Low-scoring Scrabble Games

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What is the lowest-scoring Scrabble game? If players refuse to trade in tiles, the answer to this question is simple: consider the game in which one player draws O7XJKWW and the other YYVFFH. Since neither player can form a word, each player passes three times and the game ends. Each then subtracts the total value of his tiles, resulting in a final score of -28 to -49.

It is more interesting to ask what the lowest score is if neither player refuses to make an allowable play or trade. The diagram below gives the final board position in the lowest-scoring game I have found. The first U in TUTUS is placed on the center, and asterisked tiles are blank.

Plays: 2 ut 3 tutus (through the ut) W U D 7 wud 4 duo T*U T*U S 19 tutus, wud, duo D U O 28 7 S

As there is no legitimate play on this board, the players eventually will have to subtract the point totals of their racks. If players trade tiles when it is to their advantage to do so, each will trade to a rack of all one-point tiles, for a final score of 21 to 0.

Alternatively, one can require that all tiles be played. This is not possible in a competitive game; I show a solitaire game (constructed primarily by Steve Root) which appears to have the lowest possible score.

Plays: 1. e = 4 5. ooidal = 7 10. squire = 1 14. alan = 4 10 19. awning = 1 23. steeve = 1

The highest game score obtainable to the theoretical limit of the Boston Scrabble Club

Leaving scores get in a two-point game, the solution is for Frank while his opponent

B J D

Plays: 118 108 116 78 89 89 82 77 188 11 92 1143

This is considered as the lowest possible score by the Scrabble Club.
refuse to consider the game FFH. Since times and tiles, result¬
neither play-
if neither play-
have found.
ted tiles are
Eventually will trade tiles rack of all
This is not constructed possible score.

The highest constructed game score is about four times the highest game score observed in play. Actual low-scoring games come closer to the theoretical limit; A.T. and P.M. played a game scoring 420 at the Boston Scrabble Club, but this has surely been beaten elsewhere.

Leaving solitaire behind, what is the lowest score one player can get in a two-player game without forfeiting any turns? Clearly, the solution is for one player to play one tile at a time for minimum score while his opponent plays bingo after bingo to use up the tiles quickly.

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Plays: 1. es = 0 2. centers = 10 3. avidest = 12 4. luaau = 4 5. ooidal = 7 6. bite = 6 7. rioting = 9 8. oxidize = 25 9. root = 4 10. squire = 15 11. beef = 9 12. epigram = 12 13. awardee = 11 14. alan = 4 15. frank = 13 16. eyen = 7 17. mon = 5 18. thirties = 10 19. awnings = 12 20. ohia = 7 21. jalopy = 19 22. ecus = 7 23. stevee = 10, giving a total of 216 points. I suspect that the number of possible positions with this total score is at least 1012. An examination of the position above will show that it was constructed even with additional constraints, yet still has some flexibility.

This is considerably worse than the score of 127 by N.K. at the Boston Scrabble Club. (The worst winning score recorded there was 225 by
Unlike the high-scoring competition, it makes no difference what dictionary is used, since there are no specific words needed and only a loose restriction on construction. All words above, with the accidental exception of OOIDAL, are from the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary. I have no doubt that the scores in this article could be achieved using words in a pocket dictionary.

GUINNESS PALINDROMES

As early as 1971, the Guinness Book of World Records included an entry on the longest palindromic composition. Predictably, ever-longer palindromes were sent in to the editors for consideration, leading to the ever-more-onerous task of checking them for accuracy and suitability. It has, in fact, been demonstrated during the past decade that palindromes of indefinite length can be constructed, limited only by the endurance of the composer. (Many physical feats of endurance, such as flagpole sitting or marathon dancing, are similarly open-ended.) Perhaps Guinness realized that a record of this nature was inappropriate in a section devoted to language; in any event, the longest palindrome has been dropped from their 1981 edition. Word Ways readers may be interested in the explosive growth of the palindrome -- a factor of 46 from 1974 through 1980:

1971 Howard Bergerson (242) Deliver no evil, avid diva ...
1972 Howard Bergerson (242)
1973 Howard Bergerson (242)
1974 Howard Bergerson (242)
1975 Lawrence Levine (648) Tacit, I hate gas, aroma of evil ...
1976 Edward Benbow (1717) Pot no port. Ask Sam to grade ...
1977 Jeff Grant (5023) Evils nag apart -- lunacy, a war ...
1978 Jeff Grant (10620) Tell a plateman, on a morose dam ...
1979 Edward Benbow (10689) Now Norris, Sir, I mail a new ...
1980 Jeff Grant (11125) No elate man I meet sees a bed ...

David Stephens told me in a letter that Guinness received a palindrome of more than 20000 letters in early 1980 from Edward Benbow; was this the straw that broke the camel's back?