

Teams of Four

How it works

There are four players in a team that play at any one time. One pair of our team will play with the NS cards against one pair of another team, playing the EW cards. At another table, the other pair of our team will play the same boards with the EW cards against the other pair of the other team with the NS cards. Thus the same boards are played on both tables, on one our team plays NS and the other team EW.

Scoring

Our scores from both tables are added. Thus if 4♠ is bid and made vulnerable at both tables by N, our score at one table is +620 and at the other table is -620. The total is zero and it is called a flat board.

If on the other hand, our N bid and made 4:spades (+620 to us), but, at the other table 4♠ was bid by the other team's N who only made 9 tricks (+100 to us), our nett score on the hand is +720 points. To complicate things, this +720 is converted to a sliding scale, called International Match Points or IMPs, and that is what we actually score on the hand. The same sliding scale is used in all tournaments worldwide and 720 points converts to 12 IMPs.

To complicate matters further, in a large, multi-match tournament, the difference in IMPs between the two teams may then be converted to Victory Points (Vps). If Vps are being used, and our team scores 24 IMPs in a match and the other team scores 36 IMPs, so a difference of 12 IMPs to the other team, we may score 7 VPs and the opponent team 13 VPs. If the difference had been greater, our score would be less and the opponent's team's score would be more, but the total would still be 20 VPs. Hence each match would be equally important in determining the grand total. The scale to convert IMP differences to VP's is different for different tournaments, mainly depending on the length of the matches.

Is teams only for good players?

No. Some evolving players avoid teams because they see (correctly) that at world championship level (and even at national or state levels), Teams is seen as the more important game for those wanting to flaunt their prowess. However, it is simply that some (not all) of the luck element in Duplicate Pairs is eliminated in Teams and so Teams is considered a better indicator of skill. Certainly Teams requires slightly different tactics to achieve good results. However, it is in no way played in a more rarefied atmosphere or with more seriousness than Pairs. It is an enjoyable game.

What tactics are different?

One big difference arises because you are rewarded in your score for the size of your win over your opponents, not just whether you beat them or not. At pairs, you can get a top board for bidding and making a vulnerable grand slam or for playing a part score in NT and scoring an extra 10 points. In teams, the 1500 points for the grand slam is worth a useful 17 IMPs, but the extra 10 points for playing in NT is worth nothing, not even 1 IMP. So big hands, involving slams or games, are much more important than part score hands.

Your decision as to when to be in Game is different in Teams, especially when vulnerable. Suppose you have to make a decision as to whether to raise 3♠ to 4♠ and suppose further that you are destined to make 9 tricks or 10 tricks depending on how the opponent's cards are distributed. If you play in 3♠, you will score +140 or +170 depending on whether you make 9 or 10 tricks. If you bid

4♠, you will score -100 or + 620 (vulnerable). Thus if you bid 4♠ and made 9 tricks, you will lose 240 points compared to what you would get if you stayed in 3♠. However, if you bid 4♠ and made 10 tricks, you will gain 450 points compared to what you would get if you stayed in 3♠. Thus by bidding 4♠, you have more to gain than to lose and, taking the conversion to IMPs into account, you should bid a vulnerable game with only a 40% chance (or more) of making. (This assumes that, if you go down, you will still make 9 tricks and you are not doubled). Not vulnerable, you stand to gain 250 points if you bid and make game compared to losing 190 points if you bid game and go down. You should aim only to bid games with a 50% chance of making, which is similar to Pairs.

Accurate slam bidding is more important in teams, since the premium for getting slam hands right is greater in Teams compared with Pairs. Lots of IMPs compared with a top on a single hand. Other differences come in the decision of whether to sacrifice against your opponent's game or slam contracts.

It is in play that the greatest difference occurs. In Pairs, you often have to decide whether you make a play that risks your contract in the hope of making an overtrick. In Teams, the decision is always to play to make your contract (or on defence, to defeat the contract). In Teams, overtricks and undertricks score little (20 or 30 points) compared with the score associated with making a contract (partscore about 200-250 points, game about 500-700 points depending on vulnerability and slam lots more. In Pairs, an overtrick can mean the difference between a top and a bottom score on the hand, whether you are in a part score, game or slam. In a sense, play is easier in Teams because you always know what you are trying to achieve.