

Team Game (IMP) Strategy

Some Rules and Procedures

Teams are generally designated, not by their team number rather, by the team captain's name.

Games, as in Match play, have a certain number of rounds, each round having an even number of boards usually 6 or 8 boards.

At the beginning of each round the table assigned to a team is that team's **home table** for the round.

The N-S element of the team remains at the home table while the E-W pair goes to the home table of the opponent team for that round. Table assignments are posted before the beginning of each round. The tables are labeled by their Color/Alphabetic letter and a number so for example If team 6 is to play team 8 in a particular round team 6 might be assigned to table A4 and team 8 will correspondingly be assigned to table B4.

Team games do not use pre-shuffled hands as is now common in other forms of bridge. Each round usually of 6 or 8 boards will be in groups. Each group will be split between the two tables involved in that rounds match and at the beginning of each round, when at least 1 member of each team is at the table, the cards are shuffled and dealt. Once the hands are ready all 3 or 4 boards are played and then passed, by a caddy, to the table occupied by the other halves of the two teams. You can not “get” the boards from the other table and since these are still timed events, teams events employee caddies, to make sure the boards are swapped efficiently. When you have completed your half of the boards you should call the caddy to assist in exchanging the boards between the two tables.

Each time a new round is started the team with the lesser VP's can change which of their pair plays N-S and which play E-W, and although only four members of the team can play in a particular round, additional team members (up to 4 additional) can substitute for an entire round.

When all the boards in the round have been completed each E-W retreat to their home table and compare scores on each board, obtaining a net raw score for each board. The raw scores are the same as that obtained in match play and the net is the difference between the 2 scores. That difference will be a positive (for one team) and a negative (for the other) score for each board. We will pick up what happens in the scoring after we look at IMP play strategy. Note that at least one member of the team at the table **must** keep an accurate score for each board.

The majority of the difference between playing in a team game using IMP's as the scoring method and a regular pairs game using Matchpoints (MPs) **is** in the scoring. There are several playing techniques and bidding issues that are different because of the difference in scoring. We will look at 3 aspects with regard to bidding: Part-score contracts, game-level contracts and slam contracts. Before we do, we should understand the difference between MP and IMP scoring.

Matchpoint Scoring. In your regular games you have probably noted at the top of the results printed out there is a line entitled “Top”, for example in a MP game where there are 9 tables and 9 rounds your match point score on any board can be no more than 8, that is the “top”. That is because you get 1 MP for each of the other pairs whose raw contract score on the board is lower than yours and a ½ point for each pair you tie. If, for example, you are the only pair with a score of 690 (3NT contract making 6 vulnerable), you get 8 MPs. If everyone bids and makes the same contract there will be 4 scores above and 4 below you, or 8 ties – you get a 4 MPs or 50%. At the end of the game the pair with the most MPs wins. Notice that MPs puts an emphasis on extra tricks and Major suits (Game = 120 + bonus) over No Trump (Game = 100 + bonus) and de-emphasizes Minor suit (Game = 100 + bonus) contracts; same score but needing 2 more tricks than NT. The basis of the MAFIA rule.

IMP Scoring. Rather than MPs team games are generally scored with *International Match Points* (IMPs). IMPs are awarded in a different fashion from MPs because the scoring system is attempting to determine the combined skills of a team rather than a pair. In MP games on a particular board you are either on offense or defense, in team games the team is commonly on offense and defense on the same board. A means of doing this is to split team in two and have the ½ of one team play the

identical hands against a pair from another team. The boards are played twice once by the N-S component of your team and again by the E-W component of your team. Since both teams play the same boards the scores achieved at each play can be compared if ½ of the team plays N-S and the other half plays E-W on each hand. The other teams will be playing different boards so Matchpoint scoring makes no sense. If teams are evenly matched there should be little difference between the raw scores achieved and so we need a means of comparing how well a team performed against the field. To do this the difference between the two scores obtained on a board by the two teams are summed and converted into IMPs. The process also tends to minimize the effects of wild swings in scores on a single board on the overall score and minimizes the big advantage that a high ranking team may have over lesser teams. It is a 2-step process. First there is a conversion of the raw net score. This is accomplished and verified by the teams themselves after a round is completed. The difference for each board is converted into IMPs according to the following (abbreviated) formula:

Diff (range) IMPs

20-40 1 Note: the range expands as the difference increases, de-emphasizing the effects of extra tricks.

50-80 2 The complete list, found on you score sheets goes all the way up to 4000.

90 -120 3 The team with a positive score gets a positive IMP etc

Once your IMPs are determined on each board they are summed for the round and the captain of the winning team for that round (the team with a positive IMP result), after verification by opposing Captain reports their positive IMP score to the director, who awards victory points to each team based on either a 20 or 30 point scale (also on the score sheet). The conversion of IMPs to Victory Points (VP) is the 2nd step in the process and is done by the director. Teams accumulate their VPs through out the match. At the end the teams are ranked according to their total VPs and the team with the most is in first place. At the end of each round teams are assigned to play other teams based on their VPs, with teams matched as close as possible with teams with a similar number of VP's. There are no repeat matches so eventually a high ranking team may be matched against a much lower ranking team. Thus if you lose your first-round you will, for the next round, be matched against another team that lost their first-round.

The most important takeaway from all this is that it takes a large difference in the results on one board to give a team a large number of IMPs. For example, if the N-S pair on your team bids and makes 4-Spades and makes their contract, whereas your E-W pair made a defensive error against the same contract giving the opponents an extra trick the score difference is $450-420 = -30$ for you and that is just a 1 IMP award to the opponents.¹ Whereas if their N-S bids and makes 4-Spades and your N-S only bids 3-Spades making 4, the difference is $-420+170 = -250$ for you. That's a -6 IMPs for you. The 20 and 30 VP scales are also on your team score card. Let's look at the 20 point VP scale: and how victory points are awarded

| IMPs | VP |
|------|---|
| 0 | 10-10 each team gets 10 VP for the overall tie |
| 1-2 | 11-9 The team with positive 1 or 2 IMPs gets 11 VPs and the other team gets 9 VPs, etc. |
| 3-4 | 12-8... |

The non-linearity of the IMP and VP scales change how one approaches bidding, declarer and defensive play. What follows are some suggestions on how to modify your game for team events, i.e. IMP scoring.

Part-score Contracts

By far the most common situation arises when both sides are bidding but neither has sufficient

¹ In matchpoint events that might be the difference between a top and a shared bottom board. That is a huge scoring advantage for the pair getting the top. IMP scoring erases that particular advantage.

points to get to game. Consistently winning part-score battles is a big advantage in team games. The Rules for team games (not MP games): (1) If you and partner have trump fit, but are unsure you can make game, always compete to the 3-level. Rule of “then on 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 (for a 3-level contract). More later! (2) Play in your safest contract, if in the bidding you find you have a better fit in a minor, then it is better to play a part score contract in the minor than playing it in NT. The 20/30 point difference (between making NT versus making in a minor) in the contract score is much better (+1 IMP) than the 50 (down 1 = -2 IMPs) that you might get in NT; it is a 3 IMP swing.

Game Contracts

Always bid nearly '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. (1) Whenever it makes sense you should stretch to bid game when you are vulnerable. And stretch just a little less to bid a non-vulnerable game. (2) But don't bid game strictly on HCP, you should tend to overvalue A's and K's and downgrade Q's and J's². Remember that High Spot cards enhance top honors. Example AKT7 opposite Q98 has a high probability (60%) of winning 4 tricks whereas AK32 opposite Q76 should only produce 3 tricks. 4333 hands facing a 4333 hand are bad prospects for game contracts, as are matching doubletons (e.g. K3 opposite AJ). **NT v Suit contracts**: The tendency should be to 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. It's not automatically true, use commonsense!

Slam 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 (as much as 10 IMPs). A small slam should have a least a 60% chance of success before bidding it. Don't ask for Ace's on HCPs alone, note that holding all the A's and K's is 28 HCP's but only 8 tricks; 4 or 5 less than needed for a slam. Long suits are the best source of tricks. In total, Losing Trick Count is a better assessment tool, especially for unbalanced hands. Don't ask for Aces or Keycards unless your total LTC is a sure 13 – a 5-level suit contract and, as always, if you have 2 quick losers in an unbid suit.

Declarer Play

Put emphasis on making contract, the extra trick can be very important in MP games, but only gains only 1 IMP while going down in the same contract could be as much as -6 or -7 IMPs.

Defensive Play

In MP, defensive play can be conservative because allowing an overtrick can be fatal in these contests, whereas an extra trick in IMPs only yields 1 IMP; so play aggressive defense. Giving up a trick or two surrenders little compared to the score when you set them and partners makes the same contract. An example of a risky defensive play later. 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.

Competitive Bidding

Aggressive bidding can payoff in MP games, whereas in IMP contests bid conservatively. Don't Double part score contracts – don't Double unless you have “down 2” in your own hand, don't count on partner for any tricks. Don't “go for numbers”, i.e. preempt and overcall conservatively, upgrade your overcalls by at least a Q, meaning if you had intended on overcalling because you had 8 HCP, you should have 10 HCP; make sure your suit, i.e. your suit quality, matches your bid (preempt or

2 A's and K's are relatively sure tricks, Q's and J's are dubious trick takers, Bridge, in any form, is a trick-taking game.

overcall). There will be times when both sides can make a game contract. When that is the case, bid one more unless you are very sure you can set them. Recall the Law of Total Tricks and its implications.

More

Remember that you have partners at the other table, don't make risky bids because you are down in the match and want to recoup. And don't be a hero such that you make a confusing bid that may be passed when it is forcing or a bid that shows extra strength you don't have them.

Take chances to beat a contract – take the occasional defensive risks you would never do in MP games. For example: lead K from Kx hoping to find partner with the A, or perhaps with the Q and a quick entry in trump. This sometimes gives up a trick, a potential bottom in MPs, but in IMPs you lose just 1 IMP but if your bold play sets the contract, just once in ten times, you are ahead.