

Consider these two sequences: -

- A 1♥ pass pass dbl How strong is the double in the balancing seat?
- B 1NT pass pass dbl (i) How strong is the double in the balancing seat?
(ii) Does it make any difference if the 1NT opening was weak?

Sequences A and B are seemingly similar - 1 something – pass – pass – dbl. But the double in the pass-out seat is totally different when the opening is 1 of a suit or 1NT. If the opening is one of a suit then RHO has less than 6 points, partner usually has values, and it's safe to balance with as few as 8 points. But if the opening is 1NT then RHO may well have about 7 points (or 10 playing a weak NoTrump) and you are very likely to get clobbered if you enter the auction without your full 15+ points. And also note that to double 1NT in the pass-out seat is also dangerous because partner is very likely to lead the wrong suit and also the strong hand is sitting over you. In fact, a double of a strong NoTrump for penalties is so rarely a good idea (especially in 4th seat) that Marty Bergen came up with the DONT convention so that it does not even exist!

I don't like to play DONT, but there is a good case for playing Multi Landy (or Cappelletti) in the direct seat and DONT in the 4th seat – the point being that partner may convert a DONT 4th seat double (single suited hand) into penalties with a suitable hand and that a penalty double in 4th seat is extremely rare.

- ♠ A963 Consider this hand. If RHO opens 1♥ then you should pass – this hand is
- ♠ J6 not good enough for a take-out double in the direct seat (approx 11+ points).
- ♠ J765 But if LHO had opened 1♥ and this was passed round to you then this is a
- ♣ Q97 classic 4th seat double.
If, however, LHO had opened 1NT and this is passed round to you then this hand is not good enough for any sort of noise. Pass, regardless of the range of the 1NT opener.