



Rules

The board consists of a grid with twenty-four intersections, or points. Each player has nine pieces, or men, usually coloured black and white. Players try to form 'mills'—three of their own men lined horizontally or vertically—allowing a player to remove an opponent's man from the game. A player wins by reducing the opponent to two men (whereupon they can no longer form mills and thus are unable to win) or by leaving them without a legal move.

The game proceeds in three phases:

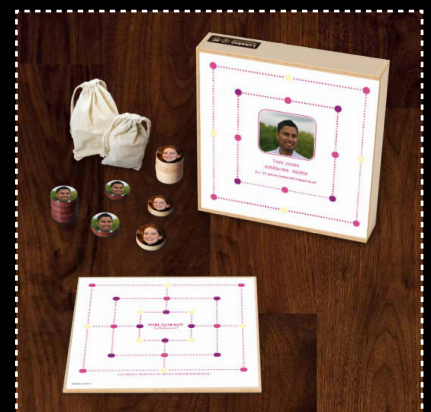
1. Placing men on vacant points
2. Moving men to adjacent points
3. (Optional) Moving men to any vacant point when the player has been reduced to three men

Phase 1: Placing pieces

The game begins with an empty board. The players determine who plays first and then take turns. During the first phase, a player's turn consists of placing a man from the player's hand onto an empty point. If a player is able to place three pieces on contiguous points in a straight line, vertically or horizontally, they have formed a mill, which allows them to remove one of the opponent's pieces from the board. A piece in an opponent's mill, however, can be removed only if no other pieces are available. After all men have been placed, phase two begins.

Phase 2: Moving pieces

Players continue to alternate moves, this time moving a man to an adjacent point each turn. A piece may not "jump" another piece. Players continue to try to form mills and remove the opponent's pieces as in phase one. If all a player's pieces get blocked in (where they are unable to move to an adjacent, empty space) that player loses. A player can "break" a mill by moving a piece out of an existing mill, then moving it back to form the same mill a second time (or any number of times), each time removing one of the opponent's men. The act of removing an opponent's man is sometimes called "pounding" the opponent. When one player has been reduced to three men, phase three begins.



Phase 3: "Flying"

When a player is reduced to three pieces, there is no longer a limitation on that player of moving to only adjacent points: The player's men may "fly" from any point to any vacant point.

Some rules sources say this is the way the game is played, some treat it as a variation, and some do not mention it at all. A 19th-century games manual calls this the "truly rustic mode of playing the game". Flying was introduced to compensate when the weaker side is one man away from losing the game.

Strategy

At the beginning of the game, it is more important to place pieces in versatile locations rather than to try to form mills immediately and make the mistake of concentrating one's pieces in one area of the board. An ideal position, which typically results in a win, allows a player to shuttle one piece back and forth between two mills, removing a piece every turn.