

Game for 3 Players

DOMINOES

Long before playing cards were invented, folks played games with tiles — before that, they were limited to pebbles and bones. Even today, the domino tiles are referred to as “bones,” and a group from which they are drawn is called “the boneyard.” There are so many variations of dominoes that it is difficult to say which is the basic game. Herein you may find general rules that apply to the majority of these games, along with a few of the more popular variations.

Set-Up

Place all the domino tiles with their spots facing down in a single layer where all players can reach them. Stir them around so that no player could know the value (number of spots) of any tile. Each player then draws a given number of tiles and sets them on edge in front of her so that their spots are not visible to other players. These tiles make up the player’s “hand.”

Play

The first player places one tile in the center of the playing table/area. Taking turns clockwise, the next player must place one of his tiles next to the first one so that the number of spots on the adjoining ends either matches or makes a particular combination with the first tile.

If a player does not have a suitable tile in his hand, he must draw tiles from the boneyard, one at a time, until he can make a play. When the boneyard is exhausted, the player must simply pass. (A variation, called a “block” game, is sometimes played in which a player with no playable tiles loses his turn instead of drawing a new tile.)

Tiles with the same number of spots on both ends (called “doubles”) are generally placed at right angles to an existing line, so that one or more branches are created within the layout. A tile that is not a double may be placed at a right angle to the line to keep the line from extending beyond the playing area.

The game is finished when one player empties his hand — and announces “Domino” — or when no one can make a legal play.

Scoring

There are two basic ways to score in most domino games.

One: the player who first empties his hand receives some set number of points or a number derived from the values of the tiles remaining in his opponent’s hands. Two: points are often awarded for making certain combinations of numbers at the ends of the lines of tiles.

Popular Games

In each of the following, set-up is as given above, players each begin with seven tiles (or fewer when more than two people play), only the first double played can start new lines, and drawing from the boneyard is required when necessary and possible.

Draw: First player (determined before the game) may lead any tile. Plays may be made to either end and to the sides of the first double (so that there usually are four playable ends in the layout). At the end of the game, the player whose hand is the lightest (that is, with the fewest total spots — not the fewest tiles) scores the difference between her hand and the total number of spots on the tiles remaining in her opponent’s hands.

Sniff: The same as Draw, with the addition of awarding points for placing tiles so that the total of spots on the ends of the lines is equal to five or a multiple of five. Points are thus added throughout the game. This is similar to the game of Cribbage, and some players find a cribbage board useful in recording points. Even more similar is a variation of Sniff in which, as in Cribbage, if a player should overlook a score, his opponent may call “Muggins!” and take the points for himself.

The first double to be played is called the “sniff.” Some play that the sides of the sniff cannot be counted until they have sprouted.

Matador: Similar to Draw except that instead of matching the open ends of the layout, a player can only place tiles so that adjoining spots total seven. Thus, a line ending with a four would require a tile with three spots, a two needs a five, etc. The three tiles whose spots add up to seven — the 1-6, 2-5, and 3-4, along with the 0-0 (double blank) are known as matadors and can be played anytime and anywhere. Doubles are always placed in-line, so there are only two ends in play throughout the game. ■

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