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Novuss: A guide to playing the game

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Novuss is a popular game that might be best described as a Latvian billiards. But finding rules for this game, played on a wooden table with wooden discs and wooden cues, can be tougher than learning the game itself. Ervīns Miezītis of Tasmania, Australia, came to our rescue, offering his interpretation of guidelines for *novuss*.

Note: These rules have been translated from Latvian, based on those used in 1980 by the United States Latvian Novuss Association and adopted with amendments by the Australian Latvian Sports Council in 1988 (and amended in 1991 and 1992). As these rules are intended for the use by English-speaking players new to the game of *novuss*, I have taken the liberty to make many changes in an attempt to eliminate ambiguity, repetition and conflicting wording and have added some clarifying information. Therefore, these rules have no official standing outside our circle of social players in Tasmania.>

1.0 General

1.1 Competitive *novuss* is played as singles or doubles. In singles competition the individual scores are tallied or, in team events, added to the team score. In doubles competition the players standing at opposite sides of the table play as a team. As social entertainment, four-sided singles can also be played. The number of sets to be played is determined by agreement (one set, best of three sets or best of five sets).

1.2 During play there is no refereeing, but an official should be available to resolve disputes as they arise.

1.3 The object of the game is to pocket all eight playing discs with the aid of a striker propelled with a cue.

1.4 After having determined the starting order (by toss of a coin, or playing the striker to rebound the shortest distance from the opposite edge, etc.), players place their own discs on the table in an uninterrupted row, touching adjacent discs and the edge board, and then take up playing position on the opposite side. There should be four discs on either side of the middle line. The player who lost the right to start has choice of side.

1.5 Before commencement of play, the participants should check the surface of the table and clean or polish it as necessary.

1.6 To make a stroke, the striker is placed on the table so that its hole lies entirely within the "blind" zone at the nearest edge between the lines of the adjacent edge zones, without touching any discs.

1.7 The striker is placed without making contact with any playing discs.

1.8 The player's fingers should never touch the playing surface, only the edge board.

1.9 To examine the position of discs, players may lean across the table without touching its surface, but may not gain support by placing hands on the edge of the table.

1.10 No discs, striker or other items may be placed on the table edge during play.

1.11 Only one striker is to be used for each game.

1.12 The striker should not be retrieved by dragging it across the table or reaching for it across the centre of the table. It should be placed near the centre by the opponent if necessary.

1.13 The player's area of movement is 3 metres by 1 metre, i.e. the width of the table plus one metre either side and one metre back from the table. However, the player should remain within the area directly behind the table while waiting for the next turn.

1.14 After the striker is put on the table, the player is allowed to move it by hand to a different position.

1.15 When executing a stroke the cue is allowed to rest only from corner to corner on the near edge of the table. When aiming or striking, the player's hand may rest on the edge board, but must not touch the surface of the table.

1.16 The stroke should be made with the tip of the cue, not with its butt or side. The stroke is considered as having been completed if the tip of the cue has moved the striker at least the width of its centre hole. If the striker is moved less than that, it should be repositioned before taking the stroke. Only one touch of the striker is permitted. If a stroke is taken with two strokes in rapid succession, the player loses the set.

1.17 After a successful stroke—i.e., if one or more discs are pocketed and no breach of rules has occurred—the player recovers the striker and places it at will as before to take the next stroke.

1.18 Player finishes a turn if:

- **1.18.1** No discs have been pocketed.
- **1.18.2** The opponent's disc is pocketed.
- **1.18.3** The disc is forced off the table.
- **1.18.4** The player commits any breach of the rules resulting in a penalty (see item 3.0).

1.19 If as a result of a stroke one disc lands on top of another, the referee puts them side by side without touching other discs. The top disc is placed on the side of its overhang. If a disc lands on top of a striker, the latter is removed and disc is put in its place. Play continues.

1.20 If a disc or striker is hit off the table, even if it falls back on the table, but has made contact with an object outside it, or lands on top of the edge board, it is considered "out". Such disc is put in the centre of the circle. If the centre is already occupied, it is placed inside the circle on the centre line of the side that it jumped over. If that point is also taken, it is put on the next available point in clockwise direction. If all five points are occupied, the disc is placed next to the disc in the centre, but always on the side where it left the table.

1.21 If after a stroke it is impossible to pick up striker without touching other disc, the referee is called upon to remove the striker.

1.22 If a disc stays on its edge, it must be allowed to come to a complete standstill before being placed flat on the table. The point of contact of its edge to the table will determine the point which can be seen through the centre of the hole in the disc (or as near to it as possible), when it is placed flat.

1.23 If a disc stays balanced on the edge of a pocket and in the course of the game drops in without having been touched by the striker or a disc, the referee replaces it in its exact former position.

1.24 If some outside interference causes a player to miss a stroke, the stroke should be replayed. If as a result some playing discs were also disturbed, the set is replayed.

1.25 If a disc is broken, a new disc is placed where the biggest part of the broken disc rested.

1.26 When a player pockets the last disc, but in doing so incurs a penalty (e.g., pockets the striker), the set is lost.

1.27 If a player with a correctly executed stroke pockets own last disc and also the last disc of the opponent, the set is declared a draw.

1.28 If a player contravenes any rules in this manual, the referee may issue a warning. For repeated offences, the forfeiture of a set or game may be imposed.

1.29 In situations when the chance exists of the striker hitting the illegal disc(s) first, an independent observer should be asked to observe the play and make the decision. However, if the play was too close to call, the opponent should be given the benefit of the doubt (see item 3.6.2).

2.0 Direct and rebound strokes

2.1 A player is allowed to pocket their own discs with direct strokes except those within “blind” zones, i.e. the centre circle and the player’s own edge zone.

2.2 A direct stroke means that the striker must first touch the player’s own disc outside the “blind” zones after which it may hit any other discs.

2.3 A disc is considered outside a “blind” zone as long as the line bordering such an area can be seen through the centre hole.

2.4 When a player’s own discs are all in the “blind” zones, it is permissible to use a rebound stroke to attack any discs anywhere on the table.

2.5 “Blind” discs can be played:

- **2.5.1** With a rebound, i.e. the striker touches at least one edge board before hitting the disc.
- **2.5.2** With the striker after it touches a player’s own disc outside “blind” zone.
- **2.5.3** By means of any discs as long as the striker first touches the player’s own disc outside “blind” zones.

2.6 Attacking the opponent’s discs is permitted in the following ways:

- **2.6.1** With a rebound stroke when the player has only “blind” discs left.
- **2.6.2** With the striker after it touches the player’s own disc.
- **2.6.3** By means of any discs, providing the stroke was correctly executed.

Note: If as a result of any of the moves under rule 2.6, an opponents disc(s) is driven off the table, it will be placed in the centre circle.

3.0 Penalties

3.1 Penalties are imposed for infringements of the rules by loss of turn and bringing back into play one previously pocketed disc. Penalty disc is put on the centre line touching the edge board. If more than one disc is to be placed, they are place symmetrically either side of the centre line or as close as possible to the centre line without moving any discs. If vacant positions are equidistant from the centre, penalty disc is placed on the side with least number of discs.

3.2 If a player has eight discs on the table, the debt stands until discs are available. Penalty disc is put out only after the player or opponent has finished turn of play.

3.3 It is the opponent’s responsibility to make sure penalty discs are placed as soon as they become available. They cannot be introduced retrospectively.

3.4 For several infringements of the rules resulting from one stroke, only one disc penalty is imposed eg.: striker is pocketed without touching any discs.

3.5 The placing of penalty discs in difficult situations should be done by an independent person.

3.6 The penalty disc is reintroduced if:

- **3.6.1** With a direct stroke, the striker fails to touch any disc.
- **3.6.2** With a direct stroke, the striker touches own and opponent's disc simultaneously.
- **3.6.3** With a direct stroke, player hits own disc in a "blind" zone. It is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.4** With a direct stroke, opponent's disc is driven into "blind" zone. It is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.5** With a direct stroke, striker first touches opponent's disc. It remains in the new position unless driven into a "blind" zone.
- **3.6.6** With a direct stroke, opponent's disc is driven out of "blind" zone. It remains in new position.
- **3.6.7** With a direct stroke, opponent's disc is driven off the table. It is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.8** With a rebound stroke, the striker first touches opponent's disc, while there are discs for direct shot. It remains in the new position unless driven into a "blind" zone.
- **3.6.9** With a rebound stroke, after hitting edge board, striker fails to touch the opponent's side edge or own disc in the circle.
- **3.6.10** With a rebound stroke, opponent's disc is driven off the table. The disc is placed in the centre circle.
- **3.6.11** With a rebound stroke, while there are discs for direct shot, opponent's disc is forced into "blind" zone. It is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.12** With a rebound stroke, the striker fails to touch opponents edge unless it touches a disc in the circle.
- **3.6.13** If player touches striker while discs are still in motion.
- **3.6.14** If player dislodges a disc by cue, hand or other means. It is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.15** If player refuses to make a stroke.
- **3.6.16** If player makes a double stroke ie. the cue moves the striker twice. If as a result of the double stroke a disc is dislodged, it is returned to original position. If more than one disc is involved, player forfeits the set.
- **3.6.17** If striker drops into a pocket or is driven off the table.

4.0 Singles games

4.1 In singles, two players take part, taking position on opposite sides of the table.

4.2 A set is won by the player who first pockets all eight discs.

4.3 At the completion of a set, the players set up the playing discs before changing sides, but the right to start the set stays on the same side.

4.4 If both players have discs left only in the "blind" zones and both miss them three times, the game is stopped and the set replayed.

4.5 If a player pockets own as well as opponent's last discs, the set is a draw. If a penalty is incurred while pocketing the last disc, set is lost.

4.6 If the first player pockets all eight discs in the first turn, the opponent is also given the right to play. Should the opponent also succeed in pocketing all discs in the one turn, the set is replayed without change of sides unless it happens in the deciding set of a game.

5.0 Doubles game

5.1 In a doubles game partners play opposite each other.

5.2 The partners of the opening team decide who is to have first stroke.

5.3 At the completion of a set, the starting position remains on the same side while players change places in a clockwise direction. Discs are set up by partners after they have changed places.

5.4 Players endeavour to pocket not only their own but the partner's discs as well. The winning pair is the one to achieve this first.

5.5 Should the opening player pocket all 16 discs on the first turn, the next opponent also has the right to attempt to do the same.

5.6 Penalty discs are put on the side opposite the offending player, but not before the starting lineup has been disturbed.

5.7 If a player misses or plays out of turn, the side forfeits the set. Therefore, only one striker should be used.

5.8 Before the striker is placed on the table, the partners may discuss the situation or which disc should be attacked, etc. After the striker has been placed on the surface, no advice may be offered orally or by means of gestures or signs.

6.0 Loss of set

A set is forfeited if the player commits one of the following offences:

6.1 With a direct stroke hits several of their own discs in the "blind" zones.

6.2 With an illegal stroke causes several discs to be moved.

6.3 With a direct stroke drives an opponent's disc into "blind" zone at the same time displacing several other discs.

6.4 Displaces several discs with fingers, striker or cue.

6.5 Pushes the table thereby displacing several discs.

6.6 Plays out of turn.

6.7 The following penalties or breaches of rules may also result in forfeiture of the set: 1.16, 1.29, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, or 3.6.14.

7.0 Equipment

7.1 The table:

- **7.1.1** The dimensions of the table are: 1,000 mm x 1,000 mm (3'4" x 3'4") with a very smooth, polished surface bordered by a 25 mm (1") high, 45 mm (1.25") thick edge.
- **7.1.2** Lines are drawn from edge to edge at a distance of 130 mm (5.5") from each edge. Another line at right angle to the edge, bisecting the area thus formed, marks the centre. A 250 mm (10") diameter circle in the centre of the table, has two crossed lines drawn at right angle to the edges. The areas thus formed by the above lines, are called the "blind" zones. There is a 100 mm (4.5") diameter pocket in the centre of each of the squares formed by the edge lines at the corners of the table.
- **7.1.3** The playing surface must be smooth and well polished to help the playing discs to glide easily and truly. To keep the playing surface of the table in good condition application of Johnson's Pledge or Mr. Sheen is recommended. Boric acid flakes may also be used.
- **7.1.4** The edges should be made of hard wood in order to provide true rebound angles.
- **7.1.5** The top edge of the table is at a height of 30" above the floor.

7.2 The discs and striker:

- **7.2.1** The 32 playing discs are 30 mm x 12 mm (1.25" x 0.5") with an 8 mm (0.3") hole in the centre.

- **7.2.2** The four “striker” discs are 45 mm x 15 mm (1.75"o x 0.6") with 10 mm (0.4") hole in the centre. The discs and striker are machined slightly concave in order to reduce their contact area and enable them to slide more easily on the polished surface of the table. Singles matches are played with 8 discs and two strikers of two colours (usually red & black). In doubles matches 16 discs and 4 strikers of two colours are used. For social, four-sided singles games, there are 32 playing discs, eight of each of four different colours (usually black, white, red and green) and matching strikers. In competition only one striker per table is used.

7.3 The cue:

- **7.3.1** The round cue tapers from approximately 25 mm to 6 mm (1" to 0.25") and is of a length to suit individual player (usually under 1,000 mm or 3'4", so as to fit inside the edges of the table).

Playing hints

A player should endeavour to pocket one disc and place another in a favourable position with the same stroke.

To extract “blind” discs 1, 2, or 3 edges of the table can be used.

A disc in a corner or on the ledge of a pocket, may be successfully attack by directing as many discs as possible towards that pocket with intention of dislodging the disc on the edge or in the corner.

Alternatively, the striker is hit hard, so that it jumps the pocket, hits the disc in the corner and bounces back on the table. Unless hit with just the right force, this stroke often results in a penalty.

Advanced players may like to try other variations of the game such as playing with their opponent’s discs, which means that all 8 discs start in the “blind” zone, or scoring two of their discs into each of the four pockets.

Another game played on *novuss* table is when all 32 discs are placed in the circle and the player who pockets most of them is the winner. Alternatively, a “colour” is allocated to each player and if a penalty is imposed, the player is not allowed to touch directly any other discs before pocketing the penalty disc.

Starting a game

In a round robin single’s tournament the pairs are determined by a draw. First player in each pair has the right of first stroke; the second player, choice of side.

In a knockout competition right of start is determined by a toss.

In team competition only first pair tosses for the start. Other team members are allotted right to open game in alternating order. The same applies to doubles competition. Only one member of each pair takes part in the toss. They then choose their positions at the table. Their opponents can change their order around the table. When playing on a new table, competitors are allowed a “hit-up” for one minute to get acquainted with the surface. Between games players are permitted to check smoothness of the table with the striker without touching any discs. In Hobart, the start is determined during the warming up (testing the surface) hits. After two tries, the third hit of the striker against the opposite edge should rebound the least distance possible. After every player taking part in the particular game has had their third try, the one whose striker has stayed closest to the edge, starts the game.

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