



Hool - A Prelude to Bridge

Michael Xu Nov. 10, 2018

While I was at China playing in the World Youth Bridge Championships, I met and conversed with a man who sought to lessen the memorization strain of bridge but still maintain the core strategies. Amaresh Deshpande, a math teacher who decided to teach bridge in his class, noticed that kids tend to have a short attention span. They are uninterested in learning bidding as it takes a long time to learn. To address this problem, Deshpande has created a game for kids to learn the concepts of bridge, called Hool. I prefer Hool to Minibridge and have switched from teaching Minibridge to Hool for my school's bridge club. I hope that my article will convince bridge teachers to use Hool as a starting step in teaching bridge.

The next page explains the rules of Hool. The pages after that have my thoughts on the game.

Step 1: Information sharing

Deal each player 13 cards from a standard 52-card deck. Then clockwise starting with the dealer, each player shares one piece of information about their hand with the rest of the table.

There are in total 6 types of information that can be shared:

- **HCP**
- **Pattern (always in descending order of numbers i.e. 5-4-3-1 even if your specific pattern is 1-5-3-4)**
- **Number of cards in Spades**
- **Number of cards in Hearts**
- **Number of cards in Diamonds**
- **Number of cards in Clubs**

This continues for two rounds so that at the end of this step, each player has shared two different pieces of information about their hand. Passing is not allowed. Psyching is not permitted.

Step 2: Bidding

All players secretly choose a contract for their side to make and reveal simultaneously. Pass is a legal choice. The highest bidder becomes the Temporary Declarer #1 (TD1). If the highest bid is tied between two or more players, then the person sitting closest to the dealer (starting from the dealer, and then clockwise) wins the tiebreak.

Next, both opponents of TD1, simultaneously decide and reveal whether to pass, double, or bid higher.

If both pass, TD1 becomes Permanent Declarer (PD).

If at least one opponent doubles with neither opponent bidding – then TD1 has a chance to redouble or pass.

Else, one opponent has bid and the highest bidder becomes TD2 (ties broken by proximity to dealer). If either opponent becomes TD2, then TD1 and partner get the final chance, at the same time, to either pass, double or bid higher. Accordingly either TD1 or TD2 will become PD.

Again, double / redouble is for penalty only.

Step 3: Play

Exactly like bridge: opening lead is made by the player to the left of the PD; dummy is put down on the table by PD's partner; everyone must follow suit if they can; highest trump played to a trick wins the trick; if no trumps are played, highest card of the suit led wins the trick; winner leads to next trick; etc.

Step 4: Scoring

- Each trick after the 6th trick in a successful contract = 10 points. So 11 tricks in a contract of 4♥ would score 40 points here.
- Each overtrick = 10 points. So 11 tricks in a contract of 4♥ would score 10 points here.
- Game bonus = 100 points.
- Small slam bonus = 200 points.
- Grand slam bonus = 400 points.
- Each undertrick = 20 points to the defense.
- Doubled Contract = 2 times total score.
- Redoubled Contract = 4 times total score.

Hool can be a stepping stone for teaching bridge. Currently, one of the more common methods of introducing people to bridge is Minibridge. There are many advantages Hool has compared to Minibridge. Perhaps the most important one is the wealth of strategy that comes with its modified form of bidding.

Here is an example of a round that I played that demonstrates my point:

North	W	N	E	S
♠ AQ4	P	P	P	4♥
♥ 7654	P	P	P	
♦ J93				
♣ AK2				
South				
♠ J2				
♥ AJ32				
♦ AQ1082				
♣ Q10				

I was South. During the Hool "bidding", LHO showed 4-4-4-1 shape and 2 HCP, RHO showed 10 HCP and 1 heart, and partner showed a 4-3-3-3 shape with 14 HCP.

I was not sure what was the right bid, but with 28 combined HCP, I decided to try 4♥ despite knowing about the 4-1 split. I got the ♠3 lead. Plan the play.

North	W	N	E	S
♠ AQ4	P	P	P	4♥
♥ 7654	P	P	P	
♦ J93				
♣ AK2				
South				
♠ J2				
♥ AJ32				
♦ AQ1082				
♣ Q10				

Here was my thinking:

12 HCP are missing: 3 kings, the ♥Q, and the ♣J. Since LHO has exactly 2 HCP, he must have exactly the ♥Q and no other high cards. RHO has exactly 1 heart, so LHO must have 4 hearts and is not short there. His stiff is most likely a diamond, for if it were a club or a spade, that would leave RHO with 7 of that suit, which he would have shown in the “bidding”. That leaves me with a spade loser and 3 heart losers. Clearly, there is nothing to be done about the heart losers, so I must not lose a spade. The only place to not lose the spade is by pitching it on the ♣K, and this is safe due to clubs being 4-4 from the deduction about diamonds being LHO's stiff.

My line will be to go up with the ace, cash ♥A knowing that I will drop RHO's ♥K, cash clubs pitching ♠J, and now run ♦J and ♦9. I'll maintain trump control and LHO will only end up getting 3 hearts.

If we were playing Minibridge, declaring the hand would be a lot harder without the helpful indicators.

In summary, Hool is better than Minibridge in that it incorporates the fun strategy of figuring out what other people have, lets everybody practice bidding, and is simple. It illustrates the fun strategy of real bridge: in bidding, you want to figure out what information to give to your partner and during the play of the hand, you want to use the information to figure out the best line.

Hool is better than just outright teaching bridge as it enables people to bid without having to memorize meanings of bids, and the information is much more specific and thus much easier to use to figure out the hand.

If you have any comments or questions or are interested in supporting Amaresh Deshpande, his email is: amaresh.deshpande@gmail.com.