HOW DOES DUPLICATE SCORING WORK? – AN EXPLANATION

The scoring system for duplicate Bridge pairs is very simple – for each board the pairs are ranked in order from highest to lowest score, with North/South and East/West being scored separately.

In the old days before computers handled everything, scoring was done manually. Each board had a travelling score sheet on which the pair numbers, contract, opening lead and number of tricks were recorded after the hand was played. Back then it was common that all players sat and tabulated the scores on the travelling sheet at the end of a session, which not only made it easier for the Director but also provided an understanding of what they were doing.

To do this, ranking kicked in. North/South was scored first. To get the maximum score possible, the number of pairs was doubled and the 2 was subtracted. e.g. for 9 tables, 2x9=18 and 18-2=16.

So for this match the maximum score is 16 for a top board, and 0 for the opponents. Scores go down in twos from maximum to 0. So if every pair scored a successively lower score, the results would be 16,14,12,10,8,6,4,2,0 for NS and the corresponding opposite for EW. But it never happens that way – pairs usually share scores, and the bigger the field, the more this happens.

It works like this: if two pairs had the same top score, they would receive the average of the two top scores – i.e. the average of 16 and 14 is 15 for them, and their opponents would get 1 point each.

So 16 and 14 have been used. If the next highest N/S score went to one pair, they would get 12 and the opponents 4. If 3 or more pairs scored the same, they would receive the average of the next 3 points going down – i.e. 10, 8 and 6 – the average is the middle number, 8. Opponents get 8 too.

And so it goes till all the scores are used up and all the results graded.

With most contracts there are scores on both sides – not all NS or EW results. So scoring NS first, the scorer would score NS from high to low first, then switch to the EW scores that are negative to NS because they lost points, from lowest to highest. e.g. the 50s followed by the 100s etc. it's all about positive and negative scores.

This is the algorithm the computer software uses.

Of course there are exceptions for the computer to consider:

- If a table is given an average score because the Director has ruled on some anomaly or other;
- If there is a sit out at one table, leaving a different number of pairs competing each way;
- Maybe other exceptions, such as the withdrawal of a pair during the match.

The computer handles it all, provided the data is correctly entered. That's why an EW player must always verify the score going into the computer and the Director rules on anomalies.

Contract	Lead	Tricks	Score NS	EW	Matchpoints NS	EW
3NT S	5H	9	400			
3NT N	2S	10	430			
3NT S	5H	8		50		
5C S	KH	9		100		
3NT S	8H	8		50		
1C S	8H	9	110			
3NT N	2S	11	460			
2NT S	8H	9	150			
3NT N	2S	11	460			

Let's score this board together.

First, we count the rows. There are 9. So the best result is 9x2=18 and 18-2=16.

Joint top scorers are pairs 8 and 10 with 460 points. They get the average of 16 and 14. That's 15 each.

Next best is pair 2 with 430. So we give them 12. Pair 1 is next with 10.

Pair 9 will get 8 and pair 7 gets 6.

Now we switch to the minus points for NS. Pairs 3 and 6 gave away 50 points so they get the average of 4 and 2. We give them 3. And pair 5 gets zero. That's NW done.

To finish off we fill in the EW scores by subtracting each NS score from 16. EW pair 1 gets 6, pair 2 gets 4, and so on to the bottom of the table.

Once all the results have been tabulated the aggregates are converted to percentiles, which is how the ranked scores for both sides are presented. Now the software takes care of everything, provided it is correctly recorded.

Pair NS	Pair EW
1	9
2	1
3	3
5	6
6	8
7	10
8	2
9	5
10	7

			Score		Matchpoints	
Contract	Lead	Tricks	NS	EW	NS	EW
3NT S	5H	9	400		10	6
3NT N	2S	10	430		12	4
3NT S	5H	8		50	3	13
5♣ S	KH	9		100	0	16
3NT S	8H	8		50	3	13
1♣ S	8H	9	110		6	10
3NT N	2S	11	460		15	1
2NT S	8H	9	150		8	8
3NT N	2S	11	460		15	1

You might notice a number 4 missing in each side – this is because with an even number of tables there must be an EW skip to prevent all pairs from playing the same board twice. Score sheets don't show the percentage you make on each board, but your share of the total points is converted as part of your overall result. This hand was played 9 times, competing for a top of 16 mps. So the total is 16 x 9 = 144. But you don't need to know that. It's the final reckoning that counts.

For other forms of competitive Bridge the scoring is different – for example, the Groner Howell movement for small numbers where players do not have fixed seating but are moved around the room according to a chart to guarantee that nobody plays against the same pair or plays the same board twice. Those results are given in a single score sheet because players sit at both directions in the course of a match.

I hope this gives you an understanding of how rankings are calculated and raw scores are converted to percentages for Duplicate Bridge. As the ABF online Bridge teacher Joan Butts says, *'A lot of people don't realize that one terrible score doesn't finish you off for the day, and that you can recover from one or two "bottoms". Many people don't realize that the score is just a calculation of how many pairs you beat on a board, rather than the amount by which you beat them.'* By the same token, going down three not doubled and not vulnerable might cost you 150 points, but letting the opponents make game in a major for 620 is far worse – so you did well to make a good sacrifice!

Do remember that playing for overtricks may seem risky, but the difference is essential if you want to achieve high percentages in Duplicate.

Happy Bridging! - Sue