

Cribbage Poker

When my wife and I were between ping-pong tables we had to come up with a new Dispute Resolution Mechanism^{TM1}. Mostly we switched over to playing card games during dinner, preferably those that work well with two players and don't require a ton of consistent manual dexterity. That said, playing the same game over and over again can get a little repetitive, so we have done some modifying of rulesets over time to keep up the replayability (occasionally we supplement the Cribbage diet with other things but at this point I would say we probably play Cribbage at least 90% of the time). Most of the rule changes have developed organically without much conscious processing but lots of iteration and testing once they got introduced. For example, we started by trying variants where the top card was revealed, which was modified to the request of the dealer, which was modified to allowing either player to pay a certain number of points to reveal the card, which eventually developed into the full set of rules below: Here are the main additions:

- After the hands are dealt and the crib cards are chosen², the dealer chooses poker or cribbage and announces an initial bid (we usually institute a maximum bet of 5 points so as not to allow bullying bets in the later part of the game).
- The other player can either fold, call, or raise and betting continues until either one player folds or a bet is agreed. If the non-dealer folds before betting in this round, the dealer is awarded two points.
- At this point the top card is revealed and another round of betting occurs. If a player folded in the previous hand they get to bet first in this round and may choose again from either poker or cribbage. Otherwise, betting continues from the previous bid. If a player folds without betting in this round (after the other player folded in the previous round) the other player is awarded one point.
- Once the betting is complete either player may pay three points per card to trade a card from their hand with one of their crib cards.
- After both players have had a chance to trade in the dealer may exchange cards from their hand for the cards that the nondealer has placed in the crib. This costs one point for the first card and two points for the second.
- Counting proceeds as normal, except that if one player says 'Go' and the other player cannot make a legal play under 31 then they must say 'Go Yourself!' or lose two points³.
- After all the cards are revealed the bet is settled. If poker was chosen the best (5 card - including the card on top) poker hand wins, otherwise the cribbage hand worth the most points wins. The winner moves forwards the amount of the bet and the loser moves backwards the same amount.
- Cribbage scoring happens as normal and then some classes of bonus points are awarded:
 - 3 points for the player with the worst poker hand
 - 3 points if your 5 card hand is "all red"⁴
 - Poker hands better than a pair are awarded an ascending number of points based on their strength: 2 points for 2 pairs, 3 points for 3 of a kind, 4 points for a straight, etc.
- [still in testing - since 2019] 3 points if you have a zero point cribbage hand

This ruleset has proved to be pretty balanced (important for chore assignment) and also makes for a slightly quicker game, since each pair of hands (makes sense to count by 2s because of the crib imbalance) averages a little under 30 points per player. This ends up about 4/5 cycles per game, which is about the right length for dinner and the consistency in scoring means that the counting order of pegging, then bets, then hand points usually comes into play for the final hand.

¹basically, figuring out who has to do the dishes

²Technically, we also allow the players to agree to 'keep all their cards' and not form a crib but this is an advanced rule that should be deployed with caution. In this case it is common to request 'payment' of a certain number of points from the proposer but whether this must be the person losing the crib or not is not something we agree on. If this happens no round of betting takes place

³like Uno!

⁴as immortalized in *Ocean's 11*...