

Bridge Centre of Niagara



Making Sense of IMP Scoring

1. How is IMP Pairs scored?

The score at your table is compared to the score at every other table and the result converted to IMPs just as if each were a team match. These numbers are added up and then divided by the number of comparisons made (this division has to take place because often some boards are not played the same number of times). This gives you your average IMPs compared to all other tables. These numbers are added up for the whole session - which gives each pair what you might call their 'raw IMPs score'. Finally, as some pairs may not have played the same number of boards as everyone else, the pairs who have played less boards get their score multiplied by an appropriate amount to bring their score into line. This is called the "Cross IMPs method".

2. What are the advantages?

- a. IMP scoring is more like 'real bridge' in that making your contract, especially games and slams gets a suitable reward, whereas the few points for an overtrick are almost irrelevant.
- b. There is little to choose between 3NT and 4 of a major and the few points difference is almost irrelevant, so you should choose the safer game, the same as if you were playing rubber bridge.
- c. At normal pairs scoring (matchpoints), pairs have a natural fear of going past 3NT in search of a minor suit slam. This has the effect of making people's slam bidding rather poor. As 5 of a minor will score OK compared to 3NT at IMP scoring, your slam bidding should improve.
- d. Safety plays that risk not getting an overtrick in return for greater safety are a luxury that you (usually) cannot afford at matchpoints. Yet a lot of bridge literature is about this very topic and may well have figured significantly in any lessons on the game you may have taken. It is nice, at least for a change, to have a form of scoring where safety plays may figure more prominently.

3. What are the disadvantages?

- a. Matchpoint bridge may not be 'real bridge', but it is no less exciting, with tactics all of its own.
- b. Matchpoints are simple to score and simple for everyone to see where their score has come from.
- c. At matchpoints, as each board is worth a simple top, bottom or a shade of grey in between, over a limited number of boards (and 27 is limited), you may get a fairer result (fairer in the sense of less random) as each board is worth the same amount. If a good pair comes to your table and bids a slam that the rest of the room has not been able to find, you will get a bottom at matchpoints which may be no fault of your own. This is an unfortunate setback, but because each board is worth the same as every other one, you can potentially recover on the next (perhaps partscore) board. At IMP scoring you will need at least two, probably three partscore swings in your favour to make up the lost ground. This is not a concern in the long run (luck will even itself out), but in a single session at IMP scoring a few 'big boards' has a bigger effect than at matchpoints.

4. How should we adjust our game with IMP scoring?

- a. When choosing which game to be in, you should choose the safer option.
- b. You should not fear being in 5 of a minor so much as you do at matchpoints, especially if you want to investigate the possibility of slam.
- c. If you think your side has the majority of the points, but not a game, then the opponents bid over you, you're in a situation where you will need to think if you should bid one more yourself, double the opponents or just pass. This is a very common situation. Often at matchpoints you should double and pass is commonly the wrong answer. The reason is simple enough - if the opponents can make their contract you're getting a poor score anyway, so the extras they get for making a doubled contract won't hurt you very much, if at all. Whereas an extra 50 or 100 if you can get them off may make quite a difference to your matchpoint score. At IMPs the maths is a little different - the extras they get for making a doubled contract, particularly if you double them into game, will hurt you badly. And, if they're off, the extra 50 or 100 won't benefit you very much. In any case, at IMPs, if it is a partscore board that your side should be getting a plus for, it will, at least, not be a bad board for you if you collect any sort of plus at all.
- d. At matchpoints, if you have a close decision between bidding game or not, then it is generally right to be conservative in your approach. The reason is simple, if the game turns out to be worse than a 50/50 bet then the advantage of staying low is obvious. And if it is a 50/50 bet then, by staying in the partscore, you will still pick up a few matchpoints from those who have got into the wrong denomination (which is more common than one might think), provided, of course, that you don't get too high yourself. At IMP scoring the game bonus is worth pursuing especially vulnerable and you should be more aggressive in your game bidding (marginally).
- e. At IMP scoring generally you should play to ensure your contract as overtricks are of little value. And in defence you should play to get the contract off even if this risks giving away an overtrick.