Scoring at Bridge.

Scoring should be easy, but is it? Consider some other sports. At darts you have to count down from 501 and finish on a double. At tennis it goes 15 – love, 30 – love etc (why not simply 1 – zero, 2 – zero etc?) and then you have deuce, tie breaks, sets etc. Seems nothing is simple. Except cricket – now this really is simple, you simply add up the runs. Only thing is that it's all for nothing if it rains (then it's a draw whatever). So every sport has it's unique scoring method and Bridge is no exception (except that it's a fine sport for when it's raining).

Now we all know what Bridge is all about – making tricks. But everything is not equal, and some tricks score more than others, and it also depends upon whether you are declaring or defending. As an example, suppose everybody is non-vulnerable and your opponents bid 1NT. If they make 7 tricks, then they get a score of 90. If you get 7 tricks (so they are one down) then you get a score of just 50. Seems unfair, but so is life.

Vulnerability

Duplicate (pairs scoring) and Teams scoring are derived from the basic Rubber Bridge. Rubber Bridge is played by 4 people and everybody starts off non-vulnerable. As soon as one side bids and makes a game, they get the score for that and they then become vulnerable for the remainder of the rubber. The rubber finishes when a vulnerable pair makes another game. What does being vulnerable mean? It means that if you go down, then it costs more! The up side is that if you are vulnerable and make a game (or slam) then the bonus you get for doing so is larger. Now that is Rubber Bridge. In a club where you want more than 4 people to play the same hands, then the vulnerability is pre-determined. The vulnerability for both sides is displayed on the boards.

Luck

When 4 people sit down for a rubber or two, then luck plays a major role. If you are dealt good hands then you usually do well. This luck factor is diminished with duplicate, it is then a matter of how well you do with your hand compared with the others holding the same hand. There is, of course, still an element of luck.

In my opinion, the variation of Bridge with the smallest luck component is teams. Your results are not affected by random scores at odd tables. Mind you, you do have to find compatible team-mates! In a long teams match the best team usually wins. Hopefully luck evens out and skill prevails.

Anyway, let's have a look at the mechanics of how bridge scoring works. We'll start off with the basic principles of scoring and later we will see how these scores are used in pairs and teams competitions etc. Finally we look at how a knowledge of the scoring may affect your bidding and play.

Contracts Bid and Made

First, let's start with contracts that have been bid and made (possibly with overtricks).

Basically, you get 20 points for making 1♣/♦, with 20 more for each extra trick. An example, you bid 2♣ and make with an overtrick, 40 for 2♣ made and 20 for the extra trick = 60; + the partscore bonus. Major suits (♥ & ♠) score 30 points. So 1♠ bid with two overtricks would be 30 + 60 = 90; + partscore bonus. No trump contracts score 40 for the first trick and 30 for each subsequent trick. So 1NT made with an overtrick scores 40 + 30 + the partscore bonus = 120.

1) Partscore Contracts A partscore is defined as a score less than 100 for a contract bid and made excluding overtricks. So a 2♠ contract is a partscore contract (60). If you bid and make (possibly with overtricks) a partscore, you get an additional 50 point bonus.

Examples:

1NT bid and made with an overtrick:	40 + 30 + 50 = 120
3♣ bid and made exactly:	60 + 0 + 50 = 110
2NT bid and made with 2 overtricks:	70 + 60 + 50 = 180

trick score _____↑
overtricks _____↑
partscore bonus _____↑

2) Game Contracts A game contract is defined as a score of 100 or more for the contract bid. Thus 4♠ is a game contract (120) but 3♠ is not (even if it makes overtricks). So, the game contracts are 3NT (100), 4♥/♠ (120) and 5♣/♦ (100). If you bid and make a game contract then you receive a game bonus in place of the partscore bonus. If you are not vulnerable, it is 300; if you are vulnerable, the bonus is 500.

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
3NT bid and made with an overtrick:	100 + 30 + 300 = 430	100 + 30 + 500 = 630
5♣ bid and made with 2 overtricks:	100 + 40 + 300 = 440	100 + 40 + 500 = 640
4♥ bid and made with 2 overtricks:	120 + 60 + 300 = 480	120 + 60 + 500 = 680

trick score _____↑
overtricks _____↑
game bonus _____↑

3) Slam Contracts A slam contract is a bid of 6 (a small slam – 12 tricks) or 7 (agrand slam – 13 tricks). If you bid and make a slam, then you get an additional slam bonus in addition to the game bonus etc and a pat on the back. If you are not vulnerable, it is 500 for a small slam and 1000 for a grand; if you are vulnerable, the slam bonus is 750 for a small slam and 1500 for a grand.

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
6NT bid and made:	190 + 0 + 300 + 500 = 990	190 + 0 + 500 + 750 = 1440
6♣ bid and made +1:	120 + 20 + 300 + 500 = 940	120 + 20 + 500 + 750 = 1390
7♥ bid and made:	210 + 0 + 300 + 1000 = 1510	210 + 0 + 500 + 1500 = 2210

trick score _____↑
overtricks _____↑
game bonus _____↑
slam bonus _____↑

Going Down↓

When you bid and make a contract, then you get points. If you go down, then it's only fair that the opponents get some points. Points awarded for setting the opponents are irrelevant of the contract (it does not matter if the contract was a suit or NT, nor does it matter how many tricks were contracted for). The only important facts are how many tricks the contract was set (and also if doubled and/or vulnerable).

If you go down, then the opponents get 50 for each trick that they set you if you are non-vulnerable. If you are vulnerable, then they get 100 for each trick. It's more if you are doubled, we come onto that next.

Doubles

If the final contract is doubled then this ups the stakes, both if the contract is made and when it is defeated.

Making Doubled Contracts

Back on page1 I explained that you get 20 points for each minor suit trick, 30 points for each major suit trick and 40 points for the first NT trick (30 for subsequent ones). If your final contract is doubled and you make the contract, then all of these scores are doubled. If the final contract was a part-score but the double makes the total 100 or more, then you have been doubled into game and you get the game bonus when you make. In addition, you get a special bonus of 50 'for the insult' whenever you make a doubled contract.

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
1NT dbl bid and made:	80 + 50 + 50 = 180	80 + 50 + 50 = 180
1♣ dbl bid and made:	40 + 50 + 50 = 140	40 + 50 + 50 = 140
2♥ dbl bid and made:	120 + 300 + 50 = 470	120 + 500 + 50 = 670

trick score _____↑
partscore/game bonus _____↑
insult _____↑

Note the huge score for 2♥ doubled and made (just 110 if undoubled). Be wary of doubling the following contracts, because if they happen to make then you have doubled opponents into game: - 3♣/♦, 2♥/♠, 2NT.

Making Overtricks in Doubled Contracts

Doubled overtricks are something else, you get more than simply double their value. The contract is irrelevant. Doubled overtricks score 100 each if non-vulnerable and 200 each if vulnerable.

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
1NT dbl bid and made +1:	80 + 50 + 50 + 100 = 280	80 + 50 + 50 + 200= 380
1♣ dbl bid and made +2:	40 + 50 + 50 + 200 = 340	40 + 50 + 50 + 400= 540
2♥ dbl bid and made +1:	120 + 300 + 50 + 100 = 570	120 + 500 + 50 + 200= 870

trick score _____↑
partscore/game bonus _____↑
insult _____↑
overtricks _____↑

Doubling opponents and then allowing them to make overtricks really can be expensive.

Going Down ↓ Doubled

What a bummer. Going down doubled can be very expensive, as much as 300 a trick – even if non-vulnerable! Let's see exactly how it works: -

	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
First down trick:	100	200
2nd and 3rd down tricks:	200 each	300 each
4th and subsequent down tricks:	300 each	300 each

Note the jump in the penalty after the 3rd down trick when non-vul. Back in the 70's it was simpler, all non-vulnerable down doubled tricks after the first were 200. However, there were a few problems as it was sometimes profitable to sacrifice against slams when holding virtually nothing. The bid that brought this to a head and caused the rules to be changed was made by an American expert, Jeff Meckstroth during the world cup final in 1981: -

Dealer: West
N-S vul

	♠ AK ♥ AQ ♦ J9 ♣ AK109642	
♠ J9852 ♥ 854 ♦ K4 ♣ J53	N W E S	♠ 103 ♥ 973 ♦ Q87632 ♣ Q8
	♠ Q764 ♥ KJ1062 ♦ A105 ♣ 7	

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	3♣	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	6♦
pass	7♥	pass	pass
7♠ !	pass	pass	dbl
all pass			

7♥ scores 2210. With this old scoring, a non-vulnerable opponent could go 11 down (-2100) and still get a profit. The actual contract went 9 down (then -1700) for a 510 point gain to America. With the new rules you cannot afford to go more than 8 down (-2000).

Redouble!

If the final contract is redoubled then this ups the stakes even more, both if the contract is made and when it is defeated.

Making Redoubled Contracts

This time, the basic value of the tricks are multiplied by 4. So 80 for ♣/♦, 120 for ♥/♠/NT and 160 for the first NT. Redoubled contracts are always game except 1♣/♦. The 'insult' bonus is also doubled (so 100).

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
2NT redbl bid and made:	280 + 300 + 100 = 680	280 + 500 + 100 = 880
1♣ redbl bid and made:	80 + 50 + 100 = 230	80 + 50 + 100 = 230
2♥ redbl bid and made:	240 + 300 + 100 = 640	240 + 500 + 100 = 840

trick score _____↑
partscore/game bonus _____↑
insult. _____↑

Making Overtricks in Redoubled Contracts

This really is lucrative. Not only have you perhaps been redoubled into game, but redoubled overtricks are very tasty, just look at the happy faces. Redoubled overtricks score 200 each if non-vulnerable and 400 each if vulnerable.

Examples:	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
1NT redbl made +2:	160 + 300 + 100 + 400 = 960	160 + 500 + 100 + 800 = 1560
1(redbl made +2:	80 + 50 + 100 + 400 = 630	80 + 50 + 100 + 800 = 1030
2(redbl made +1:	240 + 300 + 100 + 200 = 840	240 + 500 + 100 + 400 = 1240

trick score _↑
partscore/game bonus _____↑
insult _____↑
overtricks. _____↑

Just look at the score for making a vulnerable redoubled 1NT + 2 (1560); it's more than you get for bidding and making a small slam (1440). Teach them to double me!

Going Down (Redoubled)

You get what you deserve here – a big minus, very expensive. The scheme is: -

	non-vulnerable	vulnerable
First down trick:	200	400
2nd and 3rd down tricks:	400 each	600 each
4th and subsequent down tricks:	600 each	600 each

Now you may assume that only novices would go down in redoubled contracts; after all, experts and internationals know what they are doing and would not redouble the penalty for a contract already doubled if they were going down, would they?

This hand is from the 1964 North American championships: -

Dealer: North Both vul	♠ - ♥ AKQJ97642 ♦ 7 ♣ KQ5	
♠ 10862 ♥ 103 ♦ 53 ♣ J10987	N W E S	♠ AKQ7543 ♥ - ♦ 94 ♣ 6432
	♠ J9 ♥ 85 ♦ AKQJ10862 ♣ A	

N-S have a cold 7♥ (scoring 2210), and this was bid at most tables. However, the scoring is such that E-W have a good save in 7♠ (5 down, -1400). Many South's were unhappy about being unable to play in their grand slam, and so they bid 7NT. Often doubled and redoubled! Sometimes, North had cue-bid ♠'s to show 1st round control or had just bid 7♥ to show no ♠ losers, and South assumed it was the Ace – big mistake?

The bidding at two tables was: -

West	North	East	South
-	2♥	2♠	3♦
pass	4NT	5♠	6♣
pass	7♥	7♠	7NT
pass	pass	dbl	redbl

At the first table, a ♠ was led and E-W took The first 7 tricks for a penalty of 4000.

At the 2nd table, West found an ultra subtle reason for not leading a ♠ and converted the +4000 available penalty into –2980. A swing of 6980 points. A record.

West	North	East	South
-	2♣	3♠	4NT
pass	6♥	pass	7NT
pass	pass	dbl	redbl

So all of you up-and-comers out there, do not despair, there's hope for us all if North American Championship contenders can bid like this.

Incidentally, when Blackwood has been used, a jump by responder normally shows a useful void. There are various schemes to also show the number of aces (or key cards).

Sit Out

If there are an odd number of pairs, then one pair will always sit out for one round. What score do they get? The way that I do it is that they do not simply get an average, but they get an average of what their score is over the complete session. So don't worry, sitting out costs nothing (except the lost pleasure of playing a few boards). There is no need to put anything on the travellers when you sit out (I know what's going on).

Passed Out

I am often asked what score you get for a passed out hand. Obviously zero, but is that good or bad? Just depends upon what the others do. At teams, you get a good score if your team mates go positive. At pairs you get a good score if the majority of players sitting in the other direction go positive. If your opponents have passed out a hand when everybody else makes a positive score with their cards, then you will get a top. Unlike a sit-out, you must complete the traveller whenever a hand is passed out. Put in the pair numbers and simply write 'passed out'.

Pairs Movements – Howell or Mitchell?

With just 1 table, you play rubber bridge (perhaps Chicago). With two tables a teams contest is best. With more tables, you can play multiple teams, but a pairs competition is most common (saves you finding team-mates as good as yourselves!). So, with 3+ tables we usually play pairs; ideally each pair should play each other pair to make things perfectly equal. However, since about 28 boards is the maximum for one session, then this is only practical for 6 or less tables. Hence there are two distinct movement types:

3-6 tables = a Howell, where each pair plays each other pair (sometimes the movement is shortened e.g. ¾ Howell). There are Howell movements for 7 and 8 tables, but then there is only two boards a round.
7+ tables = a Mitchell, where N-S are stationary and only the E-W pairs move.

The actual scoring for both Howell and Mitchell movements is the same: matchpoint scoring.

Arrow Switching

Normally when you have a Mitchell movement it is effectively two separate tournaments (North–South's and East–West's). If an overall winner is desired then you can switch the direction of some of the boards. The mathematics behind this is somewhat complex, but it works out that about 1 board in 8 should be switched. I occasionally do an arrow switch when there are 7 or 8 tables if I have chosen a Mitchell rather than a Howell. With more (9+ tables) we can have two winners.

Rubbers, Pairs, Matchpoints, Teams, IMPs, Victory points? – What's it all about?

Suppose you are playing rubber bridge. You and your partner have big hands and you bid a vulnerable 6NT. Your bidding was rather conservative as you made +1. No problem, all you have to do is add up the rubber, a good hand to finish on.
So at rubber bridge a big score is a good score, is this true at pairs and teams?

Not necessarily. With this solid 13 trick hand, you will end up with a bad score at pairs if other pairs bid the grand. Teams (IMP) scoring is somewhat different as it depends upon just one other table. Let's look at pairs and team scoring more closely: -

Matchpoints Scoring (Pairs)

With matchpoint scoring, your score is compared with the scores obtained by all the other pairs sitting in the same direction. You get two matchpoints for each pair that you beat (and one matchpoint for each tie). It makes no difference how big the scores are or how big the difference. For example, if you bid and make 6NT and everybody else is in 3NT making +2, then you get a top – exactly the same top as you would have got if you had bid just 3NT and made +3. At matchpoint (pairs scoring) it is not the size of the winning margin that counts – just winning is enough.

Let's have an example of a completed traveller after it's been scored: -

Final Contract	Dec	Lead	Result	Pair No.		Score		Matchpoints	
				N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W
3NT	N	AS	+ 1	1	1	630		10	2
6NT	N	AS	C	2	3	1440		12	0
2NT	S	2C	+ 2	3	5	180		6	6
pass out				4	7			4	8
3H	E	KD	– 3	5	2	500		8	4
4NT	S	6H	– 1	6	4		100	1	11
5NT	N	7C	– 1	6	7		100	1	11
Total								42	42

This example is a 7 table Mitchell. N-S were vulnerable and E-W not. North 2 had a good game, but would have got the same matchpoints if they had bid just game and made the same 12 tricks (+ 690) =12 matchpoints for an undisputed top. A clear top is always 2 x the total of other pairs in your direction, so in this 2 x 6 = 12. The pairs that passed out do not get an average, they get an above average score if the others in their direction did poorly. So an above average for E-W pair 7 for just passing. E-W pair 4 and N-S pair 7 shared the E-W top, so they get 11 each. The last round was arrow switched, that is no problem, the scorer knows which pair 6 and 7 are N-S or E-W etc. The total No. of matchpoints in a given direction is n x (n-1), where n is the number of pairs. In this case, 7 x (7-1) = 42. Each competing pair share 2 x (n-1) matchpoints, so in this case, 2 x 6 = 12.

Averages

Sometimes a board cannot be played and needs to be averaged. For, example, suppose that E-W pair two came to table 5 and were about to play this board. A drunken kibitzer passes by, reels into East and all his cards end up face up face-up on the table. Some directors may rule differently here, I would say to average the board. But when I say average the board, I do not mean give each pair ½ of the matchpoints (in this case 6 each). In these cases where a board cannot be played and I do not wish to penalise either side then I give both parties an average of what their score is on the day.

The board, however, is played one less time and that affects the scores for everybody else. What we do is assume that every pair would have tied with the score or the pair that could not play the board. So in a 7 table movement, the top is now just 11 and a bottom is 1. Taking the previous example, if the board was not played at table 5 then the revised score sheet would become: -

Final Contract	Dec	Lead	Result	Pair No.		Score		Matchpoints	
				N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W
3NT	N	AS	+ 1	1	1	630		9	3
6NT	N	AS	C	2	3	1440		11	1
2NT	S	2C	+ 2	3	5	180		7	5
passed	*out*			4	7	0		5	7
4NT	S	6H	– 1	6	4		100	2	10
5NT	N	7C	– 1	6	7		100	2	10

Total 36 36

When I come to award the matchpoints for this board, I see that it has been played one less time than usual. I apply the rules set about above, so the top is now 11 and the bottom is one. The pairs that did not play the board get no score. No problem, that means that they effectively get their average for the board when I come to work out the %'s on the final result sheet.

Adjusted Scores

Now the rules of bridge cover infractions such as revokes etc. But what if you cannot play a board through no fault of your own? The rules say that you get 60%. Seems a bit random to me. Maybe your average for the session is above 60%? I know it's not your fault, but I see no reason why you should be awarded some arbitrary score. With me scoring, you get your average for the session. But suppose somebody is at fault, perhaps they pull their cards out of the wallet and they all fall on the table in full view. Obviously this pair should perhaps be penalised. I would maybe give them an average minus. But by my method that is not 40% (perhaps their average for the session was 35%!). They would get a point or so deducted from their total and get *their* average for the board. And the non-offending party? Again, I see no reason to give them more than their average (it is not fair to other competitors).

Now my opinions here may not be mainstream, but that's the way I do it. Computer scoring programs probably could not cope, 'luckily' my scoring machine is inside my head.

IMP scoring (teams)

At teams, it is somewhat different. There are two tables and your team-mates are at the other table in the other direction. After the contest, the scores are compared but it is not simply winning a board or not that counts, the margin of the win is significant. On each board, you may win up to 24 IMPs (International Master Points), these are assigned on a sliding scale; typically a game swing (you bid and make game while they go down at the other table) would yeald 10-12 IMPs, depending upon vulnerability. So teams is different from pairs – bid reasonable games, avoid big penalties.

Suppose that you open a horrid pre-empt. You get doubled and go for –1400 (minus 5 doubled, vul). Pretty bad, but just a bottom at pairs; at teams it is a disaster, even if game was on the other way, you will lose upwards of 13 IMPs, could be enough to lose a match. At teams, size does matter.

So, the winners of a teams match is decided by IMPs. You win the match if you finish with more IMPs than your opponent. In a large competition there may be a large number of teams playing a number of such matches. The results of each encounter are then converted into VPs (Victory Points) in order to establish an overall winner of the competition. This conversion to VPs limits the effect of an enormous IMP victory and awards the losers a score in more closely fought matches.

Table 1: International Match Points (IMPs)

Net score	IMPs	Net score	IMPs	Net score	IMPs
0 - 10	0	320 - 360	8	1300 - 1490	16
20 - 40	1	370 - 420	9	1500 - 1740	17
50 - 80	2	430 - 490	10	1750 - 1990	18
90 - 120	3	500 - 590	11	2000 - 2240	19
130 - 160	4	600 - 740	12	2250 - 2490	20
170 - 210	5	750 - 890	13	2500 - 2990	21
220 - 260	6	900 - 1090	14	3000 - 3490	22
270 - 310	7	1100 - 1290	15	3500 - 3990	23
				4000 +	24

In competitions with more than one match, the winning margin of IMPs is converted into victory points: -

Table 2: Victory Points (VPs)

Net IMPs	VPs	Net IMPs	VPs	Net IMPs	VPs
0 - 1	15 - 15	15 - 17	20 - 10	30 - 33	25 - 5
2 - 5	16 - 14	18 - 20	21 - 9	34 - 37	25 - 4
6 - 8	17 - 13	21 - 23	22 - 8	38 - 41	25 - 3
9 - 11	18 - 12	24 - 26	23 - 7	42 - 45	25 - 2
12 - 14	19 - 11	27 - 29	24 - 6	46 - 50	25 - 1
				50 +	25 - 0

For example, say you won your match by 57 Imps to 13. This is a difference of 44 IMPs and would translate into a 25 – 2 victory. There are a few variations of this VP scale and with some it is possible to actually get a negative score if you were thrashed. The above example is more kind.

The IMP score sheet

Not only is teams my preferred form of bridge, but it involves less work for the director (me). There are no travellers, just a sheet that is filled out by both teams at both tables. Here we have a completed example from an 8 board match: -: -

Board No.	Final Bid	Dec.	Result	Score	Other Table	Net Score	IMPs	
							+	–
1	1NT	S	-1	- 50	+ 50	0	-	
2	5S	N	-2	-200	+800	+600	12	
3	1S	S	+1	+110	-140	- 30		1
4	2S	S	C	+110	-110	0	-	
5	4H	E	C	-420	+480	+60	2	
6	5D	E	+2	-640	+1460	+820	13	
7	2D	W	C	-90	+200	+110	3	
8	3NT	S	+3	-490	+920	+430	10	

While you are playing, you fill in the first 5 columns (Board No. → Score) at the end of each hand. After completion of all the boards you agree the score column with opponents and then compare your results with your team-mates. Your team-mates 'score' goes into your 'other table' column, the difference goes in the 'Net score' and the IMPs are determined from Table 1.

Add up the IMPs (in this case 40-1) and confirm with the opponents. So you have won this match by 39 IMPs. If it is a multiple teams event, then this result is usually converted into VPs via Table 2. So a 39 IMP wind would be a final 25-3 victory. Your team has earned a maximum 25 VPs, good stuff.

So, that's wrapped up the scoring for now; let's see the implication of knowing the scoring and how it may affect your bidding or play.

Vulnerable!

When you are vulnerable, a down trick costs 100. If you are doubled, then a down trick is 200, this is very significant at pairs because if the opponents can only make a partscore then just one down doubled and vulnerable (or two down if undoubled) will give you a bottom. So vulnerable overcalls and pre-empts need to be sounder than when non-vulnerable. A good guideline is the rule of two, three and four: -

The Rule of Two and Three (and Four)

Culbertson's rule of two and three (and four) is a guide as to what level to bid if you decide to pre-empt. You assume that the opponents can make game and that you will be doubled. Another assumption is that partner can produce one trick (funny how mine rarely do). Anyway, these assumptions all boil down to this general rule: -

The Rule of Two

♠ KQJ10976
♥ 3
♦ A75
♣ 87

When pre-empter's side is vulnerable and the opposition are not, then the rule of two applies. Pre-empter should be within two tricks of his contract. For example, you pre-empt 3♠ and are doubled. This hand contains 7 playing trick and so conforms with the rule of two. What happens? Partner's dummy contributes one trick and so you make a total of eight, one down, -200 (doubled, vulnerable). A good save against the opponent's non-vul game (420).

The Rule of Three

♠ QJ109764
♥ 3
♦ A75
♣ 87

This applies when the vulnerability is equal; either both vulnerable or both non-vulnerable. This hand is a 3♠ opener under these circumstances, it contains 6 playing tricks, i.e. 3 short of the 3♠ contract. And if you end up doubled? With partner's expected trick you go down two. So 300 or 500 away as opposed to the 420 or 620 that the opponents would have got for their game.

The Rule of Four

♠ QJ109764
♥ 3
♦ 752
♣ 87

Now with favourable vulnerability (us non-vul with vul opponents) then anything goes! You can afford to go three down so we have the rule of four. Many of you would frown upon a 3♠ opener on just 3 points. 'points smoints!' If you play in 3♠ doubled then you make just 6 tricks (including partner's hoped for trick) and you go minus three (-500) as opposed to the opponents 620 for their vulnerable game. And what if partner does not have a trick? Then obviously the opponents have missed a slam.

Now this is just a very brief summary of how the scoring (and vulnerability) affects your pre-empts (it applies to all opening pre-empts and to pre-emptive overcalls). There are other major factors (especially position at the table), but that is another story for another book.

Tactics at Teams

Is there a difference in the play (and biding) if you are playing teams or pairs? Basically, good sensible bridge usually prevails, but there are a few differences. Getting a plus score is good, and if you make say 2♦ at your table but the opposition make 2♠ at the other table than you will lose 20 pts (1 IMP) – insignificant, making the contract is all important.

	Partner	You	
♠ AK985	1♦	1♠	What is your bid? The known 4-4 fit is safer than the 5-2
♥ 6	1NT	?	or 5-3♠ fit. At pairs the extra 20 points for making 2♠ is
♦ Q1072			probably worth the risk. So, at pairs bid 2♠, at IMPs bid 2♦.
♣ 972			

Bidding Dubious Games at IMPs (Teams)

Now you may well have heard Chuck saying to bid 40% games at teams when red (vulnerable), whereas a game at pairs should be better than 50%. Non-vul games are about an even bet. Why is that?

First, let's consider a non-vul 3NT. If there are only 8 tricks and you bid game, then that is –50. If they bid just 2NT at the other table they get +120. So a swing of 170 or 5 IMPs. But what if 9 tricks are made? This time you get +400 and at the other table the opponents get +150. A swing of +250 or 6 IMPs. So virtually nothing in it; bearing in mind that extra tricks score just +30 whereas more down tricks are –50 them the odds are just about even.

So, the same situation (you bid 3NT, only 2NT at the other table) but vulnerable this time. If there are just 8 tricks then you lose –100 and they get +120, so a swing of –220 or 6 IMPs. If 9 tricks are made, then you get +600 as opposed to the 150 that opponent's get at the other table, so a swing of 450 or 10 IMPs. So when vulnerable, the odds are 10-6 in your favour. This translates into 'go for 40% or better vulnerable games'.

Let's have an example of how this may affect your bidding: -

	Partner	You	
♠ A105	pass	1♣	What is your bid? No precise mathematics here, but a
♥ K85	2NT	?	borderline game. Pass at matchpoints (pairs). And at
♦ K72			teams? Bid 3NT if vulnerable, pass if not.
♣ QJ102			

Play of the Hand – Overtricks?

One very important factor is overtricks; at pairs they are very important, at teams they are fairly insignificant – making the contract is all important. So what about the play? At teams, caution prevails.

West	East
♠ 86	♠ AQ3
♥ 62	♥ QJ98
♦ 63	♦ A985
♣ AKQ9876	♣ 32

You are East and declarer in 3NT and win the opening ♠ lead. What now? Thanks to the fortunate ♠ lead, you now can see 10 tricks, so cash them? This is the way to play the hand at pairs – you got a good lead and 10 tricks should give an above average score. But what if you are playing teams? If you try you cash the ♣'s and they happen to split 4-0, then you are going down. Making the contract is all important, overtricks are not. A 4-0 break is about 10%, you are risking 1 IMP against 12. At teams you should duck a ♣ and take the nine sure tricks. Team-mates are not usually impressed when you go down in search of an overtrick. Also, of course, you have no idea if the opponents are in the same contract. People have been known to play hands like this in 5♣ (or even a partscore), in which case looking for an overtrick is sheer folly if the opponents are in a partscore or going down in an inferior contract at the other table.

At IMPs, make the contract safe before messing about.

Bid a Vulnerable 3NT or Double Opponents?

♠ Q106
♥ Q94
♦ A83
♣ AJ85

You pick up this hand. Partner has opened 1♦. You obviously bid 3NT (either directly or not, depending on your methods). Anyway, 3NT is where you want to play if partner has a normal opening. But what if RHO overcalls 1NT (15-18)? You are vulnerable and opponents are not. Do you still bid 3NT?

The 1NT overcall promises 15-18 points. Partner has opened, usually 12+, and you have a balanced 13 points. Should be enough for 3NT, so bid it? Looks like overcaller has a minimum 15 points. Let's have a look at our newly acquired knowledge of scoring. We are vulnerable, they are not. If we make 9 tricks in 3NT bid by us, then we get +600. If we double them in 1NT and make the same 9 tricks, then we set them 3 tricks, only 500 since they are non-vulnerable. So should we bid the game for the extra 100 points?

Of course you should? - but only if you can see through the backs of the cards and know *for sure* that your side is making *exactly* 9 tricks, no more, no less!! Now anything is possible, and not even Tony Forrester, Hans or Chuck can accurately predict that you will make *exactly* 9 tricks, so let's study the scores for making 7,8,9, 10 or 11 tricks. How does a (penalty) double of their 1NT compare with playing in 3NT our way? The score shown is our score: -

Tricks made (our way)	3NT bid by us		1NT doubled played by them	
7	minus 2, so	- 200	minus 1, so	+ 100
8	minus 1, so	- 100	minus 2, so	+ 300
9	contract, so	+ 600	minus 3, so	+ 500
10	plus 1, so	+ 630	minus 4, so	+ 800
11	plus 2, so	+ 660	minus 5 , so	+ 1100

As you can see, double is certainly the % action as it only (marginally) loses if *exactly* 9 tricks are made.

Another auction that I have witnessed on more than one occasion is: - where the 2NT bid was meant to be invitational (11 points). East should, of course, double for penalties.

W	N	E
1♦	1NT	2NT

Grand Slam? Small Slam? – What are the odds?

Anybody can bid a slam, that is easy. The tricky part is bidding good slams and staying out of poor ones. But what constitutes a good slam? Is 50% (say on a finesse) good enough?

First of all, we have to look at the mathematics. If you bid and make a slam, then you not only get the points that you would have earned for bidding just game, but you also get the slam bonus. So you have to weigh up the potential profit (the slam bonus) against the loss if the slam fails - you lose not only the penalty for going down, but also the game points and game bonus that you would have made by bidding and making game. In all of the following cases, we assume that the slam will either make or go one down. For simplicity, we will consider a major suit slam, the difference for minor suits or no trumps is insignificant.

Let's look at small slams first. As the chart shows, in the long run it evens out. The maths are such that it's up to you whether to bid 50% small slams.

Chart 1 – Should we bid small slams?

	Non-vulnerable		Vulnerable	
tricks made	We bid 4♠	We bid 6♠	We bid 4♠	We bid 6♠
11	+ 450	- 50	+ 650	- 100
12	+ 480	+ 980	+ 680	+ 1430
average score	+ 465	+ 465	+ 665	+ 665

With Grand slams, however, it is a completely different story because if you go down then you lose not only the points that you would have got for game, but you also lose the small slam bonus. As can be seem from the charts, you will lose if you bid 50% grand slams. Basically, you are wagering the increased slam bonus against all the points that you would have won for the small slam. Grand slams should only be bid if there is a very low likelihood of going down (such as a 4-0 break – 10%).

Chart 2 – Should we bid grand slams?

	Non-vulnerable		Vulnerable	
tricks made	We bid 6♠	We bid 7♠	We bid 6♠	We bid 7♠
12	+ 980	- 50	+ 1430	- 100
13	+ 1010	+ 1510	+ 1460	+ 2210
average score	+ 995	+ 730	+ 1445	+ 1055

Five or Seven!

Having said that dodgy grand slams are usually a bad bet, there is one exception. The so called 5 or 7 hand. Consider this example: -

♠ AQJ76	♠ 1098
♥ 86	♥ A32
♦ AKQ	♦ 87
♣ 954	♣ AKQJ10

6♠ is a very poor contract on these cards. You should either be in 4♠ or 7♠! You get a ♥ lead and make either 13 or 11 tricks, depending on the position of the ♠K. So which contract is actually superior? Let's do the maths:

	Non-vulnerable			Vulnerable		
tricks made	We bid 4♠	We bid 6♠	We bid 7♠	We bid 4♠	We bid 6♠	We bid 7♠
11	+ 450	- 50	- 100	+ 650	- 100	- 200
13	+ 510	+ 1010	+ 1510	+ 710	+ 1460	+ 2210
average score	+ 480	+ 480	+ 705	+ 680	+ 680	+ 1005

There is absolutely no % in bidding 6♠. If 6 makes, then so does 7. The best contract is 7♠. This is so because when 'betting' on the grand, you are not risking the small slam bonus.

♠ AQJ76
♥ Q6
♦ AKQ
♣ 954

OK. Let's change the West hand by adding ♥Q, still two possible losers on a ♥ lead, but things are different. Have the odds changed to such a degree that another contract is favorite? Yes! Only a small change but 6♠ is now easily the best spot. You only need one major suit king on-side and 6♠ makes on the ♥ lead. So about 75%, virtually 100% on a non-♥ lead.

Rubber Bridge Tactics

Finally we come back to where it all started – rubber bridge, often played for money. Things are totally different here as your action on one deal affects subsequent deals. For example, making a non-vulnerable game makes you vulnerable for the rest of the rubber.

Traditionally, rubber bridge involves partscores. Say you bid 2♥ and make +1. Then you get a score of 60 'below the line' and 30 'above'. The score below the line is all important. If you subsequently bid a contract with a score that brings this total to 100 or more, then you become vulnerable. There are no part-score bonuses. Now this is undoubtedly the most exciting form of rubber bridge, but these days many players prefer to have to bid games in one go (thus bidding tactics are more in line with duplicate). I'll just give a few tips for when you play this 2nd style of rubber bridge: -

My advice is: - Don't concede large penalties. Be wary of sacrificing, if you are going to lose the rubber, make it a small one. Do not bid 50% small slams, certainly if both vulnerable (if you go down and the opponents win the next game, then they win the rubber!). Grand slams should be 90+ %. Overtricks are unimportant. Bid reasonable games; 40% non-vul is OK at rubber as the gain for getting vulnerable is very significant. Unlike duplicate, it is rarely correct to sacrifice with favourable vulnerability – the opponents are still 3-1 favourites to win the rubber. If vulnerability is equal, then consider the next sentence. If you are changing partners and your current partner is the worst player present, then get this rubber over with quickly (no borderline pre-empts or sacrifices).

Chicago

Chicago is a popular alternative to rubber bridge. With rubber bridge, the length of a rubber is indeterminate, it could be as short a two quick games in succession up to hours! – until one side has successfully bid and made two games. To overcome this varying time span we have Chicago. There are simply 4 hands. Vulnerability and dealer are as follows: -

Hand No.	Dealer	Vul
1	N	none
2	E	E-W
3	S	N-S
4	W	both

It is possible to play Chicago with partscores, but normally the scoring is similar to duplicate (50 for a partscore, and 300 or 500 for games).

And the tactics at Chicago? Exactly the same as teams. It really is a different game to rubber bridge.