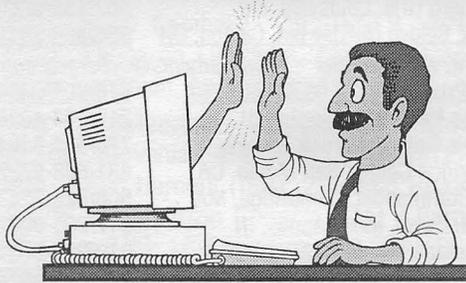


Backgammon Analysis: USING COMPUTERS AS OUR ASSISTANTS

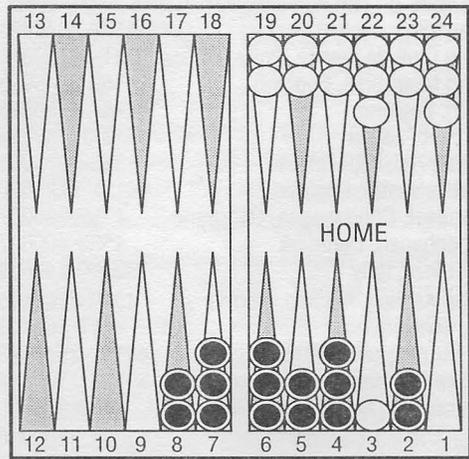


by Mary Hickey

One thing I really like about backgammon computer programs, is that they can help you expand upon the solution to a specific problem to find a general solution to a much larger class of similar problems. This can be accomplished by making small adjustments to the position to help isolate the relevant factors.

Let me show you how I used JellyFish™ to study a problem that came up in the first round of our Northern Ohio Club's 1997 Thanksgiving Tournament:

9-point match. Art Benjamin (Black) leads Mary Hickey (White), 8-6 Crawford. **BLACK TO PLAY 6-3.**



Mathematician and 1997 ABT champion Art Benjamin (CA) took a while before eventually playing 7/1, 6/3*. I also thought it was a difficult problem, and

wrote it down. A week later, I did an extensive study of it with the help of that slippery little computerized sea creature, JellyFish 3.0.

Art's choice appears to be the best of the hitting plays. The other possibility, 8/2, 6/3*, might be right in some situations, but seems unlikely ever to be significantly better.

When we look at safe plays, making the ace point seems to be out in front by a huge margin over the prime-busting (but not point-making) 8/2, 8/5. Therefore, I'll narrow my comparison to the actual play and making the ace point.

Jelly, at Level 7 evaluation and Level 5 rollout, agreed with Art's play, both at Crawford (win percent) and for money (equity). I could have left it at that, but why not get all you can out of an interesting position? By using JellyFish as a study tool, I tried to determine the criteria for hitting loose at the edge of a prime in the endgame when there is a safe, reasonable, and nondestructive alternative.

Black's rather blah standing in the race (down 72 to 68 after the roll if he doesn't hit) isn't a big deal to JellyFish, as the adjusted cases described below make clear. This is partly because if Black doesn't hit, White's standing in the race won't improve much at all unless she rolls a 6. Piling extra checkers on the lower points won't extract the full racing value of the non-6 rolls. Moreover, letting White start to break her board will make it less risky for Black to hit later, should he decide it is necessary.

What does seem to matter is that White has many "root numbers" from the bar when Black hits, and White immediately hits him back. These root numbers, 5-1, 5-3, 4-1, 4-3, and 3-3, all force White to open up a second man in her home board, giving Black the advantage despite having been return hit.

When I ran a case where White has a closed board but no root numbers (I moved the spare on the ace back to the 9-point), Jelly opted to wimp out, 7/1, 4/1. Of course this did also improve the race for Black, leaving him up four pips instead of down four after the roll.

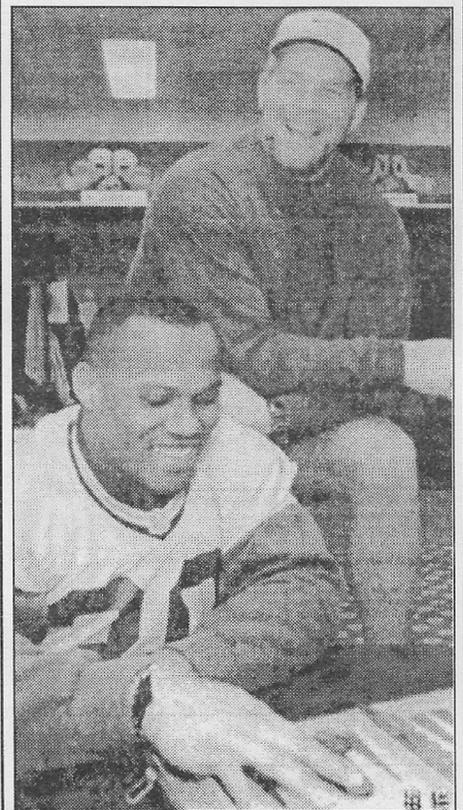
Next, I improved White's race by

moving Black's two checkers on the 2-point back to his 7- and 6-points. I tried this with White's spare checker on the 9-point and also with it back on the ace point. Jelly again determined (by a wide margin) whether or not to hit based upon whether or not there were root numbers. These results suggested that the consequences of being hit mattered a lot more to Jelly than the race.

My next question was: does Jelly really care about picking up a second checker, or would it be happy to just have some play after being hit? To test this, I tried moving White's two checkers on the 6-point back to her 8-point while leaving her two spares on the 3- and 1-points. This gives White an open 6-point but no root numbers from the

[Continued on page 5]

PLAY BY THE BAY



Brett Favre kibitzes William Henderson's backgammon play in the Green Bay Packer's locker room prior to kickoff.

[Photo by Morry Gash]

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

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MORE 'FISHY' QUESTIONS

With regard to Dick Nelson's statistics on JellyFish; I have found that while the probability of entering a three point board should be around 75%, the probability of entering a three point board just after you have accepted a double from JellyFish is less than 50%. I have not kept rigorous statistics like Dick, but intend to do so. Also, if a double has not been offered and accepted, the probability is indeed just around 75%. I sent the developers an e-mail asking if a "patch" could be offered that would permit a user to insert his own role generator. They indicated that the next release might contain such an option.—
Steve Robinson, Langhorne, PA

Many backgammon programs are now on the market and many more people are trying to learn the game by the use of these

[Continued on page 3]

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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

E-mail: cjc@flint.org

* Denotes new or revised listing

NATIONAL

American Backgammon Tour events underlined.

Nov 10-14	1998 Las Vegas Open, Riviera Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, NV	702/893-6025
Nov 15	Backgammon by the Bay, San Mateo Bridge Center, San Mateo, CA	831/688-9722
Nov 15	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	508/829-3283
Nov 15	Sunday Bimonthly Tournament, John Hawks Pub, Milwaukee, WI	414/463-2498
Nov 15	Austin Bimonthly Tournament, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/261-8518
Nov 17	16th Bar Point Club Fall Trophy Tourney, Golden Flame, Chicago, IL	773/583-6464
Nov 19	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Nov 21	Dr. Bob's "Sweet 16" Invitational, New York Chess & BG, New York City	212/302-5874
Nov 22	Atlanta Monthly Tournament, Tony's Grille, Roswell, GA	770/333-1876
Nov 28	Clarine's Monthly Tournament, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	213/822-9745
Nov 29	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
Nov 29	Louisville Monthly Tournament, Oldenberg Grill, Louisville, KY	502/458-9660
Nov 27-29	<u>Northern Ohio Thanksgiving Tournament, Belden Holiday Inn, Canton, OH</u>	<u>330/966-2811</u>
Dec 1*	Official GamesGrid Monthly Tournament, via computer	<i>tournaments@cyberarts.com</i>
Dec 4-6	<u>Gammon/Associates Invitational, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA</u>	<u>818/901-0464</u>
Dec 5	Springfield Heineken Series #2, Ride the Nine, Bloomington, IL	217/483-4028
Dec 6	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Anyway's Grill, Oakbrook Terrace, IL	773/583-6464
Dec 6	Backgammon by the Bay, San Mateo Bridge Center, San Mateo, CA	831/688-9722
Dec 13	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	508/829-3283
Dec 13	Hoosier Sunday Tournament, Wildcat Brewery, Indianapolis, IN	317/255-8902
Dec 17*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Dec 19*	Dr. Bob's "Sweet 16" Invitational, New York Chess & BG, New York City	212/302-5874
Dec 20*	Atlanta Holiday Celebration Tournament, Tony's Grille, Roswell, GA	770/333-1876
Dec 26*	Clarine's Monthly Tournament, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	213/822-9745
Dec 26*	Flint Area Club Holiday Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Dec 27*	Louisville Monthly Tournament, Oldenberg Grill, Louisville, KY	502/458-9660
Dec 27*	Beltway Club Jackpot Tournament, Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Dec 26-27	<u>Ace Point Holiday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY</u>	<u>212/753-0842</u>
Jan 5*	Chicago Bar Point Club 1998 Awards Night, Golden Flame, Chicago, IL	773/583-6464
Jan 9*	Springfield Heineken Series #3, Parker's Sports Bar, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Jan 16*	Rocky Mountain Tournament, Cheers, Denver, CO	719/574-5598
Jan 17*	Backgammon By The Bay, San Mateo Bridge Center, San Mateo, CA	831/688-9722
Jan 30*	Clarine's Monthly Tournament, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	213/822-9745
Jan 31*	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
Jan 31*	Louisville Monthly Tournament, Oldenberg Grill, Louisville, KY	502/458-9660
Feb 4-7	Rio Pro-Am Invitational, Rio Hotel/Casino, Las Vegas, NV	301/299-8265
Feb 6*	Springfield Heineken Series #4, Hilton Hotel, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Feb 7*	Illinois State Challenge Cup, Hilton Hotel, Springfield, IL	773/583-6464
Mar 5-7	<u>Gammon Associates Invitational, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA</u>	<u>818/901-0464</u>
Mar 19-21	<u>1999 Midwest Championships, Radisson Hotel, Lisle, IL</u>	<u>773/583-6464</u>
May 28-31*	<u>20th Chicago Open, Wyndham NW Chicago Hotel, Itasca, IL</u>	<u>847/674-0120</u>
Jul 2-5*	<u>Michigan Summer Championships, Novi Hilton Hotel, Novi, MI</u>	<u>810/232-9731</u>

OUTSIDE USA

Nov 12-15	Bodensee Grand Prix 1998, Bregenz, Austria	4179-3374425
Nov 12-15	French National Championships, Aviation Club de France, Paris, France	331-40150870
Nov 14-15	Townharbour Trophy, Stakis Birmingham Metropole, England	44152-2546993
Nov 21-22	UK Classic, Jarvis Hotel/Watford/London, England	44161-4380966
Nov 21-23	1998 Japan Open, Nakano Sun Plaza, Tokyo, Japan	813-33733844
Nov 27-29*	24th Finnish Open, Helsinki Sporting Club, Helsinki, Finland	358-5068061
Nov 27-29	Inner Table Tournament #4, Grand Hotel Leicester, England	44152-2721630
Nov 28-29*	Danmarks mesterskabet 1998, Østerbrohuset, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-400607
Nov 28-29*	DM 1998 under 21, Østerbrohuset, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-400607
Nov 28-29*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Firenze, Italy	39360-444664
Dec 4-6	3rd Santa Claus Tournament, Spielcasino Aachen, Aachen, Germany	4940-8306415
Dec 11-13	2nd Casino Open, Hotel Seepark, Thun, Switzerland	4417-569700
Dec 12-13	Stakis UK Championship Finals, Stakis Birmingham Metropole, UK	44152-2546993
Dec 12-13*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Genova, Italy	39338-7187324
Dec 26-27*	1st C.A. International, Restaurant Spiselloppen, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-401785
Jan 2-3	High Class Competition, Cafe Florianihof, Vienna, Austria	43664-2303940
Jan 9-10*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Rome, Italy	39338-7187324
Jan 15-24*	Giant Jackpot & World Cup Challenge V, Hyatt Regency Istanbul, Turkey	9723-6727063
Jan 23-24*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Mestre, Italy	39360-444664
Jan 28-31*	1st Principe Leopoldo Cup, Principe Leopoldo Hotel, Lugano, Switzerland	4179-3374425
Apr 1-5*	11th Nordic "Wide" Open, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-400607
Jul 12-18*	World Championship, Loews Monte Carlo, Monaco	USA contact: 954/527-4033

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 2]

programs. I would like anyone to tell me how they can rely on the results of rollouts that are generated from these programs when the dice are not random. As a matter

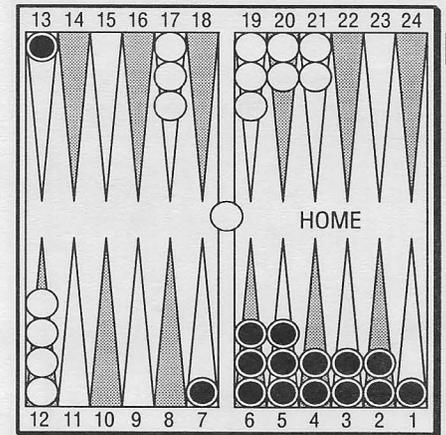
of fact they are programmed-in codes which can be figured out; hence it's possible for a person to know what roll is forthcoming.—*Ken Bruck, Ft. Wayne, IN*

I have read Mr. Nelson's letter about JellyFish and agree with his comments.

Almost everybody knows or suspects JF dice are not fair, but nobody wants to print it. Actually I find similarities with this and the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm "The Emperor's New Clothes."

Unlike Mr. Nelson, I did some testing, not with the percentages of doublets, but with the particular decisive position below, in which to roll a hitting number is particularly important.

Money game. JellyFish (White) vs. Mario Madrigal (Black). **WHITE (ON THE BAR) TO ROLL.**



After 3024 rolls, J.F. hit me almost 3.5% more times than random dice would have. That means a lot of money. In other words, I would rather play this position against Mike Senkewitz than vs. JellyFish! (Any J.F. user can repeat this procedure and should get very similar results noticing

[Continued on page 7]

AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR ★ 1998

Compiled through 1 Nov. 1998 after 13 tournaments
(Remaining: No. Ohio Thanksgiving, G/A Invitational, Ace Pt. Holiday)

Alex Caraplis 41.70	Mike Fujita 7.97	John Brooks 4.75	Francois Margot 2.88
Perry Gartner 34.44	Jeremy Kirkpatrick 7.22	Mike Lauzon 4.74	John Mazur 2.81
Maurice Barie 27.73	Bob Holyon 7.00	Mike Hendrikson 4.72	Ray Kershaw 2.67
Steve Hast 25.29	Ray Glaeser 7.00	Zia Afshani 4.68	Roger Baff 2.44
Dennis Culpepper 25.08	Jack Takala 6.82	Lucky Nelson 4.55	Linda Resnicoff 2.39
Steve McCormick 22.88	Frank Talbot 6.82	Rob Maier 4.36	Matt Reklaitis 2.39
Mike Friedman 22.45	Dave Orandle 6.54	Rory Pascar 4.35	Harold Roberson 2.38
Walter Trice 20.23	Drew Giovanis 6.50	Walt Swan 4.21	Ron Kompelien 2.38
Doug Roberts 19.46	Sig Skolnick 6.44	Chuck Bower 4.16	Hunter Jones 2.36
Bob Glass 17.42	Howard Markowitz 6.40	John Brussel 4.16	Jim Bowman 2.35
David Todd 16.67	Odis Chenault 6.11	Mark Larios 4.11	Wally Wolf 2.35
Doug Mayfield 13.74	Ray Fogelrund 6.11	Gayle Wolf 4.08	Mark Cohen 2.34
David Simpson 13.47	Paul Stebbing 5.88	Paul Dibiasse 3.99	Gordon Bass 2.34
Jeff Acierno 13.42	Larry Yudin 5.88	Gabe Davis 3.98	Adam Versaw 2.33
Merrill Schragar 13.22	Andy Glazer 5.77	Peter Kalba 3.92	James Roston 2.16
Malcolm Davis 11.75	Ana Lucia Almeida 5.65	Gary Payne 3.92	Jobey Calitri 2.11
Jannica Tornqvist 11.63	Mike Cyrkiel 5.60	Don Faix 3.67	Bob Bercu 2.11
Jim Hickey 11.55	Sam Orandle 5.33	Bob Wilensky 3.41	Bruce Russell 2.08
Frankie Farjood 11.44	Phil Williams 5.25	Karen Davis 3.41	Lenny Loder 2.08
David Wells 11.20	Bill Keefe 5.20	John Graas 3.41	Ed King 1.96
Mike Rezai 9.59	Ed Johnson 5.11	Eden Windish 3.33	Kieth Hramstad 1.81
Art Benjamin 8.71	Wendy Kaplan 5.04	Kim Haubert 3.15	Gil Evans 1.76
Richard Del Furia 8.66	Jack Kissane 4.89	Eliot Bean 3.05	Rob Keast 1.55
Lincoln Bedell 8.56	Joe Freedman 4.80	Butch Meese 3.00	David Montgomery 1.55
Steve Herman 8.04	Denny Leatherman 4.80	Sam Pottle 2.88	David Menkes 1.50

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 1998 PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 31 OCT.

Steve Mellen 23.00	Marc Rosset 5.48	Reginald Porter 2.48	Jay Ward 0.64
Joe Wollick 21.32	Don Jayhan 5.00	Georgina Flanagan 2.12	Ralph Barnes 0.64
Neil Kazaross 18.48	Elaine Kehm 4.92	Joseph Esfahani 1.92	Steve Rota 0.56
Tak Morioka 15.00	Andy Krenitz 4.88	Richard Lloyd 1.92	Sam Yoyen 0.56
Laila Leonhardt 13.56	Norma Shyer 4.80	Paul Baraz 1.76	Ken Tyszko 0.52
Paul Friedman 12.16	Jerry Brooks 4.36	Romeo Kap 1.28	Joe Wehrle 0.48
Jake Jacobs 12.08	Tim Mabee 4.20	Howard Ring 1.28	Mark Murray 0.44
Alice Kay 11.52	Arline Levy 4.18	Joann Feinstein 1.22	Rich Gast 0.32
Phyllis Smolinski 10.92	Gary Kay 4.08	Sam Pottle 1.20	Sonia Peacock 0.32
Paul Klein 10.92	Ken Bond 3.60	Val Zimnicki 1.16	Linda Woods 0.32
Herb Roman 9.56	George Barr 3.36	Bob Steen 1.12	Sarg Serges 0.32
Rick Bieniak 9.56	Rodney Bell 3.28	Barry Miller 0.96	Joe Koucharian 0.32
Paul Franks 8.40	Tim Carroll 3.24	Earl Risch 0.96	Henry Gray 0.28
Ed Buerger 8.36	Steve Klesker 3.20	Ed Zell 0.96	Steve Neidecker 0.28
Bob Zavoral 7.88	Sah Dogan 3.04	Rex Savage 0.88	Barbara Levinson 0.24
Bill Keefe 7.36	John Demian 2.72	Roz Ferris 0.84	Mark Ryan 0.16
Bill Davis 6.92	Carter Mattig 2.72	Wendy Kaplan 0.84	Boris Mindich 0.16
Mary Franks 6.60	Richard Stawowy 2.56	Jannica Tornqvist 0.84	Frankie Farjood 0.16
Harry Cohn 6.56	Peter Kalba 2.56	Greg Defotis 0.72	Paul Lombardo 0.16
Marty Tatosian 6.48	David Araiza 2.56	Bobbie Shifrin 0.72	Stan Kucharz 0.12
Phil Simborg 6.48	Dave Cramer 2.48	Roland Dieter 0.64	Amy Valerio 0.12

For the second month in a row, **NEIL KAZAROSS** is the BPC Player of the Month. Neil is trying to catch the leaders in an effort to become the annual champ for a 6th straight year. Can he do it?

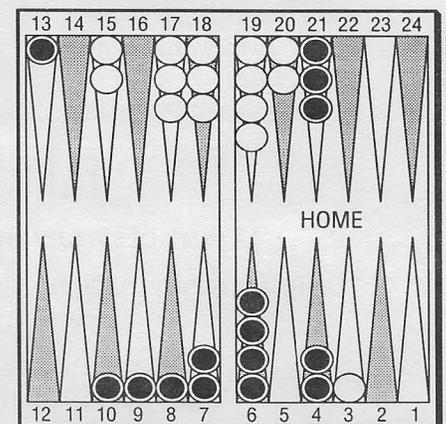
October runner's-up were Sah Dogan (3.04) and Phyllis Smolinski (2.80). Δ

your move

PROBLEM #249

to be analyzed by Alex Caraplis

1998 Florida State Championships 13-point semifinals. Ray Glaeser (White) leads Drew Giovanis (Black) 12 to 10. **BLACK TO PLAY 2-1.**



DEAR MISS LONELYBLOTS

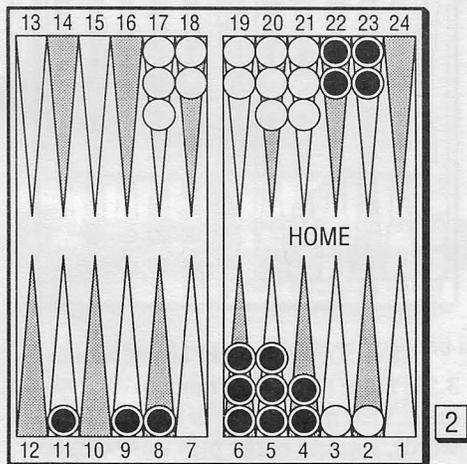


© 1998 by Danny Kleinman

TIMING

Dear Miss Lonelyblots: I'm an inexperienced player just embarking on my tournament career. Last Sunday I surprised everyone by making it to the finals against Sliderule Sally, one of the club's finest. I faced this problem in the third game:

Match to 13-points. Black leads White 2-0. **BLACK TO PLAY 2-2.**



"Nice shake, Ben," said Roger, one of the many kibitzers gathered to watch.

"Hush, Roger," said Sally.

Seizing my chance to pounce, I played 9/3*, 5/3 and lifted my dice.

"There goes his timing," muttered Roger under his breath.

I hadn't the foggiest idea what Roger meant, but soon the roof fell in and I lost a gammon.

"You went forward prematurely, Ben," said Roger. "You should have left a blot with those double-deuces."

What in the world was Roger talking about, Miss Lonelyblots? Do you have any tips for when to "go forward" in a back game?—Beginner Ben

DEAR BEGINNER: *Timing* is as thorny a concept as you'll find in backgammon. The late Barclay Cooke wrote of it as the "playability" of numbers, by which he meant *constructive* playability: the ability to move without weakening your position. That says part of it, but I'd add the *unplayability* of rolls, the concept behind "killing" 6s, a useful stratagem in back games. Rolls are also unplayable when you are on the bar and cannot reenter.

In a back game, you should aim to increase your own unplayable and constructively playable rolls and decrease your opponent's. By getting hit in the position you show, you give yourself unplayable combinations of 6s, 5s and 4s (which dance) and constructively playable combinations of 3s, 2s and 1s (which reinforce your 3-anchor). Reinforcing your most advanced anchor in a backgame helps your timing by letting you use large numbers to *recycle* men without breaking an anchor.

With four men trapped behind a 5-prime to Sally's two men behind your 4-prime, you were extremely unlikely to win a battle of primes: to be the first to escape fully without cracking. Rather than joining a battle you'll almost never win, you should delay your attempt to go forward until Sally's prime springs a leak or two.

With your first three 2s, you must play 11/7, 9/7, making the bar-point that blocks Sally's escape from your 2-point on 5s. Then you have a choice for the fourth: 8/6; 6/4; or 5/3*. Of these, 8/6 is the weakest: any 6 or 5 lets Sally escape with one man and leaves you vulnerable to crashing. 6/4 is better because it forces Sally to hit (improving your timing) with any 5. 5/3*, however, is best of all, for it forces Sally to hit with any escaping roll and gives her 1-5s and 2-5s from the bar to start cracking immediately—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.

AMALGAMATION

Recent visitors to the Chicago Bar Point Club: **Cathy Bennett** (IN) and **Harry Cohn** (NY)... **Dave Hilton** tells us that the Phoenix Backgammon Club is now open for action, meeting Tuesdays (7:00 p.m.) at George & The Dragon Restaurant. Call Dave at 602/265-1992 or e-mail: daveh@aol.com... **Jerry Brown** just opened the Greater Toronto Backgammon Club which now meets every Tuesday (7:00 p.m.) at Comedywood Club. Get more info from Jerry at 416/250-8174, or e-mail jmbpro@msn.com... Congratulations to **Doug and Wanda Roberts** (MA) who were married on 24 October. And an apology to Doug who was last year's Indiana Open Champion. We erroneously credited **Dave Williams** (CA) with that honor in the October POINT when in fact, he won in 1996... **Leo Bueno** is a contact for the Miami Backgammon Club. There's action every Thursday at 8:00 p.m. Leo can be reached at 305/818-9129, or e-mail leobueno@usa.net... Our condolences to **Neil Kazaross** (IL) who lost his father last month. Neil pulled out of the Florida State Championships when he was informed of the news on 23 October. He tells us his 78-year-old Dad had just one a bridge tournament the night before. And our thoughts are also with **Wilcox Snelings** (NV) whose Dad also passed away last month... World Cup V is "on" at the Hyatt Regency Istanbul in Turkey 18-24 January. There is no casino at the Hyatt, so tell us?: Who is coming up with the guaranteed \$50,000 added prize money?... **Joe Wollick** is now the official director of the Pub Club. Former director **Val Zimnicki** is too involved with politics to continue the club... Shopping for a Persian Rug? Contact **Marty Tatosian** (847/475-0010). His Evanston, Illinois shop, **Oscar Isberian Rugs**, is one of the largest oriental rug stores in the United States... Get well wishes go out to **Joe Koucharian** (IL). Joe suffered a mild stroke last month and is back on the road to recovery... **John Brussel** (IL) tells us that **Jan Carlstrom** (PA) has been seriously ill and is facing a long battle. John suggests you send a cheer-up card or letter to Jan at: 717 Blueberry Drive, W. Mifflin, PA 15122... **Bart Levin** (CO) wonders who the highest rated player on FIBS really is. His playing name is **BROHAM** and his 2170 places him ahead of **JellyFish Level 8** (2101), **Snowie** (2089), **Gary Kay** (2003), and **KG** (1915)... **Scott Pardee** would like you to check out his new game "Chebache." It's a new strategic board game combining the elements of checkers, backgammon and chess. You can take a look at it at www.chebache.com... Happy Thanksgiving to all our Bar Point Club members and CHICAGO POINT subscribers. Δ

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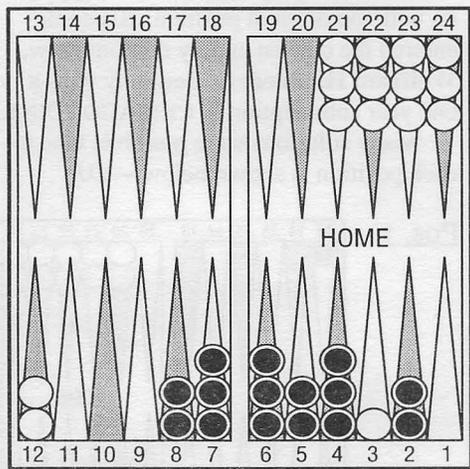
COMPUTERS...

[Continued from page 1]

bar if she enters after being hit. It also leaves the race even after the roll if Black doesn't hit. Jelly (Level 5 rollout) had a small but consistent preference for making the ace point. This safe play was preferred for both percent of games won and money equity. Thus it appears that JellyFish really does want a second checker, not just a chance to get back in the game, if it is hit back.

Crashing White's board to the 4-point and below to produce two open points with no root numbers, then putting the spares further back in the outer board to adjust the race, led to the break-even position shown below:

9-point match. Black leads White, 8-6 Crawford. **BLACK TO PLAY 6-3.**



With White's spare checkers back on the midpoint, Black will lead by six pips after the roll if he doesn't hit (actually more if you adjust for White's bad combination of stacks and extra crossovers). JellyFish makes the plays "pick em" with the Level 7 evaluation, and yields a split decision on the rollout: the safe play wins more often, but the hit gives better money equity.

Even this doesn't truly isolate Black's ability to reenter quickly. Those White checkers on the midpoint may also give Black additional shots after he reenters, since White may be forced to break the midpoint before she escapes Junior from behind Black's still-intact prime. On the other hand, they may instead benefit White by enabling her to hit Black after he reenters, buying her some more time to escape her back checker. But it's as close as it gets, since we can't safety White's checkers without improving her race or closing her board.

It was even harder to try to isolate the

importance of the race alone in a case where White had a closed board with a spare outside. The problem is, both players only have 15 checkers and there are only so many places you can put them. It turns out that anything we do to make Black's race worse, such as moving his prime back one place (to the 5- through 9-points instead of the 4- through 8-points) adds new considerations such as increased gammon chances and/or more return shots. About all we can show is that the pip count alone simply will not lead to the right play in these positions.

JellyFish Level 7 evaluational preferences were all very clear here, except in the basic problem and the two break-even cases discussed above. In all except those cases, it calculated an equity difference of greater than 0.100, making rollouts unnecessary since a "reversal on appeal" would be highly unlikely. (This was good news for me, since I am still running all this stuff on a 486DX dinosaur.)

So the answer to the specific question is, Art Benjamin made a good play. So what else is new? But what answer to the general question about hitting on the edge of a prime has JellyFish provided us with? The first two parts of the answer are easy:

1. When your race is bad, always hit if you have significant and immediate counterplay when your opponent hits you back. But if he has a closed board he rates to keep, for money, hitting is too rich no matter what the pip count is. However, in match situations where gammons don't count against you, there are extreme cases where the hit will be right.
2. When you have a big racing lead, play safe, even if gammons count for you. You only have to win the game once, and the gammons you might win don't justify the risk you take by hitting loose.

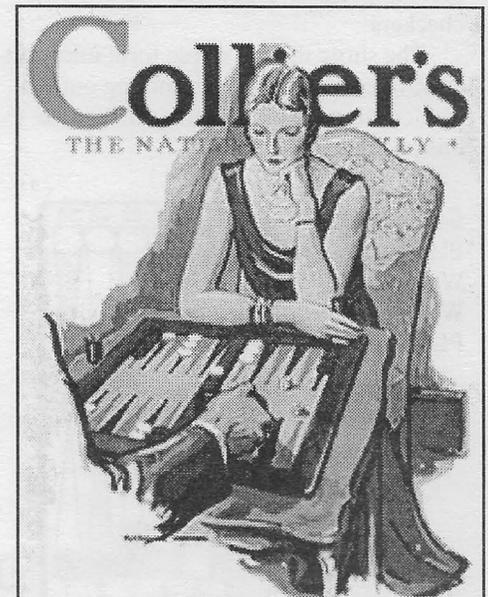
It is when the race is even, or you lead but not decisively, that this all gets interesting. Even when there is a safe alternative that isn't positionally destructive (e.g., you aren't breaking your prime or adding checkers to a made ace point), it will often be right to hit the last checker off the edge of your prime. This seems true when you have quite a lot of play after being hit back (that is, his board has crashed), or else you will be shooting at a second checker a good part of the time.

Specifically, a fair-sized group of immediate blot-leaving root numbers carries enough weight to swing the decision from "definitely play safe" to "clearly hit." In the absence of root numbers, easy reentry seems to allow the hit with up to a lead of

six pips after the roll. Only a single point open makes it a bit better to play safe when you are in an even race following the roll.

And as we noted above, if your opponent has a closed board and rates to hold it, it is usually best to play safe and hope he fails to escape.

PABLO PICASSO IS SAID to have said, "Computers are useless. All they can give you is answers." He is right that computers only give you the answers, and not the steps you could profitably use to guide you towards a similar correct decision. I don't think this makes them "useless;" but it is clear they cannot be our teachers. Nonetheless, when used correctly, computers can be very helpful assistants. Δ



March 19-21, 1999



ILLINOIS ACTION



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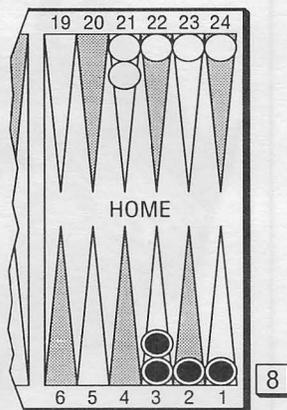
JUSTICE

By Jake Jacobs

By all accounts, it was a most impressive shrug. It conveyed elation at victory, sympathy for the opponent's defeat, amusement at the quirkiness of fate, that a game of skill should be played in the arena of chance. Finally, it conveyed a certain world weariness: One more victory? It's all a little tiresome. There were two things the shrug did not accomplish. It did not, in any way, win the game, and, more importantly, it did not bear off any checkers.

The shrug did not ripple forth unexpectedly, like an earthquake rumbling out of a sudden slippage of the earth. First came this position, to set it off.

5-point match.
Black leads
White, 2-0.
**WHITE TO
PLAY 5-5.**



The score, for those who keep it, was 2-0 favoring Black. It was a 5-point match, so with the cube on 8, we may consider this double match-point. White, as you see, had just rolled a good number. A very good number, but perhaps not as good a number as White first saw it. White stared at the number, looked up at his opponent, and then shrugged his mighty shrug. When his opponent didn't immediately bare his breast, tip his queen, reach for the sky, tap the mat, cry "Uncle," or surrender his sword, White took his hand and pushed some checkers, the four checkers west of the 24-point, into the center of the board, as though to say "See!" Then he picked up his dice. Black saw all right. He saw that the game was not over with that roll, no matter how much that shrug had tried to oomph it across the finish line. He also saw that there were still five White checkers on board.

The director was called, witnesses were subpoenaed, space was cleared on the

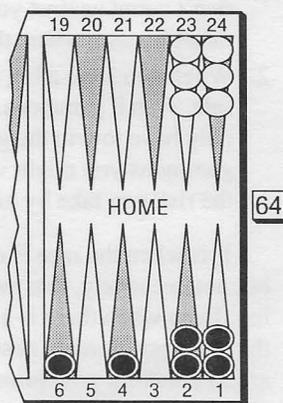
Internet to make room for the release of the report. A committee was called so that any hard feelings arising from the ruling could be minced up into non-lethal dosages. I am lucky enough to have access to the committee's deliberations as the committee consisted of Neil Kazaross and me.

Both of us shuddered as the facts were recounted. Neil doesn't talk more than I do, but he talks faster, so he rendered the preliminary judgment. "I know what's fair, but I also know what the rules say. What I don't know is, if those checkers are still on the board, just where on the board they are."

This situation is hardly new, but this year seems to have seen more than the usual number of incidents. The rules state that White has made what amounts to an illegal move. White's checkers are still on the board. Variations of this situation include: bearing off, but placing the borne-off checkers on the bar, or lifting the dice with one hand slightly before lifting the checkers with the other hand. And what about the speed demon who bears the checkers off, but starts setting up their outer board with them?

It has been proposed that the rules be modified. That a new rule should state that during non-contact bearoffs the equivalent of legal moves apply. Not touching the checkers at all, before picking up one's dice would still be a sad error, but the center shove in our case today would be sufficient to consider the four checkers born off.

Money game.
**BLACK TO
PLAY 6-4.**



Legal moves are not, of course, best moves, so the opponent would still have the option of insisting that Black's 6-4, if played merely by pushing the two pieces, was 6/2, 4-off.

There seems to be a major division of opinion on this issue, with many who favor the concept, and many more who derive what seems like sadistic glee at the thought of punishing some hapless opponent. (I hope this inspires a few of the "punishers" to write a response, explaining why it is

important to spank one's opponents. We need public discussion.)

Meanwhile, in the absence of such a rule, the director said that, after all, he couldn't rule on White's intent, which he was sure was pure and clean, but had to go by the book. Black then asked: "So it's up to me to decide if those checkers are born off?" Yes, it was. "Sit down," he said to his opponent, who had used his best shrug already, and now wasn't able to shrug it off. "Those checkers are off the board. I just wanted to hear that it was up to me."

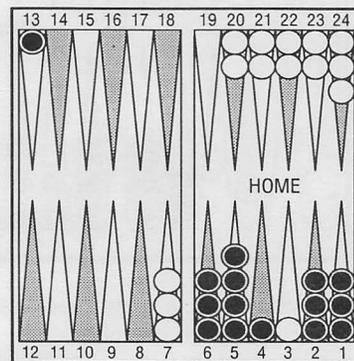
And then Black ended it with double sixes. Δ

'WHAT WERE THE ROLLS' WINNER by Duane Jensen

Last month's contest was to make four total rolls and plays (B, W, B, W) and end up with the original position. 20 people entered the contest and by random draw, **Wolfram Hinderer** of Germany wins a one year subscription to CHICAGO POINT.

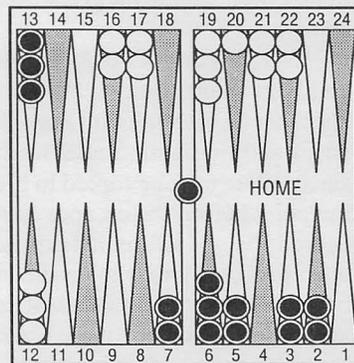
Many solutions were possible. One for each position is shown below.—DJ

Pos. 1



Black 6-6	No play
White 5-1	7/13*
Black 6-6	Bar/13
White 4-3	Bar/3/7

Pos. 2



Black 4-4	No play
White 3-1	12/16
Black 4-1	Bar/24/20*
White 4-4	Bar/12/16/20

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 3]

from the beginning, that the deviation is very consistent.)

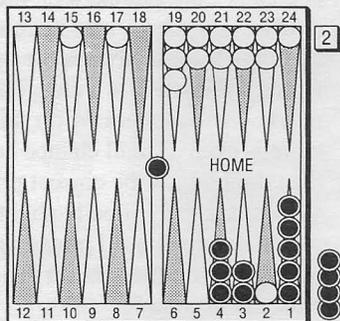
It is important to mention that when J.F. does its rollouts, the dice are certainly random. The problem arises when you are playing against it.—*Mario Madrigal, San José, Costa Rica*

EXPLAINING THE THOUGHT PROCESS

Re: Your October Issue, Perry Gartner vs. Alex Caraplis, Position #2:

Position #2

Match to 13 pts. Perry Gartner (White) leads Alex Caraplis (Black), 7 to 5. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**



In a money game, the position is a trivial redouble and pass. At this match score, by redoubling, I could have made it a much more difficult decision for Alex than it was on the subsequent roll. The take point for a 4-cube at this score is about 23% without factoring in recube to 8 potency. There's considerable cube power for the holder of a 4-cube because the redoubling window extends from 43% to 65%. Is it enough to take? It may not be, but it's surely tempting.—*Perry Gartner, Englewood, NJ*

1999 ILLINOIS STATE CHALLENGE CUP INFO

We are finalizing arrangements for the Illinois State Challenge Cup. The Springfield Hilton looks to be the venue. We will hold a Springfield Series event on Saturday 6 February followed by the Challenge on 7 February. We would be playing on the 29th floor vista room. With room rates of \$55/night, we are hoping for a big turnout above and beyond the Challenge Cup qualifiers.—*Ben Zemaitis, Sangamon Valley BG Assoc., Chatham, IL*

WHO IS JOHN LEET?

I am always seeking to add to my library of backgammon books and whilst in New York the other week, I picked up *Winning Backgammon* by John Leet, a very recently published book.

Do any of you know who Mr. Leet is or where he came from? His view of how to

play modern backgammon is a touch quaint and his recommendation to allow one roll-over per game (either at your or your opponent's insistence) distinctly odd. Jokers, after all, are the essence of the game.—*Chris Bray, London, England*

NEW BACKGAMMON MECCA?

I bring to your attention two headlines: "Maurice Barie Wins For Michigan" (*Flint Area Backgammon News*, Summer 1998). And "Gartner 'Records' A Victory In Indy" (*CHICAGO POINT*, October 1998). Only a slight mention in the two articles that Gartner and Caraplis are both from New Jersey.

There is obviously a conspiracy to underplay the fact that New Jersey is the intellectual center of modern day backgammon supplying our game with countless new age experts.

A former neighbor who now lives in Chicago came back to New Jersey for a visit and was able to brag about her son's experiences in kindergarden. "When he came home from his first day, he asked me why he was able to count to 100 while the Chicago kids could only count to 50. I told him it was because he came from New Jersey.

"When he came home on the second day, he asked me why he was able to recite the entire alphabet when the other kids could only reach K and L. Again, I told him it was because of his New Jersey roots.

"On the third day, he came home and said, 'Mom, today the nurse measured and

weighed us and told me that I was by far the biggest in my class. Is that because I come from New Jersey?"

"No," I said. "That's because you're 11 years old."

All seriousness aside, it would be appreciated if you backgammon editors pay a little more respect to New Jersey. Remember the top two ABT leaders come from New Jersey! Give credit where it's due.—*Larry Liebster, Ridgefield Park, NJ Δ*

JUST MARRIED!

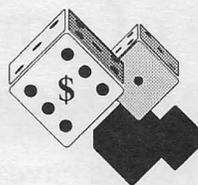


Congratulations to Illinois State Champs director Yamin Yamin and Roulla Alkass-Hanna who were married 20 September at the Syrian Catholic Church in Aleppo, Syria. 300 friends and relatives attended.

Yamin first met his bride in 1995 and says he "fell for her from the beginning." The couple will live in Wilmette, Illinois.

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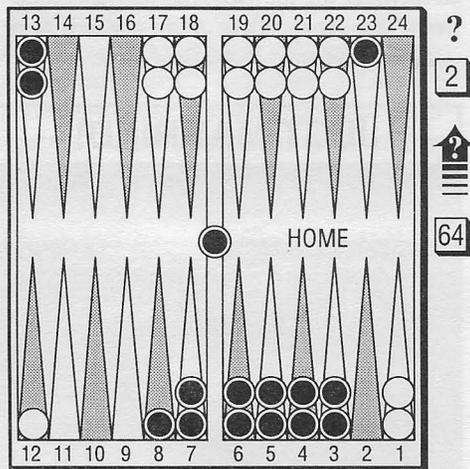


last month's position

PROBLEM #248 ANALYZED

by Kit Woolsey

Money game. Black (on the bar) to roll.
CUBE ACTION(S)?



For any cube decision problem, the first question to be answered is: what is the question? If the pass/take decision is not obvious, then that is the question—the double is crystal clear. On the other hand if the pass/take decision is obvious, then whether or not to double is the question. Both cannot be in doubt. If it is not a clear take, then it is definitely a double.

In this position, Black has the better timing. Black has two men in the outfield, and one of his checkers is at the edge of White's prime. On the other hand, White's position has a lot going for it. White has completed a full prime, while Black has not. White can win by escaping a checker quickly, by attacking Black's blot on the two point if Black stays on the bar and gaining time to escape, or simply by winning the priming battle if Black enters quickly. Picture the scenario where Black flunks and White rolls an ace. Who is the favorite now? No question about it, this is an *easy* take. It is the double which is the question.

How volatile is the position? Pretty volatile. In the next exchange White's position could start to collapse, or White could be winning. Black will lose his market if he completes his prime, and simply coming in with a 2 and White not rolling an immediate ace is probably a market losing sequence. These are the necessary ingredients for a double, provided that Black's overall equity is decent to begin with. The big question, then, is just how great Black's advantage is.

As we have seen, Black has the timing advantage. However Black is stuck on the bar against a four-point board, and White does have that complete prime. Being on the bar is good provided it becomes a timing battle, but that may not happen.

White has ample time to roll that ace and escape, with one checker in the outfield to play with and the option of attacking if Black stays on the bar. Black does have a clear edge, but it isn't all that great. His favorable sequences are market losers, but White will still have some play. My conclusion is that in theory this probably isn't a double.

In practice, however, I would definitely send it over. If I am wrong, it can't be by much. Black is the favorite and the position is volatile, so doubling cannot be a serious error. On the other hand, if I have misjudged the position and Black's advantage is greater than I think, then failing to double would be a very serious error. In addition, there is always the opponent factor. I think this is a clear take, but maybe my opponent won't think so. If there is even a small chance he will pass, then doubling is the correct practical action even if it is theoretically slightly wrong. I would not double if I already owned the cube, but with the cube in the center it is a reasonable gamble.

It has been said that all prime vs. prime positions are doubles and takes, due to the inherent high volatility of that type of position. While this is somewhat of an overstatement, there is a lot of truth to it. I believe this position falls into that category. As usual, double and take.

What else is new? Δ



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WINNER'S CIRCLE



Sep.–Nov. 1998

•**1998 Argentine Championship** (Buenos Aires, Argentina; Mondays & Wednesdays in Sep.)... CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS: Juan Alberto Aguirre, Julio Oyuela, Ezequiel Silberleib, Rafael Dana, Marcelo Di Filippo, Graciela Dodera, Mauricio Mudric. JUNIOR WINNERS: Alberto Esmerian, Ashot Simonian, Osvaldo Vazquez, Jimmy Fouquet, Ezequiel Silberleib, Juan Reston, Juan Carlos Carabajal. BEGINNER WINNERS: Leonardo Liberman, Lucas Ahmad, Narek Simonian, Andrea Mendez.

•**8th Mitteleuropa Tournament** (Nova Gorica, Slovenia; 4–6 Sep.)... MASTER (46): 1-Elio Hamoui (ISR), 2-Leonid Riskin (UKR), 3/4-Maurizio Coppola (ITA) / Barry McAdam (UK); 1C-Carlo Facchetti (ITA), 2C-Cathrine Bladh-Risselin (SWE); 1LC-Guido Flamigni (ITA), 2LC-Evtim Ivantchev (BUL); Ladies Prize-Cathrine Bladh-Risselin (SWE). CHAMPION (42): 1-Alfredo Sperti (ITA), 2-Luisa Sequeira (POR), 3/4-Albert Reiter (AUS) / Stephan Ackermann (SWZ); 1C-Siegfried Tonzer (GER), 2C-Claudio Delvai (ITA); 1LC-Fabio Cultrera (ITA), 2LC-Peter Huber (GER); Ladies Prize-Luisa Sequeira (POR). INTERMEDIATE (43): 1-Giovanna Zen (ITA), 2-Walter Demaria (ITA), 3/4-Alberto Gottardi (ITA) / Enrico Colangiulo (ITA); 1C-Enrico Ostini (ITA), 2C-Michele Molinari (ITA); 1LC-Randy Dudley (USA), 2LC-Pierangelo Bozino (ITA); Ladies Prize-Giovanna Zen (ITA). WARM-UP (64): 1-Damian Plesec (SLO), 2-Michael Higatsberger (AUS). 1-POINT TOURNAMENT: 1-Chiva Tafazzoli (IRAN). SPERTI TROPHY: 1-Elena Grigore (ROM), 2-Mario D'Osvualdo (ITA). CHALLENGE ITALIA/AUSTRIA: 1-Team Austria. BLACK JACK TOURNEY (150+): 1-Pio Saija... *Director Marco Fornasir reports a record crowd at his 8th annual event including the participation of 20 countries. Elio Hamoui's victory also gives him the title 1998 European Champion.*

•**4th Kaiserbrunnen Cup** (Brakel, Germany; 1–4 Oct.)... CHAMPION: 1-Sven Rümcker, 2-Tobias Hellweg, 3/4-Ekrem Basdas / Cemalletin Demeriz; 1C-Werner Hertel, 2C-Carsten Joh; 1LC-Dirk Schiemann. INTERMEDIATE: 1-Anja Ewers, 2-Henning Frick, 3/4-Raymond Langenfeld / Dietmar Schmidt; 1C-Willi Preskar, 2C-Birgit Scheuerling; 1LC-Michael Kitsos. BEGINNER: 1-Joachim Jedrasik-Hemer, 2-Anja Lünnermann, 3-Franz Ketteler. BLITZ 50: 1-Michael Kalinin, 2-Michael Kalinin!, 3/4-Harald Johanni /

Mario Kühl. SUPER JACKPOT; 1-Dag Ekmark, 2-Johannes Levermann. LADIES CUP: 1-Gayana Meyburg, 2-Anja Ewers. KEGELN: 1-Volker Sonnabend.

•**12th British National Championships** (London, England; 3–4 Oct.)... OPEN (42): 1-Dod Davies, 2-Stefan Paliwoda, 3-Peter Murrell, 4-Roy Hollands, 5-Billy Wicher.

•**Helsinki Sporting Club Tournament** (Helsinki, Finland; 9–10 Oct.) OPEN (23): 1-Jyrgen Orłowski (GER), 2-Hannu Ojanen, 3/4-Sampo Niskanen / Antti Lehmusvirta.

•**Nation's Capital Championships-ABT** (Bethesda, MD; 9–11 Oct.)... CHAMPIONSHIP (26): 1-Steve Hast (PA), 2-Alex Caraplis (NJ), 1C-Rory Pascar (MD), 4-David Orandle (MD), 5/6-David Montgomery / Dennis Culpepper. JACKPOT (9): 1-Ed Maslansky (MD), 2-Bill Pow (VA); 1C-Herb Avram (MD). DOUBLES (9): 1-David Montgomery (MD) & Joe Freedman (DC), 2-Fred Hodous (MD) and Tom Hodous (WV). OPEN (14): 1-Sam Orandle (MD), 2-Mark Davis (MD); 1C-Chen-Fu Yu (MD). ROUND ROBIN: 1-Fred Hodous, 2-Tom Hodous; 1C-Bill Pow.

•**BIBA Sandy Osborne Memorial** (Birmingham, England; 10–11 Oct.)... OPEN (61): 1-Michael Brereton, 2-Dod Davies, 3/4-Keir Fitz-Gibbon / Dave Edwards; 1C-Steve Hallett, 2C-Uldis Lapikens; 1LC-Gary Jackson, 2LC-Gerry Carolan. SUICIDE! (37): 1-Dave McNair, 2-John Clark. DOUBLES (15): 1/2-David's Dad & A N Other / The Professors. FRIDAY KO (16): 1-Paul Lamford, 2-Roy Hollands.

•**Bar Point Sunday** (Oakbrook Terrace, IL; 11 Oct.)... OPEN (20): 1-Jake Jacobs, 2-George Barr, 3/4-Sah Dogan / Joe Wollick; 1C-Neil Kazaross, 2C-Rick Bieniak. INTERMEDIATE (13): 1-Jannica Tornqvist, 2-Steve Neidecker, 3/4-Mark Murray / Ken Tyszko; 1C-Sam Pottle (WI), 2C-Amy Valerio.

•**New England Club Monthly** (Cambridge, MA; 11 Oct.)... EXPERT (24): 1-Bill Robertie, 2-Ed Abou-Zeid, 3/4-Marty Storer / Seth Towle; 1C-Ed Ahola, 2C-Walter Trice. A DIVISION (11): 1-Roy Chatalbash, 2-Sohrab Ghodoosi; 1C-John Smidt, 2C-Marty Gross.

•**Backgammon by the Bay Monthly** (San Mateo, CA; 18 Oct.)... OPEN (13): 1-Timothy Jaxon, 2-Nick Ballard; 1C/2C-Paul Albert / Rawlin Pullen. INTERMEDIATE (10): 1-David Feinberg, 2-Bill Landry; 1C-Dannia Esquivel. BEGINNER (3): 1-Gloria Lee, 2-Frank Berkenkotter.

•**Florida State Championships-ABT** (Ft. Lauderdale, FL; 23–25 Oct.)... CHAMPIONSHIP (28): 1-David Todd (FL), 2-Ray Glaeser (FL), 3-Drew Giovanis (FL). INTERMEDIATE

(19): 1-Ana Lucia Almeida (Brazil), 2-Jim Bowman (FL), 3-David Menkes (FL). DOUBLES (18): 1-Neil Young & Walter Fradin (FL), 2-Jim McGirr & Judy Langley (FL). ROYAL PALM CLASSIC (8): 1-David Todd. ONE POINT QUICKIE (16): 1-Alan Gaarder (FL).

•**Swedish Open** (Stockholm, Sweden; 30 Oct.–1 Nov.)... CHAMPIONSHIP (57): 1-Jorma Tattari (FIN), 2-Patrick Svensson (SWE), 3/4-Petter Bengtsson (SWE) / Cy Vafa (SWE); 1C-Karsten Nielsen (DEN), 2C-Robert Lindbom (SWE). INTERMEDIATE (48): 1-Ken Lennaard (SWE), 2-Lasse Madsen (DEN), 3/4-Lennart Grundh (SWE) / Johnny Tønnessen; 1C-Anna-Maria Höskuldsson (DEN), 2C-Eirik Magne Johanssen (NOR). SUPER JACKPOT (8): 1/2-Mats Carlsson (SWE) / John Dahlberg (SWE). SEK 1000 JACKPOT (16): 1-Dan Sandberg (SWE), 2-Johan Storåkers (SWE). DOUBLES (8): 1-Einar Tryggvason (SWE) & Sandra Fogel (DEN), 2-Bo Adler & Kjell Jernselius (SWE). BLITZ (50): 1-Steve Bibby (UK), 2-Peter Carlsson (SWE), 3/4-Johan Moazed (SWE) / Sandra Fogel (DEN).

•**Northeast Regional-ABT** (Albany, NY; 30 Oct.–1 Nov.)... OPEN (25): 1-Walter Trice (MA), 2-Jeff Acierno (NY); 1C-Sam Orandle, 2C-Ray Kershaw (UK). ADVANCED (15): 1-Gabe Davis, 2-Jeremy Kirkpatrick; 1C-Gil Evans. LIMITED (9): 1-Roger Baff, 2-Bob Pilatzke, 3-Wanda Roberts (MA). DOUBLES (8): 1-Feliks & Laura Goykhman (NY). MASTERS (7): 1-Jeff Acierno (NY). GAMESGRID TOURNEY (32): 1-Lincoln Bedell (NH)

•**20th Flint Club Championships** (Flint, MI; 1 Nov.)... OPEN (32): 1-Sandy Kaplan, 2-Ralph Dietz, 3/4-John Carrico / Jim Slomkoski. INTERMEDIATE (32): 1-Art Gillis, 2-Dave Britton (IN), 3-Ernie Denefeld, 4/5/6 Mark Gough (CAN) / Dan Grogan / Gayle Wolf. NOVICE (5): 1-Sam Denno, 2-Fran Miller (OH), 1-POINT QUICKIE (16): 1-Mike Giordano, 2-Joe Miller (OH).

•**Backgammon by the Bay Monthly** (Alameda, CA; 1 Nov.)... OPEN (18): 1-Lorien Phippeny, 2-Roger Moss, 3/4-Windy / C. Bill Jones.

•**19th Opre Invitational** (Downers Grove, IL; 7 Nov.)... OPEN (8): 1-Chris Stanford (TX), 2-Jeff Henry. DOUBLES (4): 1-Jim Opre & Yamin Yamin, 2-Bill Davis & Jake Jacobs... *The theme of this year's party event was "Italian." As usual, Carmel and Jim Opre were the gracious hosts.*

•**Springfield Series #1** (Springfield, IL; 7 Nov.)... OPEN (14): 1-Ben Zemaitis, 2-Mark Jennings; 1C-Milad Doueichi, 2C-Linda Woods; 1LC-Mike Flohr. Δ

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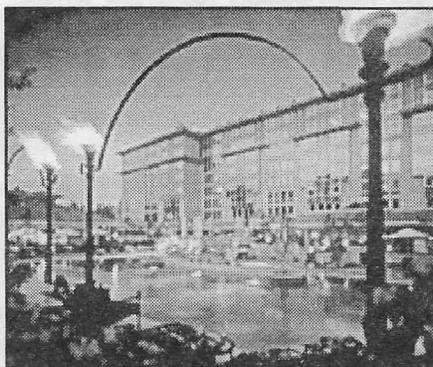
Cecilia Pedroza, President

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Tournament Director

Abraham Eitan

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