

Belote

Introduction

Belote is one of the most popular card games in France, although it has been known there only for about 70 years. It is a close relative of Clobyosh (also known as Bela), which is played in Jewish communities in many parts of the world, and of the Dutch game Klaverjassen.

Belote is a point-trick taking game for 2, 3, or 4 players. Its most interesting form is the 4 player version, which is described first.

A 32 card deck is needed (A K Q J 10 9 8 7).

Card point values

Cards in the trump suit both rank and score differently from those in other suits. Notice the promotion of the trump 9 and J.

Trump suit		Other suits	
J	20	A	11
9	14	10	10
A	11	K	4
10	10	Q	3
K	4	J	2
Q	3	9	0
8	0	8	0
7	0	7	0

Belote for four players

Players form two teams of two partners. Partners sit at opposite seats. The direction of deal, bidding and play is anti-clockwise.

The deal and the bidding

The pack is never shuffled at Belote. The player before the dealer in rotation (i.e. the player to dealer's left) cuts the pack. The dealer gives a set of three cards to each player, then another set of two cards, and turns the next card face up.

The player after the dealer in rotation (the player to dealer's right) can now "take", i.e. choose the turn-up card suit as a trump, or pass. If this player passes, the next player can take or pass, and so on around the table. If all 4 players pass, each in turn has a second chance to take, choosing a trump suit other than that of the face up card. If all



players pass a second time, the cards are collected together and the next player in rotation deals.

As soon as a player takes (in the first or second round of bidding), the bidding ends. The taker is given the turn-up card (whether it is a trump or not) and the deal resumes. Each player except the taker is dealt a further packet of three cards, and the taker is dealt only two cards. These cards are dealt in rotation, beginning to dealer's right and ending with the dealer.

Declarations

Declarations are particular sets of cards held in players' hands, which give players extra points. There are three sorts of declarations:

4 cards of the same rank, called "*carré*" in French, or "square"

- 4 jacks: 200 points
- 4 nines: 150 points
- 4 Aces, tens, Ks, Qs: 100 points

4 eights and 4 sevens are not counted.

Sequences from 3 to 5 cards of the same suit. There is yet another ranking of cards for sequences, by descending order: **A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7**

- 3 cards: 20 points
- 4 cards: 50 points
- 5 cards: 100 points

Sequences longer than 5 cards are declared and counted as any of the 5-card sequences which they include.

Belote and Rebelote are the trump King and Queen held together in one player's hand, and are counted 20 points.

Ranking of the declarations:

Belote-Rebelote always scores 20 points, irrespective of other declarations.

Apart from Belote-Rebelote, only the team holding the highest declaration is entitled to count its declarations. The other team scores nothing even if it holds several inferior declarations giving a point total higher than the highest declaration.

A square is higher than a 5 card sequence. Between equally long sequences, the one containing the higher ranked cards wins. If there are two sequences of equal rank, and one is trumps, the trump sequence wins. If none is trump, the one held by the player who is earliest in rotation wins (playing anticlockwise, the player to dealer's right is first in rotation



and the dealer is last). A particular card may not be involved in two declarations (except in Belote-Rebelote).

When to declare, apart from Belote-Rebelote:

The traditional method, now increasingly ignored (see variations below) is the following:

1. Each player makes his declaration(s) at the moment he plays his card during the first trick, saying "4 kings", "sequence of 4", etc.
2. The first trick is collected.
3. If necessary there is a contention to find out the winning declaration. All declarations made by the side with the winning declaration are scored.
4. A player of the other team may ask to see the cards of the declaration(s) which were scored. These must then be shown. Of course if a card involved in the declaration has been played in the first trick the opponents will remember.

If the highest sequence announced by each side is equal, the first announcer in rotation specifies the highest card of the sequence, and the next announcer either specifies his highest card if it beats the opponent's, or says "good!" if it does not. If the heights are the same, the player who holds a trump sequence specifies it.

When to declare Belote-Rebelote:

A player who holds the king and queen of trumps declares "Belote" when playing the first of these card and "Rebelote" when playing the second.

The Play

The next player in rotation after the dealer (the player to dealer's right) leads a card. The subsequent players must follow suit if they can. If the card led is trump, subsequent players must not only follow suit, but also play a trump card that beats all previous cards if they can, whoever holds the trick at this stage.

Trumping: If a player is unable to follow to a non-trump suit, and an opponent is currently winning the trick, he must trump if he can, otherwise he may discard any card. If his partner is currently winning the trick he is free to either trump, or discard any card.

Overtrumping and undertrumping: If a player is the third or the fourth to play, and is unable to follow a non-trump suit, and the opponent just before him has trumped, he must overtrump if he can. If he has trumps but is unable to overtrump, he must still play a trump, although he does not benefit from doing so. This is termed "undertrumping", or "*pisser*" in French Belote jargon.

If the fourth player is unable to follow suit to a plain suit lead which his partner has already trumped, and his partner is winning the trick (because the third player either discarded or undertrumped), the fourth player may either discard (even if he holds trump) or overtrump.



If he is unable to overtrump, having no sufficiently high trumps, he may either discard or undertrump.

To summarize these rules, you must always follow suit, if unable to follow you must trump unless your partner is winning the trick (in French: *le partenaire est maître*), and whenever playing a trump you must beat the highest trump in the trick if possible.

As in most trick-taking games, the player who won the trick has the lead to the next one.

The last trick counts 10 points for the team who wins it. This is called "*Dix de Der*" in French; "*Der*" is a shortening of *Dernier*, the last. The point total including these 10 is 162 points.

Scoring

The tricks taken by each team are added to the team's scoring declarations. (Remember that, apart from Belote-Rebelote, only one team can score for declarations).

If the team who "took" wins at least as many points as the other team, the taking team has made its contract, and both teams add their scores into their column. If the taker's team's points are less than those of the opponents, the takers are "*dedans*" (inside), and the opponents score 162 points plus the losing team's declarations, if any, plus their own declarations.

If the team who took wins all the tricks, that team scores 100 points instead of the *Dix de Der*, giving a total of 252 points plus declarations. This situation is called "*Capot*" in French ("*être capot*" for the victims, "*mettre capot*" for the winners). The team which took no tricks forfeit their own declarations other than Belote-Rebelote, if any. In some exceptional cases it turns out that the team who took wins no tricks at all. Despite the likely derision in this case the other team wins only the regular 252 points, plus all the declarations of both teams.

The winning team is the first to reach a total of 1000 points. If both sides reach 1000 points on the same hand, the game is drawn.

Variations

Direction of play

People often play the whole game clockwise, rather than anticlockwise.

Deal

Some play that the dealer is free to either follow the dealing scheme described above, or deal the sets of 2 cards first.

Declarations

Etiquette: nowadays most players will make their declarations and show them as soon as they notice them in their hand.



Players can agree to play without declarations. This reduces the luck element of the game. In tournaments, declarations other than Belote-Rebelote are not counted. Some play that when playing the King and Queen which form a Belote-Rebelote, the King must be played first.

Criteria for winning the contract

Some do not include the declarations in the point total when determining whether the takers made their contract. In this case, making one's contract means obtaining at least 81 points, without regard to the declarations.

Some demand that in order to make the contract, the taker's team must have more points than the opponents. In case of equality, the taker's team loses and the opponents get all the points.

When both teams get the same amount of points, some play that the result is undecided, and the points from this deal are held in abeyance. On the next deal, if the previous taker's team makes a contract or causes the other team's contract to fail its contract, then each team gets the equal number of points from the tied deal added to its score. If the previous taker's team loses its contract, or their opponents make a contract, the whole 162 points + declarations held in abeyance are given the opponents of the taker from the tied deal.

Some play that when the points are equal, only the bidders' opponents score their points. The bidders' points are held in abeyance and added to the winning team's score in the next deal. This process is sometimes known as "*litige*".

Rules of play

Some players (probably influenced by Tarot) use a different rule for undertrumping. The fourth to play after a non-trump card has been trumped by his partner, when unable to either follow suit or overtrump, must undertrump even if his partner holds the trick. So in this variation, if the trick has already been trumped by your partner and you also have no cards of the suit led, then:

1. if you are able to overtrump, you may either do so or you may throw away from another suit, but you are not allowed to undertrump;
2. if you have trumps but are unable to overtrump, you **must** undertrump if you can - you cannot throw away another suit;
3. if have no trumps, then of course you must throw away another suit.

In French, this curious variation is described by the phrase: "*On est toujours obligé de pisser*". The regular rule is: "*On ne pisse pas sur le partenaire*".

Scoring

Another probable influence of Tarot is rounding up scores to the closest multiple of 5 or 10, to make point adding faster.

Some people play that a defending team which is *capot* (takes no tricks) still scores their declarations. If this variation is played, it is possible that the defending team scores more than the takers, even without making a trick. It is generally agreed that in this case the takers are **not dedans**; both teams score their points. The defenders have to take at least one trick to put the takers *dedans*.



Ending the game: L'Arrêt

If you have just won a trick and you think that your team already has the necessary 1000 points to win the game, including any declarations and the tricks you have won so far, you can stop the game. The points in the tricks played so far are counted and if you really do have at least 1000 you win, no matter how many points the other team has. If you are wrong and you have less than 1000 points, the other team wins - even if they had no chance of getting to 1000 had play continued.

If you stop the game when you are on the taker's side, you also have to continue playing the hand to demonstrate that you can take at least as many points as the opponents on that hand, otherwise you will not be allowed to count any points from the current hand towards your 1000 and your side loses the game.

Note: It is not permitted to look back into previous tricks to count their points when deciding whether to stop the game - you have to remember the points you have taken.

