

THE 2024 NMJL CARD – by Barney Gallassio

Apologies in advance for any errors that appear within; hopefully there are not too many!



Have you recently heard comments like this:

- Boy, do I miss that hand from last year.
- Where is that hand again?
- Shoot – I'm playing this hand all wrong.
- Oh wait, I need a pair here. Forget about it.
- I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing here!

No wonder. The new card has arrived for many folks (others will soon receive theirs too). It's always one of the most exciting times on the Mah Jongg calendar – the thrill of playing with the new card. I am thrilled to share with you some of my first impressions of the 2024 card.

To start, let us thank The League again for creating the card that brings us so much joy throughout the year. I am certain most people would agree that last year's card was an exciting and challenging one and I know personally I will miss it and some of the hands that I truly loved in 2023. But it was time for something new – just like it is every year when we get close to April. So, I welcome the new card, the new excitement, and a fun year ahead playing the 2024 NMJL Card with my friends and family.

Let's start with a 10,000-foot view of the card. I have played about 150 games (in person and on-line) since receiving the card last week, so this is more about impressions than hard core facts.

- Was hoping for better Quint hands this year. Check!
- Wanted to see a hand that used all the dragons. Check!
- Lots of pattern variety. I will go into this more later. And yes, I obviously do love the handle-bar moustache pattern. (smile)
- The card feels easier than the last few cards; the time it has taken to get familiar with this card seems shorter than in the past.
- Most winning hands (for me and my opponents) have been made in the 13579 section of the card. Not sure why this is happening, but this is what I have seen so far.
- Math people are happy. Addition and multiplication hands appear in 3 sections of the card.
- Lots of flower hands again and even 2 hands calling for 5 flowers.

2024 is the Year of the Dragon – especially wonderful for Mah Jongg players. The sign of the Dragon is a symbol of strength and power. It is associated with good fortune, wisdom, success and protection. I hope this year brings you a huge dose success and fortune around your Mah Jongg table!

- The card is Red again – as is always the case with even years. Put your Blue cards away! I once heard of a player who declared Mah Jongg using her old card! Don't do that. (wink)
- There are 10 sections of the card this year – same as last.
- There are 73 different hands that appear on the card this year – up 3 from last year. (NOTE: if there are 2 different hands printed on the same row of the card, I count them as 2 hands.) There are no big swings in the number of hands in any one section of the card. Small changes here and there with a net result of 3 more hands on the card.
- As is always the case, the common patterns of Pung Pung Kong Kong (more easily written as 3344 – 3 tiles, 3 tiles, 4 tiles, 4 tiles) and Pung Kong Pung Kong (written as 3434) alternate with years. This is a year of 3344 which is good to keep in mind as it helps you remember the proper patterns for some (9) of the hands on the card. You will also find familiar patterns like 2444 (ex. pair of flowers and 3 Kongs) and 4343 (ex. 4 flowers, 3 dragons, 4 dragons, 3 dragons). But my favorite pattern, which I do not ever recall seeing is 32423 – which I call the handle-bar moustache pattern. 4 hands on the card use this pattern and I think it's great fun!
- I would have bet BIG MONEY that the NNN SSS **11 22 3333** (or EEE WWW **11 22 3333**) hand would be removed from the card. It was played over and over again last year. And even worse, in tournament play throwing in to the NNN SSS exposure will cost you 10 points. Well, the hand is back (NNN SSS **1111 2222**) and it's even easier this year because the 2 pairs are gone and the 2 Kongs can be made with Jokers of course. This will be painful.
- So which hands have piqued my interest on this card? Easy choice for me. **FFFFF 123 444 444**. Unusual. Fun. Well camouflaged if you have up just the 2 Pungs. Much less interesting, but right up my alley are the multiplication hands. Math nerd for sure.
- The League has again positioned all of the concealed hands as the last row(s) within each section. It was not always that way in the past. Many people prefer them listed last. All of the concealed hands this year (not including the Singles & Pairs hands) are valued at 30 or 35 cents, so be careful with your payouts.
- Speaking of hand values – every year people ask questions around the hand values. Generally speaking, a hand with 3 pairs will take 30 cents (or 25 cents if one of those 3 pairs are flowers) and hands with 4 pairs will take 35 cents. But this is not a rule. The League assigns these values based on frequency of wins as they practice with the new hands each year.

For the dragon fans, this card should make you happy. 16 hands use dragons. They appear in every section of the card except two – the 2024 section (those soaps are not considered dragons since they are being used as zeroes) and the Addition Hands (Lucky Sevens). And the **FFFF DDD DDDD DDD** (any 3 dragons) I am certain will be a crowd pleaser.

- Spending just a moment in the Quints-section of the card. Many people I played with last year, did not like the Quint section of the card. Lots of different reasons. I think this year's hand has much better hands in this section of the card. There is still 1 Quint hand that can be made with only 1 Joker. It is the last hand in this section of the Card. NOTE: The five Flowers can be made without a Joker. Winds, Dragons and Flowers all appear in at least one the hands. But the most unique hand, by far, is the second one down **11111 NNNN 88888** (any 2 suits, and 2 non-matching numbers, any Wind). Don't ever recall seeing a hand like this before. We will really be studying those discards when an opponent has up **11111 NNNN**, since any number other than 1 could be called for Mah Jongg!

- Many people refer to the last hand within the Singles and Pairs section of the card as the Big Hand – probably because it's the highest value and most difficult of any hand on the card. Very interesting pattern on this year's card. Most people would guess the pattern of this hand to be **FF 2024 2024 2024** as it so often is. The League created an interesting pattern this year with **2024 NN EW SS 2024**. I think this will be made more frequently this year. And if you attempt this hand and go dead, you can easily switch the concealed 2024 hand.

- Every year the League receives questions from players who are not sure about the hands/notes that appear on the card. There is only so much "real estate" on the card so not every comment/note can be printed. Don't over-think this. If you see things printed in 2 different colors – that will mean 2 suits – UNLESS the comment indicates otherwise. A reference to "Opposite Dragon" means either dragon that does not match the suit of the other tiles. So, for example, the opposite dragon for the hand starting with **FFFF 33 66 999 DDD** can be either the Red Dragon or White Dragon (Soap), since both of them do not match the Bams which precede them.

- I am always curious to see how many of these hands are repeat hands. 12 hands (17% of all of last year's hands) came back this year and 32 hands (44%) have appeared on at least 1 card from the past 9 years. So hopefully this means there will be some familiarity with these hands for those of you who have been playing for a few years.

- Every year I enjoy calculating the "average price" of a hand on the card. It's 29.24 cents this year – down about 0.5% from last year's value of 29.36 cents. The year before it was 29.70 cents. At least there's one thing in this world where prices are declining!

- Always good to know if there is single exposure that would make a hand dead. There are 3 this year. If someone exposes a Pung (3) of flowers, or a Quint (5) of Winds, or a Quint (5) of Dragons, her/his hand is dead.

- Are there any hands where a single exposure tells you automatically the hand a person is playing? I believe the answer is no. A few years back, 999 was only used in a single exposed hand. So when a player put up a single exposure of 3 9's, we knew exactly what hand they were playing.

- Another big year for flowers. 31 hands (42%) call for 2 or more flowers. 8 of the sections on the card each contain a single hand with 4 flowers – so not much a clue when someone’s first exposure is 4 flowers. A 5 flower exposure immediately narrows it down to 2 hands on the card – the last Quint hand and the 6th hand down in the Consecutive Run section.
- Two years ago, was the first time in 7 years that FF 3333 6666 9999 (done in 1 suit or 3 suits) was not on the card. Same was true for the card last year. Well, the hand is back this year and makes this hand the most frequently appearing hand for the past 9 years!
- But 3 of them are out!! How many times have you thrown “the safest tile in the world” – 3 are out and you have the 4th, but someone still calls Mah Jongg when you discard that 4th one? GRRRR This, of course, is a big problem with any NEWS hands. For example, even with 3 Norths on the table, the 4th North might still give someone a NEWS Mah Jongg. This year, there is no hand with a single flower, or a single red dragon or a single green dragon – making these tiles quite safe when you can account for 7 flowers or 3 of either dragon. Of course, someone may still call Mah Jongg if they are loaded up with Jokers.
- There are many changes on the back of the card. There are some missing words (second line down, left-hand panel), some sections that have been removed all together (ex. the “Scoring” section) and a number of areas where the words have been reorganized among various sections. However, even with all of these changes, I do not see anything that I would call an essential change to the game. There are no new rules or changes to an existing rule documented on the back of the card.

People asked me how I get familiar with the new card. Here are my suggestions:

- I write this article (smile) – preparing to do so really helps!
- I play Siamese Mah Jongg – so we both struggle together.
- I play on-line with robots.
- I write down on paper every hand from the new card – the act of writing helps me. I use grid-lined paper (like graph paper) and 4 different color inks to help differentiate the hands. See link below for a printable version of the grid if you want to practice this technique.
- I build every hand on the card on a rack with tiles – I am a visual person.
- I play the 14 tile game that I have described before. Grab 14 tiles that are a winning Mah Jongg hand. Turn them face down and mix them up. Replace 7 of them with 7 random tiles selected from the rest of the tiles. Now turn up all 14 and see if you can spot the original Mah Jongg among those 14 tiles.
- Start creating a list that shows when 2 exposures can only be one hand. This will take time (there are more than 1,000 exposure pairs), but it is so helpful in truly understanding the card. You’ll know exactly what your opponent is doing when she puts up 111 999. (smile)
- Start a second list that shows what your back-up plan is when you A Plan hand goes dead. Nice to have a Plan B for most of your hands. Most hands have a good Plan B.
- (Nerd alert!) I have a photo of each panel of the card on my phone. Whenever I need to kill some time, I look at the 3 photos.
- I know there are many people out there who have their own websites that focus on playing and strategy. Google that and you will find on-line options to learn the new card.
- Printable version of the grid:
https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0260/1163/1676/files/2024CardTrackerandLearnCard_2.pdf?v=1712195628

Until next year,
Barney

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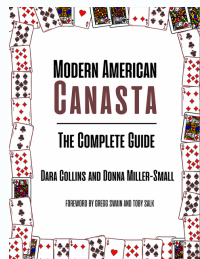
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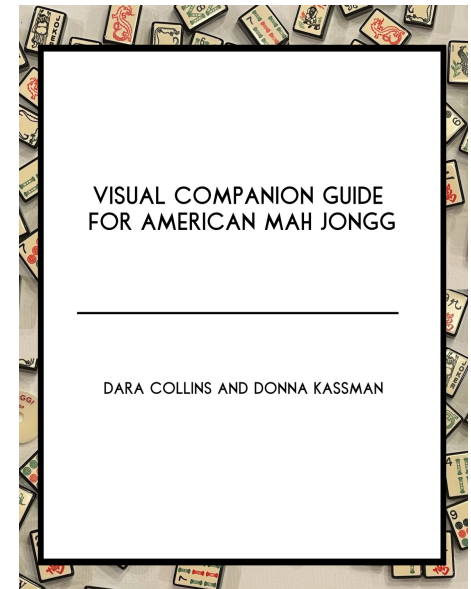
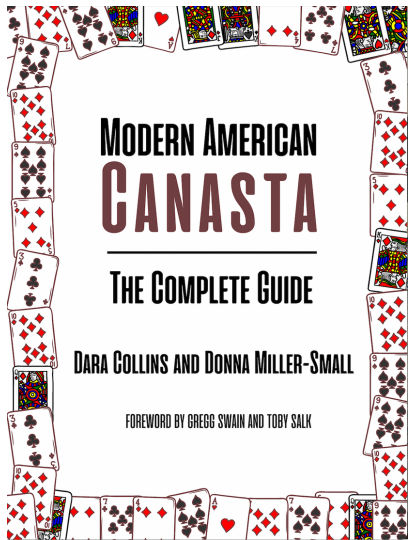
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