

# CRIBBAGE

Cribbage, card game in which the object is to form counting combinations that traditionally are scored by moving pegs on a special cribbage board. The appeal of the game, usually played by two but with a popular variant played by four or occasionally by three, is evident from two facts: few changes have been made in the original rules, and it remains one of the most popular of all card games. In the United States cribbage is played by more than 10 million people, principally across the northern states from New England to the Pacific, and the game has remained popular in Canada as well. In Great Britain one to two million players compete in nationwide leagues, to which might be added a comparable number of casual players.

Though commonly credited to the invention of the 17th-century English poet Sir John Suckling, cribbage clearly developed from an earlier game called noddie, which also used a special scoring board, as did the related but more-complicated game of costly colours, described by Charles Cotton in *The Compleat Gamester* (1674) and current in parts of England until the 20th century. Cribbage would quite likely have become the most popular of all two-hand card games if so many descriptions had not called the cribbage board indispensable, which it is not. Almost the only big change from the original rules is that, in the United States and in the British two-player domestic game, each player is dealt six cards instead of the original five. Five-card cribbage remains popular in British club and tournament play, however, since it is commonly played as a four-hand partnership game where five is the norm and a switch to six cards for two players would be confusing.

## Scoring

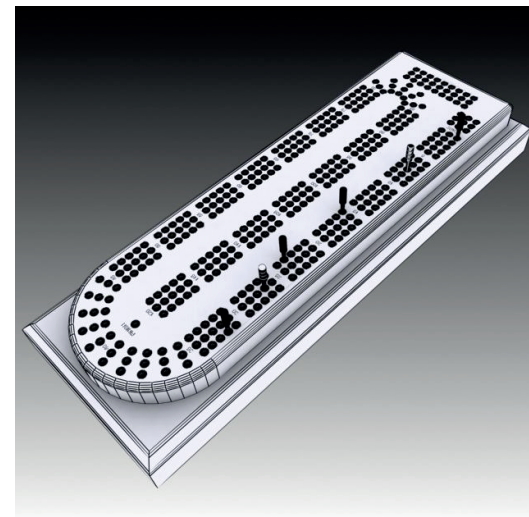
Scoring is traditionally called pegging because it usually is done by moving pegs on a scoring device, the cribbage board. This cribbage board is essentially a tablet with 60 counting holes (in two rows of 30) for each player, plus one game hole for each and often extra holes for holding pegs when not in play and for keeping track of games won. Game is 121 (twice around the board plus one for the game hole) or 61 in the less frequently played game of once around. Each player has two pegs, and each scoring point is marked by jumping the rearmost peg ahead of the other (thus showing at a glance the number of points scored on a move as well as the total). Scores must be pegged in order because the first player to reach 121 (or 61) or, in some games, to pass it is the winner. Emphasis on the board as a scoring device created the idea that the game could not be played without it, but the score can be kept with pencil and paper or with chips or other counters. Cribbage boards are also available with 180 holes (for playing up to 181).

## The cut and the deal

The standard 52-card deck is used, the cards ranking from king (high) to ace (low). Face cards count 10 each; other cards count their index value (number of pips). The player cutting low card deals first, the deal alternating with each hand. Six cards are dealt alternately to the nondealer and to the dealer. Each player then discards two cards facedown to form the crib. In discarding to the crib, since it scores for the dealer, the nondealer tries to lay away “balking” cards, those least likely to create scoring combinations. After the discard, the undealt remainder of the pack is cut by the nondealer; the top card of the lower packet is turned faceup on top of the reunited deck and becomes the starter. If the starter is a jack, dealer immediately pegs (scores) two points, called “two for his heels.” If the starter is any other card, the jack of that suit—formerly called “knave noddie,” an unmistakable link with the earlier game—is worth one point to the holder for “his nob” but is not scored until later. This is followed by the two stages of scoring, the play and the showing.

## The play and the showing

The nondealer begins the play by laying faceup before him any card from his hand, announcing its counting value. Dealer then plays a card (each adds cards to his own pile so that his original hand may be counted later in the showing) and announces the total of the two cards. Play continues alternately, each player announcing the new total, until the total reaches 31 or until one player cannot play without increasing the total beyond 31. If either player cannot add a card without exceeding 31, his opponent must play any card(s) in his hand that may be added without exceeding 31. The last to play in each sequence scores a “go”—two points for reaching exactly 31 or one for any lesser total. After a go, count begins again at zero.



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