



September 26 - October 2, 1982

Bid Whist: A Rough Game For Those Who Love To Win

Bid whist, a card game that features two sets of partners trying to "out trump" each other, ranks as one of the area's most vicious non-contact sports.

Winning at bid whist is a matter of risking your card-playing self-image on the hope that the 12 cards you're holding, plus the 12 your partner has, will outrank the 24 cards that your opponents are playing.

And you can have your ego crushed by an unsuspected "set" which means they called your bluff and won. But worse than that, you can get your card-playing self-esteem dragged through the dust in a 12-card shutout called a "Boston."

But if losing at bid whist is painful, viciously painful, winning is euphoric, ecstatically euphoric.

Patricia White knows both sides, the highs, the lows, the pain and the ecstasy of bid whist.

"I've played since I was 17," she said during a recent interview during a series of regular Monday night games at Durham's Odyssey Club on Main Street at Five Points. "Most of the time I was playing with other kids in my neighborhood."

At this point, the other players with whom Ms. White would play this particular Monday night game came in and took their seats on opposite sides of the square table between them. The sides had been chosen. The battle field was ready.

Rhonda Flowers, who teaches emotionally disturbed children and who has a 20-year whist playing record, teamed with Ms. White.

"My parents played whist," she said explaining her early introduction to the game, "and they taught my sister and me to play because they needed partners."

The White-Flowers team this night would face Brendalyn Patterson and her partner, Jackie Lyon.

The deal fell to Ms. Flowers who grasped the cards gracefully, fanned them in



CAUGHT IN A FRIENDLY GAME of bid whist, one of the world's roughest non-contact sports, these four young women settle down to an evening of fun and games. From left to right, they are: Mses. Patricia White, Brendalyn Patterson, Rhonda Flowers and Patricia White.

several shuffles, kicked in a couple of mid-deck cuts for good measure, and set the deck in front of Ms. Lyon for a final "cut" before the deal began.

"Meanwhile, the other players explained their "whistology" experience.

"I had played off and on while I was growing up," said Ms. Patterson, a contract administrator at the Research Triangle Institute. "But I didn't start playing seriously until I started going to Central (NCCU)."

Her partner, Ms. Lyon, a registered nurse, said she's been playing whist for about 10 years, and is a regular in the Odyssey's Monday night whist sessions.

"It's a great chance to get together with friends," she said. "I think that whist is a great form of relaxation. It's inexpensive and we have a lot of fun."

At this point, a basic "whistology" primer might be helpful to the uninitiated, aiding them in understanding the power, the fun and the agony that is bid whist.

The game is played mostly with a 54-card regular playing deck that includes two jokers, one designated as the "big" joker and one called the "small" joker. But jokers are hardly a joke because they are the game's most powerful cards. Only the big joker beats the small one and nothing beats the big joker. All other cards maintain their usual rank, for the most part, such as aces are better than kings, and kings are better than queens and so forth.

The game's objective is to have at least one partner of a two-person team playing a card that is better than the other three cards played that round. Each time you play the best card, you get to keep the

four cards played. They are called "a book."

Each team's goal in the game is to make the "books" they bid at the beginning, and obviously your opponents are trying to stop that by playing better cards than you play.

The game begins with a 12-card deal, and the extra six cards are laid face down in the center of the table. That's the "kitty." The "kitty" is a bonus. If you win the bidding war with the highest bid, you get to use the six cards in the "kitty" to improve your hand.

Bidding is tricky and is the first indication that this game called whist is not a tea parlor affair. It's friendly war.

You can bid 4, 5, 6, or 7 books, but those numbers are deceptive, because they don't show that if you get the bid, you have to turn the number of books you bid, plus 5 additional books. So if you bid six, you plan to turn 11 books. If

you bid five, you plan to turn 10 books. In other words, there are 12 possible books in every hand.

Though there are several variations of the bidding rules in whist, basically you can bid four types of playing styles based upon your best analysis of your hand. The styles are:

* A straight bid, such as "five," which means you will have one suit, such as diamonds, as your trump suit. In this bid high cards win, and any diamond beats any other card, but a higher diamond.

* A "low" bid, such as "five-lo-with," which means you have made low cards, i.e., ace, deuce, trey, winners and you will name one suit as your trump. In this style, a four beats a King.

* A "No-uptown" means you won't have any trumps, and high cards, i.e., aces, kings, queens and jacks win. Jokers have no value in this type of bid.

* "No-downtown" is a style the same as above, except that in this style low cards win.

There are three basic skills that you must master to win bidding wars. First, you must learn to bid only what your hand — the 12 cards you are holding — indicates you can make. Secondly, you have to give your partner a clear signal of what your hand looks like with your bid. Finally, you have to run the bid up high enough that your opponents won't take it from you.

Now back to the Odyssey.

The cards were all dealt. The four were ready to play, and they discussed their strategies for winning.

"When I'm bidding," Ms. Flowers said, "I will usually bid to the way my partner bids. If she says 3 or 4 low, I know she probably has a good hand, and I'll let her have it, if I don't think the other side will take her out. But if I have a really good hand, I'll take the bid myself."

Spreading her hand, and studying it with a rather wry look on her face, Ms. Patterson said: "If my partner gets the bid, I'll play my top trumps so that my partner

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