

Duplicate Bridge Strategy: Teams vs Pairs

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March 29, 2016

Two forms of duplicate bridge: Pairs and Teams

There are many similarities in strategy between the two forms of duplicate, but also a few important differences. This lecture will discuss the main differences.

(Both are available at the upcoming Firecracker Sectional, June 29 to July 3, right here at the Palo Alto Bridge Center!)

In all forms of duplicate bridge, you play a series of hands (boards). The result of playing a board is a *score*. The basic score is the same for pairs and teams. For example, +420 for making 4 spades non-vul; or -100 for down 1 undoubled vul.

Based on the score(s) at another table (teams) or tables (pairs), your score results in a number of:

- *Matchpoints* in pairs events.
- *IMPs (International Matchpoints)* in teams.

Pairs

You and partner compete against the other pairs who play the same boards in the same direction.

Each board is played a number of times. You get 1 *matchpoint* for each pair you beat, and 1/2 matchpoint for each pair you tie. For example, with 13 rounds, *top* on a board is 12; *bottom* is 0; *average* is 6.

On each hand, your goal is to outscore as many pairs as possible. *Note: It doesn't matter how many points you beat (or lose to) them by!*

Your *total score* is the sum of your matchpoints on all the boards. The players are ranked (first, second, third...) by their total scores. Your **percentage** score at the end of the game = total score / (top score). If you scored exactly average you're said to have a "50% game."

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 6 5 4 3
♥ K Q
♦ 10 7 6 3 2
♣ 10 7

♠ J 10
♥ 6 4
♦ Q J 9 8 4
♣ A J 3 2

W	N	E	S
♠ 9 8 2	♥ 10 8 7 2	♦ A 5	♣ Q 8 5 4

♠ A K Q 7
♥ A J 9 5 3
♦ K
♣ K 9 6

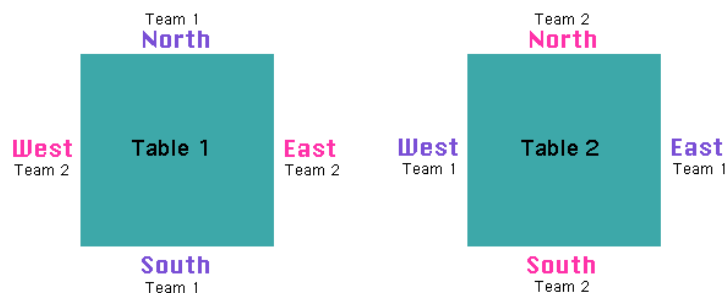
NS 4♠; NS 3♥; NS 2N; NS 1♦; Par +620

Contract	Made	Scores	Matchpoints	
			N-S	E-W
4♠S	4	620	10.50	1.50
4♠N	4	620	10.50	1.50
4♠N	4	620	10.50	1.50
4♠S	4	620	10.50	1.50
2♠S	5	200	8.00	4.00
1♥S	4	170	6.00	6.00
2♠S	4	170	6.00	6.00
1♥S	4	170	6.00	6.00
1♥S	3	140	2.00	10.00
1♥S	3	140	2.00	10.00
1♥S	3	140	2.00	10.00
1♥S	3	140	2.00	10.00
2♥S	3	140	2.00	10.00

In this example, bidding game and making got the most matchpoints. But making a single overtrick could improve your score by about the same as bidding a game! This is very different from IMPs.

Teams

You and partner team up with another pair.
You play a set of *matches* against other teams.



In each match, there are two tables. Your teammates sit the opposite direction from you at the other table. You play the same boards.

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At the end of the match, the difference in scores at each table on the same boards are converted to IMPs (International Match Points).

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

The winner of the match is the team that scored the most total IMPs.

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#	Open Room		Closed Room		IMPs	
	N: Leibowitz S: Gosney	E: Gumby W: Lazer	E: Wu W: Rew	N: Neill S: Griffiths		
1	4♠N= 420				4♠N+1 450	1
2		4♥E+3 510	4♥E+3 510			--
3	3♥N= 140			50	4♥N-1	5
4		3♠xW= 730	3♠W= 140			11
5	4♠N-1	100	100		4♠N-1	--
6	4♠N= 420				3NTS+1 430	--
7		4♠E+1 650	6♠E-1			100
8	6♣N-1	50			3NTS= 400	10
9	4♥S= 420				2♥S+1 140	7
10		4♠E+1 650	3NTW+2 660			--
11		5♠E= 450	4♠E= 420			1
12		2♠W+2 170	4♠W= 420			6

At IMPs, large swings are much more important than at matchpoints, where all boards are equal. Compared to matchpoints:

- Overtricks are relatively unimportant
- Bidding games and slams accurately is key
- Doubling the opponents into game is very bad! (At matchpoints, it's not good, but it's only 1 board.)

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Types of team games

Knockouts: You play a long match (e.g. 24 boards) against another team. The loser is eliminated; the winner goes on to the next round.

Swiss teams: You play short matches against several teams; typically 6-8 rounds of 6-9 boards. Usually the IMP results are converted to *victory points* which gives you a score for the round. Your opponent in the next round usually has a similar record to yours. The winner of the event has the most victory points.

IMP Difference	Victory Points	IMP Difference	Victory Points
0	10-10	14-16	16-4
1-2	11-9	17-19	17-3
3-4	12-8	20-23	18-2
5-7	13-7	24-27	19-1
8-10	14-6	28+	20-0
11-13	15-5		

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Advantages of team games

For those who haven't played teams, there are some nice advantages:

- Exciting head-to-head competition. (In pairs, you never face the people you are *really* competing against.)
- Less time waiting and moving between tables; more time to play challenging hands.
- You get masterpoints for every match you win!

Bidding games	Be aggressive, particularly if vulnerable. Bid the safest game, not the highest-scoring.	Bid 50%+ games. Be willing to bid riskier games if they score higher
Bidding slams	Bid small slams if 50%+. Bid safest slam.	Bid slams if 50%+. Be willing to bid riskier slams if they score higher.
Bidding grand slams	Be very sure they will make.	Be very sure they will make.
Partscores	Compete aggressively, but not quite as much as matchpoints.	Compete aggressively. Rarely let them play a 2-level fit. +200 is great, -200 is bad.
Doubles	Don't double unless you are very certain, <i>particularly if doubling a partscore into game</i>	Double aggressively, particularly if they are vulnerable.
High-level competition	Avoid double game swings	Take the action that is most likely to gain

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Summary of strategy: IMPs vs matchpoints

	IMPs (Teams)	Matchpoints (Pairs)
Overall strategy	Play good bridge!	Play good bridge!
Cost/benefit analysis	Maximize large gains and minimize large losses. Small swings are less important.	Maximize <i>number of pairs</i> you beat. Small differences can be very important. Partscores are as important as slams. Large losses are bad but they are only 1 board
Overtricks	<i>Play safe for your contract.</i> Go for overtricks only when not risking the contract. An overtrick gains 1 IMP while risking 10 IMPs or more	If you are in a normal contract, and you are a favorite to make the overtrick, go for it! (If you are in a great contract, then play safe.)
Undertricks	If you are in a poor contract, go all out to make contract; extra undertricks are not important (unless doubled).	Avoid giving up extra undertricks if making contract is unlikely.

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Bidding games

♠A10642 You open 1♠ vulnerable and partner invites with 3♠. Should you go? It looks like a very close decision. The form of scoring can make a difference.
 ♥QJ97
 ♦65
 ♦AQ

At matchpoints, your possible gain by being right is about the same as your loss from being wrong. So you should bid game if you think your chances are 50% or better.

At IMPs, you stand to gain *more* by bidding 4 than you lose: If it makes, you gain 620 - 170 = 450, which is 10 IMPs. If you go down, you lose 140 + 100 = 240, which is 6 IMPs.

So you can bid game with about a 40% chance vulnerable, or 45% not vulnerable. (This is counterintuitive to many people.) So with the above hand it's probably right to pass at matchpoints and bid on at IMPs.

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Which game (or slam) to bid?

When bidding game, the priorities are usually:

- If you can find an 8+ card major suit fit, you should play there.
- If not, think seriously about NT. NT is better than minors because it scores better, and takes fewer tricks to make game.
- Only if there's a big problem with NT (short suits, lack of stoppers) should you play in a minor suit.

However, things can vary depending on scoring:

- At IMPs, you should bid the *safest game*. The difference between 600, 620 or 630 is too small to worry about. So if you have a choice between 5♣ and 3NT and you think 5♣ is safer, bid 5♣.
- At matchpoints, those extra few points are very important. 3NT is desirable because it scores higher. So you should usually bid the *highest-scoring* game even if the chances of success are slightly lower than a lower-scoring game.

The same applies to slams: bid the safest one at IMPs and consider a higher-scoring one at matchpoints.

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At matchpoints, **think seriously about doubling them if you think they are a favorite to go down, particularly when vulnerable.** You get a top if you are right and a bottom if you are wrong, so the odds are even.

At IMPs the odds are different. If they are in 3♠ and you double and beat them 1 trick, you gain 100 pts (3 IMPs) if you are right, but if you are wrong they get the game bonus and 730 instead of 140 for a 590 swing (11 IMPs). The odds are 11 to 3, which is very poor. Therefore, **do not double the opponents into game** unless you are **sure** of setting them and predict at least a 2-trick set.

In all forms of bridge, it's important to compete for partscores. If we let them make 110 and we can make 110, that's bad (6 IMPs, or several matchpoints). Even losing 50 or 100 instead of 110 is a big win at matchpoints; it's not so important at IMPs. So at IMPs you don't tend to compete quite as aggressively.

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Partscores

Typical matchpoint partscore deal:

Board 12
 West Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ K J 6 3 2
 ♥ A Q
 ♦ 9 5 4 3
 ♣ 10 7

♠ Q 4
 ♥ 10 8 3
 ♦ K J 8 6
 ♣ A J 5 4

♠ A 10 9 8
 ♥ J 7
 ♦ A Q 10
 ♣ 9 8 6 2

♠ 7 5
 ♥ K 9 6 5 4 2
 ♦ 7 2
 ♣ K Q 3

NS 2♥; EW 3♦; EW 2♣; EW 1♠; Par -110

Contract	Made	Scores		Matchpoints	
		N-S	E-W	N-S	E-W
3♥S	3	140		11.00	1.00
2♥S	3	140		11.00	1.00
3♥S	3	140		11.00	1.00
3♣E	-1	50		8.00	4.00
3♣E	-1	50		8.00	4.00
3♣E	-1	50		8.00	4.00
Pass		Pass		6.00	6.00
3♥S	-1	100		4.50	7.50
2♠N	-1	100		4.50	7.50
2♣E	3	110		3.00	9.00
1NTW	3	150		1.50	10.50
1NTW	3	150		1.50	10.50
2♥xS	-1	200		0.00	12.00

Scores are usually between +150 and -150. -200 is the "kiss of death."

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Examples

♠ 63
 ♥ 92
 ♦ AKQ632
 ♣ J54

♠ AK4
 ♥ AK53
 ♦ 54
 ♣ Q1092

Contract:
 3NT

Lead:
 ♠ 2

South opened 1NT and North responded 3NT; better than bidding diamonds in any form of scoring. You have 7 top tricks and need at least 2 more for the contract. How should you play the diamonds?

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Diamonds are likely to split 3-2 (68%). If you play AK and they don't split, you will be defeated. At IMPs, you should *duck* the first round (a *safety play*) so you still have an entry in case diamonds are 4-1. In matchpoints, you are a favorite to make 10 tricks, and it's a normal contract, so go for it!

♠AK	Contract:
♥765	3NT
♦KJ103	
♣AQ6	Lead:
	♠2
♠532	
♥AKQ	
♦Q842	
♣J103	

You have 6 top tricks and can set up 3 more in ♦. RHO wins ♦A and returns ♠3. Should you finesse in clubs for overtricks?

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At matchpoints, it's definitely worth a try; even if the finesse loses you probably won't lose more than 2 spades. At IMPs, play safe to guarantee the contract.

♠32	Contract:
♥872	3NT
♦KQJ109	
♣AQ5	Lead:
	♠K
♠A4	
♥AQ109	
♦654	
♣KJ43	

You have 6 top tricks and need 3 more for your contract. What suit should you attack for extra tricks?

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The best source of tricks is diamonds, but when the opponents take their ace, they will take *at least* 4 spades to set you.

At IMPs, try to make the contract: play RHO to have ♥KJx and finesse twice. At matchpoints, just play diamonds, since it's a normal contract. Don't risk going down extra tricks when your chances of making the contract are so small (less than 25%).

♠A632	Contract:
♥92	3NT
♦AJ109	
♣KQ5	Lead: ♥7
♠KQ43	
♥A653	
♦Q54	
♣A6	

Should you hold up in hearts? If so, how many rounds?

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IMP: You have 8 top tricks, or 9 if the spades split 3-2. If they don't, you can take the diamond finesse for your contract. You can improve your chances by *ducking* the first 2 rounds of hearts: if the ♦ finesse loses, RHO may be out of hearts so you will lose at most 4 tricks.

Matchpoints: the thing to remember is that *most other pairs will be playing in spades*. To beat them, you must get the same number of tricks (and get the extra 10 points). They will lose at most 1 heart, so if you hold up twice in hearts you can't win. The best best is to hold up *once* and hope the diamond finesse wins, so you will take the same tricks (11 if the spades don't split).

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EXAMPLE HANDS

1. (IMPs) Dealer: S

	♠AK	
	♥765	
	♦A9832	
	♣Q65	
♠QJ1096		♠874
♥J4		♥10983
♦76		♦KQ5
♣8742		♣J109
	♠532	
	♥AKQ2	
	♦J104	
	♣AK3	

South plays 3NT; LHO leads the ♠Q. You have 9 top tricks, and 3 more if you can avoid 2 diamond losers. You lead to your ♥A and run the ♦J, which loses to the K. A spade comes back, knocking out your last stopper.

You lead ♥K to hand and lead a diamond; LHO plays a small card. Should you finesse, hoping the Q is on your left? There's a very good chance it will win. At matchpoints, finesse! You figure to gain more often than you lose.

At IMPS, don't finesse! If RHO wins you could go down, losing 2 diamonds and 3 or more spades. You gain 3 IMPs if it works (3 overtricks), but you lose 10 IMPs (NV) or 12 IMPs (V) if you go down. It's not worth it.

1. (Matchpoints) Dealer: S

	♠AK	
	♥765	
	♦A9832	
	♣Q65	
♠QJ1096		♠874
♥J4		♥10983
♦Q76		♦K5
♣874		♣J1092
	♠532	
	♥AKQ2	
	♦J104	
	♣AK3	

2. (IMPs) Dealer: S

♠8652
♥975
♦AK2
♣QJ5

♠K
♥KQJ10
♦9876
♣10864

♠J94
♥864
♦QJ103
♣932

♠AQ1073
♥A32
♦54
♣AK7

You are in 4♠; LHO needs the ♥K. You have two heart losers and could possibly lose two trump tricks but can only afford to lose 1. If you finesse the ♠Q and it loses, you won't know whether to finesse the ♠10 next, or play for the J to drop. If you guess wrong you will go down.

At IMPs, take a *safety play*: play the ♠A first, then go to dummy with a diamond and lead toward your hand. Then cover whatever RHO plays, so you won't lose more than 1 trick unless ♠KJx is on your left, in which case you could never make the contract.

At matchpoints, it is worth going to dummy and finessing the ♠Q first. If it wins you have a good chance to make 5. If it loses to the K, play the A next and hope the J drops.

2. (Matchpoints) Dealer: S

♠8652

♥975

♦AK2

♣QJ5

♠J

♥KQJ10

♦987

♣10864

♠K94

♥864

♦QJ1063

♣932

♠AQ1073

♥A32

♦54

♣AK7