

A SUNDAY-AFTERNOON DOMINO GAME

Domino Zilch



A push-your-luck game for a double-six set, adapted from the dice game Zilch.

2+ players | Lunchtime | learn ●●○

A loud, hands-on race of greed and nerve: flip tiles, score the numbers, and push your luck for more — or lose the lot. Bring as many players as you have the patience to sit and watch.

The idea. A domino shows two numbers, so **three dominoes show six — your “six dice.”** Flip dominoes from the pool, score the numbers, and keep pushing for more; but flip a fresh three that scores *nothing* and you **zilch**, losing everything you'd piled up that turn. (Because you throw the unused tiles back and redraw, expect plenty of cheerful shuffling — it's a noisy, hands-on game, and that's half the fun.)

Set-up. Two or more players, a double-six set, and pencil and paper. Remove the seven blank tiles and play with the **21 numbered tiles**, so every end shows a number from 1 to 6 — your dice. Shuffle them face down in the middle: this is the **pool**.

Scoring

Read the six exposed ends of a flip as six dice. Each end counts in only one combination.

Combination (among the six ends)	Score
Single 1	10
Single 5	5
Three of a kind	the number × 10 (three 1s = 100)
Four of a kind	double the three-of-a-kind (four 1s = 200)
Run — the ends are 1-2-3-4-5-6, one of each	300
Three pairs — three numbers, each shown twice	100
a 2, 3, 4 or 6 on its own	nothing
no combination at all	Zilch

You can't roll five or six of a kind with tiles — there's only one of each double — so the **run is the top prize**.

Your turn

1. **Flip three tiles** (six ends) — your **cast**.
2. **Score**. Find the combinations and **set aside at least one**: move those tiles to your scored pile and add the points to your **turn total**. An unused end on a set-aside tile simply scores nothing. **If the cast shows no combination at all, you've zilched** — your turn ends and this turn's points vanish.
3. **Bank or push**. *Bank* — add your turn total to your game score and pass play left. *Push* — re-roll the tiles you did **not** set aside (return them to the pool and flip that many fresh), then score the new, smaller cast. Fewer tiles means a higher chance of zilching: that's the gamble. Reshuffle the pool whenever it runs low; your recorded points stand.

4. **Clean sweep.** Set aside **all** the tiles in a cast and you've swept it — flip a fresh three and keep going, your turn total intact. Sweep after sweep if you dare.

Breaking the ice. Your **first** banked total of the game must be at least **50**; a smaller bank doesn't get you on the board, so you must push on — or zilch trying.

Winning. When a player banks a total that carries them **past 1,000**, every other player gets **one last turn**; the highest score then wins. Circle the first-past-1,000 score boldly — it's the mark everyone else is chasing.

Who goes first. Before the first game, each player takes a practice run: flip and keep pushing, never banking, until you zilch. The highest total reached before zilching goes first; in later games the previous winner starts. Treat the **1,000** target as a starting line — raise or lower it to suit how long you want a game to run.

Variant — Wild Blanks. Leave all 28 tiles in the pool and treat a **blank end as wild**: it stands for any number needed to complete a combination. Blanks make big combinations — and reckless pushes — far more tempting.

A BIT OF HISTORY

 *Zilch is a dice game of luck and greed and unknown origin — “possibly a navy or bar game” — written up by D. E. Smith at Duke University. This domino version keeps its greedy heart: the three-tile cast stands in for six dice, and since tiles can never show more than four of a kind, the humble 1-through-6 run takes six-of-a-kind's place as the jackpot.*

In the spirit of 75 Ways to Fill a Sunday Afternoon with Dominoes