

Mediocrity*

A Game of Medians

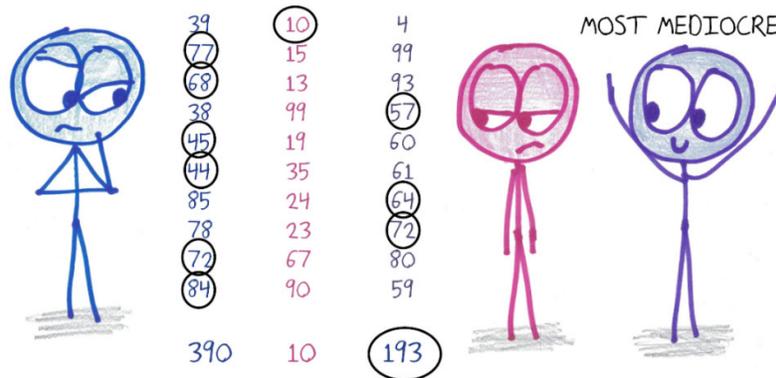
This three-player game was first played by two siblings and a friend on restaurant napkins.

Each player secretly selects a whole number between 0 and 100.[†] Then the choices are revealed, and **whoever chose the middlemost number wins that number of points**. If two people choose the same number, then each gets half of the points.



But wait—won't everyone just pick "50" each time?

No, they won't, because there's another twist. You play a fixed number of rounds—let's say ten—at the end of which **the winner is not to the one with the most points, but the middlemost number of points**. As co-inventor Douglas Hofstadter put it, that's the only way for "the spirit of the *whole*... to be consistent with the spirit of its *parts*."



The game works with any odd number of players. With an even number, simply insert an "invisible" player who picks 50 every time.

* Another name for the game is Hruska, after U.S. Senator Roman Hruska, a noted proponent of mediocrity. He once defended an embattled Supreme Court nominee by saying, "Even if he were mediocre, there are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they?"

[†] If this feels too wide open, try 0 to 20.