

2007 midwest backgammon championships

STEVE BROWN 'PIRATES' THE MIDWEST

Howard Markowitz wins Masters

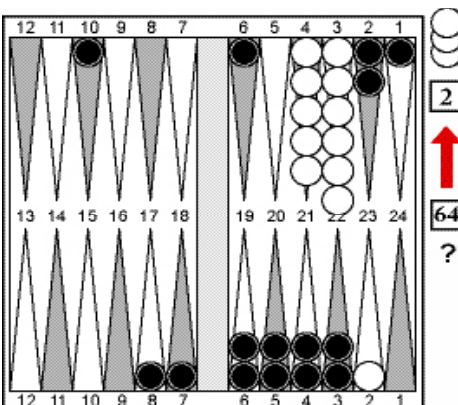
Trailing John Jennings (IL) in the 15-point MBC finals 2–10, Steve Brown (MN) became a pirate, pillaging his opponent for 15 straight points to become the 24th Midwest Backgammon Champion. The pirate-themed event, held 23–25 March at the Wyndham Lisle Hotel drew 200+ attendance including 188 in the Main and Children's Tourney. A record \$5,700 was raised for Anti-Cruelty Society animals.



Steve Brown (L) receives his pirate trophy as runner-up John Jennings looks on.

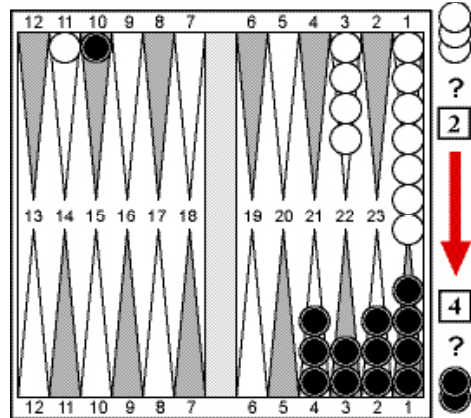
Jennings appeared unstoppable in the first six games winning a 4-cube and a doubled gammon en route to a 10–2 advantage. Two games later, Steve aggressively doubled here [all positions and write-up courtesy of Dana Nazarian]:

Steve Brown (Black) trails John Jennings (White), 6–10 to 15. **BLACK CUBE ACTION(S)?**



It was technically a bad double, but some people might drop it. Later in the same game, John arrived at this position on roll:

Steve Brown (Black) trails John Jennings (White), 6–10 to 15. **WHITE RECUBE ACTION(S)?** Then **WHITE TO PLAY 2-1.**



The correct cube action is redouble/drop. John blundered by rolling on and



MBC Staff from left: "Anchor" Amy Trudeau, "Poopdeck" Peter Kalba, Robin "The Red" Horton, "Barnacle Bill" Davis (director), "Deadeye" Dru Heggen, "PowderMonkey" Mark King.

tossed a 2-1. The correct play is to hit and play 3/1 yielding only three vs. six shots. But John moved up to the 8-point, then Steve hit with 6-2 and brought the pivotal game home to trail only 8–10.

[Continued on page 5]

THE EXTRA LINDSAY/BACKGAMMON SHOT



Back in June 2004, Lindsay Lohan did a photo shoot for Vanity Fair. They took two pictures of her with a backgammon theme. Here's the one that was never published.

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

Bill Davis

3940 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue 504
Chicago, IL 60659-3155

Tel: 773/583-6464 ♦ Fax: 773/583-3264

E-mail: bg@chicagopoint.com

www.chicagopoint.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Carol Joy Cole (MI)	Danny Kleinman (CA)
Mary Hickey (OH)	John O'Hagan (IN)
Jake Jacobs (IL)	Steve Sax (CA)
Duane Jensen (MN)	Phil Simborg (IL)
Neil Kazaross (IL)	Kit Woolsey (CA)

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LETTERS

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3940 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. 504
Chicago, IL 60659-3155

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REMEMBERING HARVEY HUIE

Another backgammon player leaves us: Harvey Huie. I enjoyed my time with Harvey and will miss him.—*Yamin Yamin, Wilmette, Illinois*

Thank you for printing Malcolm's beautiful article about Harvey Huie last month. I am deeply affected by the loss of Harvey, a sweet man and a wonderful friend.—*Nack Ballard, Richmond, California*

MIDWEST LETTERS

Thank you for another great Midwest Championships. Everything was perfect and it is clear the thoughtful detail you put into this effort. And being the very proud parent of the Children's Tournament champ [*Lyle Rubin*] is a very special experience for both David and I.

I hope you noticed the great time all of the backgammon children had as they

[Continued on page 3]

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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26	27	28	29	30
31				

by Carol Joy Cole
810/232-9731
cjc@flintbg.com

*Denotes new or revised listing

NATIONAL

American Backgammon Tour events underlined.

Apr 7	Springfield Series, LAP's Sports Bar, Springfield, Illinois	217/622-9447
Apr 8	South Florida Monthly, Northridge Raw Bar, Fort Lauderdale, Florida	954/564-0340
Apr 14	Backgammon By the Bay, Peking Express, Berkeley, California	831/261-4583
Apr 14	Northwest Indiana Club Monthly, VFW Hall, Porter, Indiana	219/785-2082
Apr 14	Tax Refund Classic, Dugout Sports Bar & Grill, Houston, Texas	281/687-1673
Apr 15*	New York Monthly, Midtown BG & Chess Club, New York, New York	212/222-7177
Apr 13-15	13th Ohio State Championships, Airport Marriott Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio	330/268-4610
Apr 19*	Third Thursday Bonus (Southeast), Days Inn, Flint, Michigan	810/232-9731
Apr 21*	Phoenix Free Monthly-USBL, Glendale Gaslight Inn, Glendale, Arizona	602/296-4307
Apr 21*	Springfield Series Finale, LAP's Sports Bar, Springfield, Illinois	217/622-9447
Apr 22*	Colorado Monthly, La Loma Restaurant, Denver, Colorado	303/791-0271
Apr 22*	New England Monthly, Dockside Restaurant, Malden, Massachusetts	718/324-0892
Apr 28*	Backgammon By the Bay, Britannia Arms, Cupertino, California	831/261-4583
Apr 29*	Dayton Monthly Free Roll-USBL, Barnes & Noble, Beavercreek, Ohio	937/890-2536
May 4-6	1st Southeast Championships, Holiday Inn Dunwoody, Atlanta, Georgia	678/982-3203
May 5*	Kansas City Club Monthly, Harpo's, Kansas City, Missouri	816/916-6599
May 6*	New York Monthly, Midtown BG & Chess Club, New York, New York	212/222-7177
May 6*	Ohio State Club Monthly, Spaghetti Warehouse, Akron, Ohio	330/268-4610
May 7*	Arizona Club Monthly, Rosie McCaffrey's Irish Pub, Phoenix, Arizona	602/279-0215
May 12*	Backgammon By the Bay, Peking Express, Berkeley, California	831/261-4583
May 12*	Mother's Day Open, Dugout Sports Bar & Grill, Houston, Texas	281/687-1673
May 12*	Northwest Indiana Club Monthly, VFW Hall, Porter, Indiana	219/785-2082
May 13*	Miami Valley Club Monthly, U. of Dayton Kennedy Union, Dayton, Ohio	937/864-1748
May 13*	South Florida Monthly, Northridge Raw Bar, Fort Lauderdale, Florida	954/564-0340
May 23-27	23rd Nevada State Tournament, Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada	702/893-6025
Jun 3	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Ramada Plaza, Chicago, Illinois	773/583-6464
Jun 8-10	Los Angeles Open, Airtel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys, California	818/901-0464
Jul 4*	Michigan Summer Warm-Up, Sheraton Hotel, Novi, Michigan	810/232-9731
Jul 5-8	32nd Michigan Summer Championships, Sheraton, Novi, Michigan	810/232-9731
Aug 3-5	Thousand Islands Tournament, Pine Tree Point, Alexandria Bay, New York	585/396-0969
Aug 16-19	Florida State Championship, Marriott North, Fort Lauderdale, Florida	954/564-0340
Aug 31-Sep 3	Wisconsin State Championships, Radisson Hotel, Madison, Wisconsin	608/516-9109
Sep 28-30	Colorado State Championships, Hilton Hotel, Denver, Colorado	720/979-3620
Oct 19-21	Illinois State Championships, Holiday Inn City-Centre, Peoria, Illinois	309/224-9579
Nov 30-Dec 2	California State Championship, Airtel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys, California	818/901-0464

OUTSIDE USA

Apr 5-9	EBGT: TrueMoneygames Nordic Open, Marienlyst Hotel, Helsingør, Denmark	453336-3601
Apr 6-9*	Cotswold Easter Pro-Am Doubles, Bear of Rodborough, Stroud, England	447988-237997
Apr 13-15*	3rd Annual Backgammon X, Spread Eagle, Croydon, England	447737-335556
Apr 18-22	PGT: 8th Paris Master & Open, Lutetia Hotel, Paris, France	331-47645938
Apr 27-29	Gammonitis Barnett Tournament, Barnett Hill, Guildford, England	441634-821107
Apr 28-May 1	7th City of Jesolo Tournament, Lido di Jesolo, Venice, Italy	393283-380725
May 5-6	County Cups Trophy, Hilton Hotel, Coventry, England	441522-888676
May 10-13	PGT: Lyon Open, Casino le Lyon Vert, Lyon, France	331-4764-5938
May 11-13	19th WBF European Championship & 6th Velden Open, Velden, Austria	390331-923537
May 16-20	EBGT: 2nd Portuguese Open & Grand Prix d'Estoril, near Lisbon, Portugal	491715-422222
May 17-20*	12th Kaiserbrunnen-Cup, Hotel Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	495272-6050
May 25-27*	Gammonitis Woodside, Woodside, Kenilworth, England	441634-821107
May 25-27*	Kalakukko Kuopio Open, BG Suomi, Kuopio, Finland	358407-550492
May 25-28*	3rd Aix-les-Bains Open, Casino Grand Cercle, Aix-les-Bains, France	336-60639726
May 25-28	Xciting-Cup, Mercure Hotel, Köln/Cologne, Germany	49711-486190
Jun 1-3	Austrian Masters Finale, Cafe Heine, Vienna, Austria	436642-404285
Jun 2-3	Hilton Trophy, Hilton Hotel, Coventry, England	441522-888676
Jun 7-10	Braunlage-Harz-Cup, Hotel Hohenzollern, Braunlage, Germany	49521-64314
Jun 7-10*	PGT: Pasino de Saint Amel Tournament, Saint Amand-les-Eaux, France	3314764-5938
Jun 14-21*	Neil Davidson's 2007 Festival of Backgammon, Zakynthos, Greece	447798-614800
Jun 21-28*	6th Zakynthos Festival of BG & Poker, Peligoni Club, Zakynthos, Greece	441819-773227
Jun 30-Jul 1	Keren Di Bona Memorial, Hilton Hotel, Coventry, England	441522-888676
Jul 9-15	32nd World Championship, Fairmont Hotel, Monte Carlo, Monaco	USA: 954/527-4033
Jul 13-15*	Festival of Games 4th Czech Open, CEZ, Pardubice, Czech Republic	420466-535200
Jul 17-22	PGT: Nations Cup & Riviera 5, Palm Beach Casino, Cannes, France	331-4764-5938
Jul 28-29*	12th Liverpool Open, Liverpool Bridge Club, Liverpool, England	441514-283082
Aug 11-12*	Studio Anne Carlton Trophy, Hilton Hotel, Coventry, England	441522-888676

LETTERS...

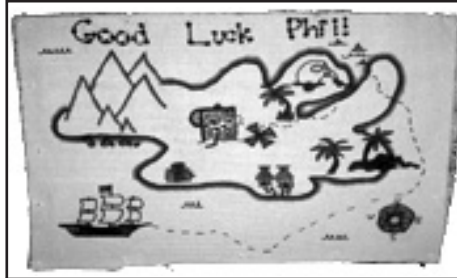
[Continued from page 2]

bonded early on Friday evening and hung out together most of the weekend. And to see them all crowd around the Children's finals match (just like the adults like to do) was a very special moment. We already look forward to next year's MBC.—*Jolie Rubin, Skokie, Illinois*

Please tell Jena Jennings' kids that the Treasure Map they made for me just in time for the pirate-themed Midwest Championships has been a real treasure. It is now a permanent part of my backgammon board, it is my computer screensaver, and I am having a copy made into a print to go on my office wall.

I only have one problem. I have gone round and round in circles trying to follow the instructions on the map and I have not found any treasure! In fact, going round

and round has been making me very dizzy. Any advice?—*Phil Simborg, Chicago, Illinois*



Phil Simborg's good luck treasure map.

THREE IN A ROW

Playing backgammon against my opponent the other day, he managed to roll double 6s three times in a row. What are the odds of this happening?—*Dr. Lee Hoge, Saratoga Springs, New York*

What you speak of should happen one time in 36x36x36 occurrences, or 46655-to-1 . .

. unless your opponent is a dice mechanic in which case the odds drop dramatically.—*Ed.*

BPC LATE MATCH POLICY

I understand that the current policy at weekly Chicago Bar Point Club tournaments is that one player can force another to play the finals (rather than split) if it is before midnight. Can this be adjusted to an earlier time? My day starts at 6:00 a.m. in the morning. It's no fun to be required to start a match at 11:45 p.m. (for example) and maybe get stuck at the club until after 1:00 a.m.—*Oleg Raygorodsky, Vernon Hills, Illinois*

We agree with you, Oleg. Effective April 2007, if one player prefers to split a regular BPC weekly finals (either main flight or consolation) and the time is after 11:15 P.M., his request will be honored. But during the last month of the year, the split request time will be extended to 11:45 P.M.—*Ed.*

AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR ★ 2007

Compiled through 25 March 2007 after 3 tournaments
(Upcoming events: Ohio State, 1st Southeast Championships)

Dana Nazarian	24.32	Linda MacLean	6.08	Bill Davis	4.33	Roz Ferris	2.15
Steve Brown	21.33	Gregg Cattanach	6.08	Alfred Mamlet	4.33	Samra Hadden	2.15
Paul Weaver	17.33	Christopher Yep	6.08	Dave Settles	4.30	Mike Freeman	1.63
David Todd	16.49	Beth Raby	5.84	Michael Valliere	4.30	Carol Leatherman	1.56
Ed O'Laughlin	14.75	Mark Dean	5.41	Doug Roberts	3.04	Ryan Hast	1.56
Fred Kalantari	12.16	Matt Reklaitis	5.33	Arlene Austin	2.92	Gil Evans	1.46
Phyllis Shapiro	11.68	Vadim Musaeayan	5.33	Vic Morawski	2.92	Bill Schragel	1.15
Howard Markowitz	10.67	Yury Millman	5.33	Bud Bowers	2.92	Joe Szwedo	1.15
John Jennings	10.67	Paul Franks	5.33	J.A. Miller	2.92	Ron Cohen	0.81
Kieth Hvamstad	10.67	Matt Cohn-Geier	5.33	Jesse Eaton	2.67	Almon Hall	0.81
Terry Leahy	8.89	Scott Johnston	5.33	Harold Roberson	2.67	Cheryl Holahan	0.78
Stick Rice	8.67	Rory Pascar	4.44	Glenn Ramsey	2.67	Tim Johnson	0.58
Paul Strasberg	8.60	Herb Roman	4.44	Joe Sylvester	2.22	Glen Arnold	0.58
Adam Bennett	8.51	Ray Fogerlund	4.33				

TRUEMONEYGAMES/SNOWIE INFO

Please note that TrueMoneygames.com currently cannot accept American players. We are presently looking into ways how to improve the situation. Also, there has been a network and management change in TrueMoneygames; we at Snowie will no longer be involved there anymore.

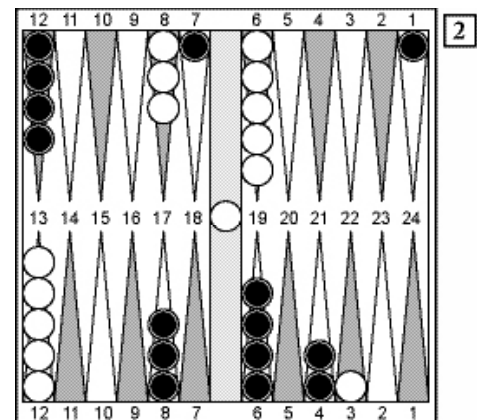
Finally, Snowie does work on the new Vista operating system, however there have been some reported problems if you aren't logged in as "administrator."—*Pierre Eggar, Snowie Group, Morges, Switzerland Δ*

your move

PROBLEM #326

to be analyzed by Kit Woolsey

2007 BG on Board 11-point Caribbean Jackpot. Black (Bill Davis) leads White (Nora Luna Righter), 5 to 1. **BLACK TO PLAY 2-2.**



CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 2007 PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 31 MARCH

David Rockwell	10.24	Bob Steen	3.28	Georgina Flanagan	1.92	Paul Franks	0.72
Phil Simborg	7.04	Tak Morioka	3.20	Wayne Wiest	1.68	Steve Klene	0.72
Herb Roman	6.88	Willis Elias	3.04	Alice Kay	1.64	Glenn Martells	0.72
Michael Ginat	5.76	Albert Jakobashvili	2.88	Adrian Rios	1.60	Ron Wagner	0.64
Oleg Raygorodsky	5.12	Nora Luna Righter	2.80	Kendra Wesley	1.32	Sargon Benjamin	0.56
Bill Keefe	4.88	Mike Pufpaf	2.60	Dan Simborg	1.28	James Roston	0.56
Rory Pascar	4.24	Dave Settles	2.40	Denise McDermott	1.16	Jerry Brooks	0.48
Roger Hickman	4.20	Lucky Nelson	2.24	Peter Kalba	1.12	Tim Stoddard	0.48
Bill Davis	4.04	Royal Robinson	2.24	Paul Baraz	0.96	Christopher Shanova	0.48
Mike Sutton	4.00	Tim Mabee	2.16	Les Moshinsky	0.96	Eric Johnson	0.48
Steve Klesker	3.60	Larry Goldstein	2.08	Dick Nelson	0.84	Jordan Sanders	0.40
Carter Mattig	3.60	Shaw Dogan	1.92	Linda Rockwell	0.84	Wendy Kaplan	0.32
Mike Wolock	3.60	Bill Bartholomay	1.92	Felix Yen	0.80	Mark Murray	0.32
Bob Zavoral	3.36						

MICHAEL WOLOCK is back, baby. Mike earned just enough points to capture March honors with 2.88. Bill Davis (2.84) finished second and Roger Hickman placed third with 2.76.

DEAR MISS LONELYBLOTS



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“HUSTLING” THE HUSTLER

Dear Miss Lonelyblots: A few hours a week of small stakes hustling on the internet are proving to be mildly profitable. But most of the weak players like to limit their loss to four times the unit stake, say \$5 a point with a maximum loss of \$20. I'm confused about how to adjust my checker play and doubling for this sort of game. For example, I think positions which are redouble/pass in a regular game can be no double if I have reasonable gammon prospects. Can you help me to take a bit more from my pigeons? —Ruthless Ray

DEAR PIGEONS: Some ruthless hustler named Ray wants to retrieve more of his money from you. Yes, my friends, that's how he views the money in your pockets and purses, wallets and bank accounts—as *his* money that is temporarily in your custody.

And he has the gall to enlist my help! Why should I help him instead of you?

So here is my advice to you. Refuse Ray's offer to play for \$5 per point (even with a 4-point limit per game) and counter with an offer to play “no-limit backgammon” for \$1 per point. Otherwise you shall have to learn new and complicated doubling and redoubling strategies—strategies that Ray has probably mastered already if he has any experience playing tournament matches.

Other than the need (created by the Jacoby Rule) to make initial doubles for gammons and backgammons to count, “four-point limit backgammon” is nearly the same as match play with the score tied and each side needing four points, e.g. a 5-5 score in a 9-point match. After you have taken Ray's initial double, you can be very quick to redouble him when you obtain an advantage, as the cube will be of no further use to him once it reaches 4.

You can even redouble when you are an underdog, so long as you are the plain-game favorite: that is, so long as you expect to win most of the games that are *not* gammons, for the increase in the cube from 2 to 4 has no effect on the games that

end in gammons.

By the same token, you should be slow to double Ray initially, for ownership of the cube *at 2* is very powerful. If your position collapses later, he will just sit on that 2-cube and play for a gammon if he develops a gammon threat, or redouble aggressively in a non-gammonish position. Just wait for Ray to double you. And he will, pigeons, he will, as he is not content to eke out a living one point at a time.

Here's another suggestion. If you are willing to study the complexities of match play—especially cube handling—you can limit your financial liability by playing matches instead of individual games. Instead of playing “four-point limit backgammon” for a couple of hours at \$5 per point, play an 11-point match for \$20. You'll have less financial risk but just as much excitement and fun—*Miss Lonelyblots* Δ

Do you have a backgammon-related question for Miss Lonelyblots involving people problems, game etiquette or the play itself? Write: Dear Miss Lonelyblots, c/o CHICAGO POINT, 3940 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. 504; Chicago, IL 60659-3155 or e-mail bg@chicagopoint.com.

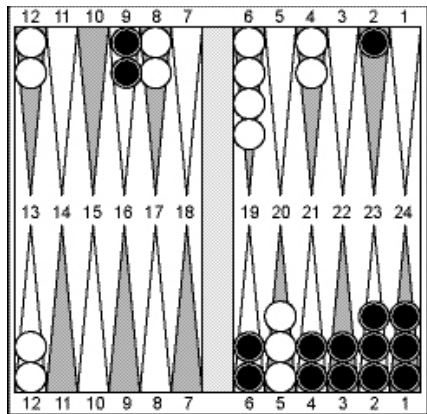
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STEVE BROWN...

[Continued from page 1]

The plundering continued and now ahead 12-10, Steve faced a tricky 4-2 play:

Steve Brown (Black) leads John Jennings (White), 12 to 10 to 15. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-2.**



As Dana put it, "Steve broke his 6-point. I didn't see how this could be right, but in fact it was. The idea is to keep your anchor in the outfield and use your other straggler as a spare waiting for a double to safely advance the anchor." Steve's strategy paid off and he was eventually able to bring the game home.

From there, it was just a matter of Steve winning one more game. This completed a 15 point title run and an overall expert-level match for both players. (The Snowie analysis showed that Steve played 4.947 and John played 5.684.)

GRAND CRYSTAL BEAVER

Each year, the MBC Masters event brings together 16 outstanding players competing for the Swarovski Grand Crystal Beaver trophy. This year saw the master of Masters events, Nevada director Howard Markowitz up against last year's ABT third place finisher, Ken Fischer of California.



Howard Markowitz winning yet another Master's event. Runner-up Ken Fischer's dice gave him no chance.

The 11-point match was one-sided with Howard leaping out to a 10-0 lead. The

only position that could be considered a big swing was at 4-0. Fischer had a 2-cube with one checker on Howard's 24-point. Howard was down to just three checkers on his deuce point. So if Howard rolled a non-doublet ace, Ken would get a double shot with a chance to save the gammon and even win the game. In fact, Howard threw a double to win a 6 point BG. He went on to win handily 11-2.

OTHER EVENTS

Congratulations to Terry Leahy (IL) who bested Herb Roman (IL) in the overflow Open tournament. Kieth Hvamstad (MN) defeated Scott Johnston (IN) 13-9 in the Advanced Division, and Mark Dean (PA) beat Illinoisan Joe Szwedo. That's two in a row for Mark who in February won the Pittsburgh Novice event. The Open Doubles victors are Mark Donaldson (MN) & Elayne Feinstein (FL). The Limited Doubles went to Gary Fishman (FL) and Beth Raby (VA).



More winners from left: \$125 Open winner Terry Leahy, Advanced champ Kieth Hvamstad, Limited winner Mark Dean.

And in the 17 player Children's Tournament, Lyle Rubin defended his title over Lizzy Ring (both local players) to win an iPod Video. The Kid's Consolation was captured by Jonathan Munitz (NY) over Elana Epstein (IL). It's great having youth involved in the MBC and this is a tradition that will definitely be continued.



Defending Champ Lyle Rubin and Lizzy Ring have an audience for the Children's Tourney finals.



Children's Consolation winner Jonathan Munitz with runner-up Elana Epstein.

FUN SIDE EVENTS

It wouldn't be a Midwest Championships without childish merriment. David Taniguchi earned an engraved iPod Shuffle and a place in the "Hog of Fame" by displaying Pig Rolling prowess. Jeb Horton romped to victory in the Jolly Roger Beanbag Toss (worth \$100), and Lisa Rockwell avoided popping up the Pirate to win a \$100 *Lettuce Entertain You* restaurant gift certificate.



David Taniguchi rolled his porkers with great flair to take the Pig-Rolling title.

TAKI TREASURE TOURNNEY

16 players participated for a Taki Retro Bakelite board in the Taki Treasure Tourney. The game was important, but it was more important to get to Taki Treasure Island to win the set. Patty Geoffroy did just that taking home the masterpiece. \$1600 was raised for charity on this board alone!



Patty Geoffroy with her Taki-Bakelite.

CALCUTTA AUCTION

Peter Kalba generated a record Calcutta

[Continued on page 7]

Backgammon:



A Rambling Essay with Pictures by Duane Jensen

Evan Diamond stood at the airline check-in counter in Flint, Michigan, and Evan was not happy. He glared at the pretty girl across the counter. She returned his glare with a professional smile and explained to him again that he could not board his plane because it had not arrived. Evan continued to glare at her to show his displeasure, but it was obvious nothing could be done. We knew it would be a long time before each of us arrived home following the 1988 Michigan Summer Championships.

Tom Costigan came up to Evan. "The bar's open. How about a chouette?"

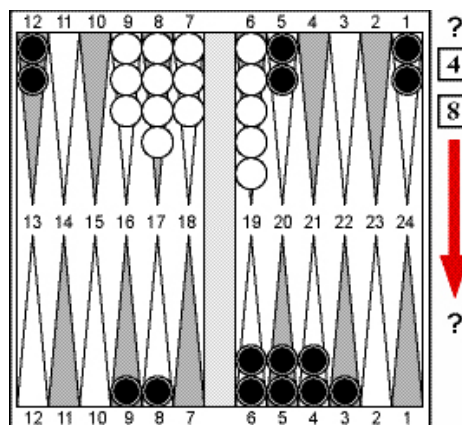
Evan's eyes lit up as he looked at me, then back at Tom. "Did you say, Chouette?" The three of us immediately headed for the nearby bar.

Evan Diamond always has something to say in a chouette so it was bound to be entertaining. In tournament play, if he gets close to the money round, he becomes a different animal. I've thought of him as the "Massachusetts Hedgehog." He will usually try to hedge with his opponent. If that doesn't work, I've seen him solicit side bets from spectators on individual rolls near the end of a match. If he's close to the prize, he wants to get a piece of it no matter how small.

Tom Costigan has had many successful tournaments, but he has never taken himself seriously as a backgammon player. He has way too much fun playing the game. Most of his concentration is on chess, the game he thrived at in high school. The three of us began the small chouette, in the small bar, in the small airport, in the small town, waiting for a big airplane to come

and take us away. In one of the games Tom recubed Evan to 16 and me to 8.

Money game. Tom Costigan (White) holds a 4- and 8-cube. **WHITE ON ROLL. RECUBE ACTION(S)?**



I didn't think the recube was correct. I took, Evan dropped, managing his winnings like a banker. I recorded the position hoping some day that backgammon software would be created to help me roll out the position. Years later I confirmed that the position was no redouble/take (720 3-ply, precise Snowie rollouts show it to be a 0.095 near blunder to recube), but I lost the game barely avoiding the gammon.

The pretty girl found us in the bar and said that our plane had arrived. How long had we played? One hour? Two hours? I have no idea because backgammon is such an efficient way to pass the time. Not everyone embraces backgammon as such a glorious way to pass the time.



Television producer Don Hewitt.

Larry King was interviewing Don Hewitt, the creator and producer of the long-running CBS show *Sixty Minutes*. King asked him about rumors that CBS executives wanted to replace him with a younger man. Hewitt said

he preferred to remain with CBS, and he'd already had two other offers. He had no intention of retiring. "I'm not going to go play backgammon and I'm not going to go fishing. I'm not going to die playing backgammon or even scrabble," Hewitt said.

It was the way he said it that caught my attention. Hewitt said the word backgammon with disdain as though it was something he found on the bottom of his shoe. To Hewitt, backgammon was played by

those whose useful lives were over. They were just killing time, watching their days dwindle away. Most people wouldn't look at backgammon with such a biased eye, but is there truth in the way Don Hewitt feels about backgammon? Is backgammon a worthy end in itself or is it merely a time killer or a shallow preliminary to a main event?

I must admit that backgammon has been a popular pastime for years aboard ships where sailors are trapped with tons of idle time. Sailors sometimes draw a backgammon board on the floor at their stations. These sailors are playing aboard the USS Liberty.



Backgammon aboard the USS Liberty.

The Swedish warship *Vasa* sank in 1628 almost immediately after leaving on its first voyage. A backgammon board was found aboard when the ship was recovered and restored 50 years ago. A backgammon board would have been useful because large warships like the *Vasa* were often used in blockades that might last for weeks or months. I think many casual players use backgammon as an effective way to kill time.



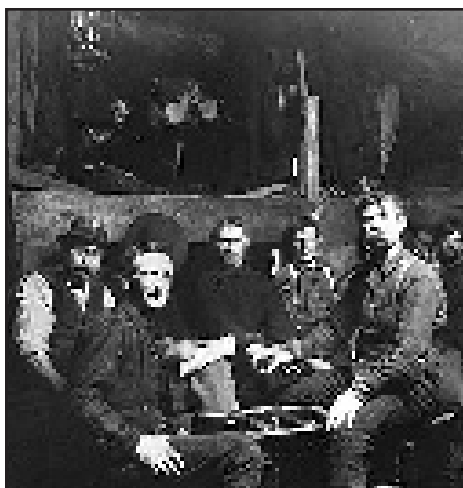
A model of the Swedish warship "Vasa," sunk on her maiden voyage in 1628.



Backgammon set found aboard the sunken *Vasa* in 1956.

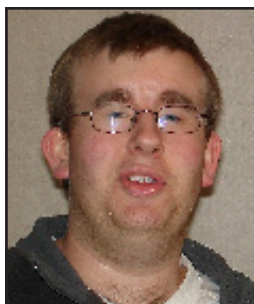
When I was a child, my grandfather Nels flipped over my checker board revealing a backgammon board. He asked if I wanted to play, but I declined. I can speculate where he learned to play backgammon. Nels left his home town of Drevja, Norway in 1909 when he was just 17 years old. He boarded the Lusitania and sailed to the United States. I thought it was romantic and courageous to immigrate and begin a new life in a strange country, but I learned later his true reason for leaving Norway. When a boy reached 18 years of age in Norway he was subject to conscription and would have to spend time in the military. Grandpa Nels left Norway to avoid the draft, not a courageous act but a very sensible one.

One of Nels' first jobs was as a lumberjack, logging the last of the white pine forests in Wisconsin. Lumberjacks had plenty of time to kill in the evenings in the fragrant bunkhouse waiting for the next day of logging to begin. Nels probably played some backgammon there like these dice-playing lumberjacks.



Backgammon in the bunkhouse, ca. 1900.

Many of the best bridge players from Minnesota like Joe Grue have played at the Bridge Center in south Minneapolis. In the wood-paneled basement of the Bridge Center, a small nucleus of backgammon players play in an economical chouette every day. Sometimes bridge players will descend into the basement to join in the chouette. They are at the Bridge Center to play bridge, but use backgammon as a



Minnesota bridge expert Joe Grue.

time killer until their bridge match begins. Bridge is the main event, backgammon merely an opening act.

Other people have a deeper involvement with backgammon. Once or twice a week they play in tournaments at their local clubs. Sometimes they travel to different cities or states to play in a national event. With all the expenses involved, this is not a moneymaking venture for most people. These people play for the social bonding and the competitive pleasures of tournament play. This is not just a time killing experience; these people love playing the game and especially love beating their friends.

There are different levels of commitment when playing backgammon. Some play to pass the time, others play for its social aspects, still others play the game with even greater intensity. I went to a friend's house for his Friday night chouette. Many hours later, one of the players lifted the window shade and said "Hey, the sun's up.

STEVE BROWN...

[Continued from page 5]

Auction of nearly \$22,000 meaning another \$2200 for the animals. Additionally, Butch and Mary Ann Meese donated every *Gammons of Chicago*, *Chicagoland Backgammon Newsletter*, and *Chicago Point* from 1979 to present. Battle of the Sexes champ



Gil Evans

Gil Evans (NH) and Howard Markowitz got into a bidding war with Gil's \$450 bid winning. He promptly came up, paid the \$450, then said "Auction them off again." That's class.

This time, Howard Markowitz's generous \$400 bid stood up meaning that the Meese's newsletter donation raised \$850 for the ACS.

In the group side event, director Bill Davis mowed down six contestants in "Simon Says." But it was the Wheel of Fortune puzzle that generated the biggest laugh. Four players had to guess letters (like the TV game show "Wheel of Fortune") in order to solve the puzzle: "It's Dr. Bob's dice prescription."

The correct answer was "Shake well before using." Despite Bill's repeated request for the audience to remain silent so that Adam Bennett (WI) would have a chance, the temptation was too much for Harvey Gillis (WA) who literally stood up and blurted out the answer ruining the puzzle! As a punishment, Harvey came up and gave Dr. Gene Mueller, president of the Anti-Cruelty Society a \$20 donation.

Let's order pizza!"

The Friday night chouette became the Friday-Saturday chouette, and eventually the weekend chouette, ending only because people had to go to work or school Monday morning. This gathering was not just for killing time or social bonding. This was a collection of backgammon addicts who had a passion for the game. The word "passion" is important. I put backgammon in with other of life's passions such as sex and chocolate. You wouldn't feel obliged to explain why you like sex or chocolate. You don't have to be an apologist for playing backgammon as well. For many of you, backgammon is not merely a pastime, it's a recreation that fulfills a need within you.

Never try to justify to others the hours you've spent over a backgammon board. Roll the dice and enjoy the game. I mean it . . . roll the dice! It's your roll. Don't just sit there holding your dice cup. Now you are wasting *my* time.—Duane Jensen Δ

When Dr. Mueller took the podium prior to the auction, he spoke directly to the guilty party saying, "You know, Harvey, this \$20 is just enough to have you neutered!"

THANKS

The list of thank-you's is deep, but we can't forget Barbara Levinson of "Barbara's Balloons" for decorating our room gratis; special donations by Arnold Zousmer (CA) and Bill Bartholomay; Dave Cramer and Tom Walthes who donated three sets of Cub tickets to auction off, as well as the many others who gave their time and money to help us raise a record \$5700 this year. That brings our all-time total up to \$48,100. Chicagoland's animals thank you!

RIDING INTO THE SUNSET

Look for us next year at the Wyndham Lisle Hotel February 29-March 2 for our 25th Midwest Championships: "Roll'em Cowboy!"—Bill Davis Δ

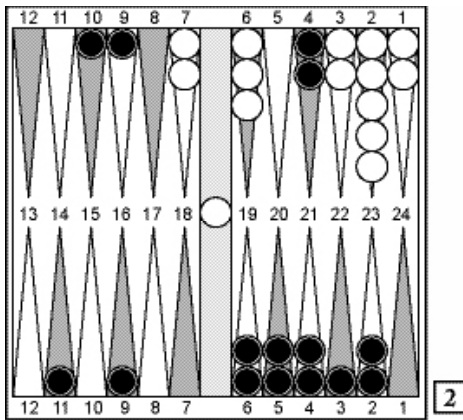
COMPLETE RESULTS ON PAGE 8



It may be "the end" of pirates, but look for an MBC Wild West theme in 2008.

**PROBLEM #325
ANALYZED**

by Dana Nazarian

11-point match. Black leads White 9 to 7. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-1.**

Black's facing a gut-wrenching decision. With a potential match-losing gammon loss lurking should Black wimp out and lift the blot on the 3-point or keep this vital point slotted? Thinking about all the variations in this game could promote the onset one gets when eating ice cream too fast. Have you ever toggled between a few different plays then suddenly and somewhat arbitrarily made one of them? Not a good idea here. Whenever possible, try analyzing the play analytically and thematically. If both point in the same direction you're well on your way to making the best play, and you'll almost never be making a huge mistake.

Black's Match Equity is 100% if he wins, 50% if he loses, and 0% if he loses a gammon. So each extra win trades off 1:1 with each extra gammon loss. Let's estimate how often Black get gammoned if he lifts the blot. If he lifts with something like 16/12, 3/2, I think Black is a slight favorite, winning maybe 60%. Of his 40% losses, since he's playing relatively safely, he probably doesn't get gammoned more than 25% of the time for an estimated total of $0.40 \times 0.25 = 10\%$ gammon losses.

What if Black leaves it slotted? Then there are a few obvious gammon loss scenarios:

Scenario 1: White hits & Black fans. This happens $(13/36) \times (16/36) = 16\%$ occurrence. In that case, Black probably get gammoned over half the time. Let's say 9% net.

Scenario 2: White hits & Black enters. This happens $(13/36) \times (20/36) = 20\%$ occurrence. If Black gets gammoned 20%

from there, that adds another 4% net.

Others: Let's add another 3% for various other scenarios. After all, when White misses, Black is not a lock to cover, and everything repeats.

So, I estimate 16% gammon losses when Black leaves the 3-point slotted. Could the slotting play result in more than 6% extra wins? I doubt it. Think about it. How often do top plays differ in game-winning chances by more than 6%? This estimate tells us that slotting must be wrong.

However, my scenarios used estimates based on big assumptions and those are prone to error. So let's look at the theme next. What are the relative strengths and weaknesses in the position? Black's main advantage is outfield control while Black's weakness is a huge race deficit. Conversely, White's advantage is the racing lead while her major weakness is inflexibility. Both players have decent inner boards. Which play best retains and exploits Black's advantages?

If Black leaves his 3-point slotted and gets hit, his main strength (outfield control) now becomes a major liability (juicy blots!). Meanwhile, we've just activated White's strengths; her decent inner board (Black's on the bar) and her race lead (she's now racing for home). Meanwhile her main weakness (inflexibility) is temporarily shunted since she's swiftly moving into the outfield instead of being primed. If Black leaves the 3-point slotted and isn't hit, he's gained a lot, but he's still not covering about one third of the time and the precarious situation repeats itself.

On the other hand, if Black lifts the blot, what has he lost? Not much. Just a small amount of flexibility by putting a "dilly" on his deuce point, but that checker still isn't completely out of play and he's retained all of his assets. There simply isn't any reason to panic here. There will likely be several rolls before the outcome of this game is settled so he shouldn't be in such a rush to conclude it. Black can comfortably make positional plays by owning the outfield and gradually moving his army around to either block White or to make his 3-point naturally. If Black is "forced" to attack White, he should do so at a more appropriate time in the future (e.g. when he has a lot more wood in the zone and less danger of a gammon loss when things go badly). For now, he should be concentrating on making the bar point or the 9-point which will often force White to strip and crunch. At that point, Black can plunder away with relative impunity. The theme here tells us to play positionally.

So both approaches tell us that Black should lift. In fact, leaving the 3-point slotted is a blunder. Rollouts on Snowie 4 and GNU are in close agreement even though Snowie 4 isn't even making checker plays to score. Even at DMP, lifting is only a tiny error. This underscores Black's huge positional advantage. After lifting, 16/12, 15/11, and 8/4 are all very close. I prefer 16/12 because it maximizes the chance to make the bar or the 9 point on the next shake. That's worth the extra 17-1 shot that Black leaves by a slight amount.

It's easy to get this problem wrong. But if you approach it in a few different ways, you're much more likely to come up with the winner.—Dana Nazarian Δ

2007 MIDWEST CHAMPIONSHIPS

CHAMPIONSHIP (64): 1-Steve Brown (MN), 2-John Jennings (IL), 3/4-Paul Franks (NV) / Yuri Millman (MN); 1C-Howard Markowitz (NV), 2C-Vadim Musælyan (NC); 1LC-Matt Reklaitis (MA)

ADVANCED (64): 1-Kieth Hvamstad (MN), 2-Scott Johnston (IN), 3/4-Glenn Ramsey (PA) / Harold Roberson (MN); 1C-Matt Cohn-Geier (WI), 2C-Jesse Eaton (MN); 1LC-Adam Bennett (WI)

LIMITED (23): 1-Mark Dean (PA), 2-Joe Szwedo (IL); 1C-Bill Schragel (IL), 2C-Glen Arnold (NE); 1LC-Tim Johnson (IL)

\$125 OPEN (20): 1-Terry Leahy (IL), 2-Herb Roman (IL); 1C-Rory Pascar (IL); 1LC-Joe Sylvester (MO)

CHILDREN'S TOURNAMENT (17): 1-Lyle Rubin (IL), 2-Lizzy Ring (IL); 1C-Jonathan Munitz (NY), 2C-Elana Epstein (IL)

GRAND CRYSTAL BEAVER (16): 1-Howard Markowitz (NV), 2-Ken Fischer (CA)

BATTLE OF THE SEXES (32 men & 9 women): 1-Gil Evans (NH), 2-Patty Geoffroy (MA)

NACKGAMMON (32): 1-Greg Merriman (MI), 2-Tom Duggan (England), 3/4-John Rockwell (CA) / Ralph Stowell (WI)

OPEN DOUBLES (32 teams): 1-Mark Donaldson (MN) & Elaine Feinstein (FL), 2-Mary & Paul Franks (NV), 3/4-Bill Bartholomay (IL) & Beth Whitney (MI) / Jena & John Jennings (IL)

INTERMEDIATE DOUBLES (12): 1-Gary Fishman (FL) & Beth Raby (VA), 2-Georgina Flanagan (WI) & Oleg Raygorodsky (IL)

GOLD DOUBLOON BLITZ (104): 1-Keene Marin (WI)

QUICKIE (128): 1-Carter Mattig (IL), 2-Peter Kalba (IN), 3/4-Paul Baraz (IL) / Jeb Horton (NC)

TAKI TREASURE TOURNEY for Taki Board (16): 1-Patty Geoffroy (MA)

\$100 SCHOONER JACKPOT (8): 1-Bruce Russell (WI), 2-Stepan Nuniyants (WA)

\$25 CLIPPER JACKPOT (8): 1-Tom Duggan (England), 2-Dan Cramer (MN)

WHEEL OF FORTUNE: 1-Adam Bennett (WI)

PIG-ROLLING: 1-David Taniguchi (CA)

POP-UP PIRATE: 1-Lisa Rockwell (IL)

JOLLY ROGER BEANBAG TOSS: 1-Jeb Horton (NC)

WINNER'S CIRCLE



MAR./APR. 2007

•**First Trinidad Backgammon Tournament** (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad; 27 Feb.)... OPEN: 1-Mohia Ma'at, 2-John Wallis, 3-Daniel Khan, 4-Deke Rohlehr; 1C-Paul Abdul, 2C-Bryan Felix.

•**Springfield Series #5** (Peoria, IL; 3 Mar.)... OPEN (22): 1-Cliff Mayoh, 2-John Bare; 1C-Jim Zimmerman, 2C-Fouad Malouf; 1LC-Jared Miller. Taki-Hold'em Qualifier: Scott Day.

•**Ohio State Monthly** (Akron, OH; 4 Mar.)... OPEN: 1-Stephen Benjamin, 2/3/4-Carmen Webb / Mike Vasilatos / Dick Bennett.

•**Arizona Club Monthly** (Phoenix, AZ; 5 Mar.)... OPEN (14): 1-Pete Campbell, 2-Dave Hilton, 3-Marty Gootzeit, 4-Jim Lowe.

•**Kansas City Double Points Classic** (Kansas City, MO; 10 Mar.)... OPEN (9): 1-James Worley, 2/3-Dan Compo / Eric Barr.

•**Slattery Scotch Open** (Coventry, England; 10-11 Mar.)... OPEN: 1-Adrian Jones, 2-Gerry Enslin, 3/4-Chris Gibbins / Uldis Lapikens; 1C-Giorgio Castellano, 2C-Peter Chan, 3C/4C-Rodney Lighton / Paul Gilbertson; 1LC-Jeff Barber, 2LC-Tom Duggan. THE HAGGIS (16): 1-Paul Barwick, 2-Myke Wignall, 3/4-Uldis Lapikens / Jon Samuel. FRIDAY 500 (16): 1-Giorgio Castellano, 2-Jerry Limb, 3/4-Ed Turner / Chris Gibbins. DOUBLES (4): 1-No Name Men, 2-Cake of Cheese. £50 JACKPOT (4): 1-Nicky Check, 2-Peter Bennet. POKER (19): 1-Paul Gilbertson, 2-Michelle Fisher, 3-Lawrence Powell.

•**South Florida Monthly** (Ft. Lauderdale, FL; 11 Mar.)... OPEN (7): 1-Perry Gartner, 2-Gary Fishman.

•**Miami Valley Club Monthly** (Dayton, OH; 11 Mar.)... OPEN (7): 1-John Crockford, 2-Jeff Clark (MI).

•**Phoenix Backgammon Club—USBL** (Glendale, AZ; 17 Mar.)... OPEN (6): 1-Marty Gootzeit, 2-Bill Mertz, 3-Robert Salem.

•**24th Fleet Underwood Memorial & Benefit** (Flint, MI; 18 Mar.)... OPEN (25): 1-Emil Mortuk, 2-Ralph Dietz, 3-Dan Grogan, 4/5/6-Dean Adamian / Frank Talbot / Rick Todd. INTERMEDIATE (28): 1-Steve Grob, 2-Abdul Alchalabi, 3/4-Ernie Denenfeld / Dave Pink, 5/6-Miriam Bureson / Brad King. NOVICE (7): 1-Lee White, 2-Fran Miller (OH)... \$600 was raised for the National MS Society.

AMALGAMATION

In a 13 March e-mail, **Jeb Horton** (NC) announced that “Effective today, I am no longer the director of the Charlotte Backgammon Club. If anybody wants to step up and take over the club, please contact me.” No specific reason was given for his decision, but Jeb did say he and wife **Robin** will continue to direct the Carolina Invitational in January... Personal reasons have caused Colorado BG spark plug **Maia Kahn** to discontinue her involvement with backgammon, at least for now. Maia has relinquished her duties as weekly director and will not be involved with the Colorado State Championships still scheduled for 28–30 September. You can now get tourney info by e-mailing **Lynda Clay** (LFClay@excite.com)... Lots of book news: **Chris Bray** (UK) announced completion of *Second Wind*, his followup to *What Colour Is The Wind?* Chris also has another book, *Backgammon To Win*, being published in late June. The second book is targeted for beginners and intermediates, but Chris feels everyone can learn from it. Look for both books at **Carol Joy Cole**'s Backgammon Boutique... Fortuitous Press publisher **Jeremy Bagai** (CA) announces the second printing of **Walter Trice**'s (MA) very popular Backgammon Boot Camp. The new version corrects numerous typos and other errors that readers found in the first edition. To order now, go to www.fortuitouspress.com... It appears that **Nack Ballard** (CA) and **Paul Weaver**'s (AL) much anticipated book on backgammon openings will finally be available to the general public in May. Look for **Jake Jacobs**' glowing review in the May CHICAGO POINT... Our longtime columnist Danny Kleinman now has his own website. Check it out at www.dannykleinman.com... **Michael Strato Libropoulos** (Canada) is hosting the Internet Backgammon Database (www.ibgdb.com), hoping to entice thousands of backgam-

•**Gilbo's Birthday Bash** (Leamington Spa, England; 23-25 Mar.)... CHAMPIONSHIP: 1-John Clark, 2-Julian Fetterlein; 1C-Neil Davidson, 2C-David Fall; 1LC-Walter Busato, 2LC-John Broomfield. INTERMEDIATE: 1-Rosey Bensley, 2-Fiona Oldham. BEGINNER: 1-Dave Treacy, 2-Stefan Constantinou. POKER (19): 1-Paul Gilbertson, 2-Fiona Oldham... *The Gammonitis event celebrated Paul Gilbertson's birthday.* Δ

mon players to write short bio's about themselves. If you've played backgammon at a “live” tournament, your name is probably included in his player list and you are invited to get on board... **Kit Woolsey** (CA) has sold his www.gammonline.com website to Play65. Bloggers at rec.games.backgammon are reporting some problems with the way the new owners are managing the site... From the *Ilseington Tribune*: A prison ombudsman has demanded tough reforms at Pentonville Prison in London after “systematic failures” led to the suicide of a vulnerable inmate. It follows a week-long inquest that heard how guards and perhaps the prison warden at the jail played backgammon with an inmate unaware that **Paul Calvert** was hanging dead in a neighboring cell after staff had tampered with emergency alarms. Former prisoners testified how warden **Steven Cummings** was learning how to backgammon with inmate **Sean Hart**, while a second warden watched. Mr. Cummings denied playing the game but said he had touched some of the backgammon pieces... Have you seen the new classy 30 second backgammon spots that PartyGammon is putting out? View them at youtube.com (keyword: partygammon)... And finally, **Phil Simborg** comes up with this true happening from last month's Midwest Championships: “Last weekend at the MBC, I was introducing **Neil Kazaross** to a relative of mine who was visiting. “Neil is one of the top three players in the world,” I noted. Neil stood there quietly with a funny look on his face, and I said, “Oh, come on now Neil, you don't have to be modest.” Neil replied: “I'm not being modest . . . I was just trying to think who the other two players could possibly be.” Δ

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SEHOTEL ENSTLER****

ph. +43 4374 3544 1
fax +43 4374 3544 44
[info@sehotel.com](http://sehotel.com)

SEHOTEL EUROPA****

ph. +43 4374 2270
fax +43 4374 2270 88
sehotel.europa@wbf.at

HOTEL GOETSCHNE****

ph. +43 4374 2185
fax +43 4374 3452
info@goetschne.com

HOTEL WÄRMER HOF***

ph. +43 4374 2651
fax +43 4374 2881 75
office@wae-rmaer-hof.com

HOTEL BRICHENWIT***

ph. +43 4374 3254
fax +43 4374 3254 28
info@hotelbrichenwit-soldan.at

CASINUMS MICHAELA***

ph. +43 4374 2408 100
info-michaela@wbf.at

VILLA BRICITA***

ph. +43 4374 2084
fax +43 4374 2088
villa-bricita@wbf.at