



Swiss Pairs

By Bob Gruber

Swiss Pairs is a seldom held event. As a consequence, how the game is structured is largely unknown. Swiss Pairs: how do we analyze those words, that phrase? Let's start with Swiss.

Is Swiss in any way synonymous with Team? No, it is not. Just because you see Swiss, do not automatically think teams, although, if you're a duplicate bridge player, it's hard not to. The Swiss method or Swiss system probably originated in the world of Tournament Chess. In Chess, the concept is to match players of similar ability, or once the tournament has one round completed, match players with similar scores. In Bridge, it works the same way, match teams—or pairs—with similar scores.

For most players, the key word here is Pairs. If it says Pairs, it's some form of Pairs game, not a Team game. Swiss Teams is a Team game and Swiss Pairs is a pairs game. Pretty simple. Do not be misled by how the matchups will be determined.

Final observation: neither of these words/concepts tells us how the scoring will be done. That is not fixed and can vary at the discretion of the tournament body.

Putting this together, we note that a Swiss Pairs game is run along the lines of a Swiss Teams game. Pairs play against each other in short matches. Pairs with similar scores are pitted against one another. And like a Barometer game, for a given round/match the boards at all tables will be the same.

With this background information, how might an actual Swiss Pairs game be structured? One possibility is as follows:

Make it a 2-session event. Per session, play 6 matches of 4 boards each. Score by Victory Points (VPs)¹ using the 30-point scale. (2 sessions yields 12 matches in total, 48 boards for the day.)

For a given match, scores for each board at all tables will need to be assembled for computation of IMPs. (This portion of the game is like IMP Pairs².) That means 5 times—after matches 1-5—the director will need time to compute the IMPs, convert them to VPs, and then do the pairings.

The total time per session looks like:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} 6 \text{ matches} \times 28 \text{ minutes/match} & = & 168 \text{ minutes} = 2 \text{ hrs, } 48 \text{ min} \\ 5 \text{ scoring intervals} \times 5 \text{ min} & = & 25 \text{ minutes} = \underline{0 \text{ hrs, } 25 \text{ min}} \\ & & 3 \text{ hrs } 13 \text{ min} \end{array}$$

A stand-by pair can guarantee an even number of pairs in the event and avoid a sitout.

Bear in mind, when you sign up for a 2-session event, you're signing up for both sessions.

Also, unlike teams, where you can have 1 or 2 extra players on the team, there are no extra players per pair. It's strictly a 2-person pair.

But like teams, where you play your next match will be posted on a Table Assignment Board.

Finally, please remember, this structure is only one possibility. What gets implemented at a particular tournament will depend, at least in part, on attendance for the event.

¹ To get Victory Points (VPs), you must first score the match in IMPs. Those IMPs are then converted to VPs.

² The details of IMP Pairs scoring are covered in the article "IMP Pairs Strategy" by Bob Gruber.