



Working the Ref

Many-time world and national champion Bobby Wolff explains the scoring in the Bidding Box.

In an attempt to explain what I think is a valid scoring system for determining a bridge bidding contest at matchpoints, rather than IMPs or rubber-bridge scoring, consider the following:

1. The calling card of matchpoints is that the *frequency* of gain (one hand is as important as the next) rather than the *amount* of gain (the hallmark of IMP scoring) is the major influence.
2. The scoring system of rating the various contracts is similar to estimating one's game while play-

ing. For purposes of comparison, I assume that the duplicate game being played is made up of above-average players possessing a formal and serious attitude with no novice players and/or (especially) clowns in the field.

3. The methods used by the players are relatively sophisticated, not necessarily world class, but highly modern and well understood by the participants.
4. This type of level field provides a consistent overview in predicting the bidding, varying only in the specific choice of bids by the individual players when faced with several logical alternatives.

With the above as a backdrop, let's examine the types of hands which

may produce somewhat varying contracts depending on the bidding choices made at the table.

- A. *Partscores*. Because the players involved are matchpoint savvy, the predictable choice would be notrump if workable, followed by a major-suit fit and finally minor suits. Of course, the score will be attuned to what the normal trick-taking capacity is for the final contract reached. The opponents' bidding will also influence both the opening lead and where the important adverse cards figure to be.
- B. *Game contracts*. The overall score potential is strictly matchpoint oriented. Keep in mind that however we want to look at it, matchpoints is a bastardized version of the

wherein even a 10-point increase in the final score needs to be considered, while at IMPs or rubber bridge, the safety of the contract (as estimated during the bidding) is of prime concern. At matchpoints, safety is only one of many other factors.

C. *Slam contracts*. I have three specific considerations:

1. In normal slam bidding, matchpoints demands that it is necessary to consider playing a higher-scoring contract (notrump and major suits rather than minors) when there are choices.
2. When a partnership, upon discovering a great fit or maybe a double fit (possibly only because of a system which caters to such a thing) can bid a low high-card-point slam, it

will tend to work out better to play the *safest* fit, since other partnerships may not have the ability to get there. Keep in mind that the scoring is based on the *likelihood* of reaching a particular contract. The Bidding Box has a top score of 12 on each problem, so any score higher than a 10 usually suggests that most partnerships will not be able to reach that contract.

3. In the much-discussed quarrel of whether to bid a grand slam on a straight finesse (usually thought of as exactly 50%, although in reality it might be a little less because of the possibility of a ruff on opening lead), it is not recommended at IMPs or rubber bridge (vulnerable or not) because the partnership will lose more points when it

goes down than they will gain when it makes. At matchpoints, however, if at least 90% of the pairs will bid the small slam, making 12 or 13 tricks, then it becomes almost a toss-up whether to bid the grand slam. And with certain possible leads or subsequent poor defense, the finesse may not need to be taken and the success of the grand slam then equates to better than 50%. Thus, for competitive purposes, the grand becomes the contract of choice resulting in the highest score.

The vagaries of the scoring system are result oriented and not based on theoretical best bidding sequences to the optimum contract. Think about it this way: What contract would you like to be in if you're playing for your life, or even more important, trying to win the event? □