

Open Whist

By Sid Sackson

You may not think so, but people did manage to enjoy life before bridge was invented. That's because there was whist, a much simpler game to learn but nonetheless a challenging game of strategy for four players. Now there's Open Whist, a modern variation that two, three, or four players can enjoy.

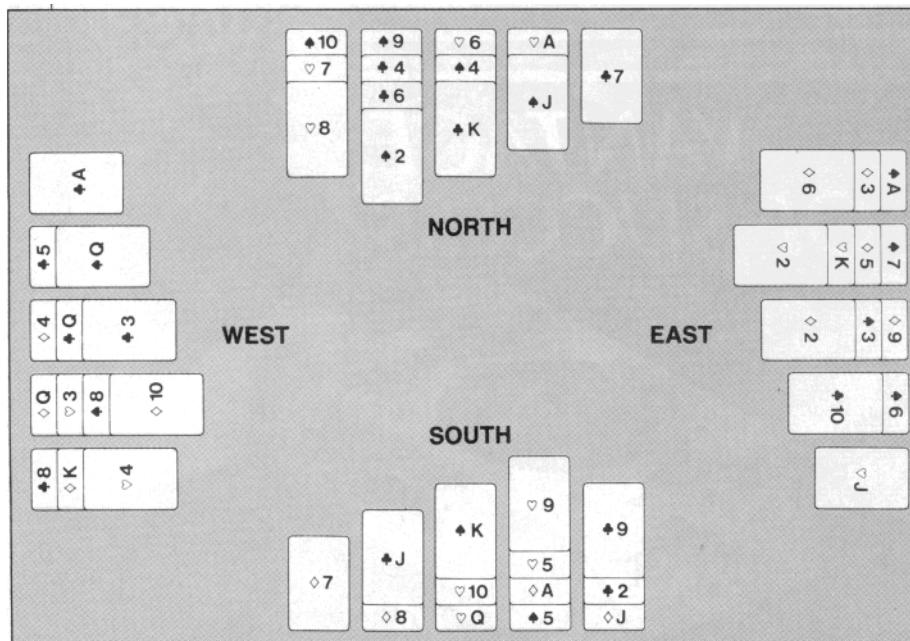
The rules of standard whist, on which the rules of Open Whist are based, are very simple. Four players use a standard 52-card deck. The dealer passes out all the cards, one at a time, starting with the player at his left. The last card is dealt face up to set the trump (the high suit) for the hand and then is picked up by the dealer with the rest of his cards. The player at the dealer's left opens by playing any card to the center of the table. Play continues in a clockwise direction. Each player must play a card of the suit led; if he cannot, he may play a trump or any other card. The four played cards constitute a trick. A trick is won by the highest card of the suit led; except that if a trump is played by one or more players, the trick is won by the highest trump card. The player who wins a trick plays the first card of the next trick, which may be any card in his hand. Each two facing players are partners and count their tricks together. One point is earned for each trick over six won by a team. The game is won by the first team to earn seven points, which normally requires several hands. After each hand, the deal passes to the player on the left.

I originally devised Open Whist as a substitute for whist when only two or three players were available, but it works well even with four. In all cases the rules of regular whist apply, with the following changes:

Four players - After the cards are dealt, each player turns his cards face up one at a time and places them on the table (without rearranging them) in columns of one, two, three, four, and three cards, with the cards in each column overlapping, as shown below. Cards should face the center of the table so all players can read them easily.

The single card at the left of the dealer's hand sets the trump. The cards on the top of each column - that is, the ones that are fully exposed - are the only cards that may be played. As usual, players must follow suit if possible.

For example, South was the dealer in the hand shown; and the $\spadesuit 7$ at his left establishes diamonds as trump. West has a choice of five cards to lead ($\clubsuit A$, $\heartsuit Q$, $\diamondsuit 3$, $\diamondsuit 10$, $\heartsuit 4$), and after studying all four hands on the table chooses the $\heartsuit Q$. North must follow suit with either the $\heartsuit 2$ or the $\heartsuit J$, and chooses the $\heartsuit 2$, saving the higher spade in case it's needed later. East, who is West's partner, has no exposed spades



and can play any of his five exposed cards. He picks the ♥2, a trump card. South, who must follow the opening suit, plays the ♠K, his only exposed spade. Since diamonds are trump, East wins the trick. The four cards are put aside face down by East, as a record that he won the trick; these cards are no longer in play.

East now leads one of his exposed cards: ♦6, ♥2, ♠3 (uncovered after he played the ♦2 on the first trick), ♣10, or ♥J. He might want to lead the ♠3, since his partner; West, has no exposed spades and can trump the trick with the ♦10.

Two players - The players sit at right angles to each other. Four hands are dealt. Each player sets up and plays two hands, the one in front of him and the one across the table as if he had a partner. The single card in front of the dealer sets the trump. The opening play is from the hand at the dealer's left.

Three players – Seventeen cards are dealt to each player. The last card is dealt face up to set trump but belongs to no player. The three hands are set up in columns of one, two, three, four, five, and two cards. A player scores one point for each trick over five. The winner is the first player to score seven points; an extra hand is played to break ties.

In all variations, the strategy of choosing which card to play is very important. Players must try to win not merely a particular trick, but should plan ahead so that they will have the right cards available (or safely buried!) at the critical times. A player may be out of a certain suit in one trick but may have it available for later tricks, when new cards have been exposed.

Open Bridge - The rules of Open Whist can also be applied to bridge; bidding is done with all hands in view. The game plays well even with two players (who control two hands each) or with three (the highest bidder gains the extra hand as dummy).