

ChRONicles of Cardplay

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How to read a Pairs Recap – What do all these numbers mean?

In the last couple of months I've spoken to several newer players looking at a posted pairs result sheet and asked, "Do you understand what you're looking at?" Most times I've gotten the answer, "Well, no, not really." So in this article I'm going to dissect the printout you see on the wall. A computer program named ACBLScore produces this printout. Games used to be scored by hand, but these days virtually all bridge events including club games are scored using a computer. By the way, most clubs now have a website where they post their game results. If you have to run out after the game, you can often get your results later at your leisure online.

To start with, you need to find your *section*. Sections are labeled with letters starting with "A" and going up from there. At a large tournament, you'll see many sections going up to "I", "J" or even "K". At very large tournaments (nationals) there may be double or even triple letter sections ("AAA"). Each section has a pre-assigned standard color. Section "A" is white, section "B" is yellow, "C" is green, etc. Your entry, the table mats, the pickup slips and even the plastic boards all match the section color so the directors can keep everything straight. Many club games have more than one section – for example *open* and *newcomer*.

When you find your section, you'll find the *recap* for your game hanging on the wall near it. Usually the North/South scores are posted on the left and the East/West scores are on the right. If there's a stanchion, they're posted on opposite sides. Of course, the first thing you're interested in is, *what did I win?*! There's a couple of different recap formats, but general information and elements are all the same. The recap's top portion describes the *event*, the middle segment summarizes the scores, and the bottom portion details the board-by-board *results*. Find your pair number and name in the middle portion. If there's a number followed by a couple of letters in parentheses on your line, those are the *masterpoints* you've won. We'll come back to what the letters in parentheses mean in a minute. The number of masterpoints you can win is a complex formula determined by the event rating, the number of pairs in the event, the masterpoint limits (if any), your results, and how many lesser events are playing under you.

Now look at the top header portion. The top line is the event name. It will read something like *Stratified Open pairs*, or *199er pairs*. This is followed on the same line with the *session name* (for example *Thursday eve*) and section letter. The next line is the date and time, and ACBL *sanction* number. An event cannot award masterpoints unless it's sanctioned by the ACBL.

The next line displays the Director's name and the game's rating and the movement. A club *rating point* game awards the fewest number of masterpoints. *Club championships*, *charity games*, *STaCs* (Sectional Tournaments at Clubs) and other special events award extra masterpoints for the same number of participants.

The next line is important. The first number is *average*. It's the number of *matchpoints* you need to win to have a 50% game. The next number is *top* – the maximum number of matchpoints you can win on any one board. Divide top in half to calculate the board average. The next item on the line is *MP LIMITS*, which defines the *strata* for the event. *Stratified* events are where the *field* is sub-divided based on the masterpoints held by the player in the partnership with the higher number of masterpoints. Sometimes a *stratum* is also called a *flight (Flt)*. An event typically has three stratifications. The strata limits are published before the event starts, and you're sold an entry in your stratum. Occasionally the director adjusts the stratum masterpoint limits so there are approximately the same number of pairs in each flight. An *open* event has no upper masterpoint limit – anyone can play who holds zero to infinity masterpoints. An open event may still be stratified. Stratified events give newer players the opportunity to play against better players, but still have a chance to win something.

Now let's examine the lower portion of the recap – the hand-by-hand matchpoint results. The board numbers run down the left side, the pair numbers run in a row across the top. In matchpoint scored events, you get one point for every pair you beat, ½ point for every pair you tie, and zero points for every pair that beats you. Matchpoint pairs is scored by *how many* pairs you beat on a hand, not by *how much*. Let's say that in the upper portion of the recap, you note that there were 13 tables in play and a top was 12. Therefore the board average is 6 (½ of 12). If you beat six pairs, you receive 6 matchpoints and an average. If you beat all the pairs, you receive a 12 and a *top*.

If you do poorly on a hand and get the worst score, you get zero matchpoints and a **bottom**. If you play a typical 26-board set with a top of 12, the maximum matchpoints you can win is $12 \times 26 = 312$. Average is 156. The sum of all the matchpoints you actually won is your **raw score**. Your raw score divided by 312 is your **percentage**. The highest percentage **your way** (East/West or North/South) wins a **section top**. The highest percentage between all East/West and North/South pairs wins the **overall top**. In stratified events, within each stratum, there's a winner. If you're in the lowest stratum, you might finish below 50%, but still win your strat because you did better than all other pairs with approximately the same masterpoints as you. You can win a higher stratum than yours, but not a lower stratum. There's only one section top winner each way regardless of stratum. The section top winners usually receive a future **free play** or some other prize.

To find out how you did on a particular board, look at the recap's bottom section. The board numbers are listed on the left from top to bottom starting with board number 1. The pair numbers are listed left to right at the top of the starting with pair number 1. Say you're pair #6 and want to find out how you did on board #10. Run your finger down the board numbers on the left until you get to #10. Then go across to column #6 to find your raw and matchpoint score. A hyphen ("-") following your matchpoint score signifies a $\frac{1}{2}$ matchpoint. Occasionally, matchpoint scores will be decimals. These happen when different boards in a section are played a different number of times (for example, some boards were played 11 times and some were played 12 due to a **sit out**) or when there's an **irregularity**. The boards played fewer times are **factored up** to make the matchpoint scores equivalent to the other boards.

Let's go back to the middle portion. You and your partner's names are listed, possibly with your ACBL numbers. Your stratum letter is listed under the "Flt" or "Rank" columns. There will typically be 2 or 3 columns, one for each stratum. The first column is where you finished in your **section** (the people playing in your direction). The number under the stratum letter is where you finished in that stratum. You may finish "in-the-money" in more than one stratum. For example, you might be 5th in "A", 3rd in "B" and 1st in "C" (reading left to right). Your **overall** rank within your stratum is a number listed under the "Overall" column. This column also has multiple columns, one for each stratum. The overall awards compare the best percentages from both the East/West AND the North/South pairs. For example, you may be first in your section, but only 3rd overall. The column labeled "Score" is your raw, total matchpoint score. The column labeled "Pct" is your calculated percentage. The column with numbers followed by letters in parentheses shows the masterpoints won. If you have two possible awards (say, 3rd in "A" and 1st in "C", or, a section top in "C" and a 5th overall), you only win **one** of the masterpoint awards – the best one. The letters in the parentheses tell you WHICH award you won. "OA" means "Overall in "A". "SC" means a Section award in "C".

So, besides checking out the masterpoints you won, what can reading the recap do to help improve your game? Actually, a careful analysis can help you quite a bit. Write your individual board matchpoint scores on your convention card in the last column. Your individual board scores are in a vertical column underneath your pair number. On each board, the top number is your matchpoint score and the bottom number is your raw score. Hint: double-check the raw scores on the recap with the ones on your scorecard. Sometimes transcription mistakes are made. Mistakes are correctable up to 24 hours after the end of the game.

Example: say a top is 12. Divide your matchpoint scores into three groups – tops, bottoms and averages. You can pretty much ignore the averages (scores between say 4- and 7-). Anything over a 7- is above average and a good score. Either you and your partner did something good, or the opponents did something bad. If you did something good (bidding, play, defense), take a moment to bask in your glory, and then move on. If the opponents did something bad, cross your fingers, consider yourself lucky, and hope they do it again the next time you encounter them. Now look at the, scores below 4-. Carefully analyzing these will improve your game. Again, either the opponents did something good or you and your partner did something bad. Sometimes, the opponents stumble into something and get an undeserved good result. For example, they play 3NT making 4 when they have an 8-card major suit fit and the rest of the field is in 4 of the major making 4. When you get a poor result, even though they've made a mistake, you've been **fixed**. Another possibility is that the opponents have a bidding gadget on their card that got them to a perfect spot that the rest of the field missed. Unlucky. The last (and often the most likely) possibility is that you and/or your partner made some mistake in the bidding, defense or play of the hand. Maybe you played in a minor when the field was playing notrump. Maybe you had a bidding misunderstanding and didn't bid a game or slam bid by almost everyone else. Perhaps your defense failed and gave declarer an undeserved overtrick. Regardless, you need to analyze these mistakes and try to eliminate them from your play. By

examining the recap you can guess what contracts the other pairs played and by looking at the hand record you can often get an idea of what should have happened at your table. Working out these kinks with your partner on just a few of the bottom boards will improve your game over the long run. Part of the fun of duplicate is going over the hands with your partner after the game is over.