

# What is Carom Billiards?

**Carom billiards**, sometimes called **carambole billiards**, is the overarching title of a family of cue sports generally played on cloth-covered, pocketless billiard tables. In its simplest form, the object of the game is to score points or "counts" by caroming one's own cue ball off both the opponent's cue ball and the object ball on a single shot.

There is a large array of carom billiards disciplines. Some of the more prevalent today and historically are (chronologically by apparent date of development): straight rail, cushion caroms, balkline, three-cushion billiards and artistic billiards.

## **Straight Rail:**

The object of straight rail is simple: one point, called a "count", is scored each time a player's cue ball makes contact with both object balls (the second cue ball and the third ball) on a single stroke. A win is achieved by reaching an agreed upon number of counts.

## **Balkline:**

The game employed diagonal lines at the table's corners to regions where counts were restricted. Ultimately, however, despite its divergence from straight rail, the champion's game simply expanded the dimensions of the balk space defined under the existing crotch prohibition which was not sufficient to stop nursing.

In the balkline games, the entire table is divided into rectangular balk spaces, by drawing pairs of balklines lengthwise and width wise across the table parallel from each rail. This divides the table into nine rectangular balkspaces. Such balk spaces define areas of the table surface in which a player may only score up to a threshold number of points while the object balls are within that region. Additionally, rectangles are drawn where each balkline meets a rail, called *anchor spaces*, which developed to stop a number of nursing techniques that exploited the fact that if the object balls straddled a balkline, no count limit was in place.

## **One-Cushion:**

One-cushion carom, or simply cushion carom, also arose in the late 1860s as another alternative to the repetitive play of straight rail, inspired by an early variant of English billiards. The object of the game is to score cushion caroms, meaning a carom off of both object balls with at least one rail cushion being struck before the hit on the second object ball.

## **Three-Cushion:**

In three-cushion carom, the object is to carom off both object balls with at least three rail cushions being contacted before the contact of the cue ball with the second object ball.

Three-cushion is a very difficult game. Averaging one point per inning is professional-level play, and averaging 1.5 to 2 is world-class play. An average of one means that for every turn at the table, a player makes 1 point and misses once, thus making a point on 50% of his or her shots.



## **Artistic Billiards:**

In artistic billiards players compete at performing 76 preset shots of varying difficulty. Each set shot has a maximum point value assigned for perfect execution, ranging from a 4-point minimum for lowest level difficulty shots, and climbing to an 11-point maximum for shots deemed highest in difficulty level. There is a total of 500 points available to a player.

Each shot in an artistic billiards match is played from a well-defined position (in some venues within an exacting two millimetre tolerance), and each shot must unfold in an established manner. Players are allowed three attempts at each shot. In general, the shots making up the game, even 4-point shots, require a high degree of skill, devoted practice and specialized knowledge to perform.

*Formula Sports distributes the [Aramith Billiards Premier 3 ball set](#) that is perfect for a game of Carom Billiards. They are available from your local cue sports retailers.*

*Check out the YouTube clips on further information on how to play each game.*