

u.s. open backgammon tournament—reno

MARKOWITZ IS THE MASTER

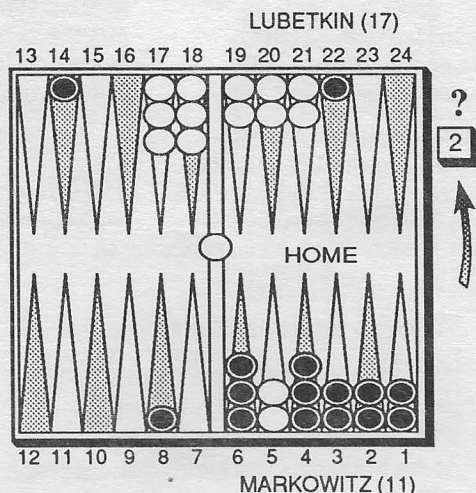
Chellstorp wins U.S. Open title

“It was very, very intense.” That’s how Chicagoan Howard Markowitz described his four match road to victory in the 1989 Reno Masters Invitational. Running concurrent with the U.S. Open, N.N.B.A.’s annual \$2,000 challenge brought 16 of the best backgammon players in North America to the Reno Nugget June 21-25. Howard’s share of the prize and Calcutta pool topped \$25,000.

Markowitz, who has achieved an incredible Reno record since 1986, had four arduous battles against Mike Corbett, Sandy Lubetkin, Kit Woolsey and finally Ed O’Laughlin. “The match against Sandy was a real come-from-behind effort,” noted Howard. “He had me 17-5 before I rallied for 12 straight points.”

In that comeback march, Howard challenged Sandy with the following cube:

1989 Masters Invitational. Round 2, 19 point match. Sandy Lubetkin (White) leads Howard Markowitz (Black) 17 to 11.
BLACK DOUBLES. SHOULD WHITE TAKE?



decision cost him four points and trimmed his lead to 17-15.

Ahead 18-17 (Crawford), Lubetkin was one dice roll from victory. Markowitz needed double 2’s or better on his last shake or it was all over. Before Howard rolled, Sandy insured the position by betting Howard Ring (CA) \$300 to \$1600 that Howard would roll 2-2 or better (the correct payoff should have been \$1860). Markowitz rolled double 5’s and Lubetkin collected a bet he would have preferred to lose. Howard proceeded to win the last game and advance to the third round.

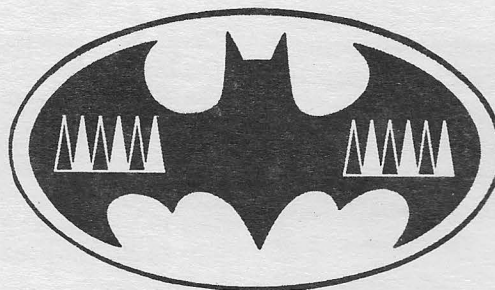
After topping Kit Woolsey 21-19, only Virginia’s Ed O’Laughlin remained. Howard recalled, “At 20-17, Ed gammoned me to take his only lead of the close match. Then I cubed him out to tie the score at 21-all. The next game, I gammoned him for the title.”

In the other major result, Las Vegas Craig Chellstorp returned from a backgammon hiatus to overpower Jay Kurzet (WA) and take the U.S. Open title for 1989. Δ

1989 U.S. OPEN & MASTERS INVITAT’L

MASTERS INVITATIONAL (16): 1st Howard Markowitz (IL); 2nd Ed O’Laughlin (VA).
OPEN (92): 1st Craig Chellstorp (NV); 2nd Jay Kurzet (WA); 3/4 Bob Glass (CA) and Scott McKenzie (CA); 1st Cons. Jack Kissane (NY); 2nd Cons. Howard Markowitz (IL); 3/4 Nack Ballard (CA) and Michael Maxakuli (NV); 1st Last Hope Kit Woolsey.
INTERMEDIATE (101): 1st Dennis Rutkowski (CA); 2nd David Hitchman; 3/4 Bill Phipps and David “Pork Chop” Wight (CA); 1st Cons. Sam Smith; 2nd Cons. Ray Foglerland; 3/4 Rob Mathes and Farhad Gharmani (CA); 1st Last Hope Joe Harris.
NOVICE (34): 1st Alan Natamura; 2nd Seymour Rosenberg; 1st Cons. Gary Quilla; 2nd Cons. Ken Schey; 1st Last Hope Veronica Mooney (AZ).
OPEN JACKPOT (32): Diane Haley.
INTERMED. JACKPOT (64): 1st Tom Leslie.
MEGABLITZ (512): 1st Farhad Gharmani.
DOUBLES (64 Teams): 1st Jim Allen (NV) & Kati Pratt (TX); 2nd Trish Hegland (CA) & Pete Tividar; 3/4 Alice Kay (IL) & Joel Harwood (FL) 3/4 Diane Blomberg (MN) & Fred Kalantari (MN).

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ROLLBY STEREO

“In my opinion, with the given score, it was an easy drop for him,” Markowitz maintained. But Lubetkin took the 2-cube. The

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

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HIGH MARKS FOR KISSANE INTERVIEW

I enjoyed the June issue, and especially the interview with Jack Kissane. He certainly is a talented gentleman (I use "gentleman" advisedly).

Although I seldom enter tournaments, I would appreciate more such character sketches of backgammon "good guys" along with their photographs. The pictures are important as I may know the face but not the name.—Tom Brizendine, Greenville, KY

WHY THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN OPEN AND INTERMEDIATE ENTRY FEE RAKES?

Over the past several months, much has been written in this publication about ways to standardize backgammon in the United States. Everything from the Holland Rule to smoking has been discussed. Everything but one important topic: Why are the Intermediate entry fees often raked at a

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

coming attractions



by Carol Joy Cole
313/232-9731

Jul 1-2	Backgammon Getaway, Howard Johnson, Deerfield Beach, FL	305/527-4033
Jul 2	Celebrities Bimonthly Sunday Tournament, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Jul 3	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	3-689918
Jul 7-9	San Remo Backgammon Tournament, Hotel Royal, San Remo, Italy	0184/7-99-91
Jul 9	Toronto Monthly Tournament, Le Spot, Ontario	416/267-2815
Jul 10-16	World Championship of Backgammon, Monte-Carlo, Monaco	301/299-8264
Jul 15-16	Nation's Capital Summer Tournament, The Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0603
Jul 22	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Jul 23	Austin Bimonthly Tournament, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/490-6538
Jul 24-25	Isar Cup Tournament, Munich, West Germany	089-642-3199
Jul 27	"Third Thursday" Bonus Tournament, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 28-30	Michigan Summer Championships, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 28-30	European Championship, Casino de Spa, Belgium	0841-12 825
Aug 4-6	1000 Islands Tournament, Pine Tree Point, Alexandria Bay, NY	716/442-8221
Aug 6	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Bagwells, Chicago, IL	312/252-7755
Aug 6	12th Annual Bob Hill Classic, Long Island, NY	516/334-4883
Aug 7	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	3-689918
Aug 7-13	Green Mountain Festival, Ascutney Mtn. Resort, Brownsville, VT	305/527-4033
Aug 10-13	Palace Summer Championships, St. Moritz, Switzerland	061 50 58 16
Aug 13	Toronto Monthly Tournament, Le Spot, Ontario	416/267-2815
Aug 17	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Aug 20	Stroh Backgammon Fest, Strohaus, Detroit, MI	313/354-5566
Aug 20	1989 Japan Backgammon Championship, Yaesu Fujiya Hotel, Tokyo	03-5476-4303
Aug 26	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Aug 27	Celebrities Bimonthly Sunday Tournament, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Sep 1-4	National Labor Day Tournament & Club Challenge, Indianapolis, IN	317/845-8435
Sep 4	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	3-689918
Sep 4	College Park Jackpot Tournament, The Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0603
Sep 10	Toronto Monthly Tournament, Le Spot, Ontario	416/267-2815
Sep 17	Austin Bimonthly Tournament, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/490-6538
Sep 17	New England Season Opener, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Sep 22-24	5th German Open Championship, Palace Hotel, Berlin, W. Germany	08341-128 25
Sep 23	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Sep 29-Oct 1	Towpath Lodge Tournament, Turin, NY	315/348-8122
Oct 1	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Bagwells, Chicago, IL	312/252-7755
Oct 2	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	3-689918
Oct 4-8	Caesars Tahoe Tournament (\$20,000 added), South Lake Tahoe, NV	702/826-1984
Oct 15	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Oct 15	2nd Annual Jim Flora Memorial Tournament & Benefit, Plymouth, MI	313/981-5706
Oct 21	The Pewter Mug, Watertown, NY	315/788-5114
Oct 27-29	New Hampshire Fall Classic, Woodbound Inn, Jaffrey, NH	603/924-3844
Oct 28	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Oct 29	Celebrities Bimonthly Sunday Tournament, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Nov 6	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	3-689918
Nov 10-12	NY/NJ Co-op Fall Tourney, Rocking Horse Ranch, Highland, NY	516/334-4883
Nov 17-19	Children's Hospital Benefit, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Nov 19	Austin Bimonthly Tournament, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/490-6538
Nov 23-26	European Backgammon Championships, Casino de Deauville, France	01-376 3033

higher percentage than the Open fees? Since backgammon is a game that involves percentages, I question the fairness of unequal rakes.

Here are two recent examples:

1989 Midwest Championships

Division	Entry Fee	Rake
Open	\$200	15%
Intermediate	\$100	20%

Michigan Summer Championships

Division	Entry Fee	Rake
Open	\$180	0%
Intermediate	\$90	20%

At the Midwest Championships, the less-skilled Intermediates were penalized an additional 5% on the rake. At the upcoming Summer Championships, Intermediates get

(Continued on page 3)

SECOND NATIONAL BACKGAMMON MEETING IN RENO

Once again, the Northern Nevada Backgammon Association hosted a meeting on the future of backgammon in the United States. Last month's U.S. Open in Reno was the site for this second get-together, attracting the following representatives: Bill Barron (TX), Linc Bedell (NH), Malcolm Davis (TX), Kent Goulding (MD), Duane Jensen (MN), Jack Kissane (NY), Nick Maffeo (CA), Butch & Mary Ann Meese (IN), Gary Oakes (CA), Mark Richardson (NV), Jim Roderick (NV) and Joe Sylvester (MI).

Aside from the benefits of keeping the backgammon channels open, Mark Richardson reports that thrust of the meeting focused on the status of Kent Goulding's rating list (*Ed. note: see page 6*). It was also suggested that Kent start to rate Intermediate players so that directors could better judge their proper level of play. Kent seemed agreeable to the idea of rating major Intermediate events.

There was also discussion on the pluses and minuses of forming a national organization. Joe Sylvester seemed very much in favor of such an organization, citing discounts on tournament seminars, books, equipment, and tournament registration

fees as possible membership benefits. He offered to draft up some material with more specific guidelines.

It was also suggested to contact the *Chicago POINT* about becoming the official publication of a national organization.

WORLD CUP II DATES ANNOUNCED

U.S. Backgammon Enterprises has announced August 7-12, 1990 as the dates for World Cup II, once again to be held in the Boston area. Joe Sylvester won \$50,000 at the first World Cup event in 1988. Exceptionally long match lengths (25-41 points) made it the most skillful test of backgammon ever offered. If next year's event draws the expected 64 player field (at \$3,500 per entry), the World Cup prize fund will exceed \$200,000 making it the richest tournament in backgammon history.

Positions in World Cup II will be available to two groups of players: 40 paid slots via direct invitation, and 24 winners of regional qualifying tournaments to be held throughout the world between September, 1989 and June, 1990.

For more information about World Cup II, write Kent Goulding, 9201 Marseille Drive, Potomac, MD 20854, or Bill Rober-tie, P.O. Box 294, Arlington, MA 02174.

LETTERS...

(Continued from page 2)

hit even harder—20% harder to be exact. I don't mind paying my fair share of a club's tournament expenses, but as an Intermediate, why should I have to pay the greater percentage?—Larry Buckingham, Dayton, OH

Carol Joy Cole responds: The Michigan Summer Championships is fortunate to have two nationally-oriented sponsors: Michelob and Sanford Kaplan of Shearson Lehman Hutton. They continue to sponsor us year after year because we regularly draw large crowds to Flint from all parts of the country. A significant factor in this draw is the 100% return in the Open division, which consistently includes world-class players from New York to California. This national field peppered with "experts" is good for all of our players, as it adds excitement to the tournament and provides extra learning experiences which Novice and Intermediate players can take advantage of. Another benefit of a big tournament crowd is the ability to fill many side events, giving added opportunities for play and winning to all participants.

Michigan's 20% rake in the Intermediate and Novice divisions is actually below average as demonstrated by the following chart:

	Chicago Open	Granite State*	New England* (Charity)
Open	15%	15%	20%
Intermediate	20%	20%	35%
Novice	30%	20%	

* Plus required membership fee (\$10-\$30)

As for the pattern of lower rakes in the Open, most tournament organizers view this as a reward for years of study, work and fiscal investment on the part of the Open players. Many do not necessarily view the Intermediate division as a permanent resting place for players, but rather as a "rite of passage" to the more challenging world of Open play with its higher equity prizes. All Open players were once Novices and then Intermediates. They have worked their way up from the "farm club," they pay higher entry and auction fees, and they have earned some extra benefits.

In conclusion, Michigan's rake does not "penalize" Intermediate or Novice players. Here they pay less than the usual

(Continued on page 7)



1989 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU JUNE 30

TAK MORIOKA	16.00	Alan Steffen	3.36	Dan Judd	0.96
GARY KAY	13.20	Paul Johnson	2.96	Bill Hoeflich	0.96
CHRIS KENIK	12.32	Bill Davis	2.76	Lenny Loder	0.96
YAMIN YAMIN	10.92	Rich Siebold	2.72	Richard Stawowy	0.92
DEAN MUENCH	10.60	John Spatafora	2.70	Paul Travis	0.88
DAVID LIBCHABER	9.96	Kathy Rudnick	2.52	Jim Pappas	0.80
BOB ZAVORAL	9.68	Judy Brown	2.48	Ron Stur	0.80
DEEB SHALATI	7.60	Ed Buerger	2.40	Jill Ferdinand	0.80
SARG SERGES	6.64	Don Jayhan	2.20	Darcey Brady	0.80
ARNOLD ZOUSMER	6.28	Ken Bond	2.08	Mike Cyrkiel	0.72
STU KATZ	5.36	Jeff Kane	1.92	Carl Severino	0.72
ALICE KAY	5.32	Don Desmond	1.92	René Wojtysiak	0.64
NORMA SHYER	5.28	Joe Koucharian	1.72	Harry Hayward	0.56
MARK KING	4.40	Arlene Levy	1.68	Joan Hegg	0.56
PETER KALBA	4.32	Dave Rockwell	1.60	Trudie Stern	0.32
JOHN DEMIAN	4.24	Mark Anshus	1.52	Leslie Lockett	0.32
VW ZIMNICKI	4.08	Gary Keyes	1.52	Craig McCullough	0.30
PHYLLIS SMOLINSKI	4.00	Bob Holyon	1.36	Mark Hicks	0.28
DAVE CRAMER	3.84	Gene Chait	1.20	Dianne Cyrkiel	0.12
JOANN FEINSTEIN	3.72	Bill Keefe	1.04	Marv Arnol	0.12
Ralph Levy	3.48				

PETER KALBA stormed onto the 1989 master point chart with two wins and a Player of the Month point total of 4.32. Tak Morioka (3.28) and Gary Kay (2.64) now rank 1-2 in the 1989 overall standings.

PLEASE NOTE: The three leaders through July will be invited to represent the Bar Point Club in the Club Challenge event at the National Labor Day tournament in Indianapolis.

ASK DANNY



by Danny Kleinman

NOTHING STANDARD ABOUT
CHOUETTES

Dear Danny: What are the rules for the more popular forms of chouette play? Is there such a thing as "accepted chouette procedure?"—Dave Cardwell, Buford, GA

Dear Dave: The existence of at least three forms of chouette play, and the proliferation of different "house rules" at different clubs, has made "accepted chouette procedure" mean very little. All chouettes have in common the ordinary rules of backgammon, of course, as well as the provision that the loser of a game go to the "end of the line" and that a captain whose game is settled or terminated by a pass is replaced by the next player in line. The Jacoby Rule—gammons and backgammons may be scored only if the cube has been turned—is nearly universal, but the late Barclay Cooke reported having played in chouettes where it was not used.

In Los Angeles over the past two decades, I have seen Consulting Chouettes supplanted by Non-Consulting, and Single-Cube chouettes replaced by Separate-Cube. Each form has merits and defects and suits the interests of different players.

Consulting Chouettes benefit a lone strong player in the short run. Whichever side he plays, Box or Captain-and-Crew, has skill advantage in every game. Yet in the long run, consulting benefits the less experienced players, who can improve their play by listening to the comments and advice of the strong players. Perhaps this is

why the hustlers of the early 1970's welcomed the advent of Non-Consulting chouettes: they didn't want their pigeons to become educated. Consulting also slows down the game—a reason for others, but hustlers especially, to resent it. Consulting requires civility, a quality in short supply in Los Angeles. The degeneration of many "consultations" into unpleasant arguments between Captain and Crew member hastened the demise of this form of chouette. Nonetheless, for people who aren't hustlers and gamblers but friendly sportsmen, devotees and students of the game, I heartily recommend Consulting Chouettes.

In Single-Cube chouettes, Crew members have little role. They can urge their Captain to turn the cube, insist on being bought out for half the previous cube if the Captain turns it against their will, and act independently only when the Box turns the cube. The Box likewise has less freedom of action. He cannot hedge when the cube is turned against him, but must either pass or play as many times the stake represented by the cube as there are players on the other side. More crucially, he cannot time his doubles to exploit maximally the cube weaknesses of all his opponents.

Separate Cubes liberate both Box and Crew from the above constraints. That is the key to the widespread adoption of this form of chouette. But in my opinion, Separate Cubes harm the game by fostering disputes and cheating. The logistics of keeping track of whose cube is where and at what level thwart all but the most careful and alert Box players. Crew members who leave the table temporarily are frequently harmed—actually cheated, I say—when their cubes remain unturned while their Captain and other Crew members who are present double the Box. I have devised and presented rules and procedures to prevent

these and other abuses of Separate Cubes. But in Los Angeles, at any rate, my recommendations are ignored or dismissed. At the Cavendish West, historically, it has been the pushiest, loudest and nastiest players who have made ad hoc rules and secured favorable rulings almost invariably.

I do not think that even the most ingenious and fair-minded framers and interpreters of rules can remedy a fundamental defect of Separate Cubes. That is the inherent conflict, or at least non-coincidence, of interests. The Captain whose cube is still centered has no incentive to avert a gammon or backgammon; plays made in pursuit of his own legitimate interest may affect adversely a Crew member whose cube has been turned. Moreover, somebody is bound to be damaged, through no fault of his own, if a Crew member wishes to double but the Captain, who is not contemplating a cube-turn, rolls first. To cancel the roll is obviously wrong, for that will injure the Captain (on a good roll) or the Box (on a bad one). To cancel the double is obviously unfair to the Crew member. To permit both the roll and the double may be unfair to the Crew member (knowledge of that roll may alter the Box's response). To permit the roll and let the Crew member decide whether he still wants to double is similarly unfair to the Box. The only remaining remedy, to penalize the player rolling too promptly, seems unduly harsh no matter how small the penalty.

Two-sided conflicts lend themselves to fair resolution, three-sided do not.—*Yours,*
Danny Δ

Questions for Danny Kleinman should be addressed to: Ask Danny, c/o Chicago POINT, 2726 W. Lunt Avenue, Chicago, IL 60645. Danny will answer the most interesting questions bimonthly.

AMALGAMATION

"Now they'll have more time for backgammon" Department: Graduates **Dan Cramer** (BA from Carleton College) and **Tim Serges** (BS from University of Illinois)... Greetings to *POINT* subscriber **Tim Helms** of Lincoln, Nebraska who attended the Chicago Bar Point Club June 11 tourney at Bagwells... Congratulations to **Steve and Gail Burke**, proud parents of **Charles Steven Burke** born June 17. Just prior to delivery at Evanston Hospital, Steve and Gail watched the U.S. Open Golf tournament on TV. Could that be the reason they

nicknamed their son "Chip"?... Visiting the Bar Point Club June 20: **John Ward** of Englewood, FL in town for his 50th anniversary Evanston Township High School reunion (this editor's alma mater)... When **Joann Feinstein** was asked if she had any backgammon news for this column, she replied: "I'm pregnant—and (my husband) **Jerry's** not the father!" We think Joann is fibbing... Check out the beautiful invitation for the upcoming Caesars Tahoe Backgammon Tournament with \$20,000 added (October 4-8, 1989). It's a masterpiece. To receive your copy, write: Northern Nevada Backgammon Association, P.O. Box 70101; Reno, NV 89570-0101... Last call

for the Michigan Summer Championships (July 28-30). Pre-registration is a near sell-out. Call CJC at (313) 232-9731... The May issue of *Lear's* magazine had a nice first person account of the Monte Carlo World Backgammon Championship from a woman's perspective titled, "Gammine of Backgammon." Author **Annabel Davis-Goff** describes an American odds maker in Monte Carlo as casting "...a cynical eye on gamblers as a species." She once heard him remark, "Checks are what gamblers think you use when you run out of money." Ms. Davis-Goff closes with a **Nick the Greek** quote: "The next best thing to *playing and winning* is *playing and losing*." Δ

IT'S TIME FOR A "NO SMOKING" BACKGAMMON TOURNAMENT

It's 10:30 PM, Thursday, May 18, 1989. I'm playing in the first round of the Backgammon Championship of Great Britain at the Palace Hotel/Casino on the Isle of Man. 200 players fill the playing room beyond the level of comfort. The temperature is near 80°. A layer of smoke blankets the room.

At 11:00 PM, the Baron of Culcreuch makes an announcement. He apologizes for problems with the air conditioning and as a result, bans cigar smoking for the duration of the tournament. The directive draws scattered applause. Still, heavy cigarette smoking continues—and European players smoke more than Americans. In fact, the London *Independent* newspaper's coverage claims that "All but half a dozen chain-smoke while playing." As the smoke begins to affect my ability to concentrate on the game, I think to myself, "This isn't right."

Both Bar Point Club co-director Peter Kalba and I lose in the first round. We meet by the drawsheets. Peter compares the playing room to a "barbecue pit." Another definition for *gammon* is "smoked ham," and that's exactly how I feel.

I go up to my hotel room. My suit smells of smoke. Later, I meet Peter downstairs in the bar. We make a momentous decision: at the 1990 Midwest Backgammon Championships, smoking in the main playing room will be prohibited.

Gary Kay, a top player (and heavy smoker) from Chicago, offers an opinion. "You'll lose players. I'll still come but (my wife) Alice won't." We probably will lose some smokers, but it's a fact that we're losing others by permitting smoking. Last month, Lee Hren (Iowa) wrote the *POINT* to say he's stopped attending tournaments because of the "smoke-filled rooms." Tom Bierovic (Illinois) was "smoked out" of backgammon in 1987.

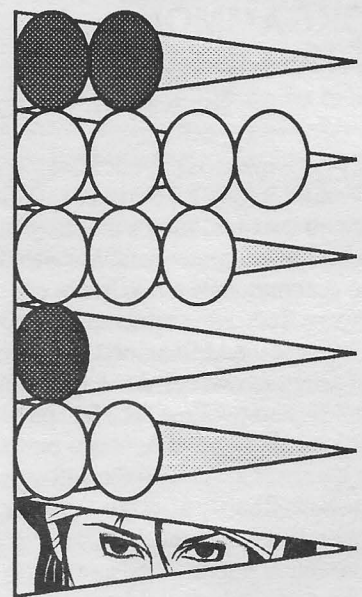
I have no hatred for cigarettes or those who choose to smoke. In fact, because my mother is a smoker, I was taught to be especially tolerant of the habit. Friends may smoke in my apartment and car. At the office, I have an ashtray on my desk for visitors who smoke. In short, I respect the rights of smokers, but feel the nonsmokers' rights must also be considered.

The decision to ban smoking in the playing room is not without precedent. Chess tournaments have been smoke-free for many years. Still, backgammon is a different type of game and the Bar Point Club will likely be hurt from an attendance (*translation: monetary*) standpoint. The Midwest Championships room rental contract with the Holiday Inn is based on a sliding attendance scale. And there will be an additional 3-day charge of \$150 to rent an 18' x 36' side room where smoking will be allowed.

At last month's U.S. Open in Reno, the Northern Nevada Backgammon Association surveyed players' smoking preferences. Based on the response, the NNBA announced a "refrain from smoking" policy in their main playing room (they had side rooms available for smokers). The system worked fairly well, but there were still some arguments when a smoker faced a non-smoker. Who would get their way? In most instances, the problem was resolved by permitting the match to take place in the main playing room.

The Midwest Backgammon Championships March 23-25, 1990 at the Oakbrook Terrace (IL) Holiday Inn will take backgammon tournaments a breath fresher with a complete ban on smoking in the main playing room. After all, nonsmokers have tolerated smoking over the backgammon board for 3500 years. Now it's time to offer them occasional events where clean air reigns supreme. Δ

Michigan Summer



Backgammon Championships

July 28-30, 1989

Sheraton Inn ♦ Flint, MI

For more information, contact
Carol Joy Cole at 313/232-9731

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berland, Chgo (625-1717).

PUB CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 7:30 PM at Fiddler's,
345 W. North Ave., Villa Park. Ed Bauder (312/985-1568).

SANGAMON VALLEY BG ASS'N: Tournaments Tues-
day, 6:15 PM at On Broadway, 210 S. Broadway, Springfield.
Randy Armstrong (217/528-0117).

WINNETKA BG CLUB: Tournaments Weds., 7:00 PM at
620 Lincoln, Winnetka. Trudie Stern (312/446-0537).

CENT. ILL. BG CLUB: Tourn. Thurs., 6:30 PM at Peoria
Pizza Wks, 3921 Prospect, Peoria. Sue Will (309/692-6909).

NORTH CLUB: Daily side play at 4747 W. Peterson (Room
402), Chicago. Howard Markowitz (312/286-8417).



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KG'S INTERNATIONAL BACKGAMMON RATING LIST LIVES!

by Kent Goulding

“What happened to your Backgammon Rating List?” It’s a question I’m asked all the time. Here’s the story.

My original computer database was designed to accommodate a maximum of 1000 players. The rating system idea caught on faster than I imagined, and a year later, the database was filled to capacity. I rebuilt the system to allow for 2500 players. As this space filled, limitations on the speed of my machine and on the software began to show. Shortly after the Summer, 1987 Rating List was published, the 2500 player maximum was reached and everything ground to a halt. I could not ignore the new players, nor could I eliminate the old ones. I was faced with two choices: either the rating system would have to be chucked or major change was needed to the computing front.

I consulted two-time backgammon world champion Bill Robertie, an independent computer software specialist by profession, and learned that I needed not only new software, but new hardware as well. Bill could design the software, but it would take weeks of work. So much so, that paying market rates would set me back tens of thousands of dollars. Bill, a true blue BG fanatic to the last, offered to do the job for less than one-tenth of the going rate. While programming would still cost over \$1000, at least it was worth considering. Of course, I would also have to buy a new computer system.

After much deliberation (and fights over the money with my wife), the decision was made to go ahead. Bill was not free to start working for several months, and when he did start, he had to do it in his precious and rare spare time. While he was slaving

away, tournament drawsheets were piling up and beginning to over-run my office.

I purchased a new state-of-the-art computer in December, 1988. The creation of the software and the transfer of the data from the old system took longer than expected with final delivery occurring in February, 1989. After ironing out a few lurking bugs, *Kent Goulding's International Backgammon Rating System* was again operational.

I am now in the process of trying to catch up with rating the hundreds of drawsheets which have accumulated over the past two years. I can only work on this project an odd hour here and there. My plan during the updating period (which could well take several more months) is to print out occasional lists of the top 100 players but hold off on a complete listing until I am at least through half of 1988. The Chicago POINT will print a Top 25 listing when it becomes available. Δ

YOU CAN HELP

Players and tournament directors can help me by submitting drawsheets containing clear, accurate information regarding player names, date and location of tournament, and match lengths. What I most appreciate are drawsheets containing player I.D. numbers written next to each name (see an old rating list for these numbers). If this cannot be done, at least see to it that COMPLETE AND PROPERLY SPELLED OUT names are provided. The most time-consuming part of rating tournaments is trying to figure out who is who. For example, the drawsheet says A. Zaltash reached the finals of a particular event. Is that Ali, Assad, Abdi and Abbas?

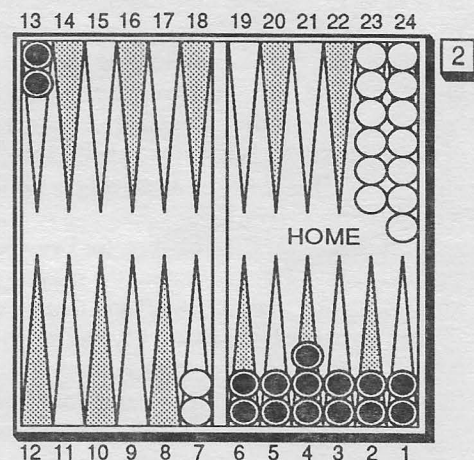
I need drawsheets. Players should get in the habit of checking with their directors to make sure results are forwarded to me. Remember, I need complete drawsheets—not just names of the final few winners. Forward significant tournament results to: Kent Goulding, 9201 Marseille Drive, Potomac, MD 20854. Telephone: 301/299-8265 (before 9:30 Eastern time).

last month's position

PROBLEM #148 SOLVED

by Kit Woolsey

Tournament double match point.
BLACK TO PLAY 1-1.



To split or not to split, that is the question.

It is probably not too big a deal exactly which split or which non-split is chosen. However, it certainly seems correct to retain the closed board, and it is probably best to stay as far back as possible. So we will analyze: 13/12(2), 4/2 and 13/12, 4/1.

The arguments for not splitting are quite strong. Unless White rolls doubles, Black will always get an immediate game-winning shot. Even if Black doubles, he is still a solid favorite in the race. Note that pip count is not nearly as significant as crossovers in this type of position.

The arguments for splitting are equally strong. If White rolls a small number which fails to hit, Black is an overwhelming favorite. In the more likely case where White hits, Black will usually have an immediate return shot and is likely to have several later shots, since White has virtually no flexibility. If any one of these shots are hit, it is a game winner. And even if White sneaks past, Black still has some chance in the race.

So, what is the verdict? I rolled the position out 108 times for both plays using identical dice and the results were inconclusive. My gut feeling is that not splitting is theoretically slightly better. However, splitting leaves White some difficult play problems in many variations, such as whether or not to hit the second man and exactly how to place her men for maximum safety, both immediate and long run. If you believe your opponent will have trouble solving these problems, then the splitting play is probably superior. Δ

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A BACKGAMMON REBUS

by Duane Jensen

LETTERS...

(Continued from page 3)



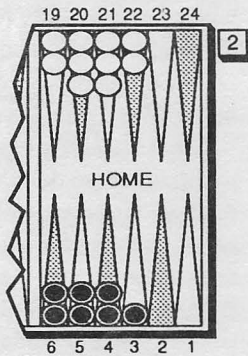
The answer to this rebus question could serve as a guide to proper checker play in some bear-offs.

shown, you'll lose the game by rolling poorly or if your opponent rolls well—not by misplaying an ace. So just relax and enjoy the bear-off.

On the other hand, if you're losing the race as in Example #2, proper checker play can increase your winning chances (however meager they may be) by up to 100%. When you're trailing in a bear-off, you're in greater control of your destiny than you imagine.

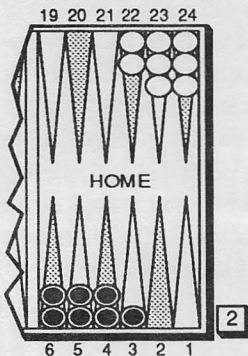
Incidentally, the rebus says: M + eye + A + head + oar + behind + Indira + ace? The question to ask yourself is: *Am I ahead or behind in the race?* Δ

EXAMPLE #1:
Black to play
an ace:



The correct play is to slide a checker from 3 to 2 retaining the even distribution of checkers desired when you're winning the race.

EXAMPLE #2:
Black to play
an ace:



The correct play is to stack a third checker on the 5-point to get the most out of double fives. If you're losing the race, look for a stacking play when you're down to your last few rolls.

In addition, don't "over-analyze" positions such as Example #1. It's a waste of energy. If you're winning the race as

rake in the majority of tournaments. In fact, our Intermediate Overflow section yields 95% return. As one's game improves, one can move up to the higher equity and prize money which we offer as an encouragement and reward to Open players.

We want our tournaments to be considered for their fun, their camaraderie and the fair shake which we try to give to all. For the past two years, the Michigan Summer Championships has had 80 players in the Open; for the past three years, we have had 80 players in the Intermediate. With numbers like these, we must be doing something right. Hope to see you in Flint on July 28!—Carol Joy Cole, Director, Michigan Summer Championships

Bill Davis responds: The Midwest Championships does have a sliding scale for entry return and there is a reason. The entry rake is used to pay for items that everyone shares in equally: room rental, tournament handouts, complimentary coffee, trophies, raffle prizes, and nearly \$500 of side event awards (Pig-Rolling, BG Pinball, etc.).

Let's look at what each Midwest Championships rake translates into on the dollar basis:

MBC Entry Fees	x	Rake	=	Amount raked
Open \$200		15%		\$30.00
Intermediate \$100		20%		\$20.00
Beginner \$30		25%		\$7.50

Although the higher rake percentage initially makes it sound like the Intermediate and Beginner players are getting the worst deal for their money, the Open players actually pay the most. Perhaps this is not fair! In fact, the only reason the MBC doesn't charge everyone a flat \$25 registration fee (and return 100% of the entry fees) is because this excessive rake would hurt Beginner attendance. We certainly don't want to stifle newcomer participation.—Ed.

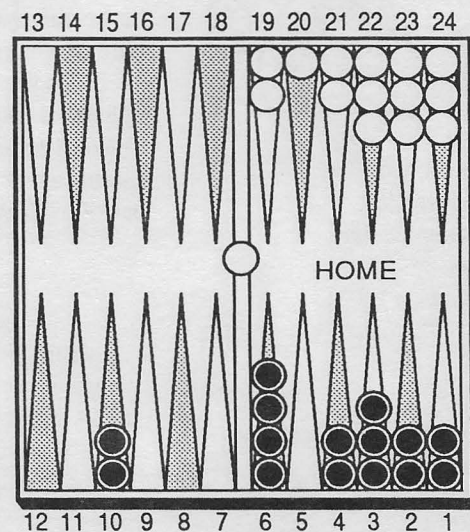
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA SHOULD BE SO LUCKY

Greetings from St. Louis, the Backgammon Wasteland of the Midwest. As there is no organized backgammon here, your publication serves as a most welcome "oasis." Please renew my subscription and keep up the good work!—Michael Shanas, D.M.D., St. Louis, MO Δ

your move

PROBLEM #149

Tournament double match point.
BLACK TO PLAY 6-2.

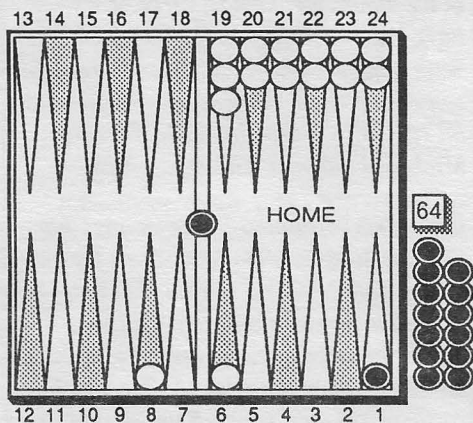


A PARADOX

by Kit Woolsey

It has always been axiomatic for me that if you are not playing for a gammon and you think your opponent should pass, then it must be correct to double. How could things be otherwise? Then the following situation arose, which caused me to rethink this most basic axiom.

Match to 11 points. Black leads White, 9 to 5. **SHOULD BLACK DOUBLE?**



I was playing the Black pieces vs. Perry Gartner, a very competent opponent, in the Bonanza event of the January Reno tournament. Leading 9 to 5 in an 11 point match, I had been playing for the gammon, but was unfortunate enough to be hit by a last ditch shot. Now, should I double or not?

To answer this question, it is first necessary to look at things from White's point of view to see if he has a take. What are the match equities? If he passes, he will be behind 10 to 5, which according to most match equity charts, leaves him with about a 10% chance of winning. If White takes and is wrong, he will have lost the match, thus costing himself 10% equity. If he takes and is right, he wins four points (since he obviously will redouble immediately) and ties the match at 9-all. This gives him 50% match equity and a gain of 40%. White's take decision, therefore, is dependent upon whether or not he has at least 4 to 1 winning chances playing this position out to the finish.

Can White win this position one time in five? Who can be sure? In a straight race, the answer is definitely *no*, but his improved chances from leaving a blot, getting hit, and picking up the second man may swing the odds. My estimate was that White was worse than a 4 to 1 underdog; therefore his correct action would be to pass if doubled. Since I obviously wasn't playing for the gammon, it certainly appeared correct for me to double.

As I was reaching for the cube, a thought struck me. If Perry were planning to pass, it wouldn't matter if I waited a few rolls. But what if he were planning to take? If I doubled now, it wouldn't matter to him if he got gammoned. Consequently, he would have the option of breaking his board immediately and giving me the early shot in an effort to pick up both men. I have

no idea if this would even be his correct play. However, there was no reason to give him this option. If I didn't double now, he would never leave a blot until he had taken a man off, since he would be risking a very costly gammon. Therefore, my correct strategy must be to wait until White had brought all his men in and is positioned to bear off. At that point, since White won't be gammoned, I should double. In my opinion, White should still pass; but if he takes, he now can no longer leave the early shot.

So, I waited until he brought his men in, and then doubled. Rightly or wrongly, Perry chose to take and redouble. I went on to win the game and match. Kent Goulding, who was watching, asked me, "What are you waiting for? For him to get off the gammon?"

When I answered "Yes!" he looked at me incredulously. After all, how can you gammon someone with a closed board when you have only two checkers left? A little analysis shows that the gammon possibility really is a consideration, for it limits White's choice of strategies.

So we actually have a situation where it is correct not to double even though you think your opponent should pass and you are not playing for a gammon. In utopia, this cannot happen—if it were correct for Perry to pass, he would have done so, and it wouldn't matter when I doubled. However, since I could not be sure that my assessment of the position was correct, it couldn't hurt to wait in case I was wrong. Δ

Pablo and Father De Niro

by Duane Jensen

You've probably asked yourself, "Why don't people play backgammon in Venezuela?" The answer is a part of South America's history from centuries ago. In 1650, a priest named Father De Niro was sent to South America. His "mission" was to rid the continent of the evil dice games overly popular among young people. Father De Niro successfully eliminated *Parcheesi* from Peru, *Cootie* from Columbia, and *Yahtzee* from the Yucatan Peninsula.

Eventually Father De Niro reached the Venezuelan village of Barpunto where he found a young lad named Pablo teaching backgammon to his friends. The priest said, "My son, if you continue to play that evil game, you will go blind. If you play backgammon, you cannot ascend the stairway to Heaven. You must destroy that game!"

"I will do whatever you command," Pablo said obediently. Pablo burned the backgammon board. As additional



penance, the Father told Pablo to destroy the large stone doubling cube by climbing to the top of Angel Falls and dropping the cube onto the rocks below. It took Pablo two days to make the difficult 3,200 foot climb. At the top, Pablo extended his arm and released the stone doubling cube. To his horror, the instant he dropped it, Pablo noticed Father De Niro slumbering 3,200 feet directly below the falling object.

Pablo knew that bouncing a doubling cube off the head of a priest was not the first step on the stairway to Heaven. The only supplies he had with him were a whistle, matches, a candle, a ball of twine, a mirror, a loaf of bread and his pet parrot José. What should Pablo do?

SOLUTION

The best thing for Pablo to do is DO NOTHING. Free-falling objects, like the doubling cube, fall in a vertical line only at the North and South Poles. Away from the Poles, the revolving earth causes objects to fall slightly east of the drop point. If dropped 3,200 feet directly above the head of Father De Niro, the doubling cube would land a couple feet east of the Father, leaving him unharmed.