

Don't Play Contract Bridge With Any Strangers!

Gamblers Turning To Contract As "Easy Money" Way Of Shearing Enthusiastic Bridge Lambs



The perfect suit hand in bridge and one which is very seldom dealt fairly but quite often is "run in" to dupe unsuspecting victims.

By Faay Fuller

A FEW weeks ago, while visiting a popular downtown "social club," I witnessed a game of contract bridge between two local physicians and a team of professional card players. The two doctors played beautiful bridge, they were in perfect accord through the medium of the Culbertson System, they held average hands, and technically speaking, played superior bridge to that of their contenders. Yet, when the final reckoning was made, at a penny a point, they were indebted to the tune of \$175.00 each!

During an ocean voyage I observed a pair of vacationing Iowa farmers pay off the tidy sum of \$1,100.00, the result of four days of penny a point contract!

It's an old story and one that is enacted a thousand times nightly in clubrooms, at lodge meetings, at parties, on trains, and even in the front parlors of those who eventually pay the piper! The losers always pay with a smile, the idea that they may have been hoodwinked never enters their minds. In nine cases out of ten they will adopt a new system, practice a few weeks, and undergo a second trouncing at the debt hands of their former victors!

For several years the professional card shark, gambler, and in some cases, cheater, took scant interest in bridge as a means of paying his or her rent. Dice, poker, and gaming devices spelt "fast money" and were their principal sources of revenue. Auction bridge was mildly popular and a trifle too slow to expend any effort on. Came the dawn and Contract Bridge with its double and triple penalties, its nationwide popularity, and a crying demand for contract players at all manner of social functions. At one cent a point, contract bridge spells "big money" and "social halls" soon observed that "customers" would rather play contract than poker. Overnight the props were shifted and today, in place of the clinking of chips you will hear the scraping of pencils on bridge score pads. The card shark sat up and took notice!

CONTRACT bridge has changed the entire routine for professional card "hustlers." Instead of the leather jacket, he has donned the latest in afternoon, evening, and sportswear. In place of the smoke filled hotel room or gambling resort, you will find him leaning on the swank hotel bars, at the country club, and even attending church socials! He has learned how to balance a tea cup, he maintains an attractive bachelor apartment and his cocktail parties (which generally wind up in a bridge game) are the talk of the town. He travels on ocean liners, he is a house guest in the best homes, and he probably is a member of your fraternal order. He may or may not be married, but if he is, his wife always manages to play as his partner in bridge, "for fear of embarrassing anyone with her poor playing." If single, there's always a "friend" present who somehow manages to be his partner. He plays only for the "sport" of the game but, if somebody doesn't beat him to it, suggests penny a point stakes, "to liven things up!"

Bridge clubs have sprung up like mushrooms and what a fertile field they present for the sharpshooter! Women equal if not excel men in the current mania for playing bridge at high stakes and many a modest housewife has returned from her Wednesday afternoon of bridge minus a month's budget and plus a firm conviction that her favorite bridge authority doesn't know what he's talking about.

And just in case you believe you can beat these boys by playing better bridge, let's examine a few of THEIR "systems"—Culbertson himself wouldn't stand a chance!

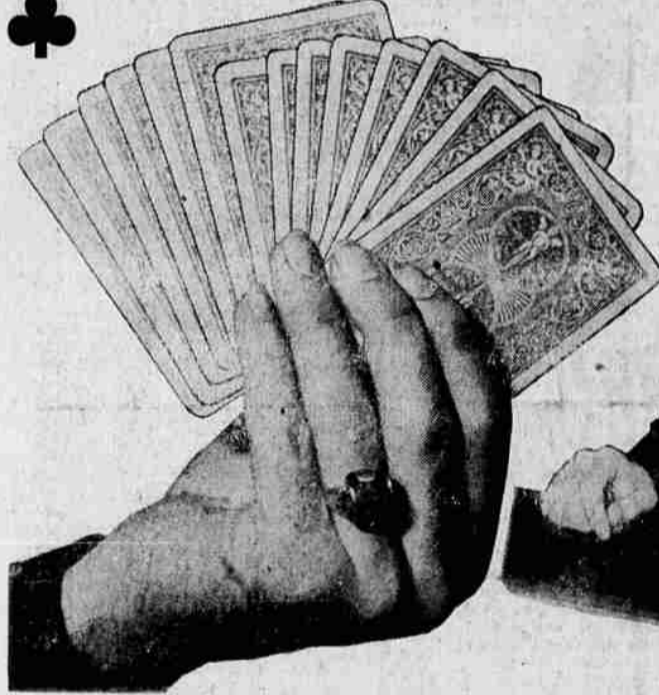
In a poker game it is preferable for card sharks to work in pairs, in bridge it is absolutely necessary and if you should ever be unfortunate enough to be the only amateur in a four-handed game you will save time and faith in your ability to play cards by simply handing the trio a mortgage on the old homestead before the score is added up. For your enlightenment I will re-act in words a little drama witnessed in a prominent hotel lobby.

SCENE ONE—Mr. A and Mr. B, visiting bankers to a national convention, sit in the smoking room sipping beer. Mr. C approaches, begs a match, seats himself, engages in conversation, orders a round of drinks. The topic of conversation mysteriously centers on contract bridge! Mr. C soon discovers that both Mr. A and Mr. B play contract. Who doesn't!

SCENE TWO, Beer Two—Mr. C laments the fact that they haven't a fourth to make up a game. (N.B. This statement is made just as the waiter is setting the glasses on the table.) The waiter, an obliging fellow, overhearing this remark apologetically suggests that several of the



Even during the lunch hour will bridge fiends gamble away their lunch money in the office buildings of the nation. From such innocent diversions as this comes the hotel lobby hanger-on, hunting for a lamb to shear. "Big oaks from little acorns grow."



The first six cards in the above hand are slightly raised to inform partner that various honors of certain suits are held. Many sharp practices, such as this, makes it difficult for good, honest bridge players to compete with sharks.

guests play bridge and that if the gentlemen wish, he will undertake to spot one for them. Mr. C agrees and before long the waiter produces a jolly looking gentleman (probably wearing a convention badge) who introduces himself and states his pleasure at serving as a fourth.

Scene Three, Beer Ten, Three O'clock in the morning, same smoking room, Messrs. A, B, C, and D have just finished the tenth rubber, the score has been added and A and B Inc., are busy signing over \$300 worth of travelers checks to C and D. Messrs. C and D bid A and B good-night and depart thru separate doors.

Scene Four—Fifteen minutes later in a corner saloon we find Mr. C, Mr. D, and (of all people) the waiter! Mr. D is handing the waiter a twenty dollar bill and commenting, "nice work Charley!"

Finale—Mr. C and Mr. D (two perfect strangers) retire to their connecting rooms in the hotel. Mr. C hands Mr. D ten dollars, his half of Charley's tip, and both turn in with \$200 more for the advancement of their careers as "professional" card sharks.

WHAT a system these boys must play! It's the same story, more or less, after every game. Instead of "forcing bids" they employ "raised cards," or a "stripper deck." In place of overcalls, "pre-emptive shut-outs," "physic bids," and "squeeze plays," they introduce "cold decks," "holdouts," "kneespread joints" and "false cuts" and it's a system that never loses! It's an older system than Culbertson's and here's a few of the more common plays.

The deck has been shuffled by Mr. C. Mr. B on his right has given the deck an honest cut. As Mr. C is about to start the deal, his partner, Mr. D, remarks, "could I trouble you for a cigar?" "Certainly," replies Mr. C and quickly reaches inside his coat to grant the request. The cigar is handed over the table—for the moment the deck has been overlooked—and during that moment, for a bare fraction of a second, Mr. C's other hand holding the deck already cut and shuffled, has dipped below the edge of the table to a little gimmick clipped to the under edge. This gadget is known as a "holdout" and is so constructed that it can be carried in the pocket and fastened to a table as the carrier seats himself, or under the pretense of picking a card off the floor. It contains two metal clips.

One clip holds a "colddeck" (a deck that has been previously "stacked" so that the dealer and his partner will hold a slam bid between them)

and the other clip is used to slip the honest deck in. The decks are exchanged in a twinkling of an eye and the hands dealt. Colddecks are only introduced by sharks as an emergency measure. Sometimes a watchful opponent will "catch the move" and sharks hate to take chances!

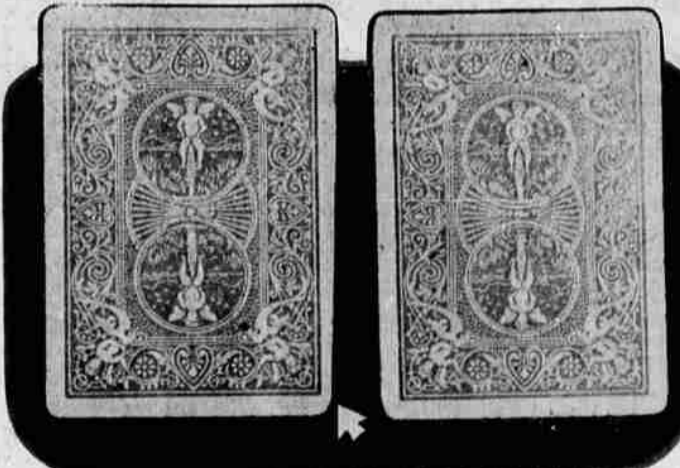
There is no rule in bridge against smoking during play and while A and B are earnestly trying to convey their honor strength to each other thru bidding a system, Mr. C merely places his cigarette on the right side of his mouth. A glance and Mr. D reads, "ace of hearts." If Mr. C has the ace of spades, he will roll the cigarette to the other side, or by holding it in his right or left hand he imparts "ace of diamonds" and "ace of clubs" respectively.

If Mr. D should hold six spades, he will arrange his hand so that the first six cards are slightly elevated above the others. If his strong suit is hearts, the end cards will be elevated to a point indicating the number of trumps.

Bridge is a gentleman's game and it is customary to employ two decks during the play.



Even the position of the cigarette tells what aces are held, if any. Such tricks are hard for the ordinary player to discover, and more difficult to "nail" on the user.



The arrow points to the shaved portion of an honor. All honors are shaved and then the deck can be shuffled, stacked and cut with every fourth card dealt being an honor. Another trick of the tricksters!

While C is dealing one deck, D picks up the discards from the deck used in the previous hand and "makes" the cards for his opponent, Mr. A on his right. What a golden opportunity for a man gifted in running the cards (stacking the deck)! After arranging the deck so that he will be dealt a five and one-half honor count he places it in front of Mr. A who will deal the next round. Everything is set for the killing with the exception of the cut. But who cuts these cards that Mr. D has so carefully fixed? Why, Mr. C, his partner and you can bet your last dollar that he will "false cut" so that they will remain in perfect order!

If you are using a standard deck, supplied by most clubs and hotels, it is a simple matter for "the boys" to run in marked cards, or better yet, a "stripper deck." The things a card hustler can do with a stripper deck would amaze you. To prepare a stripper deck for bridge, the twenty honors, or ten, jack, queen, king, and ace of each suit are laid aside and the remaining cards are "stripped" or shaved a fraction of an inch narrower in width on one end. The cards are



A very simple "guarantee" used by some bridge sharps to insure their being dealt hands like the one pictured on the opposite side of the page. This gadget is seldom used through fear of being "caught in the act."

then shuffled together, replaced in the original carton, a new stamp glued on, and re-wrapped to give the appearance of a new deck.

When the game has progressed to the point where a new deck is desirable, a waiter is summoned and our old friend "Charley" comes trotting in with the stripper deck! By giving this deck an end shuffle, Mr. C or D can immediately pull all the wide cards, or honors, to the top. A second careful shuffle and a low card is inserted between each of the top twenty cards. A third shuffle and two cards are interspersed between each honor. The fourth and last shuffle and the deck is "stacked," every fourth card is an honor. Mr. C then carefully places the deck before his opponent for the next deal and for his partner to cut! Simple isn't it and what a system!

I could continue for many paragraphs dissecting the "shark system," but these few pointers should convince you, it can't be beaten! But to return to the subject, "Don't Play Contract Bridge with Strangers." You may ask, "How can I tell who is a professional card shark and who isn't?" The answer, "You can't!"

With the exception of your own personal friends, who like yourself enjoy the game and maintain an amateur standing, watch out! There are Mr. C's and D's in every community and you will find them playing bridge under all kinds of circumstances. They may be respectable married people on the surface, members of your lodge, or casual acquaintances. Many amateurs, who have been badly singed thru penny a point stakes, spend their evenings at home brushing up on their own versions of the "shark system" and are out to even up the score.

ONE of the greatest surprises and disappointments of my card career came by way of an elderly married couple who were in the habit of playing bridge with my parents and friends in our set. Every week for several months, a group would meet at the various homes, and play contract for small stakes. During the course of these games and over a period of weeks, I noticed a consistent repetition of remarks passed between this couple during the bidding of hands. A few I recall were, "Did you turn off the heater," "Did you lock the door," "You folks will have to play at our house next week", etc. Perfectly innocent remarks, but it soon became apparent that each of these stock phrases had a definite meaning in the valuation of their respective hands. Crude, yes, but we later discovered that they had been averaging \$50 weekly through nightly sessions at one-quarter of a cent a point! So, in a few remote cases, you don't have to play with total strangers to be subject to the "shark system".

The best solution to a growing evil which tends to turn an enjoyable, fascinating and intellectual pastime and hobby into a racket, is to eliminate the "stakes" and play the game as it was intended, for relaxation and mental stimulation. There are few things which money cannot touch and contract bridge isn't one of them. Play for ten cents a corner if you will, or 25 cents a rubber, but let it stop there.

If you must play for large amounts, play in the corner, keep individual scores, and change partners after each rubber. There's nothing a shark can do once separated from his teammate and when it comes to good bridge, the shark is lost. For the most part, they have never studied a legitimate system thoroughly enough to play with one who has, and in an honest game there is little they can do to gain an advantage. A good amateur can outplay a shark nine times out of ten under legitimate conditions.

By "professional sharks," I don't mean bridge instructors. There are many bridge authorities who live by the game and they would be the last persons to use sharp practices during play. Bridge is a battle of wits, and the best team will win over a period of time. There is no game of cards, which can excel in thrills and satisfaction as that of bidding slam vulnerable doubled and re-doubled and making the contract. It pays nice dividends, too, at a penny a point. BUT DON'T TRY IT IN STRANGE COMPANY!