

Movements in BBO

Now that we are all beginning to get used to online Bridge, I intend to create a few documents aimed to give players and aspiring Tournament Directors a better understanding of what is going on. This is the first article, in which I will attempt to describe the movements you are likely to encounter.

In a regular bridge club, you probably play Mitchell or Howell movements for the most part. Players who participate in Congresses or National Competitions will also be familiar with the Swiss movement, mostly in Team events but also, occasionally, in Pairs.

BBO Virtual Clubs support Individual and Pairs events, but not Teams. The system supports five movements:

- 1) Clocked
- 2) Unclocked
- 3) Swiss
- 4) Knockout
- 5) Howell

Unclocked and Knockout movements are unsuitable for normal use and will not be covered in this article.

Clocked

You can think of this as being akin to the Mitchell movement although they are not precisely the same. The Clocked movement is the same as a Mitchell in that the field is divided in two; a N/S group and an E/W group. Like a Mitchell, there is a N/S winner and an E/W winner i.e. there are really two separate competitions going on. The difference is that in a BBO clocked competition, every table is playing the same board set at any given time. It's as if you had an unlimited number of duplicated boards. At the start of the competition, you put the first board set (say boards 1-3) on EVERY table. At the end of the round, E/W moves up a table, as in a real Mitchell; but instead of moving the boards down, the boards are removed from every table and replaced by the next set (boards 4-6 in this example) at every table.

Have you figured out the advantages of this? The big one is that all the palaver employed to avoid meeting the same boards twice (shares, relays, skips, rovers etc) if there is even number of tables, becomes redundant. The second advantage is that you can track your performance as the game progresses in much the same way as you can in a Mirrored Movement Teams event.

This movement is timed. The Tournament Director determines the time allowed when setting up the tournament. It's typically set at 7 minutes per board (8 in a novice event). Ideally, the number of rounds will equal the number of tables, but this isn't always practical. If the number of rounds is fewer than the number of tables, you miss out on playing against some pair(s). This reduces the balance (fairness) of the movement but missing one or even two pairs, while not ideal, is acceptable. If there are more rounds than tables, you meet some pair(s) twice. These are called "Revenge Rounds". Revenge rounds cause a significant level of unbalancing but again, in the real world, up to two are tolerable.

Scoring is done in exactly the same way as in a Mitchell Pairs event, using Matchpoints (see section on IMPs v MPs below).

BBO does not tolerate half tables. If there is a half table when the game begins, the Tournament Director must immediately put two substitutes in to fill the table. If this is not done, at best; the scoring is invalidated, at worst; the tournament closes down at the end of the first round.

The clocked movement is the one you will encounter most frequently when playing on BBO. It reports the N/S and E/W results separately and applies master points accordingly. It also produces an “honor* list” of, typically, the top 10 results, percentage wise, from the competition as a whole. Remember, there is actually no competition going on between N/S and E/W as there is no mixing of the two sides going on. BBO doesn’t support Arrow Switching. Consequently, while the honor list looks pretty and you doubtless love appearing on it, it’s actually somewhat meaningless. If there are two sections, there are four winners. Again, BBO produces its honor list. It’s just as meaningless. Sorry!

*I haven’t forgotten how to spell honour. BBO is, quite understandably, very American 😊.

Incidentally, there is an analogy to this Clocked movement in the real world called a Barometer Pairs event. You rarely, if ever, encounter it here, primarily due to the costs involved in producing the multiple sets of duplicated boards required. Barometer Pairs events seem to be quite popular in the USA.

Swiss

The Swiss competition format is probably most commonly encountered in Chess and is also used in Bridge. It is most usually used in large Teams competitions (e.g. The Holmes Wilson) where the number of entries is such that there is no possible way that every team can play every other. In such a situation, how do you design a fair competition? There are a variety of solutions, of which the Swiss Movement is arguably the most elegant. This movement can also be used in Pairs events. It rarely is in the real world for exactly the same reason that Barometer Pairs are rare; they both require a large number of duplicated boards. On BBO this is a non-issue.

In its simplest form, the movement works as follows:

- For the first round, you play against a pair which is chosen at random.
- At the end of the first round, the computer produces a list of the pairs in rank order of their results. The results are usually calculated on the basis of IMPs and VPs rather than Match Points (MPs).
- For the second round, the pair at the top of the list play against the pair second on the list; the third pair play the fourth and so on down the list.
- As the competition proceeds, players become increasingly stratified, such that strong pairs are pitted against other strong pairs, moderate against moderate and so on. This tends to produce a competition in which, for the most part, pairs are playing against their peers, making for an enjoyable game.

In the real world, there are refinements applied to the above scheme, for example, a mechanism is added to avoid a situation where the same pair meet more than once. BBO does not apply this restriction. For the budding Tournament Directors reading this, if the movement allows pairs to meet more than once, it is referred to as “Danish”. So, the version of Swiss supported by BBO had a distinctly Danish accent.

There are several reasons why a Swiss movement might be chosen, including:

- If the number of tables exceeds the number of boards, typically if there are 12-15* tables.
- If there is a wide mixture of ability in the competition.

- If you want to expose your players to IMP scoring as opposed to Matchpoint scoring.

*If the number of tables is 16+, BBO automatically assigned them to two separate sections.

Players who are not used to playing in a Swiss Pairs tournament on BBO should be made aware of the following:

- They may encounter the same pair more than once.
- They will find themselves switching between N/S and E/W.
- They will be scored using IMPs rather than Match Points.

Many players enjoy Swiss once they get used to it. It doesn't suit relatively strong players who enjoy beating weak players. That's hardly a reason not to use it – quite the reverse!

IMPs (International Match Points) v. MPs

Just a brief note on IMP scoring, for those of you who are not used to it.

In “normal” scoring (i.e. Match Pointing), the results for each board are converted to ranks. Whoever gets the best result gets the highest score available, usually the number of times the board was played, less 1, multiplied by 2*; so if a board was played 12 times, that's $(12-1) \times 2 = 22$ for the top, 20 for the next pair, 18 for the next all the way to 0 for the bottom. Note that it doesn't matter how small or large the margin is between the top and the rest; so, for example, if every N/S in the room make a non-vulnerable $4 \heartsuit$ (420) bar one pair who make $4 \heartsuit +1$ (450); that's a top for the pair making the 4+1; earned on the basis of 30 points. Now consider a different example where all the N/S pairs make a vulnerable $4 \spadesuit +2$ (680) except for one pair who bid and make the slam. They score 1430, a difference of 750. Alas, their reward is exactly the same as the pair in the first example who beat the field by 30. Does that seem fair?

*In the USA, they don't multiply by two.

IMP scoring addresses this. In IMP scoring, the difference is converted to a score using a scale. So, in the example above, the pair who made 4+1 against the field making 4, score 1 IMP. The slam bidding pair score 13 IMPs. If you are interested in seeing the scale, it's on page 37 of this years CBAI diary, or visit this webpage: <https://www.bridgehands.com/l/IMP.htm>

Let's look at another example. Suppose you go hunting for a minor slam but fail to find it and settle for a minor game which makes. You score 600 (vulnerable). The rest of the room, who are less enterprising, settle for the safe 3NT and make +1 for 630. In MPs, you score a big fat zero. In IMPs, your penalty is just 1 IMP.

Your tactics should take account of the scoring method in use. There are books written on this subject, but in general terms, playing in a Match pointed event, overtricks are very important, because they are likely to give you a top or near top. It is therefore worth taking calculated risks to achieve them. Playing IMPs, overtricks are rewarded, but to a much smaller extent. The best way to get big advantages at IMPs is by bidding and making slim games and slams. So, playing IMPs, you bid aggressively and then play as safely as possible to ensure you make your contract. You never risk going down in an attempt to score an extra trick, indeed, advanced players sometimes use safety plays, designed to guard against bad breaks, to ensure they make their contracts, at the expense of giving up an overtrick.

