

Bracketed KO Teams

Part I. Bracket KO's in general.

As you all know by now Units 241 and 184 have a joint regional coming up in August of this year. As per normal for regionals, the schedule is loaded with Bracketed Knockouts. If you do not attend many regionals and/or would like to better understand how Bracketed KO's work, continue reading. The rest of you can go on to the next article or skip to the Part II.

Each team must select a captain who will be responsible for all official representations to the Director or Committees. The captain or his/her designee must enter the team prior to the official closing time for entries. At that time the entry is purchased, the captain must report the total number of masterpoints held by all the players on the team as well as how many people comprise the team. (Later the completed entry will include a listing of the names of all team members, home cities, states, player numbers, number of masterpoints per last notification from the ACBL and a notation as to who is captain.) Four, five or six member teams are permitted with each team member being expected to play at least 50% of the matches, but there are exceptions for early matches. See the director if this is a problem for your team.

The directors now determined the average masterpoint holding of each team. The field is then divided into brackets with the top x number of teams making up the first bracket, the next x number of teams making up the second bracket, etc. I have used x to signify the number of teams in each bracket as best determined by the directors from the total number of entries.

Each bracket then becomes a separate event; thus you compete with those teams whose average masterpoint total is relatively equal to that of your team. The number of teams in a bracket usually varies from 8 to 16 depending upon the total number of teams entered. First match selections within a bracket are usually done randomly but can be done by seeding according to masterpoints. Each session of the KO you will play at least one other team until you lose and are "knocked out". (Frequently the first round may be a round robin of three teams in order to eliminate only one team.) If you continue to win, you play the next session up to a maximum of four sessions.

Part II. Strategy

Now that you know how these Bracketed KO's are structured, it might be beneficial for you to better understand IMP scoring as that is the method used in these events. There are considerable differences in approaching bridge from a IMP strategy as opposed to that using matchpoint scoring. To name a few, there are different theories on sacrifice bidding, balancing, and doubling. In a long IMP match such as a KO Team event, a good or bad result on an early board should not affect your bidding or play on the next deal.

IMP Principles: (1) The key to success in matchpoint scoring is how often you beat your opponents, not by how much you beat your opponents. Playing IMPS, the opposite is true--the key to winning is how much.

(2) In matchpoint duplicate bridge, the key to winning a board may very well be an overtrick--even one gained through considerable risk to the contract. At IMPS, however, an undoubled overtrick can never be worth more than 1 IMP. The same is true for the relatively small total point differences between playing notrump, major or minor suit contracts. Hence, it tends not to be the denomination of the game that is important at IMPS, but rather the safety of the game and the odds of its success.

(3) The odds on bidding close games or slams playing IMPS are influenced by the vulnerability. While I could present all the odds, suffice it to say that close vulnerable games are a much better proposition than close non-vulnerable games. Basically you should bid any vulnerable game that stands a reasonable prospect of making, but bid non-vulnerable games only with solid expectations of making it.

(4) The IMP odds change drastically for small slams. No longer is vulnerability a factor as both vulnerable and non-vulnerable small slams are closer to an even money bet. However, another factor enters in. It is best to assume that most close slams will not be bid by your counterparts at the other table unless they are either very aggressive and very good bidders. Consequently, if you are well ahead in your match or playing a team that you rate to beat, it is best to be conservative in your slam bidding. On the other hand, if you are behind playing a good team that figures to beat you, play for a substantial swing and bid a close slam.

The odds in favor of bidding and making a grand slam are very much against doing so. A word of advice on bidding grand slams is "forget it--unless you can count 13 tricks."

(5) As a general rule do not be concerned about small one or two IMP losses on specific deals. Instead, the key to winning is to obtain a plus score on the little or partscore hands. In fact your primary concern should be getting a PLUS, not how big a plus or how small a minus. This means that, as declarer, you make your contract whatever it is, and, as defender, you attempt to defeat their contracts at the risk of allowing overtricks if your tactics fail.

(6) Sacrifices in IMP play are severely overrated with the one possible exception of the opponents being vulnerable and your side being non-vulnerable. They generally do not account for material IMP swings if they are correct, but they amount to large swings if they are wrong. In addition, the prospects of being doubled are great as the opponents are less likely to be pushed one level higher. However, advance saves are more likely to work; this form of sacrifice attempts to push the opponents to the five level before they have a chance to exchange much information. This may cause the opponents to (a) misjudge their strength and bid too much, (b) miss a slam, or (c) find a profitable sacrifice for your side. On the down side, if the opponents bid a slam after your preemptive tactics, you may not know whether or not it will make and/or whether you have forced them into it and they are unlikely to be there at the other table.

(7) Close doubles should be avoided at all costs when the form of scoring is IMPS. This is particularly true of partscore contracts as the risks are far too great for the possible gain.

(8) Decisions that must be made in the second half of a KO match should be influenced by your results on the first half's boards. It is also important to remember that you do not have to win the match or that all matches have to be won at your table. Remember at all times that you have teammates who may be having a good round and who will be able to cover one or two bad results but not several. One of your objectives should be to avoid losing the match at your table as most KO matches are lost rather than won.

(9) Be a good partner and teammate. Team morale is extremely important and it will be in everyone's best interest if all team members attempt to make the game fun. It will also increase your chances of winning and doing well.

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