

The Difference Between Matchpoints & IMPs Scorings

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Bridge is a numbers game. Different tactics are required to apply to different scoring methods.

Guide to Pairs Scoring (Matchpoints)

The scoring system used at a regular duplicate club session is almost always called "Pairs" or "Matchpoints". IMPs scoring is rarely used at club duplicates. It is usually used in Congress swiss pairs events.

Just like in a swimming or foot race, it's where you place that is important, not by how much you beat the opponents by. Similarly, the size of the score is of secondary importance in Matchpoint scoring. What is important is how many pairs you beat.

Usually you get two points for each pair that you beat and one point for each pair that you get the same score as. These points are called matchpoints, and are divided by the best possible score to give you a percentage.

Here are some examples:

Example 1: If there were only 3 tables playing,

Contract	Made	Score	MPs	%	
				NS	EW
3NT	10	430	4 (beat two)	100	0
4H	10	420	2 (beat one)	50	50
3NT	9	400	0 (beat no one)	0	100

Notice? The size of the score doesn't matter, only the relative placement of the score.

In example one, if your opponents have a terrible bidding misunderstanding and you play in 3NT redoubled and make 10 tricks, then you score (+1000). You would get the same board. Similarly, if you played 4H poorly and only made 9 tricks (-50) then you would get the same bottom. The middle score would still be 50%. But now there were 5 tables and the first 3 hands were the same as above:

Example 2: ...Then add the new upper & lower. If there were now 5 tables playing,

Contract	Made	Score	MPs	%	
				NS	EW
3NTX	10	1000	8 (beat four)	100	0
3NT	10	430	6 (beat three)	75	25
4H	10	420	4 (beat two)	50	50
3NT	9	400	2 (beat one)	25	75
4H	9	-50	0 (beat no one)	0	100

Notice how now, for the same first 3 scores, some of their MP% have changed.

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How does that differ to IMP scoring?

Normally the best and worst scores are removed, and the average is calculated, and then rounded (down I believe)

So, on the first 3 boards we remove the best & worst, and get the average ... 420.

Then we compare the difference for all scores to the average, and look at the IMP table to see the result.

Example 3: If there were only 3 tables playing,

Contract	Made	Score	MPs	%		IMP avg 420		
				NS	EW	Diff.	NS	EW
3NT	10	430	4	100	0	10	0	0
4H	10	420	2	50	50	0	0	0
3NT	9	400	0	0	100	-20	-1	1

Notice? In IMPs, the result is IDENTICAL for 2, and only 1 IMP on the third board.

How about if we now do the same calculation on the 5 board hand?

Example 4: If there were now 5 tables playing,

Contract	Made	Score	MPs	%		IMP avg 420		
				NS	EW	Diff.	NS	EW
3NTX	10	1000	8	100	0	580	11	-11
3NT	10	430	6	75	25	10	0	0
4H	10	420	4	50	50	0	0	0
3NT	9	400	2	25	75	-20	-1	1
4H	9	-50	0	0	100	-470	-10	10

In IMPs, the size of the score does matter, as this affects its distance from the average. The relative placement of the score is effectively irrelevant.

In both methods, a good board is still a good board, and a bad board is still a bad board, but in MPs, it is the relative placement, in IMPs it is the distance from the average. Overtricks are vitally important in matchpoints, as is going positive and doubling whenever opponents are going down and not bidding tight games. IMPs is about bidding tight games, making sure you beat the opponent's contracts, over/undertricks are of secondary importance.

Remember the four things I said in the previous article when playing IMP based scoring?

- ◆ Declarer's top priority is making the contract
- ◆ Play the safest contract
- ◆ Bid your games
- ◆ Defender's top priority is to defeat the contract rather than simply try to limit the overtricks

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PLUS,

DON'T DOUBLE unless you are confident of taking off the contract, but if confident the contract is going down, then DOUBLE (this gives a bigger distance from the average).

Be confident in your sacrifices but don't give away big scores.

If you know your scoring, then these can be a good sacrifice vs a game contract (but terrible vs a part score game):

1 down doubled VUL vs NON VUL (300 vs 420); or

2 down doubled VUL vs VUL (500 vs 620); or

3 down doubled NON VUL vs VUL (500 vs 620)

If the opposition sacrifice, you should double.