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## Bridge Scoring Explained (because, you oughta know)

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**Author:** Larry Cohen

**Date of publish:** 07/14/2018

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

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Before the advent of computers in bridge, it was more common to learn/understand bridge scoring. Now with so much online bridge (or only online bridge during a pandemic) even fewer people learn it.

As a result, this topic is often glossed over as newbies learn the game. The computer (or "Bridgemates") do all the work.

However, a basic understanding of scoring is important to the strategy of bidding.

Sure, most readers of this article know that there is a bonus for game or slam. But, understanding how much successful contracts pay, and equally important, how much failing contracts cost, is crucial.

Especially at Matchpoints/Duplicate, it is a big deal to be -100 if everyone else with your cards is -110. It is a big deal to be +140 if everyone else with your cards is +120 or +100. It is a top board if you are -300 and everyone else your way is -420.

The vulnerability plays a huge part in all of this. Almost all strategy decisions (when both sides are in the auction) need to be based on who is vulnerable (RED).

I know this isn't the most exciting topic, but it is worth learning the basics.

Let's break the scoring down into 3 mini-lessons for your study.

- 1) Penalty for being defeated (undoubled)
- 2) Score for making contracts (undoubled)
- 3) Doubled and redoubled contracts

Explanation of scoring and types Matchpoints/IMPS Pairs/Teams (From ACBL Bulletin, April/2020)

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## Score for Making Contracts

**Author:** Larry Cohen

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*Note: There are 3 articles in this series. The start/cover page is [here](#).*

The scoring explained here is for Duplicate Bridge (matchpoints, teams, etc.). Rubber bridge scoring is different.

Failing in a contract always results in a minus score, explained [here](#).

For making any contract, there is a bonus (explained below). In addition, there is always a payout for each trick taken (assuming the contract makes).

## Trick scores

If you make a contract, you've taken more than 6 tricks ("book"). All scoring starts with the 7th trick you take (the first 6 are assumed). So, if you take 7 tricks, think of that as the starting point--thus "1". If you take 9 tricks, you get awarded for "making 3."

In a *making* minor-suit contract ( $\clubsuit/\diamonds$ ), you get 20 per trick (starting with the 7th trick taken). So, for taking 8 tricks in clubs ("making 2") you get  $20 \times 2 = 40$ . It doesn't matter whether you bid for 7 ( $1\clubsuit$ ) or 8 ( $2\clubsuit$ ); if you take 8 tricks, you get paid per trick whether they are overtricks or not. Of course, if you bid  $3\clubsuit$  and take only 8 tricks, you are down and get a minus score.

In a *making* Major-suit contract ( $\heartsuit/\spadesuit$ ), you get 30 per trick. So, for taking 8 tricks in hearts ("making 2  $\heartsuit$ ") you get  $30 \times 2 = 60$  (remember that the first 6 tricks taken don't count).

In a *making* Notrump contract (**NT**), you earn an extra 10 points above a Major contract. You get 30 per trick +10 extra. So, for taking 9 tricks in notrump you get  $30 \times 3 + 10 = 100$  (remember that the first 6 tricks taken don't count).

# Bonuses

Every making contract also gets a bonus added. Here are the 4 kinds of contract:

Grand Slam = Bidding for all 13 tricks

Small Slam = Bidding for 12 tricks (you get the bonus if you make 12 or 13 tricks)

Game = Bidding for a # of tricks that adds to 100 or more (use the trick scores as explained above).

The minimum threshold for game is 3NT ( $30 \times 3 + 10 = 100$ ) or 4♥/4♠ ( $30 \times 4 = 120$ ) or 5♣/5♦ ( $20 \times 5 = 100$ )

Partscore = Bidding and making a contract less than game (less than 100 points bid for in trick score).

A bonus is never awarded unless you bid to the level indicated. If you bid 2 and make 7, you get only a partscore bonus.

What are the points awarded for the bonuses?

**Partscores** (no matter who is vulnerable "red") pay a 50-point bonus.

**Games** pay 300 not vulnerable and 500 vulnerable (but you don't also get the partscore bonus).

The bonus for bidding and making a **slam** also depends on vulnerability:

<u>Level bid</u>	<u>Not Vul Bonus</u>	<u>Vulnerable Bonus</u>
Small Slam	800	1250
Grand Slam	1300	2000

I've done something here you won't see in other scoring explanations. I've shown the actual bonus. *Bidding and making a slam includes the game bonus.* So, in a "traditional" chart, you'd see only

1500 for a vulnerable Grand Slam, but it also pays 500 since it is game, thus the 2,000 shown. I think it is simpler this way.

*All making contracts score the trick points and the bonus points.*

The bonuses explained above are paid only if you bid to (and make) the level indicated. If you make a small slam (12 tricks), you get the bonus only if you bid for 12 tricks. If you make game, you get the bonus only if you bid to that level.

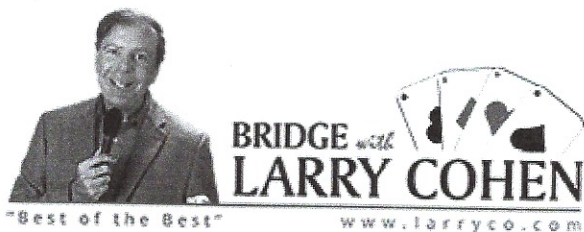
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Examples (all of these contracts succeeded; if they are down, use [this table](#)).

Vulnerability always matters in the scoring if game or higher is bid.

<u>Contract</u>	<u>Vulnerability</u>	<u>Tricks taken</u>	<u>Making How Many</u>	<u>Trick Score</u>	<u>Bonus</u>	<u>Score</u>
1♦	irrelevant	8	2	2 x 20 = 40	+50=	<b>90</b>
2♠	irrelevant	9	3	3 x 30 = 90	+50=	<b>140</b>
3NT	Vul	10	4	4 x 30 + 10 = 130	+500=	<b>630</b>
4♥	not vul	11	5	5 x 30 = 150	+300=	<b>450</b>
6♦	not vul	13	7	7 x 20 = 140	+800=	<b>940</b>
7NT	Vul	13	7	7 x 30 + 10 = 220	+2000=	<b>2220</b>

For doubled contracts, read [this](#).




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## Penalty for being defeated (undoubled)

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### Penalty for being defeated (undoubled)

If you are going to go down, it is obviously better if you aren't doubled.

It is less penal if you aren't vulnerable.

Not vulnerable (and not doubled), it costs only 50 per each trick you are set. In an auction where your opponents were going to make their contract, it is usually okay if you play it and can go down only 2 undoubled for -100. This is better than letting your opponents make just about any contract. Anything higher than 1NT (90) or 2♣ or 2♦ (90) would have paid more than 100 for them.

So, if your opponents were in 2♥ (110) and going to make it, you are better off paying out 50 (down 1 not vulnerable) or 100 (down 2 not vulnerable).

Even if you are vulnerable, the penalty is -100 for each trick you fail by. Down 1 (undoubled) for -100 is better than letting them make a contract of 2♥ or higher.

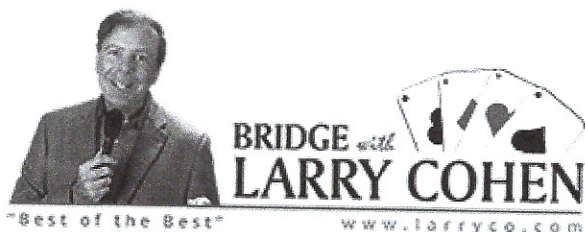
Of course, there is no sure way to know who is making what, but knowing what the penalties and scores are is useful in your decision making.

Here is the table for going down (undoubled):

Down how many	Not Vulnerable (not doubled)	Vulnerable (not doubled)

For doubled penalties, see [this](#).

1	-50	-100
2	-100	-200
3	-150	-300
4	-200	-400
5	-250	-500
etc...	50 per undertrick	100 per undertrick




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## Doubled and Redoubled Contracts

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### Scoring for Doubled and Redoubled Contracts

Going down doubled can be scary. The scores add up quickly. If you are sacrificing, you have to not only hope the contract you sacrifice against was making, but that your minus score (especially doubled) is not more than what their contract was worth.

If it is a partscore battle, you can afford down 1 doubled if not vulnerable (-100). Vulnerable, down one doubled is -200, which is considered the "Matchpoint Kiss of Death." That is because when your opponents bid and make most partscores you end up something like -110, -120, -130, -140 -- and while -100 would be great in comparison, -200 is typically a disaster. Down 2 doubled (no matter what the vulnerability) will always score more than a partscore.

If the opponents were going to be in a bid and making game, you can afford to pay out a "medium" penalty and still profit. You need to know the score for their game. If they are Vulnerable, they are getting at least 600. If Not Vulnerable, only 400. Knowing their vulnerability and yours is crucial to your decision making. The best time to sacrifice (or be frisky) is when your opponents are Vulnerable and you aren't.

Sacrificing against slams is rare, but again, you need to know who is vulnerable and have a rough idea of what the scores involved are.

### Scoring Table for Doubled Penalties

<b><u>Down how</u></b> <b><u>many</u></b>	<b><u>Not Vulnerable</u></b> <b><u>(doubled)</u></b>	<b><u>Vulnerable</u></b> <b><u>(doubled)</u></b>	Redoubled penalties are rare (why redouble if you expect to get set?).
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1	-100	-200
2	-300	-500
3	-500	-800
4	-800	-1100
5	-1100	-1400
etc...	300 per extra undertrick	300 per extra undertrick

On the once-a-year occasion where you need to know, just take every number in the doubled table and double it again.

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Anything under this line isn't too important to understand. But...

### Scoring for making doubled contracts

It isn't too important to understand this. It is practical to just look it up (on the back of the bidding box cards) or let the computer do the calculation. Making a doubled contract is almost always a great result for the making side and a disaster for the doubling side. I don't recommend spending time/energy memorizing/learning this aspect. But, for those who want to know:

- For any making doubled contract, there is a 50-point bonus (called an "insult" bonus).
- If the double is "into game" the game bonus is given (300 nv; 500 Vul)--"into game" would be 2♥ doubled (which becomes 4♥=game) or 3♣ doubled (which becomes 6♣=game). Doubling into slam is not rewarded with a slam bonus.
- The trick score is always doubled (so, if in 2 doubled making, you get paid for 4)
- Doubled overtricks (in any contract/denomination) score 100 nv and 200 Vul

#### Examples:

1♥ doubled making 1 = 30 per trick x 2 = 60 + 50 insult + 50 for the partscore (part of any duplicate scoring) = 160

2♠ doubled making 3 (Vul) = 60 for the regular tricks  $\times 2 = 120 + 200$  for the doubled overtrick + 500 Vul game bonus (considered like bidding 4♠) + 50 insult = 870

5♦ doubled making 5 not vul =  $100 \times 2$  for the tricks + 50 insult + 300 for game = 550

### Scoring for making *redoubled* contracts

It is even less important to understand this. Just look it up. Someone has a top and someone has a bottom. If you must know:

- For any making redoubled contract, there is a 100-point bonus (called an "insult" bonus).
- If the redouble is "into game" the game bonus is given (300 nv; 500 V)--"into game" would be 1♥ redoubled (which becomes 4♥=game) or 2♣ redoubled (which becomes 8♣=game).

Redoubling into slam is not rewarded with a slam bonus.

- The trick score is redoubled (so, if in 2 redoubled making, you get paid for 8)
- Redoubled overtricks score 200 nv and 400 Vul

1♣ redoubled making 2 not vul = 20 per trick  $\times 4 = 80 + 100$  insult + 50 for the partscore (part of any duplicate scoring) + 200 for the overtrick = 430

2♠ redoubled making 3 Vul = 60 for the regular tricks  $\times 4 = 240 + 400$  for the doubled overtrick + 500 game bonus + 100 insult = 1240

5♦ redoubled making 5 not vul =  $100 \times 4$  for the tricks + 100 insult + 300 for game = 800

# Scoring at Bridge

I BY AMY CASANOVA

**L**earning to play bridge is often compared to learning a new language, or relearning English as it pertains to bridge. In addition to all the bidding rules, defensive strategies and declarer play techniques, there are also multiple ways to score at bridge. The differences can affect your decisions in bidding, play and defense.

## Pair games

Matchpoints is typically the form of scoring duplicate players learn first. What, exactly, is a matchpoint and how do you get them? Here is how you matchpoint:

If you are playing in, say, a seven-table game, there are six other pairs playing your direction that you are competing with. Every pair is awarded one matchpoint for each pair they scored better than, and half a matchpoint for every pair they tie. In this game, a 6 would be a "top board." Scoring no matchpoints is referred to as a "zero" or bottom board.

At matchpoints, the best score wins; it doesn't matter by how much. That is why it's said that overtricks matter. For example, if your contract is 1NT, even if you took an overtrick for a score of plus 120, if the rest of the field made three for plus 150, you would get no matchpoints. The theory of risking the contract for the overtrick is that it's the same bad score if you don't take the risk, so you might as well.

If you are playing online, you might see your score for a board displayed as a percentage. This is the percentage of matchpoints you earned. For example, if in our seven-table game you scored 4 out of 6 matchpoints, you would have a 67% board.

The total available matchpoints for a session depends on how many pairs, the movement and how many boards are in play. Your final score is the percentage

of total available matchpoints you won. If there are multiple sections, your score could go up or down after the game is scored across all sections in play.

## Team games

In a team game, you and your partner sit one direction at one table, and your teammates sit the opposite direction at another table. The two pairs from the opposing team do the same. The same boards are played at both tables.

When you play a team game, the contracts are scored the same as at pairs. After you play the boards, you compare scores with your teammates. The difference in your scores is measured in International Matchpoints (IMPs).

If there is no difference, it's a "push" board. The difference in points begins at 20 and costs 1 IMP. If you are plus 100 and your teammates are minus 110, that is a push board. If you are plus 90 and your teammates are minus 120, the score is minus 1 IMP for your team and plus 1 IMP for the other team.

Let's take another look at that notrump partial from the matchpoint session. At teams, you just want to make your contract. You are not going to risk your plus 120 for plus 150. Why? This is what it sounds like when you and your teammates reconvene to compare scores:

"Board one, plus 120," you say. Your teammates, "Minus 120. Push"

What if you risked an overtrick and went down one?

"Board one, minus 50."

"Minus 120. Minus 170 is lose 5."

If you didn't get the overtrick and they did, it's only lose 1. Better to lose 1 IMP than 5.

The bigger the difference in scores, the more IMPs are won or lost.

For example, say you are North-South and you reach a vulnerable game

## IMP Scale

Difference in Points	IMPs
20-40	1
50-80	2
90-120	3
130-160	4
170-210	5
220-260	6
270-310	7
320-360	8
370-420	9
430-490	10
500-590	11
600-740	12
750-890	13
900-1090	14
1100-1290	15
1300-1490	16
1500-1740	17
1750-1990	18
2000-2240	19
2250-2490	20
2500-2990	21
3000-3490	22
3500-3990	23
4000 +	24

## 20-pt. VP Scale

IMPs	VPs
0	10-10
1-2	11-9
3-4	12-8
5-7	13-7
8-10	14-6
11-13	15-5
14-16	16-4
17-19	17-3
20-23	18-2
24-27	19-1
28 +	20-0

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in a major, just making, for plus 620. Your teammates, sitting East–West at the other table, played a contract undoubled and went down two for minus 100. Your net score is plus 520 which, converted to IMPs, is win 11.

Phrases such as “double partscore (or game or slam) swings” mean that both sides can make such a contract. When your side is double-negative, it can mean a loss of a lot of IMPs. If you have a minus score, hope that your teammates have a plus.

A swing can also mean that one side made it but the other did not – or did not bid the same. That score might look like plus 420 and plus 50, for a win (or loss) of 10 IMPs, or plus 420 and minus 170 for a win (or loss) of 6.

Negative IMPs detract from your score.

Once you tally up your plus and minus scores, you have your IMP margin. Sometimes, there is a further conversion to victory points (VPs). The conversion depends on how many boards you played, and which scale you are using. The most common is the 20-point VP scale, which simply means there are 20 available victory points in a match. If both teams score the same number of IMPs, each team gets 10 VPs.

If you are playing an eight-board match and you won by 12 IMPs, your team would get 15 VPs and the other team 5.

### Swiss

Swiss is a method of matching contestants, as opposed to a round-robin where you play everyone. In a Swiss, after each round, the next round's matchups are determined by each team's score. If you have a big win the first round, you'll likely play a team with a similar score in the second round.

### Knockouts

In a knockout, the field is divided into two or more groups, called “brackets.” The division is according to the average masterpoints of all players on each team. You only play the teams within your bracket. The number of teams in each bracket and the number of brackets depend on the number of teams entered in the event.

Typically, a knockout consists of 24 boards. The teams compare after 12 boards and then play the other 12. You really get to know your opponents with this format.

Knockouts are single elimination: The winner advances, the loser does not. You do not convert IMPs to VPs. ♣