

SCORING AND TACTICS: IMPS versus MATCHPOINTS by Maritha

The type of scoring used affects a pair's or a team's tactics and strategy. For example, at matchpoints, making one more overtrick than everybody else on a board gives a top score, whereas it will be zero or 1 IMP difference. At matchpoints, you get **the exact same top score** for bidding and making a slam that no one else bid as for making one measly overtrick that no one else made. At IMP scoring, the difference comes down to 1 IMP (30 points) in the case of the overtrick, but **11 or 13 IMPs** (500 or 750 points) in the case of the slam. In general, matchpoint scoring requires more risk-taking in Declarer play, while IMP scoring requires more caution. Bidding vulnerable games (an 11-IMP swing) tends to be very aggressive at IMPS. Likewise for small slams. Defensive play is also very aggressive at IMPS. Try anything that gives even a slight chance to set the contract. At matchpoints, defense is more conservative. Try to set the contract, but also strive not to “give away” an overtrick through a desperation play. The main features of the tactics are:

Matchpoints

- Overtricks are important.
- Safety plays are often neglected in the hunt for overtricks.
- Seek the contract that most pairs will play, but be aggressive in bidding games (50%--go for it).
- Sacrifices are more frequent; e.g. going down 500 points doubled is worthy against opponents scoring 620 points for a game.
- Doubles are more frequent, as they increase the score for the penalty.

IMPs

- **Overtricks are not important**, as it's not worth the risk of losing e.g. game bonus (300-500 points = 8-11 IMPs) for potential 1-IMP gain for an overtrick
- **Safety plays are very important**, for the same reason
- Thin games and slams are often bid **if you are vulnerable**. Bidding a game with 36% (some say 40%) probability of success and a small slam with 50% probability—when vulnerable—constitutes an equal deal, and anything over that increases the possibility of positive IMP score in the long run.
- Suggested percentage for non-vulnerable games is 45% chance of making.
- Don't bid 7 unless you are strongly odds-on to make it. (Other table may only be in 6!)
- Bid the **safest** game. That will sometimes be 5C rather than 3NT.
- Also look for the **safest part-score**. Give up no-trump-it is.
- **Do not stretch to bid game when non-vulnerable**. Bid only games you think are likely to make.
- Be **sensible with overcalls, competition, and balancing when vulnerable**. It's OK to let the opponents play some low level contracts. Don't go to three level unless you have 9 trumps. Having a plus score (you making part-score OR setting opponents) is more important than size of plus score.
- **Sacrifices are less frequent**, as they may be risky. Even white versus red, do not sacrifice unless you are sure you won't go down more than two tricks. If unsure, let the opponents play and try to set them.
- **Doubles are less frequent**, as they may be risky. Often, when an opponents' contract is doubled, it turns Declarer's attention to the bad lie of cards, and may help Declarer find a successful line of play that s/he wouldn't take otherwise. Doubling an opponent below the game level at IMP's is very rare—must be sure you're setting contract at least 2 tricks.
- At IMPS, people often “**take out insurance**” and “bid one more” on highly distributional hands. Some hands involve a “double-game swing” where one side can make 4 hearts and the other side 4 spades. If you think the opponents might be making their contract and you expect to go down only one trick (or two tricks maximum), it is often advisable to bid one level higher.
- **Standard opening leads** are advisable. Try to lead what you think will be led at the other table. In the **middle of the hand**, be willing to **be aggressive and take chances** (when you have more information). If there is a possible layout that will result in you setting the contract, play for that layout even if it means giving the opponents an overtrick if it doesn't work out.