

Hearts

Hearts and its several variations are very similar in principle to Black Maria (see page 83) because the object of the game is to avoid taking tricks that contain certain specified cards. It originated with a family of related games called Reversis, which became popular around 1750 in Spain. Hearts itself was established in its own right around 1850. Today it is popular among school students in the USA.

Number of players

The game may be played by any reasonable number of players, but it is at its most interesting and skilful as a game when played by four, each playing for himself.

Cards

The full pack of 52 cards is used. However, when the game is played by three players or by more than four, low cards are removed from the pack to reduce it to a number that allows every player to be dealt the same number of cards.

All the cards are dealt out one at a time, and clockwise.

How to play

The play follows the general principles of trick-taking games: the player on the left of the dealer leads to the first trick, and thereafter the winner of a trick leads to the next; a player must follow suit to the card led if he can, and if he cannot he may discard any card that suits him.

The ♠Q and all cards of the heart suit are penalty cards. Every deal is a separate event, and the usual method of settling is to debit the player who wins the ♠Q 13 points, and those who win hearts one point for each card.

A revoke is heavily penalized. A player may correct a revoke if he does so before a card is led to the next trick; otherwise the revoke is established, the hand is abandoned, and the revoking player is debited all 26 points.

The game is not a difficult one, but it calls for an ability to count the cards, read the distribution and visualize possibilities. It is instructive to consider the play in the deal illustrated overleaf on page 133.

West has to make the opening lead and assumes that the best lead is the ♥2 because one of the other players will certainly have to win the trick.

Against West's opening lead of the ♥2 the play will be short and sharp, and West will come off worst of all because good play by his opponents will saddle him with the ♠Q.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♥2	♥4	♥3	<u>♥8</u>
♥6	♥7	<u>♥10</u>	♥9
♥Q	<u>♥K</u>	♥J	♦A
<u>♥A</u>	♥5	♠Q	♦Q

A more experienced West would have kept off leading a heart. It is probable that his best lead is the singleton diamond, because he has nothing to fear in the spade suit, and, once he has got rid of his diamond, he gives himself the best chance to get rid of the dangerous ♥A and ♥Q.

DOMINO HEARTS

In this version of the game, the players are dealt only six cards each, and the rest of the pack is placed face downwards in the centre of the table. The player on the left of the dealer leads the first trick, and the game is played in the same way as the parent game except that if a player cannot follow suit to a card that has been led he must draw a card from the stock, and continue to do so until he draws a card of the suit led. Only after the stock has been exhausted may a player discard from his hand if he cannot follow suit to a lead.

Play continues until all the cards have been taken in tricks, each player dropping out as his hand is exhausted. If a player wins a trick with the last card in his hand, the next active player on his left leads to the next trick. The last player to be left in the game retains all

the cards left in his hand, and takes into it any cards that may be left in the stock.

The ♠Q is not a penalty card; only cards of the heart suit are, and one point is lost for each one taken in a trick or left in the hand of the surviving player.

GREEK HEARTS

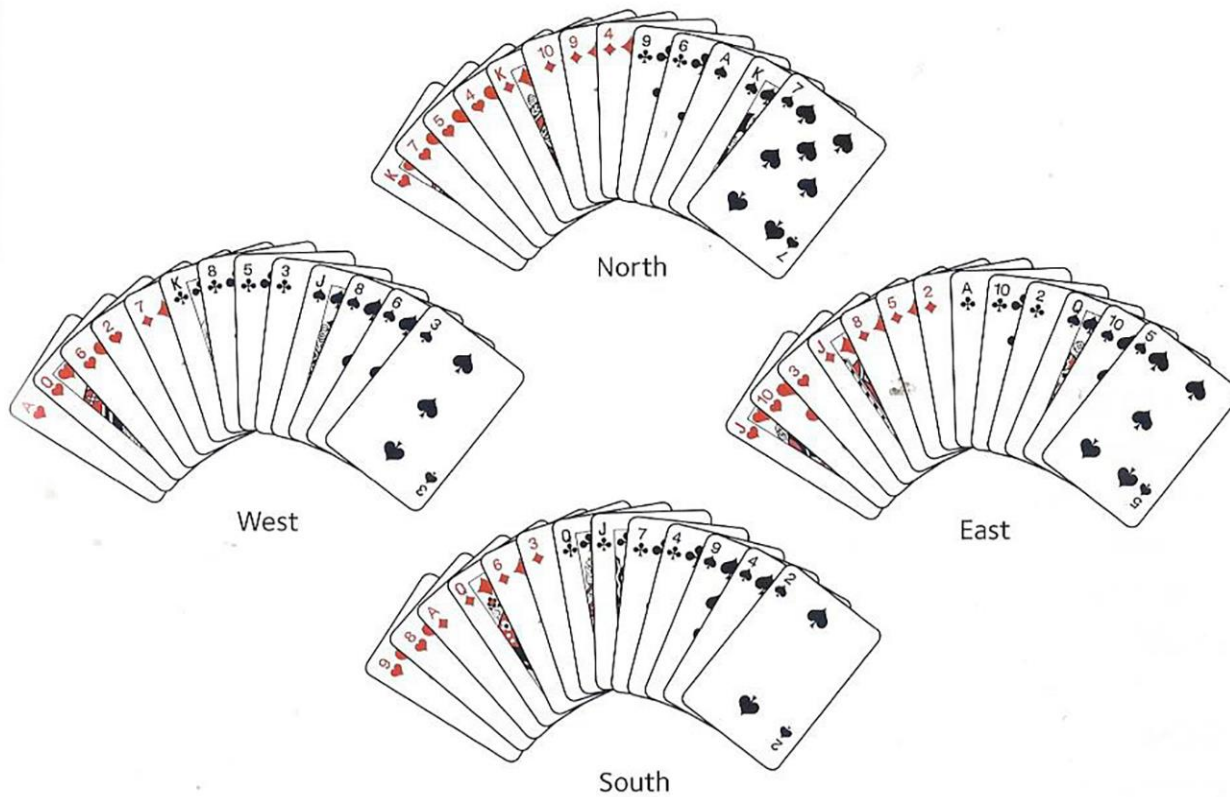
In this version, as in Black Maria (see page 83) each player, before the opening lead is made, passes three cards to his right-hand opponent and receives three from his left-hand opponent.

As in the parent game the penalty cards are the ♠Q and all cards of the heart suit, and the penalties for winning them are the same; if, however, a player wins all the hearts and the ♠Q, instead of losing 26 points, he receives 26 points from each of the other players.

The game calls for some considerable skill, because, before passing on his cards, a player has to decide whether he will take the easy road and play to avoid winning penalty cards, or try for the big prize by winning them all. The decision is never an easy one, because in discarding a high heart one may be helping an opponent gain a better score, and oneself to lose a good score if one receives the ♠Q and a couple of high hearts from one's left-hand opponent.

HEARTSETTE

This variation is played in the same way as the parent game, but with a widow hand, dealt face down. If three or four



take part in the game the ♠2 is removed from the pack, and if five or six take part the full pack is used.

When there are three players, each one is dealt 16 cards; when four, 12 cards; when five, ten cards and when six, eight cards. The remaining cards are placed face downwards in the centre of the table.

The player on the left of the dealer leads to the first trick and whoever wins it takes the widow and discards from his hand to reduce it to the proper number of cards. No one else sees the widow nor the cards that have been discarded.

The play continues in the same way as in the parent game with the same penalty cards and the same penalties for winning them.

OMNIBUS HEARTS

Also called Hit the Moon, this version combines most of the features that have been added to the parent game. Like it, it is at its best when played by four people, each playing for himself.

Thirteen cards are dealt to each player, and before the opening lead is made each player passes three cards to his right-hand opponent and receives three from his left-hand opponent.

The play is the same as in the parent game. All the hearts and the ♠Q are penalty cards, but a novel feature is that the ♦10 is a bonus card. A player loses one point for every heart that he wins and 13 points if he wins the ♠Q. By contrast, he wins 10 points if he takes the ♦10, and if he wins all the hearts,

the ♠Q and the ♦10 (known as hitting the moon – no longer such a feat as it once was) he wins 26 points instead of losing 16.

The game is won by the player who has the highest plus score, or lowest minus score, when one player reaches a score of –100.

The game calls for skill both in discarding to the right-hand opponent and in the play. Good discarding is dictated by the fact that only the club suit is neutral and harmless. Every heart is a liability and top spades are dangerous (unless adequately supported by low cards) and though top diamonds are advantageous the low ones may simply be liabilities.

In play it is necessary to aim at forcing the lead into the hand of the least dangerous opponent. All the time temporary partnerships must be formed. If the score stands at: North –83, East –41, South +32, West +47, it is obvious that West will be doing his best to win the game by driving North to –100 as quickly as possible. A skilful South, therefore, will enter into a tacit partnership with North to try and save him by prolonging the game and so give himself more time to pull ahead of West. The strategy is perfectly proper because both players are acting in their own interests.

PIP HEARTS

This version is played in the same way as the parent game, but the ♠Q is not a penalty card and the penalty for winning a heart is increased to the pip value of the card, the court cards counting Jack 11, Queen 12, King 13 and Ace 14.