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Pegging Pointer #4

by Dan Barlow

Learning from your mistakes is a good way to improve your cribbage game. But it can also be expensive. Here's a better way to improve: learning from my mistakes.

Here's a hand I choked on in a tournament a few years ago. I needed eleven holes; my opponent needed nine. I saved 5-9-10-J of Hearts. I had first count and I felt great, because I didn't even need a cut. I felt even better when the cut wasn't a Jack.

I led my 10 and opponent scored 15-2. I played the Jack, and she got a Go with her 4. Now I played my 9, and she scored another 15-2. My 5 made the count 20, and she had a 7 for a run of three plus a Go. She pegged out. Stunned, I tossed my lucky pegs into the trash can.

But, of course, it wasn't bad luck that cost me the game. Holding 5-9, with my opponent needing to peg six more holes. I should have played the 5. There are no two cards in the deck that would allow her to peg six holes, had I played the 5. By playing the 9, I allowed her to win if she held 6-7 or 6-4.

For some of you, this is a lesson in pegging strategy. Figure out the worst that can happen, and play to avoid it. For the rest of you, including myself, the lesson is -- it's not over till it's over, so stay on your toes until your peg is in the game hole.



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Take me to the game

Pegging Pointer #5

by Dan Barlow

Some players never pair an opponent's opening lead. The two holes they score just aren't worth the risk. The "risk" of course, is the net loss of four points if the opponent was leading from a pair. This is a good policy when the game situation demands that you keep the opponent's pegging to a bare minimum, but is it always a good policy?

The answer is "NO." If you will examine your cribbage hands more closely, you will see that the risk is not always four holes! Look at these two hands:

A. 10-9-8-5

B. 9-4-4-2

Your opponent leads a 9. In hand "A," if you pair the 9, scoring 18 for two, and your opponent has the third nine, she scores 27 for six, plus a go. You've lost five holes. But look at hand "B." If your opponent plays 27 for six here, you play your 4; and get 31 for two. The total loss is only two holes. Since you cannot lose more than two holes by pairing the 9 in hand "B," your opponent must hold the third 9 for 50% of the time just to break even. You don't need a computer to tell you she won't hold the third 9 that often.

Suppose you hold hand "B" and your opponent leads a 2. Should you play your 2? Yes, because if he does have another 2, scoring 6 for six, you can play your 9 and score 15 for two. Again, you have lost only two holes. When two holes are all you can lose, that's no great risk. After all, you risk losing two holes almost any time you lay down a card!

In short, if you pair up only when the danger is least, you will make a steady profit in the long run.

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