

## Hearts

The concept of turning games around and letting the losers win and the winners lose has been applied to most of the card-game families. It seems to work best with the family of trick-taking games. Hearts (also known as *Omnibus Hearts*, *Black Maria*, and *Black Lady*) is the most successful example of a trick-avoidance game. Marilyn Simonds Mohr noted its international reputation—the only game of its type to ascend to those heights. The United States Playing Card Co. reports that Hearts is the second-favorite card game among American college students (Spades is number one).

### ***How the Game Is Played***

The usual number of Hearts players is four (three, five, and six may also play, but we won't consider those variants here). It's every man (or woman) for himself. Hearts uses the standard 52-card pack. The cards in each suit rank from the ace (the highest) to the 2 (the lowest). There are no trumps.

The deal rotates clockwise, as does the play of the cards. The entire pack is dealt, one card at a time. Players may discard three cards by passing them to the player on their left. (You must pass these cards before you can look at the ones you'll be receiving.) The player with the 2 of clubs opens the game. In *Hoyle Card Games*, passing can rotate or be dispensed with, and the player to the dealer's left can open.

Whichever card is led first, the other players must try to follow suit. A trick is won by the highest card in the suit led. The winner of a trick makes the next lead.

The object of play is to avoid taking hearts in tricks, as each heart counts as one point against the player taking it. The queen of spades (*the Black Lady or Black Maria*) counts as 13. However, you could try to take *all* the hearts *and* the Black Lady. This is called *Shooting the Moon*, and, if you pull it off, you hand your opponents a whopping 26 points each.

Hearts cannot be led until they've been *broken*, that is, thrown into a previous trick by a player who couldn't follow suit. When a player equals or breaks 100 points, the game is over, and the player with the lowest score at that time is the winner.

### ***Strategies***

The queen of spades rules the game of Hearts. To ignore the queen is to court humiliation and risk defeat. Consideration of the queen should begin before play starts, during the passing phase. Any high spades (Q, K, A) are dangerous if they are not protected by several lower spades.

However, it can be fatal to be short on low cards in a particular suit, especially later in the game. Using the last example, say a few hands have passed, and you still have the 8, 10, queen, and king of clubs. After the ace and 9 are played, you happily throw down your queen, and the top player takes the trick with the ace.

However, the player to your right threw down the jack of clubs. You now have the three highest clubs (8, 10, K). What happens after that could be destructive. Players will be running

out of clubs, and next time someone leads in clubs, they'll paint you with hearts or stick you with the queen of spades.

Guarded high-cards should be saved until later in the game, especially if they are hearts. This will help to prevent someone from successfully Shooting the Moon. If the player who receives your discards likes to Shoot the Moon, you may wish to pass them a low heart. This may discourage them from making the attempt in the first place.