



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

I am having a difficult time finding information on IMPs and matchpoints. When they are used and what is the planning behind each one? Are they played at regular games or tournaments and how would one know? I am sure they are very different challenges for each. I would love it if you could give me and other readers some easy and clear understanding of both.

Barbara

Dear Barbara,

Let's start with an explanation of the differences between these scoring systems.

Matchpoints is the scoring format typically used in duplicate pairs events. At the end of the session, your result on each deal is compared to those of all the other pairs playing the same direction. You get one matchpoint for every result that is better than the pairs you are compared to, and half a matchpoint for every pair you tie. The matchpoints are totaled for all the deals to determine your overall score and relative position.

IMPs (international match points) is the primary form of scoring used in team events. One partnership plays a deal sitting North-South while their teammates ultimately play the same deal sitting East-West at the other table. The IMP scale (found on the inside of all ACBL convention cards) converts the net difference in scores on each deal to a score based on a sliding scale.

The IMP scale rewards the magnitude of difference more than the frequency of occurrence.

The scoring format impacts your tactics.

For example, let's say some good things happen on the first two deals at your table in a team event. On the first, the opponents have a bidding misunderstanding and reach a vulnerable grand slam in hearts missing a cashing ace. You double and collect 200 points. When your teammates play this board later, they stop in a small slam, collecting plus 1430. You are 1630 points to the good.

On the second deal, you reach a contract of 3♦, scoring plus 110, while your opponents at the other table score plus 120 in a notrump partial. Your net score on this board is minus 10.

On the first result, you would gain 17 IMPs, and on the second there would be a zero-IMP differential. Your teammates would surely forgive you for playing an inferior partscore that ultimately didn't cost anything while gaining a significant slam swing.

At IMP scoring, the magnitude of differential on a single hand can outweigh the frequency of being slightly better on a series of hands.

If you had these two identical results at matchpoints, however, your position would likely be significantly different. The plus 200 on the first board rather than minus 1430 is almost certainly a top board. On the second, if every other pair in your direction scored plus 120 in a notrump partscore, your plus 110

in diamonds would be a zero. It might not be that bad if you have some company in diamond contracts, but let's say it is.

Although still significantly ahead in total points, one top board followed by one bottom makes you exactly average at this point. At matchpoints, the frequency of being right is more important than the magnitude of the score.

In a team event, it's important to bid and make your games and slams, and to defeat the opponents' contracts. At matchpoints, you might risk going down in a game if faced with a reasonable chance for an overtrick. If you're right two out of three times about the overtrick, you're usually ahead of the game!

Team games are more social because you play more boards against a single pair. Flighted or bracketed events help ensure that you can play against others of similar experience.

At matchpoints, every card matters because a top or bottom can swing on a single overtrick or undertrick on the most mundane partscore deal. Although I have lost knockout matches by a single IMP, the occasional missed overtrick/undertrick can easily be covered by bidding and making a good game or slam not reached at the other table.

To me, team games are more like real bridge. Someone once told me, "You play matchpoints to win, and IMPs not to lose." ■