

Card Game for 5 or More

HEARTS

Historical Notes

A card game developed in the 1700s was called "Reverse" because it rewarded players for not taking certain tricks. Hearts is the most recent and popular development along that historic line.

Cyclically popular with college students, [read Stephen King's *Hearts In Atlantis*] Hearts is a poor choice as a gambling game because normal play can be interpreted as expressions of favoritism (and it often is).

Concept

The idea is to either avoid taking tricks containing the queen of spades and any hearts, or to capture all of them. Hearts may be played with as few as three, but is really a group experience and is most enjoyable with five or six players. There are no partnerships. The Q♠ is colloquially called the Black Lady, or Black Maria, or simply The Bitch.

The Deck

The standard, 52-card deck. For various numbers of players, adjust the deck and the deal according to the table below.

Number Of Players	Adjustment To Deck	Cards Per Player
3	remove 2♦	17
4	—	13
5	remove 2♦ & 2♣	10
6	remove 2♦, 3♦, 2♣, 2♠	8
7	remove 2♦, 2♣, 2♠	7

Rank

Ace (high), king, queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 (low).

The Deal

One at a time, face down, left to right, beginning with player on dealer's left. Quantity varies depending on number of players (see table above).

The Pass

After all cards are dealt, each player passes any three cards to another player. The players first select the cards to be passed and place them face-down, ready to be picked up by the receiving players; only then may the players pick up the cards passed to them. Cards may be passed according to different schemes (always left, alternating left and right, etc.). The most common passing scheme is to the left for the first round, to the right for the second, then across (or two to the left if an uneven number are playing), then hold (no passing) for the fourth round and then repeat the cycle until the end of the game.

The Play

A trick consists of one card placed by each player in turn, face-up in the middle of the playing area. The player to the dealer's left leads the first trick and may lead any card. Each player in turn must follow suit, if able. If unable to follow suit, any card may be played. The player who places the highest-ranking card of the suit led wins the trick.

Each player collects the tricks she has won in front of her in a pile for later examination.

Scoring

At the end of the round scoring is as follows.

If a player has captured all of the points, that is the Q♠ and all 13 of the hearts (this is referred to as a "slam," "take all," or "shooting the moon") he scores minus 26 points.

If no player has taken all the points, then each player is scored the number of hearts taken,

and an additional 13 points is added to the score of the player who ends up with the Q♠.

Winning

The player who has the lowest score when the game ends is the winner. Prior to playing, players should agree on what event ends the game; generally, either a certain passage of time or whenever one player's score reaches a certain point, such as +100.

Variations

Many play "Omnibus Hearts" in which the 10♦ (or the J♦) is worth minus 10 points to whoever captures it. If captured by a player making a slam, that player would score a total of minus 36 points.

Some play that the opening lead in each round is the lowest club in the deal.

Some, apparently adopting a rule from the more recent game of Spades, play that hearts cannot be led until they have been otherwise played ("broken") or unless only hearts remain in the leader's hand.

Some play that the player holding the Q♠ must get rid of it on the first trick he can — either by playing it when the A♠ or K♠ is already in the trick or by sloughing it when a suit is led in which he is void. Such a rule would not prevent a player from taking the Q♠ himself if he is trying to take all the points. ■

For all the rules in one convenient book,
check out *Games People Actually Play*.

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