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They Wrote the Rules

Here's how it happened that card games are played "according to Hoyle" and boxing is conducted by the "Queensberry rules."

by Jerry Klein

FAIL TO PLAY canasta according to Hoyle some night and you're liable to be requested to step outside and fight like the Marquis of Queensberry. But maybe you can soothe your partner by telling him all about those oft-quoted authorities on sport, Hoyle and Queensberry. They really did exist, you know.

John Sholto Douglas became the 8th Marquis of Queensberry at the age of 14, in 1858, when his father was killed while hunting rabbits. The first thing the young nobleman did was put in a five-year hitch in the Royal Navy, which may well be where he learned to use his fists so well.

At any rate, the young marquis soon became known as the "finest amateur boxer of his time." But boxing had fallen into disrepute as a brutal, bare-knuckled sport in which blood flowed freely.

Determined to make boxing "respectable," the Marquis of Queensberry helped found the Amateur Athletic Club to foster clean competition. And in the following year, 1867, he drew up the famous Queensberry rules of boxing, which were soon adopted in both Britain and the United States.

Boxing began to be al-

most a genteel sport. In affairs of honor, it substituted nicely for dueling, abolished some years earlier. Even Lord Byron, the gentle poet, took lessons in the manly art of self-defense.

The Marquis of Queensberry apparently was a heavyweight. Visiting California in the Wild West days, he entered a frontier café dressed in the style of English nobility from silk hat to shiny boots.

In came "a gigantic cowboy" who "cast a menacing look around him," cursed Queensberry and his polished boots, and spat on them. Calmly, the marquis lifted a handkerchief from the cowboy's breast pocket, bent down, wiped his boots, and carefully replaced the handkerchief.

The cowpuncher roared and rushed at Queensberry. The short scuffle ended with the Westerner on the floor and the nobleman "leaning nonchalantly on the bar, immaculate as on his first entrance."

Edmond Hoyle never ran such risks—and lived to be 97. For his first three score years and ten, Hoyle practiced law in London. Then he apparently became less interested in the law than in a card game called whist.

So absorbed was Hoyle in the intricacies of this game that in 1742 he published a

"Short Treatise on the Game of Whist" that proved so popular there were five editions in a year.

Soon Hoyle was offering to sell for a guinea the secret of his "artificial memory which does not take your attention off your game." This helped the reader "to play any hand well with moral certainty." Later he published "An Essay Towards Making the Doctrine of Chances Easy to Those Who Understand Vulgar Arithmetick Only"—in short, a book on betting and gambling odds.

Delighted at the demand for such instruction, Hoyle wrote rules for other games: chess, backgammon, piquet, quadrille, and brag.

Even after Hoyle's death in 1769, rules for playing various games continued to be printed under his name. A 1796 edition, for example, gave regulations for playing billiards and tennis "according to Hoyle." And during the 19th Century American publishers quoted Hoyle as the authority on many games he'd never even heard of.

From the time of Hoyle, whist continued to gain in popularity until the introduction of bridge. Bridge, of course, gave way to canasta—which leads us back to fighting according to the Queensberry rules.

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