Cribbage

Thomas J. Robinson

Introduction

What follows is a game of cribbage. Readers who know the game may follow along. Readers who don’t must know this: the score is kept on a board with rows of holes arranged in various designs. The players tally their score by leapfrogging two pegs each. The board is traditional but not essential to the actual play. Cribbage is a card game played with a standard 52 card deck. While a pedant might disagree, I claim that all the basic rules are included below, so with a little savvy guesswork the attentive but uninitiated reader ought to be able to reconstruct the rules.

I was taught the game and the lingo by my grandfather, Dr. Louis P. Saxe, who used a board made for him by an old friend, Mr. Cady (who’s first name I never learned). My granddad probably beat me about 2 out of every 3 games, although even that record may be wishful remembrance on my part.

The game of cribbage

The cut of the deck has gone my way,
so I’ll be the dealer to begin the play.

It’s one and two for two,
and it’s three for six but that’s for you.
I should have been more careful. Ain’t it true,
but it’s four for twelve. Thank you. Thank you!

Now it’s ten for fourteen, and eight for twenty two.
Oh what are you gonna do?
A nine! Good gravy that’s no fair.
You’ve got cards up your sleeve. I do declare.

That’s thirty one for two and a run for three,
and that’s five altogether. I must agree.
Well I’ve got a second eight. It’s good for one.
And now the time for pegging is done.

The cut’s three square’. So you’ve got two pair. 
That’s two and two and four and no more. 
My cards are all laid out. So there’s no deceivin’. 
I’ve got the same. So this part’s even.

So far, I’m a couple couple ahead, 
but I’ve got a crib and I don’t mean a baby’s bed. 
No sir, this hand’s full of royalty. 
Shows you how the cards to me got loyalty.

A king, two queen’s and a jack-in-the-box, 
that’s a double run which you can do in your socks.

Cribbage oh cribbage, a game for all ages, 
for young whippersnappers and grizzled old sages. 
They shuffle and ruffle the decks as they play, 
the classical comments refreshed every day.

We each pegged one. 
So we’ve hardly begun. 
A five and a five and a four and a four, 
I gave up two sure hoping to cut some more. 
You were holding two pair, sevens and eights 
and a six came up just as sure as the fates. 
Double double double runs of twenty four, 
each a good day’s worth and an honest to good score.

Ten, jack, ten, nine, 
a double run but not mine, 
and nine and six for a fifteen two, 
that must be nice for lucky you. 
But not too fast now, 
you’ve got an extra. Say how? 
Oh, that jack’s matched a suit for a hat. 
Now why didn’t I think like you of that? 
Well one for the delicate nob of his nobs, 
the merited reward of all cribbage snobs.

Cribbage oh cribbage, a game for all ages, 
for young whippersnappers and grizzled old sages.
They shuffle and ruffle the decks as they play,
the classical comments refreshed every day.

You got four sixes and the cut was a nine,
but I’ve got four threes. Don’t let me hear you whine.
And don’t forget. I’ve got a second hand to boot
like clockwork even when it turns out moot.
So let me see. Well I’ve got two ones
but no fifteens and not any runs.
So that pair, that measly two,
well that’ll just plain have to do.

Cribbage oh cribbage, a game for all ages,
for young whippersnappers and grizzled old sages.
They shuffle and ruffle the decks as they play,
the classical comments refreshed every day.

You parceled out the cards, and I cut your deals.
I turned up a jack. That’s two for his heels.
Now it’s nine and eighteen for two. I know.
Nineteen, twenty seven and thirty for a go,
seven, fourteen, that’s two for me.
Twenty two for a go, so we each pegged three.

I’ve got four and no more, for my hand’s a flush.
What are you yammering about my foolish rush?
Oh muggins because they’re five of a feather.
That jack’s just a knave for flocking together,
outside of the crib a near trivial addition,
but I’m still sitting in a right fine position.

Come on, old timer. Show me your crib hand.
How you can move so slow, I just cannot understand.
Two, four, ten, king
plus a jack is no-thing.
Why don’t you mark yourself out nineteen whole points?
Muggins you may win, but a goose egg disappoints.

Cribbage oh cribbage, a game for all ages,
for young whippersnappers and grizzled old sages.
They shuffle and ruffle the decks as they play,
the classical comments refreshed every day.

Eighty eight to ninety two,
close it is ’tween me and you.
I’m right on your tail nearing easy street.
You’d best prepare for your ultimate defeat.
It’s all about timing at this stage of the game.
You’ll soon be toasting to my well deserved acclaim.
What’s that you say? I’m a schlamiel.
Better’n a schlamazel, but here’s the deal.

Now cut me a jacko, if you please.
Otherwise I’ll just have to win with expertise.
A five, dagnabbit. What good is that?
That fiver’s no better than a gnat on a bat.

Jack, two, five, one, five, one, five, one,
thirty it is. One sum and it’s done.
I got my go and it’s your turn to score.
A twenty nine, what!? But you’re just a snore.

How can it be? Unless you’re a shark,
with a mightier bite than your outward bark?
I think this game was set up from its birth,
but I’m up for a rematch for what it’s worth.

Cribbage oh cribbage, a game for all ages,
for young whippersnappers and grizzled old sages.
They shuffle and ruffle the decks as they play,
the classical comments refreshed every day.

This song is the fable of the shark and the skunk,
who talked a lame game, but whose spirits never sunk.

In loving memory of Baba