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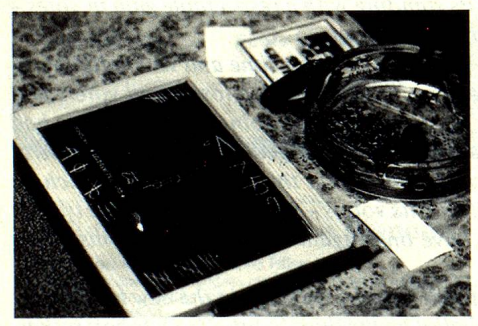


Jass – a magic word for most Swiss. The recently-published report of an opinion poll confirmed that jass remains the number one Helvetic sport: 75% of Swiss are reckoned to be habitual jass players, which makes this card game more popular than football. A little irony of history: what is regarded as a typically Swiss game, originally came from abroad. When the cards fly across the green baize in Swiss inns and parlours, only very few of the players would know that jass is of Dutch origin. Even the name of the game re-

another irony of history is that today the only Swiss factory making playing cards is in – of all places – the Canton of Schaffhausen. The figures are impressive: every year, the Swiss buy 3½ million packs of jass cards; and it is reckoned that a game of jass lasts about eight hours. Indeed, the game has been a media happening for years. Every two weeks, the German-Swiss television puts out the early evening «Saturday Jass» programme, which almost explodes the

viewer ratings – so much so that the daily news transmission, the «Tagesschau», until recently the most popular TV programme, has been relegated to second place. Meanwhile, jass has probably spread all over the world – not least thanks to the Swiss abroad who remember the game in their own homeland haunts on the green baize tablecloth.

JM/(Photos: Andreas Blatter)



calls its northern European roots, for «jas» means jack of trumps in Dutch, and also the «nell» (nine) goes back linguistically to the land of windmills. Swiss mercenaries are supposed to have brought the card game back to their home grounds towards the end of the 18th century, where it was mentioned for the first time in an official chronicle in the Canton of Schaffhausen's Siblingen. There, the parish priest denounced players who «jassed» the whole night through. And

