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How to Score Duplicate Bridge Hands

One of the most overlooked aspects of playing duplicate bridge is the importance of integrating scoring into your game strategy. Most of us know a game contract in a major suit results in a higher score than a contract of 3NT. But important to strategic bidding and playing is knowing when it's time to take a sacrifice or, as another example, passing rather than forcing opponents to a makeable game. An advantage—actually a necessity—to play at an advanced level is knowing how to score duplicate bridge hands.

Let's look at this situation. Non-vulnerable, you and your partner are bidding spades and the vulnerable opponents have reached 4♥. Should you bid 4♠ and certainly go down one or two tricks or allow the opponents to make their 4♥ contract? A quick calculation of the probable tricks and resulting scores will help you decide.

We will discuss partscore, game, and slam contract scoring—doubling, redoubling, and vulnerability—starting with *vulnerability... after this reminder*: In duplicate bridge, the boards are “duplicated” across many tables. You are playing against many other pairs who are sitting in your direction (N/S or E/W) besides the opponents at your table.

Simply put, vulnerability is a scoring condition, which affects both the size of bonuses for making contracts and the size of penalties for failing to make them. Vulnerability changes from board to board. You will find your partnership vulnerable about 50 percent of the time. Sometimes neither partnership will be vulnerable; sometimes both will be vulnerable.

The vulnerability of a partnership is identified before the bidding starts. Red is vulnerable and white is not vulnerable. For this board, E/W is vulnerable, as both names are in red in the bidding box. N/S is not vulnerable as both names are in white in the bidding box. This is also reflected in the Board number box in the upper left of the screen.

The screenshot displays a duplicate bridge hand interface. In the top left, a box indicates 'IMP Pairs Board 3' with a 'D' icon and scores: 'NS: -7.8 IMPs (-2.6)' and 'EW: +7.8 IMPs (+2.6)'. The top center shows North's hand (7♠, 3♥, 7♦, 5♣, K♠, J♠, 7♠, 6♠, 5♠, 3♠, 2♠, 9♦, 5♦) with a bid of 'AllSpades'. The bottom center shows South's hand (A♠, K♠, 6♠, 4♠, 4♠, A♠, 10♠, K♠, J♠, 10♠, 8♠, 7♠, 6♠) with a bid of 'bailysisd'. The middle left shows West's hand (Q♠, J♠, 8♠, 2♠, A♥, 6♥, 3♥, 2♥, Q♥, 4♥, Q♥, 4♥, 3♥) with a bid of 'indro'. The middle right shows East's hand (10♠, 9♠, 5♠, K♥, Q♥, J♥, 10♥, 9♥, 8♥, 9♥, 8♥, A♥, 2♥) with a bid of 'ric91'. A bidding box in the center shows 'indro' and 'ric91' in red, and 'AllSpades' and 'bailysisd' in white.

Important Definitions: A partscore contract is any contract less than game. A game is 3NT, 4 of a major, or 5 of a minor. A small slam is a contract at the 6-level. A grand slam is a contract at the 7-level. Bonus points are additional points you receive for making the contract you bid.

The Basic Formula of Duplicate Bridge Scoring

Each trick receives points as follows:

Minors = 20

Majors = 30

NT = 40 for the first trick and 30 for each subsequent trick.

Bonus for a partscore = 50

Bonus for a game = 300 (nvul) / 500 (vul)

Please note: If you bid and make game, you do not get the partscore bonus as well.

Bonus for small slam = 500 (nvul) / 750 (vul)

Bonus for grand slam = 1000 (nvul) / 1500 (vul)

Examples of scoring partscore contracts:

$$2\spadesuit = 50 \text{ (partscore contract bonus)} + (2 \times 30) = 110$$

$$3\heartsuit = 50 + (3 \times 30) = 140$$

$$1\text{NT} = 50 + (1 \times 40) = 90$$

$$2\text{NT} = 50 + (1 \times 40) + (1 \times 30) = 120$$

$$2\clubsuit = 50 + (2 \times 20) = 90$$

$$2\clubsuit \text{ making } 3 = 50 + (3 \times 20) = 110$$

Simple and very important to strategic bidding is to remember that as long as you make your partscore contract, your score depends only on the number of tricks you made, and *not* on the contract you bid. For example, bidding 1♥ and making 3 and bidding 3♥ making 3 are both worth 140 points.

$$1\heartsuit \text{ bid and making } 3 \text{ tricks} = 50 + (3 \times 30) = 140$$

$$3\heartsuit \text{ bid and making } 3 \text{ tricks} = 50 + (3 \times 30) = 140$$

Thus, it is in your interest to bid a low-level contract and it is in your opponents' interest to force you into a higher-level contract.

Also, in partscore contracts, vulnerability is not a factor in scoring. Whether you are vulnerable or not vulnerable, your score is the same.

Game Bonus Points

A game bonus is 300 (nvul) and 500 (vul). A game bonus is only acquired if you bid game.

For example, if you bid 1♥ (nvul) making 4 tricks it is worth 170 [$50 + (4 \times 30) = 170$].

If you bid 4♥ (nvul) making 4 tricks, it is scored $300 + (4 \times 30) = 420$.

If you are vulnerable and bid and make 4♥, your game bonus is 500. Your score is $500 + (4 \times 30) = 620$.

Examples of scoring non-vulnerable game contracts:

$$4♠ \text{ making } 4 = 300 + (4 \times 30) = 420$$

$$5♦ \text{ making } 5 = 300 + (5 \times 20) = 400$$

$$3\text{NT making } 3 = 300 + (1 \times 40) + (2 \times 30) = 400$$

$$4♥ \text{ making } 5 = 300 + (5 \times 30) = 450$$

Examples of scoring vulnerable game contracts:

$$4♠ \text{ making } 4 = 500 + (4 \times 30) = 620$$

$$5♦ \text{ making } 5 = 500 + (5 \times 20) = 600$$

$$3\text{NT making } 3 = 500 + (1 \times 40) + (2 \times 30) = 600$$

$$4♥ \text{ making } 5 = 500 + (5 \times 30) = 650$$

Note that a contract of 3NT making 3 is worth the same as a contract of 5 of a minor making 5. However, 3NT only requires you to take **9 tricks**, while you must take **11 tricks** to make 5♣ or 5♦. For this reason, **when you have a minor-suit fit, it is often better to be in 3NT than in minor-suit game.**

Slam Bonus Points

A *slam* is a contract at the 6-level or 7-level. Slam contracts are worth additional bonus points (beyond the game bonus).

A *small slam* is a contract at the **6-level**.
 Bidding and making a small slam is worth **500 bonus points (nvul) and 750 (vul)**.

A *grand slam* is a contract at the **7-level**.
 Bidding and making a grand slam is worth **1000 bonus points (nvul) and 1500 (vul)**.

For example, 7♥ (nvul) making 7 is worth

+ (7 x 30) for each trick
+ 300 for game bonus
+1000 for slam bonus
1510 points

For quicker calculation, you may find it easier to remember that 4♥ (nvul) making 4 is worth 420. Add 420 to (3 overtricks x 30) plus your slam bonus of 1000.

In any major game contract that is non-vulnerable add 420 + 30 pts for each overtrick to figure your score.

In any major game contract that is vulnerable add 620 + 30pts for each overtrick to figure your score.

	<u>Nvul</u>	<u>Vul</u>
3NT	400	600
4Major	420	620
5Minor	400	600

Though many scoring sheets are available to you for reference, it is far better to be able to quickly calculate the scores of contracts while you are bidding. Memorizing game scores when non-vulnerable and when vulnerable is a distinct advantage at the early stages of your bridge game; and, as you advance, you will soon find value in being able to make quick mental calculations of the contracts. The important thing is not to wait until the game is over to score the hand but to start scoring mentally as you bid.

Going Down

When you fail to make your contract, it is called *going down*, and the extra tricks that you failed to take are called *undertricks*. When you go down in a contract, your *opponents* receive points.

-50 point penalty for each undertrick (nvul)
-100 point penalty for each undertrick (vul)

Doubles

If your opponents think you will go down, they can *double* you to increase the penalty. Penalties for going down in a doubled contract are quite severe.

Non-vulnerable you lose 100 for the first undertrick, 200 for each for the next two—then 300 for each subsequent undertrick.

Vulnerable you lose 200 for the first undertrick and then 300 for each subsequent undertrick.

	<u>Nvul</u>	<u>Vul</u>
Down 1	-100	-200
Down 2	-300	-500
Down 3	-500	-800
Down 4	-800	-1100
Down 5	-1100	-1400
etc.		

However, if your opponents double and you *make* the contract, then *you* receive extra points.

First of all, you get a bonus of 50 (“the insult”).

Secondly, the score for all your tricks is ***doubled***. That means you might get a game bonus even though you didn’t bid game—the tricks for which you contracted might score more than 100. **Please note: Any score of 100 or more is considered “game.”** This is called “being doubled into game.”

Examples of Scoring on Partscore Doubled Contracts

2♠ is worth 2 x 30 or 60, so 2♠ X making is 50 for the insult + (2 x 60) + 300 for game = 470!

2NT is worth 40 for the first trick + 30 for the second trick or 70, so 2NT X making is 50 for the insult + (2 x 70) + 300 for game = 490!

The part scores which are game if doubled are: 2H/S, 2NT, 3H/S, 4C/4D. So if you double these contracts, it's a good idea to make sure your opponents are really going down. If you make OVERTRICKS doubled, each overtrick is worth 100 (nvul) and 200 (vul), regardless of the suit.

Game Contracts Doubled

In a game contract of 3NT (nvul), you receive your game score + 150 bonus points for a total of 550. **Each overtrick is worth 100 points.** So 3NT X and making 4 tricks is 400 + 150 + 100 = 650.

In a game contract of 3NT (vul), you receive your game score + 150 bonus points for a total of 750. **Each overtrick is worth 200 points.** So 3NT X and making 4 tricks is 600 + 150 + 200 = 950.

Important! The more incredulous the opponents' double when you are in a partscore contract, the more points you get. For example, 2♥ doubled making 4 is worth 670, but 4♥ (nvul) doubled making 4 is only worth 590. Therefore, **once the opponents double you into a game contract, there is no reason to bid further unless you think you can make slam.**

Redoubles

If your opponents double a contract you think you will make, you can *redouble* for even more points. The “insult” is 100 and all the tricks are doubled again.

Examples of Redoubled Scoring

2♠ XX (nvul) making is 60 for the tricks $\times 4$ or 240 + 300 for the game bonus + 100 for the insult = 640!

4♥ XX (vul) making is 120 for the tricks $\times 4$ or 480 + 300 for the game bonus + 100 for the insult = 880!

strategic tips

1. Choose the highest-scoring game.

For game contracts, you should be thrilled to play in a major, happy to play notrump, and reluctant to play in a minor. If you have an 8-card trump fit in the majors, it will usually score one trick more than a notrump contract. Your score for 4♥ making 4 (+420) will beat the pairs who play in 3NT making 3 (+400).

In minor suits, though, this one-trick advantage doesn't produce a higher score. Five♣ making 5 (+400) will score less than 3NT making 4 (+430). For this reason, 5♣ and 5♦ contracts are somewhat rare at duplicate. Players will jump at the chance to bid 3NT, even if a minor-suit game might be safer.

2. Choose the safest partscore.

If you're stopping in a partscore, your first choice should still be the major suit, but your choice between a minor and notrump isn't as critical. You should almost always play in the major if you have an 8-card fit—2♠ making 2 (+110) beats 1NT making 1 (+90) or 2♣ making 2 (+90).

However, if your partscore decision is between notrump and a minor, it may be better to play in the suit contract if you have a fit, especially if you have bare-minimum points. Getting a plus score is important, so when you have limited high-card strength, you'll usually want the safety of a trump suit.

3. Go for it!

Don't settle for a comfortable contract if you think the odds are good of making a higher-scoring one. Also, learn techniques for investigating slam—missing one could mean your partner blocking your phone calls for several weeks.

One-on-one help with Duplicate Scoring is available from our BIL Friends who generously volunteer their time. Please contact PeterB at BILFRIEND1@yahoo.com.

Good Bridging!