

SHADES OF GRAY

A RULES AND RULINGS COLUMN

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LEGAL MOVES

Dear Danny: We play "legal moves" in our *Chouette*: any player has the right to correct an illegal move. It usually works out very well. But the other day while in the *Box*, I made an illegal move, and the Captain rolled his dice before a *Crew* member drew attention to it.

The *Crew* member said that he still should have the right to demand the correction of my illegal move (which had been to my own benefit), else the Captain could collude with the *Box* against the *Crew*. What do you think? —Legal Egil

DEAR EGIL: The *Crew* member is Kroghing up the wrong tree. It's far more effective for the Captain to collude with the *Box* in less obvious ways, by overlooking combination shots, creating stacks, burying checkers and making other bad plays. But don't get me started on collusion in *chouettes*.

In a game like backgammon, where each play depends on the current position and therefore the moves that produced the current position, a statute of limitations on the cor-

rection of errors is a must. In backgammon, that statute tolls with the next action of an opponent, whether a roll or a cube-turn.

The right to correct (or demand correction of) an illegal move must expire after the next dice roll, lest the illegal move be corrected with benefit of foreknowledge of that roll. Also, if delayed corrections were permitted, a player would have an incentive to delay his decision whether to "notice" and draw attention to an opponent's illegal move, depending on his own roll: for example, if an opponent advanced a checker one too far, to where it could be hit with 4s instead of 5s, a player might wait to see whether he rolled a 4 or a 5 before deciding whether to "notice" the opponent's illegal move.

It is easy to determine whether a move is illegal, but hard, often impossible, to determine whether a player has noticed the illegality of the move. Therefore no rule should require anyone to notice an illegal move, and such a requirement would be unenforceable anyway. An illegal move may be condoned inadvertently, so condonement must always remain an option for the opponent, even after attention is drawn to the infraction. Else a player would have an incentive to move illegally, for most illegal moves stem from wishful thinking (or seeing) and therefore benefit the mover. The risk that an occasional illegal move benefiting an opponent will be condoned must remain as an incentive for

players to take care to move legally. That is why "Legal Moves" is a terrible idea.

An "idea" is all it is, not a workable rule, which may explain why thoughtful framers of backgammon rules have not incorporated it. As such, "Legal Moves" reminds me of the many "Propositions" that have plagued California during the last three decades. Many, if not most, are poorly formulated and have consequences unforeseen by, and adverse to the interests of, the majorities that voted for them. Lawyers have been derided since Shakespeare's time, and politicians have been derided in our own era. I, for one, advocate a republican form of government, in which legislatures containing substantial numbers of lawyers, formulate and debate, amend and refine laws to avoid unintended adverse consequences and provide adequate means of enforcement. Likewise in backgammon, where uniform laws should govern and no players should be able to impose their own special rules, such as vaguely formulated "Legal Moves," upon any others. —Yours, Danny. Δ

Have you ever been involved in a questionable ruling? Get Danny Kleinman's opinion. Write to: Shades of Gray; c/o CHICAGO POINT; 3940 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. 504; Chicago, IL 60659-3155 or e-mail: bg@chicagopoint.com.



2004 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 31 JAN.

Bob Zavoral	3.36	Carter Mattig	1.44	Lucky Nelson	0.72
Bob Steen	2.40	Val Zimmnicki	1.40	Tim Mabee	0.72
Mike Sutton	2.28	Roger Hickman	1.36	Gary Kay	0.72
Phil Simborg	2.16	Bill Keefe	1.36	David Rockwell	0.72
Phyllis Smolinski	1.92	Alice Kay	1.20	Tak Morioka	0.72
Herb Roman	1.92	Paul Baraz	1.08	Mark Phillips	0.56
Norma Shyer	1.80	Joann Feinstein	1.08	Royal Robinson	0.56
Mark Murray	1.60	Barbara Levinson	1.04	Wayne Wiest	0.56
Joe Wollick	1.56	Howard Ring	0.96	John O'Connor	0.40

BOB ZAVORAL was a finalist in three out of the four January tournaments to grab the early lead in the 2004 BPC points race. Bob Steen and Mike Sutton placed second and third respectively.

If you finish in the top 20 for 2004, you will be entered in a drawing for over \$300 worth of valuable merchandise. The higher you finish, the better your winning chances. Individual awards: 1st—Trophy + \$150, 2nd—\$100, 3rd—\$50. 1st through 20th—one ounce solid silver dollar. 1st through 6th—Invitation to participate on the Chicago Bar Point Club team in the 2005 Illinois State Challenge Cup.



ILLINOIS ACTION



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Tuesday, 6:00 P.M. at the Clarion Hotel, 5615 N. Cumberland Ave., Chicago; 773/693-5800.

Sunday Bimonthly, 12:00 NOON at Champs Sports Bar, 17 W. 517 Roosevelt Rd., Oakbrook Terrace; 630/691-1888.

PUB CLUB: Tourn. Mon., 7:00 P.M. at Danny's Grill and Bar, 345 W. North Ave., Villa Park. Joe Wollick (847/942-2068).

BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BACKGAMMON CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 6:30 P.M. at Ride The Nine, 503 N. Prospect, Bloomington. Michael Flohr (309/662-7967).

SANGAMON VALLEY BACKGAMMON ASSOC.: Tournaments Wed., 6:30 P.M. at Brewhaus, 617 E. Washington, Springfield. Randy Armstrong (217/528-0117).

WINNETKABG CLUB: Tournaments Wednesday, 7:00 P.M. at 620 Lincoln, Winnetka. Trudie Chibnik (847/446-0537).

PEORIABACKGAMMON CLUB: Tourn. Thurs., 6:30 P.M. at Peoria Pizza Works, 3921 Prospect, Peoria. Ed Zell (309/674-0557).