

play bridge

A section designed with the newer player in mind.

The three T's

Last time, we talked about the alphabet soup of stratification. Now we are off to the three T's: Team, Tactics and Terminology. A team is usually four people, and the two most common team offerings at tournaments or clubs are the knockout and the Swiss.

Here are the mechanics of team play. One half of your team sits East-West and plays a number of boards against another team. The other half sits North-South and plays the same boards against the same team. After the match is over, you get together with your teammates to compare results on each deal. For example, suppose North-South were plus 420 on a board and East-West were minus 450. This means the team lost 30 points (420 to 450). This is then converted to International Matchpoints (IMPs). If you look inside your private scorecard, there is an IMP scale. You see that losing 30 points is the equivalent of minus 1 IMP. After all the boards are compared, your IMP results are totaled and, barring a tie, your team is plus or minus IMPs.

When finished, you compare with the other team and then report your total IMP result to the director. If it is a Swiss teams, the match is posted in victory points (VPs). At the end of the Swiss, the team with the most victory points wins. In a knockout, the scores are not converted to VPs.

If you are not bogged down with all this terminology, you might be ready for a few team tactics:

- ❖ Make your contracts. Play the safest you can, even if it sacrifices a potential overtrick. Risk going down more than one if that play might make your contract.
- ❖ Try to set the opponents. Don't worry about giving up an overtrick if you can find a plan that might defeat the contract.
- ❖ Don't double for a one-trick set. If something doesn't go right, you might be giving up a doubled partscore or game. You should know you have the contract beat.
- ❖ Do not be eager to balance, especially if the opponents have not found a fit. You might risk minus 200 or minus 300 instead of giving the partscore they were going to make.
- ❖ Bid your vulnerable games or slams. The bonus is so much greater vulnerable that you cannot afford to miss a game (620 vs. 170 = 10 IMPs).

The knockout event has the winners continuing to play and the losers being knocked out of the event. Your competitors are determined by total masterpoints for the team, with teams put into groups or brackets. If you win your first match, you will continue to play against people in your own bracket. A typical knockout runs three or four sessions, depending on the number of teams in the bracket.

Normally a knockout match is lon-



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ger than a Swiss match and is most often head-to-head. This means you are matched against one other team for 24 boards, for example, taking a break in the middle to compare. The team with the greater number of IMPs wins, even if it is only by a 1-IMP margin.

The nice part about KO matches is that you can have one or even two bad results and overcome them. In the shorter Swiss match, one big mistake often spells disaster.

Most players love teams. Team bridge is social, as you have three teammates. It is comfortable to play, as your goal is to get to the safest contract and make it. You do not have to fret over extra tricks. You can lose one match or have one disaster and still overcome it — or have teammates who overcome it for you.

Next time you go to a tournament or see a team game scheduled at your club, give it a try! □

Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers