



Safety First

PLAY OF THE HAND SAFETY PLAYS

Play of the hand at IMPs

- There are vast differences between IMPs and matchpoints.
 - Giving away an overtrick in matchpoints will likely cost many matchpoints; however, that is what you should do at IMPs to be safe.
 - Going down extra tricks trying to make the contract against the odds at matchpoints is a losing tactic but at IMPs it is called for.
 - The winning IMP player will not be concerned about overtricks in an effort to set a contract.

Giving away tricks

♠ J4
♥ T7
♦ 542
♣ AKQT52

♠ AK32
♥ Q983
♦ AQ8
♣ 74

- At matchpoints overtricks are vital and at IMPs they do not matter very much.
- In IMPs overtricks take a back seat.
- Consider the hands to the left.
- The matchpoint player will play for a 3-2 division of cards and play clubs from top.
- The IMP player will take a safety play in clubs and duck a club.

	3-2 Break 68%	4-1 Break 28%
Points without safety play	+630	-100
Points with safety play	600	-600
Total points difference	30	700
IMP difference	+1	-12

IMPs vs. matchpoints

- Matchpoints pose a different problem; a 700 point risk and a 30 point risk are basically worth the same thing: 1 match point.
- The club finesse will gain matchpoints 28% of the time and will lose 1 matchpoint 68 % of the time.
- At matchpoints you must take as many tricks as possible.
- At IMPs you are concerned about making your contract, if necessary at the cost of an overtrick.

Safety plays

- Safety plays are as the name implies. It is a play to minimize the risk of losing the contract.
 - Looking both ways before crossing the street.
 - Taking an umbrella if it may rain.
- Two kinds of safety plays:
 1. Deliberately sacrificing a trick to reduce the chance of not making the contract.
 2. Handling card combinations in a way that will overcome the worst possible holding by the opponents without losing the contract.



Safety plays

- Safety plays are not card sense, but card common sense.
- It is always easy to recognize the need and the time for safety plays.
- Even though the need for safety plays is easy to understand, sometimes the situation is more complex.
- At matchpoints, the idea is to make as many tricks as possible, at IMPs the most important thing is to make the contract.

Card combinations

Safety plays are typically not used in matchpoint events.

There is not a formula for card combinations; however they can be memorized, or you can imagine the worse possible holding and protect against it.

- Safety plays are a form of insurance against bad breaks.
- You sacrifice a trick when the distribution is favourable, but when it is unfavourable you make sure to minimize the loss.
- It may seem difficult, but once you understand card combinations, you will win more IMP events.
- Let's look at some card combinations.

Card combinations

	Declarer	Dummy	# of cards to lose
1	A1032	Q87654	1
2	AJ432	Q9876	0
3	AJ8xx	Qxxx	1
4	AK9xx	Qxxx	0
5	AK9xx	Q10xx	0
6	AQ109x	xxxx	1

1. The only problem is a 3/0 distribution. You must play low toward the Q. If LHO shows out you can play the Q and finesse on the way back.

2. Play the Q first and finesse the 10 later, if RHO has K10x.

3. The only distribution to worry about is RHO having K1097. If LHO has these cards there is nothing you can do about it. Therefore, lead the Q and finesse the 8 on the next round, if RHO doesn't split his 10 9. You need 3 entries to dummy to execute this line.

4. You have to worry only about 4/0 distribution. If LHO has J10xx there is nothing you can do. You must lose 1 trick. But if RHO has J10xx you must play the Q first and finesse twice, if LHO shows out.

5. Now you can win all of the tricks, if either opponent has J876. Play the A first and if one opponent shows out, you can finesse against the other.

6. You cannot be sure of losing only 1 trick. But you give yourself the best chance by playing low from table to the A and play accordingly to what the opponents play. Take the A if RHO plays low.

More Card Combinations

	Declarer	Dummy	# of cards to lose
7	AK98	76543	1
8	A109xx	K876	1
9	AQxxx	xxxx	1
10	KJ852	Q643	1
11	A9xxx	QJxx	1

7. If the suit is distributed 2/2 you'll make all tricks, by cashing AK. If it is 3/1, you'll lose 1 trick whatever you do. But if RHO has QJ10x you can hold your loss to 1 trick, if you finesse on the first round. You pay the premium of an overtrick if the suit is distributed 2/2.

8. If you need all tricks, you should play A or K, hoping for 2/2 distribution or restricted choice.

If you can lose 1 trick, you can ensure not losing 2 by leading up to the A10, finessing the 10, if RHO plays low. This saves against either opponents having QJxx, but gives up a overtrick, if the suit is 2/2 or you can execute restricted choice.

9. Here is the same principle as in #7. You give up a possible overtrick, if RHO has Kx, but you can ensure not to lose 2 tricks, if LHO has K alone by playing the A first.

10. This is the same motif as in #3. You must protect yourself, if RHO has A1097. Therefore your first lead must be the Q. This is not a real safety play, because there is no insurance premium. It is only the right suit-management.

11. You have a perfect safety play against either opponent having K1087: Play a low card toward the QJ. If someone shows out, you know what to do. You lose your overtrick, if LHO has xx or 10 stiff. But that is the insurance premium for your safety.

Card Combinations

	Declarer	Dummy	# of cards to lose
12	A9843	K765	1
13	AJ87x	K9x	1
14	AQ5432	J6	1
15	AQJxx	xxx	1
16	A1098	Q765	1

12. Play the 9 first , if LHO plays low then you should duck. You'll lose only 1 trick if either opponent has Q10xx.

13. Play the A first and finesse the 9, if LHO plays low. You'll lose only 1 trick if either opponent has Q10xx.

14. You'll lose 1 trick if opponents' cards are 3/2. You win against either opponent having the stiff K by playing the A first.

15. Play the A first and then lead up against QJ (if necessary, twice). You'll lose only 1 trick unless LHO has K1098 or suit is 5/0.

16. Contrary to # 12 the correct line here is the double finesse.

More on [Dorsey's website](#)

Dealer - South

Refusing a trump finesse

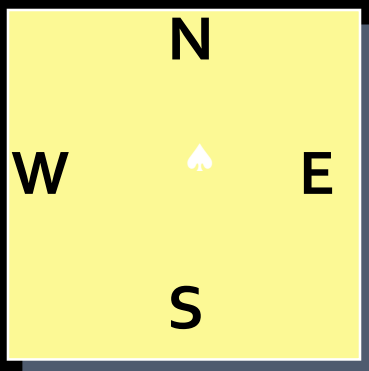
Contract 4 Hearts

Lead ♣ Q

♠ Kxx
 ♥ Jxxx
 ♦ Kxx
 ♣ AKx

W	N	E	S
			1♥
2♣	2NT	P	3♥
4♥	AP		

♠ Txx
 ♥ Kx
 ♦ QJ
 ♣ QJTxxx



♠ Jxxx
 ♥ xx
 ♦ JT98xx
 ♣ x

N/S is in a great game of 4♥
 This is a very typical hand in either IMPs or matchpoints. In matchpoints, declarer tries to make as many tricks as possible.

♠ Axx
 ♥ AQTxx
 ♦ Ax
 ♣ xxx

In IMPs, declarer tries to ensure the contract. Therefore, declarer does not finesse, but plays to the A and continues with a♥ to pull trumps and make the contract.

Dealer - South

Protecting against the worse possible distribution

Contract 4 Hearts

Lead ♣ Q

♠ A9x

♥ xxx

♦ Txxx

♣ Axx

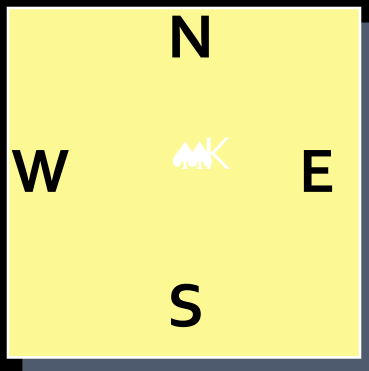
W	N	E	S
			1 ♠
P	2 ♠	P	4 ♠
AP			

♠ J8xx

♥ AKQ

♦ Jxxx

♣ xx



♠

♥ JTxx

♦ KQxx

♣ JTxxx

N/S is in an good game of 4 ♠.
This is a very typical hand in either IMPs or matchpoints.

♠ KQTxxx

♥ xxx

♦ A

♣ KQx

The play is the same in matchpoints or IMPs.
The declarer should play the ♠K so he can find the Jxxx in either hand.

Dealer - South

Protecting against the worse possible distribution

Contract 4 Hearts

Lead ♣ Q

♠ Agxx

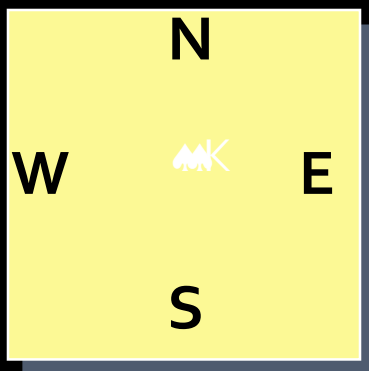
♥ xxx

♦ Txxx

♣ Ax

W	N	E	S
			1 ♠
P	2 ♠	P	4 ♠
AP			

♠
♥ AKQ
♦ Jxxxx
♣ xxxxx



♠ JTxx
♥ JTxx
♦ KQx
♣ Tx

This hand is different because the JT xx is missing. The only way to protect yourself is to lead to the ♠ A.

♠ KQ8xx
♥ xxx
♦ A
♣ KQJx

If East has the JTxx of spades, you can pick the suit up. If West has them, there is nothing you can do.

Dealer - South

Contract 6NT

Lead ♣

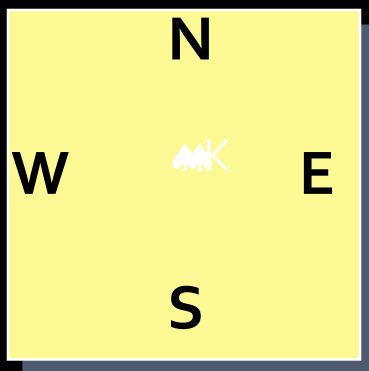
Think!!

♠ 863

♥ AK4

♦ J764

♣ AK4



The decision is whether to play ♠ or ♦ first. The ♠ suit is a straight finesse while there is a safety play available in ♦. The correct technique is to take the ♠ finesse 1st.

♠ AKJT

♥ 63

♦ AK853

♣ 63

If it is successful, then you can afford to take a safety play in ♦. If not then you must hope for a singleton or doubleton ♦Q.

Pessimism

Dealer - South

Contract 6 ♦

Lead ♣ K

W	N	E	S
			1 ♦
4 ♣	5 ♦	P	6 ♦

♠ KQ53

♥ JT

♦ K83

♣ A842

♠ A6

♥ AQ8

♦ AQJ9742

♣ 7

- Since West has shown a long ♣ suit and not much else, the ♥ finesse should work.
- Plan the play.
- Duck the ♣. Later pitch one ♥ on the high spade and the other heart on the ♣A.
- If you play the ♣ A on the first trick and it gets ruffed, you have to try the ♥ finesse to make the contract.

Dealer - South

Protect against unlikely bad breaks

Contract 4 Hearts

Lead ♠2

N/S got to 4 ♥ with a spade lead and continuation. Plan the play.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	2♠	3♥
P	4♥	AP	

♠ T964

♥ K7

♦ QJ65

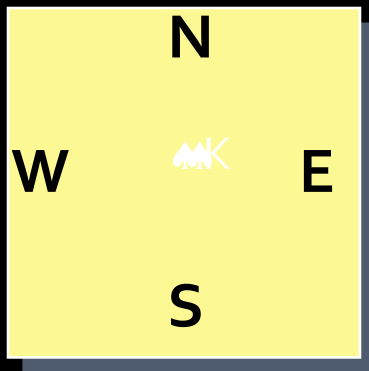
♣ AKJ

♠ 732

♥ 85

♦ KT7

♣ T9632



♠ AKQJ5

♥ 6432

♦ 94

♣ 87

To protect against the 4-2 ♥ split and a 5-3 spade split, South should pitch a ♦ on the second spade and trump the 3rd ♠.

♠ 8

♥ AQJT9

♦ A832

♣ Q54

Since East does not have any entries, South can safely pull trump and play ♦.

Even though this is very unlikely, that is what IMP declarer play is all about.

Dealer - South

Protect against unlikely bad breaks

Contract 6 Hearts

Lead ♠A

N/S reached a sound but conservative 6♥. West led the ♠ Ace. Plan the play.

♠ QT876

♥ 96

♦ AQJT

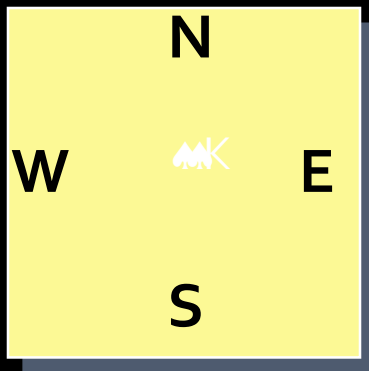
♣ 84

♠ AKJ94

♥ 73

♦ K9876

♣ 7



♠ 532

♥ 54

♦ 5432

♣ QJT9

If clubs are 5-0 there is nothing that can be done.

If they are 4-1 the contract is iron-clad.

Trump the 1st ♠.

♠

♥ AKQJT82

♦

♣ AK6532

Play the ♣ Ace and a small club. East will win the club and no matter what happens, you can trump a club, pull trumps and the clubs are set up. Play clubs from the top.

Declarer - South

Losing a trick you might not have to

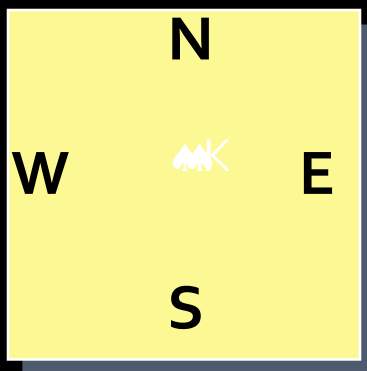
Contract 4 Spades

Lead ♣2

N/S reached 4 ♠. When the dummy comes down, you wish you were in 3NT. You have 9 tricks.

♠ 73
♥ Q543
♦ 932
♣ AT53

♠ T9
♥ AJ9
♦ J742
♣ J962



♠ 854
♥ KT87
♦ QT8
♣ K84


The ♣2 was led and you play low from dummy, and East wins the King. Plan the play!

♠ AKQJ62
♥ 64
♦ AK5
♣ Q7

You should play the club Q and finesse the T after you pull trumps. You might go set 2 tricks but you might make it.



IMPs vs. matchpoints


- Even though team games are becoming more popular, most players play in pairs games early during the tournament.
 - Then when the Sunday Swiss rolls around, they have a difficult time making the adjustment.
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Additional Tips...

- The differences are straightforward and you should bid and play accordingly.
 1. At IMPs, you should maintain an aggressive approach to bidding games. At the table, you seldom can judge the percentages accurately, so if a game may exist, bid it.
 2. Slam bidding is more like matchpoint bidding. You are rewarded more or less the same as if you go set.
 3. Against opponents that are not as good as you, do not stretch, tighten up the bidding.



Summary

- Learning how to play card combinations is not as important in matchpoints, but it is vital in IMPs.
 - You can buy books on card combinations or go to the internet and search for card combinations.
 - You should study or even just memorize various card combinations.
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What did you Learn?

- How are you going to use what you learned?
- What is the next step?
- Everyone is different. Some will need to memorize card combinations while other just need to be aware they are important in team games.
- You should assess where you are and make a plan for improvement.