



4-Point Pitch

By Jim Pittenger

Pitch is an upper Midwestern card game and a favorite at Pittenger & Anderson. There are several forms: 4-point, 5-point, 7-point, 10-point, etc. The game described here is 4-point, hold low, Hollywood scoring. Most who play the game know 4-point as the most challenging format. The rules of pitch are “local” and should be discussed at each sitting. If you don’t like the local rules, don’t play. Traditionally, the game is played with two partners, four people. Use two decks to speed play, make one while playing with the other. Draw for partners, the two high cards compete against the two low with the two highs choosing the direction of their seats. The highs deal, six cards per player with 28 left in the “blind.” Each hand consists of four points: High, Low, Jack, and Game. The player to the left of the dealer bids first by passing or indicating the number of points they hope to take. Two is the lowest allowable bid and four is a moon, which ends the bidding. The winning bidder then declares “trump.” If the three players to the left of the dealer fail to bid, the dealer is stuck for two. Here are some helpful definitions:

- **High** is the highest card of trump played during the hand. If the Ace is in the blind, then the King will be high. If the Ace and King are in the blind, the Queen is high. It is possible for the Deuce to be high.
- **Jack** is the Jack of trump. If the Jack is in the blind, then there is no Jack out and the players will only score three of the four available points. If the Ace, King, and Queen are in the blind, then the Jack will count as “Jack” and “High.”
- **Low** is the lowest card of trump played. If the Deuce is in the blind, the Trey is Low. If the Deuce and Trey are in the blind, then the Four is Low. It is possible for the Ace to be high and low. In the game we are describing low cannot be captured, the player dealt the low trump retains that point. Capture low is a different game and requires its own strategies, particularly when a player moons. Capture or hold low is a local rule and you need to get it straight before you sit down. There is no right or wrong to pitch rules, they change with the geography of the game. In Lincoln we typically play hold low while the guys in Omaha favor capture low.
- **Game** is the skill point. We count for game by assigning a numerical value to all the face cards, and a 10 count to all tens. Aces count 4, kings 3, queens 2 and jacks 1...the Tens (not just Trump) count 10. There are 20 points in each suit and 80 points in total. Expect a fair number of points to be in the blind. Tens are important. We have never seen all 80 points out, nor have we experienced a zero count. Bridge players like their game because all the cards are out and there is a right and wrong way to play them. Pitch players enjoy the mystery of having 28 cards in the blind...remember, it’s a game, not a science.

Bidding...

The player to the left of the dealer bids first. The lowest bid is two, the highest is four, which is also called a “Moon.” Each player bids by determining how many of the four points they think their team will be able to take. Holding the Ace and Deuce of any suit would make for a cinch 2-bid, High & Low. A player holding an Ace/Deuce may be inclined to bid three if another player bid two first. The assumption being that any partner worth having could provide the Jack or at least a Ten for game. Bidding is as much gumption as science. It can only be learned by playing the game. Remember, this is a game with 28 of the cards in the blind...lots of uncertainties.

Bidding is all numbers. Once everyone has bid, the winning bidder declares trump and must be led. If all three players to the left of the dealer pass, the dealer is stuck with a 2-bid. At this point the dealer can pitch, taking a 2

point "set" and the other team does not score. The dealer can pitch, play a 2-bid or outbid the others. If no one has mooned in front of him the dealer has that option as well. A moon scores 7 in all open games and doubles the money won. A moon that goes set results in (-4) on all open games. More on scoring a moon follows.

If a player "Moons," the bidding ends immediately, and play begins. During play, suit must be followed unless the player elects to trump in. Players may trump in at any time. When a player decides he cannot take anymore tricks and cannot contribute in any way, he can "pitch" his remaining cards on the trick being played. You cannot "pitch" trump. "Pitching" speeds play.

Players collect tricks as the game progresses. The tricks won can be laid face-up or face down (local rules.) This allows both teams to audit for Game (the skill point) or requires them to keep a running mental count as play progresses. If you want to take 4-point pitch to its most difficult level, play with the tricks face down and "capture" low. It makes for a much more challenging game. Most players have a hard time keeping track of trump, let alone an accurate game count, high and low.

Scoring...

Single Game Method

Here's another degree of difficulty and where things get even more interesting. We know two methods of scoring. The first, and simplest, is the Single Game method. Play each game to 15 or 21 (local rules.) A Moon is worth the game value, either 15 or 21. A Set Moon counts whatever local rules dictate, often 4-points against the bidder. Aggressive players will notice there is usually a mathematical incentive to Moon. Points are accumulated in a column of figures. "Made" bids are positive and "Set" bids are negative. The first team to 15 or 21 wins.

If the players want to introduce a wager (a natural for pitch), the stakes would be set at the outset and the wager would be sub-totaled with each game. For instance, with stakes set at \$2.00/\$2.00 or "Two's," the players would be playing for \$2.00 per game (of 15 or 21) and \$2.00 per set. The winning team is forgiven their sets. If the winning team goes out with its opponent "On the Post," or "Posted" (a score of Zero or less), the results are doubled. If a player Moons and goes out, the results are doubled.

Hollywood Scoring

The second method is "Hollywood Scoring." It takes pitch to a higher level and makes the score pad an important part of bidding. Using Hollywood, the teams play up to three games simultaneously. Each game is played to 7, making a Moon worth 7 and a Set Moon worth (-4). Score is kept on a 12-column sheet, also called a "Rack." Again, local rules.

The stakes are set at the outset and the contest is completed when all 12 games of a Rack are finished. The scorekeeper tallies the first, second, and third games cumulatively. The fourth game is not started until the first game is completed. Only three games are open at one time. It's a simple running total...you can do it! The following pages describe a number of Hollywood Scoring scenarios, followed by a blank score sheet. Feel free to make a copy. Scoring errors are common in both formats...watch the scorekeeper. Always remember, Pitch is a game...have fun.

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