

Love Means Nothing

A tennis card game by Ariel Seoane (seo) to play singles or doubles (2 or 4 players)

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Plan your strategy to gain control of the point and reduce your opponent's options. You need to prepare for your next shot as soon as you hit the ball and make an informed guess of what your opponent might play, based on his stance. But you don't want to pass too much information: a well played faint could be the seed of the cleverly planned shot that will give you the point. Break your opponent's serve and hold yours, and you're on your way to win the match!

Overview

In Love Means Nothing each player has a 24-card deck, with each card depicting 2 halves of a tennis court. One half-court is used for defense, returning a ball that comes your way. The other half-court is used to determine the placement of the returned ball. You never use both halves of the card at once, it's either one or the other. A typical turn consists of first playing a card to cover the shot your opponent played, then playing another card to dictate which of the 6 zones you'll hit the ball to. There are also combinations of cards which create a special shot. Special shots, if not covered with the corresponding combination of cards, leave a player off balance: at the end of the turn they will draw 1 less card than played. Left with a smaller hand, the off balance player has fewer options to play for the remainder of the point and is less likely to cover the opponent's shots. Of course if a player cannot cover a shot at all, then the point is lost.

SINGLES RULES

Setup

The two empty-court cards are placed at the center of the table to form the court.

Player decks are shuffled.

Serving player (A) takes 6 cards, receiving player (B) takes 5.

The remainders of both decks are placed on the table to form a reserve pile for each player.

From their hands, the receiving and the serving player, in that order, place as many cards as they wish (as long as the defense areas covered do not overlap) face up on the table next to their side of the court. These are their preparation cards.

Anatomy of a card

Cards have information organized into three sections:

[illustration here]

(A) DEFENSE - A grey rectangle shows the area covered to return an opponent's shot. This might be one or two of the six possible spots.

(B) SHOT PLACEMENT - A tennis ball marks the placement of a shot. This is the spot the opponent will need to cover with his DEFENSE card.

(C) SUMMARY - Summary of the information on the A and B sections for easy reading when holding several cards in-hand.

Service

The serving player places one card, either from his hand or his preparation zone, onto his opponent's half-side of the court. There's no card drawing after the serve.

Rallies

The typical return shot consists of two cards: one with the defense part covering the current location of the ball (the destination of the opponent's shot), and another one in which the shot placement half is used to determine the destination of the shot. Special shots can be played by using two cards with the same shot placement location, instead of just one.

To safely return a special shot you need to play two defense cards covering the current location of the ball, instead of one, or you'll be off balance, which means you draw one less card at the end of your turn, reducing your hand-size for the remainder of the rally.

Based on these rules, the possible rallying shots are as follows:

- **Regular shot.**
Two cards are played (one for defense, one for shot placement); two cards are drawn from the reserve pile.
- **Special shot.**
Three cards are played (one for defense, two for shot placement); three cards are drawn.
- **Return of a special shot.**
a: Safe return. Three cards are played (two for defense, one for shot placement); three cards are drawn.
b: Off balance. Two cards are played (one for defense, one for shot placement); **only one card is drawn**, and the player hand remains reduced for the rest of the rally.
- **Counter-attack (special shot in return of a special shot).**
a: Safe counter-attack. Four cards are played (two for defense, two for shot placement); four cards are drawn.
b: Off balance counter-attack. Three cards are played (one for defense, two for shot placement); **only two**

cards are drawn, and the player hand remains reduced for the rest of the rally, as in the regular off balance shot.

Independently of how many cards are played in a given turn, only one can come directly from the player's hand; the other, or others in case of a special shot or the return of a special shot, must come from the returning player's preparation area (the face up cards next to his side of the court). It is perfectly acceptable to play all the cards from the preparation area.

Preparation cards

Since players can only play one card per turn directly from the hand, deciding which and how many cards are placed onto the preparation area plays a big tactic and strategic role in the game. Cards in the preparation area will be used to play special shots and when returning special shots, but will also give information to the opponent regarding your strengths and weaknesses.

Turn end

To end your turn once you played the cards on the court, you first manage your preparation cards, moving cards from the preparation area onto your hand and vice versa, then draw cards from the reserve pile to your hand.

Game, set, match

When a player is unable to play a valid defense card for the current location of the ball (or runs out of cards and is unable to play a shot placement card), the point ends and his opponent wins the point.

In Love Means Nothing, a point is equivalent to a game in a regular tennis match. The first player to score six games, with an advantage of two or more, wins the set. A match may be played to one set, best of three (win two sets) or best of five sets (win three).

Players take turns serving and receiving.

DOUBLES VARIANT

The doubles game variant is played with two decks per team. Teams take seats on opposite sides of the table. Turn order goes as shown in the diagram, with members of one team playing to the opponent in front of them and the other team playing diagonally (turn order: ABCD; Teams: AC and BD).

Rules are the same, except for one exception: when a player is unable to return the ball, or if the team finds it more convenient to their interests, he can pass (simply discarding one card from his preparation area, thus reducing his hand for the remainder of the rally) and let his teammate play instead. Turn order continues as if it had been the second player's turn. E.g.: on player C's turn he passes, hence player A returns the ball, then turn order continues with player B, C, etc.