

Oh Hell!

Introduction

This game, in which players try to predict the exact number of tricks they will win, first appeared in London and New York in the 1930's and has since become popular in many parts of the world. It is sometimes also called Oh Pshaw!, Oh Well!, Oh Shit!, Blob, Elevator, Up and Down the River, Contract Whist, Bust, German Bridge, and Mannaggia!

Players and Cards

From 3 to 7 people can play. The game is best when played with 4 to 6.

A standard 52 card deck is used. The cards in each suit rank (from high to low) A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2.

Sequence of Hands

The game consists of a series of hands. The first hand is played with just 1 card dealt to each player. Each successive hand is played with one card more, up to a hand of 17 or fewer cards, depending on the number of players, and back down to just 1 card. For shorter games, limit the maximum number of cards dealt.

Example: With 7 players, the hands are: 1 card, then 2,3,4,5,6,7, then 6,5,4,3,2,1, for a total of 13 hands to the game. A game should take approximately 45 minutes. (A variation is to start with the highest number of cards: 7,6,5,4,3,2,1,2,3,4,5,6,7.)

Object of the Game

The object is for each player to bid the number of tricks he thinks he can take from each hand, then to take exactly that many; no more and no fewer. Points are awarded only for making the bid exactly, and are deducted for missing the bid, either over or under (see scoring below).

The hook is that at least one player will fail on each hand, because the total number of tricks bid by the players may not equal the number of tricks available on that hand.

Deal

To determine the first dealer, draw cards. The player with the lowest card deals first. The turn to deal rotates clockwise with each hand.

The cards are shuffled and cut and the dealer deals the cards singly until everyone has the appropriate number of cards for the hand being played.

Bidding

The bidding in each hand begins with the player to the left of the dealer, and then continues clockwise, back around to the dealer, who bids last. Each bid is a number representing the number of tricks that player will try to take. Everyone must bid - it is not possible to pass, but you can bid zero, in which case your object is to take no tricks at all. A bid may be changed only if the next player to the left has not yet bid. Remember the hook: the dealer may not bid the number that would cause the total number of tricks bid to equal the number of tricks available; a hand will always be "over-bid" or "under-bid". Keep in mind when bidding that not all cards in the deck are in play in any hand.

The player with the highest bid will name trump. They do not have to hold any trump, nor must they lead trump. In cases of more than one player with the highest bid, the first player to make their bid will name trump.

Play

The play begins with the player to the dealer's left, who leads the first card. The lead may be any suit (including trump). Play follows clockwise. Each player must follow the suit led, if he can. If not, he may play any other card in his hand, including trump. The player who has played the highest trump card, or if no trump was played, the highest card of the suit led, wins the trick. That player then leads to the next trick. Continue until all tricks have been played and won.

Scoring

The scorekeeper is designated prior to each game according to house rules. The designated scorekeeper notes each bid and resulting scores on a score sheet.

A player who wins the exact number of tricks bid scores 10 plus the number of tricks bid (10 points for zero tricks, 11 for one trick, 12 for two tricks, etc.). Players who take more or fewer tricks than they bid score nothing. This method has the advantage that the scorekeeper, having written down the bids at the start of the play, can simply write a figure "1" in front of those that were successful and delete those that are not.

The player with the highest score at the end of the game is declared the winner.