

Teams v Pairs



There are subtle differences between playing Pairs and Teams, because at Pairs all boards carry equal weight, but this is not true at teams. One bad board at Teams can wipe out several good ones.

We therefore need to adapt our game very slightly when playing Teams (or Butler Pairs).

We will look at:

1. Play - Safety
2. Play - Different contracts
3. Bidding - Doubling
4. Bidding - Thin games

1. Safety Plays

Board 29. Dealer North, both vulnerable, at TEAMS you hold:

♠ AJ2
♥ AK54
♦ AQ
♣ J852

The bidding (uncontested) goes 2NT (19-20) - 3NT and (LHO) leads ♥ 3. Dummy goes down, plan the play:

♠ K84
♥ J87
♦ K109752
♣ Q

♠ AJ2
♥ AK54
♦ AQ
♣ J852

Count your tricks! 2 spades, 2 hearts, 5 or 6 diamonds.

You try ♥J but the ♥Q appears. You win trick 1. What now?

Clearly if diamonds break 3-2 (68%) or ♦J is singleton (5.6%) you will make 6 diamond tricks. However, 22.4% of the time they will break 4-1 without the ♦J being singleton. Can we do anything about this?

YES! Play ♦A, then ♦Q and OVERTAKE with ♦K. Now ♦10 will fetch the ♦J and (if they were 4-1) the ♦9 will remove the last diamond when you get back in and cross to dummy with the ♠K. The only danger is that (LHO) will win the ♦J and return a club, but your holding will stop the suit against nearly every distribution.

At pairs if you cash AQ you will score better over 80% of the time and it is clearly the correct play. At teams you are giving up an overtrick (1 IMP) on 8 hands but gaining 12 IMPs on the 2 hands where diamonds don't break!

Gains 24, Losses 8 every 10 boards at teams.

The full deal:

♠ K84
♥ J87
♦ K109752
♣ Q

♠ 9653
♥ 3
♦ J643
♣ K974

Board 29
Dealer N
Both
Vulnerable

♠ Q107
♥ Q10962
♦ 8
♣ A1063

♠ AJ2
♥ AK54
♦ AQ
♣ J852

We could fill a whole book with safety plays, but one is enough for now!

2. Playing in `different` contracts.

Sometimes you find yourself declarer in a contract that you suspect is not optimum, or one that is being played `upside down`. This can be because:

Your methods are different from other players,

Your opposition have been particularly competitive during the auction,

You have not bid the hand as well as you might have!

You hold:

♠ A85
♥ Q10652
♦ A8
♣ A62

And for one reason or another you open 1NT (12-14).

Partner raises straight to 3NT and a spade is led.

♠ K54
♥ AKJ
♦ KJ963
♣ 53

♠ A85
♥ Q10652
♦ A8
♣ K62

You assess the situation. Clearly you are going to make 9 tricks.

(So of course at TEAMS you will cash out).

However, at PAIRS you might stop to consider whether other pairs have reached 4H

1H - 2D

2H - 4H

If so, you will be looking at a poor score making 9 tricks in 3NT, because 4H looks pretty certain to make 10 tricks, maybe 11.

(Those playing in hearts will play ruff out the diamonds in order to discard a spade).

So what is the solution?

Well, if you believe that pairs enough pairs will be in 4H, you need to take the diamond finesse against west and hope for a 3-3 break. If it loses and a club comes back you might have some explaining to do to partner.

You are hoping for something like:

♠ K54
♥ AKJ
♦ KJ963
♣ 53

♠ Q10763
♥ 43
♦ Q42
♣ AQ8

♠ J92
♥ 987
♦ 1075
♣ J10974

♠ A85
♥ Q10652
♦ A8
♣ K62

As opposed to this:

♠ K54
♥ AKJ
♦ KJ963
♣ 53

♠ Q1063
♥ 43
♦ 1042
♣ AQ98

♠ J972
♥ 987
♦ Q75
♣ J1074

♠ A85
♥ Q10652
♦ A8
♣ K62

Note that if the hearts were different and therefore you are not concerned about 4H contracts, playing the diamond finesse into East is not correct due to the club situation.

3. Bidding – Doubling

Both sides non vulnerable, the opponents bid to 4S. You think it is likely to go off. Do you double? At pairs the double needs to succeed more often than it fails to be a winning strategy; every time it goes off you gain, every time it makes (with or without overtricks) you lose.

At teams, every time it goes one off you gain 50 points (100 v 50) which is 2 IMPs. If it goes two off you gain 200 points (300 v 100)

which is 5 IMPs.

However, every time it makes you lose 170 (590 v 420) which is 5 IMPs, and if it makes an overtrick you lose 270 (690 v 420) which is 7 IMPs.

Therefore if you double 10 times and it makes +1 once, makes exactly twice, goes 1 off 6 times, and 2 off once:

You gain $5 + 12 = 17$

You lose $7 + 10 = 17$

So you must defeat a game 7 out of 10 times at teams.

The maths is much worse for part-scores because the downside is so much larger:

You bid to 3H but they call 3S over you. You are pretty sure it is going off.

At teams, every time it goes one off you gain 50 points (100 v 50) which is 2 IMPs.

However, every time it makes you lose 390 (530 v 140) which is 9 IMPs!

Therefore if you double 10 times and it makes exactly twice, goes 1 off 8 times:

You gain $8 \times 2 = 16$

You lose $2 \times 9 = 18$

At teams you have lost out but at pairs you gained 8 time out of 10.

4. Bidding 'thin' games.

Suppose you hold something like:

♠ 987
♥ A106
♦ KQJ1097
♣ 103

.... and partner opens 1NT (12-14). Do you take action?

If you pass, whilst others may bid game, then:

If you make 9 tricks and others bid the game, you will LOSE 6 IMPs (250, nv) or 10 IMPs (450, v).

If you make 8 tricks and others bid game, you will GAIN 5 IMPs (170, nv) or 6 IMPs (220, v).

So if the game has a 50% chance and you bid it, then for every 10 times this happens:

At pairs would will gain on 5 hands and lose on 5

At teams, nv you will gain 30 IMPs, and lose 25 IMPs

At teams, v you will gain 50 IMPs, and lose 30 IMPs

Moral: At teams bid 50% games.

P.S. SLAMS are not the same and require a better chance of making.

