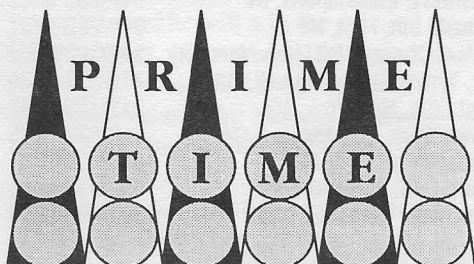


—The 1998 Las Vegas Open—



by Jake Jacobs

This year's Las Vegas Open was the best-attended Nevada Backgammon Association event in years. 300 competitors came to the Riviera Hotel 10–14 November, many from overseas. Kudos to director Howard Markowitz and staff for a job well done.

In the Championship division finals, Amschel Nadjar of France defeated New York's Mark Kaczmarczyk, Janet Riley (TX) bested Pete Townsend (PA) among the Intermediates, and Niel Borden (CA) stopped Georgina Flanagan (IL) to win the Beginner title. In the Super Jackpot, Nack Ballard (CA) defeated Steve Sax (CA), and Steve Choi (CA) beat Ary Nogueira (Brazil) in the Limited Jackpot.

Author Jake Jacobs didn't fare quite as well—at least in the beginning. But being the never-say-die competitor that he is, Jake managed to find an event to pull himself out of the hole. Here is Jake's first person account.—Ed.

They say you can't keep a good man down. A few of us bad men are also irrepressible. Normally, after losing in the doubles, in the Super Jackpot (to Woolsey, my doubles partner), in two Blitz qualifiers, and in the money round of the Las Vegas Open, I would be ready to retire from backgammon. It would be time to shave my head, don saffron robes, and set out with my begging bowl, putting the ways of the flesh behind me. Then again, that is a lot of flesh that needs putting, so after a good night's sleep, even a thrashing by Mika Lidov in the Consolation was not enough to deter me from plunking down another thousand for the last Jackpot.

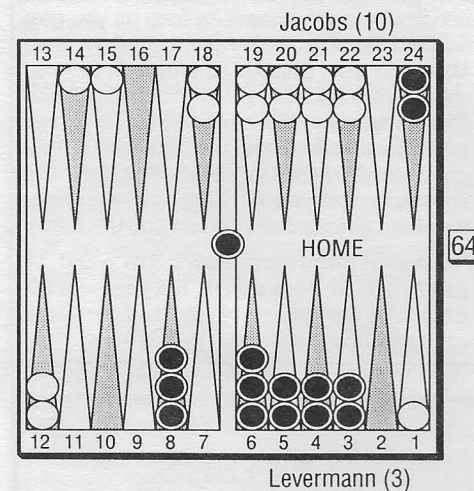
It was still early afternoon when I did my plunking, but it was after dinner that the draw took place. I had gone to dinner with the New York delegation: Paul and Martine, Mika and Rick, and Perry Gartner. Martine is not actually a New Yorker, but in most states guilt by association is sufficient to convict. Paul had treated us to dinner at the Hilton, a wise investment as at least one of his potential opponents was now a bloated hulk, ready to wash up on the beach and let the looters come and plunder.

I slept through my first match so I cannot tell you precisely what my dice did to keep me alive. All I recall is that I was getting gammoned for the match, despite holding my opponent's 5-point when Evtim (Ivantchev, of Sofia, Bulgaria) left a blot on his 6-point. I missed, but he rolled aces, and I went on to win the game, and the match.

Meanwhile, my erstwhile dinner companion had his hands full. Paul played a 3-hour match with Germany's Johannes Levermann. It was approaching 11:00 P.M., and Johannes had tickets for the show at new Bellagio Hotel. Once upon a time I

might have waited up for Johannes's return, but I was too exhausted to consider it. Besides, another dinner companion, Rick Barabino, was waiting to play the winner, so Johannes and I got down to it.

In the Crawford game (I led 10–3), we had our battle of the primes. Johannes was tested first. **BLACK TO PLAY 1-1:**



[Continued on page 9]

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?



Marcy Sloan (IL) sent us a reproduction of this beautiful painting taken from the cover of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) magazine (18 November 1998). Look closely. Assuming US Tournament Rules, can you spot two apparent errors in the picture? See "Amalgamation" (p. 4) for the answers.

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

c/o CHICAGO POINT

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

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IN SUPPORT OF JELLYFISH™

The JellyFish manual explains that "...the automatic dice rolls are generated from the input of two numbers, seed and counter... Giving two specific numbers will always give exactly the same sequence of dice rolls." This seems to me to be a convincing proof that JellyFish does not roll the dice in its favor.

That leaves one further doubt. Does JF know what the upcoming dice rolls will be? I think this can be answered by changing the seed and/or counter whenever you want during your game against JF. I suggest your correspondents try this and, if they still lose, have the grace to admit that they are just not as good as JellyFish.

I get beat by JellyFish; Paul Magriel doesn't. Enough said.—*Ray Kershaw, London, England*

I have read your magazine for a few years

[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

E-mail: cjc@flint.org

* Denotes new or revised listing

American Backgammon Tour events underlined.

NATIONAL

Dec 4-6	Gammon/Associates Invitational, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	818/901-0464
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 25-27*	<u>Ace Point Holiday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY</u>	<u>212/753-0842</u>
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
Jan 1*	Official GamesGrid Monthly Tournament, via computer	tournaments@cyberarts.com
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 10*	14th Annual Grand Opening Day, Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Jan 10*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	508/829-3283
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 17*	Austin Sunday Bimonthly Tournament, Bombay Bicycle Club, Austin, TX	512/261-8518
Jan 21*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Jan 24*	Sunday Bimonthly Tournament, John Hawks Pub, Milwaukee, WI	414/463-2498
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
Feb 7*	New England Club Monthly, Sheraton-Commander, Cambridge, MA	508/829-3283
Feb 12-14	<u>21st Pittsburgh Championships, Greentree Marriott, Pittsburgh, PA</u>	<u>412/823-7500</u>
Feb 21*	Backgammon by the Bay, San Mateo Bridge Center, San Mateo, CA	831/688-9722
Feb 27*	Clarine's Monthly Tournament, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	213/822-9745
Feb 28*	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
Feb 28*	Louisville Monthly Tournament, Oldenberg Grill, Louisville, KY	502/458-9660
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>
Apr 20-25*	International Twin Championships, Four Queens, Las Vegas, NV	702/893-6025
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>
Sep 3-6*	<u>47th Indiana Open, Sheraton-Westin Hotel, Indianapolis, IN</u>	<u>317/255-8902</u>
Oct 8-10*	<u>Illinois Championships & America Cup, Holidome, Rolling Meadows, IL</u>	<u>847/945-7801</u>
Oct 8-10*	<u>Nation's Capital Championships, Promenade, Bethesda, MD</u>	<u>301/530-0604</u>

OUTSIDE USA

Dec 4-6	3rd Santa Claus Tournament, Spielcasino Aachen, Aachen, Germany	4940-8306415
Dec 11-13	5th Open von Thun, Hotel Seepark, Thun, Switzerland	4417-569700
Dec 11-13*	Italian Championship Series, Genova, Italy	39338-7187324
Dec 12-13	Stakis UK Championship Finals, Stakis Birmingham Metropole, UK	44152-2546993
Dec 26-27	1st C.A. International, Restaurant Spiseloppen, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-401785
Jan 2-3	High Class Competition, Cafe Florianhof, 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
Feb 5-7*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Hotel Adige, Trento, Italy	39347-4529409
Feb 20-21*	1998/99 Italian Championship Series, Imola, Italy	39338-7187324
Mar 27-28*	1998/99 Italian Series: 3rd Torneo Città di Cortina, Italy	39360-444664
Apr 1-5	11th Nordic "Wide" Open, Copenhagen, Denmark	4539-400607
Apr 26-May 2*	5th European BG News Mayday Tournament, Almeria, Spain	34950-133009
Jun 2-6*	6th German Open, Hotel am Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	49521-64314
Jul 12-18	World Championship, Loews Monte Carlo, Monaco	USA contact: 954/527-4033
Dec 8-12*	6th Tournament of the Americas, Cancun, Mexico	USA contact: 773/583-6464

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 2]

now and hold it in very high esteem. You manage to pack a lot of very good quality and fun reading into the 10 or so pages.

However I am dismayed that you have stooped to wasting valuable reading space "discussing" whether JellyFish cheats. This subject has been argued to death on the RGB Internet backgammon newsgroup and not one single person has come up with any

proof whatsoever that it cheats. Comments like "Almost everybody knows or suspects JF dice are not fair, but nobody wants to print it" are just laughable. In fact I will give \$250 to the first person who can conclusively prove JellyFish cheats!—
Michael Depreli, Kent, England



AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR ★ 1998

Compiled through 1 Nov. 1998 after 14 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 Pascal	4.35	Harold Roberson	2.38
Walter Trice	20.23	Drew Giovanis	6.50	Walt Swan	4.21	Ron Konpelien	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 Fogelund	6.11	Gayle Wolf	4.08	Mark Cohen	2.34
David Simpson	13.47	Paul Stebbing	5.88	Paul Dibiase	3.99	Gordon Bass	2.34
Jeff Acierno	13.42	Larry Yudin	5.88	Gabe Davis	3.98	Adam Versaw	2.33
Merrill Schrager	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 Reza	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 30 NOV.

Steve Mellen	25.72	Marc Rosset	5.48	Georgina Flanagan	2.12	Jay Ward	0.64
Joe Wollick	22.12	Norma Shyer	5.44	Joseph Esfahani	1.92	Ralph Barnes	0.64
Tak Morioka	18.64	Gary Kay	5.36	Richard Lloyd	1.92	Steve Rota	0.56
Neil Kazaross	18.48	Arlene Levy	5.22	Paul Baraz	1.76	Sam Yoyen	0.56
Laila Leonhardt	14.84	Elaine Kehm	4.92	Romeo Kap	1.28	Ken Tyszk	0.52
Phyllis Smolinski	12.84	Andy Krenitz	4.88	Howard Ring	1.28	Joe Wehrle	0.48
Jake Jacobs	12.72	Ken Bond	4.48	Joann Feinstein	1.22	Mark Murray	0.44
Paul Friedman	12.72	Jerry Brooks	4.36	Sam Pottle	1.20	Rich Gast	0.32
Alice Kay	11.52	Tim Mabee	4.20	Val Zimnicki	1.16	Sonia Peacock	0.32
Herb Roman	11.44	Sah Dogan	3.92	Bob Steen	1.12	Linda Woods	0.32
Paul Klein	10.92	Tim Carroll	3.76	John Stryker	1.04	Sarg Serges	0.32
Paul Franks	9.68	George Barr	3.36	Barry Miller	0.96	Joe Koucharian	0.32
Rick Bieniak	9.56	Rodney Bell	3.28	Earl Risch	0.96	Henry Gray	0.28
Ed Buerger	9.28	Steve Klesker	3.20	Ed Zell	0.96	Steve Neidecker	0.28
Bill Keefe	8.64	Richard Stawowy	3.08	Rex Savage	0.88	Bev Loder	0.28
Bob Zavoral	7.88	John Demian	2.72	Roz Ferris	0.84	Barbara Levinson	0.24
Don Jayhan	7.40	Carter Mattig	2.72	Wendy Kaplan	0.84	Mark Ryan	0.16
Phil Simborg	7.36	Frankie Farjood	2.64	Jannica Tornqvist	0.84	Boris Mindich	0.16
Mary Franks	6.96	Peter Kalba	2.56	Greg Defotis	0.72	Paul Lombardo	0.16
Bill Davis	6.92	David Araiza	2.56	Bobbie Shiffrin	0.72	Stan Kucharz	0.12
Harry Cohn	6.56	Dave Cramer	2.48	Roland Dieter	0.64	Amy Valerio	0.12
Marty Tatosian	6.48	Reginald Porter	2.48				

November's Player of the Month is **TAK MORIOKA**. Tak's 3.64 points vaulted him into the top three for 1998 with one month to play. Runner-up Steve Mellen solidified his overall lead earning 2.72 points. Frankie Farjood's victory in the Fall Trophy Tourney (worth 2.48 points) was enough to earn him third place for the month.

PRAISE FOR MARY

I want to thank Mary Hickey for her front page article in last month's POINT ("Using Computers As Our Assistants"). It was the most useful article about the game that I have read in a very long time.

And thanks for continuing to publish a fine newsletter.—*Donald Kahn, London, England*

BACKGAMMON CONSPIRACY?

I write in response to Larry Liebster's November letter accusing the CHICAGO POINT and *Flint Area BackgammonNews* of favoritism. In reviewing the POINT issue regarding my victory at the Michigan Summer Championships, the state where I live is mentioned once as is Perry Gartner's state . . . sounds pretty fair and equal to me.

Regarding the *Flint* newsletter, remember it is a Michigan publication! Michigan residents naturally root for the hometown competitors. Michiganians root for University of Michigan, Michigan State, The Detroit Redwings and the Detroit Lions (OK, maybe not the Lions!), just as you root for the New Jersey Devils.

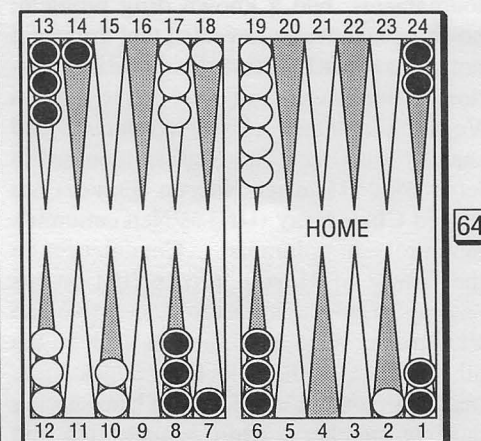
[Continued on page 8]

your move

PROBLEM #250

to be analyzed by Kit Woolsey

Match to 7 points. No score. **BLACK TO PLAY 2-2.**



SHADES OF GRAY

A RULES AND RULINGS COLUMN

© 1998 by Danny Kleinman

PLAYING WITH THE CLOCK

Dear Danny: A director's job is often a thankless task. I have to make a ruling that involves many possible options, and as is often the case, each option will offend one of the players. Let me "set the stage" for you.

Alan is playing Bob in the 7-point finals of our weekly tournament. When I am called to the table, I find both players using a chess clock. The score is 6 to 4 (Crawford) in favor of Bob, but Bob's chess clock flag has fallen, apparently just after the completion of the last game. The "Backgammon Clock Rules—March 1995" say to add two points to Alan's score and reset Bob's clock with an additional five minutes.

There is more to it than that. Alan is experienced and comfortable with the clock and has plenty of time remaining. Bob has little clock experience. Due to the big time differential, it is fairly obvious that Bob has forgotten to punch his clock more than once during the match.

I ask why the players are using a clock in the first place. Alan says that when he suggested its use as a courtesy to the director because it was getting late, Bob agreed. But Bob says Alan told him that due to the late time, the director had required the use of a clock.

There are two ways to look at this. The

rules say that the "Director may require both players..." to use a clock. This didn't happen. Therefore, I could:

1. Void the entire match and require a replay without the clock,
2. Impose the 2-point penalty (making the score 6-6), but remove the clock for the last game,
3. Leave the score at 6-4 and remove the clock for the rest of the match. (Alan objects to this option claiming his strategy in the preceding game had been to get Bob into time trouble.)

The second approach is to accept that both players agreed to use a clock for whatever reason. Then I could:

1. Impose the penalty, and place an additional five minutes on Bob's clock,
2. Impose the penalty, but remove the clock for the last game.

This is a tough one, Danny. The match remains suspended. What do you think is right here?—Director Dirk

DEAR DIRK: Some favor Alan did you when he suggested using the clock as a "courtesy" to you! That is, if you believe Alan's answer against Bob's to your question why they were using clocks; I wouldn't.

As a former tournament director, I can appreciate all courtesies shown. However, it is not a courtesy to a director for a player to usurp his job. Any aid rendered to a director should come from a disinterested party.

Alan's introduction of a clock into a

match against an opponent who lacks clock experience was neither disinterested nor within his rights under the Clock Rules. He was obviously seeking advantage. He could have sought advantage legitimately by asking you (the person authorized by the rules to decide whether clocks are to be used) to require them, but he didn't—perhaps because he knew you wouldn't.

Had you required clocks, I hope, you would have taken a few seconds to remind Bob of the need to punch his clock promptly after each play. Then Bob might have avoided time trouble.

As it was, the clock had no role in the match other than to distract the players (more so Bob than Alan) from the game. The ruling problem is a no-brainer: The match continues, with Bob leading 6-4 entering the Crawford Game.

When I directed, I liked to encourage attendance by offering advice to the players that might help them in subsequent tournaments. So I would draw Alan aside after the match, and whisper:

"Next time you want to distract your opponent, have your girlfriend sit by his side and rub his back during the match. (If you don't have a girlfriend, rent one.) That will distract any normal male opponent more than a silly old clock, and is much better than having her unbutton her blouse.—Yours, Danny Δ

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

AMALGAMATION

3-time world poker champion **Stu Ungar** was found dead in his Las Vegas hotel room 22 November. He was 45. Ungar, who also participated in gin rummy and backgammon tournaments, had a known drug problem; however an autopsy revealed that drugs did not play a roll in his death. For more information on this developing story, go to the Las Vegas Sun website (lasvegassun.com) and search "Stu Ungar"... NetGammon newsletter editor **Heather Noreen** (France) has named **Chris Bray** (UK) as NetGammon's new problem columnist... Condolences to the family of **Harold Grote** (IL) on his passing 26 November. Harold, an active Pub Club player since 1980 (he was 15th on the all-time listing), died of a heart attack while mashing potatoes at a family Thanksgiving day get-together... **Don Marek** (IL) had

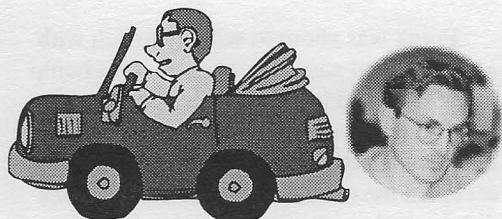
good reason to miss the BPC Fall Trophy Tourney. His wife went into labor that night and the next day (Nov. 18), gave birth to **Katie Marie Marek**. Congratulations!... We found two errors in the picture from page 1 of this issue: (1) The roller is not using a dice cup, and (2) he has cast his dice on the wrong side of the board... **Max Esquivel** (Costa Rica) has announced dates for the 6th Tournament of Américas: 8-12 December 1999 in Cancun, Mexico. Directing again will be **Bill Davis**, **Carol Joy Cole** and **Peter Kalba**... An excellent biography about **Art Benjamin** and his mathematical prowess appears in the November 1998 issue of *Math Horizons* magazine... The metromix.com website claims that backgammon is played at the following Chicago bar/restaurants: Mercedez Bar (766 W. Jackson), Nine Muses (315 S. Halsted), Café Kallisto (343 S. Halsted) and Club Lago (331 W. Superior)... Happy Holidays from CHICAGO POINT! Δ

FARJOOD AND LEVY TAKE BAR POINT CLUB FALL TROPHY TITLES



BPC director Bill Davis (center) congratulates Arline Levy (Intermediate) and Frankie Farjood (Open) on their Fall Trophy Tourney victories. [Photo by Peter Kalba]

Chicago, IL; 17 Nov... OPEN (31): 1-Frankie Farjood, 2-Laila Leonhardt, 3/4-Tak Morioka / Ken Bond; 1C-Paul Franks, 2C-John Stryker. INT. (26): 1-Arline Levy, 2-Richard Stawowy, 3/4-Ed Buerger / Mary Franks; 1C-Tim Carroll, 2C-Bev Loder.



Rambling Through Kentucky

—or—

Being Frank About Frigo's Misplays

by Duane Jensen

This was not Minnesota. The road I was driving was shadowed by steep hills covered by tall hardwoods. Each mile was marked with a dead opossum on the road's shoulder, apparently placed by the Kentucky Highway Department to check the accuracy of my car's odometer.

I was 25 miles southwest of Louisville, headed for another backgammon tournament, when I decided to take a side trip. I turned into Bernheim Forest, an arboretum and nature preserve of over 10,000 acres. I took a hike into the wild part of the forest on a winding trail that led me past huge beech, hickory, and tulip trees.

As I walked further, I began to feel more isolated and separated from civilization, but not alone. I thought I heard voices across the next ridge. It sounded like Ned Beatty squealing like a pig. Would I be confronted by a shoeless, toothless, gun-toting, mountain man who took a "liking" to me? Maybe I'd seen too many movies. I retraced my steps, hurrying back to my car.

What would these Kentucky people

really be like? Would they be friendly or cold to this Minnesotan?

Kentucky is the beginning of the South and the beginning of southern hospitality. The people in Louisville were the most gracious hosts I'd ever met. They were warm, friendly, and fun. They didn't struggle to act this way—it came naturally.

SATURDAY MORNING prior to the Calcutta Auction, four of us walked to a small café for breakfast. After seating ourselves, the waitress came to greet us saying, "I may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I'd guess that y'all aren't from around here." She was curious about backgammon so we gave her a quick summary along with our breakfast orders.

When she returned with my plate of food, I grabbed my fork but didn't immediately begin eating. I was staring at an unfamiliar food on my plate. It was a soft, whitish lump that looked as if it had been deposited using an ice-cream scoop.

"It's called 'grits,'" our waitress said. "By state law, it has to be on your plate."

She took the fork from my hand, forming the grits into a tighter ball. "There, you're safe now. The grits don't touch any of the rest of your food."

Loud singing came from the kitchen. The waitress jammed the fork back into my closed fist and rushed to the kitchen's open doorway.

"Leroy?" she asked. "What did you do with all that money?"

"What money?" said the cook.

"The money your mamma gave you for singing lessons!"

A slight pause and then laughter throughout the café. She was great entertainment. We tried to go there the next morning but the café closed on Sundays. Too bad: nice people and lots of fun.

LOUISVILLE ISN'T KNOWN for its great backgammon players, but a former "World Champion" has taken it as his home. He moved around in Southern California for years before landing in Kentucky where his wife Stephanie was finishing her education.

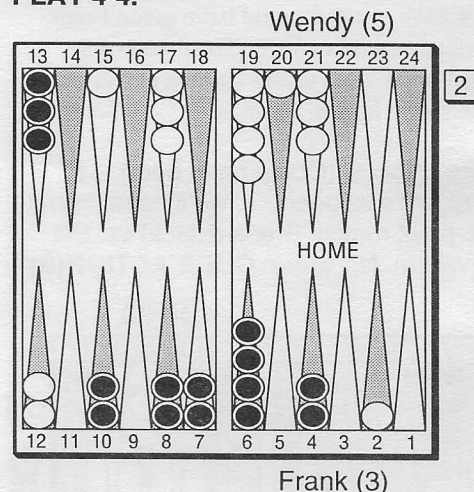
I first played him in Las Vegas years ago. He was of average height, slim, and well-dressed by my standards. He wore slacks and a wrinkle-free long sleeved shirt (a fashion I aspire to, but have yet to achieve). We shook hands at the beginning of our match and, as we sat down, he said "I'm Frank Frigo, the best backgammon player in San Diego."

I laughed. It was a peculiar thing to say even if true. Frank was certainly the best backgammon player at our table; he finished me off effortlessly. He played at the expert level and was gracious during and

following our match.

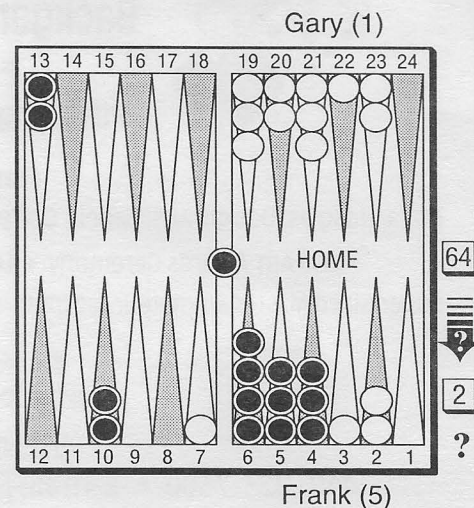
Frank Frigo is a very steady player who makes few mistakes. Those mistakes he makes are usually small. Here are a few of them I've recorded over the years. All the positions have "gammons" as a subplot.

Position 1. (Letting the Gammon Slip Away.) 7 point match: Wendy (White) leads Frank (Black), 5 to 3. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-4.**



Frank made the "pure" play you might expect from a skillful player. He played 13/5(2), exposing a blot but duplicating aces everywhere. I don't think he took full advantage of this good roll. Frank needed 4 points to win the match and should have chosen a more aggressive play, 7/3 (2) and 6/2 (2)*. This hitting play is a powerful wallop which could stagger Wendy, tipping her over, giving Frank a match-winning gammon. Both plays win about 80% of the time, but the hitting play yields 20% gammons vs. 15% gammons with Frank's play.

Position 2. (Gammon-o-Phobia.) 7-point match. Frank (Black) leads Gary (White), 5 to 1. White doubles. **SHOULD BLACK TAKE?**



[Continued on page 6]



ILLINOIS ACTION



Bill Davis
773/583-6464
Peter Kalba
773/252-7755

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GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: Tourn. Monday, 6:30 P.M. at The Clique, 2347 S. Michigan, Chicago. Reginald Porter (773/471-5066).

BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BG CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 6:30 P.M. at Ride The Nine, 503 N. Prospect, Bloomington. Gary Daniels (309/452-3034).

SANGAMON VALLEY BG ASSN: Tournaments Wednesday, 6:00 P.M. at Brewhaus, 617 E. Washington, Springfield. Ben Zemaitis (217/483-4028).

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

PEORIA BACKGAMMON CLUB: Tourn. Thurs., 6:30 P.M. at Peoria Pizza Works, 3921 Prospect, Peoria. Ed Zell (309/673-7622).

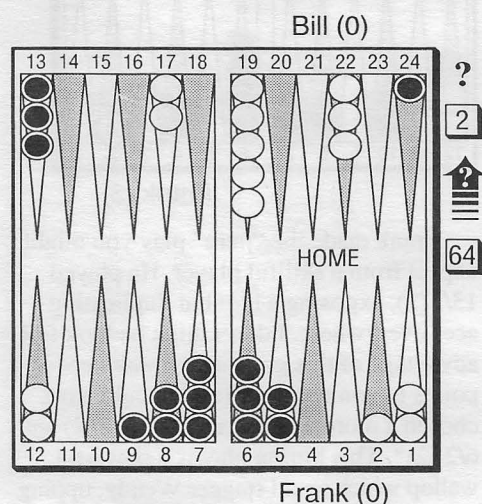
RAMBLING...

[Continued from page 5]

Frank was nursing a comfortable lead and was wary of any cube which might have a high gammon risk. He quickly declined the double, letting the score go to 5-2. While the take did have 20% gammons, Gary's winning chances were only 56%.

The drop left Frank with match equity of 75%. A take would have given Frank match equity of 78%. The threat of a gammon often scares away a player protecting a lead in a match.

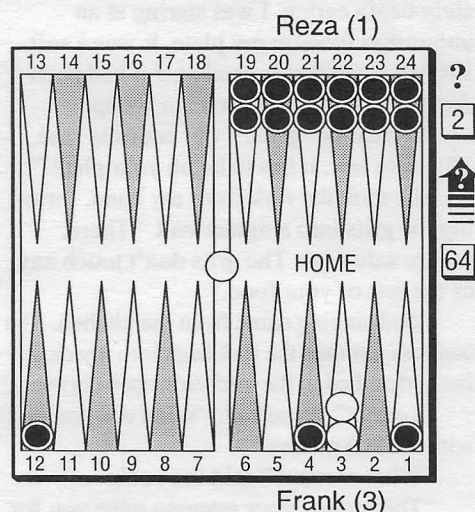
Position 3. (Could have been . . . might have been . . . we'll never know.) 5-point match. Frank (Black) vs. Bill (White). No score. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**



Frank doubled and Bill dropped. What could be wrong with that? Why would Frank double in this position? More than half the time he'd have three of Bill's men stuck behind a 5-prime and could play for an undoubled gammon for many rolls. Of course this game usually ends when the opponent is doubled out, but Frank had nothing to lose by playing on, at least for a roll or two.

For every game Frank loses by not cashing this game, I estimate that he wins at least three undoubled gammons. This type of "premature" double is quite common even in matches between expert players.

Position 4. (A gammon lost.) 5-point match. Frank (Black) leads Reza (White), 3 to 1. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**



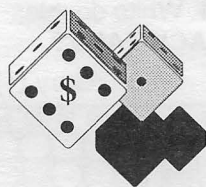
Frank was about to win the match with an undoubled gammon when he hit a bump in the road and left a shot. Reza hit the man and Frank immediately doubled to 2. Reza, an experienced player, saw his opportunity, accepted the cube and twirled it to 4. Reza didn't need much equity to take. If he dropped he was left with a 17% chance to win the match. In Position 4 he had 21% making it a take.

So if Frank wins the match 79% of the time when he doubles, what does Frank gain from his double? If he leaves the cube in the center, he wins about 90% of the games sending the score to 4-1 (Crawford) giving him 83% probability of winning the match. His 10% losses give him a probability of 60% at the score of 3-2. His net probability of winning the match with a centered cube becomes $(90\%)(83\%) + (10\%)(60\%) = 81\%$.

It appears that Frank gave away some match equity by doubling. If he delayed doubling he had 81%, but he ended up holding a 4-cube with a 79% chance to win this game and the match. Δ

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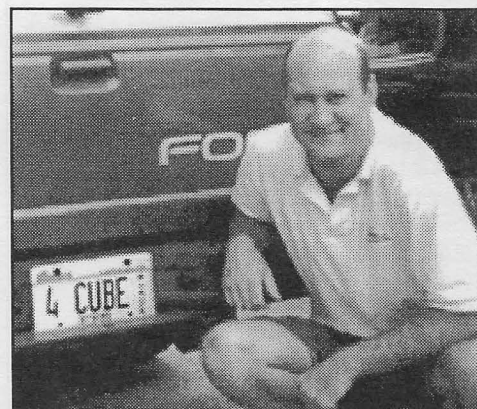
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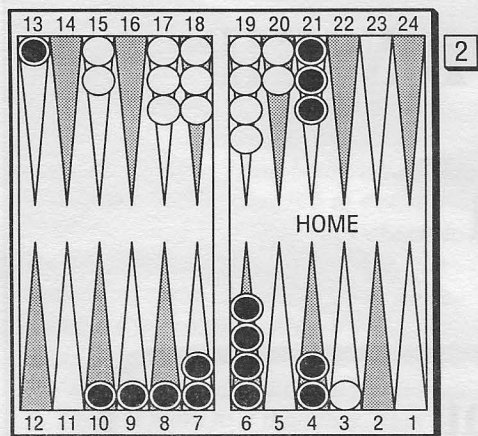
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PROBLEM #249 ANALYZED

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.**



In Problem #249, Black is faced with a difficult 2-1 to play. Let's begin by counting the race. Black trails by 28 pips not including the roll. Before Black moves the checkers, he must decide what is the most likely way that he can win this game and then make a play that he feels best meets those needs.

There are three main ways Black can win:

- He can roll large doubles and catch up in the race,
- He can hit a shot while White is clearing his points, or
- He can hit and/or contain White's straggler.

Black's race equity is not good; however he has fair chances playing from the 4-anchor. White's position is quite compact and rates to clear easily, probably without even leaving a shot. The only liability White has is the lone straggler in Black's inner board. Black should focus on either choice (a) or (c) as feasible game plans. Of the two choices, (c) is more likely to win than (a), and choice (b) is the least likely. How can Black best accomplish these objectives?

Let's identify all plausible checker plays:

- 6/3*
- 10/8, 9/8
- 10/9, 6/4
- 13/11, 9/8
- 13/11, 10/9
- 13/12, 10/8
- 9/8, 6/4
- 10/8, 6/5
- 10/9, 8/6

6/3* keeps White off balance but leaves five blots strewn around the board. If this tactic fails, it could quickly kill Black's race chances; if it works, the gains don't seem to justify the risk. Interestingly, it is JellyFish's first choice on Level 7 evaluation.

10/8, 9/8 is quite safe and lowers the blot count while making some blocks. Unfortunately, it stacks points and doesn't offer much in checker flexibility.

10/9, 6/4 is a reasonable compromise that diversifies checkers and retains some blocking potential. 13/11, 9/8 is similar, but duplicates 5-1 and 6-5 to make the 5-point (which are also good running numbers from the 21-point). Unfavorable duplication makes this a weak alternative.

13/11, 10/9 and 13/12, 10/8 make blocking points but offer little checker flexibility and weak overall structure.

9/8, 6/4 covers blots while spreading checkers, but also duplicates 5-1 as a pointing number and removes 4-4 as a pointing and priming number.

10/8, 6/5 keeps the checkers in a compact formation and starts a potential 6-prime. This play exerts enormous pressure on White to roll a deuce or 6 else risk being primed or blitzed. It places the checkers where they do the most good if they are missed, and unstacks the heavy 6-point. Play #8 also offers blitz potential with the possibility of making the 5-point and hitting loose while attempting to roll the prime forward on White's head.

10/9, 6/4 is a bit better for the race if White doesn't hit, but the overall structure and volatility of 10/8, 6/5 yields an easier position to roll forward and forces the game to a decisive conclusion.

Knowing when to take a calculated risk and to what degree is probably the hardest part of backgammon. 10/9, 6/4 (play #3) was the actual play made in the match. White rolled 5-5 and Black lost from there rather easily. Play #8 gives Black his best chance to make a great blockade with a poor roll.

Another angle to this play is that it forces White to hit two men with a 4-2 roll which could work to his advantage. Although substantially decreasing his racing chances, Black may reenter, anchor on a low point, and get into some kind of backgame.

The resultant structure is so strong after 10/8, 6/5 that it seems worth the risk. Black's timing is also somewhat precarious as he is being squeezed for 5s.

If White hits one checker and Black reenters on the 1- or 2-point, he may have a phantom 1-4 or 2-4 game. Black has to get

a little lucky to win, but this gives Black another possibility if White rolls awkwardly in the bear-in.

If Black just plays a 4-point game, White can dump checkers behind him with little fear while simultaneously stacking the 5- and 6-points. This enables White to get several men off with a shot coming late for Black. This means that he has better chances to roll large doubles in winning the race than he has in getting a shot. I strongly prefer the potential blitz and prime formation of 10/8, 6/5 over any other variation.

Initially, 360 JellyFish Level 6 trials were performed for all nine plays. The top five plays were then subjected to 2592 more trials. The results are listed below. Δ

JellyFish Analyzer 3.0 roll-out data consisting of 2592 trials at Level 6.

Black wins	#8	#7	#5	#3	#1
games	36.3	31.0	31.8	31.4	33.9
gammons	5.7	4.5	5.0	4.7	5.7
BGs	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
equity	-0.410	-0.440	-0.465	-0.465	-0.496

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 3]

If there was a "New Jersey Backgammon News," I'm sure it would spotlight Perry and Alex Caraplis and all the other fine players in New Jersey. And you can be sure, I'd be the first one to subscribe.

I think there should be an investigation as to why publication of the "New Jersey Backgammon News" is being suppressed. It must be a *conspiracy!*

Anyway Larry, if you come to Michigan, I'll have a pair of Detroit Lions tickets waiting for you.—Maurice Barie, *Citizen of the USA*

WHO HAS CELEBRITY BG PHOTOS?

The photo of the Green Bay Packers playing backgammon on the front page of last month's POINT was a good one. I would like to see more photos of famous people who play our game, whether past or present. This can only add to the prestige and recognition of our game. "Bravo Zulu" to the POINT! (That's a Navy compliment.)—Lee Hoge, *Saratoga Springs, NY*

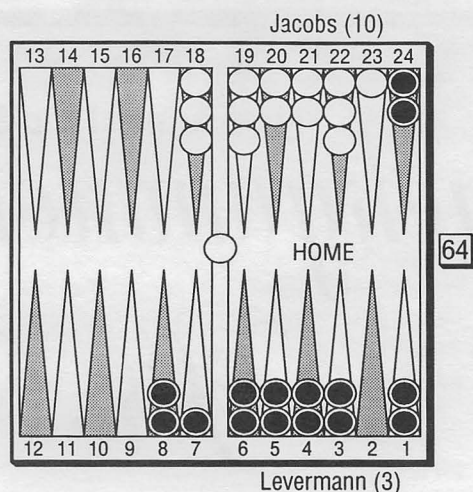
Nice idea, Lee. If anyone has a good celebrity backgammon picture, past or present, send it to: CHICAGO POINT; 3940 W. Bryn Mawr 504; Chicago, IL 60659-3155.—Ed. Δ

PRIME TIME...

[Continued from page 1]

Two aces are easy: Bar/23 (2). Should Johannes make his bar, or my deuce heavy? It seems like trying for the prime is too optimistic. He has three men back to my one. By putting all three on the 23-point he may time the deuce-point game, and still has chances to attack me and go forward. Once in awhile, my sixes will desert me, and he will win the priming battle anyway. If we were playing for money this would be the right play, but at this score, fighting for his life, Johannes should make his bar. He loses more gammons, but doesn't care about those. He wins more gammons, and more games, by making his bar, and that is what he did. A second look shows he is not being foolishly optimistic. If he springs the first man from the deuce with a six, he has reasonable timing, and if he throws an ace, he has my deuce-point anyway.

Now it was my turn to meet a challenge.
WHITE TO PLAY 5-2:



I had done well my previous turn by slotting with a three, rather than bringing in my last builder from the bar, 7/4. Now came this pretty little 5-2. My hand flashed, and disdainfully, I flicked the Black checker away from the bar-point, to make

room for my man. *Outta my way, Squirt!*

Then, I paused. The events of the game had roused me from my post-prandial torpor just enough to question the play. Hitting was right for money.^{1,2} Was it right, at this score to not hit? I put my checker back on his deuce, and covered my own deuce to make the prime.

Go back to sleep, Jake! My play was as bad as Johannes's earlier play had been good.

Johannes rolled a 2-1, a good number either way. I cracked with 4-2, and he attacked with 6-5. Johannes won the game, but that was it for him. We spoke earlier about good men, and where to keep them. Johannes is a nice guy, so you may guess where he finished.

My next two opponents, Rick Barabino, and Fred Kalantari, are also very nice guys, so it was up to me to finish first. Δ

¹ Anyone who would not hit for money, go stand in the corner. Anyone who wonders whether cube ownership makes a difference, go stand in the corner with them. The cube does not belong on your side.

² On second thought, never mind standing in the corner. Come sit in my game.—JJ

who did what

WINNER'S CIRCLE



Oct.–Nov. 1998

•**2nd Moscow Open** (Moscow, Russia; 12–18 Oct.)... **MASTERS** (46): 1-Michael Meyburg (GER), 2-Jacob Modzvrishvili (GEO), 3/4-Ian Ressu (SWI) / Gochik Asoyan (ARM); 1C-Paul Magriel (US), 2C-Johannes Levermann (GER); 1LC-Hendrik Meusers (GER). **INTERMEDIATE** (39): 1-Sergei KotoB (RUS), 2-Zahar Gugulashvili (GEO); 1C-Mosoyan Nikoloi (ARM); 1LC-Andrane Atoyan (ARM). **BEGINNER** (32): 1-Alexander Vechkyresev (RUS); 1C-Pavel Shirokov (RUS); 1LC-Nickoloi Gugulashvili (GEO). **WARM-UP** (98): 1-Petri Pietila (FINLAND), 2-Chris Ternel (DENMARK). **SUPERJACKPOT**: 1-Gianmichele D'Onofrio (ITA)... Results provided by tournament directors Martin & Bambi de Bruin.

•**Clarine's Monthly** (Los Angeles, CA; 31 Oct.)... **OPEN** (10): 1/2-Cameron Scott / Steve Sax.

•**Grand Prix de Suisse 1998** (Lugano, Switzerland; 3–8 Nov.)... **CHAMPIONSHIP** (50): 1-Peter Heitmueller (GER), 2-Carsten Joh (GER); 1C-Rino Mathis (SWZ), 2C-Giorgio Caldera (ITA); 1LC-Joachim Johansson (SWE), 2LC-Guido Flamigni (ITA). **INTERMEDIATE** (35): 1-Yannis Vallianos (GRE), 2-Nonglak Praserttham (THA); 1C-Gordan Markotic (CRO), 2C-Daniel Bruni (SWZ); 1LC-Helge Keller (GER), 2LC-Silvio Carrese

(SWZ). **AMATEUR** (9): 1-Batrice Guardini (ITA), 2-Massimo Cucchiario (ITA); 1C-Ingeborg Haussleiter (GER); 1LC-Maria Croce (ITA). **SUPERJACKPOT POMMERY**: 1-Vittorio Castro (ITA). **CHOUETTE GRAND PRIX**: 1-Bill Robertie (USA). **DOUBLES SNOWIE**: 1-Riskin/Riskin (RUS), 2-M.DeBruin/Cantamessa. **TEAM EVENT MUSICDOOR**: 1-"No Name" (Russia/Italy/Sweden) L.Riskin/G.D'Onofrio/R.Ekstroem. **RAYMOND WEIL EVENT**: 1-Marcel Liechti (SWZ). **SWOROVSKI EVENT**: 1-Roland Ekstroem (SWE). **GRAND HOTEL EDEN WARM-UP**: 1-Bill Robertie (USA).

•**Townharbour Trophy Tourney** (Birmingham, England; 14–15 Nov.)... **TT TROPHY** (75): 1-Simon Gascoigne, 2-Rachel Rhodes. **FRIDAY NIGHT KO** (18 + 7bb): 1-Brian Lever, 2-John Slattey. **DOUBLES** (18 + 4bb): 1/2-David's Dad & A.N. Other / Old Contempitables... Prior to the Doubles, director Michael Crane had his head shaved for charity raising over £185.

•**Backgammon by the Bay Monthly** (San Mateo, CA; 15 Nov.)... **OPEN** (12): 1-Peter Blanchian, 2-Danny Epstein; 1C-Rawlin Pullen, 2C-Paul Tanenbaum. **INTERMEDIATE** (11): 1-Duane Fuller, 2-Bill Caplan; 1C-Christian Stoddard, 2C-Clint McClintic.

•**Milwaukee Backgammon Sunday** (Milwaukee, WI; 15 Nov.)... **OPEN** (9): 1-Bob Holyon, 2-Dennis Hajewski; 1C-Sam Pottle.

•**1998 Twin Cities Club Championship** (Minneapolis, MN; 21 Nov.)... **OPEN** (13): 1-Steve Maas, 2-Steve Brown. **INTERMEDIATE** (8): 1-Dave Wetzell, 2-Greg LaRue (PA). Δ

1998 LAS VEGAS OPEN

CHAMPIONSHIP (108): 1-Amschel Nadjari (France), 2-Mark Kaczmarczyk (NY), 3/4-Drew Giovanis (FL) / Mike Senkiewicz (NY); 1C-Hugh Sconyers (NY), 2C-Dirk Schiemann (Germany), 3C/4C-Perry Gartner (NJ) / François Tardieu (France); 1LC-Mario Sequeira (Portugal), 2LC-Johannes Levermann (Germany). **INTERMEDIATE** (122): 1-Janet Riley (TX), 2-Pete Townsend (PA), 3/4-Karsten Busch (Germany) / Wilder Wadford (NC); 1C-Charlie Raichle (CO), 2C-Ken Tyszko (IL), 3C/4C-Steve Herman (NC) / Harold Seif (NV); 1LC-Zoreh Zafarianian (TX), 2LC-Bruce Penrod (CO). **BEGINNER** (48): 1-Niel Borden (CA), 2-Georgina Flanagan (IL), 3/4-Saad Heinen (CA) / Nancy Ishac (MI); 1C-Pia Rasmussen (Denmark), 2C-Terry Valentine (AZ); 1LC-Rich Orwell (CA), 2LC-David Nahigian (CA). **SUPER JACKPOT** (16): 1-Nack Ballard (CA), 2-Steve Sax (CA), 3/4-Odis Chenault (CA) / Mike Senkiewicz (NY). **LIMITED JACKPOT** (16): 1-Steve Choi (CA), 2-Ary Nogueira (Brazil). **\$1,000 JACKPOT** (16): 1-Jake Jacobs (IL), 2-Fred Kalantari (MN). **\$300 JACKPOT** (16): 1-Joe Freedman (DC), 2-Sergio Portillo (MEX). **BLITZ** (480): 1-Steve Clark (CA), 2-Roger Gabrielson (CA). **SENIORS EVENT** (64): 1-Bob Lumbra (VT), 2-Mark Kaczmarczyk (NY). **2-POINT MINI-MATCH** (128): 1-Odis Chenault (CA), 2-Bruce Penrod (CO). **OVERFLOW MINI-MATCH #1** (64): 1-Michael Meyburg (Germany). #2 (64): 1-Martine Oulès (France/USA). **DOUBLES** (32 teams): 1-Karen Mersey & Ed Petrillo (FL), 2-Niel Borden & David Nahigian (CA), 3/4-Peter Heitmueller & Andreas Maertens (Germany) / Johannes Levermann & Dirk Schiemann (Germany). **OVERFLOW DOUBLES** (8 teams): 1-Evtim Ivanov (Bulgaria) & Aram Kouleyan (CA). **AFTER-TOURNAMENT TOURNAMENT \$50 DIVISION** (32): 1/2-Paul Klein (IL) / Hossein Zafarianian (TX). **\$20 DIVISION** (28 players): 1-Rudy Citrom (CA), 2-Pia Rasmussen (Denmark).



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