A Modification of the Game of "Threes are Free"

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ABSTRACT

Throughout human history, groups of degenerate gamblers have found innovative ways to gamble their few remaining coins on games of chance. One such group was a band, which played dice games in the back of a short school bus in the late 2000s, on the way to playing shows. Among these games was one known as Threes are Free, mainly a game of chance. This game can be improved by adding certain elements of skill, reminiscent of poker games that are enjoyed and recognized as competitive games.

1 Threes are Free

In 2005, a band called The Blend, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, bought a short school bus, repainted it, and took out the seats in order to use it as a tour vehicle. The drummer taught exactly two gambling dice games to the rest of band, to be played as a means of passing the time on the way to playing live shows. I was a member of that band. In the late 2000s, we played many rounds of the games "Threes are Free" and "Michigan", gambling our few remaining single dollar bills on games of chance with dice.

I do not quite remember the rules for Michigan, and there is no record online that I can find of any game under that name, or of any game that seems similar to that game. There was a minor change I introduced that improved the state of that game. However, I do mostly remember our version of Threes are Free, the rules of which are as follows.

The goal of the game is to obtain the lowest score, with rolls of 3 counting as a score of zero. To begin play, each player antes a dollar bill. The first player rolls five standard dice. The player can set aside any dice they want. The player rolls the remaining dice, sets aside any dice they wish, and rolls the remaining dice a third and final time. Their score is recorded, and the next player repeats the same process. The lowest-scoring player wins all the money in the pot. If there is a tie for the lowest score, all players put another dollar in the pot, and the game is repeated anew (in order to keep all players in all the games.) The player who goes first rotates between games.

There is a clear advantage for the player going last, as they know the score that they must beat and can plan accordingly. There can be some decision to be made on whether to set aside non-optimal dice rolls (with face values other than 3) in certain situations. But there is no meaningful player choice beyond that.

2 New Threes are Free

In this game, all participants are provided with five dice. They roll their dice at the same time, perhaps with the assistance of a dice-rolling cup so that they can dump out the dice simultaneously with ease. A round of betting then commences, with each player betting, calling (or checking) or folding. The players may then set aside as many dice as they wish, out of view of the other players. A second roll takes place with the remaining dice in play, with another round of betting, followed by a third roll that determines the winner. The scoring system is the same, with the lowest score winning the game.

3 Process and Limitations

Virtual Dice Roller

Sum: 17
Product: 300

Number of Dice: 5

Roll Dice

Figure 1: Unlike some others, I do not have real dice readily available, let alone carry bags of them around with me, so virtual means will have to suffice. Screenshot courtesy of https://www.calculator.net/dice-roller.html.

In order to make the game more skill-based, simultaneous rolling of the dice is required. Cards are often the medium of choice for casino games that involve skill, but dice can be used for this purpose as well.

My goal was to re-create the game as something that still could have been played on the bus, with limited space and before smartphones were widely used. There is some degree of memorization required, in order to remember what each person initially rolled, and what they may have set aside.

Limitations to the game, however, include the fact that many more dice are required in order to play the new version of the game. More money, or denominations of money, is also required in order for there to be multiple rounds of productive betting, and it is unclear whether an initial mandatory bet would be required in order to improve the game, as with big and small blinds in poker. More thought towards the structure of this game may be required, as well as testing with multiple players. Finally, the game requires some level of trust between the players, if in fact the dice that are to be kept are set aside out of the view of the other players. The problem of trust, however, arises frequently in gambling games when there is no referee for the game, or a house watching over the action.