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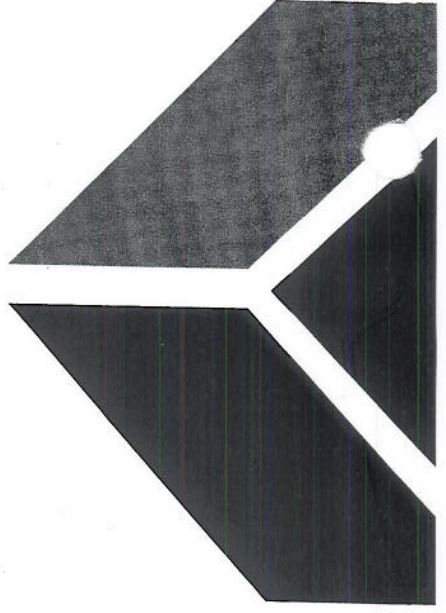
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SWISS TEAM TACTICS

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Despite the increasing popularity of Swiss Team events, little has been written regarding winning tactics and strategy in this popular event. Most partnerships and teams do not discuss the special tactical problems caused by this unique type of game and form of scoring. Even experts, who have spent hours discussing or writing about match point tactics or IMP strategy for long knock-out matches, rarely discuss how to win Swiss Team games.

The reason for this neglect is rather obscure. Many of the principles of effective match point, board-a-match, or long IMP match play do not apply to the standard seven board Swiss matches. The special tactics and strategy in match point duplicate cannot be used since the usual form of scoring for Swiss Teams is IMPs, not match points; and, unlike match point duplicate, you have only ONE set of opponents, not all the pairs holding your cards in your section. The principles of winning long IMP matches cannot be applied to Swiss Team games because of the length of most Swiss Team matches. In a long IMP match an early good or bad result should not affect your bidding or play on the next deal; in a short Swiss match it may dramatically affect the action your side takes on the remaining deals. Consequently, Swiss Team games call for tactics and strategy unlike those used in the other types of tournament events.

In this pamphlet we will describe several principles that we believe are important to doing well in Swiss Team events. As in all team events, the key to success (in addition to playing well) is having good, supportive partners and teammates. Team morale is critical. You must accept the fact that errors will be made and nothing can be gained by further upsetting the offending player or partnership by pointing out their stupidity.

SWISS TEAMS VERSUS MATCHPOINTS

In duplicate your score is compared with the results of the other pairs holding your cards on each deal. And it is this comparison, not your actual plus or minus, that determines whether you have a good score or a bad score. You are awarded one match point for every pair whose score yours exceeds and ½ point for every pair your score ties; and it does not matter whether you beat another pair by 10 points or 1000 points—you will still receive only one point for beating that pair. The key to success in match points is HOW OFTEN, not by how much you beat your opponents.

Playing IMPs is different. The key to winning is HOW MUCH, not how often you beat your opponents. In addition, you have only ONE set of opponents, not an entire "field" holding your cards. Unlike match points, IMP scoring does not regard 1 ♠ contracts as being equal in importance to 7NT contracts.

Consider the International Match Point scale:

INTERNATIONAL MATCH POINT SCALE

Diff. in Pts.	I.M.P.	Diff. in Pts.	I.M.P.	
20-40	1	370-420	9	
50-80	2	430-480	10	
90-120	3	500-590	11	
130-160	4	600-740	12	
170-210	5	750-880	13	
220-260	6	900-1090	14	
270-310	7	1100-1290	15	
320-360	8	1300-1490	16	
			4000 and up	24

In match point duplicate, an overtrick may be the difference between an average score and a near-top or top on a board. Playing IMPs, however, an undoubted overtrick can never be worth more than 1 IMP. The same is true for the relatively small total point differences when playing notrump, major, or minor suit contracts; playing match points the differences are often significant, whereas at IMP scoring they are negligible.

GAME & SLAM ODDS

The odds on bidding close games and slams playing IMPs are considerably influenced by the vulnerability. For example, bidding a close non-vulnerable game can gain a swing of 250 points (+420 versus +170), 6 IMPs. If you go down in a close non-vulnerable game you may lose 190 points (-50 versus +140), 5 IMPs. So, the odds are only 6 to 5 in favor of bidding close non-vulnerable games; and, this does not consider the badly splitting hands on which you may get doubled and go for a considerable set. When you add that factor the odds are reduced to about even money.

Close vulnerable games are a better proposition playing IMPs. When you are vulnerable, you stand to gain 10 IMPs while losing only 6. (Obviously, these odds—10 to 6—are also slightly reduced by the possibility of being heavily penalized by a double.)

As these odds suggest, you should bid any vulnerable game with reasonable prospects; but bid a non-vulnerable game only with solid expectations of making it.

For example, suppose you open a 15 to 17 point 1NT holding:

- (a) ♠ A 9 5 4
♥ K J 3
♦ Q J 4
♣ K Q 7

and partner raises to 2NT. Playing IMPs should you pass or carry on to 3NT with this borderline 4-3-3-3 sixteen count? Our answer to this close decision would be found in the vulnerability. Vulnerable, we would bid 3NT; non-vulnerable, we would pass 2NT.

The same is true if partner made an invitational limit raise to 3♠ after we had opened 1♠ with:

- (b) ♠ K J 10 6 5
♥ A 10 7
♦ 8 4
♣ K Q 3
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Technically, example (b) is a 5-3-3-2 thirteen point minimum opening bid. Nonetheless, if we were vulnerable playing IMPs we would accept partner's invitation and raise 3♠ to 4♠. (b)'s honors are working together and we have a couple of ten spots.

Moving up to small slams, the IMP odds change dramatically. No longer is the vulnerability a factor. Both vulnerable and non-vulnerable small slams are an even-money bet—you stand to gain or lose the same number of IMPs (vulnerable: 13; non-vulnerable: 11). However, there is another important factor. Unless you know your opponents at the other table are good aggressive bidders, it is best to assume that most close slams will NOT be bid by your counterparts at your teammates' table. Consequently, if you figure to be well ahead in a Swiss match, or playing a team you rate to beat, it is best to be conservative in your slam bidding; if you are the underdog in a Swiss match, or rate to be behind, play for a substantial swing and bid a close slam. It may be your only chance to win the match. (More on this subject later when we consider special strategy and tactics.)

On the surface, grand slams appear to have the odds against them of 15 to 11 non-vulnerable, and 17 to 13 vulnerable. At the table, however, the odds are actually far worse. Consider the possibility that at the other table your opponents misjudge their assets and stop at the game level. Then, going down in a vulnerable grand slam actually costs your team 26 IMPs—the 13 you would have won by stopping in a small slam, plus the 13 you will lose by bidding the grand slam. Even with the stronger team, rarely will you be able to recoup such a loss in a short Swiss match. One of our favorite teammates in Swiss Teams is the number one masterpoint winner of all-time, Barry Crane, who is also probably the most successful Swiss Team player in North America. He insists that his teammates never bid a grand slam unless they can count 13 tricks. We have found that this is excellent advice. You may feel it is next to impossible that your counterparts will miss a small slam when you are considering a grand slam, but you will be pleasantly surprised how often it happens. Do not risk a disastrous result by bidding a marginal grand slam unless you feel your team is in dire straits.

SMALL SWINGS & PART-SCORES

Although we have all lost Swiss Team matches by one, two, or the usually critical three IMPs, as a general rule you should NOT be concerned about small one or two IMP losses on a specific deal during a Swiss Team match. Being plus 90 in 2♠ or 2♦ when you could have scored +120 in notrump may prove critical in a match point event but is of little consequence in IMP contests. The same is true of settling for a 100 point set when you could have scored +110 or +140 by playing the hand.

Often the key to winning Swiss Team matches is to obtain a PLUS score on the little hands. If both your pairs can obtain plus score on the majority of part-score deals, your team should win the vast majority of the Swiss Team matches you play. Unlike match points, your primary concern should be get-

ting a PLUS, not how big a plus or how small a minus you can score. Consequently, when you are declarer you should be willing to risk an extra undertrick for a chance to make your contract; correspondingly, on defense you should be willing to risk an overtrick when you have any chance to defeat the enemy contract. Of course, when your contract is iron-clad (or on defense when you see that it is impossible to defeat declarer), you can give yourself the pleasure of battling over an extra trick or tricks. However, the business of IMP play is making or setting contracts.

Contrary to popular belief, the fierce competition over part-score hands which typifies good match point tactics should be carried over to IMP events. Beware of letting your opponents play peacefully at the two-level; remember, the difference between 2♥ or 2♠ making two and defeating a three-level contract one trick may be 5 IMPs. One or two such savings in a short seven-board match can easily determine the winner.

IMP scoring, as opposed to match points, does simplify some competitive part-score decisions. Suppose, with both sides vulnerable, the auction proceeds:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	DBL
Pass	3♦	Pass	Pass
?			

You, as North, hold:

- ♦ A 10 4
- ♥ K Q 9 5 2
- ♠ A 9 4
- ♣ J 7

Playing match points, this is a tough decision. If your side can make +140 in hearts, going minus 110 or even plus 100 on this deal will be a disaster. Even if 3♥ fails by a trick (and you are not doubled), -100 may not be a terrible result if your opponents are on for +100 in diamonds. Consequently it is probably right to bid, not pass, in a pairs event. If in need of a "big" result, we would favor doubling 3♥ hoping to get 200; otherwise, we would take the push to 3♥.

Playing IMPs, you should definitely PASS 3♦. Whether you are plus 140 or plus 100 makes little difference. Since it is rather unlikely that both 3♦ and 3♥ will make, you want to avoid the possibility of going MINUS 100 at both tables losing 5 IMPs. In short, you cannot lose much by passing 3♦, only by bidding 3♥. Obviously, it would be unthinkable to consider doubling 3♦ with this hand playing IMPs.

As a general rule, our philosophy in part-score battles is: "Fight the enemy up to the three-level, and then play for a PLUS score."

SACRIFICING

Sacrifices against enemy games are a far better proposition playing match points than they are at IMP scoring. At match points you may earn an excellent result by losing 300 points

rather than 420, or 500 instead of 620. Playing in a Swiss Team, these savings only amount to 3 IMPs. This is not a very good bet if there is any chance you may beat the enemy game. Keep in mind, if you take a phantom safe of -500 against an unmakeable vulnerable game, you lose 12 IMPs; you may also cancel out a good result your teammates obtained by avoiding the unmakeable game.

In addition, your opponents are far more likely to double a sacrifice playing IMPs than at match points. The prospect of pushing them one level higher is considerably reduced. Remember, accepting a 500 point set in return for a vulnerable game may be almost a zero in a pairs game, but will only cost 3 or 4 IMPs in a team event.

Despite this warning, of course it pays to go for 100 or 300 against a vulnerable game in any form of scoring. It also pays to take the push to the five-level when you have reasonable prospects for 11 tricks rather than accept a likely one-trick set against the opponents' save. General maxims such as "never sacrifice" or "always double a save—do not take the push" should not be followed.

Among expert IMP players, one type of sacrifice is extremely popular—the "premature" save. This form of sacrifice pushes the opponents to the five-level before they have exchanged much information. This can work in one of three ways. The opponents may misjudge their strength, bidding one too high and going down. With their bidding room preempted they may miss an easy slam. Finally, even if they judge the hand correctly the sacrifice may be profitable. Hence, this tactic aims at perhaps a 12 IMP, not a 3 or 4 IMP, profit. For example, suppose partner opens 3♦ at favorable vulnerability, right-hand opponent doubles, and you hold:

- ♦ A 10 9
- ♥ 7
- ♠ K 8 5 2
- ♣ Q J 10 7 3

Jump to 5♦. You undoubtedly will bid 5♦ over either 4♥ or 4♠ so bid it directly and make your opponents guess at the five-level.

Sacrifices against slam contracts often save large numbers of IMPs. This is particularly true when the vulnerability is favorable and your side has a fit. Even down 6 doubled, -1100, will gain 8 IMPs if your teammates are plus 1430. When your opponents have a lay-down grand slam the odds of a successful sacrifice are even greater as is the potential profit. There are only two dangers: (1) the slam may fail; and (2) your teammates might not reach the slam. If either of these dangers is present, you are best advised to pass and hope to beat the slam rather than concede a substantial penalty.

PENALTY DOUBLES

As a general rule, in almost all doubling situations at IMPs the odds favor the COWARD, not the hero. Since in a team event you do not have a field to contend with, close doubles should

be avoided; in addition, the rewards for close penalty doubles other than lead-directing doubles are far greater in match points than IMPs.

For example, consider the position in which vulnerable opponents have crept up to 4 \heartsuit with obviously marginal values, if they are running into bad breaks, it is likely they will go down, perhaps two tricks. Then a double stands to gain 300 points (500 versus the 200 you will collect if you do not double and defeat 4 \heartsuit two tricks). In the unlikely event that they make 4 \heartsuit doubled (without any overtricks), the loss will be 170 points. However, the IMP odds are only 7 to 5—doubling stands to win 7 IMPs if you collect 500 instead of 200 and lose 5 IMPs should the opponents score 4 \heartsuit doubled. And if your opponents' contract is silly, your partners probably stopped and made a part-score; then a double stands to gain even less since you had a substantial pick-up on the board without your double.

As at match points, when playing IMPs you rarely have to doubt silly final contracts to get most of the points available on the board. There is no reason to risk a double in case you were wrong about the sound of the enemy auction. This is particularly true when you are playing against poor bidders. In addition, there is always the danger that your double will allow them to make a contract that otherwise would go down or drive them to a makable contract.

Unless there is no practical danger that the opponents will make the contract, you should, playing IMPs, avoid penalty doubles of part-scores that might be perfectly reasonable at match points. For example, suppose you bid up to 3 \heartsuit in a pair game and your vulnerable opponents contest with 3 \spadesuit ; you probably should double any time you are confident that your side could score +140 in hearts. Plus 100 rates to be a poor score, perhaps not a great deal worse than -730. You must try to get +200 for a good score. Obviously, this approach would be suicidal playing IMPs.

Lead-directing doubles are a far better proposition playing IMPs than they are in a pairs contest. Consider the odds in doubling a non-vulnerable 3NT contract to get a favorable lead. Playing match points, you are gambling a top against a bottom, instead of settling for an average or slightly below average result; the odds are a little better than even money. At IMPs, consider the "swing" if 3NT is bid and made undoubled at the other table. If you beat 3NT, you will gain 500 points (figuring a one-trick set), while if it makes, you will lose 150 points; these total point odds convert to IMP odds of 11 to 4. The chances of overtricks reduce these odds but you will still break even if your lead-directing double beats one out of three game contracts.

The odds become even more attractive when you make a lead-directing double of the touch-and-go slam contract. If your teammates play a game on a deal where your opponents play a non-vulnerable slam, your loss from doubling a makable slam is 1 IMP; and when your lead-directing double defeats the slam, your gain is 22 IMPs. (You gain 11 IMPs instead of losing 11 IMPs.) At odds of 22 to 1, even a speculative double becomes a good bet.

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GENERAL TACTICS

Your objectives in a Swiss Team event are quite different from those you must have to do well in a match point event. In a pair event, you are trying to beat some number of competing pairs (often this number is huge). In a Swiss Team you are trying to beat ONE team (at a time). Par bridge, i.e. taking everything which is yours without attempting to steal what belongs to your opponents, will win most Swiss matches. Avoiding mistakes is often the key to victory. In short, a 51% game at both tables will win the match; at match points a 51% game is a disaster. You will not even place in your section; even 60% games will not come close to winning most pair events.

SWISS TEAM STRATEGY

It is often important to assess your chances against the team you are playing prior to the start of the match. This assessment should influence the approach your team takes toward the match. There are three possibilities:

Your Team is the Favorite

If you draw a group of obviously inexperienced players or a team you rate to beat, play your normal sound game at both tables. Avoid taking any chances that could lead to major adverse swings—such as bidding close slams or making doubtful preempts or overcalls. Your opponents in this type of match will most often LOSE the match on their own; you do NOT have to win it. Do not let an early poor result influence your bidding and play on the remainder of the boards; the poor result may be duplicated or your teammates may pick it up on the other boards if you do not.

It Rates to be an Even Match

This type of match does not call for any adjustments in your normal IMP game. It does call for a sound analysis of each board you play to determine your board-by-board status in the match. Be particularly aggressive if you have an early poor result and attempt to avoid a big adverse swing if you have an early good result. Concentration and avoiding careless mistakes often determine the winners of Swiss Team matches between teams of comparable ability.

Your Team is the Underdog

This type of match is the most challenging and can often be the most fun. Aggressiveness is usually the key to upsets. Your best chance to win is to bid a close game or slam that is missed at the other table. In addition, you should be very competitive in the part-score auctions. In an effort to avoid "giving" you the match, your favored opponents will probably not take chances that you should be willing to take. Since it is unlikely you will be able to outplay or outdefend the enemy, you most likely will have to win the match in the bidding. Do not misunderstand. This does not mean that you should go "crazy" in the bidding, it simply means you should be very aggressive—preempt more freely and compete in the early stages of the auction whenever possible.

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ESTIMATING RESULTS

Decisions that must be made on boards in the second half of Swiss Team matches should often be influenced by your results on the first few boards of the match. Unlike long IMP matches, you do not have a lot of time to recoup an early substantial loss. (The only exception is when the event is scored via victory points, then you can afford to lose a match or two by a small margin; playing the normal -3 is a loss method of scoring, it does not matter whether you lose a match by 3 IMPs or 53 IMPs.) One word of caution, however. All matches do NOT have to be won at your table; remember, you have teammates that may be having a big game. Just because you have one unfortunate result is not cause for panic. Your team may be able to "cover" one soft result, but not several.

Make a mental note of how you are doing in a match after every board. Such estimates may influence your decision to either bid or not bid what is likely to be a touch-and-go slam on the sixth or seventh board of the match.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

We have found the following tips most helpful in winning Swiss Team games:

1. Give every deal your undivided attention. (Most matches are lost by careless mistakes usually caused by a lack of concentration.)
2. Almost without exception, play to make your contract as declarer and to set the contract as defenders. Do not worry about an extra undertrick or overtrick.
3. Keep in mind the IMP ODDS of game and slam bidding, sacrifices, and doubles.
4. Know your own team's weaknesses and strengths, evaluate your opponents (as best you can), and estimate your results as the match progresses.
5. Avoid LOSING matches at your table. Remember, most Swiss matches are LOST, not won. And perhaps MOST important:
6. BE A GOOD PARTNER AND TEAMMATE. Partnership and team morale is important. By being a good partner and teammate you will increase your chances of doing well and make the game more fun for everyone.

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