

Bart Learns a Lesson **A Duplicate Bridges Fable**

Brett Bridges smoothly pulled the card from dummy as instructed by his partner Donovan, the declarer at 6 Spades. Looked like trusty old Donovan was well on his way to fulfilling this slam contract. From the corner of his eye, Brett watched his twin brother Bart pushing back from the table, confidently scoring his last hand of the evening. The body language said it all with Bart's confident strut to the Director's table. No psychic powers needed here.

Donovan laid his last three cards on the table claiming the rest of the tricks cleverly scoring an overtrick. Brett scored the hand then followed his brother's path to the front of the room. Bart was savoring the round-to-go results. There he was, comfortably at the top of the heap, 62%, with his nemesis, Sammy Spade, sitting a full 2% behind.

"Finally!" Bart exclaimed.

"Beating Sammy. Very nice." As usual, Brett knew just what was on Bart's mind.

Bart had every reason to be optimistic. As he explained, he just finished the last round in a 7 Full Table game; his last round was average-plus. He's sitting first N-S after 24 of 28 Boards; 86% of the bridge is history, played, scored, entered. Good results on the last 4 Boards, the last 14%. What could go wrong?

Smugly Bart waits impatiently as the last scores dribble in. They are entered, the computer crunches and the Director announces, "Again we have a winner!"...but it's not Bart! He has plummeted to third while the fourth place team has catapulted to a convincing win.

Bart clamors for his summary. "Summary please. Let me check those scores. Nope everything looks right. Darn computer. Something must be wrong with it."

Bart knew what was coming next. It would be another one of Brett's long-winded explanations. His twin had already drawn a deep breath and began.

"Match Point scoring can be perplexing despite its primitive simplicity. Every partnership plays the same hands, receiving 1 point for outscoring another partnership on a hand or ½ point for a tie. The confusion comes from a not-so-obvious fact-of-life...everybody plays the same hands but at different times. Let's look at it in detail."

"Each Board in this rotation will be played 7 times offering the potential to win 6 Match Points on each of the 28 Boards for a total of 168. If you outscore everybody on every hand then you get 168 Match Points, 100%. Never happens. Go back to your first round. You played 4 Boards in that round."

Question: How many of the 168 Match Points could you accrue on that round?"

Answer: Zero."

“That’s right. One-seventh of the hands have been played, 14%, but you have accrued no Match Points. How can that be? Simple. You could not outscore anybody because nobody else has played those hands. They were all busy playing other hands, hands in your immediate future.”

“How about the second round? You played 4 Boards in the second round; each had been played once before. You could pick up one point on each of those Boards by outscoring the previous play. Meanwhile each Board played in your first round is in play during the second round with the potential for one point per Board if your score is better. Therefore a total of 8 Points have been determined by the end of Round 2. With 29% of the bridge behind you, only 8 of the 168 Match Points, a mere 4.8%, have been determined. “

Brett chalked a quick table on the board.

Round No	Match Points	Cumulative MP	Percent	Cumulative %
1	0	0	0%	0%
2	8	8	4.8%	4.8%
3	16	24	9.5%	14.3%
4	24	48	14.3%	28.6%
5	32	80	19.1%	47.6%
6	40	120	23.8%	71.4%
7	48	168	28.6%	100.0%
Total	168			

“How could you slip so much in the last round? You played 4 Boards in that round, each previously played by 6 Pairs, offering an opportunity to win a total of 24 Match Points. Simultaneously the 24 Boards previously played by you were in play at the other 6 Tables. You could get 1 Match Point per Board depending on your previous scores (and the last round results), totaling 24 Match Points. In other words, that last round is only one of seven but determines $24 + 24 = 48$ Match Points. That’s almost 29% of the Match Points up for grabs in the last round, only half determined by your performance in that round, the remainder out of your control, determined by the rest of the room. Your last round average-plus was better than 50% but not quite up to your blistering 62% pace; the rest...well that was in the hands of the bridge gods.”

“Moral dear brother...Don’t count your chickens...”