

GETTING A BETTER SCORE IN MATCHPOINT PAIRS

The form of the game we play in ordinary club sessions is called “Pairs”, or “Duplicate”, or “Matchpoint Pairs”. Because of the scoring, the way you approach pairs is different to the way you approach the other main form of the game called teams.

In pairs, you want to get the best score you reasonably can on each board. In general, this means if an action has better than a 50% chance of gaining for you, you should be doing it. And conversely, if an action has less than a 50% chance of working, you shouldn't be doing it. What does this mean in practice?

1. **Bid solid games not light games in non-competitive auctions.** If your 23 point game has a 30% of making, 30% of the time you get a top score as no one else is in the making game. But if you go down, 70% of the time you get a bottom because no one is in the game going down but everyone is in a part score making. So overall you are losing. If in doubt, don't bid the game. A 25 point (including distribution) game is usually a 50-50 proposition if played completely correctly.
2. **Don't invite with 10 counts (including distribution).** Invite with 11-12 hands, knock 10 point hands down to the 6-9 bid unless there is something strongly compelling about them.
3. **Slams should also be solid,** possibly even more solid in daytime fields where a considerable number of people don't know how to bid slams.
4. **Give yourself every chance to play in a major (or no trumps) rather than a minor.** Majors (and no trumps) are worth more. If partner opens 1 of a minor, you should almost always bid back 4 of a major if you have one.
5. **It's usually best to play in the 8 card major fit rather than no trumps,** even though no trumps gives you an extra 10 points. This is because the trump fit usually gets you a trick or two extra from ruffing which outweighs the extra 10 points.

S AQ8
H K93
D J7
C KQJ109

S 643
H A
D K643
C 76532

S 9752
H QJ85
D AQ82
C 4

S KJ10
H 107642
D 1095
C A8

This hand occurred in a recent daytime session.

North opens 1NT (15-17). What should South do?

Opposite a 15-17 1NT opening in pairs, you normally:

1. Bid game with 10 or more points
2. Invite game with 9 or more points
3. Pass or transfer to a long suit and pass with 8 or less points.

The South hand is an 8 count. However, you do have a 5 card suit, but I don't add an extra point for length unless the suit is headed by the ace or the king. Having these cards increases the chances that you can set the suit up for tricks. The heart suit also looks like a poor choice for trumps missing all those high cards.

The South hand also 3 tens. Tens are not counted in the point count but do matter and can increase your chances of taking tricks. You average one ten a hand, so this hand has 2 more tens than average.

This hand is a very good 8 count. I am in doubt as to whether I should invite or not. This tells you what you should do:

1. Playing pairs, pass
2. Playing teams, where the game bonus is all important, I would invite.

4H goes 2 down on the bad trump break – you lose 2 hearts and 2 diamonds. However, on a normal trump break you are still 1 down.

One further small point – you'll notice I said pass, not transfer to the hearts and pass. Normally with a weak hand and a 5 card or longer major opposite an opening 1NT you transfer to the major and pass. The weaker you are, the more you want to play in the suit, as the suit could get stranded in dummy in NTs but as trumps it will hopefully score a few extra tricks. However, opposite a 1NT opening, if you have a smattering of points and a very weak 5 card suit, it often pays to play in no trumps rather than the 5 card suit. This is because you lose too many tricks in the weak trump suit.

You'll notice on this hand, you can make 2NT for +120, which is better than the +110 for the 2H you can make.