

Knockout and Swiss Teams Tactics by: Kevin Wilson www.kevinwilson.com

Slow and steady wins HUGE at imps scoring. You are not trying to beat everyone in the entire room to score a 65% game to finish first in a field of 30 pairs. You only need to finish above 1 other team. You typically take many more chances playing matchpoints than you do playing imps, especially in the bidding. Play solid and don't give away the match with a random crazy bid or phantom sacrifice!

My advice is to remember that the difference between IMPs and matchpoints is that in matchpoint scoring each board counts exactly the same amount towards your final score. This is not true at IMPs scoring where you might win IMPs on 10 out of 14 boards but still lose the match by a fair amount. A pushed board doesn't count anything in the final tally. Spend more time on the hands where game may or not make and more concentration energy on defending or declaring a close slam. Once the contract is secure, if you don't have the concentration power let the overtrick make or the concentration lapse on these hands. Since the hand will not count equal, spend your maximum time and energy on those you think crucial. All slams and any close games are the most important hands of a match.

BIDDING GAMES

Start with a Little Math on Bidding Games When Non-Vulnerable and When Vulnerable

Non vulnerable games that make win 6 but lose 5 when they go down 1... this doesn't account for the rare hand with bad breaks that gets doubled so it is about even money to bid a 50% game.

Non-vulnerable comparison

You Bid Game	Your Score	Teammates (not in game)	IMPs at stake
go down 1	-50	-140	Lose 5
make the game	+420	-170	Win 6

Vulnerable comparison

You Bid Game	Your Score	Teammates (not in game)	IMPs at stake
go down 1	-100	-140	Lose 6
make the game	+620	-170	Win 10

This makes bidding a vulnerable game a 5-3 proposition which means that even slightly against the odds games should be bid! This is a major difference between IMPs and Matchpoints.

GRAND SLAMS

Grand slams are slightly against even; you win 11 (for bidding and making 7 when they bid 6) vs. lose 15 (bidding 7 down 1 while they bid and make 6 non-vul) or win 13 vs lose 17 vulnerable but this doesn't count the huge factor that the other table may not even be in a small slam! The key takeaway is that you should only be bidding grand slams when you think you can count 13 tricks!

SMALL SLAMS

Small Slams are EVEN Money bets in that you win or lose the same amount.

PART-SCORES and COMPETING

You should balance with the right distribution and not give in on the low level part-scores. Each time you lose a part-score battle will cost you 5-6 imps and these can be critical when they add up.

You want to compete against part-scores fairly aggressively, but not ultra aggressive because disasters may loom. A below average score like -170 instead of -140 does not cost the match but a big number can. -800 instead of -140 doesn't look good on the scoresheet.

KEY TIP AT IMPs: Go for the surest, not the biggest plus score. (game decision and converting part-score to minor suit examples)

DOUBLING

Doubles at IMPs favor the silent rather than the rambunctious. Doubling the opponents in a part-score and then letting them make it is considered the biggest faux pas in the entire IMP play game.

Doubling a Game Contract is a much better strategy but it isn't without risk. If you double a non-vulnerable and get a two-trick set for +300 for a gain of 7 to 5... but if the opponents have reached a poor contract, then your teammates may not have reached the same poor contract. What if they haven't overbid? Have you considered that the opponents may have additional distribution?

The one double that wins huge at IMPs is the lead directing double. These tend to pay huge dividends when they work and only small losses when they fail.

Example 1 (Bidding as South):

		♠ 762	
N deals		♥ AJ3	
EW vul		♦ A32	
		♣ AJ83	
♠ AJ98			♠ Q1043
♥ K1042			♥ 87
♦ K86			♦ Q9754
♣ 52			♣ K10
		♠ K5	
		♥ Q965	
		♦ J10	
		♣ Q9764	
W	N	E	S
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	1NT	pass	2♣
All pass			

This hand is an example of playing for the safest plus score instead of the highest plus score. At matchpoints, some players will pass 1NT with the South hand. This wins when notrump and clubs score an equal amount or when the extra points for playing notrump surpasses that which can be scored in a club contract. When playing IMPs, the difference between 90, 110, and 120 is negligible but if you go minus when you could have gone plus it will be bad. Note the KEY TIP for IMPs from above!

Example 2 (Bidding as South):

		♠ K743			
S deals		♥ AJ53			
NS vul		♦ QJ97			
		♣ 2			
		♠ Q9		♠ 10862	
		♥ 92		♥ 6	
		♦ K82		♦ A10543	
		♣ AJ7653		♣ Q94	
		♠ AJ5			
		♥ KQ10874			
		♦ 6			
		♣ K108			
W	N	E	S		
			1♥		
2♣	3♣	pass	4♥		
pass	pass	5♣	dbl		
All pass					

South decides to bid 4♥ instead of stopping below game. South knows that bidding vulnerable games is a huge winner at IMPs scoring (5:3 odds). A vulnerable game that is 40% or better to make is a winner long term at IMPs scoring. East decides to sacrifice only once the opponents actually reach game. South has a difficult decision over 5♣. I think the decision is South's to make (with the ♣K108) and that South should not pass the decision to North. South should likely double 5♣. South wants to go plus on the hand and a small plus is far better than a minus. If South bids 5♥, South may or not make it. It is usually much better to take the sure pluses when making an important decision at IMPs scoring. Perfect defense will beat the contract three tricks for +500. Are you certain you would make 5♥?

DEFENSE

Defense at IMPs is much easier because your objective is always to defeat the contract and not to stop possible overtricks, until you are absolutely certain that the contract can't be defeated. You should be aggressive about putting necessary cards in partner's hand and playing for a lie of the cards that will beat the contract. Don't worry about the 20 or 30 points you will give up for the overtrick when defeating the contract will give you a coveted plus score. Think about 30 points for an overtrick is lose 1 imp sometimes but defeating a contract may be worth +720 or 12 imps. The odds of winning 12 versus losing 1 make defending to set the contract the clear winning tactic!

DECLARING

IMPs scoring places a huge premium on making the contract and gives almost no incentive to play for overtricks. Think safety on every hand and every contract choice. You no longer desire to play in 3NT when 5 of a minor may be more likely to make. SAFETY PLAYS in suit combinations should be considered whenever possible playing IMPs scoring!

THE SAFETY PLAY

A safety play is a play by declarer that will maximize the opportunity for a certain number of tricks from a given card combination. Frequently the safety play is utilized to cater to a distribution of the cards that is not typical. The safety play is like an insurance policy, it guarantees or improves the chances for success of a contract. Some safety plays guarantee a specific number of tricks from a suit while others maximize your chances of getting the tricks you need. The key point lies in knowing how many tricks you require out of a suit and thereby knowing how many tricks you can afford to lose in a suit. You must master the concept of knowing how many you tricks you need. A safety play may involve losing a trick that does not have to be lost. You concede the trick as an insurance policy against a bad break.

Contract 6♠; No possible losers outside of the spade suit

Dummy

♠ A972

Declarer

♠ K10863

Playing Matchpoints, most players would play the ♠A and then the ♠K and hope the honors dropped. When the suit splits two-two, declarer makes all 13 tricks. However, this play will fail whenever the suit divides 4-0 and the honor is cashed from the wrong hand. The SAFETY play is to lead low from either hand and insert the 9 or 10 from the other hand unless someone shows out. This will guarantee only one loser in the suit regardless of how the suit divides. There are many suit combinations where safety plays can occur.

What to look for:

1. Safety play in a suit combination. Learn through study and experience the suit combinations that offer easy safety plays.
2. Consider giving up one trick to protect against losing two tricks in a suit. This is the by far the most common type of safety play that you will encounter.
3. Protect against bad distributions, especially 4-1 trumps.
4. A long suit in the dummy with limited or no outside entries offers the safety play of ducking the first round in the suit. Ducking is an effective safety play technique in many situations.

Example 3 (Defending as West):

		♠ AJ5			
S deals		♥ 654			
none vul		♦ Q5			
		♣ AKJ65			
		♠ Q4		♠ 876	
		♥ A932		♥ KJ10	
		♦ K10843		♦ 9762	
		♣ 84		♣ 1092	
		♠ K10932			
		♥ Q87			
		♦ AJ			
		♣ Q73			
W	N	E	S		
			1♠		
pass	2♣	pass	2NT		
pass	3♠	pass	4♠		
All pass					

West leads the ♦4 against 4♠. Declarer rides it around to the ♦J. Declarer then plays a spade to the ♠A and leads the ♠J. Partner follows and declarer plays low from hand, West winning the ♠Q. What should West do? At matchpoints, most Wests would cash the ♥A and lead a heart, knowing that declarer could easily have the ♣Q and the ♥K. At IMPs scoring, the risk of an overtrick is well worth the chance to set the contract when the layout is like the above or even close. A low heart from West will allow the defense to take three heart tricks and defeat the contract.

Example 4 (Declaring as South):

	♠ 974				
S deals	♥ AJ93				
NS vul	♦ 92				
	♣ J642				
♠ 108652				♠ K3	
♥ K52				♥ Q1064	
♦ 3				♦ J8752	
♣ Q1083				♣ K7	
	♠ AQJ				
	♥ 87				
	♦ AKQ104				
	♣ A95				

W	N	E	S
			2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3♦
pass	3NT	All pass	

South may choose to open 1♦ instead of 2NT since South doesn't have hearts stopped. In this case, South decided to open 2NT anyway. North bid Stayman and then 3NT, which ended the auction. The ♠5 lead went to the ♠K and South won the ♠A. Playing matchpoints, South may decide to try for overtricks by attacking hearts or by hoping that the ♦J falls doubleton or third. Playing IMPs scoring, the plan is crystal clear! MAKE the contract! South can play the ♦4 up to the ♦9 and guarantee the contract. South can't be stopped from winning three spades, one heart, four diamonds, and one club. Always think safety instead of overtricks when declaring at IMPs scoring.

