

1995 american backgammon tour

JOE RUSSELL WINS 1995 ABT AT THE WIRE

Prior to Gammon Associates' 35th Invitational, the last of 17 nationwide 1995 American Backgammon Tour events, Joe Russell of Studio City, CA stood in 8th place with 21.01 points. "I had some other business planned for the weekend, but I knew if [director] Pat Gibson got a big enough turnout I could win."

In fact Russell needed a first place finish coupled with Open division attendance of



1995 ABT Champion
Joe Russell.

at least 39 players to overtake Doug Roberts' and Abbas Zaltash's point totals. The G/A finale event, held 1-3 December at the Holiday Inn in Woodland Hills, CA, fielded 42. Joe's dramatic tournament victory earned

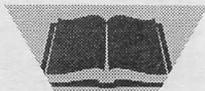
him the title of 1995 ABT Player of the Year.

Considering he entered only seven ABT events, Russell, the 1989 world backgammon champion, had an excellent 1995. He also won the Chicago Open in May and the \$1000 Firecracker Jackpot at the Michigan Summer Championships in July.

Regarding his 35th G/A clutch victory, Russell praised director Gibson's efforts as well as the strength of the field, "The tournament was well run and I thought the competition was extremely tough. Freddy Kalantari (MN) in the finals played very well [Russell won 11-8]. Doug Amenda (AZ) was very strong. And Daniel Murphy, who I came back from down 10-4 to 11, played well, too. Maybe JellyFish™, FIBS and the backgammon newsletters are making a positive difference."

Facing the always-tough Bob Glass (who finished third), Russell remembers

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Long Road To Gammon

Danny Kleinman's newest book
reviewed by Walter Trice

Long Road To Gammon © 1995 by Danny Kleinman. Published by the author, 5312 1/2 Village Green; Los Angeles, CA 90016. Spiral bound soft cover, 176 pages. Price: \$32.

CHICAGO POINT readers scarcely need an introduction to the backgammon writings of Danny Kleinman. In the June 1988 premiere issue, Danny (as "Miss Lonelyblots") offered his advice on the proper rules and procedures for strip backgammon, and he has been represented in almost all of the 85 issues to date. Kleinman is backgammon's most prolific author. He originated many of the analytical methods that we take for granted today, and he remains virtually peerless in the areas of theory, technique, and tactics.

But Danny has been inactive as a tournament player for many years. This creates a credibility problem when he comments on situations that call for judgement and intuition. If Kit Woolsey or Bill Robertie says "In *this* position, I would do *that*," I tend to believe them, knowing that whatever reasoning Bill or Kit uses to come up with "*that*," the result is a powerful game which often wins tournaments. If Danny offers exactly the same opinion as would Bill or Kit, I look at it in a different light: Not representing the thought processes of a demonstrably great player, his observations and reasoning must stand on their own and convince me.

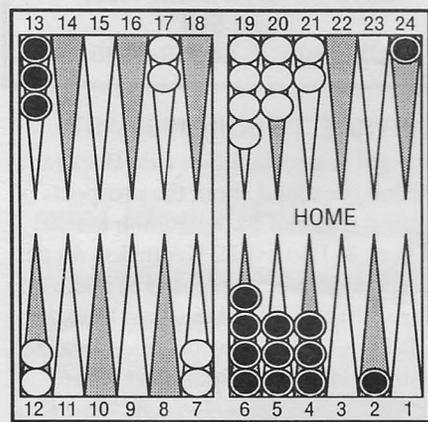
"Long Road To Gammon" is Kleinman's 12th backgammon book. Like its predecessors, it was composed on a typewriter and published by its author. The main drawback to Kleinman's production technique is that his backgammon diagrams are ugly and difficult to read. Since Danny could easily triple his book sales by investing \$700 or so in a computer and some graphics software, I presume that he sticks with his

antique format in order to discourage unmotivated readers.

The new book contains three annotated matches and 18 miscellaneous short subjects, with the match commentary taking up 142 of the book's 176 pages. In going through the text, I have on the whole, been quite favorably impressed with the analysis. Danny's explanations of the checker plays are compact, lucid, and cogent. Although none of his concepts are entirely new to me, in many instances, his presentation is fresh and original enough to have improved my understanding of things I thought I already knew. When his recommended plays differ from those actually made by the expert players, his commentary is in most cases sufficient to convince me that he is right.

Here's a rather nice example from page 46:

Diagram A. 17 point match. Black leads White 5-3. **WHITE TO PLAY 2-2.**



White actually played 6/2(2). Kleinman writes:

"White doesn't need his 2-point for blocking purposes. So long as he has his 8-point, Black won't be moving there anyway, and making the 2-point here deactivates the 6-point as a builder. Therefore White should look for reasonable alternatives.

"13/9, 13/9 improves White's blockade, keeping Black from escaping on 6-2. But that lets Black

[Continued on page 5]

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

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LOUISVILLE TO JOIN 1996 ABT

After eight years, the Louisville Backgammon Club is excited about the prospects of bringing a regional backgammon tournament back to Louisville, Kentucky. As per our discussion, we are pleased to make this event part of the 1996 American Backgammon Tour. As soon as the dates are finalized, we will advise you for inclusion in the 1996 ABT schedule.—*Holland "Quint" McTyeire, Louisville Backgammon Club*

GOT A SPARE \$10,000?

The 1996 Paradise Island/Atlantis Pro-Am will be played 1-4 Feb. at the newly-renovated Ocean Club in the Bahamas. The focus is Doubles with an entry fee of \$10,000 per team. Play (one match per day) is conducted around the swimming pool. The winning pair usually picks up around \$100,000. There are also high entry jackpots every day for those eliminated in the Doubles. If people want high action, this tournament is for them. 'Ribbon

[Continued on page 3]

coming attractions

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

BACKGAMMON						
1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

by Carol Joy Cole
810/232-9731

* Denotes new or revised listing

American Backgammon Tour events underlined.

NATIONAL

Dec 17	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/784-6114
Dec 17	Atlanta Holiday Tournament, Three Dollar Cafe, Buckhead, GA	770/441-2074
Dec 17	Greater New York Club Monthly Tournament, Ramada Inn, Woodbury, NY	718/341-3779
Dec 21	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Dec 28	Flint Area Club Holiday Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Jan 1	1996 FIBS Winter Blitz, Via computer modem, Internet	E-mail: davide@sco.com
Jan 6*	C.B.O.B. Grand Opening Tourney, C.B.O.B. Clubroom, Chicago, IL	708/359-3855
Jan 6	Sangamon Valley Monthly Tourney, Parker's Sports Bar, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Jan 13-14*	Winter Open Tournament, Promenade Cardroom, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Jan 14*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/784-6114
Jan 14*	Milwaukee Bimonthly Tournament, John Hawks Pub, Milwaukee, WI	414/463-2498
Jan 16	Bar Point Club Awards Night, Golden Flame, Chicago, IL	312/583-6464
Jan 17	RSCARDS Winter 1996 Computer Modem Tournament, GENie	301/294-2212
Jan 18*	BG on Board Warm-up Tourney, Biscayne Bay Marriott, Miami, FL	312/583-6464
Jan 19-22	Backgammon on Board III, Miami to Key West cruise tourney on NCL	312/252-7755
Jan 25*	Flint Club Awards Party & Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Jan 26*	NEW DATE—Hawthorne BG Classic, Hawthorne Race Course, Cicero, IL	312/583-6464
Feb 3	Sangamon Valley Monthly Tourney, Location TBA, Peoria, IL	217/483-4028
Feb 11*	Bar Point Doubles Tournament, Braxton Seafood Grill, Oak Brook, IL	312/252-7755
Feb 11*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/784-6114
Feb 15*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Feb 16-18	<u>18th Pittsburgh Championships, Greentree Marriott, Pittsburgh, PA</u>	<u>412/823-7500</u>
Mar 2*	Sangamon Valley Monthly Tourney, Parker's Sports Bar, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Mar 3	12th Fleet Underwood Benefit Tournament, Ramada Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Mar 8-10*	<u>36th Gammon Assoc. Invitational, Venue TBA, Los Angeles, CA</u>	<u>818/901-0464</u>
Mar 17*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/784-6114
Mar 22-24	<u>1996 Midwest Championships, The Drake Oakbrook, Oak Brook, IL</u>	<u>312/583-6464</u>
Apr 13*	Sangamon Valley Monthly Tourney, Parker's Sports Bar, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Apr 13*	Spring Open Tournament, Promenade Cardroom, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Apr 14*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/784-6114
Apr 17*	RSCARDS Spring 1996 Computer Modem Tournament, GENie	301/294-2212
Apr 19-21	<u>Spring Gran Prix, Embassy Suites Hotel, La Jolla, CA</u>	<u>619/294-2007</u>
Apr 23-28*	Worldwide Twin Championships, Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas, NV	702/893-6025
May 24-27*	<u>17th Chicago Open, Woodfield Hyatt Regency Hotel, Schaumburg, IL</u>	<u>708/674-0120</u>
Jul 4-7	<u>Michigan Summer Championships, Novi Hilton Hotel, Novi, MI</u>	<u>810/232-9731</u>
Aug 11-18	World Cup V and U.S. Open, Harvey's Hotel Addison, Dallas, TX	301/299-8265
Aug 30-Sep 2*	<u>43rd Indiana Open, Radisson Hotel (tentative), Indianapolis, IN</u>	<u>317/845-8435</u>
Oct 11-13*	<u>Nation's Capital Championships, Promenade, Bethesda, MD</u>	<u>301/530-0604</u>

OUTSIDE USA

Dec 16	Bonzo-Backgammon, Tinneff, Bielefeld, Germany	49521-64314
Dec 16-17	Christiania Christmas Cup, Mandfeskere, Christiania, Denmark	4531-57 14 56
Jan 6-7	The Mary Rose Tournament, Hilton National, Portsmouth, England	441522-546993
Jan 6-7	Berlincup & Billard International, Berlin-Pavillon, Berlin, Germany	4930-461 9624
Jan 8	Hong Kong Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club, Hong Kong	852-846 1923
Jan 13-20*	Australian Champs, Lasseters Hotel Casino, Alice Springs, Australia	1800-658 951
Jan 16-21	4th Turkish Open, Conrad International Istanbul, Turkey	Eitan Telefax: 972 3-672 8918
Feb 1-4	Paradise Island/Atlantis Pro-Am, Ocean Club, Pradise Island, Bahamas	301/299-8265
Feb 5	Hong Kong Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club, Hong Kong	852-846 1923
Feb 8-11*	French Open Championship, Hotel Lutetia, Paris, France	331-4359 1080
Feb 10-11	Jarvis Trophy Tournament, George Hotel, Solihull, England	441522-546993
Feb 15-18	1st Monte Cassel Cup, Schlosshotel Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, Germany	49561-898768
Feb 22-25*	10th Cannes International Festival of Games, Cannes, France	4161-331 5816
Mar 1-3	Einladungsturnier, Hotel am Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	495 21-64314
Mar 4-9*	2nd Kenyan Open Tournament, Casinò Malindi, Malindi, Kenya	254123-30878
Apr 5-8*	8th Nordic "Wide" Open, Radisson SAS Hotel, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-40 06 07
Apr 13-14*	British Open, George Hotel, Solihull, England	441522-546993
Apr 20-27	Caribbean Open, San Juan to New York cruise tourney on Mv Zenith	4930-461 9624
Jun 25-30*	2nd Backgammon Olympiad, Casinò of Venice, Italy	3941-521 1029
Jun 27-30	2nd Kaiserbrunnen Cup, Hotel am Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	495 21-64314
Jul 2-4	Pagano's 2nd Super Cup Villa Condulmer, Venice, Italy	3941-521 1029
Jul 8-14	Monte Carlo World Championship, Loews Monte Carlo Hotel, Monaco	3392-16 21 33
Jul 18-21*	Riviera's Cup Championship, Hotel Martinez, Cannes, France	331-4359 1080



AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR ★ 1995

Top 100—Final standings after 17 tournaments
159 players earned points



Joe Russell	37.81	Ray Baker	10.59	Wally Wolf	6.16	John Smulders	4.38
Doug Roberts	36.21	Arnold Zousmer	10.40	Richard Armbruster	6.12	Bob Glass	4.20
Abbas Zaltash	35.02	Steve Hast	10.21	Patti Beadles	6.08	Marcy Sloan	4.20
Harry Cohn	33.82	Paul Stebbing	9.90	Mike Senkiewicz	5.85	Howard Ring	4.16
Walter Trice	24.61	Jake Jacobs	9.63	Herb Gurland	5.78	Paul Symington	3.90
Mike Colgan	22.88	Dan Shapiro	9.47	Mike Pettigrew	5.75	Elijah Miller	3.83
Harry Brown	21.53	Trisha Hegland	9.46	Martin Lee	5.60	Don Parker	3.78
Art Benjamin	21.18	Hal Heinrich	9.45	Bob Green	5.58	John Jennings	3.75
Odus Chenault	20.83	Chuck Stimming	9.33	Marta Hilworth	5.52	Bill Davis	3.62
David Rubin	19.91	Clarine	9.03	Paul Franks	5.29	Frank Talbot	3.62
Dave Williams	18.90	Ray Fogerlund	9.03	Bob Lumbra	5.29	Mike Friedman	3.62
Bob Paris	16.50	Alan Steffen	9.01	Hersel Namdar	5.26	Peter Heitmuller	3.62
Dean Muench	15.86	Dean Adamian	9.00	Milad Doueihy	5.20	Jeff Kane	3.51
Bob Koca	15.06	Fred Kalantari	8.40	Norm Wiggins	5.16	Frank Dickerson	3.32
Homer Hector	14.50	Doug Amenda	8.40	Steve Goldstein	5.10	Bill Rudd	3.20
Paul Magriel	14.50	Emily Fisher	8.04	Ed Johnson	5.00	Mike Rezaei	3.06
Maurice Barie	14.24	Peter Kalba	7.77	Jim Forbes	4.95	Larry Liebster	2.94
Tom Costigan	14.24	Jack Takala	7.50	Pat Gibson	4.94	Pete Ryder	2.79
Blake Sorem	14.10	Wally Watson	7.30	Sally Woolsey	4.73	Peter Longman	2.79
Nora Luna	13.79	Toni Wuersch	7.25	Bill Hodes	4.66	Andy Krenitz	2.76
Jim Muirhead	13.25	George Photias	6.92	Randall Witt	4.66	Airan Friedman	2.76
Todd Doucet	12.31	Eden Windish	6.67	Dorn Bishop	4.56	Jerry Smith	2.60
Judy Brown	12.18	Bruce Pollack	6.47	William Counts	4.50	Jolie Rubin	2.60
Kit Woolsey	12.15	Joe Sylvester	6.40	Joe Freedman	4.49	Ron Bruns	2.55
Gene Entel	11.73	Randy Douthat	6.25	J.A. Miller	4.41	Kathy Muench	2.55

The top three players will be honored at the Pittsburgh Championships 16–18 February. Pittsburgh is the 1996 ABT kickoff event. Watch for the ABT all-time standings next month.



CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 1995 PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 30 NOV.

Harry Cohn	32.32	Peter Kalba	5.20	Howard Ring	1.76	Wilcox Snellings	0.88
Neil Kazaross	30.00	Nora Luna	5.12	Marcy Sloan	1.68	Andy Krenitz	0.84
Tak Morioka	20.12	Jolie Rubin	5.00	Stu Katz	1.68	John O'Hagan	0.72
Jake Jacobs	17.64	Ken Bond	4.80	John Stryker	1.60	Mike Flohr	0.72
John Demian	16.48	Bobbie Shifrin	4.76	Elijah Miller	1.52	V.W. Zimmnicki	0.72
Herb Roman	16.04	Stuart Thomson	4.64	Mojie Shishineh	1.52	Ali Morovati	0.64
Tim Mabee	15.32	Jeff Kane	4.56	Wendy Kaplan	1.48	David Rockwell	0.64
Paul Franks	12.00	Alan Zimmerman	4.16	Elaine Kehm	1.48	Jay Ward	0.64
Richard Lloyd	11.52	Norma Shyer	3.96	Jerry Brooks	1.28	John Meyers	0.64
Gary Kay	11.08	Georgina Flanagan	3.92	Jon Hartman	1.28	Steve Klene	0.60
Alice Kay	10.66	Ralph Levy	3.76	Tim Serges	1.28	Arlynne Simon	0.56
Reggie Porter	10.18	Bill Davis	3.72	Mark Murray	1.22	Larry Strommen	0.56
David Rubin	9.68	Paul Friedman	3.70	Jill Ferdinand	1.00	Jerry Smith	0.54
Don Jayhan	9.40	Dean Muench	3.28	Bruce Pollack	0.96	Barbara Levinson	0.48
Joann Feinstein	8.96	Dave Cramer	3.16	Ed Bauder	0.96	Tom Fahland	0.40
Phil Simborg	8.72	Yamin Yamin	3.12	Marty Tatosian	0.96	Don Marek	0.40
Ed Buerger	8.72	Leslie Lockett	2.96	René Wojtysiak	0.92	Monica Miller	0.40
Frankie Farjood	8.28	Alex Itkin	2.96	Doug Roberts	0.88	Mark Zoll	0.32
Paul Klein	8.16	Sarg Serges	2.80	Earl Risch	0.88	Patrick Desmond	0.32
Mary Franks	8.12	Nan Feiber	2.64	Gregg Westrick	0.88	Willie Franklin	0.32
Arline Levy	7.52	John Brussel	2.56	Mitch Pomper	0.88	Scott Richardson	0.30
Bill Keefe	7.44	Peter Heitmüller	2.56	Richard Stawowy	0.88	Kurt Warning	0.24
Amy Valerio	7.02	Roz Ferris	2.40	Roger Smith	0.88	Vinton Knarr	0.24
Phyllis Smolinski	6.88	Paul Ruterman	2.08	Roland Dieter	0.88	Stan Kucharz	0.18
Harold Seif	6.40	Andy Bittman	1.84	Walter Trice	0.88	Tim Carroll	0.16

November's player of the Month was **TAK MORIOKA** who appears to be solidifying his hold on 3rd place. Reggie Porter and Phil Simborg were runners-up.

Although the standings through November show Harry Cohn in front, Neil Kazaross has moved into first place after two Dec. events. Three 1995 BPC tournaments remain. Can Harry come back? Don't forget Bar Point Club Award's Night 16 January 1996.

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 2]

clerks' need not apply!—Lewis Deyong,
Tournament Director, London, England

For more information on this event, contact Kent Goulding at 301/299-8265.—Ed.

BACKGAMMON, O.J. STYLE

Regarding Lee Hoge's request in last month's POINT for what type of backgammon game celebrities like O.J. Simpson play. I talked with a couple of people out here who played with O.J. back in the early 80s. They told me he was a slasher.—Norm Wiggins, Quartz Hill, CA

GO WHERE THE ACTION IS

The Kew Backgammon Club went into what could be a permanent "recess" for lack of attendance in July. Together with Alex Adler, my 19 year old son Paul and Brian Wood, we commenced a new group at the Avenue Neighbourhood House in Blackburn.

Sorry to say that after five months, we are still unable to field a regular eight players. I wish backgammon was as popular as "Line Dancing" here. It's taken off in the last year and has been absolutely incredible, although it hasn't caught me yet.

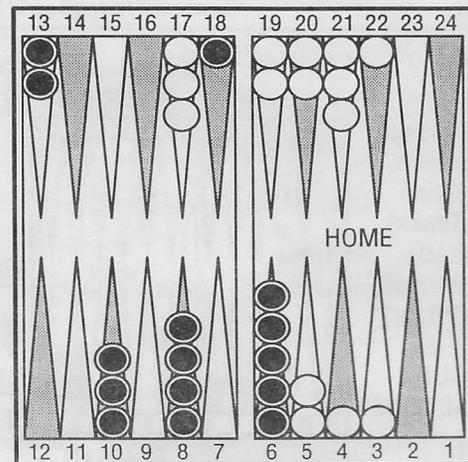
Merry Christmas to all the Chicago Bar Point Club players.—Jim Vanselow, Blackburn, Victoria, Australia

Why not take your club into the bars where line dancing is so popular? It worked for backgammon in the United States during the 1970s disco craze.—Ed. Δ

your move

PROBLEM #220

Tournament double match-point.
BLACK TO PLAY 4-4.



**ASK
DANNY**



© 1995 by Danny Kleinman

REACHING A PEAK

Dear Danny: Paul Magriel's "Backgammon" took our game to a higher standard in 1976. Then your "Vision Laughs At Counting" exposed elements of our game that almost nobody even knew existed before 1980. Do you think there will ever be another 20 year period of backgammon enlightenment similar to what we have just lived through?

I ask this question because I've been playing backgammon for about ten years now. It seems that my game may have peaked out. (This is not to say that I am one of the top 100 players in the world, however.) What study methods do you suggest for me to take my game to the next level? Also, where will backgammon be in the year 2000?—Peaked Out in Pennsylvania

DEAR PEAKED: Presumably, you have been combining the two ingredients essential to improving your backgammon: (1) study of the classic literature and new material currently produced by many fine analysts; and (2) practice. Alas, in backgammon as in other sports as diverse as chess and basketball, study and practice are necessary but not sufficient. We are limited by our native gifts. Most of us can no more reach the heights of Paul Magriel than of Paul Morphy or Wilt Chamberlain. As we approach our limits, diminishing returns from study and practice set in. Sooner or later, age erodes our skills faster than study

and practice can hone them.

I do not know your limitations in backgammon, but you have two things going for you: the slowness with which our minds deteriorate compared to our reflexes, and the great value of experience in backgammon (especially for cube decisions).

Not even the most gifted players can evaluate positions accurately by purely *a priori* analysis. All must rely on benchmarks—similar positions with known values—and judgment in estimating how deviations from these benchmarks affect equities. As you play more, observe more, and study more published matches, you accumulate more benchmarks and develop better judgment in applying them. This occurs without any great advances in backgammon theory.

Your other questions ask about backgammon theory itself. I doubt the next 20 (let alone five) years will see advances comparable to the last 20. Diminishing returns set in here, too. Just as it may cost ten times as much to eliminate the last 50% of automobile exhaust emissions as the first 50%, so also it may take ten times as long for advances in backgammon knowledge to eliminate the last 50% of errors that top players make as the first 50%. The first steps in any science are giant steps, the last steps only inches.

I cannot say how or why Paul Magriel was able to write his pioneering *Backgammon* 20 years ago, but I can speak about my own contributions. Many biographical accidents had to occur for me to learn and write what I did about backgammon: a centipedal parlay of longshots very unlikely to recur in the next 20 years.

One set of accidents led to my developing "Jack Gammon," a backgammon machine. First I tried programming Jack algorithmically: "Do this if your roll per-

mits, else do that." No matter which hierarchy of priorities I invoked, Jack made bad plays—not just beginners' plays, but utterly absurd ones.

Soon I replaced algorithm by comparison of alternatives. I devised numerical measures of features (assets and liabilities) of the resulting positions, assigned weights to each feature, and had Jack make the play with the highest rating. Then I adjusted weights and measures until Jack moved regularly in accord with my own (limited) judgment.

I "taught" Jack. Human concepts (boards and builders, blots and shots, anchors, primes and degree of contact) determined Jack's plays; human judgment evaluated them. I'll guess that the next giant step for backgammon theory may come when future computer programs invert this process.

Already many analysts use massive JellyFish™ rollouts to estimate equities. *Frog* (a program in the year 2000) may play well enough for us to trust its rollouts. *Monkey* (a still more sophisticated program in 2015) may do more. *Monkey* may roll out sets of similar positions for comparison purposes, varying them in small increments (e.g. a spare on the 4-point instead of the 5-point, or a blot 12 pips away from a hitter instead of 11), and use "multivariate analysis" to derive lists of relevant variables, measures of these variables, and weights which we can apply to the measures to generate accurate equities. Then the program will teach us, not we it. We may even learn new concepts.—Yours, Danny Δ

Questions for Danny Kleinman should be addressed to: Ask Danny, c/o CHICAGO POINT, 3940 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. 504; Chicago, IL 60659-3128

RUSSELL WINS ABT...

[Continued from page 1]

the following pivotal position:

9 point match.
Glass (Black) leads
Russell (White) 7-5.
CUBE ACTIONS?

RUSSELL (5)
GLASS (7)

Glass thought for a long time before accepting and eventually losing. "I ran this on JellyFish™ and Bob was right to take by about 2%," Joe reported. "It's tough to analyze these types of positions over the board, but I think he made the correct decision. I'm not sure JellyFish™ plays this kind of position perfectly, but it's got to be a very close call. Many players would pass at this score. I was impressed with Bob's take."

Champ Joe Russell, along with runners-up Doug Roberts and Abbas Zaltash will receive their ABT trophies at the 18th Pittsburgh Championships 16-18 February. Pittsburgh is the American Backgammon Tour kickoff event for 1996. Final

1995 ABT standings are on page 3. **G/A 35TH INVITATIONAL** results follow: Δ

- OPEN (42): 1-Joe Russell, 2-Fred Kalantari (MN), 3-Bob Glass; 1C-Doug Amenda, 2C-Marcy Sloan.
- INTERMEDIATE (17): 1-George Photias (NV), 2-Randy Douthat; 1C-Larry Deckel.
- SUPER 16 (24): 1-Odis Chenault, 2-Doug Mayfield, 3/4-Mike Mooney (AZ) / Zev Vered.
- DOUBLES (8): 1-Paul Stokes & Woody Woodson, 2-Saul Meir & Leon Weiner (TX).
- SPEED-GAMMON: 1-Ray Fogerlund.
- CALIFORNIA CLUB CHALLENGE CUP (3): 1-Gammon Associates (Bob Glass, Patrick Gibson, Todd Crosner, Mike Ungerleider, Norm Wiggins, Azzam Masarani), 2-Clarine's of Beverly Hills, 3-Backgammon Club of San Diego.

'Long Road' Reviewed...

[Continued from page 1]

escape more completely on 6-4 as well as 6-6, and isolates the two men White still has on Black's bar-point.

"White has nearly equalized the race and should be thinking about clearing the bar-anchor safely. Now is a good time to play 18/14, 18/14. While this releases some of the pressure on Black's midpoint, it provides better coverage of White's outer court: double shots instead of single if Black runs with 6-4, 6-3, or 6-2."

Deceptively simple! I doubt if anyone who has never struggled to write about backgammon checker play for publication can fully appreciate the artfulness of this analysis. The first paragraph neatly captures the ineffectiveness of an offensive formation containing points six pips apart, and the next two play off the implicit inflexibility of this formation to motivate a search for "purer" alternatives.

The second paragraph introduces the motifs of outfield control and communication. The third recapitulates the control, communication, and flexibility themes and presents the recommended play as providing a solution in all three areas. All this accomplished in simple language without a bit of abstraction or appeal to generalities. (Incidentally, Danny gets the right answer.)

Most cube action problems are not solvable by pure reason, and since Danny doesn't do rollouts, his credibility is more problematical in this area. The matches in "Long Road To Gammon" happen to include many difficult and interesting doubling positions. Although I have only found a few in which I am 99% convinced that Danny's opinion is mistaken, there are more that I regard as too close to call. Oddly enough, the only position he puts into the "close/don't know" category is a calculable bearoff.

Of course the book contains errors. It is not possible to write an interesting book about backgammon without making a few mistakes. Kleinman's reputation has suffered in some circles because he doesn't make the same kinds of mistakes everyone else does. When he goes astray, it is usually due to a blind spot in his positional vision—the inevitable result of failure to keep abreast of current tournament practice. These mistakes then seem "obvious" to high-ranking players.

For instance, his solution to CHICAGO POINT's June 1994 Problem #203 (page 19

in "Long Road To Gammon") was a move that top players would not consider for long. Marty Storer wrote another solution to the problem, which appeared in the August 1994 POINT along with Danny's acknowledgment and "thanks for the correction." This was not a unique incident. Kleinman has no delusions of omniscience; his objectivity about his own work is one of his strengths.

"Long Road To Gammon" is not free from "vision thing" errors. The two diagrams below show a crucial point in a game from Match 1 (page 59) in which Kleinman's evaluation really seems to miss the boat:

Diagram B. 17 point match. Black leads White 11-4. **WHITE TO PLAY 6-3.**

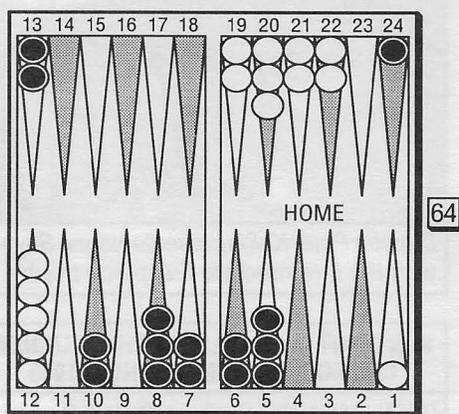
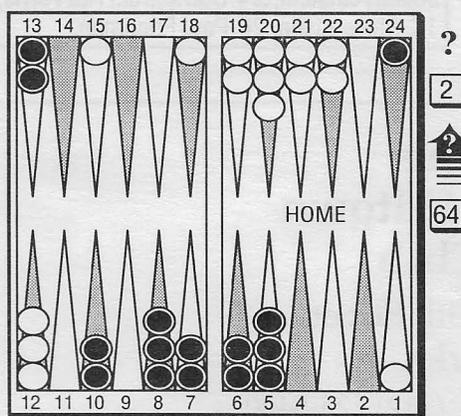


Diagram C. 17 point match. Black leads White 11-4. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**



In Diagram B, White slots his bar with 13/7, 13/10, a play which Danny criticizes as "too risky." But the slotting play feels completely natural to me, and none of the three world-class players I consulted on this had much doubt that the slot was correct. Building a 5-prime from the back is the most efficient and direct way to use the checkers on the mid-point to create a winning position.

Kleinman's recommended 13/4, plan-

ning to attack later, anticipates and relies on a tortuous, chancy path to victory: White will have to roll lucky point-making numbers, or hit loose, pray for Black to dance or at least miss, get lucky and cover the blot, hope Black dances again, or repeat the process . . . and finally, with little timing left, thread his back man through Black's structure before his own position collapses. Meanwhile, if Black happens to have made a 6-prime, the attack will be 100% futile.

After White slots, Kleinman is surprised by Black's failure to double in Diagram C. Except for the shot, though, White has an edge in all departments: race lead, better home board, better checker distribution. If he makes his bar (26 numbers miss, then 28 numbers cover, so he's a slight favorite), he'll also have a solid 5-prime, which is a lot better than Black's gapped prime. My rollout result (-0.04 after double/take, 108 trials) suggests that for money, it may actually be a beaver.

The other errors I have found are a good deal less serious than this one, and most represent simple oversights. On balance, I strongly recommend "Long Road To Gammon," especially to those readers who are prepared to give it the thoughtful reading that it deserves.—
Walter Trice Δ

november contest results

CHECKER SWITCHEROO

Solved

The challenge was to pick up two adjacent checkers (no space in between them) and within four moves, reposition the checkers so that they alternate black, white, black, white, etc.

Congratulations to ART BENJAMIN of Pasadena, CA who wins the \$25 for this neat solution: Move BC to fill 2 and 1. Move EF to fill 9 and 8. Move HB to fill 6 and 5. Finally move AE to fill 3 and 2. *Bingo!*

It's a nice puzzle for between matches. Δ

AMALGAMATION

Look for an expanded "Winner's Corner" in the January POINT... **Yamin Yamin's** (IL) interest in Chicagoland history, past and present is the impetus for his new game "Chicago Wheelers." The \$69 game mentions several backgammon players. For more info, call 708/317-9715 or write: Chicago Wheelers, Inc.; PO Box 275; Lake Bluff, IL 60044... Former Louisville Backgammon Club director **Larry Strasberg** (KY) surfaced at the recent Gammon Associates tournament in Los Angeles... **Stu Katz** (IL) is too busy with his new vocation to play much backgammon these days. His new company Cybering, Inc. builds home pages for computerland's World Wide Web. If you can use his services, call 708/679-1772... Macintosh computer users still can't get JellyFish™, but for \$24.99 (less in software stores) we can own "Game Parlor" by MacSoft (612/559-5140). The CD-ROM includes chess, checkers, solitaire, crossword puzzles and a standard version of **Tom Johnson's** (NV) Expert Backgammon™ with outstanding graphics. The manual suggests the following EXBG upgrades direct from Komodo Software (702/384-1068): Game Edition \$25, Master Edition \$75... **John Stryker** (IL) was part of the Oakton Community College's College Bowl team who won the Skyway Conference championship this fall. The game required an extensive knowledge of all subject matters... It was **Thomas Jefferson** who said: "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." Δ

SIMBORG AND SHYER CAPTURE BPC FALL TROPHY TOURNEY



Open champ Phil Simborg (right) battles Herb Roman as Dean Muench watches.

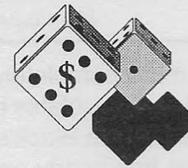


Director Peter Kalba presents Norma Shyer with the Intermediate first place trophy.

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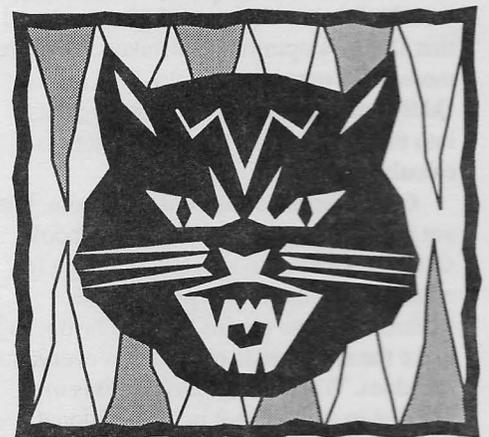
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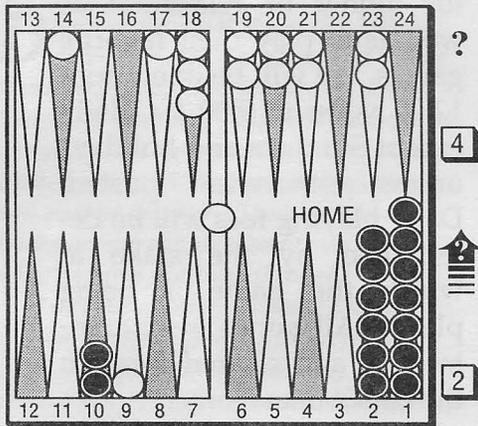
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**PROBLEM #219
SOLVED**

by Neil Kazaross

Money game. Black holds a 2-cube.
CUBE ACTIONS?

Although this position may look a bit unusual, the cube action can easily and accurately be determined by JellyFish™ computer rollout since the checker play is likely to be quite straightforward in most variations. Unfortunately, one is not permitted to bring a computer to the table, so I will discuss my practical approach for solving this problem.

Black is clearly a favorite to win the game and has some chance to gammon White if things go really well. From Black's standpoint, this is close to a "last roll situation" because so many sequences (Black's roll followed by White's roll) clarify the outcome. White will either hit at least one blot and win, or she'll miss and Black is then favored to clean up his blots and gin the game. Thus the volatility is very, very high right now and Black should be recubing here if he is a clear favorite not to be hit.

To consider the volatility, Black can roll 5-5 or 6-6 and be playing for a gammon. On the other hand, he might shoot 4-6 or 5-6, leave two inside blots, and get gammoned. A concept that is misunderstood by many players is that the higher the volatility in an upcoming roll sequence, the lower Black's advantage has to be to justify a double or redouble since the risk of a huge market loss is great.

So all Black must do here is realize that he is a clear favorite and then ship the cube over to White. But wait a minute! What about all those double blot numbers? Is Black really a clear favorite? Let's check without going through the mental gymnastics of cross-counting shots for each and

every roll.

Well, 1-2, 1-3 and all doubles leave at most, one indirect shot. 2-3, 2-6, 3-5, 3-6, and 4-5 leave only 11 shots, although shots may repeat if Black rolls poorly next turn. The hitting 1-4, 1-5 and 1-6 force Black to leave a direct shot; however the number of hits is not high as White has two men on the bar. Now 4-6 and 5-6 leave two inside blots and will likely get Black recubed to 8. The other numbers leave 18-20 shots and a near toss-up game. All told, it seems like White is going to get the equivalent of a direct shot next roll and still have some shot possibilities on the following shake.

Does Black lose if hit? Certainly, unless he hits back with 3-5 or leaps in and out with 3-6.

How often will Black get gammoned? Actually, not that often because first, White needs to pick up two blots (both of which may not even be around). While White waits for the second blot, there is the chance of Black entering and escaping. And even if White hits the second checker and completes a closeout, she is still only about 40% to win that gammon. Thus, Black is not likely to get gammoned and White will often cash via recube after hitting only one blot. Since Black will only be hit a bit over 30% next roll and has more gammon chances than White, Black must redouble now!

White must decide whether she can take this cube. How often can she really get gammoned if she never hits? White need 11 crossovers to get all her men in. Black will hit White with an ace, cost her two more crossovers, and give her dancing chances. White also needs to bear a checker off and may waste a crossover moving around the board. So it looks like White will need seven or possibly eight rolls to save the gammon if she doesn't hit.

However, Black will need one roll to bear his men in and eight more to bear them off and also may waste a roll cleaning up a blot or two. So Black will need nine, or maybe 10 rolls to bear off his men. Although Black has a speed board and shoots first, it is clear that White is a favorite to save the gammon when she is unable to hit.

Let's estimate that White is only gammoned 30% of the time she misses. Next we have to consider how often White can hit Black on the second roll. Many sequences leave Black with an outside blot or an outside and inside blot and considerable cleanup work. Let's say that in the 70% of the games where Black escapes getting hit this turn, he will be hit in 15% of those in subsequent turns. So in total, Black gets hit about 40% and loses almost

all of them, while White misses 60% and gets gammoned in 30% of those. Going through the numbers, we have White winning almost 40% and getting gammoned only 18%. Thus White has a clear take here and might even get a couple of gammons herself, or at least a "recube in" if Black shoots 4-6 or 5-6.

My JellyFish™ rollout agreed with this "seat of the pants" evaluation and showed Black winning only one point if he holds the cube. By doubling, Black's expectancy would rise to a point and one-half per game. (Initial rollout results: Black wins 44% single games, 17% gammons; White wins 38% single games and 1% gammons. Personally, I think White can win 2%-3% gammons here.) Of course, White must "take" since she would forfeit two points by passing.

Another JellyFish™ rollout showed that Black has a close pass if he rolls a number like 2-6 and gets hit and enters on the 3-point but can't leap. Thus we can see that getting hit is indeed almost fatal for Black. If Black rolls the 4-6 or 5-6 turkey, it seems White can gain a bit of equity by sending over the easily takeable recube to 8.

Two lessons are apparent in this problem. First and most important is that you must cube in high volatility situations when you are the clear favorite. Secondly, as a rule of thumb, turn the cube when you have a huge race lead and only one point to clear unless you can see that your opponent is close to a favorite to hit you. Δ

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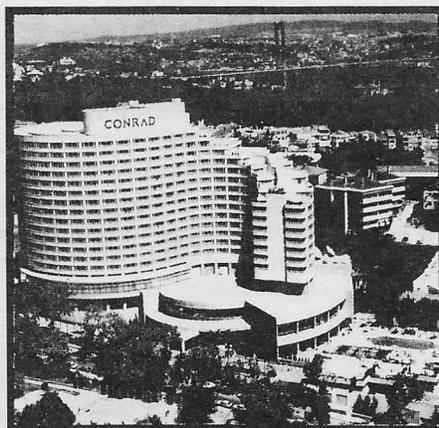
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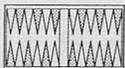
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