

Introduction to IMP Scoring

Most sessions at a club are scored based on *matchpoints* (see Introduction to Matchpoint Scoring for details). Some events are scored using a different system - International Match Points or IMPs. This is often the case for team and Swiss Pairs events. This document provides an introduction to how IMP scoring works.

Scores

When a board is played each pair gets a score based on the contract, the number of tricks made and the vulnerability. For example 4S vulnerable making 10 tricks scores 620 points for the declaring side and -620 for the defending side. The two scores always sum to zero. The scores for all possible results can be found on the back of the table number cards used at the club, and on the back of the bidding box cards. The BridgeMates show the points scored when the board results are entered.

IMPs

Where a board is played more than twice (eg in Swiss Pairs) the scores are converted to IMPs by comparison with a "datum". The details of the process vary from event to event, but in general the process is:

1. Calculate the datum for the board - effectively the average result on the board.
2. Calculate the difference between the score achieved and the datum.
3. Convert the difference into IMPs - using a standard score to IMP table.

In a teams event each board is played twice, with each team playing NS at one table and EW at the other. The two scores achieved by the team's pairs are summed to give the amount to be converted to IMPs.

The key feature of either process is that the number of IMPs awarded is based on the *size* of the score differences. This is significantly different to Matchpoint scoring where size of the differences in scores is irrelevant and all that matters is the ordering of scores.

IMP Conversion

The following table is used to convert score differences to IMPs:

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

A few points are worth noting:

- The IMPs awarded to the two sides for a result sum to zero. For example, if the score difference is 50 points in favour of NS, NS gets +2 IMPs and EW gets -2 IMPs.
- A score difference of less than 20 is converted to 0 IMPs. This means that a 10 point difference between a No Trumps contract and a suit contract is not relevant in IMPs scoring.
- The maximum score achievable on a single board is +24 IMPs.

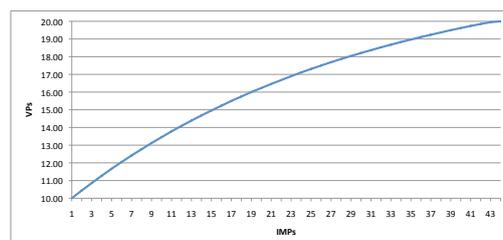
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Victory Points

The total IMP score for a match could be very large (either positive or negative). This leads to the issue that a single outstanding or catastrophic match could unduly dominate the overall result for a pair. For example, in round 1 of a Swiss Pairs event a highly seeded pair could have a massive win against one of the lowest seeded pairs, giving the winning pair an unassailable lead for the rest of the event.

This issue is addressed by using Victory Points (VPs). The overall IMP score for a match may be converted to VPs using an appropriate VP scale. The field is then ranked by VPs rather than IMPs. The number of VPs awarded flattens out as the number of IMPs increases. This reduces the impact of unusually large magnitude IMP scores.

The VP score for a match is between 0 and 20. VPs are always positive and the scores for the two sides sum to 20. For example, a maximum win for one side scores 20 VP and 0 VP for their opponents. A draw with 0 IMPs earns both sides 10 VPs. The specific IMP to VP table used depends on the number of boards per match. The chart shows the WBF table for 8 board matches.



Whether an event is scored on IMPs or VPs and the specific IMP to VP table used will be determined by the event organisers and is often detailed in the scorebook for the event.

Cross IMP Scoring

Cross IMP scoring is a variation on the IMP scoring described above ('Butler' scoring). A pair's score on a board is compared with every other score for the board (in the same direction) and the differences converted to IMPs. These IMP scores are then averaged to give the cross IMP result for the board for that pair. The two methods are doing the same operations but in different orders; Butler scoring averages then compares and converts to IMPs, where cross IMP scoring compares, converts to IMPs then averages. There are pros and cons for each method. From a player's perspective it is worth noting that at cross IMPs overtricks always are reflected in the score whereas an overtrick can be averaged out in Butler scoring.

Impact on strategy

IMP scoring has an impact on your strategy when bidding and playing a hand. Your strategy "at IMPs" will be different to the strategy you would use if the event were being scored using another system (eg. Matchpoints).

Failing to bid a makeable game contract could cost 6 or 10 IMPs (not vulnerable and vulnerable respectively). Playing in game when a small slam is available could cost 11 or 13 IMPs. Allowing your opponents to play in a makeable game contract when you also have game could cost 13 to 15 IMPs. Going 1 off but preventing your opponents finding game could earn 10 to 11 IMPs. It is therefore particularly important when playing at IMPs to bid available games and slams. It is worth risking marginal game contracts particularly when vulnerable.

Making an overtrick at IMPs has a relatively small impact (eg +1 IMP) whereas at Matchpoints it can make a big difference. At IMPs it is more important to make your contract than risk the contract for overtricks. This being said, matches can be won or lost by 1 IMP and multiple small overtrick gains can be significant over a match.

The 10 point margin between No Trumps and a major suit contract does not impact the IMP score, so chose the safer contract (eg between 2S and 2NT). This applies if you expect to make the same number of tricks in either contract. Often a suit contract can make more tricks than a No Trump contract and that overtrick may earn an extra IMP.