

Calabresella

3 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

Win tricks worth at least 18 of the 36 available points as the solo player.

SETUP

- Remove 8s, 9s, and 10s from the deck.
- Deal 12 cards each, set 4 aside as a widow.
- Bid to become the solo player.

SCORING

- 3, 2, and Ace each worth 3 points. King, Queen, Jack each worth 1 point.
- Last trick earns a bonus point for 36 total.

Tip: Use the widow exchange to void a suit, giving you flexibility in later tricks.

ON YOUR TURN

- Solo player exchanges cards with the widow.
- Lead a card and all players must follow suit.
- Highest card of the led suit wins the trick.

Calabresella is a classic Italian three-player trick-taking game using a 40-card deck. It features a unique bidding system where one player plays alone against the other two in a temporary partnership.

Objective

The objective is to win tricks containing valuable cards. The solo player aims to capture more than half the available card points, while the two defenders try to prevent this.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck with 8s, 9s, and 10s removed, leaving 40 cards.
3. **Deal:** Deal 12 cards to each player and set the remaining 4 cards face down as a widow.

Gameplay

1. **Bidding:** Starting from the dealer's right, each player may bid or pass. The player who bids becomes the solo player (the 'caller') and plays against the other two.
2. **Widow Exchange:** The solo player picks up the 4 widow cards, adds them to their hand, and discards 4 cards face down. Any point cards discarded count toward the defenders' total.
3. **Trick Play:** The player to the dealer's right leads the first trick. Players must follow suit if able. There is no trump suit. The highest card of the led suit wins the trick.
4. **Card Ranking:** Within each suit, cards rank from highest to lowest: 3, 2, Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 7, 6, 5, 4.

Scoring

- Ace = 3 points, 3 = 3 points, 2 = 3 points, King = 1 point, Queen = 1 point, Jack = 1 point.
- There are 35 card points total, plus 1 point for winning the last trick, making 36 total.
- The solo player needs at least 18 points to win. If successful, each defender pays the solo player. If not, the solo player pays each defender.

Variations

- **Calabresella Aperta:** The defenders may reveal their hands to each other after the first trick to coordinate their play.
- **Solo Without Widow:** A higher bid where the solo player does not use the widow, earning double stakes if successful.

Tips and Strategies

- As the solo player, use the widow exchange to strengthen your longest suit and create voids for strategic discards.
- Defenders should try to signal their strong suits to each other through their card play.
- The 3, 2, and Ace are equally powerful, so holding multiple high cards in one suit is very valuable.

Tips & Strategy

As the solo player, maximize the widow exchange by voiding weak suits. As a defender, coordinate play with your temporary partner to isolate the caller's strong suits.

Controlling the lead is vital since there are no trumps. If you can force opponents to follow suit where you hold the top cards, you can systematically collect high-value tricks.