

# Dominoes: a Cuban Game

**Materials:** A set of dominoes, up to double six

The game of dominoes (Dominó) is the national game of Cuba. You frequently see people playing games in parks and other public areas. In the parks, you can hear the click-clack noise of the tiles — called “fichas” in Spanish — and the sounds of heavy Cuban Spanish arguing and laughing. In all of Cuba, Double Nine (55-piece dominoes) is the most widely played version of dominoes.

Two teams of two players acting as partners play Cuban dominoes. There are three standard games: 100, 150, or the longest version, which is 200 points. The most popular game is played to 150 points. The two teams usually play three sets — whoever wins two games out of three wins the match.

To play:

1. Place "fichas" (tiles) face down on the domino table. One player mixes up the tiles. Each of the four players takes 6 dominoes. The extra pieces are set aside.
2. To begin, each player picks one ficha from the leftover pieces that were set aside. Whoever gets the ficha with the highest total number of dots gets to go first. Set these fichas out of play. Begin the game with the double six, if you have it. However, any ficha can be played first. It does not have to be a double.
3. As in most games of dominoes, each player tries to match the dots on one end of a ficha from his hand with the dots on an open end of any ficha on the board. There are always two open ends where a play can be made. If a player can't make a match from his hand, the player passes his turn (“Un Pase”) to the player on his left (clockwise). Each player may play only one tile per turn.
4. Playing a double has no special significance. Only one tile can be played in each turn! However, a double is traditionally laid perpendicular to the tile it matches — forming a “T” shape.
5. Play continues until one player runs out of dominoes. You might hear the winner call out “Domino!” (In Cuba you are much more likely to hear the losing team call out a Spanish expletive or two.) If none of the players can make any more plays, the game also ends. Each player counts the value of the remaining fichas in his hand and the person (and his teammate) with the lowest total wins.
6. Once the winning team is determined, the LOSING team counts the value of their remaining fichas. This total is awarded to the WINNING team's score. The first team to reach 150 points wins the game.

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