

Introduction to Swiss Pairs

Swiss Pairs is a very popular format for bridge competitions. For many players their first experience of an event other than club duplicate sessions will be in Swiss Pairs. A Swiss Pairs event is a pairs competition using a “Swiss draw” to determine who plays who in each match. One attraction of the format is that as the event progresses pairs “find their level” and are matched against pairs with similar results.

How does it work

A Swiss Pairs event will consist of a number of rounds, each round being matches of a fixed number of boards. For example, a one day event may consist of 6 rounds of 7 boards.

At the beginning of the competition the pairs in the field are ranked and given a pair number. The pair numbers are fixed for the duration of the event. Various methods are used to provide the initial ranking. Often it is simply done on the basis of masterpoints.

The “draw” for a round specifies which pairs will be playing each other, at which tables, and in which directions (for example, pair 1 playing NS at table 1 against pair 8). How the draw for the first round is done can vary. In many cases it will be a random matching of the pairs from the top half of the field with pairs from the bottom half.

During a round all tables play the same set of boards (eg boards 1 to 7 in round 1). The pairs remain in the same direction for the match.

At the end of each round the results are calculated and published. Each pair is awarded a win, loss or draw for the match. The field is re-ranked based on the cumulative results and the draw for the next round is determined. In a Swiss draw each pair is matched against one of the pairs nearest to them in the current ranking. Normally this will be a pair that they have not played before. Again the draw specifies for each pair which pair they will be playing in the next round, at which table, and in which direction.

This process is repeated for each round. The ranking after the final round is the final result of the event.

Why it is popular

The Swiss draw means that as the event progresses pairs are matched against other pairs who have similar results. This means that you are more likely to play against people of a similar standard which can make for a more enjoyable event.

The match format, and the reranking between rounds gives immediate feedback about your performance which can be both exciting and challenging. At the end of the event you have both your final overall placing and your individual match win/loss/draw record. Having a good match result against a particular pair may be a highlight, regardless of your final overall placing.

In most Swiss Pairs events masterpoints are awarded for each match won or drawn, as well as for top places in the overall results. Frequently the vast majority of the field will win some masterpoints across a Swiss pairs event.

Scoring

Some people associate Swiss Pairs exclusively with IMP (International Match Point) scoring. While many Swiss Pairs events are IMP scored, some are matchpointed. See the separate Introduction to Matchpoint Scoring and Introduction to IMP Scoring for details. The entry form or event description will normally specify the number of rounds, the number of boards per round and the scoring method to be used. It is important to know which scoring method is in use as it impacts strategy.