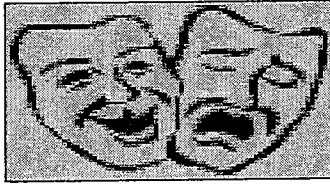


By DeLynn Colvert, author of, "PLAY WINNING CRIBBAGE"



## THE "TWENTY-SIX THEORY" (Con't)

### #14

If you are the dealer, the first hand should be played defensively. Your major objective is to hold your opponent scoreless on the peg. Lay off his lead; do not form runs, be extremely cautious about counting to "15-2"...especially on the first card lead. Try to keep cards to for the "Magic Eleven" to thwart the 10-card lead...even if it slightly weakens the count in your hand--**PLAY DEFENSIVELY!** Pat yourself on the back if Jake fails to peg a point on the first hand. You have done your duty if he is scoreless after pegging is completed. Remember, you can give up nine points (you are +9) and still have the advantage in an average game.

And once again, returning to Lord Kelvin and knowing your numbers, if Jake leads a king and you're holding 4-5-6-king, resist that temptation to play your 5 for a "15-2." Doubly resist the temptation to pair the king--a pairs royal retaliation may well be fatal! The play is 6 for "16," keeping the 5 (the other half of the "Magic Eleven") to score "31" in the case of the logical 10-card follow-up by Jake--resulting in only two points for you, but , more importantly, **NO** points for Jake. Continue to play defensively the remainder of the pegging on the first hand. The only exception to this rule is if you have an extremely bad hand (two points or less...and the discards you have laid away in your crib are not helped by the starter card, with the possibility that you have, indeed, lost your plus-nine advantage on the very first hand). In this event, peg cautiously, and score when you get no worse that a trade. Be especially cautious if Jake's first lead will combine with the starter card into a possible "barnburner." Before trading points on the peg, check his second card played. If it also combines with the starter card, avoid pegging, as a 12 or higher hand, plus a few pegs, will certainly put Jake in the driver's seat! If his third card played does not combine with the starter card, collect pegging points--but cautiously! There will, of course, be times when you have no alternative but to go ahead and peg, being trapped into a situation with no safe cards. Take your lumps, but keep them to a minimum.

Scoring throughout the game by the first-hand's non-dealer is more critical to the outcome of the game that is the scoring of the first-hand's dealer. Statistics show that the average game is nine hands (see the chapter "What's the Odds"). The non-dealer scores first on this critical ninth hand and, after scoring, is about seven points short of winning the game (in a typical average game). One big hand (16 or more) scored during one of the nine deals will pick up those minus-seven points, providing the other eight hands are about average.

However, the dealer must score at least **TWO** big hands (16 or more) to gain the minus-seventeen points he must pick up to win the game with the **FIRST COUNT** on the **EIGHTH HAND!** Picking up minus-seventeen in eight hands is much more difficult for the dealer than is picking up minus-seven points by the non-dealer in nine hands.

For the reason, the non-dealer's score is usually the key to the game. The dealer must make early efforts to slow the game down--to make the game ten hands. Or at least force the non-dealer to be no better than average, and as far below average as possible, by playing defensively throughout the game (or until board position dictates a shift in strategy). And, of course, the non-dealer must make every effort to speed the game--to make the game nine hands, and being in position (less than 10 points from the 121st hole) to take advantage of that ninth-hand count.

Since the non-dealer's position throughout the game is usually more ~~critical than the dealer's~~ position, let's analyze the non-dealer's strategy. First, let's plot the board with marks, or targets to shoot for on each hand. This is the primary reason for playing an easy to read 121-point board. Since you (the non-dealer) must pick up seven points over average to be in the first-count range of winning the game on the critical ninth deal, let's add seven points to the locations you should be during an average game. Set your goal for 17 as "par" on the first deal, then 33 as par on deal two, then 43, 59, 69, 85, 95, and finally 111 as "par" after completing the eighth deal.

Then, through playing offensively throughout the game, if you have attained or exceeded "par" 111 after playing the eighth deal, the odds of winning the game are in your favor. You are within 10 points of winning the game with the first count, and the odds are even you will score at least 10 points as the non-dealer on the ninth deal. Of course, many games will NOT be average, but a compilation of statistics shows that *about 42% of all games are decided on the ninth deal*. Study the charts in the chapter "What's the Odds?" and you will understand why the ninth deal is so important in cribbage!

If you attain the "par" 111th hole after the eighth deal, you still have only a 50-50 chance of winning the game (if Jake maintains the pace with you). Still, 50-50 is better than losing those 12%, if the "Twenty-Six Theory" isn't played. But try to surpass the "par" holes by as many points as possible. With each point on the plus side of "par," your odds of winning increase.

For example, if you have scored 36 points after deal two, you are plus three to "par." If Jake, the dealer of the first hand, is tied with you at 36 points after the second deal, he is minus 7 to "par." Confusing? This minus 7 means *he is 7 points under "par" to score 121 on first count on the eighth deal. The dealer of the first hand must speed up the game one full hand to gain that first count advantage* (or, if successful in slowing the game, will have that critical first-count advantage on the tenth deal). The first-hand dealer's target, or "par" for the second deal would be 43 (your third-hand target).

These numbers will be confusing at first, but mastery of board position is critical to expert cribbage. Don't give up at this point. Take your time and study the "par" numbers. Remember, the non-dealer will have first count on **ODD NUMBERED** deals, the dealer will have first count on **EVEN NUMBERED** deals. And although the average game is nine deals, many games will go eight or ten deals. A few games will be won in seven or eleven deals. About one game in 300 will be won in six deals...with a twelve game deal not quite as rare. A thirteen-deal game is about a 1,000 to 1 shot. the shortest game in some 60,000 games witnessed is a five-deal game (three have been witnessed by the author). The reason longer games are not as rare as short games is that poor, low-counting hands are more common than those high-counting "barnburners" (suspicious confirmed?), and by the fact it is easier to slow a game down than to speed it up.

