost 60 points or more, and a forced double of domino could cost 100!

On some hands you would double for profit in which case you would either double everyone (Max) or target specific players. Obviously a Max is the most rewarding because you gain against everyone however it is also the riskiest. If dealer chooses NL2, you max, and the dealer redoubles, you stand to gain 30 points (with an outside chance of 60 if dealer has got it badly wrong). However, if you take them yourself, you will lose 150.

So, what should your strategy be for a 'Max'?

- a) You have a rockcrusher. Sometimes you are dealt an almost perfect hand for dealer's choice. You can 'Max' with confidence.
- b) You have a fairly good hand. In this case, if it is an early choice you can be sure that at least one of the other players has a bad hand so doubling the Flancs (the 2 players excluding the dealer) can be a good strategy. If you owe a double at that stage, then include the dealer as well and do a 'Max' because although you are unlikely to get profit from the dealer, you will at least use up an obligatory double.
- c) Take notice of other players bids or passes. If dealer chooses No Q, next hand goes Max and the third player passes you make have a hand which expects to take at most one Queen. You should double your right hand opponent (whose silence proclaims a poor hand) and also the dealer (if you owe a double). Now, if RHO takes 3 Queens and you take the 4th, you will only lose 12 points.

Remember that if you are doubled or redoubled with a specific player, they are allowed to target you in the play. This is particularly important in 'Barbu' because the person with the KH can often wait.

Dealer on your left chooses 'Barbu' and the bidding goes Max, Pass and you have:

S: J 7
H: Q 8 5
D: A 8 5 3 2
C: 6 5 3

This is a very good hand and you are unlikely to take the KH but if you Max and dealer or the first doubler holds it they can target you. This is how things can go:

They lead a diamond; you win and play JS (your bad suit). They win and 3 more diamonds are played on which dealer discards 3 spades. Now you take the KH on the 7S.

If you had just doubled your right hand opponent, this would not have happened because there would be no reason to target you. So an injudicious Max could cost you 140 points (losing 120 instead of gaining 20).

A Max of NL2 can be lucrative (earning you 30 or 60 on a good day if you are redoubled). However unless you have an extremely good hand it can be very costly if you are a bit unlucky or you misjudge the play. You really need to assess how many times you will need to play your bad suits and you will need that number plus one of controls to succeed. For this purpose a control is a winning trick in one of your good suits. Here are some examples:

S: Q 10 7
H: A K 2
D: J 5 3 2
C: 8 4 2

This would be a good hand to choose NL2 as a dealer, but should you double? It is tempting but you need to play spades 3 times to clear the suit and you only have 2 controls so you would need some luck or co-operation. If you had a short suit, you could hope for a discard which would swing it in your favour, so with:

S: Q 10 7
H: A 7 2
D: 3
C: A J 6 5 3 2

Here, although you will not be able to play spades 3 times, you can hope for (and expect) a discard when diamonds are played the second time (you will discard a spade of course).

Doubling Barbu is a special case because of the severe danger that the person with the KH will be able, with the assistance of another player, to target the doubler. If you suspect that the dealer holds the KH, you must be on ultra safe ground to double everyone, but it is often safe to double the flancs (the two non dealer players). Of course, when the dealer chooses Barbu they will not always hold the KH so sometimes you might misjudge a bit.

S: A J 4 2
H: 9 6
D: K 7 5 3 2
C: A 3

If dealer (on your left) chooses Barbu and the next two players pass it might seem safe to Max but what might happen is that dealer redoubles and then does not discard the KH whilst spades and diamonds are played. Eventually someone will have only hearts – you may win with the 6 and have a winning diamond to cash. Better to double the Flancs and now, by the rules of the

game, dealer will have to discard at first opportunity (not permitted to target unless it is in their direct interests to do so).

Your position at the table relative to the dealer is also highly significant. It is much safer to double Barbu when chosen by your RHO (assuming the probability of dealer holding the KH). However, there is also an advantage to being 4th to play at trick 1 on most of the other negative hands.

To sum up, these are your doubling options:

Max

Double everyone, but don't redouble

Double the Flancs

Double Dealer only

Double a specific player only

Pass

3. Redoubling

You redouble for profit, so you should be sure of a probability of profit. Remember that if you redouble, you make yourself a target and that might well outweigh any potential profit. For example, if you choose No H on this hand:

S: J 9 6
H: K J 6 4 2
D: A 8
C: 9 5 2

And the bidding goes Pass, Pass, Max. Should you now redouble? You have a good hand but the bidding suggests that the hearts are likely to be taken by the players to your left and opposite so your probability of profit is low. Also, if you redouble RHO might choose to discard the AH on the 3rd spade rather than a possible risk card in a side suit.

S: Q 7 5 3
H: 9 7 5
D: K 5 4 2
C: J 5

Bidding goes: No Q on your left, Max from the player opposite you and Pass on your right. Just content yourself with a double of the other two – you don't want to make yourself a target.

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