Protected Starters on the Final Lap

1,200 paired bot hands · 400 per Joker option · Current engine v248

Rule tested

When the first player goes out, every unfinished protected starter already on the table becomes available to all remaining players for the final lap. It stays in its original place and keeps its original team's penalty unless completed. Existing exposed starters remain neutral. New starters made during the final lap retain normal protection.

Results

Metric	Current rule	Available final lap	Change
Snatches during final lap	0.57	0.90	+0.33
Final-lap completions including snatches	1.22	1.55	+0.33
Absolute hand score margin	65.55	64.82	-0.73
Hands with margin at least 100	24.4%	23.2%	-1.2 pp
Hands with margin at least 200	1.2%	1.2%	-0.1 pp
Secured points across both teams	237.04	244.44	+7.40
Protected-starter penalties across both teams	20.48	25.09	+4.61
First go-out team wins the hand	71.2%	68.7%	-2.6 pp
Cards left in all hands	4.08	3.65	-0.42
Turns per hand	15.05	15.05	+0.00
Longest secured run per hand	4.50	4.49	-0.01

Read these as modeled effects

The rule changed the winning team or tie status in 7.4% of paired hands. 1154 of 1,200 hands had at least one protected starter when someone went out; the average was 2.33. Unclaimed available starters kept their penalties even if their normal exposure time passed, which explains the penalty increase. The hand-margin interval includes zero. These bot outcomes do not predict human play.

What the comparison can tell us

Paired changes and uncertainty

Metric	Average change	Approximate 95% interval
Final-lap snatches	+0.33	+0.30 to +0.37
Absolute hand margin	-0.73	-2.05 to +0.58
Protected-starter penalty points	+4.61	+3.82 to +5.40
Secured points	+7.40	+6.67 to +8.13

Across the Joker options

Joker option	Extra final-lap snatches	Change in hand margin	Change in penalty points
Flexible	+0.28	-1.96	+3.67
Fixed	+0.38	-0.12	+4.24
Permanent	+0.33	-0.11	+5.92

Method

The current game engine and current Bob, Tactician, Runner and Setter bots played to the first go-out. Each position was then cloned into the two rule conditions, with matched random seeds. All four bot profiles appeared at each table, with seating rotations. Dealer rotated across the sample. Nine cards were dealt; starter exposure was at the end of the creator’s next turn. Flexible, Fixed and Permanent each received 400 hands. Results are single-hand comparisons, not four-hand match statistics.

Scope and limitations

Bots used the broader legal opportunities but were not retrained for the proposed rule. Pre-final-lap decisions were identical, so this test cannot measure how humans or adapted bots might change earlier passing, starter placement, or going-out decisions. The final lap still has exactly three scheduled turns, so turn count does not increase in this design. The longest-run measure checks one aspect of table growth; it is not a complete measure of table crowding. Intervals describe variation in this bot sample and do not account for bot-model uncertainty.

Rule checks

Verified opponent access to a formerly protected starter, continued penalty on an unclaimed starter, and removal of that penalty when the claiming team secures the cards. No game or official rules were changed. Reproducible source, paired hand data, seeds and summaries are included in the companion test archive.