



## Bridge Team Win-Loss (IMP) Scoring and Victory Point Scoring and How They Influence Strategy & Tactics by Bob Gruber

In a Bridge Team Game, whether you're playing Win-Loss (using International Match Points, IMPs) or Victory Point (VP) scoring, your strategy is different than in Duplicate pairs scoring.

In Duplicate pairs, where Match Point scoring is in effect, you may go all out for overtricks, even at the risk of going down. On the defensive side, you may double more often because +200 is normally a very good Match Point score. And everyone seems to savor +800 and +1100. You risk going down or having the opponents make a doubled contract because your result on each board is typically only 1/26<sup>th</sup> of your total score for the session.

In a Team Game, where a match is usually seven (7) boards, a disastrous result on a single board may cost your team the whole match. Therefore, in a Team Game, you don't risk the contract to make overtricks, nor do you make close doubles, doubles of contracts the opponents may make with a little luck in the distribution or a slight slip in the defense.

### International Match Points (IMPs)

In team game scoring, you convert the difference between the results the two partnerships achieved on a board to International Match Points (IMPs), as shown in Table 1. You only win IMPs if you have a positive difference of 20 points or more. If you lose by 20 or more points, you lose the appropriate number of IMPs. A dead tie or a difference of only 10 is called a "push" and neither team earns any IMPs. All boards played are converted to IMPs and totaled to arrive at a single IMP score for the match (which may be + or may be -).

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

Table 1. International Matchpoint (IMP) Scale

Although we talk about the difference between the results, we actually add them together to come up with a net plus or net minus on the board. For instance, on Board 1 we're +140, but at the other table our teammates are -170. We add them together to come up with a net minus of 30. When we look up that Diff(ERENCE) in the IMP chart/scale, we see that we lose 1 IMP on that



board. Now on Board 2 we hold the opponents to 9 tricks in 3NT for -600, but our teammates are making +690 in 3NT. When we add these together, we're +90 on the board. The IMP scale tells us we win 3 IMPs on Board 2. At this point, we're ahead by 2 IMPs in the match, but we still have 4 or 5 more boards to score before we can determine the winner.

Returning to the IMP scale, note, as the differences get bigger, wider and wider ranges earn the same IMP score, thus reducing the influence of a single extreme board. IMP scoring reduces the effect of a huge difference to a maximum of 24 IMPs. It also makes the numbers in a match a little more manageable (and maybe a little less embarrassing for a really bad match).

### Win-Loss Scoring

In Win-Loss scoring, you win or lose the match based upon the total IMP score for all boards played. For purposes of placing in the event, a 0 IMP margin gives each side a  $\frac{1}{2}$  win. A 1 or 2 IMP margin results in a division of  $\frac{3}{4}$  win and  $\frac{1}{4}$  win. A difference of 3 IMPs or more is a full/clear win.

(A very small number of Masterpoints are at stake for each match. Masterpoints for a match that is a dead tie are split 50-50. All the masterpoints for the match go to the team that wins by 1 IMP or more.)

In this form of scoring a win is a win. It doesn't matter whether you win by 3 IMPs or 130 IMPs or any number in between, you get credit for one win and one win only. Similarly, a loss is a loss. It doesn't matter how big the margin, it's only one loss.

Given the all or nothing nature of Win-Loss scoring, your strategy at the end of a match may change drastically. If you're familiar with your teammates' play and good enough to accurately gauge your team's standing in the match, and that standing is way behind, then you may suddenly throw caution to the wind and become a bidding demon in an attempt to pull out the match. This may result in a 50 IMP loss instead of a 5 IMP loss, but hey, a loss is a loss.

On the other hand, if the conditions to accurately gauge your position in the match aren't present, or you've decided you're the ones way ahead, stick with your normal, steady-as-she goes game.

### Victory Point Scoring

Victory Point (VP) scoring may or may not have been devised to eliminate or at least reduce the end-of-match kamikaze behavior of win-loss scoring, but that's what it does. VP scoring essentially turns a team game from a series of individual matches into a single, long match. This transformation happens because the Victory Points accumulate during the course of all the matches and the winners are those with the most Victory Points, not those with the most wins. Wins are still satisfying, but the unit of importance is the number of Victory Points, not the number of wins. Thus, it's not necessary to go all out to win a particular match. In fact, that strategy may prove to be counterproductive in VP scoring.

Victory Points are derived from IMPs based on either a 20-point scale or 30-point scale. The 20-point scale is the one most widely used and is shown in Table 2.



20-Pt. Victory Point (VP) Scale			
IMPs	VPs	IMPs	VPs
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		

Table 2. 20-Point Victory Scale

The conversion to Victory Points is done for the net IMP score for the match. Unlike IMPs, Victory Points do not go negative. The 2 teams split the available VPs. As shown, a dead tie in IMPs (a zero IMP difference) gives each team 10 VPs. If a team wins by 1 or 2 IMPs, that team gets 11 VPs and the losing team gets 9. A win by 28 IMPs or more has all 20 VPs going to the victors, and is known as a “blitz.”

Even if you go undefeated, eking out victories in all your matches, you may not be the winner in Victory Point scoring. A team that wins several matches big and then loses to you in a squeaker, will best you in Victory Point scoring.

Now we’re beginning to see a bit of a strategy conflict in Victory Point scoring—we don’t want to go all out to pull out a victory in a single match, thereby risking a bigger Victory Point loss, but on the other hand, we want to win big if possible. To accommodate both perspectives, you simply need to keep your killer instinct intact. Each board is important, even if you’re way ahead in a particular match. Remember, it’s Victory Points, not wins, that count. So, don’t let up, don’t lose your concentration, don’t feel sorry for your opponents even if they’re obviously suffering. Work to safely maximize your result on every board.

### General Team Game Tactics

- Stretch to bid Vulnerable games.
- Stretch to Invite game/small slam, but not to Accept the invitation.
- Bid the safest slam or game or part score if game is not possible. Don’t worry if it’s a minor, a major or no trump.
  - With a long suit and a likely wide-open suit, don’t sit for 1NT; pull to 2 of your long suit.
- Don’t double a low-level contract into game, unless you’re 120% sure you’re going to beat it even if the opponents have highly distributional hands. (You cannot be doubled into slam; you must bid to the slam level to earn the slam bonus.)
- Because the opponents are reluctant to double low-level contracts, be aggressive (but not foolish) in competing for part scores.



- Don't risk the contract to make overtricks, which are not usually significant.
- Defend to set their contract. Here too, overtricks are usually not significant.
- Playing Victory Points, don't go all out to win a particular match, with the possible exception of the last one.
- Playing Victory Points, every board counts. Don't let up; don't lose your concentration; don't feel sorry for your opponents. Work to safely maximize your result on every board.
- Try to absorb these tips, but don't become preoccupied by them; better to play your normal game than be confused trying to remember one of these tips