

Dead Man's Hand

When Jack McCall shot and killed Wild Bill Hickok during a poker game on August 2, 1876, Wild Bill was holding a pair of aces and a pair of eights. Two aces and two eights have been called the “dead man’s hand” ever since. Here is a fun variation of the game.

Number of Players

Best played in small groups of 4 to 8 players. For larger groups, double the setup.

Setup

- You will need a deck of cards with the face cards (jacks, queens, and kings) removed. Then add all of the aces and eights from two more decks of cards to end up with a deck of 56 cards.
- Have pencil and paper available for players to keep score.



The object of the game is to get a hand that has two aces and two eights.

To Play

1. Deal each player five cards. Place the rest of the cards facedown in the center of the table to make a draw pile. Turn over the top card to start a discard pile.
2. The first player must draw a card from the top of the draw pile or take the top card from the discard pile. The player then discards one card from their hand faceup on the top of the discard pile.
3. Play continues until a player has two aces and two eights in their hand. That player shouts “Bang!” and the round is over.
4. If the draw pile is depleted before someone wins, shuffle the discard pile and keep drawing.

Scoring

- The player with the “dead man’s hand” gets 10 points. All other players get 1 point for each ace and 1 point for each eight they have in their hand.
- Play several rounds and keep a running tally. The player with the highest score at the end of the game is the overall winner.



Scoring Variations

- Supposedly, Wild Bill Hickok’s hand included two black aces and two black eights. Award 10 extra points if the winning player’s cards are all clubs or spades.
- No one really knows what Wild Bill Hickok’s fifth card was. Make one card in the deck a “wild card” and announce it at the beginning of the games. It can be any card you want, except for an ace or an eight. If the player draws a “wild card,” they can make it an ace or an eight.