

A Simple Guide to Bridge Scoring in Match Point Pairs, Teams and Cross-IMPs

Team Bridge, and the less well known pairs equivalent, Cross-IMPs, is declining in popularity and a recent discussion with representatives of several Surrey clubs indicates that this decline is at least in part due to a lack of understanding of how to run and score such sessions.

The purpose of this note is:

- to encourage clubs and committees to try running team events, or the pairs equivalent: Cross-IMPs;
- to show that Cross-IMPs scoring is as simple to organise and run as a normal club Bridge session with the benefit that it requires the tactics needed for Team Bridge.
- to show how these forms of scoring contrast with that of Match Point Bridge (often referred to as Duplicate) that is the most common form of Bridge currently played in clubs.

Match Point Scoring

Let's first look at a golfing analogy.

Suppose you play a round of golf with a group of people and for each hole you score 2 points for everyone who took more strokes than you did and 1 point for everyone who took the same number as you. Then at the end you simply add up the points to see who won. With this type of scoring every hole is worth the same number of points. It doesn't matter how difficult the hole is, each one scores the same. This is not a very common way to score at golf but...

... this is exactly how Bridge is scored in most club sessions. Your score on each board is compared with every other pair that had the same cards: you get 2 points for every pair that did worse than you, 1 point for every pair that scored the same as you and zero for every pair that did better than you. It doesn't matter how much you win by, just that you beat as many of the other players as possible. This is by far and away the most common form of scoring used in Bridge clubs today.

With this form of scoring getting an extra trick, or the extra 10 point for playing in No Trumps can make a big difference your score.

Teams Scoring

The more normal way to score a golf match is to count the total strokes used for the whole round. This is very close to the way Team Bridge is scored.

In its simplest form a team consists of two pairs, one sitting NS and the other EW and in any competition between two teams (A & B) both teams play the same boards twice, once with NS(A) playing against EW(B) and once with NS(B) playing against

EW(A). The two scores for each board are then compared and the difference is converted IMPs (International Match Points) using the table found at the bottom of most scorecards.

There are many standard movements available in the popular scoring programs that allow a club to run a multiple teams event where the EW pairs of each team and the boards move round the room in such a way that any two teams play the same boards as described above.

With Team Bridge the important point to note is that it is not just who gets the higher score on any one hand that matters, but *how much better* their score is. So the extra points from a single over trick or 10 points for playing in No Trumps count for little. What counts more is bidding and making games and slams that others don't and not going down in contract that others make.

What about NGS?

Those players that are interested in their NGS are probably familiar with how the results of a normal club Match Point pairs session can impact their NGS. Put simply: the average NGS of your partnership is compared with the average NGS of your opponents to derive a target % score for your partnership. If you score more than that target your NGS will increase, if you score less it will decrease.

In a Team event the final ranking of a team has no effect on the NGS of the members of the team. The NGS calculation is done for each pair of the team separately and not for the team as a whole, so the performance of your teammates will have no effect on your NGS. The NGS calculation for a team event is based on something called Cross-IMPs scoring which is described below.

What is Cross-IMPs Scoring – and Why Do It?

Well Team play can be fun but there can be difficulties. First you have to find another pair to make up a team, and it is impossible to play a team event with a ½ table. Not all of the boards are played by every pair and it is necessary to have available more boards than any one pair will play. One solution to these problems is to run a normal pairs movement but to score the session using Cross-IMPs – as some clubs already do.

In Team Bridge your score on a board is compared with that of your team mates score, and the sum of those scores is used to work out the IMPs score for the team. So if you are sitting NS your score is compared with the score achieved by your team mates sitting EW.

At Cross-IMPs the same system is used but your score will be compared with every EW pair that played that board and your score will be the average of the IMPs

obtained. In other words, for each hand half of the room are effectively on your team.

The tactics and types of play are the same at Cross-IMPs as they are at Teams, so Cross-IMPs scoring provides extremely good practice for Team playing but without the disadvantage of always having to make up full teams and deal more boards.

Playing Strategies

Okay, so how does the type of scoring change the way hands should be played? This is quite a complex subject to get to grips with, but there are a few general principles as follows:

- with Match Point pairs:
 - o play in a denomination that scores best (eg NT rather than a minor);
 - o go for as many tricks as the odds favour;
 - o chose tactics that will succeed more often than they fail – irrespective of the size of the success or failure;
- with Teams (Cross-IMPs):
 - o bid boldly (get those game and slam bonuses) but play in safe denominations;
 - o play safely to make your contract – overtricks are worth having but not if they risk the contract;
 - o avoid actions that might result in a large loss.

It is clear that to do well in all forms of Bridge you must be good at both bidding and playing the cards. However, Match Point Bridge favours the card player that can see where extra tricks can come from that others might miss. Team (Cross-IMP) Bridge favours those that can bid accurately and can see game and slam contracts that others might miss.

To be a well rounded Bridge player it is important to be comfortable playing all forms of Bridge, and for anyone wishing to develop their game to inter-club, inter-County or International level Team playing is essential.

Summary:

Match Point	Teams	Cross-IMPs
Your score is compared with all the other pairs that had those cards and you get 2 points for every pair you beat and 1 for every pair you draw with.	Your score is compared with the one pair that are your teammates. The score the team gets depends on by how much you score better or worse than the other team.	Your score is compared with all the other pairs that had those cards, just as in Match Point scoring, except that the score you get depends on by how much you did better, or

		worse, that they did.
Every board is worth the same number of points.	The number of points scored on a board depends on the amount by which you beat the other team.	The number of points scored on a board depends on the amount by which you beat the other pairs that had the same cards.
It pays to be in the best scoring denomination	It pays to be in the safest denomination	It pays to be in the safest denomination
Card players that can extract the extra tricks are rewarded.	Accurate bidding of games and slam is rewarded	Accurate bidding of games and slam is rewarded
Can be played with ½ table.	Need team movements and cannot be played with ½ table.	Uses a normal pairs movement and can be played with ½ table.
NGS is determined by how well your score compares with those pairs that had the same cards you had.	NGS is determined by how well your score compares with those pairs that had the same cards you had. The performance of your team mates has no effect on you.	NGS is determined by how well your score compares with those pairs that had the same cards you had.

Appendix: An Example of Playing the Odds at Match Point and Playing Safe at Teams (Cross-IMPs).

You are in a vulnerable 3NT:

Dummy:

Spades: A K Q x x x
 Hearts:)
 Diamonds:) Lots of little cards
 Clubs:)

Declarer:

Spades: x x
 Hearts:)
 Diamonds:) 5 certain tricks and no more.
 Clubs:)

There are two sensible ways to play the spade suit: play A K Q first; or duck a round then play A K Q. Which you chose should depend on the form of scoring used. To see why let's look at the possible outcomes.

The spade suit may split 5-0, 4-1, or 3-2 and the probabilities are:

5-0: 4%
 4-1: 28%
 3-2: 68%

Here are the scores for the different types of play:

	A K Q	Duck first then A K Q
5-0	-100	-100
4-1	-100	+630
3-2	+660	+630

If the suit splits 5-0 it doesn't matter how you play, you will only ever make 8 tricks, but so will everyone else and you will get a flat board. For the sake of argument to make the difference very clear let's assume that however you chose to play the hand your opponents chose the opposite. So at Duplicate playing A K Q first will give you a top whenever the cards split 3-2 (68% of the time) and bottom when they split 4-1 (28% of the time). So over many hands you score better to play the odds: 3-2 is more likely than 4-1 so play for a 3-2 split.

At Teams and Cross-IMPs the logic is different, with this scoring it is important to take account of the size of any points swing. Here the correct play is to duck a round first. The result of this will be that most of the time you will get a 3-2 split (68%) with a swing of -30 (which is -1 IMP) but 28% of the time you will get a swing of +730 (which is +12 IMPs). So even though you lose more often than you win, the winning score is so much greater that it is worth playing that way. Your teammates are unlikely ever to be happy to see you go down in a rock solid contract simply because you went for an extra over trick.

BUT: The good news is that you don't need to work all this out at the table, a simple thought process will get you there:

- in a normal club duplicate session your thinking should be: a 3-2 split is most likely so that is what I am going to play for, and run the suit from the top.
- in a team, or cross-IMPs event your thinking should be: is this contract in danger of going down? Answer: yes if the suit splits 4-1, can I guard against this? Answer: yes. If I duck the round first.

Simply apply that thinking to all your hands and you will not go far wrong.