

Team Game (IMP) Strategy

The majority of the difference between playing in a team game using IMP's as the scoring method and a regular pairs game using match points is in the bidding. There are 3 aspects to look at with regard to bidding: Part-score contracts, game-level contracts and slam contracts.

Part-score

By far the most common situation arises when both sides are bidding but neither has sufficient points to get to game. Consistently winning part-score battles is a big advantage in team games. Rule: If you and partner have trump fit, but are unsure you can make game, always compete to the 3-level. Rule of the other thumb: Never double a part-score contract unless you have enough trump tricks to "book them" and are sure your side has 23 HCP.

Game Contracts

Always bid near obvious games, missing those games always results in poor IMP scores. The question here is should you bid game when it certain your side has slightly fewer HCPs than what is necessary. Whenever it makes sense stretch to bid vulnerable games. Stretch just a little to bid a non-vulnerable game. But don't bid game strictly on HCP, tend to overvalue A's and K's and downgrade Q's and J's. High spot cards enhance top honors. Example AKT7 opposite Q98 has a high probability (60%) of winning 4 tricks whereas AK32 opposite Q76 will only produce 3 tricks. Matching 4333 hands are bad prospects for game contracts, as are matching doubletons (e.g. K3 opposite AJ). NT v Suit contracts: Always prefer a game in a suit contract when you have 8-card fit in a Major and a NT contract when you have a 7-card fit.

Game Contracts

Don't stretch to bid slam. Your teammates won't be happy if you go down 1 in a risky contract while your opponents stop in game – it's a huge IMPs difference. A small slam should have a 60% chance of success before bidding it. Don't ask for Ace's on HCPs only, holding all the A's and K's is only 8 tricks; 5 or 6 less than needed. Long suits are the best source of tricks.

Declarer Play

Put emphasis on making contract, the extra trick, important in matchpoints, gains only 1 IMP while going down could in the same contract could be as much as 6 or seven IMPs.

Defensive Play

In matchpoints defensive play can be conservative, allowing an overtrick can be fatal, whereas an extra trick in IMPs gives them 1 IMP; so play aggressive defense. Giving up a trick or two surrenders little compared to the score when you set and partners makes the same contract. Example: Your teammates bid and make a non-vulnerable game of 4♠ for 420. If opponents bid the same game and make 5♠ even 6♠ for a score of 450 or 480 that's a 1 or 2 IMP difference (loss). However, if you set that contract for a +50 the net score is +470, a +7 IMP gain.