

Kozel

4 players

36 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Medium

With your partner, capture tricks worth at least 61 of 120 points.

SETUP

- Use a 36-card deck (6 through Ace) with 4 players in two partnerships.
- Deal 9 cards to each player.
- The dealer's last card is shown to set the trump suit.

SCORING

- Aces: 11, Tens: 10, Kings: 4, Queens: 3, Jacks: 2.
- 120 total points per round; 61+ wins the round.
- Scoring under 31 gives the losing team two goat marks instead of one.

Tip: Lead aces early to secure guaranteed points before opponents can trump them.

ON YOUR TURN

- Follow suit if possible; otherwise you must play trump if you have any.
- The highest trump wins; without trump, the highest card of the led suit wins.
- Teams collect won tricks in a shared pile.

Kozel, meaning 'goat' in Russian, is a popular partnership trick-taking game played across Russia and Eastern Europe. Teams compete to capture point-bearing cards, and a team that fails to reach the minimum score threshold is humorously branded the 'goat.'

Objective

Working with your partner, capture tricks containing aces and tens to accumulate points. The team that scores at least 61 of the 120 available points wins the round. The losing team receives a goat mark.

Setup

1. **Players:** 4 players in two partnerships.
2. **Deck:** 36-card deck (6 through Ace in each suit).
3. **Deal:** Each player receives 9 cards.
4. **Trump determination:** The last card dealt to the dealer is shown to all players and determines the trump suit.

Gameplay

1. **Leading:** The player to the dealer's left leads any card to the first trick.
2. **Following suit:** Players must follow the led suit if possible. If they cannot, they must play a trump card if they have one.
3. **Winning tricks:** The highest trump wins. If no trump is played, the highest card of the led suit wins.
4. **Collecting cards:** Each team gathers their won tricks in a shared pile for scoring at the end of the round.

Scoring

- **Aces:** 11 points each.
- **Tens:** 10 points each.
- **Kings:** 4 points each.
- **Queens:** 3 points each.
- **Jacks:** 2 points each.
- **Total per round:** 120 points are distributed across all cards.
- **Goat penalty:** A team scoring fewer than 31 points receives two goat marks instead of one.

Variations

- **Kozel with bidding:** Teams bid on how many points they will capture before play begins.
- **Three-player Kozel:** Adapted for three individual players rather than partnerships.

Tips and Strategies

- Lead with aces early to secure guaranteed points before opponents can trump them.
- Communicate with your partner through card play by leading specific suits to signal your strengths.
- Keep trump cards for the later tricks when opponents are running low on options.

Tips & Strategy

Securing aces early is crucial since they are worth the most points. Coordinate trump usage with your partner to control the flow of high-value tricks.

The key partnership skill is recognizing when your partner leads a high card of a specific suit, signaling they want you to play your high cards in that suit to secure combined points.