

## Tournament Jargon: How Do I Decide What Events to Play?

Mary Alice Seville  
2011 Oregon Coast Regional

### Tournament categories

#### Sectional

- Each ACBL Unit can sponsor at least one sectional tournament per year. This means there are many close to home.
- Silver points are awarded.
- STaC (Sectional Tournament at Clubs). A Club game awarding silver points.

#### Regional

- Each ACBL district can sponsor one or more per year. District 20 has four - Vancouver, Seaside, Reno plus either Eugene or Medford (Bend will be added to and Reno dropped from the mix in the future).
- Red points and Gold points are awarded.

#### National

- 3 NABCs (North American Bridge Championship) per year.
  - 2012 schedule: spring (Memphis), summer (Philadelphia), fall (San Francisco).
- Red, Gold and Platinum points are awarded.
- High level national competitions
  - Some games are open to everyone – pay your money and you can play against all those people we read about in the **Bridge Bulletin**.
  - Some games are by invitation or (*Red Ribbon/Blue Ribbon/Silver Ribbon*) qualification only.
  - The only source of Platinum points.
- Regionally rated events
  - Essentially a big regional tournament at the national event. Not many of the big names play in these games. Red and Gold points are awarded.

### Adjectives for events

#### Stratified

- Everyone plays together, but to determine winners, your score is compared only to others in your strata – A, B, or C.
- The master point range for each strata depends on the tournament: Nationals and Regionals have higher limits for C and B than Sectionals do.
  - For example, in the Oregon Trail regional, A=2000+; B=750-2000; C=0-750
  - At the Heart of the Valley (Albany) sectional, A=2000+; B=500-2000; C=0-500

#### Strati-flighted

- A/X is confined to people with a high number of master points (usually more than 3000) and/or those that want the challenge of playing against them. These people play against each other but **not** against B, C, and D players.
- B, C, and D strata are the same as described in the "stratified" description above.
  - For example, in the Oregon Trail regional, A/X: A=3000+; X=0-3000; B=1000-2000; C=500-1000; D=0-500

### Bracketed (usually a team game)

- Brackets depend on the number of players that enter and the team's master point total.
- Once you are assigned to a bracket, you play against only teams in your bracket, i.e. against teams with points comparable to your team's points.
- If many teams enter, there will be many brackets and the master point ranges will be narrow.
- If few teams enter, there will be fewer brackets, and the master point ranges may be quite wide. In that case, handicaps may be awarded to the lower ranking teams to try to "level the playing field".
- Awards vary – bracket 1 awards the most master points, with awards decreasing as the bracket number increases. If there are 5 brackets, bracket 5 (for teams with the fewest master points) are awarded the fewest master points, and, if regionally rated, the award may be half red, half gold.

### Event Names

#### Open pairs

- All tournaments hold one or more open-pair events.
- Stratified (everyone is competing for master points against pairs with similar master points).
- Some are 'play through' – you are expected to play in 2 or more sessions. Gold points are awarded at regionals and nationals for overall winners as well as section/session 1st and 2nd places.
- No gold points are awarded for single-session events.

#### Swiss teams

- Stratified or Strati-flighted.
- A team of 4 (or 5 or 6) play 7 to 9 boards against another team.
- Win or lose, you play to the end of the event.
- After you finish the boards, you compare how your team did on each board with how the other team did. Hand score differences are converted to IMP's (international match points) to determine the winner of each hand.
- Total IMP score is usually converted to a 20 or 30 Victory Point scale. (The use of Victory Points helps differentiate between a match you won big versus one that was a squeaker.)
- If you "place" in a Regional/National A, X, or B strat, you are awarded gold points.

#### Knockouts (bracketed)

- A team game – instead of playing in all rounds of the event, you play until you are beaten, i.e., get knocked out.
- Held at National, Regional and some Sectional tournaments.
- You generally play 24 boards against one team;
  - you may play in a 'round robin' where you play 12 boards against two teams
  - in a 'round robin' two of the three teams involved advance to the next round.
- The brackets are designed so that an overall winner will be chosen after 4 sessions (sometimes only 3 sessions).
- A variation is the Compact Knockouts – usually two 12 board matches in one session with the winners advancing to a second session.
- Knockouts are a very popular event – many people have amassed nearly all of their gold points (gold is awarded if you win 2 rounds) playing in regionally-rated knockout events at National and Regional tournaments.

#### Board a Match (BAM)

- A team game that moves like a pairs game. Sometime during the event, your N/S will play the same boards against an E/W pair that your E/W played against the other N/S pair—the magic of computers!
- You either win or lose a board, but the score difference is immaterial. The team that wins the most boards is the winner (gold points at a National or Regional).
- More common at a National than Regional or Sectional tournament.

### Barometer

- Everyone plays the same board at the same time, so you know how you are doing as you go along. (This requires **many** decks of cards, and **much** duplication!)
- More common at sectional tournaments.

### Gold Rush

- A relatively new event.
- Limited to players with 750 or fewer master points: Two strats with upper limits of 300 and 750.
- Since higher ranked players are excluded, you have a better chance of winning gold points. Gold points are awarded for placing overall and for section/session winners in the 750 strata.
- Available only at Nationals and Regionals.

### Side games

- Single session events (usually pairs) at Regionals and Nationals: Morning, afternoon and evening.
- If you win a side game **and** play in one other similar game (morning, afternoon, or night), gold points are awarded; otherwise your award are red points.

### 299er or newcomer

- Limited to players with fewer than 300 master points.
- If there are enough players, the game will be stratified (D/E/F).
- Available at most Sectionals and Regionals and all Nationals. No Gold points are awarded.

### So, where should you play? It depends upon your goal:

- **To earn your Life master ranking:**
  - play in events where gold points are awarded – anything except 299er.
  - **Life Master** requirement: 300 master points (at least 50 black, 50 silver, 50 red or gold/platinum, of which at least 25 must be gold or platinum)
- **To become a better bridge player:**
  - start out in 299er games, but move into side games, open pairs, team games etc.
  - “Play up” as quickly as you are comfortable.
- **To have fun playing bridge in a relatively stress free environment:**
  - play in the 299er games until you earn so many master points that you don’t qualify. Then ‘play up’.

## Points (definitely NOT “points shmoints”)

- MASTERPOINT types
  - “Unpigmented” points are awarded for on-line ACBL-sanctioned games.
  - Black points are awarded only at ACBL-sanctioned club games.
  - Silver points are awarded at sectionally rated tournaments and at STaC club games.
  - Red points are awarded at regional tournaments, NABC tournaments and at special ACBL club events, like GNT qualifiers and certain club charity games.
  - Gold points are awarded at regional tournaments, NABC tournaments and at special ACBL-wide charity club games.
  - Platinum points are awarded ONLY at NABC events, and only at nationally-rated events.
- Matchpoints
  - A method of scoring individual hands in pairs events. For each hand, compare your score with the score of all of the other pairs (who played in your direction) who played this hand. You earn ½ matchpoint for each pair whose score you tie, and 1 matchpoint for each pair whose score you beat. For example, say you are sitting N/S in a club game with 9 tables. Each board is played 9 times. If your score beats all 8 of the other N/S pairs’ scores, you earn 8 matchpoints (a “cold top”). If everyone earned the same score on a hand, everyone earns 4 matchpoints (because everyone tied with 8 other pairs). If you beat all other pairs except one pair, whose score is the same as yours, then your score is 7½ (“tied for top”).
- IMPs (International Match Points)
  - A method for comparative hand-scoring in team events. An example is easiest to demonstrate. Assume on board 1 of your match, your NS pair played 3NT, vulnerable, making, thus earning a score of +600 for your team. Assume your EW pair, when they played that board at the other table, sacrificed in a 4S contract, going down two for a score of -200 for your team. Your team’s net score for that hand is +400. On the side of your team score sheet, the “International Matchpoint Scale” table shows that a score differential of +400 translates to +9 IMPs (370-420). Next, on board 2, your NS pair let the opponents make four hearts, not vul, for a score of -420. At the other table, your EW pair stopped in three hearts, making four, for a score of +170. Your net score for board 2 is -250, which translates to an IMP score of -6. After scoring each hand, add your IMP scores, and then translate that total into Victory Points (VPs).
- VPs (Victory Points)
  - A method of assessing the margin of victory in a team game. There are two VP scoring tables shown on the side of your team score sheet under “20 VPs” and “30 VPs”. One table divides 20 VPs between the two teams; the other divides 30 VPs between the teams. (Each table is further divided into two columns, depending on how many boards were played for each match, with 6-8 board matches on the left side, and 9-11 board matches on the right side.) The most common usage is 6-8 board matches with the 20 VP table, which I assume holds in this example. After translating each hand score to IMPs, as described above, your IMP total indicates the margin by which you won or lost the match. If you tied your opponents (an IMP score of zero), the teams divide the 20 VPs equally, with each team awarded 10 VPs. If one team dominated the other by a differential of 28 IMPs or more, then the winning team earns all 20 VPs, and the losing team earns no VPs at all. Teams whose IMP score differential is between 0 and +28 IMPs divide the 20 VPs on a sliding scale. (The VP scoring method is like a boxing match score, where ten points are divided between two contestants. This is called a “must” scoring method.)