

## WHEN 1NT IS DOUBLED

Playing the weak notrump is effective — it simplifies your constructive bidding and allows you to preempt the opponents' bidding. However, nothing in life is free. Every so often, the opponents will be in a position to double your 1NT opening, especially when their side has a lot more points than you do. Oh sure, every once in a blue moon they will even get you for a big number (such as 800 or 1100), but usually a good runout system will make it unprofitable or just too difficult for them to double you. In addition, a good runout system allows you to double *them* when they walk into your auction at the wrong time. This chapter will take a look at one particular runout system — the DONT approach. But first, let's lay down the basics.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A RUNOUT SYSTEM?

At last count, there were a million different runout systems to choose from after the opponents double your 1NT opening bid. Okay, so maybe a million is an exaggeration, but it sure feels like that many. There's Guoba, Rubens, Meckwell, SWINE (yes, a treatment called Swine) . . . the list goes on. The best runout systems combine two important principles:

1. *They give you the best chance to land in a playable contract when the opponents have more values than you.*
2. *They give you the ability to double the opponents (or play 1NT redoubled) when you have more values than them.*

One of the best opportunities to nail the opponents happens when they double your partner's 1NT opening bid and you have a good hand (10+ points). I strongly recommend that you play a direct redouble of the opponent's double as penalty.

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	

You are saying, 'Partner, we got 'em! Let's see if we can get a nice telephone number to write on our scorecard.'

The reason I recommend having a natural redouble available is that it makes doubling the opponents a lot easier. Many people play that passing a double forces partner to redouble, after which the auction may go:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	pass
redbl <sup>2</sup>	pass	pass	pass

1. Forces partner to redouble.
2. Forced bid (you must redouble to see what partner does next).

Two such systems that use the redouble this way are Guoba and Rubens. This is great when the auction develops like this, but it doesn't happen that often. Much more likely the auction will go like this:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	2♦
pass	pass	?	

1. Forces partner to redouble.

Oh, great! You were planning to show strength, but now partner has no idea if you are strong or you were going to run! What does a double by you — after an opponent removes their partner's double to a

suit (here 2♦) — even mean? Is it for penalty? Is it takeout? Does it promise 10+ points? Does anyone know? Much better if the auction starts like this:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦

Now, no matter what your agreements for follow-up doubles are (penalties or takeout), you and your partner both know that the deal belongs to your side.

The other major drawback of ‘pass forces a redouble’ is that these methods do not allow you to play in 1NT doubled. At match-points, not vulnerable, this means that on occasion you will concede a deadly 200, instead of 100 when you go one down (unluckily, of course!).

While there’s no doubt many proponents of the weak notrump will have their own pet structure which they feel works best for them, the following runout system is a highly recommended treatment to adopt. As a bonus, it’s pretty easy to learn.

## DONT RUNOUTS

This system will be easy for most people to remember — it’s much like the DONT convention for competing over 1NT openings. Instead of DONT standing for Disturb the Opponents’ NoTrump, perhaps this DONT acronym is better remembered as Doubles over Our NoTrump.

Whatever you want to call it, the rules are ironclad: whenever you bid a suit over their double of your 1NT opening, you are showing that suit plus a higher suit. With a one-suited hand, you *pass*, and partner can either bid a suit of his own, or more commonly, redouble to learn what your suit is. With a good hand, you can start with a redouble of 1NT.

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

Now the DONT bidding structure looks like this:

<b>pass</b>	<b>Ostensibly a one-suited hand, asks partner to bid a five-card suit of his own or else redouble to hear your suit.</b>
<b>redbl</b>	<b>Penalties, showing 10+ HCP.</b>
<b>2♣</b>	<b>Clubs and a higher suit.</b>
<b>2♦</b>	<b>Diamonds and a higher suit.</b>
<b>2♥</b>	<b>Hearts and spades.</b>
<b>2♠</b>	<b>Just spades.</b>
<b>2NT</b>	<b>Good offensive hand (not interested in doubling the opponents for penalty), distributional with fewer than 10 HCP, requires a fit with partner to bid game.</b>
<b>3 of a suit</b>	<b>Preemptive, one-suiter, usually a seven-card suit.</b>
<b>3NT and up</b>	<b>To play. (South African Transfers apply: 4♣ = hearts, 4♦ = spades, 4♥ and 4♠ are natural.)</b>

Knowing all of this, let's look at some example hands to see how you can wiggle out of trouble.

Each of the following auctions starts:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

What do you bid with each of these hands?

(1) ♠ K 9 6 4	(2) ♠ 5	(3) ♠ K Q 10	(4) ♠ 9 4 3 2
♥ Q 10	♥ K Q J 9 7 4 3	♥ A 9 4 3	♥ J 7 3
♦ K 9 4 3 2	♦ 7 3	♦ K 5 2	♦ 10 9 4 3
♣ 4 3	♣ 9 7 2	♣ 10 9 4	♣ J 5

[To Answers](#)

With (1), you should bid 2♦, showing diamonds and a higher suit. If partner would rather play in your second suit, he will bid the next step up, here 2♥, over which you either pass if that's your suit, or bid your other suit (here you would bid 2♠).

With (2), you could start with a pass, showing a one-suited hand. However, this is a perfect hand on which to make a preemptive jump to 3♥. The opponents will have a tough time finding a playable contract after you do this. Also, they may get into trouble — have *you* discussed bidding over opponents' jumps to the three-level here?

With (3), you should start with a strength-showing redouble. The opponents may be in serious trouble. (See below for bidding strategy after the redouble.)

With (4), you should bid 2♦, showing diamonds and a higher suit. Compared to the first example, this hand is a lot worse. However, telling partner about both your suits gives you the best chance of landing in a fit and surviving. This is the kind of hand that you least want to pick up when partner opens 1NT.

[To Questions](#)

## *Why Does Pass Show a One-Suited Hand?*

Sometimes when your partner opens 1NT, you will pick up a *really* awful hand like:

♠ Q 9 8 ♥ 9 5 3 ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ J 10 5 3

Let's say the worst happens and your RHO doubles. Blech! Technically, this is a one-suiter, but it's really a 'no-suiter'. By using pass to show a 1-suiter, you are giving partner a chance to show a five-card suit of his own. You will then land in a playable contract. For example:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	pass
2♦			

1. Nowhere to run; 'shows a one-suiter'.

Whew! You found your 5-3 fit and that means the opponents won't get rich doubling your side. If the worst happens — partner redoubles (thus denying a five-card suit) — you can bid 2♣ and pray.

At least this way you get the extra chance of partner having a suit of his own when you are really in trouble.

This system does have a drawback. If you have a six-card suit, partner might bid two of a higher suit in front of you, causing you to miss your best fit. It is far more likely, however, that you will be glad to hear about partner's suit and will avoid a big number with the 5 HCP hand shown. There is also a hidden benefit — passing puts pressure on LHO. If he has some values, he may decide to bid his suit now rather than waiting and possibly having to come in at a higher level. Then you're off the hook entirely!

### *Bidding after the Redouble*

Your right-hand opponent doubled your partner's 1NT opening and you redoubled. Your left-hand opponent has run to some suit at the two-level. Now what do your bids mean?

This is an important area, one worth spending time on with your partner. First things first: your side has shown (ostensibly) 22 or more points to their 18 or fewer. It is highly recommended that you and your partner agree that you cannot sell out to an undoubled contract below the level of 2♠. Suppose the auction continues:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦
?			

Now a pass will be *forcing*. A forcing pass means the auction will not quickly die. The passer's partner must bid, either by doubling or by taking a call. In the example above, partner can pass the decision around to you without worrying that you will chicken out. Similarly:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
dbl	2♥	?	

Here, a pass would still be forcing. The opponents are still at a level lower than 2♠, so your side is forced either to double them in their contract or bid on.

Once the opponents bid past 2♥ (to 2♠ or higher), it's safer to discard the 'forcing pass' concept:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
dbl	2♠	?	

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♠
?			

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	3♣
?			

In each case, the force is cancelled, since the opponents have bid to 2♠ or higher. This means that your side is allowed to pass out the contract without doubling or bidding on.

### *What Do Doubles Mean after a Redouble?*

There are two main ways to play doubles in this situation: penalties or takeout. Both ways are playable, but I like this agreement: *the first double by either player in a forcing situation is for takeout.*

Since passes are forcing, you don't need to worry that partner will pass the hand out, even if you have the rock-of-Gibraltar penalty double. Also, when you have length in the opponent's suit, it makes it more likely that partner will have shortness, meaning that he will likely make a takeout double, which you can pass.

Playing doubles as takeout lets you handle deals where you don't want to double the opponents for penalties, but don't have a suit of your own to bid. Let's look at the next example deal from both perspectives — penalty and takeout. Incidentally, the takeout double does not promise any extra values — you can do it with a minimum or a maximum. The takeout double simply shows shortness in the opponents' suit.

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

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### *Playing Takeout Doubles*

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	dbl	redbl
2♣	dbl <sup>1</sup>	2♦	dbl
all pass			

1. Takeout, three-card support for the other three suits.

South's double, being the *second* double for his side, is penalty. Since North implied at least three diamonds, South knows that 2♦ is getting creamed, so he doubles. Incidentally, South was planning to pass North's takeout double of 2♣.

### *Playing Penalty Doubles*

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	dbl	redbl
2♣	pass	2♦	?
pass	?		

In this case, it is much harder for North-South to double East in 2♦, even though they are playing penalty doubles! Neither player can double with complete confidence.

Perhaps you wouldn't have doubled with the East hand, but on this deal (from real life) East did. Could you make him pay?



## *Bidding with In-Between Hands*

Let's say you pick up:

♠ A 8 5 4   ♥ Q J 5   ♦ J 10 5 3   ♣ 10 8

The auction goes:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

What should you do? You know your side has anywhere from 20-22 HCP. This situation is largely a matter of judgment. Many experienced players have found that playing for penalties with these marginal hands often puts them in a bad spot. Sometimes the opponents have long suits to lead and sometimes your finesses don't work. Also, you know that at other tables this hand will be played in a partscore (since both sides have about equal high-card values), so trying to play in a doubled or redoubled contract is playing swingy bridge.

It boils down to this: if you need a big result, you can try to play for penalties, but keep in mind that it's a risky action. If your session is going well, it's probably best to use your runout system and try to get a normal result.

## *The Other Option in a Forcing Auction*

By now all of this passing and doubling and redoubling is probably beginning to make sense. Here's the final wrinkle: what if you don't double or pass in a forcing auction, but make a bid instead? For example, say the auction starts:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦
pass	pass	?	

If you now bid a suit at the two-level, including 2NT, it is not forcing. It is termed 'forward going' and shows about 10-12 HCP. If you bid a suit at the three-level or cuebid the opponents' suit, it is forcing.

Just remember: *after responder's redouble, his two-level bids are not forcing, while his three-level bids are forcing.*

Here's an example:

♠ K Q 9 8 6   ♥ A 8 4   ♦ J 10 9 4   ♣ 5

Now that the opponents have butted in, you have a neat way to invite game in spades. Start with a redouble and then bid 2♠ at your next turn. The 2♠ bid is not forcing, but forward going — a perfect description of what you have. The auction might turn out like this:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
pass	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

The full deal:

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

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Of course, 4♠ isn't quite ice-cold, but it's an excellent contract. Notice that if somehow 1NT redoubled were to be passed out, your partner would have no trouble making eight or even nine tricks.

### ***What If the Opponents' Double is Not for Penalties?***

If the opponents' double is not strictly for penalties, there is still a significant risk that doubler's partner will leave the double in. For example, an opponent might make a DONT-style double against you, holding:

♠ J 6 4 ♥ A K J 8 7 3 ♦ 3 2 ♣ 10 7

Some folks will have the audacity to enter your auction with hands like this. Clearly this hand is nowhere near being a penalty-oriented double; rather it's a one-suiter — in this case, hearts. However, since the partner of this player might leave the double in (*he* has a 14-count), I recommend that you play your runout system. This actually makes life easier — just assume the opponent's double is for penalties and do your thing.

## TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY DONT RUNOUTS — THE LAST ROUNDUP

In the end, you should play whatever runout system you are most comfortable with. To be fair, the DONT runout system presented in this chapter has the flaw of not specifically identifying the higher suit of a two-suited hand.

For example:

YOU	LHO	PARTNER	LHO
1NT	dbl	2♦	

In this auction, you don't know what partner's major suit is. At times, this will be a problem.

There are runout structures where both suits are always known, but these generally pay the price of giving up the natural, strength-showing redouble in order to use redouble for something else. I recommended that you retain the redouble as strength showing. If you are more comfortable with a runout system that sacrifices the penalty redouble in favor of more detailed runouts, that is okay too. Just be sure that your runout system covers the core principles:

1. *It gives you the best chance to land in a playable contract when the opponents have more values than you.*
2. *It gives you the ability to double the opponents (or play 1NT doubled or redoubled) when you have more values than them.*

Playing the DONT style of runouts allows you to have your cake and eat it too, and is my personal choice. Not only do you often scramble into your best fit when you are weak, but you make the opponents pay a price when they enter your auction. Perhaps when you gain more experience playing the weak notrump you will get around to testing the other runout systems, but for now DONT is probably best.

Finally, in closing this chapter, we come to a famous bridge argument — one that caused great consternation for four Canadian bridge players traveling by car to a weekend sectional Swiss teams tournament.

One of the four players offered the opinion that it was not necessary to play a runout system if playing the weak notrump. His teammate, and partner for that matter, begged to differ — he insisted that a runout system was necessary for those playing a weak notrump structure.

The ‘discussion’ continued:

‘Now, you listen to me: they are not necessary.’

‘No, you listen to me: they are absolutely critical.’

‘No — you listen to me!’

*‘No, you listen to me!’*

So heated was the argument and so focused on it were the travelers that they ended up at the Canada-USA border before realizing they had missed their exit entirely. After a mad dash back to the playing site, arriving in the nick of time, the argument was left unsettled.

Flash forward fifteen years: it can only be hoped that you and your partner don’t argue over *whether* to play a runout system, but rather over *which* one to play.