

## Back Alley Bridge (Spring, 2010)

Back Alley is a simple version of bridge with some strong similarities to Spades and Hearts. A quick search of the web reveals a version of Back Alley Bridge was popular during the Vietnam War. I learned this version during my college career at University of California, Santa Cruz.

A full game is a relatively long experience, running roughly 1 to 2 hours, depending on speed of play. Don't play drunk; it's not fun.

Preparing for Back Alley Bridge. You will need:

- 1 deck of 52 standard playing cards (including jokers).
- The 2 jokers need to be marked to make them distinguishable from each other. I recommend using a felt tip pen to mark 1 joker with the word "BIG" and mark 1 with the word "LITTLE" (see below).
- 1 pad of paper & writing utensil used to keep score.
- 4 players (2 teams).

### 1. PLAYERS AND CARDS

- a. The players form 2 teams. Players on the same team sit facing each other.
- b. The game is played clockwise.
- c. The trump in Back Alley is always SPADES.
- d. The BIG joker used in Back Alley is the highest trump card. The LITTLE joker is the second highest trump card.
- e. The cards in each suit rank from highest to lowest:
  - i. A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2.
  - ii. For the trump, or Spades, the BIG and LITTLE jokers would come before the ace.

### 2. DEAL

- a. Initial dealer is determined at random.
- b. The dealer shuffles and deals out all cards so that each player has 13 cards. This will leave 2 cards left over.
- c. Turn to deal rotates clockwise.
- d. Each subsequent hand is dealt with 1 less card (i.e., 13, 12, 11, etc.) 2 hands are dealt with a single card, followed by dealing with 1 more card (i.e., 2, 3, 4, etc.) for a total of 26 hands. (*Variation: deal every OTHER hand, i.e., 13, 11, 9, etc. – this allows the game to be completed in roughly 1 hour.*)

### 3. BIDDING

- a. Starting with the player to the left of the dealer, each player bids as to how many tricks they can take and each team's bids are totaled. If the player does not bid that they can take any tricks, they "pass".
  - i. For example: Player 1 bids 5, Player 2 bids 2, Player 3 bids 3, and Player 4 bids 2. That totals 12 of a possible 13 tricks.
- b. There are 2 special bids in Back Alley called BOARD and BOSTON.
  - i. If a player bids BOARD, they are saying that their team will take EVERY SINGLE trick in the hand (see: SCORING).
  - ii. If a player bids BOSTON, they are saying that their team will take the FIRST 6 tricks in the hand (see: SCORING).

1. Unlike the BOARD bid, a player may not declare BOSTON when there are 6 or fewer tricks being played
- iii. Players may double, triple, or quadruple any of these bids.
  1. This occurs very often when only a few cards in the hand. For example, Player 1 bids "BOARD", Player 2 passes, Player 3 bids "DOUBLE BOARD", Player 4 passes (see: SCORING). In this case, DOUBLE BOARD would be the highest bid and would lead.
  2. A player may not bid a double, triple, or quadruple bid unless the appropriate single, double, or triple has already been bid. Example:
    - a. The first bid cannot be DOUBLE BOSTON.
4. REDEAL
  - a. There are 2 situations where a hand can be redealt:
    - i. If ALL players pass during the bidding process, or,
    - ii. If, at 7 or more cards, a player's hand contains no aces, spades, or face cards.
5. THE PLAY
  - a. Highest bidder leads with anything they want, except trump, unless:
    - i. If the team has either bid BOARD or BOSTON, they may lead with the trump.
  - b. Each player MUST follow suit if able to. If they can't, they can trump and thereby normally take the trick. Or they can throw another card (usually low) of another suit because that way they cannot take the trick.
  - c. Once trump is broken, anyone can lead with a trump or other suit.
  - d. The BIG joker is the most powerful card (i.e. the HIGHEST SPADE). When lead, both players on the other team must follow with their largest trump card while the partner may lead any spade (if they have one). The LITTLE joker is second highest trump card (i.e. below the BIG joker, but above the ACE) and has no other special characteristics.
  - e. In the following play, the person that took the prior trick leads the next trick.
6. SCORING
  - a. Team scoring is 5 points per trick bid and taken, with 1 additional point for any tricks taken over the bid. -5 points per trick bid if the team does not take the number of tricks they bid, which is referred to as being "SET". Examples:
    - i. Bid 5 and get 5: the team receives 25 points. (5 tricks bid x 5 points.)
    - ii. Bid 7 and get 8, the team receives 36 points. (7 tricks bid x 5 points + 1 point for the extra trick.)
    - iii. Bid 4 and get 2, the team receives -20 points. (4 tricks x -5 points)
    - iv. Bid 4 and get none, the team receives -20 points. (4 tricks x -5 points.)
  - b. If a team bids BOARD, the points per trick are adjusted to 10 points per trick. -10 points per total tricks if the team does not achieve the number of tricks they bid. If a board is doubled, tripled, or quadrupled, the points are multiplied accordingly.

- i. Bid BOARD on a 2-card hand and get both tricks. Team receives 20 points. (2 total tricks x 10 points.)
  - ii. Bid BOARD on a 3-card hand and get 2 tricks. Team receives -30 points. (3 total tricks x -10 points.)
  - iii. Bid DOUBLE BOARD on 3-card hand and get all tricks. Team receives 60 points. (3 total tricks x 10 points x DOUBLE.)
- c. If a team bids BOSTON, a flat bonus of 100 points is awarded to the team that successfully takes the first 6 tricks, plus 1 point per extra trick. A flat bonus of -100 points is awarded to the team that declares, but fails to take, the first 6 tricks.
  - i. Bid BOSTON on a 10-card hand and get the first 6 cards plus 1 additional trick. Team receives 101 points. (BOSTON + 1 extra trick.)
  - ii. Bid BOSTON on 7-card hand and get only get 3 tricks. Team receives -100 points.
  - iii. Bid DOUBLE BOSTON (this does not happen very often and usually only as a last ditch effort on the final hand) and get only 4 tricks. Team receives -200 points. (-100 points x DOUBLE.)
- d. At the end of 26 hands, the team with the highest score wins.

#### History:

1/1/01, First draft.

1/15/02, Minor edits to scoring, added re-deal section.

1/16/02, Minor clarifications in BIDDING and THE PLAY. Adjusted BOSTON minimum to 6 or less cards. The guy at UCSC who taught me the game would contest this, but he was wrong.

11/10/02, Minor formatting edits.

2/25/06, A dusting off.

3/11/10, More dusting in preparation for publication.

3/20/10, Clarifications on scoring after publication (Thanks Mark!)