

# Swiss Pairs: Scoring and Tactics

by Josh Rosenbluth and Bob Gruber

Our club games in the Ventura Unit are all pair events that use the matchpoint scoring system. If you play North-South, you get one matchpoint for each other North-South pair that has a lower score than you had on a board, and one-half of a matchpoint for each other North-South pair that has the same score.

There is another popular method for scoring duplicate bridge that is typically used in team games called the International Matchpoint/Victory Point (IMP/VP) system. A team consists of four players that play a series of matches against other teams. A match consists of many boards where one pair on a team plays North-South and the other pair plays the same hands as East-West.

Each board is scored based on the sum of your team's North-South and East-West scores. For example, if North-South scores +620 (4 spades by N/S making 4) and East-West scores -170 (3 spades by N/S making 4), then your team gets  $620 + -170 = +450$ . The +450 score is converted on the IMP scale to +10 (at the other table, your opponents will be scoring -10 IMPs). The IMP scores for all the boards in a match are added together for your total net IMP score in the match. The total net IMP score is then converted to Victory Points (VPs), a number between 0 and 20. A VP score from 0 to 9 means your total IMP score was less than zero (you lost the match). A VP score from 11 to 20 means your total IMP score was greater than zero (you won the match). A VP score of 10 means your total IMP score was exactly zero (the match was a tie).

A Swiss Pairs event uses the same IMP/VP scoring system as a team event, **but does not have any teams. You show up and play as pairs.** As with a team event, you play a series of matches. But, those matches are against other pairs (**there are no teams**). How can that be?

In Swiss Pairs for each match, you have one opponent pair, the pair you are playing. Your "teammates" are every other pair that is playing in the opposite direction. From the above example if you are playing North-South and score +620 on a board, your "teammates" score is the average score of all the other East-West pairs. If half of them score -620 and the other half score -170, the East-West average is -395, and you score  $620 + -395 = +225$ , or +6 IMPs on that board. Your victory points in the match are again based on the sum of your IMP scores across all the boards in a match.

In Swiss Pairs, the same boards are being played by everyone in the room at the same time. **So, it is critical that you don't talk about the hands.**

The same tactics that work in team games work in Swiss Pairs. The key elements that are different from matchpoint pairs are:

- Stretch to bid Vulnerable games
- Do not worry about overtricks
  - Make your contract even if you give up overtricks to insure the contract
  - Set them even if you risk giving up overtricks if you fail
- Don't insist on playing in NT as much; the extra points don't count for much
- Don't double a low-level contract into game unless you are extra-extra certain to set it
- Don't insist on bidding your suit on the 5 level after your opponents have clearly sacrificed at the 5 level.