THE GREAT SCRABBLE COMPETITION

Ever since the fascinating game of Scrabble first appeared, players have wondered how many points can be scored by one player in a single move. The history of this search was reviewed in Darryl Francis’s article, "High Scoring Scrabble", in the May 1972 Word Ways. Josefa Byrne’s 1175 points, reported in Dmitri Borgmann’s Beyond Language (Scribner’s, 1967) was briefly outdone by Joel Gaines’s 1184-point solution, and decisively bettered by Darryl Francis’s 1261-point solution, both given in the abovementioned article. Darryl was the first to concentrate exclusively upon a high-scoring single move; the other two Scrabblers tried to simultaneously maximize the single move score and the sum of the two players’ scores.

Since May, Word Ways readers have been actively attacking the problem of constructing high-scoring single-move solutions, and their achievements to date are briefly noted below.

An examination of the common properties of these solutions will reveal that Scrabble players have been able to zero in on the probable form that a best solution must have. In all solutions, the seven tiles in the player’s hand are added to eight letters already on the board to form a 15-letter word along the edge of the board; five of these seven tiles are placed in the first, fourth, eighth, twelfth and fifteenth positions of the word. In addition, these seven tiles complete several (ideally, seven) long words in the perpendicular direction. Of course, not just any long words will do; they must be collectively beheadable (all remain words with the first letter removed) or curtailable (all remain words with the last letter removed).

Ralph Beaman points out that further, less obvious strategies are necessary for a really high score. For example, a doubled triple-triple-triple is worth far more than a triple-triple-triple that is again added to a triple. Confused? Look at your Scrabble board. Imagine that your 15-letter word has a Z as the initial letter. This will count as 10x3x3x3, or 270, plus an extra 10x3, or 30, for a word at right angles. However, if the Z is placed as the fourth letter (on the doubled letter square), it contributes 10x2x3x3x3, or 540 -- far better than 300. Carrying this argument to its logical conclusion, one ought to be constructing 15-letter words with the letters Q and Z in the fourth and twelfth positions; Ralph suggests the coined word JACQUARDERIZING as an ideal.

With this theoretical analysis in hand, let us turn to practice. To focus on the essentials and save space, no full board solutions will be given; instead, we list only the 15-letter word (with capitalized letters the one that formed as well).

Joel Gaines’s points which he got IlCatE, and the player, congoing, provided only Q are rather plurals of success.

Ralph Beaman using the final beheadable word, humbling, and suppress the second.

Onward another, and Darryl’s reasons that would suppress the one.

Unaware of coming up with the winning 1807 point matching it with tactisms and general solution revealed have been compiled huddle together. Similarly, Websters have looked up to but is still rejectivity applied.

Has the ultimate England have newly-launch move Scrabble placed the be reported ones will be judged; that a prize of 1000 will be awarded in a month, even the readers should huddle together the terminality ultimate one-
letters the ones added by the player), plus all perpendicular words formed as well.

Joel Gaines submitted for consideration a game scoring 1413 points which he first devised in 1961. His final word is SesQUiDUp-liCatE, and the perpendicular (curtailable) words are jayhawkers, pareu, congou, dorp, syllabic, and hydroxylamine. Note that he provided only six perpendicular words: curtailable words ending in Q are rather rare. All words appear in Webster’s Second (or are plurals of such words).

Ralph Beaman improved on this with a game of 1554 points, using the final word JacKpuDDInGHooD and the perpendicular (beheadable) words jatrophic, koffs, dawning, dwayberries, grazed, humbling, and dextrality. Again, all words appear in Webster’s Second.

Onward and upward! Josefa Byrne soon came up with a 1580-pointer, and Darryl Francis followed her effort with a solution of 1680. For reasons that will soon become apparent, it has seemed advisable to suppress the details of these solutions.

Unaware of this frantic activity, Ernest Theimer of Rumson, N.J. came up with the highest one-move Scrabble score of all -- an astounding 1807 points. For his 15-letter word he selected ReeQuillBRizInG, matching it with rejectivity, quintas, ived, lodometry, raffable, ze-tactics and greengages. Unfortunately, a closer examination of his solution reveals that the rules for deciding what words are admissible have been considerably relaxed. The word raff (to sweep, rake or huddle together) appears in Webster’s Second, but not raffable; similarly, Webster’s notes the existence of equilibrize (to give balance to) but is silent concerning reequilibrize or equilibrizing. Nor does rejectivity appear; the closest approach is rejective.

Has the ultimate been reached? The distributors of Scrabble in England have entered into an agreement with Games & Puzzles, the newly-launched British puzzle magazine, to discover the highest one-move Scrabble score by means of a contest. Games & Puzzles has placed the best solution known to date (one which exceeds any of the ones reported on above) as a secret target against which entries will be judged; the first person to improve on this solution will be awarded a prize of 100 pounds sterling. Consolation prizes of 5 pounds sterling will be awarded each month for the highest score received during that month, even if it does not exceed the target. For details, Word Ways readers should consult the November issue of Games & Puzzles. At the termination of this contest, we hope to be able to report on the ultimate one-move Scrabble score.