

Matchpointed Pairs and Teams Bridge: Summary of Comparisons and Differences

| Topic | Matchpointed Pairs | Teams |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Form of the game | Duplicate | Duplicate |
| Scoring of contracts | Common to both types | Common to both types |
| Your side | A pair | A team |
| Events scored by | Matchpoints | International match points |
| Methodology of event scoring | Against pairs sitting in the same direction | Comparing with teammates' score |
| Importance of each board | Equal | Variable - depends on the outcome |
| Approach to bidding games | Avoid marginal games | Bid marginal games |
| Approach to competitive auctions | Aggressive | Conservative |
| Vulnerability | Less important | Very important |
| Choice of slams | Bid one that yields the highest score | Bid the safest one |
| Overtricks | Important | Not important |
| Minor differences in contract scores | Important | Not important |
| Doubled contracts | Play as safely as possible | Play as safely as possible |
| Playing in 5minor (and not 3N) | Rare | More common |
| Leading | More passive | More aggressive |
| Defence | More conservative | More aggressive |
| Penalty doubles | More common | Less common |
| Sacrificing | More common | Less common |

Matchpointed Pairs and Teams Bridge: Commentary

In the notes that follow “matchpointed pairs” will be shortened to “pairs”. Where a section refers solely to Pairs it will be *italicised*; where it concerns only teams play it will be shown in blue.

Form of the game

Both pairs and teams are forms of duplicate bridge. In order to arrive at a counting score for a deal, a comparison is made. For pairs that's against the results that have been achieved at all the other tables. For teams it's the outcome that has resulted at the “other table” (i.e. where teammates sit).

Scoring of contracts

The scoring of the contracts, made by the players at the table (usually with the aid of Bridgemes), is the same for both pairs and teams. This relates to the denomination of the contract (a suit or trumps), the number of tricks made, game and slam bonuses, penalties, applications of doubles and redoubles and the vulnerability of the declarer. These scores are summarised as follows:

Tricks bid and made

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| ♣ + ♦ | Each trick |
| ♥ + ♠ | Each trick |
| No trumps | First trick |
| | Each subsequent trick |

| Undoubled | Doubled | Redoubled |
|-----------|---------|-----------|
| 20 | 40 | 80 |
| 30 | 60 | 120 |
| 40 | 80 | 160 |
| 30 | 60 | 120 |

Undertricks

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| Not vulnerable | First trick |
| | Second and third trick |
| | Each subsequent trick |
| Vulnerable | First trick |
| | Second & subsequent trick |

| | | |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 50 | 100 | 200 |
| 50 | 200 | 400 |
| 50 | 300 | 600 |
| 100 | 200 | 400 |
| 100 | 300 | 600 |

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Bonuses

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Partscore contract bid and made | | 50 |
| Game bid and made | Not vulnerable | 300 |
| | Vulnerable | 500 |
| Small slam bid and made | Not vulnerable* | 500 |
| | Vulnerable* | 750 |
| Grand slam bid and made | Not vulnerable* | 1,000 |
| | Vulnerable* | 1,500 |
| For making a doubled contract | | 50 |
| For making a redoubled contract | | 100 |

*the bonuses are in addition to the game bonuses

Overtricks

| | | |
|-----------|-------------|--|
| Undoubled | Trick value | |
| Doubled | | 100 each if not vulnerable; 200 each if vulnerable |
| Redoubled | | 200 each if not vulnerable; 400 each if vulnerable |

Your side

Yes, the cynic regards Pairs as a "better" game in that there is only one player, partner, who can make a mess of things.

Teams is usually played as "teams of four" which means you have two more players, your teammates, who affect your destiny. When you sit North South they sit East West, against the same set of opponents, so that a comparison of scores can be made. Sometimes you will be pleasantly surprised with the good results teammates produce, not to say thrilled with how well partner has done (for once).

Events scoring

Pairs is scored by matchpoints and teams by international match points. The latter is usually shortened to the colloquial acronym "imps".

Methodology of event scoring

Matchpoints

For pairs your score is derived by comparing your contract score for any board against the contract scores for all other pairs who sat in the same direction as you (either North South or East West).

For each pair that you beat – score 2 points

For each pair with whom you had the same contract score – score 1 point

For each pair to whom you lost – score 0 points

This process is carried out by the program used to score the event. Your matchpoint total is the sum of all the matchpoints you gained over the boards you played. This is expressed as a percentage of the total (maximum) matchpoints that were available to you.

Here is an example of a typical set of results for a matchpointed pairs event:

| NS | EW | Contract | Lead | Tricks | NS+ | NS- | MP NS | MP EW |
|----|----|----------|------|--------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1 | 13 | 2♣ | ♥A | 9 | 110 | | 24 | 4 |
| 2 | 15 | 3♦ | ♥K | 9 | 110 | | 24 | 4 |
| 3 | 2 | 2♥ | ♣8 | 9 | | 140 | 0 | 28 |
| 4 | 4 | 3♥ | ♦J | 8 | 50 | | 16 | 12 |
| 5 | 10 | 3♣ | ♥A | 8 | | 50 | 9 | 19 |
| 6 | 12 | 2♣ | ♦Q | 8 | 90 | | 20 | 8 |
| 7 | 14 | 2♣ | ♥A | 7 | | 50 | 9 | 19 |
| 8 | 1 | 2♥ | ♣Q | 7 | 50 | | 16 | 12 |
| 9 | 3 | 2♥ | ♠7 | 8 | | 110 | 2 | 26 |
| 10 | 5 | 3♦ | ♥A | 10 | 130 | | 28 | 0 |
| 11 | 7 | 2♦ | ♥9 | 9 | 110 | | 24 | 4 |
| 12 | 9 | 3♣ | ♥K | 7 | | 100 | 4 | 24 |
| 13 | 11 | 2♥ | ♣Q | 7 | 50 | | 16 | 12 |
| 14 | 6 | 3♣ | ♦Q | 8 | | 50 | 9 | 19 |
| 15 | 8 | 3♦ | ♠5 | 8 | | 50 | 9 | 19 |

NS and **EW** record the pair numbers.

Contract scores are shown relative to North South, either positive (**NS+**) or negative (**NS-**).

MP NS and **MP EW** show the matchpoints for North South and East West respectively.

Total matchpoints available is equal to (the number of tables - 1) multiplied by 2, i.e. the number of comparisons that can be made times the maximum matchpoints per board. Here that's $14 \times 2 = 28$ (15 tables).

For each board the sum of the North South and East West matchpoints add up to the total matchpoints available (here, again, 28).

Getting 0% is known as a "bottom" and obtaining 100% is referred to (but not gloatingly at the table) as a "top".

To re-iterate, all comparisons are made with those pairs sitting in the same direction (**NS** or **EW**).

An example - for NS Pair 1

NS Pair 1's plus 110 has beaten 11 pairs (3 to 9 and 12 to 15), drawn with 2 (pairs 2 and 11) and lost to 10 (pair 10)

Matchpoints : $(11 \times 2) + (2 \times 1) + (1 \times 0) = 22 + 2 + 0 = 24$

An example - for EW Pair 8

EW Pair 8's plus 50 has beaten 8 pairs (13, 15, 4, 12, 1, 5, 7 and 11), drawn with 3 (10, 14 and 6) and lost to 3 (2, 3 and 9)

$$\text{Matchpoints} : (8 \times 2) + (3 \times 1) + (3 \times 0) = 16 + 3 + 0 = 19$$

Teams

For teams you compare your contract score for any board with the contract score obtained by your teammates at the other table. You add these two scores together so if you made a vulnerable 4♥ for plus 620 and your partners defeated the same contract for another plus 100 your team scored plus 720 on the board. This number is converted to imps by using the following standard table:

| Sum of Contracts | IMPs | Sum of Contracts | IMPs | Sum of Contracts | IMPs | Sum of Contracts | IMPs |
|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| 0-10 | 0 | 220-260 | 6 | 600-740 | 12 | 1,750-1,990 | 18 |
| 20-40 | 1 | 270-310 | 7 | 750-890 | 13 | 2,000-2,240 | 19 |
| 50-80 | 2 | 320-360 | 8 | 900-1,090 | 14 | 2,250-2,490 | 20 |
| 90-120 | 3 | 370-420 | 9 | 1,100-1,290 | 15 | 2,500-2,990 | 21 |
| 130-160 | 4 | 430-490 | 10 | 1,300-1,490 | 16 | 3,000-3,490 | 22 |
| 170-210 | 5 | 500-590 | 11 | 1,500-1,740 | 17 | 3,500-3,990 | 23 |
| | | | | | | 4000+ | 24 |

Imps are calculated by the event's scoring program but it is part of teams ethos to "score up" at the end of the event, thereby encouraging the camaraderie that is an integral part of being in a team. You do not need to know this table because it is produced on all standard scorecards. After a while you will be surprised how many imp scores become second nature.

In our example a score of plus 720 is in the range 600-740 and converts to plus 12 imps.

Another example : you play in 3spades doubled when not vulnerable. You fail by 2 tricks so the contract score is minus 300. At the other table teammates defend 1N which makes (for minus 90). On the board you have lost 390 points and this is converts to an imp loss of 9 imps (with 390 being in the range 370 to 420).

Imps are not the full story for scoring teams events. When teams are played as part of a league structure imp scores are converted to victory points. This has the effect of flattening the imp scores. The scale for converting from imps to victory points is dependent on the number of boards played. Each match is worth 20 victory points and the extent of the imp win determines the victory points each side receives (from 10-10, for a draw, to 20-0 for a trouncing).

Importance of each board

In pairs all boards count equally in that each board can score a certain maximum number of points towards your total. If you are playing a 24 board session each board is worth a maximum of 100/24 per cent (i.e. just over 4%). This puts a limit on the effect a decision makes and allows of the taking of more risks at pairs.

Because of the use of the imp scale this isn't so for teams. You cannot say how important any board is until after it has been played at both tables. That's because the outcome could vary anywhere from a (theoretical) minus 24 imps to a (theoretical) plus 24 imps.

Approach to bidding games

Playing pairs it is not advisable, in a constructive setting, to bid marginal games. If a game is "marginal" we are saying its chance of success is not great. If we bid it we are more likely to fail and register a negative score. By staying in partscore we increase our chance of making a positive score and thereby increase our matchpoint total.

At teams the situation is quite different because of the operation of the imp scale. If we bid a non-vulnerable game, not bid at the other table, we gain 250 points when it makes (i.e. 420 less 170) and we lose 190 when it fails (i.e. minus 50 to go with minus 140 conceded at the other table). We can convert these figures to imps. We are trading a 6 imp gain against a 5 imp loss. We should bid game if we think it has a 5 in 11, or better, chance of making (about 45%+).

When we are vulnerable the gains are more pronounced. If we bid game, not bid at the other table, we gain 450 points when it makes (i.e. 620 less 170) and we lose 240 when it fails (i.e. minus 100 to go with minus 140 conceded at the other table). We are trading a 10imp gain against a 6imp loss. We should bid game if we think it has a 6 in 16 (i.e. 3 in 8), or better, chance of making (about 37.5%+).

Approach to competitive auctions

At pairs you should bid aggressively when the auction becomes competitive. Within this, be prepared to overcall and come back into the auction if it is otherwise going to fizzle out (protective bidding). You should be willing to jostle the opposition into misjudging and pushing them out of their comfort zone. e.g. you bid on to 3♠ believing this won't be doubled and that you will concede minus 100. You do this because you think the opponents will make their 3♦ (minus 110). (but see Penalty Doubles below).

At teams you should be more circumspect (i.e. conservative) in that the cost of being wrong is so much more pronounced. Again this is because of how the imp scale operates. In the above example you don't need to trade minus 110 for minus 100 since the imp difference is zero. Further if you have misjudged, you may find that bidding 3♠ will attract a double and you book yourself a decidedly underwhelming minus 500. Those negative imps will certainly hurt.

Vulnerability

The points in the previous two sections, and at other places in this document, are factors in your approach.

Playing pairs what matters is whether your contract score is better than the rest of the field; the magnitude of any difference over the field is of little importance. You might have bid and made plus 620 from 4♠ vulnerable when everyone else failed in game or only made plus 140 in a partscore. You would make the same "top" had you stayed in partscore and made 10 tricks for plus 170. Further, whilst competing is important, overbidding is discouraged, especially when vulnerable. If partner takes you seriously, and you get too high, you may record an awful minus 200, a score that will never score well.

Playing teams your emphasis is in bringing in those big scores, especially vulnerable games, but avoiding large penalties that will eat into your imp score. In this regard teams is very pure and resembles rubber bridge (make your contracts, bid your games and don't go for a big number).

Choice of slam

Playing pairs, and where you have a choice of denomination, if you think most pairs will be at the slam level, you should play in the slam that will bring in the highest contract score (so bid 6♦ instead of staying in 6♥, say; or convert 6♠ to 6N). (yes, the higher scoring contract should still have a good chance of making).

In teams, play in the safest slam. If you have a 5-4 diamond fit and a 5-3 heart fit, prefer 6♦. Not vulnerable, playing 6♦ loses 2imps when both that and 6♥ make (920 against 980) but gains 14imps when it makes but 6♥ fails (plus 920 against minus 50). That's a significant trade-off.

Overtricks

In pairs, overtricks are paramount to getting a good score. In a standard contract always strive to make as many tricks as possible and don't be put off by the possibility of bad breaks. You should still play the percentages (i.e. taking lines that are backed up by considerations of probability). If your approach doesn't work you'll be in good company as the other matchpoint specialists will be playing in a similar fashion. It's quite possible to go down legitimately in a contract in the search for an overtrick.

In teams the safety of the contract is crucial and it is right to sacrifice the odd overtrick to ensure the contract against bad breaks. If, however, overtricks are there, don't squander them. Concentrate, however, on making the contract and consider as many pitfalls as you can that could endanger a successful outcome.

Minor differences in contract scores

At pairs the decision to bid 4major against 3N (perhaps when a balanced hand faces another and there is a 5-3 major suit fit) may be nothing more than a toss of a coin but, because of how matchpoints work, your decision may have an important outcome on the matchpoint score you get. If you play 4♥ and make plus 420 when 3N will bring in 430, with the same tricks, you have made the wrong call. If you play 4♠ and make plus 650, when no trumps can be held to plus 630, you have done the right thing. You'll need judgement. Perhaps play the major if you think a ruff will help you make that extra trick. As a counter-example, if you have considerable extra values, say 29-30 high card points, you may well make as many tricks on these high cards and not need a ruff.

At teams, provided both 4major and 3N make, your decision is more relaxed. The 10 point contract difference between 420 and 430 translates to 0 imps, a so-called flat board (sometimes also known as a push). If you make 630 (3N +1), but could have made 650 in the major suit game, you'll lose an undramatic 1 imp.

Doubled contracts

Whether it's pairs or teams, play them as safely as possible (looking out for bad breaks, cards placed badly). If a doubled contract makes you will get a good score. Overtricks are not relevant (but, again, don't waste them if your safe line can still bring them in).

Playing in 5minor (and not 3N)

At pairs you should only play in 5clubs or 5diamonds if you think 3N is not making and a slam in a minor won't be successful either. This is largely because of how the scoring works. First it's a long way to contract for 11 tricks and (let's say non-vulnerable), if that makes for 400 when 430 makes in 3N, you will have booked yourself a bad score. If you feel you have misjudged you may as well bid a small slam and hope it rolls in (miraculously).

Part of the problem at pairs is you sometimes have to make a decision as to whether to try for slam. This is often all-or-nothing. You decide to play in 3N and miss a cold slam. You try for slam but realise too late that it won't succeed but are now too high.

In teams you can investigate slam and stop in 5minor because you know it is a playable spot and the imp scale saves you. Your 400 lost to their 430 at the other table but you only lost one imp (at pairs you will have converted a very healthy score into a near bottom).

Leads

Your objective at pairs is not to give away wasteful tricks that will sap your matchpoint total. For this reason you should tend towards making passive leads. Of course some auctions call for a cashing out of tricks and this will influence your approach.

At teams your objective is to defeat their contract and this translates to your leading style being more speculative (*in a controlled way but not wild*). If you think the only way to defeat game is to lead a side suit king from king doubleton (playing partner to hold the ace in this suit) then try it. This is risky and would be too dangerous at pairs.

You will, in practice, find that your lead in both types of game is often just the same.

Defence

The thinking follows on from the approach on opening leads. Playing pairs, let's say halfway through the defence you see a way to defeat the contract ... but only if the hand layout is quite fanciful. You should reject this line as it's more likely to be wrong. That will cost lots of matchpoints.

In a similar situation, at teams, you should seize the chance and follow through on what your imagination has conjured up. If the plan fails you may have cost one or two overtricks but its success may have gathered in a double digit imp score. A good trade-off.

Penalty doubles

Partly because the risk of being wrong is small (being limited to the available matchpoints on just one board) making penalty doubles is an important element of pairs bridge. You should be making more penalty doubles than in other forms of the game. A jostling approach to competitive bidding may see you pushing the opponents too high. You will be ready to pounce with the double card. Sometimes you might judge that doubling their partscore may be the only route to a decent score. In some circumstances you may try to protect your own partscore. Let's say you feel you will make plus 110 from 2 ♠ but the opponents bid on to 3 ♦ (with them being vulnerable). You judge that if they make their contract you will have a poor score. Moreover if they fail by one trick your plus 100 will not be adequate compensation. Your double will cost very little but when 3 ♦ fails by a trick you pick up plus 200 for a very good score. A score of 200 in a partscore battle, for the pair on the wrong side, is known as the "kiss of death".

In teams you should be much more circumspect, tending to double only those contracts that you "know" will fail. In the above pairs example, you would not double partscores in tight situations since the cost of being wrong is great. Partscores that make are converted into games because of the scoring system. The imp scale ensures you have a terrible board when the contract rolls in.

In both types of the game, a double based on a good trump holding may backfire as it pinpoints who has those cards. Further, not vulnerable, a contract that would have drifted off by two tricks undoubled may now be played to limit the undertricks to one. That's plus 100 for the defending side in both cases. No benefit from the double and the tip-off might just see declarer home.

Sacrifices

A sacrifice is a bid in a competitive auction made in the belief that, whilst the contract will fail, the cost will be less than allowing the opponents to play in their contract. You should presume that your sacrifice will be doubled (lucky you if this is not the case). Bidding a sacrifice that concedes more points than their making contract is known as a *phantom*. Sacrifices may also work in pushing the opponents up a level, to one that fails.

At pairs you can make relatively more sacrifices as, again, the cost is limited to the number of matchpoints on the one board. Your minus 500, say, will be great against a long list of minus 620s. If you record minus 800 then you have converted a (more or less) shared average (about 2%) into a bottom (i.e. losing that average score).

At teams you should be more reluctant to make such bids as you need to factor in the cost of misjudging. Non-vulnerable against vulnerable you push on to 5♣x against their 4♥. Let's say your teammates play in 4♥ at the other table. Your judgement is that you will record minus 300 against teammates making 620. That's a net gain of 320 points and converts to plus 8 imps. Unfortunately you *have* got it wrong. You fail by three tricks (minus 500) and 4♥ didn't make. Now your net score is minus 550 and that's a whopping minus 11 imps. The outcome was 19 imps worse than you what you thought would happen.

Marcus Witt

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