

The “Butler” Scoring Method for Pair Competition

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Bridge is a numbers game. Different tactics may need to apply to different scoring methods.

Butler Pairs is a hybrid between Teams and Duplicate Pairs. It is a Pairs competition with Teams scoring.

(A Guide to) How is Butler Scoring calculated?

- ◆ Essentially, a "datum" or mean score is computed from the set of the scores after discarding the top and bottom 10% of scores and retaining the rest. Then the average of all of the retained scores is calculated, and rounded to the nearest 10 points.
- ◆ For each pair (including those pairs whose scores were discarded from the datum calculation), the score for their board is taken and subtracted from the datum score to determine their net score.
- ◆ This score, positive or negative, is converted to IMPs according to the IMP table. Each of the pairs then scores that number of IMPs for the board, one pair getting the positive score and the other the negative score.
- ◆ This is done for every board, and each pair's total IMP score across all of the boards they play is computed.
- ◆ The winner (E/W and N/S) is the pair with the overall highest total of IMPs (International Match Point scoring).

How is this different to Matchpoint (MP) Scoring?

In MPs, for each board, the pairs playing the board are given 2 MPs for every pair whose score they have beaten and 1 MP for every pair whose score they have equalled. This does mean that beating another pair's score by 10 points brings no greater benefit than beating that pair's score by 500 points. There is nothing wrong with the MP scoring method per se, but it does lead to an excessive need to take a risk of going down in a contract than can be made safely in an effort to obtain the maximum score. For example, you may decide to try 3NT to make 10 tricks rather than 4 Hearts or Spades (making 10), for the extra 10 points even though the Major may be the “safer” contract.

How should I best bid & play then in Butler Scoring vs Matchpoints (or, what tactics)?

- ◆ **Declarer's top priority is making the contract.**
Overtricks are worth a maximum of 1 IMP each, and may possibly not gain anything (depending on the datum level). It is tactically unsound to risk going down in a contract that can be made safely in an attempt to score an overtrick.

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◆ **Play in the safest contract.**

The 10 point premium for playing in no trump is insignificant at IMP scoring. Playing in 4 of a major, scoring 420 points, will score the same as those playing in 3NT+1, scoring 430 points.

Minor suit game contracts should be attempted whenever the 11 trick contract is safer than 3NT. You will tie with those making 9 tricks in 3NT (the same as when using MP scoring). The loss to those pairs making 10 tricks in 3NT will be small, unlike at MP scoring. On the other hand your gain, when the minor suit game makes and 3NT fails, will be huge.

◆ **Bid your games**

Pairs should be more prepared to bid close game contracts than they would be under MP scoring. You will come out ahead in the long run even if game succeeds less than 50% of the time.

◆ **Defenders' top priority is to defeat the contract** rather than simply try and limit the overtricks.

Facts about the Butler Scoring Method

The overall total of IMPs for any competition must be zero, since every time a pair gains IMPs their opponents will have lost the same number of IMPs. In a two winner movement, the total IMPs for the NS pairs and the total IMPs for the EW pairs need not be zero. However, the total IMPs for all of the NS pairs will be equal but opposite to the total IMPs for all of the EW pairs.

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Examples of calculating scoring can be found at various websites. Try searching "Butler Pairs Scoring in Bridge"