

## THE CULBERTSON AND "OFFICIAL" SYSTEMS— A COMPARISON

The following is a brief but fairly complete comparison of the Culbertson and "Official" Systems of Contract bidding. In such a discussion it is essential to realize that the Opening bid of one constitutes at least eighty percent of all initial declarations in Contract Bridge. (In the Culbertson-Lenz Match eighty-four percent of the hands were opened with a bid of one.)

There are, however, basic differences in the two systems which this match was designed to test. The Culbertson System, based upon the Approach principle, provides that whenever a hand contains a choice between a biddable suit and notrump, the suit (even a four-card minor) should be preferred as the Opening bid. The "Official" System authorizes an Opening notrump bid on hands containing biddable suits, it being stated on page 49 of "The Official System of Contract Bridge" that the Advisory Council believes an initial bid of one notrump should be preferred to many weak four-card suit bids and sometimes even to a five-card minor suit bid. This basic difference, with the game invitation bid of two, which plays a pre-eminent part in the "Official" System and was quite generally used throughout the match, brings the conflict of the two systems into sharp contrast.

### CARD VALUATION

There is an essential difference in the basis of the valuation of the honor cards under the "Official" and the Culbertson Systems. The Culbertson System bases the worth of the honor cards on defensive values—that is, on what the cards should be worth in tricks against an adverse declaration. The "Official" System values the honor cards on an attacking basis, or on what they are worth at one's own declaration. The following table gives specific instances of the differences in evaluating certain honor-card combinations:

	<i>Culbertson</i> <i>Honor-tricks</i>	<i>"Official"</i> <i>High-Card Tricks</i>
A K Q	2	3
A K J	2	2½
A Q J	1½	2
K Q J	1½	2

In the Culbertson System the additional values of honors that cannot be counted as *honor-tricks*, are counted as *playing-tricks* at one's own or partner's bid.



## NOTRUMP VALUATION

In evaluating a hand at a notrump declaration the Culbertson System uses the same honor-trick table as at suit bidding; whereas the "Official" System uses the point count 4-3-2-1, counting Ace four, King three, Queen two and Knave one.

### THE OPENING SUIT BID OF ONE

The Opening suit bid of one is practically the same in the two systems, as was stated originally.

*Honor Card Requirements:* Essentially the same. The Culbertson System requires  $2\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks as minimum Opening honor strength. The "Official" System requires  $2\frac{1}{2}$  high-card tricks as minimum Opening strength, as First or Second Hand; and each requires about the same additional strength— $\frac{1}{2}$  honor- or high-card trick, for Third or Fourth Hand bids. The "Official" System, however, provides that a Fourth Hand bid should contain some strength in both major suits.

*Raises:* In the raising of an Opening suit bid by partner, the systems again come into rather sharp conflict. In the Approach-Forcing System, partner's Opening suit bids of one or two may not be raised by the Responding Hand without adequate trump support—that is, not less than four small trumps or three trumps headed by a Queen or higher honor. The "Official" System permits a Raise with what is designated as "neutral trump support," namely, three small trumps. Having neutral trump support and no other suit to show, the "Official" System provides for a Raise of partner's suit bid with 3 probable tricks. The Approach-Forcing System, played by Mr. Culbertson and his partners, requires, as the cornerstone of a Raise, adequate trump support, and for the first Raise requires the possession of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  playing-tricks in the Responding Hand (sometimes only 3 when the intervening opponent passes).

The "Official" System does not provide for Raises on distributional values alone, while, in the Approach-Forcing System, Raises of a partner's suit bid may be based entirely on distributional values. These basic differences regarding the responsibilities of the Responding Hand were among the issues submitted by the contestants to the test of actual play.

*Takeouts:* Under the Culbertson System, a Takeout of partner's suit or notrump bid is made on any biddable suit provided the hand contains  $1\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks, or slightly less if the Takeout can be made at a bid of one—the "One over One" principle. In the "Official" System the minimum suit Takeout is based on  $1\frac{1}{2}$  high-card tricks if bidding a five-card suit, and approximately 2 high-card tricks if bidding a four-card suit. Both systems permit a Takeout in any six-card suit if the hand contains 1 high-card or honor-trick.

*Jump Takeout—Forcing Bid:* In the Culbertson System, 3 + honor-



tricks are required; in the "Official" System, approximately  $3\frac{1}{2}$  high-card tricks. Both systems lower their high-card requirements if the Responding Hand holds, in addition, excellent support for the Opening bid. The honor-card strength is then reduced to about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  tricks.

*Minimum Notrump Takeout:* For a Takeout in one notrump, the Culbertson System requires about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks; and the "Official" System requires a notrump count of 7, with two unbid suits stopped. (A count of 7 is equivalent to about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks.)

*The Two Notrump Takeout:* Indicates in the Culbertson System 2 + honor-tricks; in the "Official" System, a count of 11 to 13.

*The Three Notrump Takeout:* In the Culbertson System shows more than 3 honor-tricks; in the "Official" System, a count of 15 to 17.

*Choice between Two Suits:* The rules which follow are exactly the same in both systems: with two suits of equal length, the higher ranking suit is bid first; with 5-4 distribution, the longer suit is bid first; with 6-5 distribution the higher ranking suit is bid first.

*Choice between Notrump and Suit:* The "Official" System prefers an Opening suit bid, but does not insist on it as does the Culbertson System.

#### OPENING NOTRUMP BID OF ONE

The honor card requirements are practically the same, and both systems require that three suits be guarded to bid notrump.

The requirements of the Culbertson System are  $2\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks in three suits—not vulnerable—First and Second Hand, and 3 honor-tricks, Third and Fourth Hand.

The "Official" System employs the point count as above explained, and for a First Hand bid requires a count of 13; for Second Hand a count of 12; for Third Hand a count of 14, and for Fourth Hand a count of 15.

If one translates this count in terms of honor-tricks, he will find very little difference in the mathematical requirements of the two systems.

#### OPENING SUIT BID OF TWO

In the Culbertson System this is a Forcing bid based on  $5\frac{1}{2}$  (or 5, with very favorable distribution) honor-tricks. In the "Official" System, this is a game invitation bid and shows:

7 probable tricks with a hand containing 3 high-card tricks; or  
 $6\frac{1}{2}$  probable tricks with a hand containing  $3\frac{1}{2}$  high-card tricks.

In the Culbertson System, the Opening suit bid of two is a Forcing bid; both partners are required to keep the bidding open until a game contract is reached.

In the "Official" System, the suit bid of two is an invitation bid, so the partner is permitted to pass with a trickless hand. However, if the partner makes a positive response of any kind—that is, if he raises the bid



or takes out in a suit or notrump—the Opening bidder is required to make one Rebid, and further partnership bidding is optional.

As stated above, the invitation bid of two is really the basis or backbone of the “Official” System.

### OPENING NOTRUMP BID OF TWO

The Opening notrump bid of two, in the Culbertson System, shows 5 honor-tricks and all suits stopped.

In the “Official” System it shows a count of 19 with three suits guarded, or a count of 17 with four suits guarded.

*Raises:* In the Culbertson System, a Raise should be made with slightly more than 1 honor-trick. In the “Official” System, a Raise should be made

- (a) with any count of six; or
- (b) with a King and Queen in different suits; or
- (c) with an Ace and any other honor.

### OPENING SUIT BID OF THREE

In the Culbertson System, an Opening suit bid of three is a strength-showing bid made with a hand containing 8 playing-tricks of which at least 5 are certain trump tricks and not less than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  honor-tricks are in side suits. Such a bid indicates a hand with the preponderance of strength in one suit. As far as the trump suit is concerned, the bid of three is practically the same as a Pre-emptive bid. Partner should respond holding 1 + honor- or ruffing-trick.

In the “Official” System, the suit bid of three is a game demand bid based on 9 probable tricks in a major and 10 probable tricks in a minor suit. The partnership, of course, must keep the bidding open until a game bid is reached. The “Official” suit game demand bid of three corresponds in general to the Culbertson suit bid of two.

*Responses to Forcing Bids:* The responses to the Opening Forcing bids of the two systems are identical in character, intent and purpose, and both employ the minimum notrump response to keep the bidding open.

### OPENING SUIT BIDS OF FOUR AND FIVE—PRE-EMPTIVE BIDS

The Pre-emptive bids, as employed in both systems, are exactly the same. Both require 8 to 9 probable tricks, depending upon whether the bid is 4 or 5 in a major or minor, respectively, and both show the same absolute control of the trump suit, so that adequate trump support is not needed.

### DEFENSIVE BIDDING

The mathematical requirements, tactics and strategy employed in defensive bidding are practically the same in both systems. Both employ



a minimum Overcall as a strictly defensive or interference measure, and both employ a Jump Overcall as an attacking bid. This Jump Overcall is not a Forcing bid in either system. The Defensive Overcall runs from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  honor- or high-card tricks, depending on the size of the bid overcalled, and whether the Declarer is vulnerable or not vulnerable. The Jump Overcall is made with 3 to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  honor- or high-card tricks.

A vivid contrast of the two systems is presented in the Overcall in the opponents' bid suit. In the Approach-Forcing System an immediate Overcall of the opponents' bid suit shows an unusually strong hand: 4 or more honor-tricks and very freakish distribution; it is a Forcing bid which partner may not pass until a game contract is reached. The same bid, as used in the "Official" System, denotes a desire to play that suit as trump, and as advocated by Mr. Lenz and his partners, has as its purpose the exposure of psychic bids by opponents.

#### THE TAKEOUT DOUBLE

The Takeout Double, in the Culbertson System, is any Double of one notrump or two in a suit, when the partner of the Doubler has not bid or doubled. The Culbertson System requires 3 honor-tricks, divided in 3 suits, or 3 honor-tricks divided in at least 2 suits, and a fair biddable suit for such a declaration.

The Takeout Double, in the "Official" System, is any Double of one notrump or three of a suit, when the partner of the Doubler has not previously bid or doubled, and is based on about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  high-card tricks.

#### THE ARTIFICIAL TWO CLUB BID

The "Official" System also provides an optional artificial two club bid as a game demand bid that may be employed instead of the game demand suit bid of three. This bid, however, was not used by Mr. Lenz and hence has no place in this discussion.