

TIDDLYWINKS STRATEGY

A brief introduction to the principal strategies of tiddlywinks, for those new to the game. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with, or can refer to, the International Rules.

Queensberry Rules

This, the earliest form of the game, is now used only for potting practice. The four winkers play individually and not as pairs, the intention being merely to be first to pot all one's winks. When a wink is accidentally covered, the covering wink is moved aside.

Squopping Practice

A game for two persons. The pot is removed, and each person sets up 6 winks on opposite sides of the mat. Play proceeds alternately, the object being to completely squop one's opponent.

Pot-Squop

The development of squopping (covering the opponents' winks) and desquopping led to the pot-squop game, the earlier of the two standard strategies for 4 players playing as 2 pairs. The strategy arises from the scoring system: 4 points to the first player to pot all his 6 winks, 2 points to the second, one to the third, and none to the fourth. It is thus all-important to be first in the pot, since this yields more points than the second and third places combined. So the potter spends all his energy on getting into the pot and of course avoiding squoppage. It is the squopper's job to obstruct the opponents (principally by squopping the opposing potter, but also by attacking the squopper) and to free his own partner when he becomes squopped.

This apparently simple strategy often leads to a very interesting game. In the preliminary stages play centres on the fortunes of the potters, but very often a stage is reached where some of each potter's winks are potted and the rest squopped; the squoppers now dominate the theatre of battle, and the struggles between them to free their own partners, and to prevent the freeing of the opposing potters, can be crucial and exciting.

Double-Squop

In pot-squop, one player tries to hold the opposition at bay while his partner races for the pot; in contrast, the essential aim of both partners in double-squop is to concentrate from the first squidges on squopping-up their opponents, and only when this has been done does one player manoeuvre his winks into a position to pot them.

Most double-squop games are played in two stages; the "covering" stage and the "adjusting" stage. In the former, it is usually a good plan to attempt to completely immobilise one opponent (preferably the stronger player). This is often done by a series of "bichromatic attacks" - simultaneous attacks by both winning players on different winks of the same opponent. The adjusting stage involves amalgamating piles (to free surplus covering winks), splitting piles (to make desquopping more difficult) and of course potting.

Normally double-squop will defeat pot-squop; the former's combined squopping force of 12 winks can generally partly immobilise both potter and squopper. Frequently there is a time-limit of 20 - 30 mins on each game, which renders the double-squoppers short of time for their elaborate operations, so that they must often risk potting before they have fully immobilised the pot-squoppers. At the time-limit, the game is adjudicated mainly according to the number of winks in the pot, hence the need for a certain amount of potting. Double-squoppers playing a really good pot-squop pair often have considerable difficulty in doing all they want to, and can easily lose the game.

In practice, double-squop is normally countered with double-squop. It is a complicated strategy with many ramifications, and beginners are advised to master the techniques of pot-squop before attempting double-squop!

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