

Congklak - A Traditional Game

Aim of the game:

To collect all of the counters or shells (biji) in your storehouse.

To win:

You win the game if you have the most shells in your storehouse (menang biji) - or - if you are the last person to run out of shells on your side of the board (menang jalan).

How to play:

First Round

- Two players sit opposite each other with a congklak board between them.
- Start with six counters in each hole. The two large holes at either end of the board are called storehouses, or 'ibu' as the Indonesians call it. The storehouses start off empty. A player's storehouse is on their left.
- Both players count 'satu-dua-tiga' and begin play at the same time. Play will continue until one player has finished his turn and must wait until his opponent has finished his turn, then play will continue by both players taking turns one at a time.
- Players choose any hole on their side of the board to start with and remove all the counters from the chosen starting hole, and starting from the next hole, place one counter in each hole in a clockwise direction. Include all of your own holes and your storehouse as well as all of your opponent's holes, but DO NOT put counters in your opponent's storehouse.
- If a player's last counter falls into their own storehouse, then they have another turn, again starting from any hole on their side of the board. If the starting counter falls in any other non-empty hole, gather up all the counters from the hole and continue as before.
- If a player's last counter falls into an empty hole on their side of the board, and the opposite hole has counters, the player must take all these counters as well as the ones on their side of the board. The counters are put into their storehouse, and their turn ends.
- If a player's last counter falls in an empty hole on their side of the board, and the opposite hole is empty, their turn ends (they are 'mati') and it is their opponents turn.
- If a player has no counters on their side of the board, so they have run out of shells first ('kalah jalan'), the round ends and their opponent has won the first round.

Second Round

- The winner of the first round is the player who is first to put all their counters in their storehouse, and they have no counters on their side of the board. When all the counters are in both players' storehouses, each player takes the counters from their own store, and places six into each of their own holes, starting with the hole closest to their store. Extra counters are left in the storehouses, and play continues as before.
- The player with fewer counters in their store will not be able to fill one or more of their holes. These holes remain out-of-play for this round (you can place something else in these holes so you remember they are out-of-play for example; a coloured counter or a stone). These holes should be closest to your opponent's storehouse or 'ibu' and these holes become protected from your opponent in this round. As your opponent goes around the board, they must skip these holes, not dropping a shell or counter in to them.
- The player who won the last round always goes first in the next round.

End of the Game

- Play continues with successive rounds until one player captures all of their opponent's shells or counters, or both players wish to stop playing, at which time you would count the shells to see who has the most, and is thus the winner.

While the game is simple enough, strategies develop with practice and skills that enable the player to maximise the chances of having at least one shell left in a position to carry on the journey and to create the opportunity to harvest their opponent's shells.

