

Swiss Team Game Tips

Guidance for new players (p. 1)

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For NEW Players

What happens when you play in your very first team game?

As with pairs, start at the registration table and pay the team's entry fee. You will receive an entry form, with your team number on the upper right, requiring all four names and ACBL numbers. The person whose name is at the top of the form is considered the captain, and their last name will appear after the team number on the white board near the registration table. Each person should grab a team score sheet, which is different than a pairs score sheet.

Keep a written record of all hands and results – there are typically no hand-held electronic scoring devices as in pairs games.

Your team of 4 people plays against another 4-person team. You and your partner play either N/S or E/W at one table, your teammates take the other direction at a second table.

In a Swiss team event, you will typically play 6-8 matches against different teams. You will play a total of 48 hands over the course of the day.

Next to the team white board will be an assignment board. Your table assignment will be listed above your team number. The N/S pair sits at that assigned table and E/W sits at a table with the same number but a different letter. Say N/S sits at say A7, E/W will sit at B7. **If you are unsure where to go or which direction to sit, the directors are there to assist you.** It is always a good idea to double check that teammates are sitting in the opposite direction from you. The N/S table is considered the "home" table.

There will be 3 or 4 boards on the table. Most of the time, you will need to shuffle and deal the boards. (If the hands were pre-dealt, that will be announced.) It does not matter who shuffles. The ACBL recommends that you wait for at least one opponent to be at the table before you shuffle and deal.

When the hands are shuffled and distributed, start play. **When finished with the boards at your table, call "Caddy, please," and they will exchange boards from the other table. DO NOT SHUFFLE THE NEW BOARDS.** After you play the boards delivered from the other table, go to your home table when they are also done playing.

Bridge is a timed event, and there will be at least one prominently-displayed clock counting down the time remaining in the round. The clock will start when the round is called. You are given 7-8 minutes to play each board, sufficient time for all but the most difficult of hands. Try to finish the match (but don't rush) before the timer reaches zero. Leave a few minutes to compare scores with your teammates. The director will call for score slips if you run a bit behind.

It is extremely important to keep an accurate personal score, entering the contract and result on your scoresheet. Unlike match point games, typically there are no Bridgemates for entering the scores.

Scoring – You will compare results with your teammates when you return to your home table after the match. Unlike pairs, team scoring is IMPs (International Master Points). The score sheet shows you how to determine IMPs. For example, if N/S made 4S for +420, but their E/W teammates set the contract for +50, the total will be +470 for your team. Look up 470 on the score sheet under IMPs and

you will see that +470 is worth 10 IMPs. The team with the most IMPs wins the match. If you need help, ask someone who looks like they know what they are doing. Most people are happy to help.

Score slips, roughly 3x3, are found on every table. The winning team will enter the two team numbers and the net result. It is the winning captain's responsibility to verify with the opponents that the score is correct, then submit the score slip to the director's table. After all the scores are tabulated, new assignments will be displayed.

Team game strategies

Most important: make your contract.

In pairs, an overtrick may be the difference between a good score and an average minus. In teams, a small number of IMPs are won due to overtricks, but if your positive score becomes negative due to a risky try for overtrick(s), the loss is substantial.

Example: 4S making is +420 non-vul (+620 vul), but if your play for an overtrick fails, down 1 is -50 (-100). That result translates to a 10 (or 12) IMP loss.

Be safe. 5 of a minor may be the best contract, where 3NT is shaky. Remember, the bonus for an overtrick is only 1 IMP.

Be aggressive in bidding close games, especially if vulnerable.

Example: the difference between +150 and +600 is 10 IMPs (6 IMPs if non-vul).

Don't bid a small slam unless it's 75%, i.e., 1 of 2 finesses. Grand slam? Be able to count 13 tricks from the auction.

Competitive bidding, or, Whose contract is it?

Aggressively raise your partner to the 2 level, as chances of a penalty double are small.

At equal or favorable vulnerability, raise pard's overcall to the 3 level when you have 9 trumps between you (Bergen's rule) but less the game values.

Example: Pard opens a weak 2H and you have Jxx support with scattered values. Raise to 3H to obstruct opponents.

If you have the values or distribution for a single raise, don't raise twice – you may push opponents into a game they wouldn't otherwise bid, or run into a substantial penalty.

Sacrifices have less reward than in pairs games. Bid only if there is reason to believe you will be down 1 (down 2 NV vs VUL).

Example: Don't sacrifice with 4333 distribution – it will be too expensive.

Corollary: The 5 level belongs to the opponents after you sacrifice. Let them make the last guess.

Overcalls should be a bit stronger than in pairs, and suit quality should be better (especially for pre-empts).

Example: QJ9xx and 9-10 points are suggested minimums (QJ10xxx for weak 2s).

Defense

Vince Lombardi said "Offense brings in the crowds, defense wins the game." The toughest part of the game, true in bridge as in football. Definitely a topic for extensive discussions with your partner.

Risky leads to set contracts can have big rewards. If you can visualize some layout of the cards where defeat is possible, play for that. Giving up an overtrick costs 1 IMP, but +100 vs -620 is 12 IMPs for you.

Example: Lead K from Kx in an unbid suit, versus a suit contract (and sometimes vs NT).

Be wary of penalty doubles without trump control. The lower the level, the stronger your trumps must be.

Example: Many a contract succeeds due to skewed distribution/cross-ruffs. You may need to lead trumps.

Remember the objective is a plus score, not the maximum score.

General Suggestions/Strategy

Bid according to your system. Made-up bids are confusing to partner and may cause bad results.

There's nothing wrong with playing a comfortable, simple game, omitting more complex conventions that could lead to confusion. In the 70s, a Taiwanese team playing a modest convention card advanced to the world championship finals, beating several teams with far more sophisticated systems by playing within their abilities.

Never try to learn new conventions the morning of the game. You will not be able to master them; even if you do, you will spend the entire day overly focused on the new convention(s), perhaps causing you to forget more fundamental bids.

Don't make risky bids (shooting) if you think you're behind in a match. Remember, your pards are playing the same boards, and the contract/result could be the same at the other table.

Never criticize your opponents. The ACBL frowns on such behavior, and it could result in IMP penalties or removal from the game. Also, it's poor manners to gloat if opponents hand you a gift: remember, you too could make a mistake.

If you lose a match, be gracious in defeat. Do not criticize your partner or teammates. Blaming them for perceived errors is upsetting and leads to more bad results. In the same vein, if you made the error, just move on. Don't obsess over a mistake and lose focus on subsequent boards.

Treat the game as a learning experience. Discuss bidding and defense (politely) with your partner and teammates after the game. These discussions of what went right and wrong will accelerate your growth. Feel free to ask more experienced players about bidding, play of the hand, and especially defense. Most importantly, have fun.