

12. The Greatest of All Gifts

“The greatest of all gifts is the power to estimate things at their true worth” --- François de la Rochefoucauld.

All my partners know that I take more pride in estimating my match point performance than actually performing well in the event. In this column, I will introduce you to a fascinating yet simple way to estimate your game.

Most bridge players I know will try to estimate the performance of his/her match point game as the play continues on. Some folks will write an A for their estimate of an average board, an A+ for a better than average board, and an A- for a below average board. Some other people would draw an arrow like \rightarrow for average board and arrows like \nearrow or \searrow to show estimates of above average or below average boards. The problem with these types of estimation is that you cannot sum them up at the end and get a good, *overall* estimate for the session. I will show you a method that works really well to estimate the overall percentage of your game.

The arithmetic behind this estimation comes from the fact that in one matchpoint session one typically plays 26 (13 rounds of 2), 24 (12 rounds of 2), 27 (9 rounds of 3) or 24 boards (8 rounds of 3). Since all these numbers are close enough to 25, for our *estimation* purpose we will consider that the event is made out of 25 boards.

As the maximum possible percentage is 100% for one session (getting absolute top in every board) and there are 25 boards in one session (in our estimate), we will estimate that each board carries 4% of your total percentage.

Thus one way to estimate your game is to put a number between 0 and 4 next to your score for each board as your estimate for the board. For example, you are in 2S and the defense is weak and you make four for +170, your estimate for that board will be 4 for an absolute top. If on the other hand you are defending 2S and partner goofs up (we find it self-evident that we never goof up) and they make four, that board will get a 0 for your estimate of a bottom board. So the overall structure of estimation will be the following:

Your estimate of performance on a board	Your self-scoring
Absolute top or close to an absolute top	4
A little better than the field	3
Average board	2
A little worse than the field	1

Absolute bottom or close to an absolute bottom	0
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Then at the end, you sum up all these numbers for all the boards that you have played and that will be your estimate for the whole session. You can compare with the actual scores you got and whether they match your expectations of your performance board by board.

However, I do not like this specific method. This method is a kind of **brute force**, as at the end you have to add all these numbers. We can do better and avoid adding so many numbers. How?

Note that your estimate for an average board is a 2 in the above brute force method. In the new, improved method, we will set our reference level at the average board and call that as zero. **So in this new, improved method this will be the overall self-scoring structure:**

Your estimate of performance on a board	Your self-scoring
Absolute top or close to an absolute top	2
A little better than the field	1
Average board	0
A little worse than the field	-1
Absolute bottom or close to an absolute bottom	-2

See what I have done? I have subtracted 2 from each score so that the average board is at the reference with a score of 0. What is the advantage of this new method? Consider that you have played 6 boards so far and your estimates for these six boards are:
+2, 0, +1, -1, 2, -2

You don't have to add all these numbers. Simplify the set first. Cancel +2 with -2 and cancel +1 with the -1 and your total score so far is a +2. It is really a very simple method to handle the set of numbers. And no, it does not mean you are having a 2% game so far. It means your total performance so far is 2 percentage points above the reference level.

Let's say on a good day you end up with +12 for the whole session. Recall that the reference level is set at the average level. Thus, your score says that you are 12 points above the reference level. Now what is the reference level for the total session? Average or 50%. Thus, +12 in this way of counting say that your estimate of your game is $50+12 = 62\%$ for that session.

To sum up, estimate your scores with 0 as average board and +2 for a top and -2 for a bottom. Cancel out the plusses and minuses as much as you can and get the total score at the end. Whatever number you end up for the sum, add that to 50. This will be your estimate for the whole session in percentage terms. It turns out that this is a fairly accurate method if you can pinpoint well your average, below average, and above average boards.

So next time you play match point, estimate this way and compare your final estimate with your real, percentage score. It would be a lot of fun!

Acknowledgement

My good friend and occasional partner Gary Morrison of Denver introduced me to this method of estimation when I had only 5 masterpoints. I was amazed by the success of the method but Gary never told me why it works. Only recently I have figured out the reason behind the success of this superb method.