$C_3O_1F_4F_4S_1$ $S_1C_3R_1A_1B_3B_3L_1E_1$ $C_3L_1U_1B_3$

NEWSLETTER # 4

Jonathan Swift (author Gulliver's Travels etc.) invented the name 'Vanessa' (BINGO!). Frequently used as a girl's name, it is also used as a valid Scrabble word meaning a type of butterfly. Using two power tiles (two 'esses') for a word, would need careful consideration.

SCRABBLE JARGON:

Just like any other sport or industry Scrabble has its own terminology. I wont endeavour to list all the words the Scrabble community use, as you probably know most of them anyway. I will only concentrate on the more important ones and the ones I will use from time to time.

BINGO - Besides being a game, this word is used in North America (NA) for using all seven tiles and scoring an additional 50 points. Outside of NA the word 'Bonus' is used. However, considering the time spent studying and building these seven letter words, I am of a mindset to use 'Bingo' as a preferred option, as it has a certain dynamic to it. Besides that, using any of the other additional scoring squares is a bonus, whereas using all your letters for a Bingo is a different concept to placing your tiles on bonus scoring squares. If I had to choose, I'd put a Bingo down before winning a game, My name for this syndrome -Bingo Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

ANAGRAM - Rearranging the letters of a word to form a new word. eg. dog to god. Now there are three concepts here that champions employ that I wish to explain.
- *Concept **One*** - Anagramming – where a person trains to recognise & rearrange a word into a new word. They learn this with flashcards & using the most likely words that could occur.

ALPHAGRAM - This word was first used in 1924 for a puzzle that consisted in defining of one phrase with another phrase made up of rhyming words that are spelled alike except for the first letters. However, in Scrabble jargon it means when the letters of a word are arranged in alphabetical order. Thus 'Oregano' to AEGNOOR. You'll find a lot of Scrabble books refer to Alphagrams.
- *Concept **Two*** – Alphagrammimg – rehearsing the alphagrams until they become almost as visually familiar as ordinary words. The most popular tool for memorising alphagrams is flashcards by way of a computer program. There are many alphagrams that do look similar, but you'll be surprised how the brain sorts them out after you've been living and breathing this type of anagramming method for six months or so.

STEMS – A stem is a group of letters that combine easily with other letters of the alphabet.
- *Concept **Three*** – Stem Study - The ones most often studied by experts are the 5 & 6 & 7 letter stems. There's usually 100 of the most useful to study. With the Collins Dictionary the top ranked one is 'RETAIN' with the Merriam- Webster its 'TISANE'. In addition, the plus eights are usually studied along with the normal stems. For instance, with the 'RETAIN' stem there is 70 words to memorise plus 42 extra plus eights where a combining letter does not exist to form a seven letter word but does to form an eight letter word.

OPEN BOARD – A game is said to be 'open' when there are many places to play either Bingos or other high-scoring words.

CLOSED BOARD – The opposite of an open board. When there are few places to play either Bingos or other high- scoring words. Depending on your opponents knowledge and ability certain letters that help to achieve this are; 'c', 'u' & 'v' are top of the list.

BLOCKING – Playing a word on the board that stops the opponent from making a potentially large score. It also refers to playing words that make it harder for either player to score many points.

DUPLICATION – When a rack has more than one given letter. Better players strive to avoid duplication because, in general, there are fewer choices for good plays when duplication exists.

POWER TILES – There are ten power tiles. They are the two blanks, the four 'Ss' and the J,Q,X and Z. These are your most powerful tools in your weaponry. Do not be frivolous with your blanks and esses. Of course, if a six letter word pops onto your rack adding an 's' for a Bingo is easy. There is a school of thought that says you should not use these unless you can score 25 points or more in a turn. When you think of the combining power of these tiles you can see the reasoning for it. The other power tiles the J, Q, X and Z are very useful when they can be put on a triple or double letter square, triple or double word squares. They are especially useful when you can hook onto a word and get the value both ways. However, they should be off your rack as soon as possible, as they tend to clog up your rack. The 'x' is the only power tile that combines with all vowels in two letter form.

RACK BALANCE – This involves a play that allows you to save the letters on your rack that will most likely help you score well next turn. This often translates into leaving an equal number of vowels and consonants. In written English the letter 'e' occurs every eighth letter. However, the letter 'h' appears more in everyday speech & writing than it does in a list of dictionary words. The letter 's' starts the most words in the English dictionary. The word 'run' the most meanings.

TURNOVER – Players are going for 'turnover' when they play as many tiles as possible in order to draw as many new tiles as possible. By playing for 'turnover' (typically 5 or 6 tiles in one play), a player maximises his/her chances for drawing the better tiles. As there are 100 tiles, if you have played 60 tiles in a game, you had 60% chance of drawing good tiles. That's a 50% better chance than your opponent who has only drawn 40 tiles.

HOT SPOTS – These are either specific squares or areas on the board that have excellent bonus-scoring opportunities. Players will do well to identify these areas before looking for words on their rack. Example: Triple Letter Squares or Double Word Squares adjacent to vowels; a single letter placed between two Triple Word Squares; words that take a variety of hooks.

SPREAD – The difference between the winning and losing score of a game and is usually employed in tournaments. Examples: If the score of a game is 350-280, then the spread is +70pt for the winner and -70pt for the loser.

*BOXER – A player who uses the technique of placing words next to or parallel to each other on a continual basis. Some games occur where the tiles are boxed diagonally from one corner to the other. This not only makes it difficult to continue the game, as the players are 'boxed in', but should be avoided as it is considered a naive or beginners way to play. Having said that, even top players occasionally get trapped into this scenario, but avoid this at all cost.

*POWER PLAYER – A player who consistently achieves 25 or more points per turn. This technique is probably a better way to class an expert and not by the outcome of the final score. If a player were to score 30 pts or more per turn then, he/she would be considered an expert.

*BINGO PLAYER – A player who strives to build and consistently make Bingo plays. Guilty as charged your honour! There is a 12.63% chance or 1 in 8 chance of having a Bingo on your rack. Unfortunately, the average player fails to spot it or even look for it. Yes, it maybe because the player doesn't know the word/s but more often it's because the player is looking for a smaller word and not considered the Bingo aspect, many Bingo words occur that the player would know, "seek and ye shall find".

"I think Alfred Butts had an exaggeratted idea of how many Bingo words have five 'i's."
At least one good thing came out of the the Great Depression – Scrabble.
Keith Bancroft - Convener