

## IMP Strategy

At a standard 6 table club duplicate with Match Point ("MP") scoring, where five pairs bid and make 6S, and one NS pair bids and makes 6NT, the bid of 6NT gets a top, 5 MPs, and every one else gets 2 MPs. 6S scores 1430 vulnerable, and 6NT scores 1440. Even though the difference between first and the rest of the field is only 10 points, Match Points are awarded based on relative position, not the magnitude of the scoring space between positions.

In a Swiss Team match, if one NS bids and makes 6S and the other team's NS bids and makes 6NT, the difference of 10 points doesn't result in any IMPs. A 10 point difference is a tie.

Now suppose at the club duplicate everyone bids 4S and makes 6, for a score of 680, except one adventuresome pair who bids 6S and makes 6S, for a score of 1430. Now a score of 750 points separates first from the rest of the field, but the board is scored exactly the same way as the first example. The NS that bid the slam gets 5MPs and the others all get 5MPs.

But in a Swiss Team match, where one NS scores 680 and the other NS scores 1430, the spread is 750, which translates to 13 IMPs. The magnitude of the spread is everything in IMPs.

### First Lesson: Reach for Vulnerable Games

Suppose that your NS is adventurous and bids every vulnerable game that needs one finesse to succeed, and your opponent's NS only bids vulnerable games that are cold. The chance of making a finesse is 50%. Therefore, your NS will make 50% of these games and go down 50% of the time. Your opponent's NS will always stop a 3S. Therefore, they will always score a partial score, but will miss 50% of these games. What does this mean in IMPs?

For the boards where your NS goes down, you lose 100 points at one table and lose 140 points at the other table. The spread is  $(-100) + (-140)$  or  $(-240)$  points, or  $(-6)$  IMPs.

But on the boards where the finesse succeeds, your NS scores 620 points and you only lose 170 points at the other table. The spread is  $620 - 170$  or  $(+) 450$  point, which converts to  $(+) 10$  IMPs. If you regularly bid games that are a finesse away, and your opponents don't, you will on the average pick up 4 IMPs for every two-game cycle.

Is it the same for non-vulnerable games? No. When your NS goes down the spread is  $(-50) + (-140)$  or  $(-) 190$  points, or  $(-) 5$  IMPs. When your NS makes the game, the spread is  $420 - 170$  or  $(+) 250$  points, or  $(+) 6$  IMPs. There is only a 1 IMP advantage for adventuresome bidding for non-vulnerable games.

Repeat First Lesson: Reach for Vulnerable games.

Second Lesson: Take chances on defense to defeat the contract, especially game contracts.

This explanation is more difficult to follow, so please bear with me.

Suppose your opponent's EW is in 3NT vulnerable. Suppose your NS has a defense strategy to set the contract will succeed only 30% of the time. And when it fails, which is 70% of the time, Declarer gets an overtrick which Declarer would not get if you played it safe. You would never try this strategy at the club duplicate. The likely overtrick will give you a bottom nearly 70% of the time. But what about IMPs?

If you use the strategy, and you opponents don't, over a period of ten games where this situation arises, in 7 games you will give up an overtrick and loses 20 or 30 points, which only 1 IMP per board. You will lose 7 IMPS over the 10 board cycle.

But in the 3 games where it works, and wasn't used by your opponents at the other table, you get a +100 for setting the contract. And when your EW at the other table makes the game (because your opponents didn't use this risky strategy) your team gets another (+) 600, for a total on the board of  $600 + 100 = + 700$  or 12 IMPs.

Over a ten board cycle, you will lose a total of 7 IMPs ( $7 \times 1$ ) and gain a total of 36 IMPs ( $12 \times 3$ ), for plus 29 IMPs.

When Declarer is not vulnerable, the risk is still worth taking. The overtrick is still worth only 1 IMP per board. And the spread on the three boards where you set the contract is  $50 + 400$ , or 450, or 10 IMPs. Over a ten board cycle, you will lose 7 IMPs ( $7 \times 1$ ) and gain 30 IMPs ( $3 \times 10$ ), for a plus 23.

You should definitely take chances on defense when defending game contracts.

Third Lesson: Don't Sweat Partial Scores

The following is a set of possible scores for NS where the most that NS can make is 2S or 2NT, and EW can make 1D, and no one is vulnerable: 80, 90, 100, 110 1nd 120. Can you figure out what contracts these scores represent?

1S makes 1 = 80; 1NT makes 1 = 90; 3DS (by EW) down 2 = 100; 1S makes 2 = 11;

1NT makes 2 + 120

In a five-table club game, the NS that scored 80 gets a bottom, 0 MPs. The NS that scored 120 gets a top, 4 MPs, etc.

But at IMP scoring, the total spread of 40 points (between 80 and 120) is worth only 1 IMP. And the adjacent spreads of 10 points each aren't worth any IMPs.

The score of 100 represents EW saving at 3D, after NS bid 2 or 2NT, and going off two. At the club duplicate (Match Points), this save is a good move. NS could make 2S for 110 points or 120 for 2NT. Because of the save, NS only go 100 points. This

save would be a top if all of the other EWs let NS play 2S or 2NT. But at IMPs, the spread of 10 points is not rewarded, and the save is not worth the effort.

If you are sitting EW and your opponent's NS is destined to make 2S, relax. Your NS at the other table will probably do the same, and the board will be a tie.

Ties are OK. If every board in a match is tied, both teams get 10 Victory Points. Getting an average of 10 VP's per match is like scoring 50% at the club.