

MEFUHVA

by Damian Walker

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information about mefuhva and other mancala games is available from the following books.

Botermans, J. et al. *The World of Games*, pp. 178-179. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1989.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other Than Chess*, p. 211. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Copyright © Damian Walker 2011 - <http://boardgames.cynningstan.org.uk/>

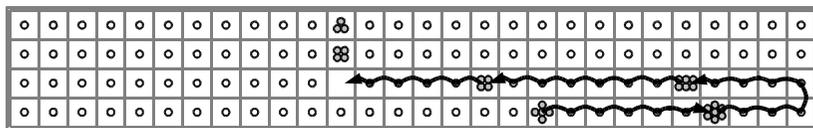
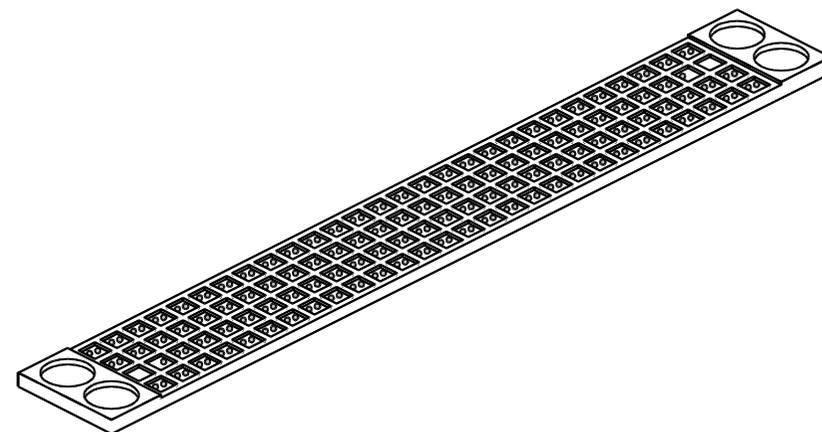


Illustration 3: a sample move. South lifts the five pieces from the back row and drops them into subsequent holes, the last landing in the hole with seven pieces. All eight are lifted and the next lap is sown. Seven resulting pieces are then sown, ending in the hole of four pieces. All five are lifted for the final lap, ending in the empty hole opposite the opponent's groups of four and three pieces. Those are captured, along with the contents of any of the opponent's other holes (see rule 13). The numbers of white pieces in the other non-empty holes are irrelevant to this example.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Some of the most impressive games played across Africa are the *mancala* games with four rows, or ranks, of playing spaces. Mancala is a family of games in which players lift all the pieces from a particular hole, and “sow” them around a particular path, dropping one piece in each hole along the route. Certain outcomes allow players to capture each other’s pieces.

Mefuhva is a four-rank mancala game from the northern Transvaal, and is one of the biggest games played. There are four rows of up to 28 holes, and the game starts with 218 pieces. There is a storage hole for each player’s captures. Due to the extreme length of the board, some boards have four storage holes for the convenience of the players, one for each player at each end.

HOW TO PLAY

Mefuhva is played by two players on a mancala board of four ranks of up to 28 holes. It can be played on shorter boards with an even number of holes, some sets having as little as six holes per row, but it is more usual to play on boards of at least sixteen holes per row.

Beginning the Game

1. The game starts with all but four of the holes having two pieces each; the front left hole of each player is empty, and the hole adjacent to it has only one piece, as shown in Illustration 1.

2. Players sit opposite each other at the longer sides of the board (top and bottom in the diagrams). Each player takes ownership of the two rows nearest to him.

3. Players decide at random who begins the game.

Moving the Pieces

4. On beginning his turn a player selects a hole at his side of the board containing two or more pieces, such a hole being said to be *loaded*.

5. He lifts all the pieces from this hole, and drops one in the next

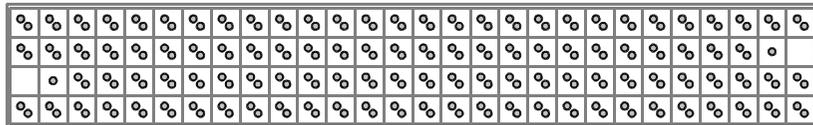


Illustration 1: *mefuhva* at the beginning of the game. All holes have two pieces, except two at each player’s left front row. The stores are not shown in this and other illustrations.

hole along the course shown in Illustration 2, one in the hole following, and so in until his hand is empty. This is known as a *lap*.

6. If there were pieces in the last hole, before the last piece was dropped in it, then the player has another lap starting at that hole. All pieces are lifted from it, and sown along the course as before. The player continues playing more and more laps until he finally sows his last piece into an empty hole.

7. If at the beginning of his turn there are no loaded holes, the player may lift a *singleton* from one of his rows instead, i.e. a piece which is the only one in its hole.

8. A singleton may only be played into an empty hole.

9. After playing the final lap of his turn, and removing any captures, control of the game passes to the player’s opponent.

Capturing Enemies

10. If the final lap ends at a

hole on the player’s front row, and if there are pieces in the adjacent square in the opponent’s front row, then a capture is made.

11. All the opponent’s pieces are lifted from that hole and placed in the player’s store.

12. If the opponent had further pieces in the hole behind (i.e. on his back row), then those pieces are also captured and placed in the player’s store. An example capture is shown in Illustration 3.

13. Furthermore, a player may select one other hole from the opponent’s side of the board and take the pieces from that hole also.

Ending the Game

14. The game ends when one of the players is without any pieces on his own side of the board. His opponent is declared the winner.

Variation

In one source, the extra capture in rule 13 is not allowed.

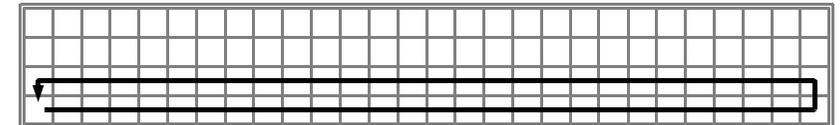


Illustration 2: this is the direction of movement for the south player. It is a circular track; pieces may move from the top left, down to the bottom row and right again.