

SCOPA

A deck of cards is a door that leads to a thousand different destinations. Play Scopa and you step through a door to the past. An Italian game in origin, the first reference to Scopa comes in 1522 from an English variant called Laugh and Lie Down (or Lay Down). The Oxford English Dictionary records the following references to the game in John Skelton's poem *Why Come Ye Not To Court?*:

“Now nothyng but pay, pay, With, laughe and lay downe, Borowgh, cyte (city), and towne.”

The rules to Laugh and Lie Down appeared in Francis Willughby's *Book of Games* (c. 1665). The first published rules to Scopa itself appear over two hundred years later, penned in Naples by a Monsignor Chitarella in 1750. And while many local variants have evolved since then, the game you'll learn below has survived essentially unchanged and is played widely across Italy today.

Overview

Scopa (sweep in Italian) can be played by two, three, or four players. The first team to collect 11 points over a series of rounds wins the game.

NOTE: In Italy, the game is most commonly played with four in fixed partnerships. Partners sit across from each other at the table.

The Cards

Scopa is played with a deck of forty cards. There are 10 cards in four different suits. Each suit has cards ranked from ace to seven and three face cards: Il Rey (The King), Il Cavallo (The Horseman), and Il Donna (The Woman). The face cards are ranked 10, 9, 8 respectively.

Setup

Shuffle the deck and deal each player three cards. Then deal four cards face up to the center of the table and place the rest of the deck next to them.

Game Play

On your turn, you play one of the cards from your hand to the table. One of two things will happen. If you make a match with a card or cards in the center of the table, you will capture those cards and place them with the card you played in a score pile face down in

front of you. If you cannot or chose not to make a match, the card you play will be added to the cards in the center of the table. Play continues clockwise to the next player. When each player has exhausted their hand, three new cards are dealt to each player but no new cards are added to the center. The game round continues in this manner with players playing mini-hands of 3 cards - either playing a card to capture or adding cards to the table. The game round ends when the entire deck has been played. Scores are tallied based on the cards collected and the next round begins with the deal passing to the player to the left.

Capturing Cards

You can capture cards in two ways:

If the rank of your card matches the rank of a single card in the center of the table, you capture it. *Example: A five played would capture a five.*

If the rank of your card matches the sum of two or more cards in the center of the table, you capture those cards. *Example: a five played could capture a three and a two.*

Additional rules for capturing:

If your card matches a single card in the center of the table, you must capture it, even if there are other captures possible. *Example: A five played would have to capture a matching five even if there were also a 3 and a 2 in the center.*

If your card matches more than one single card in the center of the table, you choose which one to capture. *Example: A five played could choose which five to capture if there was more than one in the center of the table.*

NOTE: You are not obligated to play a card that will make a capture on your turn.

If your card cannot make a capture, it is added to the center of the table. That card can now be captured by any player.

Scopa!

A scopa (sweep) is a special kind of capture. If you play a card that captures all remaining cards in the center of the table you score a Scopa. The captured cards and the card you play are placed face up (rather than face down) in your scoring stack to indicate your bonus score at the end of the round. Each scopa you score is worth one point. The other benefit to playing a scopa is your opponent will have no choice but to play a card to the center of the table since there are no cards to capture.

End of the Round

When the deck has been exhausted and all cards have been played, the round ends. Any remaining cards in the center of the table are added to the scoring stack of the player who made the last capture.

Note: taking the last card in the center of the table at the end of the round does not count as a scopa.

Scoring

In addition to scopas, there are four points to score in each round

Most cards – team or player who captures the most cards - 1 point

Most coins – team or player who captures the most cards of the coin suit – 1 point*

Seven of Coins (Sette Bello) – team or player who captures the 7 of coins – 1 point*

*In the Gamer's Edition of Scopa, use the dice suit in place of the coin suit when figuring these two points.

Primera – team with the highest value primera – 1 point

The Primera

This is the one aspect of Scopa that can take a little getting used to. Each player or team assembles its best primera based on the following two rules:

A primera should contain at least one card from each suit. A primera lacking one card in each suit can be assembled but it is automatically lower in value than any full primera.

The sum of the four cards in the primera is its value. Now here's the tricky part. Each card rank in Scopa has a different value when determining the primera. Put simply, the value for each card does not correspond to its rank. Listed below are the cards ranked from highest to lowest primera value.

Card Rank	Primera Value
7	21
6	18
Ace	16
5	15
4	14
3	13
2	12
Rey (King)	10
Cavallo (Horseman)	10
Donna (Woman)	10

As a general rule, the player or team who has the most sevens will most often have the highest value primera.

In the event of a tie for the most cards, the most coins or the value of the primera, that point is not awarded.

Winning the Game

The first player or team who scores 11 points wins the game. If both players or teams reach 11 points, the player or team with the highest point total wins. If there is a tie at 11 points, the players or teams play one more round to determine the winner.

NOTE: A common variant requires the winning player or team to win by two or more points.

Scopone, Scopone Scientifico and Other Variants

As mentioned earlier, there are several popular variants still played widely today. Scopone follows the base rules for Scopa but instead of three cards, each player or team is dealt nine cards at the beginning of the round. In Scopone Scientifico, ten cards are dealt to each player or team and no cards are dealt to the center of the table. In Scopa d'Assi, playing an Ace can capture all the cards on the table (a guaranteed scopa, in other words). There are also many regional scoring rules adding additional points for capturing certain cards, Rey Bello, the King of Coins, for instance.