

## Understanding Swiss Pairs

For the benefit of members who have never played in a Swiss Pairs or Swiss Teams tournament here is an explanation of how such tournaments work. But first, a reminder of how normal pairs work.

In a normal club pairs tournament, the usual arrangement is that all the NS pairs remain at their table throughout and the EW pairs move around the room. At the end of each round, where a Mitchell movement is being used, EW move up one table numerically and the boards move down one table.

Sometimes there are skip rounds and sometimes there are shared boards and relays. You are all very accustomed to this. So, the NS pairs never play against each other and the EW pairs also do not play against each other. Your next opponents are simply determined by the sequence in which they happened to fill the tables.

For our on-line games, the people sitting NS also stay NS throughout and their opponents come in sequence without any regard to what happened on previous rounds. Unlike real bridge however, neither the players nor the TD have any control over where people sit for their first round. BBO handles this automatically. The only thing the TD can control is the number of boards per round, the timing of the rounds and the scoring method i.e. Match Points or Imps. In addition, on-line games are played 'Barometer Style' with all tables playing the same boards at the same time, something that is much more difficult to do at the club.

In a Swiss Pairs tournament, your opponents for the second and all subsequent rounds are determined by how well you are doing overall at the end of each round. The system will find you a pair to play against with a similar or identical rolling score. Thus, as the tournament progresses the players doing well only play against other players that are doing well and similarly for those doing less well. This also means that sometimes you will sit NS and at others EW and this produces an overall winner rather than winners in each direction.

Another difference between Swiss Pairs and normal pairs is that the number of boards per round is usually larger and that each round is referred to as a 'match'. For our tournament on 1 August each round, or match, will be of six boards duration. Sometimes 7 or 8 board matches are played in Swiss events it is up to the organisers. Match scores in real life are also normally converted to Victory Points (VPs) on a scale of 0 – 20 which means that if a match is tied

each side gets 10 VPs. A good win for a match might be 16 – 4, 18 – 2 or even a 20 – 0 whitewash! It is the rolling total VP score that is used to ‘match up’ opponents from round two onwards.

Swiss Pairs that are played at the club are controlled and scored using a program that has a rule that prevents pairs from playing each other twice. Unfortunately, the BBO software does not have that rule built in, so for our congress on 1 August it is possible that you could get to play a pair more than once although it will be unlikely if we manage to fill all 49 tables and therefore have 98 pairs.

A further difference in the BBO version of Swiss Pairs is that the matches are not treated in isolation as far as Master Points are concerned. In normal times this is quite an incentive for inexperienced players, as they soon start playing against players of a similar standard and therefore have a good chance of winning some matches and therefore some Master Points. Unfortunately, the BBO software does not report back the outcome of each match as far as I am aware. If so, this means that we may not be able to award Master Points on a per match basis and that the normal method of awarding MPs will apply. However, I intend to investigate this to see if it can be done.