

Burraco

Introduction

Burraco is related to Canasta, and in some ways similar to Samba, in that the aim is to meld combinations of seven or more cards that can be either sets of equal rank or runs in a suit. Like several of the newer games of this family it also features a second hand of cards which is picked up by the first member of a partnership who disposes of all the cards from their first hand. It originated in South America, probably in the 1940's, and is still widely played there. Since the 1990's a version of the game has become extremely popular in Italy, and thanks to an active tournament scene and the establishment of a national organization, the Federazione Italiano Burraco, the Italian rules have become more or less standardized.

Players and Cards

The usual game is four players in fixed partnerships: North and South play against East and West. Deal and play are clockwise.

Two standard international 52-card packs with 4 jokers are used – 108 cards in all. The Jokers, known in Italian as “*jolly*”, are wild cards. The twos, known as “*pinelle*”, can be used either as wild cards or (within a run) as the natural two of their suit.

The cards have point values:

- Each joker: 30 points
- Each two: 20 points
- Each ace: 15 points
- Each K, Q, J, 10, 9 or 8: 10 points
- Each 7, 6, 5, 4 or 3: 5 points

Deal

The first dealer is chosen by drawing cards from the shuffled pack: the player who draws the lowest card deals first. For this purpose the cards rank from high to low: joker, 2, A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3. Among equal cards, the suits rank in order of spades (high), hearts, diamonds, clubs (low). If more than one player draws a joker, those players draw again to break the tie. The draw can also be used to determine the partnerships and seats if not decided in advance: the two highest play against the two lowest, and the player who drew the highest card sits to the dealer's left and therefore plays first. The turn to deal passes to the left after each hand.

The dealer shuffles the cards thoroughly and offers them face down to his right-hand opponent to cut. This player lifts approximately the top third of the pack – for the deal to work smoothly he needs to take at least 22 cards and leave at least 45 behind. The dealer takes the remainder of the pack – the part that was originally at the bottom – and from the top of it deals the cards one at a time face down clockwise to the players until each has 11 cards. Meanwhile the player who cut deals cards from the bottom of the section of the pack that he lifted, to form two face-down piles called *pozzetti*. The cards are dealt one at a time alternately to the piles until each has 11 cards. The cutter then places these piles one on top of the other in a cross formation towards one corner of the table, and puts the remaining cards of this part of the pack face down in the middle of the table. Having dealt the four

hands, the dealer places the next card face-up in the middle of the table and stacks the remaining cards next to it on top of the stack placed there by the cutter, thereby completing the cut. So now each player has a hand of 11 cards, there are two face-down 11-card stacks in a corner of the table, and in the middle is a face-down draw pile with a single face-up card beside it.

Melds

The objective is to form melds which may be **sets** of equal cards or **runs** of consecutive cards in a suit, and place them face up on the table. Each team keeps its melds together, each meld in a column as shown below. Each meld (set or run) must contain at least three cards. You may extend your own team's melds, whether begun by yourself or by your partner, by adding cards to them, but you can never add cards to the opponents' melds.

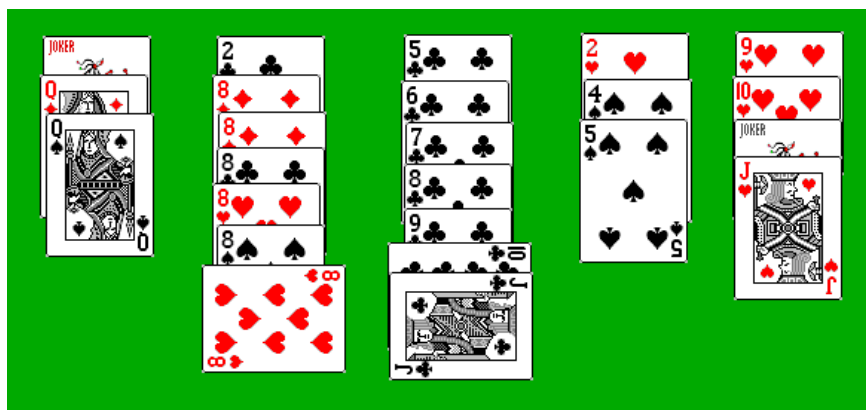
A **set** consists of three or more cards of the same rank: A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or 3. At most **one** wild card (two or joker) may be included in a set, so the maximum number of cards in a set is nine. Sets consisting entirely of twos and/or jokers are not allowed. It is not legal for one team to have more than one set of the same rank. Examples of valid sets:



A **run** consists of three or more consecutive cards of the same suit, the order of the cards being (A)-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-J-Q-K-(A). At most one wild card (two or joker) may be included in a run as a substitute for a missing card. However, a two of the correct suit may also serve as a natural card (next below the three), in which case it is possible for a run to contain 2 twos or a two and a joker. An ace can be placed at either end of a run, above the king or below the two, but it is not legal to place two aces in a run, one at each end. However a run can contain a wild card in addition to 13 different natural cards. It is possible for one team to have two separate runs melds in the same suit, but runs once placed on the table cannot be joined together or split. Examples of valid runs:



A meld that consists entirely of natural cards is clean (*pulito*) and a meld that contains a wild card is dirty (*sporco*). A meld of seven or more cards is called a burraco, and earns a bonus for the team that owns it: a clean burraco scores more than a dirty one. A run that contains a two of the correct suit in its place is of course clean. A burraco is usually indicated by placing its last card crosswise if it is dirty, or its last two cards crosswise if it is clean, as shown below.



The Play

The player to the dealer's left begins. Players take turns to play, in clockwise order around the table, until someone goes out or the play ends because the stock is exhausted.

A turn consists of:

1. either drawing the top card of the face-down draw pile, or taking the whole of the face-up discard pile, and adding it to one's hand;
2. optionally laying down any number of valid sets or runs, or adding cards to sets or runs already melded by one's own team, or both;
3. discarding one card from your hand face up on top of the discard pile.

The first player who gets rid of the last card from their hand picks up the first *pozzetto* of 11 cards to use as a new hand. The second *pozzetto* is taken by the first player of the other team who runs out of cards. There are two ways to take a *pozzetto*.

- **Taking a *pozzetto* directly.** A player whose team has not yet taken a *pozzetto* draws, melds all the cards in their hand, picks up a *pozzetto* and continues playing. Often it will be possible to meld some cards from the *pozzetto* immediately, either as new sets or runs or by adding to the team's existing melds. When the player does not wish to meld any more cards, a card is discarded to end the turn as usual.
- **Taking a *pozzetto* on the discard.** A player whose team has not yet taken a *pozzetto* draws, melds all but one of their cards and discards the final card. Having no cards in hand, the player takes a *pozzetto* and keeps it face down, while the opponent to the left and the player's partner take their turns. After the partner has discarded, the player picks up the *pozzetto* to use as their hand for the next turn. This delay in looking at the *pozzetto* is to avoid any temptation for the player to influence partner's play on the basis of the cards in the *pozzetto*.

The play can end in one of two ways.

1. **A player goes out.** This is known as *chiusura* (closing). In order to close, the following conditions must be satisfied:
 - a. the team has taken its *pozzetto*;
 - b. the team has melded at least one *burraco* - a set or run of 7 or more cards;
 - c. a member of the team melds all but one card from hand and discards this final card, which **cannot** be a wild card.

Note that it is not legal to go out by melding all one's cards. A final discard is always required. Also, it is not legal to go out if one's team does not have a *burraco*. If your team has taken a *pozzetto* but you do not have and are unable to make a *burraco*, then you must keep at least two cards in your hand after melding: one to discard and another to hold in your hand to continue playing. (Some variations allow a player to close without having a discard.)

2. **There are only two cards left in the draw pile.** When a player draws the third last card of the draw pile, the play automatically ends at the end of that player's turn. After that player has discarded, the discard cannot be taken and no further cards can be melded by any player.

Notes on the play:

- It is always legal to take the whole discard pile, instead of drawing from the stock. Unlike some forms of Rummy and Canasta, there is no requirement to be able to meld when taking the pile, and no card that freezes the pile. When taking the discard pile, the entire pile must be added to the player's hand: it is not possible to take a part of the pile or just its top card.
- There is no minimum requirement to lay down a team's first meld. Any valid set or run of three or more cards can be melded.
- When a run is melded with a wild card at the end, it must always be placed at the lower end. For example $2♥ 6♣ 7♣$ and not $6♣ 7♣ 2♥$. It can nevertheless be extended in either direction, in this case by the $4♣$, $5♣$, $8♣$, or $9♣$. This custom is followed to prevent a player suggesting to partner by the placement of cards in which direction the run should preferably be extended. Example: A player who also held the $10♣$ would like partner to add the $8♣$ or $9♣$ and definitely not the $4♣$, but is not allowed to indicate this.
- When a run contains a wild card, it is possible for a member of the owning team to add to the run by melding the real card that the wild card represents. The wild card is then moved to the lower end of the run, but can be used to represent the card at either end when the run is further extended. Example: A team has melded $8♦ ♠ 10♦$ and a member of the team holds the $9♦$. This player can add the $9♦$, making $♠ 8♦ 9♦ 10♦$. The run can then be further extended by adding the $6♦$, $7♦$, $J♦$, or $Q♦$. If the $Q♦$ is added, it becomes $8♦ 9♦ 10♦ ♠ Q♦$; in the other cases the joker would remain at the lower end of the run.
- A wild card can only be replaced in a run by the real card it represents. It is not possible to exchange a wild card for a different wild card. Example: If your team has melded $3♥ 4♥ 2♥ 6♥$ and you hold $A♥$ and $♠$, you might like to substitute the $♠$ for the $2♥$, move the $2♥$ to its natural position and add your $A♥$. Although the resulting run looks valid, the move is illegal, because the only card that can replace the $2♥$ in this run is the $5♥$. If you have the $5♥$ you can put it in the run and move the $2♥$ to its natural place, and then add the $A♥$ as well if you have it. Since the $2♥$ has now become natural, you could also add a joker or another two to make a burraco.
- A natural two at the lower end of a run can be used as a wild card if necessary, in order to add a card at the top of the run. Example: With $2♦ 3♦ 4♦ 5♦ 6♦ 7♦$ on the table, a $9♦$ can be added from hand to make a dirty burraco $3♦ 4♦ 5♦ 6♦ 7♦ 2♦ 9♦$. The burraco can become clean again if the $8♦$ is substituted for the $2♦$, which then returns to its place at the bottom of the run.
- If there is only one card in the discard pile, it is illegal to pick up that one card and discard the same card. However, when a pile of more than one card is picked up, it is legal to discard any of those cards, even the one that was on top of the pile. Also, if the discard pile has just one card, say the $5♣$, and a player holds the other $5♣$ in hand, it is legal to pick up the $5♣$ from the pile and discard the other $5♣$. It is not the same card, even though it looks the same.
- It is legal to discard a wild card, except as the very last card in one's hand when going out. In fact, discarding wild cards may be the only way to dispose of them if one has too many, since not more than one wild card can be used in each set or run. Although it is illegal to go out by discarding a wild card, a player whose team has not yet taken a pozzetto can discard a wild card as his or her final card to take a pozzetto.

Scoring

When the play ends, both teams score as follows, and add their scores to their cumulative totals.

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| cards in melds on the table | plus card value |
| cards in players' hands | minus card value |
| burraco <i>pulito</i> (clean meld of 7+ cards) | 200 points extra |
| burraco <i>sporco</i> (7+ card meld including wild card) | 100 points extra |
| for going out (closing) | 100 points extra |
| a team that has not taken its <i>pozzetto</i> | minus 100 points |

Notes on scoring:

- If the play ends because the draw pile is reduced to two cards, or no one having gone out, neither team scores the 100 point bonus for going out.
- If a player goes out while an opponent (or even the player's partner) has taken a *pozzetto* but not yet looked at it, the owner of the *pozzetto* subtracts the actual value of the cards in it, as though they were already in hand, rather than 100 points.
- It is possible for a team's score for a hand to be negative (if the cards in their hands are worth more than those they have melded), and a team's cumulative score can also be negative.

The game ends when either team has a score of **more than** 2000 points, and the team with the higher score wins.

Variations

- A burraco of 8 or more cards that contains a run of 7 consecutive natural cards and a wild card or consists of at least 7 equal cards with a wild card, is "semi-clean" (semipulito) and is worth 150 points. This is indicated by placing the second to last card crosswise.
- A player does not require a discard to close. The final card can be played for points.