

Determining a Single Winner Result for a Pairs Event

Balance:

A fair or balanced competition reflects how well a pair has played on the day and rewards a pair for getting good results. In a pairs event, pairs are compared with other pairs who have played the same hands. The scoring system for pairs means that a pair is in direct competition with every other pair who plays the same hand. By corollary, every pair opposing them is an ally.

For a completely fair competition all pairs should have an equal number of allies and of opponents.

Movements:

Essentially, when we require a single winner in a session of pairs there are two possible ways of achieving this. Either play a Howell movement or play a Mitchell movement with one or more arrow switches.

Full Howell Movements:

A movement where every pair plays every other pair but each pair does not compete equally with all other pairs. Pairs play different hands (hands not boards) and are compared with other pairs an unequal number of times.

3/4 Howell Movements:

The most unbalanced of movements, more so than for the full Howell movement as pairs are compared with other pairs a vastly different number of times.

Mitchell Movements:

A movement where a pair remains either North/South or East/West but one that gives two independent winners. The movement is suitable for up to 16 tables. When more tables than that are played and the movement is curtailed then competitors do not all play the same boards and the competition becomes unbalanced.

Arrow Switched Mitchell Movements:

Arrow switching redresses the balance between allies and opponents. Clearly there is an inequity in results from this movement that your score is compared with some EW pairs and some NS pairs. However, the overall inequity has been calculated as less than the incomplete Howell movement.

Theoretically, approximately one board in 8 should be switched. In general terms, less than 1 switch in 8 favours pairs sitting in the weakest direction and more than 1 board in 8 favours pairs sitting in the strongest direction. Analysis to determine the appropriate number of switches for the fairest result is a complex subject. Many papers have been written on the subject for those who have any inclination to delve deeper into the topic.

Conclusion:

Arrow switched Mitchell movements are considered the fairest way by which to determine a single winner from a pairs event. Analysis can show that most movements are not strictly fair and that the final results have an element of luck.

That is bridge.