

Guide to IMP scored Pairs

The Bidding:

Games: Bid the *safest* game. At matchpoint pairs, you may get a much better score for playing in no trump instead of a major, or in a major instead of a minor, but in IMP scoring, however, there is little difference between these contracts. Your best strategy is to choose your best (longest) trump fit and bid the game that's most likely to make -- even if it's 5C instead of 3NT.

- **If you're not vulnerable**, don't stretch too far to bid a close game -- the odds favour bidding only those games that you are reasonably sure will make.
- **If you're vulnerable**, it pays to be a little more optimistic when considering a thin game. The IMP odds suggest you consider bidding any game that has even a 40% chance of making.

Part scores: Look for the *safest* part score. Don't worry about searching for a few extra points by playing in no trump instead of a minor.

Overcalls: Matchpoint players often make light overcalls, but it pays to beef up your overcalls at IMPs. A vulnerable overcall, even at the 1-level, should promise a fairly good suit or a good hand (or both). If your overcall is at the 2-level, you need a strong suit (usually 6 cards) and the playing strength of a full opening bid.

Competing and balancing: Don't be too bold. Unless you have a good suit and good hand, let the opponents play in their low-level contracts, especially if you're vulnerable. Trump length is more important than overall strength, so don't let the opponents push you to the 3-level unless you have a 9-card trump fit.

Doubles: There's little to gain -- and much to lose -- by making a close penalty double, especially of a part-score. Don't make a penalty double unless you're reasonably sure the contract is going down *at least two tricks*. If the opponents sacrifice against your game and you're in doubt about whether to bid higher, double and take your sure plus score.

Sacrifices: If you want to take a non-vulnerable sacrifice over your opponent's vulnerable game, you should be reasonably sure that you won't go down more than two (perhaps three) tricks. If you're vulnerable, you should be virtually certain that you won't go down more than one (perhaps two) tricks. Anything more is "too close for comfort" and won't gain you many IMPs. When in doubt, let the opponents play their contract and hope you can beat it.

The Play:

Overtricks: When you're declarer, don't risk your contract trying to make an extra trick. Always choose the safest line of play to make your contract, even if it might cost you an overtrick or two.

Opening leads: Be cautious about trying for a swing with an unusual opening lead. It's usually best to make your "normal" lead -. Save your brilliant defensive plays for later in the hand, when you have more information.

Defence: Be optimistic and fairly aggressive when you're defending contracts. If there's a layout of the cards that will set the contract, choose your leads and plays to cater to that possibility, even if it means you may give up an overtrick if you're wrong.