

Back Alley Rules

Players

There are four players in fixed partnerships, partners sitting opposite. The game is played clockwise.

Cards

54 - a standard 52 card pack with two distinguishable jokers, high and low. The cards rank in order of trump **High Joker-Low Joker-A-K-Q-J-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2**.

Deal

13 cards each in the first hand, then one card fewer each successive hand down to one card each. Then a second hand with one card dealt to each player and rising again to a final deal of 13 each, so that there are 26 deals in a complete game. Turn to deal passes clockwise. After the four hands have been dealt the next card is turned up and its suit is trumps for the hand. If the turn up is a joker there are no trumps.

Bidding

Starting to dealer's left, each player in turn has just one bid. The possible bids are 'pass', a positive whole number, or 'board'. There is no requirement for each bid to be higher than the previous one.

- If all pass the cards are thrown in and there is a new deal of the same number of cards by the next dealer.
- If both members of a team bid a number, those numbers are added and the team's aim is to win at least that many tricks. A pass counts as zero. So if the members of a team bid 1 and 4 they try to win at least 5 tricks between them. If they bid pass and 3 they try to win at least 3 tricks. If both pass they have no minimum target, though any tricks they do win will benefit them slightly. The maximum number bid allowed is one less than the number of cards dealt.
- A player who bids 'board' commits his or her team to try to win all the tricks. If more than one player bids board, the second board bid is a 'double board', the third is a 'triple board' and the fourth is a 'quadruple board'.

Play

The highest bidder leads to the first trick. If more than one player bid the same number the earliest of those bidders leads. If more than one player bid a board the last of them leads.

Players must follow suit. If unable to follow suit you may play any card. The trick is won by the highest trump in it, or if it contains no trumps, by the highest card of the suit led. The winner of a trick leads to the next. It is illegal to lead a trump unless trumps have been 'broken' - someone has already played a trump to a previous trick.

If the high joker is led to a trick, each of the other players must play their highest trump. If the low joker is led the other players must play their lowest trump (note that the low joker might still be beaten if someone's only remaining trump was the high joker). These constraints do not apply when a joker is played other than as the first card of a trick. Also, a player who has no trumps is free to discard any card when a joker is led.

Scoring

A team which wins at least as many tricks as they bid scores 5 points per trick bid, plus 1 point for each trick won in excess of the bid. If they win fewer tricks than they bid, they lose 5 points for each trick bid.

A team which bid board scores 10 points per trick if they succeed in winning all the tricks; if they fail they lose the same amount (e.g. 50 points in a five card hand). A team which bid double, triple or quadruple board wins 2, 3 or 4 times as much. (When a team bids board only their highest bid counts; the other partner's bid does not affect the score).