



Swiss Teams for Newcomers

by Bob Gruber

If you're new to Swiss Teams, a few things may seem a bit baffling. Let's see if we can clear them up. In reading this treatise, bear in mind the emphasis is on 2-session events held at tournaments at the Sectional level and higher, or at unit games. If you're in a 1-session event at a club or tournament, not everything will apply, the meal break for instance.

The Team Entry Form

When you buy your Swiss Teams entry, you get a form to fill in the names and ACBL numbers of all the team members. Your team plays at two tables simultaneously, so that's a minimum of four (4) players. ACBL allows one substitute pair, or two individuals, so that's a maximum of six (6) players. (To share in any overall points won by the team, each player must play at least 40% the boards and participate in at least 50% of the matches.) Commonly, teams have four players only.

You also need to indicate the Masterpoint holdings of the team—either individually, or the total of the 4 highest ranking members, or maybe just the number of the highest ranking member. Ask the director when you buy in.

This team entry form will be picked up from your table sometime during the 1st match/round. Somewhere on this form will be your team number. That will be your number for the entire event. Since the palest ink is more enduring than the strongest memory, you should write this number down. The private score sheet designed for team games has a slot in the upper right just for this number. If you have one of the two-sided forms, write your team number on both sides.

Number of Matches and Number of Boards per Match

The typical Swiss Teams event is an all-day, two-session event consisting of seven or eight matches of eight or seven boards per match. And sometimes only six boards per match. A match is the basic unit of play, pitting 2 teams against one another head-to-head when possible, but sometimes a 3-team round robin is necessary.

Meal Break

This event is usually split in the middle to allow either a lunch break or a dinner break depending upon the starting time. An hour or 1½ hours is not unusual for the break. Sometimes the event is called a “play through,” where you typically pay for food as part of your entry fee and have a very short break to eat. Sometimes even a non play-through break is very short and you either need to buy food at the facility, have brought your own, or go on a short-duration diet.



Best strategy is to neither over eat and become too sleepy to concentrate, nor to under eat and become too distracted by hunger pangs.

Determining the Match Ups

In a Swiss team game, teams are randomly matched the first round (or maybe two) and thereafter assigned to pit teams of similar records/scores against one another. Unlike a typical pairs game, where the N-S's are stationary and only the E-W's move, all pairs move in a team game except for those with special needs—either mobility or vision—who request a stationary table.

Normally, one partnership plays in Section A, where the table markers are white, and the other partnership plays at the same table number in Section B, where the table markers are yellow.

The Team Assignment Board

To convey who plays where, a Team Assignment Board is used. This board has pockets labeled with all the possible team numbers, starting with Team #1. The first thing to do is to locate your team number on the board. You'll focus on that pocket for the entire event.

When a team's assignment becomes available, a director puts a card with a color-coded table number into that team's pocket. (The format is: Section#, e.g. B5.) That table is the team's "home" table, where its N-S will play that round. That table may be in Section A or Section B. The E-W pair will go to the corresponding table in the "complementary" section.

When your team is being assigned, the opposing team is also assigned. The pocket for their team number will receive the same table number in the "complementary" section, and in the appropriate color for that section. That is their "home" table. Their N-S will play at that table and their E-W will move to your home table as your opponents for that round.

This procedure is repeated for each round of the event.

Summary:

- Find your team number on the assignment board
- The color-coded table number (Section#, e.g. A3) in your team's pocket is your "home" table for that round
- Your N-S pair plays at your home table
- Your E-W pair plays at the same table # in the "complementary" section. Complementary sections are: A & B, C & D, E & F, etc.
- When all boards have been played, E-W return to their home table to compare results with their partners



Winning Masterpoints

In Swiss Teams, you score a small fraction of a Masterpoint for each match you win. Masterpoints for a match are split 50-50 for a dead tie. Otherwise, no matter how small the margin, all the Masterpoints for a match go to the team that wins. If you place in the overall rankings for the event, you may win several points. The overall awards are based on a number of factors, including the number of teams entered and any restrictions on those entries.

General Team Strategy Tips

- Stretch to bid Vulnerable games.
- Stretch to Invite game/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.
- 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.
- When defending, don't worry about overtricks; go all out to defeat the contract.
- Try to absorb these tips, but don't become preoccupied by them; better to play your normal game than introduce confusion trying to remember one of these tips

Starting a Match

We've learned that at the start of a match the E-W pair moves to enemy territory, specifically the opponents' home table. If all the boards for the match are at E-W's home table, they shouldn't go empty handed. Like good house guests, they should take something. In this case, that something would be about half the boards for the match. If the boards are already split between the two tables, which should be the case for all matches after the first one, no transfer of boards is needed.

Transferring Boards during the Match

At each table, North is responsible for controlling the boards. That means removing the board just played after everyone has had a chance to score it, and making sure the next board in sequence is in position to be played next. Everyone should check that the North on the board is aligned with the table indicator's North. When all the boards initially at the table have been played, North should call "Caddy" and raise a hand as a visual clue to further assist the Caddy in finding the table. A Caddy is someone who is responsible for moving the boards as needed.



If the other table finishes its half of the boards first, then when the Caddy arrives with those boards, North gathers up the boards already played and exchanges those with the Caddy.

Two points of etiquette for North. 1) If you know both tables will have had the full complement of boards after the current exchange, it's polite to inform the Caddy that, "This is the last transfer." 2) If the other table is waiting for boards from you, when you finish with those 1 or 2 boards, call the Caddy. Don't make the other table call for boards one after another.

Swiss Teams Scoring

Swiss Teams events may be scored in a variety of ways. Three possibilities quickly come to mind: 1) Win-Loss based on raw score, 2) Win-Loss based on International Match Points (IMPs), and 3) Victory Points (VPs).

Raw Score

The simplest type of scoring is to compare raw scores and declare a winner of each match on that basis. Then at the end of the event, teams would be ranked based on the number of wins. This type of Win-Loss scoring may hinge on a single board where the raw scores are large, such as occurs with a slam that one team makes and the other doesn't. Such a board could account for 1000 or 2000 points (or more) and dwarf the results of all the other boards together. Probably for this reason, ACBL avoids Win-Loss based on raw score.

IMPs

International Match Points (IMPs) were most likely invented to reduce the influence of a single board. Raw score differences are converted to IMPs using a table called the IMP scale.

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

- All boards played in the match are converted to IMPs
 - 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 a “push” and neither team earns any IMPs
- All IMPs are totaled to arrive at a single IMP score for the match

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).

In Win-Loss based on IMPs, you win or lose the match based upon the total IMP score for all boards played in that match. For purposes of placing in the event (not winning Masterpoints), a 0 IMP margin gives each side a $\frac{1}{2}$ win. A 1 or 2 IMP margin results in a division of $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$. A difference of 3 IMPs or more is a full/clear win.

Win-Loss Strategy

In this form of scoring a win is a win, and the general team strategy already listed still applies. It doesn't matter whether you win by 3 IMPs or 130 IMPs or any number in between, you get credit for one (1) win and one (1) win only. Similarly, a loss is a loss. It doesn't matter how big the margin, it's only one (1) loss.

Given the all or nothing nature of Win-Loss, 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 ahead, stick with your normal, steady-as-she goes game.

Victory Points

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, it may be detrimental to your end-of-day standing.

Victory Points are derived from IMPs based on either a 20-point scale or 30-point scale. The 20-point scale is the 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		

- Victory Points (VPs) are calculated on the total IMP score for the match
- The 2 teams split the available Victory Points (no negative VPs)
 - A dead tie in IMPs gives each team 10 VPs (20-point scale)
 - A team that wins by 1 or 2 IMPs gets 11 VPs; the losing team gets 9
 - A win by 5-7 IMPs results in a 13 / 7 split
 - A win by 28 IMPs or more, called a “blitz,” has all 20 VPs going to the victors
- Victory Points are cumulative for all the matches

Table 2. 20-Point Victory Point Scale

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.

Victory Point (VP) Strategy

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.

- Playing Victory Points, don’t go all out to win a particular match, with the possible exception of the last one.
- In Victory Points, every board counts. Don’t let up, don’t lose your concentration, don’t feel sorry for your opponents. Work to maximize your result on every board.

Remember, it’s Victory Points, not wins, that count.

Comparing Results to Determine the Winner of the Match

In a team game, you actually need to perform two (2) separate comparisons. First, when you finish playing all the boards at your table, you need to compare scores with your opponents and agree on the results on each board to preclude disputes later and speed up submitting the results of the match. The second comparison is with your partners. You compare the two partnerships’ results at each table on a board-by-board basis. Whether you’re playing IMPs or Victory Points, all you need to do is calculate the net IMP difference. (The computer will calculate the Victory Points if they are being used.) Etiquette has the winning team filling out a “match results” slip/card, getting the losing team’s initials, and then submitting the results at the directors’ table.



The Leader Board

The Leader Board is usually located near the Team Assignment board. Unlike a golf leader board where the leader is at the top and the others are in descending order, this board is organized by team number. For the entire board you need to scan the column with current wins or current Victory Points and determine for yourself who ranks where. The board is updated after each round so that each team can determine its current standing in the event and can adjust its strategy appropriately if needed.

When all rounds are completed and all results turned in, the Leader Board becomes the final standings board, annotated to show which teams placed in the event and where they placed. A separate Awards Sheet may be posted showing the masterpoints each place earned.

Masterpoint Awards for the Event

If your team makes it to the overall rankings, you win the greater of the sum of all match awards (you personally participated in) or the overall award, but not both. For the overall awards, each eligible player personally wins the number of points listed on the Awards Sheet based upon percentage of participation. To be eligible, you must play at least 40% of the boards and participate in at least 50% of the matches.