

the 1988 world cup & eastern open

JOE "HAS BEEN" SYLVESTER PROVES HE STILL IS

Last month, tournament chairman Kent Goulding ribbed Joe Sylvester at the Auction dinner of the 1988 World Cup and Eastern Open. With no major tournament victory since March 1987 at the Louisville Bluegrass Regional, the Michigan Wizard was jokingly auctioned off by Goulding as "Joe 'Has Been' Sylvester." The "Has Been" got the last laugh, however. Sylvester's tense World Cup final victory over Ray Glaeser of Livingston, New Jersey was worth over \$60,000.

Advertised as "the largest and most prestigious invitational event in the history of backgammon," the August 3-7 World Cup at the Sheraton Commander Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts lived up to its billing. The \$3500 entry fee attracted 45 high rollers from the United States and beyond. Given the extra-long matches (25-41 points), the winner of this event would need more than good dice and skillful play. Extended concentration, patience and

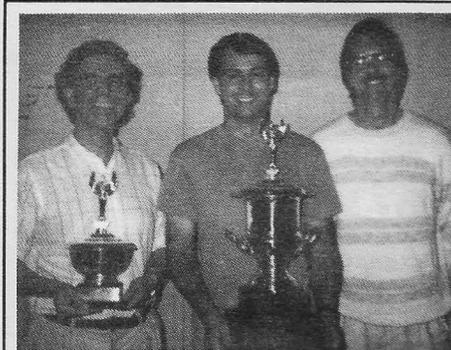
endurance would also be required.

THE FIRST ROUND of play began on Wednesday. Two more rounds on Thursday sliced the field to eight. Later that evening at the Auction dinner, the guests were subjected to the magic of "The Amazing Graffeo and Fantasia" (their best trick was disappearing from the stage). Kent Goulding quickly revived the crowd with an entertaining auction of the remaining World Cup entrants. The closing bids were: Joe Sylvester-\$2100, Sandy Lubetkin-\$1900, Mike Svobodny-\$1700, Bill Robertie-\$1600, Malcolm Davis-\$1200, Ray Glaeser-\$1000, Alan Steffen-\$1000, Doug Mayfield-\$800.

On Friday, two favorites, Lubetkin and Robertie fell in the 33 point quarterfinal round to Steffen and Glaeser respectively. In the other matches, Sylvester eliminated Davis and Svobodny rolled past Mayfield. The Saturday semifinals were set.

"**GREAT SPIRITS** have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds." That was the quote on Alan Steffen's Albert Einstein T-shirt in his 37 point semifinal against Joe Sylvester. It was a crowd-pleaser testing both player's ability to come back from big deficits.

Trailing 14-5, Joe outscored Steffen 16 to 2 to grab a 21-16 lead. Then it was



Chairmen Bill Robertie and Kent Goulding are side by side the 1988 World Cup Champion Joe Sylvester. Robertie was a winner in the consolation division.

Alan's turn to enjoy a 15 point surge and jump ahead 31-21. But Sylvester would make one last scoring drive to edge Steffen 37-35 and reach the finals.

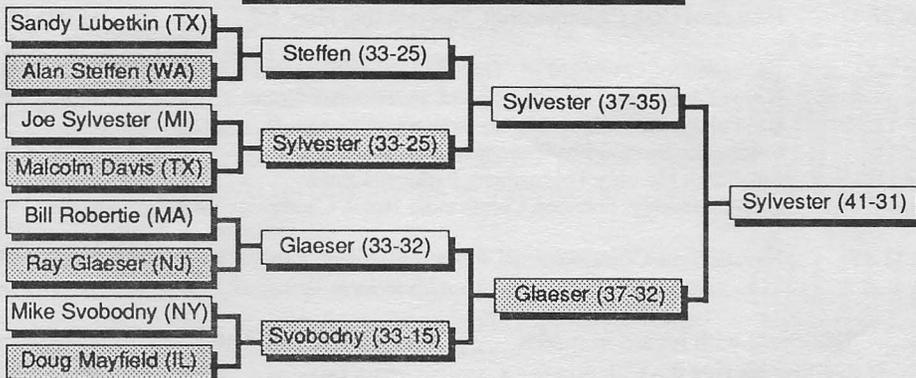
In contrast, Ray Glaeser's semifinal against Mike Svobodny was a tight struggle. Ray's triple game win, increasing his lead to 33-28, was the first time the match score differential exceeded three points. The Glaze was able to hang on 37-32 in a battle spanning 12 hours.

JOE SYLVESTER and Ray Glaeser arrived to play the 41 point World Cup finals in the "Minute Man" room at noon on Sunday. An overhead TV camera was set up to relay the results to the spectating room and Kent Goulding's expert commentary. Joe and Ray had played together for many years at the Flint Backgammon Club in the early 80's. Now there was an uneasy friction between the two and it wasn't just the big prize money.

Ray's pregnant wife, Susan had driven over four hours to be with her husband for his last two matches. Still, Joe decided that psychologically, it was against his best interest to allow her to sit beside Ray in the private playing room. This was understandable considering that Susan Glaeser was Susan Sylvester when Joe won the \$100,000 Las Vegas World Amateur in 1983. Susan seemed very understanding and left the room without a complaint. The match began at 12:17 PM.

JOE WON the opening roll with a 5-1 quipping, "I'm a favorite in the match." But as the game progressed into a drawn

1988 WORLD CUP—THE FINAL 8



OTHER ENTRANTS

United States: Nack Ballard, Bill Bartholomay, Kevin Brandt, Mike Corbett, Perry Gartner, Sam Hanna, Dan Harrington, Billy Horan, Sam Janjigian, Fred Kalantari, Wendy Kaplan, Mike Keener, Chris Kelly, Jason Lester, Harry Madoff, Paul Magriel, Howard Markowitz, A. Melkalainas, Joey Mirzoeff, Dean Muench, Chuck Papazian, Howard Ring, Avi Samuels, Gino Scalamandre, Katie Scalamandre, Hugh Sconyers, Eric Seidel, Mike Senkiewicz, Ami Tennenbaum, David Winn, Steve Zolotow.

Australia: Tino Lechich, Bill Marczak. *Canada:* Hal Heinrich, Al Jones. *Germany:* Hans Nelki. *Italy:* Gerald Crispi.

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

EDITOR

Bill Davis
2726 West Lunt Avenue
Chicago, IL 60645
Telephone: (312) 338-6380

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS

Carol Joy Cole (MI) Tak Morioka (IL)
Duane Jensen (MN) Larry Strommen (IN)
Danny Kleinman (CA)

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LETTERS

c/o Chicago POINT
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Kudos From The Coterie

The *Chicago POINT* is terrific! Everyone at my club has found it to be exciting and informative. Keep up the good work.—
Louise Goldsmith, Coterie Club, New York

Another Opinion On Seeded Draws

In the August editorial ("Seeded Draws Add Personality To Our Game"), a reference was made to organized sports and the seeding they use. Remember that organized "spectator" sports need to draw a paying public to help create the prize fund. Seeding the best players maximizes the chance for them to advance to the later rounds.

Undeniably, this is good for the spectator.

In backgammon, the spectating public does not sponsor the event. Backgammon is really not a spectator sport (especially in the early rounds). Since each player pays the same entry fee to get into the tournament, inequities, however small, should not be introduced by the organizing director.

The Calcutta auction should not have any bearing on the tournament draw sheet. The Calcutta must be looked upon as an

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

coming attractions



by Carol Joy Cole
313/232-9731

Sep 2-5	Labor Day Weekend Tourney, Ramada Inn East, Louisville, KY	502/451-3950
Sep 2-5	Labor Day Festival, Stouffer Concourse Hotel, Los Angeles, CA	818/905-6937
Sep 10-11	Baden Württemberg Championship, Stuttgart, W. Germany	040/270-1166
Sep 11	Toronto Monthly Tournament, Le Spot, Ontario, Canada	416/267-2815
Sep 11	Cavendish North Anniversary Tournament, Southfield, MI	313/642-9616
Sep 11	Pittsburgh Monthly Tournament, Parkway Center	412/241-1301
Sep 15	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Sep 18	Bi-monthly Sunday, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/928-1321
Sep 18	NEBC Monthly, Sheraton Commander Hotel, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Sep 23	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/681-9671
Sep 24	9th Annual Oppe Invitational, Downers Grove, IL	312/963-7321
Sep 25	Jim Flora Memorial, Mayflower Hotel, Plymouth, MI	313/349-1953
Sep 27-Oct 2	Caribbean Championship, Treasure Island Resort, St. Maarten	702/826-1984
Sep 29-Oct 2	International Casino Cup, Schloss Seefelds, Pörschach, Austria	0032/26489349
Sep 30-Oct 2	Towpagh Inn Tournament, Turin, NY	315/348-8122
Sep 30-Oct 2	Victorian Open, Melbourne, Australia (Tentative)	03/578-7983
Oct 2	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Bagwells, Chicago, IL	312/252-7755
Oct 7-9	5th Indiana Classic & Indy \$500, Viscount Hotel, Indianapolis, IN	317/845-8435
Oct 8	CPBC Fall Open Tourney, Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0603
Oct 9	Celebrities Bi-monthly Tournament, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Oct 9	Toronto Monthly Tournament, Le Spot, Ontario, Canada	416/267-2815
Oct 14-16	European BG/Golf Combo Championship, Zell am See, Austria	0 8341/12825
Oct 15-16	Gammon Associates Invitational, Stouffer Hotel, Los Angeles, CA	818/901-0464
Oct 16	NEBC Monthly, Sheraton Commander Hotel, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Oct 20	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Oct 21-23	New Hampshire Internat'l Fall Classic, Woodbound Inn, Jaffrey, NH	603/863-4711
Oct 21-23	North-German Open, Hannover, West Germany—CANCELLED	
Oct 22	Pewter Mug Tournament, Watertown, NY	315/482-9753
Oct 23	Pittsburgh Monthly Tournament, Parkway Center	412/241-1301
Oct 26-30	Autumn Harvest Backgammon Tournament, Hyatt-Lake Tahoe, NV	800/327-3910
Oct 28	Bayou Club Monthly Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/681-9671
Nov 1	Bar Point Club Fall Trophy Tourney, Pat's Pub, Norridge, IL	312/338-6380
Nov 4-6	Bad Zwischenahn, Spiel-Casino, West Germany	040/270-1166
Nov 4-6	Crystal Cup Venezia, Casino Municipale, Italy	061-50-5816
Nov 5-6	Gammon Associates Invitational, Los Angeles, CA	818/901-0464
Nov 11-13	North Rhein-Westfalen Open, Novotel, Breitscheid, W. Germany	02151-503591
Nov 17-20	European Championship, Bad Salzschlirf, West Germany	0 8341/12825
Nov 20	Bi-monthly Sunday, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/928-1321
Nov 25-27	Children's Hospital Benefit, Sheraton Hotel, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Nov 27	Flint Area Club Championship, Sheraton Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Dec 2-5	Backgammon On Board III, Tropical Cruise: Miami to Nassau	312/338-6380
Dec 3	Bayou Club Christmas Tournament, Houstonian, Houston, TX	713/681-9671
Dec 11	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Bagwells, Chicago, IL	312/252-7755
Dec 11	Celebrities Bi-monthly Tournament, Houston, TX	713/495-2240
Dec 11	Pittsburgh Monthly Tournament, Parkway Center	412/241-1301
Dec 18	NEBC Monthly, Sheraton Commander Hotel, Cambridge, MA	617/547-4800
Jan 11-15	Nevada State Championships, Peppermill Hotel, Reno, NV	702/826-1984

independent event with regard to match play. If the director rigs the Calcutta for a bigger pot by separating seeded players in the draw, he is putting himself into a conflict of interest.

Backgammon tournaments have come a long way toward better formats and rulings. There is still room for improvement, however. A totally random draw is one improvement long overdue.—*Larry Strommen, Indianapolis, IN*

Reactions To The Kaplan Interview

The interview with Wendy Kaplan was very interesting. She came across the way I know her: an honest person with a good sense of humor.—*Mike Corbett, Ft. Lauderdale, FL*

Congratulations on the Kaplan (telephone) interview. It seemed like I was listening in on the actual conversation.—*Howard Markowitz, Skokie, IL*

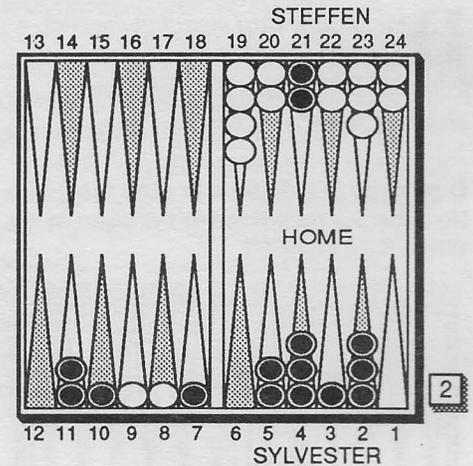
WHAT PLAY DID SYLVESTER MAKE?

Guess Joe's move and WIN



The 1988 World Cup semifinals. Alan Steffen reads "The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell" while Joe Sylvester goes through a half hour of calculations on what he calls "the toughest backgammon position of my life." Guess Sylvester's actual move in the setup shown at right and you could be a winner.

1988 World Cup semifinal match to 37 points. Joe Sylvester (Black) leads Alan Steffen (White) 19 to 16. **SYLVESTER TO PLAY 3-3.**



THE CONTEST: Guess the play Joe Sylvester made in the above position.
ENTRY DEADLINE: Sept. 28, 1988.
PRIZE: A wallet-size backgammon set and one year subscription to *Chicago POINT*. Ties will be broken by a random draw.
HOW TO ENTER: On a sheet of paper, write your name and address along with your guess of Sylvester's actual move.
 Mail your entry to:

Guess Joe's Play
 c/o **Chicago POINT**
 2726 W. Lunt Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60645

1988 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB COMPILED THRU AUG. 31

RICH SWEETMAN	22.24	Neil Banoff	2.96	Don Desmond	0.80
TAK MORIOKA	21.68	Gary Keyes	2.88	Harry Hayward	0.72
KATHY BAUDER	18.96	Dan Judd	2.84	Marty Tatosian	0.72
JOHN DEMIAN	17.16	Joe Koucharian	2.84	Don Marek	0.64
YAMIN YAMIN	17.16	Greg Shore	2.80	Miles Cohen	0.64
DAVID LIBCHABER	11.48	Dave Cramer	2.76	Tom Walthes	0.64
STU KATZ	11.24	Barry Epstein	2.68	Marcy Sloan	0.60
DEEB SHALATI	10.32	Alyce Wallen	2.24	Arlene Levy	0.56
PETER KALBA	10.16	Chris Kenik	2.20	Mark Hicks	0.52
IRA HOFFBERG	9.84	Andy Suszczyk	2.16	Kevin Bryant	0.48
JOANN FEINSTEIN	9.16	Jeff Kane	2.12	Mark Anshus	0.48
ANDY ARGY	8.40	George Panagakis	2.08	Paul Reiner	0.40
ARNOLD ZOUSMER	8.36	Bill Hoeflich	2.00	Roland Dieter	0.40
SARG SERGES	7.96	Don Pearson	1.92	Ron Stur	0.40
BILL DAVIS	6.24	Jeff Henry	1.92	Al Meinecke	0.32
BOBBIE SHIFRIN	6.20	Kevin Muench	1.88	Howard Markowitz	0.32
KEN BOND	5.96	Ralph Levy	1.84	Ida Zeman	0.24
DON JAYHAN	5.80	Gene Chait	1.68	Les Berg	0.24
NORMA SHYER	5.48	Jim Sargent	1.28	Rudy Emmelot	0.24
PHYLLIS SMOLINSKI	4.80	John Spatafora	1.20	Chuck Evers	0.20
Bill Keefe	4.24	Dean Morehouse	1.16	Sharon Hegg	0.20
Connie Sychowski	4.16	Jeff Vaughn	1.16	Dave Lehrer	0.16
Ed Buerger	4.00	Elaine Kehm	0.96	Trudie Stern	0.16
Don Muellner	3.72	Larry Guzan	0.96	Chris Hegg	0.12
Bob Zavoral	3.64	Betsy Miller	0.88	Dave Shifman	0.12
Dean Muench	3.60	Bob Holyon	0.88	David Hegg	0.12
Rich Siebold	3.52	Dave Rockwell	0.88	Ray Lanzillo	0.12
Peggy Fleming	3.44	Doug Mayfield	0.88	Jay Bleiman	0.08
Ron Garber	3.24	Larry Strommen	0.88	Richard Stawowy	0.08
Ed Bauder	3.12	Carol Mennis	0.80		

DAVID LIBCHABER reached the finals of four consolation tournaments last month—enough to win August Player of the Month honors with 4.76 points. Tak Morioka (4.24) and Kathy Bauder (3.56) challenged for the top spot.



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ASK DANNY

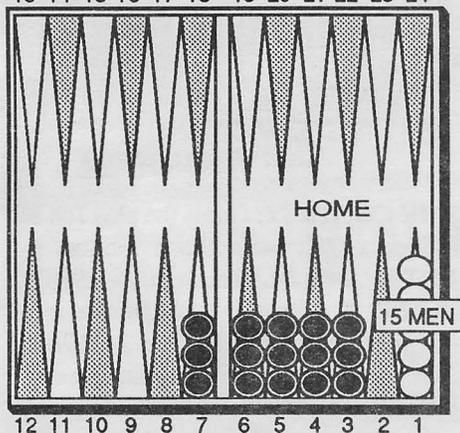


by Danny Kleinman

Dear Danny: Last month at the club, a good player offered to play me in the following proposition. I could have my choice of sides:

O gets the first 55 rolls to start the game. No cube, no gammons or backgammons. WHO IS FAVORED?

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24



Since I'm not familiar with this setup, I refused his offer; however, we agreed to play it at a future tournament. Which side should I take?—Andy Argy, Chicago, IL

Dear Andy: I recall this or a similar proposition vaguely from the brief period several years ago when it was played in Los Angeles. My impression was that it was roughly even, but nobody kept statistics on the results. My memory, moreover, is fallible: White may have been given 45 rolls—or 65—rather than the 55 you mention.

This proposition has very little to do with backgammon. It tests, essentially, how many rolls White needs to escape completely, via 15 sequences of 1-then-6. True, occasionally White will complete her escape at the very end of her allotment of rolls, and Black (to a greater extent than White) will be able to exercise some bear-off skills.

Somewhat more often, White will remain with a deucepoint game (acepoint or ace-deuce games will be rare). Then Black will get to exercise his contact bear-off skills. But even then, Black will seldom have to play very carefully, for the usual

ending will find White with a crushed board rather than an effective prime. The checkers that White succeeds in freeing, after all, will have to keep moving forward while White's back men wait on Black's 1- and 2-points.

If we could simply assume that White won when and only when she escaped completely, then the problem would be purely mathematical: in how many rolls will White escape? A median of 55 or fewer would make White the favorite: a median of more than 55 would make Black the favorite. But this assumption yields only an approximate answer, and we do not know the size of the distortion. Worse still, though this mathematical problem has an exactly calculable solution, the computations exceed your capacity and mine.

Therefore, for all practical purposes, we must use what mathematicians call the "Monte-Carlo Method"—and backgammon players call "roll-outs"—to approximate theoretical expectations by statistical samples.

Your first step should be to roll out the proposition a large number of times and tabulate the results. You could take a purely random sample by rolling the dice 1000 times, perhaps. But you'll obtain a slightly more representative sample and reduce the deviations from expectation due to favorable or unfavorable early rolls by using a cross-section of 1296 trials: one for each combination of White's first two rolls.

If you perform these roll-outs (and there's no reason I should do them for you), you may become convinced that one side has a clear advantage. But if you think it too close to call and still want to play the proposition, choose the Black side. For it is Black who may be called upon to play skilfully, and you will have seen the results of your own good or bad moves as Black. If you choose the White side, your opponent may surprise you with good plays for Black that you overlooked in your roll-outs.

Your second step should be to make a firm enforceable contract with your opponent before playing this proposition, and without telling him which side you'll choose. Then you'll be betting, essentially, that your roll-outs produced accurate results (not guaranteed even in 1296 trials).

What can happen if you don't make a firm contract for a specified number of games?

To understand this, let's suppose that your roll-outs are accurate "with a 95%

confidence level" (as statisticians say). This means that for every 19 times you're on the right side of the proposition, you'll be on the wrong side once. Let's suppose, furthermore, that the "good player" who suggested the proposition has more extensive experience with it than you, and knows the truth about it.

Without a firm contract, your opponent, finding himself on the wrong side, may quit after 10 games. If the cumulative results fluctuate, there is apt to come a time when you're exactly even, and he may choose that time to quit. But when your opponent finds himself on the right side, he may maneuver to play 1000 games (remember, you don't know you're on the wrong side, for this is the one time in 20 that your roll-outs have produced an incorrect answer). In effect, therefore, you risk playing a long series at a disadvantage while you are guaranteed only a short series when you have an edge.

You were wise to decline the offer to play an unfamiliar proposition against a knowledgeable opponent. I have not attempted to answer your question specifically. I hope the advice I have given, however, will prove useful not only for this proposition, but for any others you may face in the future.—Yours, Danny

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. Δ

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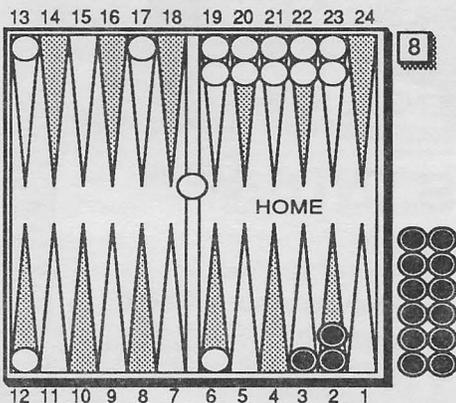
For further details, send name and address to: Northern Nevada BG Ass'n
P.O. Box 70101 • Reno, NV 89570-0101
702/826-1984

RIDING THE CREST

by Jim Wallace

Sometimes luck seems to come in waves. Have you ever had one of those days where everything is going right? All the rolls you need show up at the perfect time. In a recent head-to-head session, I had been getting miraculous rolls and my opponent was completely hopeless at hitting shots.

I was already about +50 on the score sheet and found myself in this enviable position as **BLACK TO PLAY 1-1**.



What to do?

Without any deep positional analysis, I took two men off, giving White a direct shot to save the gammon, but also giving myself a better chance to win an 8-cube backgammon.

"Settlements!!" was the call from my opponent who faced the unpleasant prospect of losing 24 points in one game. Questions popped into my head: What is the position worth? Did I make the right play with the double 1's? Should I be greedy and go for the BG, or just settle?

I calculated what the correct settlement should be after my play by looking at White's 36 possible rolls. To keep things simple, I assumed that White would save the gammon every time he hit. To offset this, I ignored White's chance to win the game after hitting.

My calculations showed that in the 36 games, I would win a total of 616 points. Dividing 616 by 36 games = **17.11 points per game**.

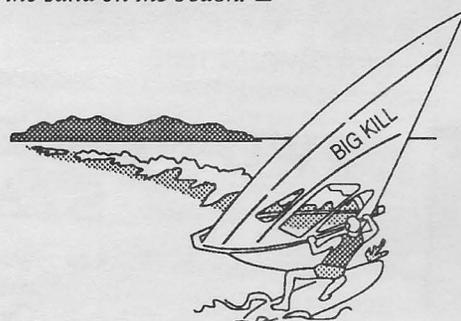
Compare this to the other play of stacking three men on the ace point. This situation is slightly more complicated to calculate. White can save the BG with four rolls but will still be backgammoned every time Black rolls a double on his next turn.

Add to this the small possibility of White not getting his men out in two rolls. In a cross-section of 7776 games I can expect to win an average of **17.31 points per game**.

Two questions answered, one to go. Should I be greedy? I declined to settle!

I should have been punished, but the backgammon gods smiled and blessed me with a juicy backgammon. The blessings continued for several more games and my opponent's final damages totalled 104 points in little more than 1 1/2 hours.

Aside from the small equity loss in my play of 1-1, what is the biggest reason for not making this play? If I'm hit, this game will drag on much longer, consuming valuable time that could otherwise be used to great profit. In other words, *When the surf's up, you don't want to be buried in the sand on the beach!* Δ



SYLVESTER WINS...

(Continued from page 1)

out battle, it was obvious that Ray was in a better mental state. His focus was on the game, whereas Joe's eyes wandered around the 24' x 36' empty room. When Joe lost the long first game on a 100 to 1 parlay, he looked at his watch and grumbled under his breath, "Hmph, 28 minutes. At this rate, we'll be here until Tuesday."

Through the first 25 games, Glaeser built up a 23-15 advantage. Sylvester still seemed a bit dull. Things would change with game #26.

WITH THE CUBE ON 2, Sylvester had borne off five men against Glaeser's 2-4 backgame when he was forced to leave a shot. Glaeser connected and upon closing Joe out, redoubled to 4. Joe accepted the efficient recube and waited on the bar for Ray to open his board.

Sylvester entered quickly to reach the position shown above. To win from here, Joe (Black) would need a set of doubles or Ray would have to miss once on the bear-off. Should Joe try action at the 8-level?

After calculating that Glaeser could never redouble back to 16, Sylvester offered the "snowman" cube which the

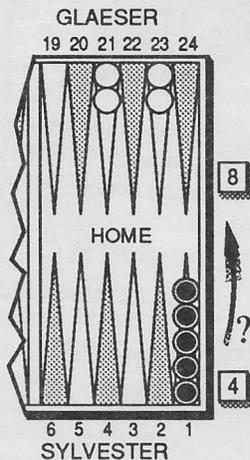
Glaze correctly took. Joe rolled a 6-2, Ray rolled 4-3 (missing), Joe followed with 4-2 and Ray had the last shake of the game.

If Ray rolled double 2's or better, he would take a nearly insurmountable 31-15 lead. Otherwise the match would be tied at 23-all. As Glaeser shook his dice, Sly stood up and announced, "I'm taking a break after this game **no matter what**."

The dice spun out of the cup and came to rest on 5-...1. Joe barked "Yes!", clapped his hands, and stormed out of the room. The loss was painful for Ray; still he continued to keep his emotions in check. He simply posted the score and quietly left the room. But the tide had turned. Joe kept things going his way to gain a 33-26 lead prior to the 6:00 PM dinner break.

THE TWO HOUR RECESS did nothing to stifle Joe's intensity. At 10:10

41 point World Cup final. Sylvester trails Glaeser, 23-15. **CUBE TO 8?**



PM, it was over. Joe Sylvester had defeated Ray Glaeser to win the greatest test of backgammon ever staged.

IN THE OTHER major event, Dennis Culpepper of Richmond, Virginia defended his Eastern Open title with a semifinal win over Paul Magriel and a final victory against Al Hodis 25-21. Δ

1988 WORLD CUP RESULTS

WORLD CUP (45): 1st Joe Sylvester (MI); 2nd Ray Glaeser (NJ); 3/4 Alan Steffen (WA) and Mike Svobodny (NY). 1st Cons. Bill Robertie (MA); 2nd Tino Lechich (AUS).
EASTERN OPEN (76): 1st Dennis Culpepper (VA); 2nd Al Hodis (NY); 3/4 Paul Magriel (NY) and Walter Trice (MA). 1st Cons. Laura Petrillo (FL); 2nd Cons. Evan Diamond (MA).
INTERMEDIATE (34): 1st Robert Mathes (MA); 2nd Mike Rezai (OH); 3/4 Ed Pavilonis (NJ) and Eden Windish (ONT). 1st Cons. Derek Payne (ENG); 2nd Cons. Andrew Costigan (MA).
\$500 JACKPOT (16) 1st Joey Mirzoeff (NY); 2nd Dean Muench (IL).
\$1000 JACKPOT (8 each): Winner #1- Mike Senkiewicz (NY). Winner #2- Jason Lester (NY) / Chuck Papazian (NY).
DOUBLES KO's (8 each): #1-Linc Bedel & Fred Kalantari (NH/MN). #2-Steve Brown & Riley Harrison (MN).

LOW COST TRAINING GROUNDS

by Larry Strommen

Backgammon clubs are important to the game for a number of reasons. Local clubs afford individuals an opportunity to play, offer the potential for learning,

provide a social interaction with other intelligent people, and encourage sportsmanship and proper game etiquette.

To facilitate learning and develop your skills, you need to play the better players. The nominal entry fee for weekly tournament play does a good job in this regard. For a fixed amount of money, you have the chance to compete against the experts. By playing these individuals "head on," the cost could be much higher.

When I was first starting out, I asked a Midwestern expert to play a 9 point match with me. He said "Sure, as long as we bet \$100 on the outcome." His reasoning was that if he was going to risk the possibility of losing to a novice, he wanted "just compensation" for his time. No thanks!

Some time later, I had my chance to play a match against that same individual in a \$10 Flint (Michigan) Backgammon Club tournament. Δ

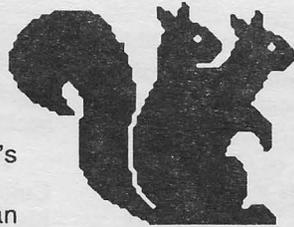
BACKGAMMON ENQUIRER

SEPTEMBER 1988

D. JENSEN, SLEAZE EDITOR

TWO-HEADED SQUIRREL WINS INDIANA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP!

Indianapolis, IN—A two-headed squirrel, a last-minute entry, captured the Indiana State Championship last weekend. Runner-up Larry Strommen said, "Since this was a double elimination event, I was an underdog in the finals. I needed to beat him twice to win the tournament."



Analyzing the squirrel's play, Strommen said, "His checker play was good for an unseeded rodent. However, he was assessed two penalty points for slow play because the two squirrel heads often had lengthy arguments.

"Like most animals, he had bad habits which tipped off many of his cube decisions. The squirrel would flick his tail back and forth if he was going to

drop a double. And whenever he was about to double me, the squirrel would first play with his nuts. Other players were distracted by his frequent scampering to the vending machines to get more nuts.

"Perhaps the Midwest backgammon directors should meet to discuss banning rodents from future tournaments." [See *SQUIRREL*, page 2]

DOCTORS REMOVE BRAIN—MAN STILL PLAYS BACKGAMMON!

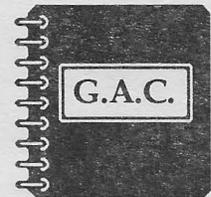
Birmingham, MI—Michigan backgammon star Mike Keener revealed last week that three years ago, he donated his brain to medical science. As Keener put it, "I really wasn't using it anyway. Besides, most Michigan backgammon players have already had the operation."

The removal of Keener's brain has had no effect on his desire or ability to play backgammon. Reluctant at first to have the operation, Keener agreed when doctors told him the brain removal would also improve his golf swing.

GENERAL CUSTER PLAYED BACKGAMMON!

Montana—Archaeologists recently found General George Armstrong Custer's diary buried in a ravine at the Little Bighorn. Although much of the writing had faded, the final entry was still legible.

Custer wrote, "At tea time this afternoon, I took part in a backgammon chouette with five officers. I was most successful, winning and collecting \$250. Though I played skillfully, modesty forces me to admit that this big win was due to my good luck. I massacred the poor devils."



THE 1988 WORLD CUP: WIFE WATCHES AS "EX" BEATS HUBBY IN BEANTOWN BLOODBATH!

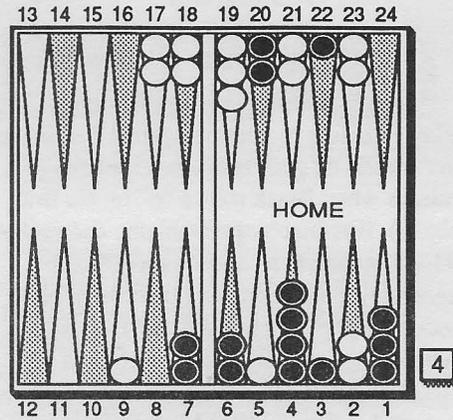
Boston, MA—Joe Sylvester won "big" in Vegas. Now he wins "big" in Boston. It looks like deja vu all over again! [See *BOSTON*, page 2]

PROBLEM #137—WHAT THE EXPERTS SAID

Problem #137 (shown at right) was a horror roll to say the least. Black is trying to avoid a match-losing gammon, and still give himself a small angle to win the game.

Last month's solution offered one opinion. Now let's look at the opinions of 14 master players surveyed at last month's World Cup tournament. The results of the survey are shown at far right.

11 point match. Black leads White, 6 to 3.
BLACK TO PLAY 5-4.



20/15, 20/16

Hal Heinrich, Wendy Kaplan, Joey Mirzoeff, Alan Steffen, Joe Sylvester.

20/15, 7/3

Nack Ballard, Mike Corbett, Kent Goulding, Jason Lester, Dean Muench, Chuck Papazian, Bill Robertie, Mike Senkiewicz, Mike Svobodny.

Players choosing 20/15, 20/16 did so to avoid getting hit twice, including on their opponent's 5-point. Those choosing 20/15, 7/3 wanted to build a quick 4-point board in hopes of hitting a lucky shot.

What's "right" may be a matter of style. Δ

15 VS. 15



by Dean Muench

Programmer/analyst Dean Muench of Chicago enjoys applying his knowledge of the computer to the game of backgammon. From time to time, Dean will favor us with his findings.

In June of 1979, I coded a computer program that analyzed backgammon bear-off positions. Although very accurate, it was of limited use because it could only evaluate positions that would be resolved within a few rolls. Longer positions took too much computer time.

I have recently added an *internal book* (in memory) and an *external book* (on hard disk) to the program running on my computer. These changes greatly enhance the range of positions that can be resolved. The *external book* holds information for all positions where "5 men or less" face "5 men or less." There are 212,521 of these with each one having four possible cube positions: NO CUBE (Crawford game), OWNED BY ROLLER, IN THE MIDDLE and OWNED BY NON-ROLLER. The data held for each cube position is:

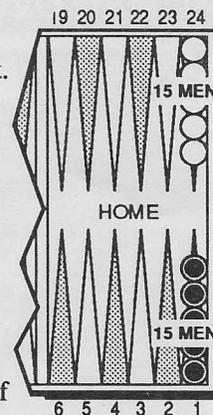
- EXPECTANCY (Number of points due the roller),
- PROBABILITY (Chance the roller will win the game),
- DOUBLE? (Whether roller should double before rolling),
- TAKE? (When doubled, should the non-roller take?).

My computer can now handle all "9 men or less" vs. "9 men or less" positions. Some simple 15 man positions are also possible. For example, in the position at right, each side has 15 men on their 1-point.

To solve this problem, the computer tests every possible rolling sequence (and correct cube action) for each side. The printout tells us that Black (on roll) should not double when he owns the cube. This is not surprising.

What is a little surprising to me, however, is the computer's determination that Black *should* double this pure eight roll position when the cube is in the middle. Expectancy is the singlemost important criteria for determining correct cube actions and piece plays.

Sometimes an action is correct, even though it yields a lower probability of winning the game. In this case, Black loses nearly 5% of his game-winning chances by relinquishing his cube. By doubling from the middle, his game-winning chances remain the same—about 65.36%. Δ



CUBE POSITION	ROLLER'S EXPECTANCY	ROLLER'S WIN PROBABILITY	DOUBLE?	TAKE?
No cube	+.3404377385218830	.6702188692609416	n/a	n/a
With roller	+.5439389331044461 x 2	.7000696853448639	No	n/a
In the middle	+.4519335160471354	.6535712278926011	Yes	Yes
With non-roller	+.2259667580235677 x 2	.6535712278926011	n/a	n/a

AMALGAMATION

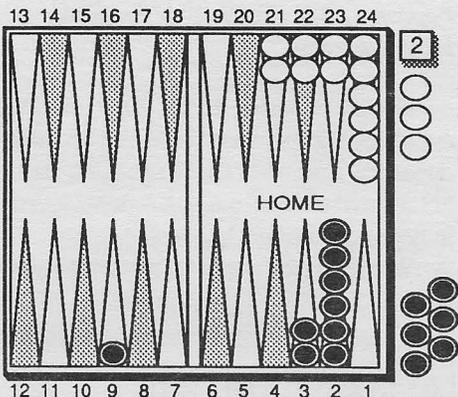
Here's important information if you're interested in joining us for the Backgammon On Board Miami to Nassau cruise tournament. You'll need to put down a \$25 deposit to assure cabin space by October 1. Rates begin at \$449 per person/double occupancy and include free air fare from much of the United States. Call 800/234-0887 to reserve space, or 312/338-6380 for tournament information..... "Takgammon" will appear in the *Chicago POINT* on a bimonthly basis beginning next month. Author Tak Morioka wants the extra time "to develop new ideas."..... Chicago is about to lose a long time backgammon friend. Bobbie Shifrin Goldman and husband Howard are planning to move to Las Vegas in the fall. Bobbie is currently #7 on the Chicagoland All-Time master point list with 192.73 points. She'll definitely be missed..... Congratulations to Patrick Gibson, celebrating his Gammon Associates 10th anniversary of organizing backgammon tournaments in the Los Angeles area..... Visiting the Chicago Bar Point Club: Jim Gibbs (CA) on August 14 and John Ward (FL) on August 30..... Good luck to former Eastern backgammon organizer Steve Avery who is campaigning for the New Hampshire State Legislature as a Republican..... Chicago's Stu Katz is a cousin to Movie starlet Jennifer Grey. When he can't enter off the bar, that explains why he calls it "dirty dancing."..... Wendy Kaplan, in last month's *POINT* interview, said her favorite animal was a snake because "I like their personalities!" Now thanks to good friend Laura Nuhn, Wendy sports a snake ring. Look for it if you face her over the board. Δ

last month's problem

PROBLEM #138 SOLVED

by Neal Kazaross

Money game. **BLACK TO PLAY 1-1.**



I am fortunate enough to have Hal Heinrich's "Match BG" bear-off program which can mathematically produce the solution to this problem. However, at the table, one cannot use a computer and the rules do not permit the use of pencil and paper for calculations. Therefore, before presenting the computer analysis, I will discuss the factors pertinent to an over-the-board solution.

After Black's play, he will have 9 men remaining to White's 12 men. Black must guard against missing twice in his next two turns; otherwise he'll face a recube at a borderline drop/take point (i.e. White on roll in an 8 men vs. 7 men position), or be redoubled out if the two misses come after

three rolls (i.e. 6 men vs. 5 men).

The three 1-1 plays to consider here are:

#1 9/8, 2/1(3)

#2 9/7, 2/1(2)

#3 9/6, 2/1

Let's first compare plays #1 and #2. Play #1 offers protection against 4 missing aces while #2 guards against 3 misses (4 misses when Black rolls a "6" on his first shake). But the comparison also shows that #1 will generate an additional 3% bad second roll misses and a powerful White recube. For example, look at #1 vs. #2 when Black rolls a 3-2 followed by a 4-2.

How likely is it for Black to miss on 4 aces in his next 5 rolls? Most humans will be unable to answer that question at the table. One must be objective where it's possible to be analytical and subjective where analysis is not possible. I slightly prefer play #2 over #1 because I prefer to avoid White's 3% powerful recubes rather than prevent a small percentage of my misses after the second roll.

Now compare play #2 and #3. #2 is equal to #3 for later misses with a few exceptions: notably 4-1. Then play #2 has around 0.5% fewer second roll misses. Play #2 would get the nod except that almost 4% of the time, play #3 can gain a roll on 3-3 (which bears off 3 checkers) and 2-2 (which bears off 4). I would choose play #3 over the board for this small reason and one general principle: you have to bear in before you can bear off.

Let's look at the computer solution. Hal's program can't handle men in the

outfield. Thus I determined the best plays for the 36 subsequent rolls following each bear-in alternative and averaged out the number of rolls required to bear off each position. In order:

#2 bears off in 4.6436 average rolls

#3 bears off in 4.6450 average rolls

#1 bears off in 4.6472 average rolls

The computer gives the position after play #3 (9 men in) a 62.1% cubeless probability of winning (CPW). I checked a position very similar to play #3 with a 4.66 average roll bear-off and obtained 61.3% CPW. Thus a difference of 0.015 rolls is worth 0.8% CPW here. We now estimate:

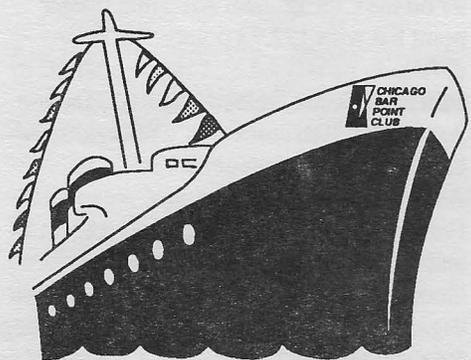
#2 = 62.18% CPW for Black

#3 = 62.10% CPW for Black

#1 = 61.98% CPW for Black

Remember also that play #2 gives White the least opportunity to optimally use the cube, further increasing the minute advantage. So play #2 is best, but it hardly matters.

Finally, let's consider this problem from a practical standpoint. Backgammon tournaments and long money game sessions are wars of attrition. The body has only so much stamina. Upon realizing that the plays were very close, I would avoid burning my brain out in search of exactness and simply play 9/6, 2/1. By doing so, I conserve energy for later plays where the cost of a wrong decision could be far more detrimental than here. This advice is more valuable than the exact solution to this problem! Δ



DON'T MISS THE BOAT

Backgammon On Board III

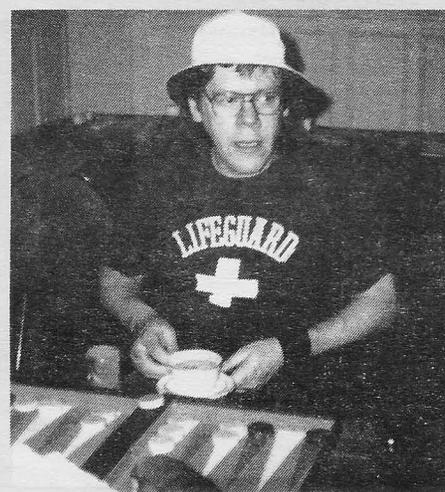
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MAN OVER BOARD



It's former world champion Paul Magriel surfacing at the World Cup last month.

your move

PROBLEM #139

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

