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SCRABBLE/Sam Orbaum

SEVEN-LETTER SEARCH

The seven-letter word — the bingo — can be confounding to the raw novice, who feels more adept at working with, say, three or four letters at a time to make a word, any word. *Et voila*: DOG or CAT.

In fact, this is one of the basic formulas for unearthing the treasured bingos from a seemingly cluttered rack: break it into workable components.

Any good player who spots an ING or EST in front of him will seek in the other four letters a word-root that will go with the common suffix (or prefix). It is that much easier to find the bingo in a rack such as **DEGINOR** by scuttling the **ING** to one side and working with the **DEOR** — and finding **REDO+ING**. If you cannot find a word in there, or if the board will not accommodate these letters in that order, transpose them. Look for other prefixes, suffixes or viable combinations. **REDOING**, for example, anagrams into **ERODING**, as well as **IGNORED**, **GROINED** and **NEGROID**.

Take control of an unwieldy rack by first rooting out the more common combinations. Some excellent prefixes: **DE-**, **RE-**, **UN-**, **OUT-**, **IN-**, **OVER-**, **BE-**, **DIS-**, **UP-**, **MIS-**, **EX-** and **PRE-**. And the suffixes: **-ED**, **-ER**, **-IES**, **-ING**, **-EST**, **-LY**, **-ION**, **-IC**, **IAL**, **-IVE**, **-ICAL**, **-ATE** and **-OUS**.

You will also begin seeing eight-letter bingos, which is more difficult because you must imagine that an open letter on the board is there in your rack, leapfrogging with the seven in front of you as you shuffle them around. With the rack **CEGINOR**, you scan the board and notice, among other letters, a **W** and **V** open. You have already reduced your own seven letters to a manageable four by setting aside the **ING**, but have found no verb root with **CEOR**, so you now visually project an additional open letter from the board onto your rack. Within seconds, you've played **COVERING** or **COWERING**, scored a hatful of points, and 20,000 fans are on their feet, cheering, chanting your name. It's a nice feeling.

Back to our beleaguered Raw Novice. With the rack **AACLPTY**, he has found **CAT**, and also notices that the remaining letters spell **PLAY**. Smiling at his good fortune of a choice of two paltry plays, he is completely unaware of the bingo balefully glaring right back at him.

In such a rack that offers no words with a prefix or suffix (despite the presence of **LY**), try for a compound word: one formed of two smaller words. **PLAYACT**. Nice play, Novice.

At a recent Scrabble tournament in Tiberias, Rena Schwartz thundered to a tournament-high 497 game by playing three bingos: **REFILES**, a basic find that contains a common prefix and suffix, plus two beauties — **SUNLIKE** and **HEARSAY**, and the Jerusalem Scrabble Club's Blanche Gulko cinched a game with a couple of lovely compound bingos, **AIRBASES** and **ANTEATER**.

Sometimes a rack of letters appears to be brimming with possibilities, and may include possible bonus plays of either variety. Occasionally, too, you might use a few letters to tack onto the beginning or end of a word already played, perhaps thus extending the word to a triple word score. This manner of thinking resulted in a now-legendary rarity between top-ranked Chester Collins and Lesley MacTaggart.

Reports Collins: "I played an ordinary bingo on the fourth row across, so that it ended just before the last column. Lesley promptly pluralized it and ran the word **SEQUENT** across the triple word, scoring 118. I just happened to have the tiles to extend it to **CONSEQUENTIAL** on my next turn, picking up a cool 75 points with nothing more than a prefix and a suffix. Lesley gasped, and then very quietly, she threw in the **LY** at the tail-end for another 87, and pandemonium broke loose, **CONSEQUENTIALLY** running across the complete board!"