

Playing the game

Mus is a Basque card game which makes use of a deck of forty cards (the 8's, 9's, and 10's are set aside). As with most things Basque, it is not certain exactly where or when the game originated. In this case, the debate is not about the origins of the game but sometimes over which is the "real way" of playing this entertaining game. There are several variations. The standard form, adopted by NABO for the national championship and the International competition, is to play the game by the cards; meanwhile another version accepts the 3's as kings and the 2's as aces making eight kings and eight aces in the deck. Yet another version takes this step further and makes the five of diamonds an additional king, totaling nine kings, etc. In the standard form, the game is played by four people split into two teams, but it is also sometimes played by six people divided into two teams of three. Usually, this variety is not a problem because any given community usually has one preferred way of playing.

Despite these variations of the game, the basic rules remain the same. The rules at first may seem complicated, but don't lose heart since once you get going it comes quickly. The game is played in numerous languages, but this introduction proposes that new players learn how to play the game in Euskara or the Basque language. Everyone has room for thirty-some new words in their head so this should not be a big problem. Select the Basque dialect appropriate for your community. Yes, there is a variation in some of the words used but do not despair, you will soon understand what is meant.

To get started, one player from each team cuts the deck to draw one card: the player who reveals the lowest card deals first. The game is played in a counter-clockwise direction. Four cards are dealt to each player. The player directly to the right of the dealer is the "esku" or first player to speak. This first team with the "esku" must now decide whether they want to play their hands or go "mus" and ask for new card[s]. All four players must agree to go "mus" since it only takes one player who wants to play to initiate the game. Mus can be repeated indefinitely until someone decides to start.

ORDER OF PLAY

The game consists of four parts--five if necessary--and it always follows this same order. When you finish one phase, you move to the next one not revealing your cards until the very end. This description follows the standard form adopted by NABO which recognizes only four kings and four aces.

1. **HANDIA.** You play the best high cards in your hand with the kings high, followed by queens, jacks, etc.
2. **TXIKIA/TTIPIA.** You play the best low cards in your hand with aces low, followed by 2's, 3's, etc.
3. **PAREAK.** Each player must first announce whether or not s/he possesses them. A pair of kings is best, followed by a pair of queens, etc. Three of a kind is better than any one pair while two pairs is better than three of kind.
4. **JOKUA.** Each player must first announce whether or not s/he possesses it. Total card points are counted thus: one through 7 are face value while all face cards are worth ten points. Jokoa is 31 points or better, and the best point total is 31, 32

followed by 40, 37, 36, 35, 34 and 33. The best hand of 31 is one face card with three 7's--this is the one and only time that a hand can defeat the supremacy of the esku.

[5.] PUNTUAK. If no one has jokua [31 points or more], then this final additional phase is added. Now the hand closest to 30 points is best, followed by 29, 28, 27, etc.

BETTING & SCORING

The minimum bet in mus is "enbido" [2 points]. Teams begin with zero points and the first team to gather the total decided [usually 40 points] wins the game. Thus you bet against the other team to get points. For each of the above phases, each player can be involved by either betting, declining to bet, accepting a bet, raising a bet, etc. In the event that no player bets on any given phase—that is all say "paso" and pass—then the game moves on to the next phase. Sometimes both players on the same team may want to bet, therefore the first bet issued by a player is the bet for the team. The opposing team may then decline the bet and forfeit one point [every forfeit or "tira" response is only worth one point regardless of the amount bet]. Or they may want to hold the bet ["gure" or "edoki"] and see who has the better cards later; thus it becomes important to remember what has been done in each phase because not until the end of the game are the cards revealed and final points decided. Finally, the opposing team can choose to respond to a bet with a raise. The raise can be everything from two more points upward to betting "hordago" or the whole game. Hordago always keeps a game close—even if you are losing by twenty points, and if the opposing team takes your hordago bet, if one of your team's hand beats theirs, then you are the winner!

The betting and scoring of the first two phases of the game is straightforward:

1. HANDIA. If all four players said "paso", then the player with the highest cards [kings high] receives one point for the team. If one team bet and the other responded with "tira" during this phase, the point has been taken and there is no more scoring. If the bet was held, the player with the highest cards wins the last point total held.

2. TXIKIA/TTIPIA. If all four players said "paso", then the player with the lowest cards [aces low] receives one point for the team. If one team bet and the other responded with "tira", the point has been taken and there is no more scoring. If the bet was held, the single player with the lowest cards wins the last point total held.

The last two phases require each player to first declare if s/he possess this to play. In these last phases there are bonus points awarded.

3. PAREAK. If opposing teams had pairs and all said "paso", then the player with the highest pair[s] wins for himself and his partner if s/he has pairs. If one team bet and the other responded with "tira" during the phase, in addition to the one point received, points are awarded at the end when the cards are revealed. Finally, if the bet was held, the player with the highest pair[s] wins the last point total and bonus points for the pair[s] in their hand. Remember that you must win the phase; if you said "tira" and discover you had better pairs, you receive no points--the team that won the phase does. The additional scoring for pareak, for each person having it on the winning team, is the following:

one pair 1 point per pair

mediak 2 points

dobleak 3 points

4. JOKUA. If opposing teams have the game [31 or better] and all [to pg. 3] said "paso", then the player with the best game wins for himself and his partner if s/he also has the game. If one team bet and the other responded with "tira" during the phase, additional points are now awarded in addition to the one point received. Finally, if the bet was held, the player with the best game wins the last point total. Remember that you must win the phase; if you said "tira" and discover you had a better game, you receive no points--the team that won the phase does. The additional scoring for each player on the winning team is the following:

31 points 3 points

32, 40, 37, etc. 2 points

5. PUNDUTZIA. If no player has the game, the hand closest to or at 30 wins. The additional scoring here is one point only for the single player with the best hand.

KENUAK: Signs

A player cannot show his partner his hand, but you can send signs to notify the other of what you possess. This can be helpful because one player could simultaneously play both your hand and his/her own, confusing the opposition. The trick is to send signs while the other team is not watching you, and in turn, you watch them to see if they try to send any. Teams can only utilize the accepted signs and they are as follows:

--biting the lower lip: indicates a pair of kings

--sticking out the tip of the tongue: indicates a pair of aces.

--twitching the mouth to one side or the other - indicates three of a kind for pairs

--raising the eyebrows or twitching both ends of the mouth outwards: indicates "dobleak".

--winking the eye: indicates 31 for game, or if no game is had, it indicates 30 for "punduzia".

HITZAK

Basic Basque Vocabulary for Mus

mus--call for new cards

hasi/mintza--start the game

paso--I pass [no bet]

tira / altza--decline the bet

enbido--minimum bet of 2

berriz--I raise you the same

handia--high cards

ttipia/txikia--low cards

mediak--three of a kind

dobleak--two pairs

parea--pair

parea bai--yes I have a pair

parerik ez--no, I don't have pairs

gehiago--I raise you . . .

kanta / bota--I accept hordago

jokua--game

jokua bai--yes, I have the game

jokurik ez--no game

ponduzia--points

gure/edoki/eduki--I'll hold your bet

hordago--bet the entire game

bi--2

hiru--3

lau--4

bost--5

sei--6

zazpi--7

zortzi--8

bederatzi--9

hamar--10