

# FOOTSTEPS

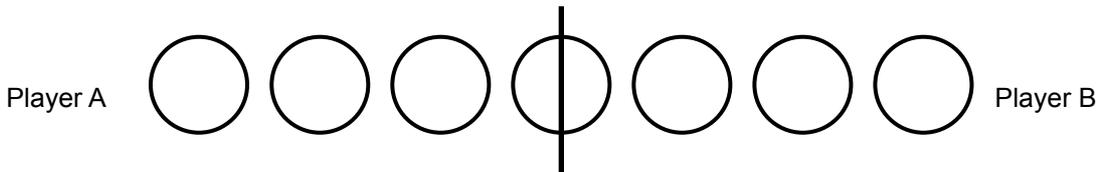
- A psychological game .
- Pencil and paper
- Five minutes
- A little game of surprising subtlety

## Background

This simple-to-play psychological game combines mind-reading with bluff, mental arithmetic and just a little luck. A proprietary version is marketed as Quo Vadis (Invicta).

## Play

The 'board' consists of seven circles or marks in a straight line, spaced so that each circle is large enough to accommodate a small token. A line is drawn through the central circle. The three circles on each side of it belong to the respective players (see Figure 39).



Each player starts with 50 points. On each turn, both players write down the number of points that they wish to spend. The minimum allowed is 1. Numbers are then compared and the player with the larger number advances the token, which is placed at the start of each game in the central circle, one space into his opponent's territory. If the numbers are equal, the token is not moved. Both players now deduct the points they have used from their allocation of 50 to give their remaining total of points, and the next turn starts. The object of the game is to get the token on to your opponent's end circle; or, put another way, to win three more turns than your opponent. If one player uses up all his points, the other can have successive plays. If both use up their allocations, the game can either be agreed drawn or a half-victory awarded to the player in whose territory the token does not lie. And that is all there is to the game - but don't underestimate it.

## Strategy

The subtleties of Footsteps will not become apparent until you have played a few games. The ideal to be aimed at, of course, is to win each turn by a single point. To allow your opponent a big lead on points is to face certain loss. In the early stages a margin of 5 or 6 points is acceptable, but later this could be severe. An extreme case is where you have got the token to within one space of victory but have used up all your points. Your opponent, however, has 5 points left. Clearly he has only to play 1 point each turn to win.

Be frugal with your points until danger threatens. Consider the situation where the token is on the centre and you have each used 30 points. You decide to allocate 9 to your next turn (you wouldn't do this if you'd played the game twice!) and you find that your opponent has only allocated the minimum permissible of 1. Now you are two spaces from victory but your opponent has 19 points left to your 11. If you now play 6, for example, your opponent may again play 1, and although this puts you within a space of home, you have only 5 points left to your opponent's 18 - an unacceptable margin. Your opponent next plays 5 (in case you gambled all your remaining points) and thereafter will force a win by a series of Jow plays: remember that you are obliged to use at least 1 point on each turn. It will now be dear where the mind-reading comes in. Some people seem to have second sight at this game, particularly when playing with close friends or relatives.

Psychic players could claim that it is an advantage to let the opponent write his number down first. The way round this is to keep the action concealed with, say, a one-minute time limit per move.

Good advice for Poker is good advice for Footsteps: never play routinely. If you always play low your opponent can advance quickly by pitching a few points higher each time. If he reaches the penultimate space you are obliged to equal his point count, so it is better to stop him one space further back. But he may read your thinking on this and - well, as I said, the subtleties of the game will soon become apparent.

## Variants

The seven-space board and the fifty-point allocation give a quick and balanced game, but you may prefer other parameters.

Incidentally, a couple of pocket calculators are a useful aid for Footsteps. Start with 50 on the display and at each turn compare negative inputs.