

IMPS OR MPS

After a few months of learning, and reading books you go to your local club to play. What do they play when you get there? Duplicate of course! MP scoring. So when you start to learn to put into practice what you have learnt, and gain valuable experience it's in a MP environment.

Experience is very important, as it enables you to play automatically in some areas, that way you can use your time to concentrate on aspects of a hand that are important. If you give a hand to analyse to an expert, it might take a fortnight for them to sort out all the in`s and out`s. You only have 7 minutes at the table! And into that you have to say "hello" to the opponents, read their convention card, and score up.

So when you come to put that experience to use its on a MP basis. So if you have found that doing "x" usually gets you a good score you do it. If doing "y" usually gets you a bad score you don't. The problem arises that in MP scoring, a number of MPs are awarded to each board regardless of what happens. If there are 7 pairs playing then 12 MPs will be shared between each NS and EW pair. If everybody bids 3nt and makes exactly 9 tricks, then everybody gets 6 MPs, even though nobody has done better than anybody else. If somebody scores 10 pts more than anyone else, then they get 12 MPs, and their opponents 0 MPs. If you get 1000 pts more than anybody, you still only get 12 MPs, and your opponents still get 0 MPs.

In IMPs it matters whether you beat someone else and by how much. There are no points awarded on a board. If everyone bids and makes 3nt exactly, then nobody gets any IMPs for it. If you beat someone by only 10pts you still get no IMPs, as it is regarded as being so close. Beat your opponents by a 1000pts and you will get 14 IMPs, and your opponents will lose 14 IMPs. As you can see this can make quite a difference.

In MPs you can take big risks for 10pts. In IMPs you don't.
In MPs, if you have gained 10pts you play safe. In IMPs you try for as much as possible.

COMPETING FOR THE PART SCORE

An example: - You are playing MPs the opponents bid 1H-2H passed round to you. You turn to me and say, "should I bid 2S on this". "Yes" I reply. "But you have not looked at my hand"... "I don't need to".
From experience you learn that with 5 spades it is usually right to bid 2S in that situation. I don't want to go too much into the law of total tricks, but usually in that situation, if you go down in 2S then they could have made 2H, and going down in 2S will score more. If they would have gone down in 2H, then you will be able to make 2S and still score more. So its heads I win tails they lose, the sort of odds I like:o).

For those of you like me who like an excuse to bid what you were going to bid anyway, here's some ready made ones.

1. I am short in hearts, so in spades, I can soon ruff hearts.
2. I am long in hearts, so partner must be short and can ruff hearts.
3. I have a couple of hearts, so after cashing them the opponents will have to open up the other suits for me. Partner must have another suit somewhere.
4. I don't have much strength, so partner must have strength, but no decent suit.

Therefore he has a fit for my spades.
5. I have a good hand! Hey I'm worth this bid.

Well you should be able to fit at least one of those to any situation.

Now at IMPs you ask me the same question, "Do I bid 2S"? This time I come and look at your hand before saying whether to bid or pass.

The pair who bid 2H may have been over timid, and should be in 4H, and after you bid 2S they go on to bid and make 4H. Or they are in a 4-3 fit, and your 2S gets doubled and goes for 500.

At MPs it does not matter that this happens occasionally, but at IMPs it does. If you think any of the above is likely then you pass. Indications would be you holding a very weak hand (why has partner not bid?), or holding 3 or more hearts (partner should be short and has not bid?).

So where as it does pay to compete vigorously for the part score, in both methods of scoring, you should think there is some chance of making the contract in IMPs.

DOUBLING A PART SCORE

Another situation: - At MPs you open 1S and partner bids 2S, passed round to L.H.O. Who bids 3H (must have read previous chapter: o ((), passed round to you. You don't fancy bidding 3S, so you ask me "Gary do I double or pass ". "double "I say " and no I don't want to see your hand". (As an aside for a moment its decisions like these without even needing to look at the cards, that make some experts say, "pairs isn't bridge"). The reason I say dbl, is because if you pass you are bound to get a bad score. It makes, and a lot of people will not have bid it, so you only get 1 MP at most anyway. It goes down, and it goes 2 off, you still get 1 MP at most. If you are not bidding 3S, then dbl. . At pairs you should dbl the opposition into game about 1 in 5, if not, you are not doubling enough. At IMPs you do not dbl you pass. Why risk doubling them into game for 50/100 pts. You have to be pretty sure the part score is going down in IMPs before you double. If you fancy bidding on in either method of scoring, then you do so.

GAME BIDS

Do I bid this close game? Do I make a game try?

At MPs you bid any game that you think is better than 50%, it is only the percentage of success to failure you are interested in.

At IMPs you bid any game that you think might have some play, it is the amount of gain to the amount of loss you are interested in. In IMPs 1 success in 3 is probably good enough. Hence the comment 1S-3S is forcing in teams. Whilst not strictly true, it is worth considering very carefully before passing.

1S-2S, do you now make a game try? At MPs normally not, if partner declines you will find yourself one level higher, and if this goes down, you will have a poor score. It is not worth the risk at pairs.

At IMPs it is worth the risk, the game bonus makes it worthwhile looking. So be sure what your trial bids mean, so that partner knows what is required. Well worth discussing this with partner for IMPs.

SLAM BIDDING

At MPs you only bid slams that you think are fairly sure. 75% or more should be enough. The reason is that there are sure to be a few pairs that don't bid it, so even if it makes you will still get some match points if you are wrong by not

bidding it. If on the other hand you bid it, and its a close slam, going down might get you 0 MPs.

At IMPs you bid slams that are better than 50%. The amount of gain makes it worthwhile. Discuss slam bidding with partner.

DOUBLING FOR LEAD

At MPs you don't double game contracts for the lead, unless you are sure this will defeat the contract. At IMPs it's worth doubling for the lead, if you think this gives you a reasonable chance of defeating the contract.

If a slam makes against you, it will be a poor score whatever the form of scoring, so feel free to double for a lead.

PYSCHING

At MPs DON'T DON'T DON'T DON'T DON'T DON'T. Hope you get the idea.

At IMPs there are situations where it might be worth the risk, but be very careful, make sure you have an escape route. I would recommend, avoiding psyching, as it can destroy partnership confidence.

SACRIFICING

At MPs if the chance of them making their game contract is 50% or better and you think you can keep you sacrifice below the value of the game. Then sacrifice -500 is better than -620.

At IMPs the difference between -500 and -620 is not a lot, so for this to be right you would have to be sure their game made, and sure that -500 was the worst score you are likely to get. There is unfortunately never a situation when you can be certain of this. So you need to be fairly sure that their game is going to make, before you even consider sacrificing. If after that you decide to sacrifice, you should be confident of at least a reasonable chance of going off 1 less than you could afford to, only losing 300.

If not it is usually best to defend and hope they go off.

When the opponents sacrifice over you. Say they bid 5C over 4S.

In MPs you have a tricky decision, you need to make the right choice!! If you think it's a good save and you think no one else will find it, then you will just have to bid on and hope 5S makes. If you think everyone will bid 5C, then all you have to decide is whether 5S will make, and dbl or bid 5S depending. If you are not sure, well that is life I'm afraid.

In IMPs you double take the money, unless you are sure 5S will make or are worried that 5C will make. To go down and register a minus score would be a disaster at IMPs, when you should be getting a plus.

IMP TACTICS

If you have read what I have written so far, you will see that you are more likely to be doubled in a part score at MPs than at IMPs, but more likely to be doubled at the game level in IMPs than MPs.

So you will see that you can bid at a part score level at IMPs with a certain amount of safety.

What can the opposition do? If they double they risk losing a lot of IMPs, if you make it. If you go a couple off they have probably missed a game, and will still lose IMPs.

If you only go 1 off then it may be the right decision, but will not be worth much in the way of IMPs.

So they pass or bid on. Now if you have taken away a level or 2 of bidding off them, they now have less room to investigate whether they should be in game or slam.

This means they will get it wrong more often. So your system should allow you to get into the auction easily, and to a sensible level quickly, with minimal values. Discuss it with partner.

Once you know you have a fit, then compete freely. If they want to do tight doubles let them, in the long run you will gain. If you have not got a good fit, then get out of the auction FAST! Let them worry.

At the game level, don't just bid games haphazardly; they will be more likely to double at IMPs. At pairs if you are wrong to bid the game, there is no need for the opponents to risk doubling you. After all they are getting a top anyway. In IMPs they want as big a penalty as possible.

So though it is right to bid games at IMPs, they must be realistic games.

PLAY

At MPs you take chances for overtricks. Scoring 650 when others score 620 is a good score. At IMPs, if it involves the risk of going down, you don't do it. The risk of a swing of -720 to try and gain 30, is not a good bet. The problem is so many people are used to playing for as many tricks as possible that they do not even realise that safety plays are available. At IMPs try and stop and count your tricks, before playing from dummy. You should work out the best way of making exactly how many tricks you require. This often involves deliberately conceding a trick you might not need to lose. Or taking a finesse that you would not normally take. Or refusing a finesse that you would normally take.

CONCLUSION

I wish to emphasise that this has not been proof read and is only my opinions. I have avoided putting in actual hands, as I am of the opinion that you can always construct a hand to prove your point. And will you pick up that particular hand anyway?

I consider playing MPs or playing IMPs is more a matter of putting the right head on.

Remember that in MPs you are only interested in whether a bid or play will gain more often than not. The amount of the swing is unimportant. In IMPs it is the amount of the swing that is important over the long run. So if an action will cost you 1 IMP 4 times out of 5, but gain 12 IMPs on the other, you do it.

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