

Advice To Players When Scoring With International Match Points (IMPs) and Match Points (MPs)



When playing teams bridge a system of scoring is used called International Match Points (IMPs). When playing pairs we generally use Match Points (MPs) scoring but we can also use IMPs. When we play teams we always have teammates who themselves obtain a result on a board so there are always two scores to compare. When we use IMPs scoring in a pairs competition we must generate a second score with which to compare (called Butler) or score each North/South score with each of the other East/West scores (called Cross IMPs). There are some quite different tactics we must employ depending on whether we are playing Match Points or IMPs.

One thing to consider carefully is that playing Match Points and going for -1400 and getting a bottom can be easily rectified by making an over trick in 1C (+90) on the next board. At IMPs going for -1400 against the opponents 1N+1 (-120) loses you 15 IMPs. In order to get those back you need to bid and make one and a half vulnerable games that your opponents do not bid!

Games

At IMPs you must always bid the safest game. At Match Points the aim is to play in NTs or Majors in order to gain the most Match Points and to rarely play in a minor suit game. At IMPs it matters very little whether you play in NTs, Majors or Minors so long as you make the contract!

The strategy non-vulnerable should be to only bid games that are certain. However, vulnerable you should aim to bid games that are less certain. The better declarer player you are the more aggressive you can be in your bidding of vulnerable games. The important thing is to be consistent in your approach because then you will reap the benefits over time. Teammates do not mind the -100s when you go off in an aggressively bid vulnerable game, as long as you do not then come back with +170s that were cold makeable games.

Part Scores

Look for the safest part score. Do not worry about searching for a few extra points by playing in no trumps instead of a minor.

Overcalls & Pre-empt

At Match Points you can be quite aggressive in your overcalls, but at teams you should ensure that your suit is good and, if overcalling at the two level, you should have a good six card suit and a reasonable chance of making your contract opposite very little from partner.

At IMPs when making weak jump overcalls you should be sure that you have a good quality suit. Your opponents will have great difficulty in doubling without good cards in your suit, and they might take a losing action.

When pre-empting the same principle applies. At IMPs your pre-empt vulnerable and at equal non-vulnerable should be with good suits and not QJxxxx. Non vulnerable against vulnerable you can stretch things a little. The aim of pre-emptive bidding is to give the opponents losing actions and not to hang yourself!

Competing and Balancing

At Match Points you should be aggressive when balancing and competing for the part score, but at IMPs you need to act more cautiously. Going for -1100 to contest a -110 score does not bode well with teammates or partner!

Doubles

Never double close contracts. Doubling a part score and then taking it one off suggests a poor double since the double will gain only 2 or 3 imps but if the contract makes it will cost much more than can be gained. So doubles at teams should be going at least two off. For example 2Sx making vulnerable would be -670 against +110 which would cost 11 IMPs. At Match Points, of course, the situation is completely different, and you can double much more freely as a contract going one off for +50 will now score you +100 and possibly all the Match Points. At Match Points one in four doubles should make. Anything more and you are not doubling enough.

Sacrificing

In competitive situations at IMPs you need to be more certain that if you are bidding above the game level you were prepared to play at, you can make it. It is better to double them and take the plus score than risk going down at a level you were not prepared to play at. For example, if you double a non-vulnerable sacrifice and pick up +500 when you can make +620 and your teammates allow them to make the game you will lose 3 IMPs. But, if you go down 1 at the 5 level your combined scores will be -670 and lose you 12 IMPs.

When you are considering a sacrifice at IMPs you must consider the vulnerability carefully. If you are non-vulnerable versus vulnerable, or both vulnerable, then you should not expect to go down more than two tricks. Any more is too close for comfort! If you are vulnerable versus non-vulnerable then you should actually be expecting to make your contract!

The Play

At IMPs do not worry about overtricks. Yes, they do gain 1 or 2 IMPs, but if you go down then it costs 12 IMPs vulnerable! Take the safest line to ensure the contract. Be sceptical about trump breaks. If you can take a line that will be successful should trumps break 4-1 then take it. At Match Points, of course, you should always be looking for overtricks and will sometimes take risks to gain a good board – especially if you think you are lying 3rd in the final round!

Leading & Defence

At IMPs be cautious about trying for a swing with an unusual opening lead. In the long run, it is usually best to make a “normal” lead — the same one you think your opponent will make when the board is played at your teammates’ table. Save your brilliant defensive plays for later in the hand, when you have more information! At Match Points the aim is to defeat the contract and also prevent overtricks. At IMPs the aim is to defeat the contract, and if that allows the opponents to make overtricks sobeit.

Scoring at Match Points, IMPs (Teams of Four) and Butler Pairs

At Match Points, your score is put on a list with everyone else's score. Then the total Match Points available for each result on that board is calculated by multiplying by two the total number of scores on the board and subtracting 2 ie $(S \times 2) - 2$. So for a board with 6 scores on it the top would be 10MPs. Starting with the NS plus scores 10MPs is given to the best score; 8 for the second best score, then going down in 2's until 0 for the worst score. Each line must add up to 10. If there is a tie for a place (for example there are three joint tops) the sum of the MPs available for those three scores (ie 10, 8 and 6) is added together and then divided by the number of scores (3) thereby awarding 8 MPs to each of the 3 scores.

Traveller for a Pairs (MatchPointed) Event:

NS	EW	Contract	Dec	Lead	NS+	NS-	MP	MP
2	2	4H-1	S			-50	2	8
1	4	4H+1	S		450		8	2
6	3	4D-5	E		1100		10	0
5	5	4H-1	S			-50	2	8
4	7	4H-1	S			-50	2	8
3	6	4H=	S		420		6	4

Traveller for a Teams (IMPed) Event:

NS	EW	Contract	Dec	Lead	NS+	NS-	IMPs NS	IMPs EW
2	1	4H-1	S			50	0	0
3	4	4H+1	S		450		11	-11
5	6	4D-5	E		1100		12	-12
1	2	4H-1	S			50	0	0
4	3	4H-1	S			50	-11	11
6	5	4H=	S		420		-12	12

At International Match Points (IMPs), we take the DIFFERENCE between the scores that we and our teammates have achieved and convert that difference to an arbitrary number of IMPs according to the scale below:

Difference in points	IMPs	Difference in points	IMPs	Difference in points	IMPs	Difference in points	IMPs
0-10	0	220-260	6	600-740	12	1750-1990	18
20-40	1	270-310	7	750-890	13	2000-2240	19
50-80	2	320-360	8	900-1090	14	2250-2490	20
90-120	3	370-420	9	1100-1290	15	2500-2990	21
130-160	4	430-490	10	1300-1490	16	3000-3490	22
170-210	5	500-590	11	1500-1740	17	3500-3990	23
						4000+	24

At Butler IMPs the theory is the same as Teams but it is necessary to create a score to compare with. The traveller below is a typical Butler Pairs traveller. You will note that the scores for each side are the sum of all the scores entered on the traveller divided by the number of scores entered. Then each pair scores with their Datum NS with the EW datum and EW with the NS datum.

Traveller for a Butler Pairs (IMPed) Event:

Butler Datum for NS: +300 Butler Datum for EW: -300								
NS	EW	Contract	Dec	Lead	NS+	NS-	IMPs NS	IMPS EW
2	2	4H-1	S			50	-8	8
3	3	4H+1	S		450		4	-4
5	4	4H=	S		1100		13	-13
1	5	4H-1	S			50	-8	8
4	6	4H-1	S			50	-8	8
6	1	4H=	S		420		3	-3

I hope this document helps you to understand the approach to take in the various forms of scoring included. Please do feel free to ask me questions if it would help you further. Do enjoy!

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