ConHex

(A game by Michael Antonow)

Introduction

ConHex is a game of strategy for 2 players. There are only a few rules to learn, with a simple objective, and no luck or chance is involved. It's played on an arrangement of spaces enclosed by straight lines, with circles at most of the vertices where the lines meet.

Objective

Players attempt to connect opposite sides of the board by claiming circles, thereby taking ownership of spaces, in order to form an unbroken chain of owned spaces between sides. Player 1 wins by connecting the top and bottom of the board, while player 2 wins by connecting the left and right sides. (See Illustration 1.)

Materials

- Playing board (Illustration 1).
- Colored pencils, pens, markers, crayons, etc., or colored playing pieces (at least 50 of each color), in 2 colors.

  If playing pieces are used, they should be small enough to be placed on the circles of the board, without covering up the lines connecting the circles or the spaces enclosed by those lines. Ideally, there should be 2 sizes or shapes of the playing pieces: 1 size or shape would be used for marking claimed circles, while the other would be used for marking owned spaces.

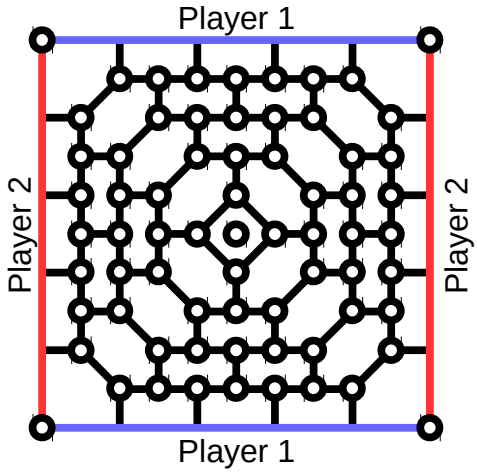

Illustration 1: Initial Conhex board.

Rules for play

- Initially, the playing board starts out as shown in Illustration 1.
- In turn, each player claims an unclaimed circle by marking it with his or her color (or playing piece). A claimed circle remains that way for the duration of the game.
- The first player to claim at least half of the circles directly around a space takes ownership of that space, and marks it accordingly. (See Illustration 2 for an example.) Thus, for spaces at the edge of the board, each with 3 surrounding circles, claiming 2 such circles establishes ownership of the space; for spaces with 6 circles around them, claiming 3 of the circles

establishes ownership; for the center space, the circle in the middle of the space is included, for a total of 5 circles – of which 3 must be claimed to establish ownership. Once established, ownership of a space doesn't change for the duration of the game.

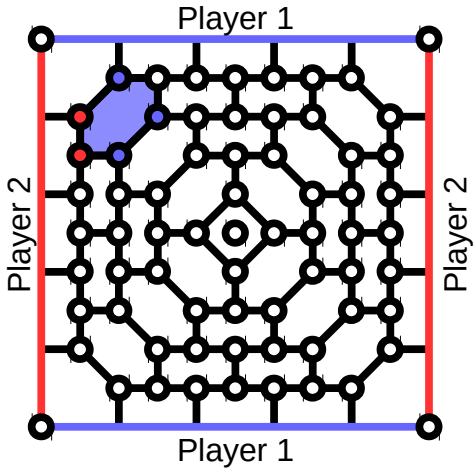

Illustration 2: Player 1 (blue) takes ownership of a space by claiming at least half of the surrounding circles.

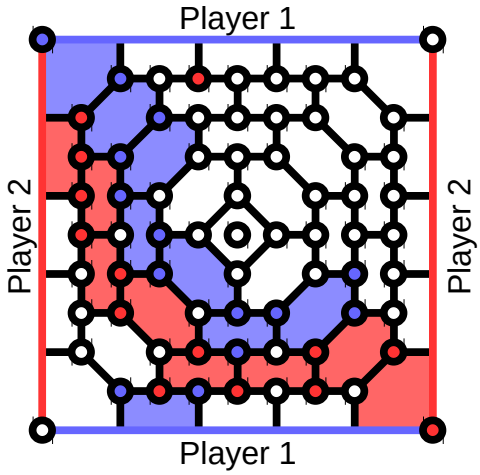

Illustration 3: Player 2 (red) wins the game with an unbroken chain of owned spaces between the left and right sides.

- The first player to complete an unbroken chain of owned spaces between his or her opposite sides of the board wins the game. (See example in Illustration 3.)

Exploration and discussion

After playing the game a few times with different opponents, or with the same opponent but alternating who moves first, think about and discuss these questions:

1. Do all circles have an equal influence or potential effect on the outcome?
2. Are there some spaces that seem to be included in most winning chains?
3. Does thinking about questions 1 and 2 give you ideas for possible strategies?
4. Do you think the first player to move has an inherent advantage? If not, then what about the second player?
5. If either the first or second player has an inherent advantage, can you think of ways to make the game more fair?
6. Is it possible for the game to end in a draw, with neither player able to form a winning chain of spaces?

Play the game a few more times – changing opponents, if possible – to test out your answers to these questions, and to try out any new strategy ideas you might have.