

IMPs Vs. Matchpoints

Rubber bridge and team games (IMPs) are “real” bridge. Matchpointed pair games are somewhat artificial. “Chicago” is a hybrid of the two. Essentially, Chicago is rubber bridge scored with duplicate values. Your approach, playing IMPs, rubber bridge or Chicago should be more relaxed than at matchpoints, where every trick is important. Do what you’re supposed to do, avoid disasters and don’t make crazy bids or plays. At IMPs and rubber bridge small gains and losses on each deal mean very little, large ones mean a lot.

To illustrate the difference in scoring, suppose you played three boards. The first two boards you were plus 50 points; the last you lost 800. At matchpoints that would be a good result – you won two boards and lost one, for a 67% game (which will win almost any pair game). These same three boards with IMP scoring would not be good. Your net result would be -700 points (800 - 100).

	IMPs	Matchpoints
Main Objective	<i>Amount</i> of gain or loss is most important. Your sole objective is to beat the pair sitting at your table. You should strive for a plus score on every board. That means making your contract or defeating the opponents contract. Overtricks and extra undertricks are negligible.	<i>Frequency</i> of gain or loss is most important. Strive to beat the other pairs holding your cards at the other tables. It matters little if your opponents make their contract or not. What matters most is they take fewer tricks than “the field.” When declaring, you want to take more tricks than the other people holding your cards. Overtricks and extra undertricks (when defending) are paramount.
Bidding Game	Bid games very aggressively, especially when vulnerable. Borderline decisions should <i>always</i> be resolved by bidding the game.	Bid only games you are a favorite to make.
Part Score Bidding	Don’t compete nearly as aggressively as at matchpoints. Avoid going down a big number to contest a part score by the opponents.	Compete <i>very aggressively</i> in part score auctions. Seldom sell out below the three-level.
Notrump vs. Minor Suits	There is no reason to prefer notrump to minor suits. Bid the <i>safest</i> part score, game or slam. There is little difference between 5♣, 5♦ and 3NT.	Generally prefer to play part scores and slams at notrump – they usually score more. <i>Greatly</i> prefer 3NT to 5♣ or 5♦.
Sacrifice Bidding	Don’t.	Don’t be afraid to.
Bidding at the Five Level	When both sides are bidding and it is not clear who can make what, bid one more.	The five-level belongs to the opponents.
Opening Leads	Make aggressive opening leads. Try to set up a trick with your lead. Remember, you are trying to defeat the contract and care little about giving up an overtrick.	Aggressive leads are not always best. Avoid risky leads. Keep in mind, your aim is not necessarily to defeat the contract. It is to give up fewer tricks to declarer than the other people defending the hand.
Declaring	Make your contract! Do not worry about overtricks. Guard against bad breaks. Safety plays are in order. Play every hand as if you were doubled!	Overtricks are important. Assume others are in the same contract and endeavor to beat their scores.
Doubles	Double only when you <i>know</i> they are going down or, even better, when the double will increase the odds of beating the contract (lead directing doubles). Almost never double part scores. One of the worst results you can obtain is to double the opponents “into game.”	Double the opponents frequently. Feel free to double part scores when they outbid you. If you can make a part score of 110, beating the opponents 50 or 100 will not be a good score anyway. Try for a penalty of 200 or more. If they make an occasional doubled contract, it is not the end of the world.

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The Mathematical Advantage of Aggressive Bidding

No matter what bidding system you use, or how good you are, there arise some hands that offer a 50/50 chance of making game. Rather than agonize over each one as it occurs (and risk guessing wrong more often than not) it would seem to be a distinct advantage to take a consistent stand on whether or not to bid *all* close games. The question of which course to take can be answered by analyzing the mathematics of scoring.

For example, assume two hands where the odds of making game are exactly 50%. To simplify the discussion, let us further assume that the choice lies between passing three spades and bidding on to four (game). The first hand makes four; the second makes three (or goes down one, if you bid four). Using duplicate values for part score (50 points), non-vulnerable game (300) and vulnerable game (500), we can easily construct a table for the relative value of bidding game vs. part score at various vulnerability conditions.

Stopping In Part Score (Any Vulnerability)

Bid	Made	Score
3	4	170
3	3	<u>140</u>
		310

Bidding Game

Bid	Made	Not Vulnerable	Vulnerable
		Score	
4	4	420	620
4	Down 1	<u>-50</u>	<u>-100</u>
		370	520

At any vulnerability, if you stop in part score on both hands, the score for the two hands totals 310 points (140 + 170). If we compare this total to the score you would obtain by bidding game on both hands, we can derive odds for bidding game:

Not Vulnerable - Bidding game on both hands results in a net score of 370 points (420-50), 60 points more than the part scores. Thus, the odds in favor of bidding game are 370 to 310, or a little over 54%.

Vulnerable - When vulnerable, the odds are even better for the aggressive pair. Now, bidding game both times nets 520 points (620-100) and yields a net gain of 210 points! The odds for bidding the game increase to 520 to 310, or almost 63%!

Of course, this table does not take into account unfavorable factors which may cause the contract to be set more than one trick or doubled which change the odds somewhat, but it is clear that, mathematically at least, it pays to bid aggressively.

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How Should These Odds Affect Your Bidding?

IMPs, “Chicago” or Rubber Bridge: it is clear - *be aggressive!* The odds are in your favor to bid on to game. In fact, it is mathematically sound to bid 40% games when you are vulnerable and slightly less than 50% games when you are not.

Matchpoints: Sadly, these simple calculations do not apply to matchpoints. In matchpointed events, you win a point against every opponent you beat and lose a point against everyone who beats you. Thus, the mathematical odds of a 50% game remain 50/50. However, don't lose sight of the fact that defense is generally agreed to be the *most difficult* phase of the game. Since you're declaring and the enemy is defending, you have an inherent advantage. It's not possible to quantify this edge as simply as above, but you should make it a policy to bid close games.

Bonus “Chicago” Tip

When the opponents are vulnerable and the auction starts with three passes to you, consider opening a sub-minimum hand in fourth seat to “kill” their vulnerability. What happens if you pass the hand out? The dealer redeals, and they get *another* chance to bid and make a vulnerable game or slam. If you open light, the hand ends up playing in a part score somewhere and the deal (and vulnerability!) passes on. Don't give the opponents two consecutive shots at being vulnerable.