

SCRABBLE/Sam Orbaum

Like the proverbial little acorns from which tall oaks grow, the two- and three-letter word is the root of the mighty seven-letter word — most of them, anyway, Scrabble's 'little acorns' nourish the development of a bingo in several ways.

The most potent bingo letters are the common low-value tiles such as D, G, L, N, R, S, T, plus the five vowels and, of course, the blanks. With the right combination of these bingo-builders, certain higher-value letters — C, F, H, M, P — become bingo-prone, as well. Usually, however, the three- and four-point tiles are used as fodder for the bingo, in the form of good-scoring, strategically smart two- and three-letter words.

If, for example, you cannot find a bingo in the rack AAEHNST, don't get frustrated searching. Instead, drop the HA for 25 to 30 points (the H on a triple-letter score, going two ways), to achieve the following:

1. Rack management. You are left with AENST, a fine rack-leave to draw on, and a good bet for a game-breaking bingo in the next turn or two.
2. You've created a prime spot for the budding bingo, should your draw from the bag that bear fruit. Let us say you placed your HA upon the last two letters of the word BEAVER, creating HE, AR and HA. The bingo, if you get it, would likely end in an E, S or T. Your innocuous yet presumptuously planned 'little' play sets up such hooks as THE, SHE, HAE, HAS, HAT and others. Furthermore, the HA play opens two spots, one parallel to HA (using the H with the E below it to set up SHE and THE), and the other perpendicular (HAE, HAS, HAT).
3. You have also added 28 points (in this example) to your score. This factor indirectly assists your bingo formation; whereas it does not help get your bingo from rack to board *per se*, it is an aggressive set-up that does not telegraph to your opponent that you are creating a bingo spot which he would surely block. Strictly for its points value, this play stands on its own merits.

At this juncture, should you draw unwieldy tiles to go with your well-balanced rack leave, you could abandon the bingo search and switch to another approach: maximizing the potential scoring value of, say, a Y or a W or, especially, a J, X or Z. Or you could continue thinking bingo while collecting another 30 points or so with a similar play to dump the unwanted but potent consonant.

Once you have the bingo, finding a place for it often depends on knowing how to extend a two-letter word to three letters, or a three- to four-, or even a four- to

five-. It is folly to devote time to studying bingo construction unless you are intimately familiar with the twos, threes and fours.

At times though, when the Scrabble muse is with you, the bingos pop up like mushrooms and hook very neatly onto the ends of other bingos, and the short word becomes like a bump on a log.