

# HEARTSWITCH

A New Way to Play an Old Classic

By Joe Andrews

The original game of Hearts evolved from a card game called Reverse, which was played in Spain more than 200 years ago. Reverse was based on the avoidance of winning tricks. Sometime around 1830, a similar game called Four Jacks began to gain popularity. The player who won any of the four jacks would be penalized; thus, the concept of a negative-points game was created. The next step was to make taking each heart result in earning a penalty point. A few years after the Civil War, Hearts was a favorite among riverboat gamblers and the settlers of the Old West. Then in the early 1900s came many rules changes, including the passing of three cards, the "big penalty" card (queen of spades), an option to "shoot the moon" (take all the penalty cards and achieve a negative score instead of a positive score), the jack of diamonds bonus card (worth -10 points), and the required opening lead of the deuce of clubs. All of the competitive elements were then in place. Special themed decks were manufactured by several companies to promote Hearts to younger players.

Card playing, especially the game of bridge, was in vogue during the Great Depression, as people had plenty of time and little cash on hand. Hearts was a mainstay on college campuses, especially after World War II. Tournaments were held in many cities from the 1970s through 1990s, culminating in the launch of the annual Grand Prix World Series of Hearts. This national tournament was promoted and sponsored by the Microsoft Gaming Zone. The inaugural event was held in 1999 at Harrah's Casino in Las Vegas. It attracted more than 200 players and had a first prize of \$5,000. Several years later, the enthusiasm for large "live" Hearts events waned, due to the rise of the Internet, a renewed interest in other card games, the recession, and the cost of lodging and entry fees.

However, Hearts would still be played socially by many devotees, especially in local meet-up groups. An annual charity Hearts event in Chicago still draws close to 200 players.

Heartswitch, an attempt to bring new energy to the game of Hearts, is the brainchild of yours truly, with a great assist from Ken Fisher of Toronto, Canada, who provided the concepts of "witch" and "magician" cards. Ken created the classic card game Wizard (1984), which is still published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc. (Stamford, Connecticut). The same company publishes Heartswitch. The Heartswitch rules were reviewed and edited by games expert Ralph Anderson, and the artwork for the game was designed by Jody Boginski Barbessi.

The idea for this new game was to retain some of the flavor of traditional Hearts while adding twists that give Heartswitch its own identity and rules, and that require new strategies.



## THE DECK

The new 60-card deck allows any number from three to six players to participate without having a kitty or unequal numbers of cards after all the cards are dealt out. The object still remains the same: The player with the lowest score wins. The deck consists of 52 regular cards and eight additional cards: four witches and four magicians. The four witches (ranked above the 10 and below the jack in their respective suits) are easily identified by a color, a suit, and the "W" in the corner of each card. Witches affect the scoring for the player who takes them in a trick as follows:

- The "wicked" spade witch counts as 5 points.
- The "kind" club witch cancels or voids out either the spade witch and/or the spade queen.
- The "evil" heart witch, instead of counting as a point, doubles the point value of each heart taken (up to a maximum of 15 points).
- The "good" diamond witch deducts up to 5 points from points taken in the current hand.

The four magicians (identified by the letter "M" and a star in the corner of that card) have no point value or suit designation. A magician may be played at any time, even if you hold the suit led. You cannot win a trick with a magician (unless all players play a magician on the same trick); it can save you in many situations.

## PASSING OF CARDS

There is always a three-card pass in every hand (there are no keeper or "hold" hands). The rotation of the pass varies with the number of players in the game.

## THE OPENING LEAD

This rule represents a big change from Hearts. Instead of the standard club deuce lead used in Hearts, the player to the left of the dealer may lead anything! This includes a heart, a magician, a witch, or any other card. Players must always follow suit, unless they are void in the suit led or choose to play a magician.

## ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when one player reaches 70 or more points; whoever has the lowest score at that point wins. However, players may instead choose to play a fixed number of deals. In order to "shoot the moon," you must win all 14 hearts cards plus either the spade witch or the spade queen or both, resulting in a score of 20, 25, or 30, respectively, which is added to each opponent's score. You can create your own variations of Heartswitch, including a partnership game with two teams (in a four-person game), or three teams (in a six-player game).

Heartswitch retails for \$8 and can be obtained from U.S. Games Systems at [www.usgamesinc.com](http://www.usgamesinc.com). 

