

**Esther Discusses "Bridge Pairs 'Movements'
(e.g., 'Mitchell', 'Howell') and
ACBL MasterPoints:
What's It All About, Alphonse, and
What is 'Stratification'?"**

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One of the duties of ACBL Duplicate Pair Game Directors is to structure the competition such that the competition is as "**fair**" as possible. Ideally, every duplicate Pairs competition would be structured such that (1) every Pair played every other Pair, and (2) every Pair played every Board.

During an actual competition, the Director will place a "Table Movement Card" on each bridge Table. The Table card will tell each Pair where to move to after the competition of each Round of bridge play. For example, the Table Movement Card may say, "N/S Pair #1 at Table 1, you never move during this competition," or "E/W Pair at this Table, move after this Round next to N/S at Table #4."

"Mitchell" Movement

In a "**Mitchell**" movement every Pair sits **only** 1 direction, either N/S or E/W, throughout the competition, and (2) **only** competes against the Pairs sitting in the **same** direction. For example, in a competition involving 12 Pairs, the Director might structure the competition using a "**Mitchell**" movement in which 6 Pairs sit only NORTH/SOUTH, and 6 Pairs sit only EAST/WEST. Each N/S Pair competes only against the 5 other Pairs sitting in the same N/S direction. The Director may decide that there will be 6 Rounds of competition, with each Round involving the Pairs at a

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhouse in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

given Table in each Round playing one time 4 of the 24 Boards used in the competition.

After each of the 6 Rounds, the *E/W* Pairs will move "up" to the next *higher* numbered Table (e.g., from Table 1 to Table 2, or from Table 6 to Table 1), while the *N/S* Pairs never move to different Tables across competition Rounds. But the set of 4 Boards just completed in the Round will be passed on to the *lower* numbered Table which has not yet played that set of 4 Boards. As they say, in a "**Mitchell**" movement "*Players get older, while Boards get younger!*"

"Howell" Movement

Some competitions are too *small* to accommodate running a "**Mitchell**" movement. For example, if the competition involves only 6 Pairs, each *N/S* Pair competing only against 2 other *N/S* Pairs, and each Round requiring 10 Boards, does not seem reasonable. In such cases, the restriction that Pairs each only sit in one direction (*N/S*, or *E/W*) is relaxed, and instead some Pairs alternate sitting *N/S* versus *E/W* during different Rounds. For example, each of the 6 Pairs might play against each of the 5 other Pairs during 5 Rounds of play with each Round involving 4 Boards² from among 20 Boards.

"Web" Movement

In larger games involving 11, 12, 15-17 Tables and 22, 24, or 30-34 Pairs, a "Web" movement can be used to allow the Pairs to all play the same Boards thus making the competition much more "*fair*". Running a "Web" movement requires the Director in advance to prepare 2 *duplicate* sets of game Boards, and so thus does involve more preparation by the Director.

Movement Tweaks

In some competitions the Director will invoke certain "tweaks" to insure that (1) Pairs never play the same Board twice, and (2) Pairs do not usually play the same Pair for more than a single Round³. These "tweaks" may take various forms.

² "Rounds" in duplicate Pairs competitions involve an equal number of Boards being played in each Round, and usually each Round will involve 2 to 4 Boards. However, Esther during the pandemic did play in one Bridge Base Online game in which the Director, probably due to incompetence rather than genius, structured the competition as a Howell movement involving 18 Rounds with 1 Board played per Round!!!

³ Playing against a given Pair for more than one Round, sometimes called a "revenge" Round, lessens the "fairness" of the competition. Pairs who play two rounds against a superior Pair will

For example, the Director in a "**Mitchell**" movement may tell the E/W Pairs, "After Round 5, '**skip**' the next higher Table number when you move for the next Round. For example, the E/W Pair sitting at Table 4 during Round 5 should move next not to Table 5, but instead should move to Table 6."

The Director may also use a "bye stand", where a set of Boards is placed between 2 Tables, and not played during a given Round. Players will move a new set of Boards to the "bye stand" after each Round at the same time that E/W Pairs move after Rounds, and Boards are also passed Table to Table.

"Sit Outs"

In some competitions it is mathematically impossible for the Director to structure the competition such that every Pair is playing during every Round of the competition. When a Pair is not playing during a Round, this is called a "**sit out**". If you have a "sit out" during a competition, you will never have more than one "sit out". For example, if the competition involves 7 Pairs, a "sit out" by 1 Pair during each Round is unavoidable.

Directors try assiduously to avoid "sit outs", and when "sit outs" are unavoidable, Directors try to structure the competition such that *each* Round involves relatively *few* Boards so that the "sit outs" are briefer.

ACBL MasterPoints

All ACBL members playing in an ACBL-sanctioned competition are eligible to earn ACBL MasterPoints. ACBL MasterPoints are awarded in various colors: Black always in Club-level games, Red in Sectional-level games, Silver in Regional-level games, and Gold in National games. Some competitions award a mixture of colors (e.g., 75% Silver, 25% Black).

ACBL MasterPoints (MPs) are used to award ACBL Ranks. A fewer of the lower ACBL ranks and their MP requirements are:

Junior Master	5 MPs of <i>any</i> color
Club Master	20 MPs of <i>any</i> color
Sectional Master	50 MPs, at least 5 Silver
Regional Master	100 MPs, at least 15 Silver, at least 5 are Red/Gold/Platinum

More information about ACBL rank requirements can be found at:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masterpoints>

In any ACBL bridge competition about **40%** of the players are awarded ACBL MasterPoints. However, the awards are

be unfairly *disadvantaged*, while a Pair who twice plays a new Novice Pair will be arbitrarily *advantaged* in the competition.

disproportionately larger for players closest to the top of the competition rankings.

The number of ACBL MasterPoints awarded in a competition is also affected by the *competition level* with the most MPs awarded in "Open" games, and progressively fewer MPs in more "Limited" competitions (e.g., 999er, 499er, 99er, Novice 0-20 MPs games). Additionally, the number of MPs is greater as the number of Pairs/Teams in the competition gets larger. For illustrative purposes here are the MPs awarded in the April 23, 2025 299er competition in the Savannah Bridge Club:

Pair	Score %	MasterPoints
Tommy & Susan	61.41	1.05 Black
Carolyn & Willson	59.35	0.79 Black
Cary & Gary	57.70	0.59 Black
Debra & Heather	55.56	0.44 Black
Holland & Mel	53.70	
Carl & Mike	46.32	
Judy & Marion	46.29	
Jeff & Lisa	44.79	
Elyse & Katrena	33.79	

"Stratification"

The previous discussion implicitly assumes a small competition in which the Director cannot create reasonable "stratification" of the competition into "Sections" or could do so but elects not to "stratify" into "Sections". Instead, **"Stratification without creating Sections"** involves the Director setting "cut points" to divide the single group of Pairs into sub-groups, usually "A", "B", and "C" sub-groups. For example, the Director in a 499er game might create 3 strata by dividing the Pairs into an "A" group involving 5 Pairs with more than 300 MasterPoints, a "B" group with 5 Pairs holding between 100 and 300 MP, and a "C" group of 5 Pairs with fewer than 100 MP. The "strata" may or may not hold an equal number of Pairs, but usually will be roughly equal in size.

"Stratification" assignments do not affect which Pairs you will play or compete against. However, "strata" are used to create another way of awarding ACBL MasterPoints (MPs) as long as a given "strata" includes at least **3** Pairs. After the competition ends, Pairs are ranked irrespective of "strata", but also ranked within "strata".

The "top" Pair in the competition will be awarded MP for coming in 1st, and the "top" Pair can be a Pair from any of the 3 "strata". But Pairs can also be awarded MP "within strata". For example, if the "top" 5 Pairs are all "A" Pairs, and Pairs 6th

through 11th are all "B" Pairs, and the 5 "C" Pairs all come in 11th through 15th, at least the "top" "C" Pair will be awarded some MPs for coming in 1st *within their "strata"* even if that Pair is 11th in the overall ranking. And the "C" Pair tied 3rd **overall** in the competition may obtain slightly more MPs than the "B" Pair they exactly tie in the competition, because the "C" Pair is awarded a bonus for their performance both overall as well as "within strata".

Movements Maximizing MasterPoints

Some competitions (e.g., 6 or 7 Tables) could be played using either a "Mitchell" or a "Howell" movement. Some players in such cases prefer a "Mitchell" movement in these cases because you then are competing only against the Pairs sitting in the same direction as you on the given Boards. Theoretically, for example, in such a situation in a "Howell" movement you might somehow, against all odds, be *randomly* assigned repeatedly to sit in the direction on Boards involving your Pair receiving Hands with *fewer* HCPs, and thus you and Partner being forced to play on defense throughout the competition!

But another duty of the Director is to try to structure the competition such that (1) the most possible ACBL MasterPoints are awarded, and (2) the most possible Pairs receive MasterPoints. The number of MasterPoints awarded in a competition is a function of various factors, such as (1) the number of Pairs your Pair competes against in the competition, with more MPs being awarded as you compete against a larger number of Pairs, (2) the level of the competition (e.g., "Open" versus "Limited", such as 0-499, 0-99, 0-20), with more MPs awarded as the competition is less and less "limited", and (3) the number of Boards played, with more MPs possibly being awarded as more Boards are played.

There is a very important aspect of these considerations for competitions involving a modest number of Tables, such as 5 or 6 Tables, and respectively 10 or 12 Pairs. These competitions might reasonably be played using either "Mitchell" or "Howell" movements. But you will receive more MPs in the competition, awarded to more Pairs, if the Director runs a "Howell" rather than a "Mitchell" movement.

For example, if there are 12 Pairs, and the Director runs a "Mitchell" movement, you sitting N/S will be competing against only 5 other N/S Pairs. If instead the Director runs a "Howell" movement, you might compete against 9 other Pairs during 9 Rounds of competition. You would get more MPs in the "Howell" movement because you would literally be playing against more Pairs in that

competition! As Roger Neds⁴, the Savannah Bridge Club Director of Directors, recently told SBC members:

In a standard six [T]able game using a Mitchell movement first place in each direction will receive **.60** points [MPs] and each pair in second place [in both directions] will receive **.42** [MPs]. In the same game [depending upon game structure] using a Howell movement the awards will be as follows: first **1.2** [MPs], second **.84**, third **.60**, fourth **.42**, and fifth **.30**. [emphasis added]

More Complex Duplicate Pairs Movements

Structuring the duplicate Pair competition movement can be as simple as the movements used as illustrations here, but indeed can also be *quite* more complex. More complex duplicate Pairs movements as noted previously can involve variations such as using a "bye stand" or a "skip", but also other variations such as a "roving Pair".

If you wish to pursue your Ph.D. in Duplicate Pairs Movements, you may wish to consult the Wikipedia entry "**Duplicate Bridge Movements**" at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duplicate_bridge_movements

Or, to explore an even *wider* range of possibilities, consult the Crowborough Bridge Club "Pairs Movements" sub-tab entry, "**All About Bridge Pair Movements (well, a lot anyway!)**" under the "Items of Interest" tab at:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/crowborough/Pair%20Movements.htm>

But, unless you are a Director, **as a Player you do not need to get into the weeds of all these complex movement variations!** That instead is the Director's job! The Director will make *quite clear* how you should "move" from Round to Round and will happily answer any questions that occur along your competition journey! And most duplicate Pairs movements that you encounter in small games will usually be *quite simple*!

If you would also like some information about (1) the Director's duties, (2) ACBL Director licensure requirements, and (3) ACBL Director licensure test procedures, go to:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/directors.pdf>

⁴ Roger was the ACBL Director who supervised Esther's completion of the ACBL Director Examination in December, 2018.