Bingo: History of the Game

## Bingo is a popular game that can be played for cash and prizes. Bingo games are won when the player matches numbers on their card with ones randomly drawn by a caller. The first person to complete a pattern yells, "Bingo." Their numbers are checked, and a prize or cash awarded. The patterns can be varied throughout a gaming session, which keeps players interested and engaged.

Bingo's Ancestors

The game's history can be traced back to 1530, to an Italian lottery called "Lo Giuoco del Lotto D'Italia," which is still played every Saturday in Italy.

From Italy, the game was introduced to France in the late 1770s, where it was called "Le Lotto", a game played among wealthy Frenchmen. The Germans also plyed a version of the game in the 1800s, but they used it as a child's game to help students learn math, spelling, and history. ​

In the U.S., bingo was originally called "beano". It was a country fair game where a dealer would select numbered discs from a cigar box and players would mark their cards with beans. They yelled "beano" if they won.

Edwin S. Lowe and the Bingo Card

When the game reached North America in 1929, it became known as "beano". It was first played at a carnival near Atlanta, Georgia. New York toy salesman Edwin S. Lowe renamed it "bingo" after he overheard someone accidentally yell "bingo" instead of "beano."

He hired a Columbia University math professor, Carl Leffler, to help him increase the number of combinations in bingo cards.

By 1930, Leffler had invented 6,000 different bingo cards. They were developd so there would be fewer non-repeating number groups and conflicts when more than one person got Bingo at the same time.

Lowe was a Jewish immigrant from Poland. Not only did his E.S. Lowe company produce bingo cards, he also developed and marketed the game Yahtzee, for which he bought the rights from a couple who played it on their yacht.

His company was sold to Milton Bradley in 1973 for $26 million. Lowe died in 1986.

Church Bingo

A Catholic priest from Pennsylvania approached Lowe about using bingo as a means of raising church funds. When bingo started being played in churches it became increasingly popular. By 1934, an estimated 10,000 bingo games were played weekly. While gambling is banned in many states, they may allow bingo games to be hosted by churches and non-profit groups to raise funds.

Casino Bingo

Bingo has been one of the games offered at many casinos, both in Nevada and those operated by Native American tribes. E.S. Lowe built a casino hotel on the Las Vegas Strip, the Tallyho Inn. Today, more than $90 million dollars are spent on bingo each week in North America alone.

Bingo in Retirement and Nursing Homes

Bingo is a popular game played for recreational therapy and socialization in skilled nursing facilities and retirement homes. It is easy to operate with just a couple of staff or volnteers, and residents can play along with their visitors. The opportunity to win a small prize is a lure. Its popularity may wane once the elderly population who enjoyed church bingo in their youth pass on to new generations raised on video games.

Variations

U-Pick'Em bingo

A common form of bingo which allows players to mark the numbers they wish to monitor for a win. While this game closely resembles Keno, a game invented by the Chinese which predates the Han Dynasty, it is recognized as a variant of bingo and is permitted in almost all jurisdictions.

Shotgun Bingo

Also known as Quickie Bingo, Turbo Bingo and similar names, these games are often played in between regular games with cards sold separately from the main game package. Players typically only play one or two cards and the numbers are called as quickly as the bingo balls come out.

Quick Shot bingo

A game where numbers are pre-drawn, and players purchase sealed bingo cards which are then matched against the pre-drawn numbers. If a specified pattern is achieved, then the player usually wins a prize according to a prize table. Some versions are played until a player achieves a top-level prize and then new numbers are drawn and the game begins anew. This type of bingo may be played over days, weeks or months depending on the difficulty of achieving a top-level prize.

Bonanza bingo

Typically, 43 to 48 numbers are pre-drawn at the beginning of a bingo session. The numbers pre-drawn can be odd, even or the first 43 numbers that pop out the machine. Players purhase cards and mark out all even, odd or pre-drawn numbers. At a designated time, the caller asks if anyone has bingo. If no one does, the caller then draws one ball at a time until someone shouts bingo. This game is sometimes played as a "progressive" game, where the jackpot increases if no one hits bingo before the desired number of balls are called. If no one has achieved bingo before or on the desired ball count, then the game is played again in another session in which the desired ball count increases by one and the jackpot is increased also. The player who hits bingo after the desired ball count does not win the jackpot but does win a consolation prize. If a player does hit bingo in the right number of numbers, then they win all the money in the jackpot. The ball count goes back to 43 after the jackpot is won and the ball count increases by one until the jackpot is won again.

Facebook bingo

Bingo on Facebook differs from traditional online or land-based bingo games. Most games feature 'power-ups' which give individual players an advantage on winning the game when using such power-ups. Players can also collect, buy and share virtual items with friends on the Facebook platfom. This adds to the community element which is otherwise not experienced in other forms of online and land-based bingo.

Horse racing bingo

Up to 15 players are randomly issued a number from 1 to 15 which corresponds with the top row of the bingo flashboard. Numbers are then drawn and the first person to have all five numbers in their column be drawn wins. This is a fast paced and exciting form of bingo typically played in fraternal organizations.

Table bingo

With the expansion of Tribal gaming across the US, there are numerous versions of bingo which now emulate the fast action of casino like table games but utilize the principals of bingo where players mark and monitor matrices cards with chips. Casino games like Roulette, Acey Duecy and Money Wheel have bingo counterparts that are permitted to be played under bingo licenses in many parts of the country.

Electronic bingo

The advent of computer technology in bingo has blurred the lines between traditional slot machines and bingo slot machines. To the average person, bingo-based slot machines are physically indistinguishable from an RNG based slot machine typically seen in Atlantic City or Las Vegas. These devices are comonly called Class II machines, because the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act separated bingo, including electronic and mechanical aids, where players play against each other, from Class III slot machines, where player play against the house.

Because of the passage of SB1180 in 2017, the State of Arizona now allows technological aids for bingo games that functions only as an electronic substitute for bingo cards. These technological aids are not defined by Arizona law or regulation, but one such electronic technological aid consists of a system which includes a network linking player interfaces to a number drawing device (ball-draw server) and an electronic substitute for a "live" cashier. The player interfaces themselves do not contain random number generators or allow a player to directly deposit cash. Rather, the Arizona technological aid system allows a player to deposit money into a unique individual player's account, pay for the games played out of that account, and at the end of play redeposit the value of any unused games that player may have purchased or won back into that account. The system does not allow the player to print a redemption ticket or receive anything of value directly from the player interface. In Arizona this system is only legally available for use by fraternal organizations, by service organization such as the VFW, American Legion or Amvets, or non-profits such as hospice or volunteer fire departments.