1999 Midwest Backgammon Championships

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**MIDWEST WIN GIVES KAZARROSS BIG ABT LEAD**

Grand Crystal Beaver goes to KG

1999 Midwest Champion Neil Kazaross with finalist Clarine at his side. [All MBC photos by Peter Kalba or Carol Joy Cole.]

It may be over. Neil Kazaross’s (IL) impressive victory at the 1999 Midwest Backgammon Championships coupled with his Pittsburgh victory in February may have already won him American Backgammon Tour top honors for the year.

This year’s Midwest biggie was held at the Radisson Lisle Hotel 19–21 March. 200 players were in attendance, 175 playing in main tournament events.

Kazaross marched through a field that included the likes of Sconyers, Ring, Goulding, Ballard, Senkiewicz and other world class players. His current ABT point total (43.17) is already higher than any other yearly total with the exception of Neil’s own record-shattering 77.92 points in 1994.

Following a hard fought victory over rival Bar Point Clubber Steve Mellen (13–8), Neil faced Clarine. A director in Los Angeles, Clarine had been defeated in the opening round of the Lady’s Treasure. Not one to sulk, Clarine won four straight matches to find Stuart Hosen (TX) waiting for her in the semifinals. Her big victory over Hosen gave her a spot in the Championship match.

Neil Kazaross describes the action beginning with this position in the 15-point finals:

Position 1. Midwest Championships 15-point finals. Neil Kazaross (Black) leads Clarine (White), 5 to 3. Black on shake. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**

Kazaross (5)

“Leading 5–3 against Clarine, I have 19 numbers that cover the 2-point. Five of these shots make a full prime. Clearly, the game can backfire as I have three checkers somewhat blocked and can still lose after covering if she jokers me. However, I felt that my gammon chances from a quick closeout or a prime would make this position at best, a borderline money take (I would have passed for money).

“I redoubled to four. After some thought, Clarine took it. At the time, I estimated the chances of her passing to be around 40%. I felt she probably had a close

**‘LADY’S TREASURE’ VICTORY BELONGS TO ANTOINETTE-MARIE WILLIAMS**

by Larry Strommen

Antoinette-Marie Williams proudly shows off her Kosta Boda trophy upon winning the Lady’s Treasure.

They all know that winning a tournament is not easy. Of course, skill is a necessary ingredient. But skill alone can’t cook up a victory, especially when the competition is keen. Luck is also required. And luck is a two-sided coin. Bad luck can also determine a winner . . . or loser.

It had never been done before and may never be done again. A tournament for the century. A $35,000 winner-take-all women’s challenge event open to the first four ladies to ante up a $9,000 entry fee—the highest ever for any organized singles event. The tourney would be part of the 1999 Midwest Championships 19–21 March at the Lisle-Radisson Hotel near Chicago, Illinois.

Laila Leonhardt (Chicago/Denmark), Antoinette-Marie Williams (New York) and Mika Lidov (New York) each plunked down their nine grand within one week of the January 3 invitation mailing. When Clarine (Los Angeles) entered in late February, the elite field-of-four was set.

[Continued on page 6]
I want to tell you about the game that is catching on big time throughout the backgammon circles in Cincinnati. It’s called “Snackgammon.”

With Snackgammon, cookies are used instead of checkers. When a player hits his opponent’s cookie, he doesn’t place it on the bar. Instead, he eats it. The opponent now has one less cookie (checker) with which to finish the game. If the player thinks that eating an enemy cookie would help his opponent, then he shouldn’t hit. If the hit is forced, that’s tough!

Care is often taken in choosing cookies to use as checkers so that the calorie count is essentially the same for both sides. Vegetarians and fat-conscious dieters usually request their opponents to play with carrot rounds instead of cookies. (Tater-tots are another alternative for those not concerned about

[Continued on page 3]
chocolate; raw onion slices are a wicked alternative for those who are.)

For those of you still reading about Snackgamon, I have two words, "April Fool"—David Moeser, Cincinnati, OH

Snackgamon sounds like a great Midwest Championships side event, David. We’ll keep it in mind. And that’s no April Fool!—Ed.

A NOTE FROM KATHY MUECHN

Sorry we missed the Midwest Championships. Son Kevin and I had planned to attend but he had other commitments. With backgammon such a big part of Dean’s life, I miss hearing the latest backgammon news and how everyone is doing.

Our family is doing much better. We have two new grandchildren since Dean’s passing—that makes eight. The loss of Dean was a terrible blow to us, but the “fog” is finally lifting.

Youngest son Max [Maximilian Gammon Muench] is doing great. Kids seem to spring back fast. He’s quite an athlete and keeps me very busy with his sporting activities. He has his father’s competitive spirit!

If you get the chance, send some backgammon news my way.—Kathy Muench <uberdean@interaccess.com>, via e-mail, Palatine, IL

WHO IS THAT LADY?

I wonder if you can tell me the issue number or the publishing date of the Collier’s Magazine that is shown in your ad on page 4 of the Jan./Feb. issue of the Flint Area Backgammon News.—Casey Forrest <clf@epn.org>, via e-mail

That is the Collier’s Weekly dated April 11, 1931. Maurice Barie is selling reproductions of the cover suitable for framing. See the back page for his advertisement.

We are currently searching the Internet for the complete issue. (Maurice only has the cover.) Thus far, all searches have proved fruitless. If anyone can find the April 11, 1931 Collier’s in decent condition, we will pay $60 for it.—Ed.

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 2]

NEW CLUBS “SPRINGING” UP

Just to let you know that the Albany Club is up and running. We meet at Romano’s Family Restaurant in Halfmoon, New York the first and third Sunday monthly. For additional info, call me at 518/382-1098 or e-mail: flash@localnet.com—Marc Gray, Schenectady, NY

We want to inform you of the grand opening of the Crabtown Backgammon Club. Our first meeting will be Sunday, April 18 at the Pioneer Pub in Parkton, Maryland. Interested parties should e-mail: divdesman@home.com or call 410/453-0001.

Your Internet page on tips for starting a new club is super. Thanks for the guidance.—Richard Warnk, Reisterstown, MD

Hi! I’m going to be starting a club in Charlotte, North Carolina and have no idea how to set up a master point system. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

I have already read your tips online at Stephen Turner’s website. They have been extremely helpful!—Jeb Horton <jeb@carolina.rr.com>, via e-mail

We’ll send you the Bar Point Club master point system, Jeb. Also check with Carol Joy Cole <cjic@flint.org> on her system—or create your own!

The Internet site with club tips is at: <http://www.gamesdomain.com/backgammon/clubs/howto.html>. No Internet access? Send your name and address and we’ll mail you a copy.—Ed.

your move

PROBLEM #253
to be analyzed by Alex Caraplis

1999 Midwest Championships match to 11-points. Hugh Sconyers (White) leads Steve McCormick (Black), 9 to 8. Black on shake. CUBE ACTION(S)?

April 1999
PLAYING UNDER PRESSURE

Dear Miss Lonelyblots: Last month, I attended the Midwest Championships in Lisle, Illinois where I witnessed the $35,000 Lady's Treasure event. Antoinette-Marie Williams (the eventual winner), Mika Lidov, Clarine, and Laila Leonhardt were exciting to watch.

The matches were pressure-packed with a monitor and 20 or more spectators always present. The format was best two-out-of-three 9-point matches. Chess clocks always present. The format was best two

$35,000

These women could keep their cool under the intense scrutiny I have described to you. And that's my problem.

I'm a competent open level player on the Internet, but it seems impossible for me to compete at this level in public because I choke whenever anyone (especially an expert) watches me play. And when a camera is pointed in my direction while I'm thinking, forget about it—I freeze like a deer in headlights.

I've been to about four tournaments and my problem has not improved. Miss Lonelyblots, how can I gain the confidence to play "live" backgammon at least as well as I do on the Internet?—Petrified in Public

Dear Petrified: I must take issue with my sister. She's become just as nutty as her friend Ally, and in her new female-bonding craze, she made the unwarranted assumption that you are a woman. Disregard her advice. Forget trying to affect the reactions of others: that is the root of your problem, not its cure. Instead, focus all your attention on the game you are playing—as I understand it, an intellectual game—treating each position as if it were an academic problem.

The anxiety you describe is a form of stage fright. Many suffer from it, but most become deconditioned with practice (four tournaments are not enough).

Some can never be at ease in the limelight, however. Psychologists have discovered two dimensions of personality—extraversion vs. introversion, and emotionality—that are as largely genetically determined and unalterable as intelligence. Combine emotionality with extraversion and you get a craving for attention with enhanced performance under pressure. Combine emotionality with introversion and you get shyness: shunning of attention with folding under pressure.

There is no "cure" for shyness, nor should there be. For in many ways, shy people are admirable. However, if you find that repeated exposure to the limelight fails to diminish your anxiety, hypnosis may help you. The hypnotic suggestions “Ignore the pressure!” and “Don’t be nervous!” won't work; the hypnotist must find a positive suggestion that creates an illusion of being alone and unobserved.

I say that hypnosis may help, not that it will. People vary in the degree to which they are hypnotizable. About 15% cannot be hypnotized at all, and even if you are in the other 85%, success may depend on finding the right hypnotist for you; not all hypnotists and subjects have rapport. A good hypnotist can train you to hypnotize yourself, so you will not have to keep paying for treatments.

For further information, read Fact and Fiction in Psychology and Sense and Nonsense in Psychology by H.J. Eysenck, one of my professors in graduate school.—Dr. Antoinette G. Lonelyhearts, Ph.D.

PS: It's nice to know that my namesake won the "Lady's Treasure" tourney—AGL A

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.

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CHICAGO POINT 118

April 1999
Meanwhile, the winner's bracket was not and then we slowed down to a crawl. A By now it was 2 a.m., and I was not eager the locals was ordering a celebratory round players whenever possible. I owed it to the padding my resume, but he was undeterred. should the dice be so kind.

(us) to finish dinner before holding the nation format is up for revision, so expect them to end in a more timely fashion. Then I rolled 6-3, and he rolled the cube my way. It seemed that all was forgiven. Trying to keep the conversational dice rolling, I asked: “What do you do for a living?” “Well, since the accident that took my right arm, and nearly took my life, I haven’t done much of anything.”

Fortunately, the field finally narrowed to a group of us already planning to spend the next afternoon together, so play was adjourned before I could do any more for international relations. (Future visitors to Acapulco take note. Wednesday tournaments will be starting earlier, and the double elimination format is up for revision, so expect them to end in a more timely fashion. Then again, what have you got to get up for?) We resumed the next day at Andy’s hotel, the Mayan Palace. I outrolled one Franks, but nobody outrolls both in one day. I finished 3rd behind Paul, who went on to beat Isaac Lemke (previously unde­feated) and claim the title “Wizard of Wednesday Night.”

No BG article would be complete without a position or two. Here they come. Both were played poolside at the Hyatt.

Poolside chouette. Captain and Crew (Black) on roll vs. the Box (White). CUBE ACTION(S)?

We were on roll here as Black. This is obviously not a double, but we doubled anyway. Before you decide our brains were baking in the tropical sun, I will point out that Paul collected a point (we were not playing equal action, so the Box was permitted to take only one cube, while dropping Paul). Paul and I knew he would win a point. I doubled because I felt there was some chance the Box would pass me too, and because, even if taken, my opponent might “play it into a double.” I never got to find out if he could screw it up. I rolled 6-6. He rolled 5-5, which was no prize either. Then I rolled 6-3, and he rolled the cube my way.

One more that’s kinda’ cute!

Sad to say, I wimped it up. Here is a rare bearow where it is right to volunteer the shot by pointing. In fact, JellyFish™ prefers hitting loose to my actual play of 5/ off. My poor play cost me the gammon, though I salvaged the win. A

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**ILLINOIS ACTION**

**CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB**

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

**PUB CLUB: Tourn. Mon., 7:30 P.M. at Tortilla Flats Cancun, 290 S. Schmale, Carol Stream, Joe Wollic (675/355-0887).**

**GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: Tourn. Monday, 7:00 P.M. at The Clique, 2347 S. Michigan, Chicago, Reginald Porter (773/471-5065).**

**BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BG CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 6:30 P.M. at Ridge Black, 305 N. Prospect, Bloomington. Gary Daniel (309/452-3034).**

**SANGAMON VALLEY BG ASSN: Tournaments Wednesday, 6:30 P.M. at Brewhaus, 417 E. Washington, Springfield. Ben Zemaitis (217/483-0537).**

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

Tension among the participants was at an incredible level prior to Friday’s opening round of play. To reach the finals, a lady would need to win a match consisting of two-out-of-three 9-point “sets.” Chess clocks, baffle boxes, match monitors and the use of overhead video cameras placed additional pressure on the women, and could be felt by the dozens of spectators on hand.

In the first semifinal match, Antoinette-Marie pulled in front of Clarine on a doubled gammon in game one and never looked back. Antoinette ended up winning the first set 9-3. But the second set went down to the wire with Williams eventually eking out a 9–8 decision to advance to the finals.

The other semifinal match between Laila Leonhardt and Mika Lidov was even closer. Trailing Mika 5–0 in the first set, Laila, one of the fastest players in the world, accelerated her game winning back-to-back doubled gammons and eventually winning 9–6.

In the second set, additional pressure was placed on Lidov. Trailing 7–4, Mika had just over eight minutes on her clock to win five points. If her clock fell before the end of the set, Laila would be granted two points and Mika’s clock reset to five minutes. But gaining two points here would make Laila the winner of the set and thus the match. So Mika’s strategy was to double at her first opportunity and go all out to win a gammon.

Mika moved in rapid fire sequence, relying on quick thinking only. Try as she might, Laila could not avoid falling into a gammonish position. As Mika began bearing off, Laila had two men on the bar and 30 additional outfield pips. Laila eventually lost a gammon, but not before missing a match-winning blot on the 3-point. Mika had taken an 8–7 Crawford lead.

In the next game, Position 1 (shown above) came up with Mika on shake. Here, Mika has a win probability of 97.8% cubeless. But fortunes favored Antoinette-Marie who was lucky enough to roll a set of boxcars and go on to win this game, set and match.

Rick Barabino was the first to congratulate Antoinette following her stunning victory.

All four ladies did great justice to themselves in this unique tournament. While only one player could be crowned Champion, all played like Champions.
take at this score. I covered, escaped and rolled a double on the last roll to gammon her and take a huge 13–3 lead.

"After the match, several players told me I won because of Clarine’s bad 4-cube take. Clearly, I was sure that she hadn’t sacrificed much equity by taking here.

"A 250,000 game, 1-ply Snowie rollout for the given match score surprised me. It said that Clarine had an easy take and that I actually sacrificed a quarter of a percent of match equity by doubling! However, the position rolled out as a money pass!

"I haven’t done the analysis (or higher ply rollouts) to understand how slight changes in doubling, takepoint and gammon costs and values can turn a pass for money into "not good enough to recube to 4" at this score! Suffice it to say, Clarine has an easy take here and my redouble is in doubt. It certainly helps to get lucky!

"Against Clarine, I found out that a 13–3 lead is not so commanding. She fought back to trail 13–11 aided by good cube strategy. I had been cubed in the holding game shown below and now must break either my 20-point or my board:


In other main division events, Paul Friedman stopped Leslie Lockett in the $140 Open all-Chicagoland finals. The 64-player Advanced division saw Mike Shanas (St. Louis) come out of tourney "retirement" to defeat Chicago’s Joann Feinstein. And Glenn Swanson (IL) won his first Limited title by defeating Dirk Hogan (MI).

This year’s Calcutta Auction was especially action-packed. Heavy bidding helped to generate a donation of $1850 for Anti-Cruelty Society Animals.

Between the Advanced and Championship auction, Laila Leonhardt surprised many players by performing three jazz standards accompanied by pianist Steve Thorpe.

Special thanks to administrators Peter Kalba, Carol Joy Cole, Dru Heggen, Elaine Kehm and Greg Tomlin; also to Harry and John at Fast Track Printing; Sheri Buchette and the Radisson Hotel staff; Jeff Henry (Jim Henry Trophies); Maurice Barie (Collier’s artwork and backgammon history); and everyone else who helped to make the 1999 Midwest Backgammon Championships (16th annual) one of our most successful of the 20th century. Complete results appear on page 9.
PROBLEM #252
ANALYZED
by Kit Woolsey

In most backgammon positions, the cube is not a relevant consideration when determining the best play. Occasionally, however, cube access becomes a major factor. This problem illustrates one of these situations.

Black’s two logical choices appear to be lifting the blot with 14/10, 5/4, or shifting and going for the blitz with 6/5, 6/2*. Plays which leave the 5-point slotted such as 14/10, 7/6 or 7/2* simply leave White too many good rolls without the compensation of putting the second checker on the bar; and playing super-safe with 7/3, 5/4 is too harmful to Black’s structure.

If Black did not have access to the cube, I would be fairly confident that 6/5, 6/2* is the correct play. Putting the second checker on the bar while leaving only one shot increases Black’s gammon chances while cutting down on White’s good numbers. The safer 14/10, 5/4 makes any entering number for White reasonable, while after 6/5, 6/2*, if White doesn’t hit or otherwise enter both checkers, Black will have a formidable position.

The cube location sheds a different light on the position. Going into this roll, Black was playing on for the gammon. (White clearly had a very easy pass if Black had doubled.) This was a reasonable decision by Black. Had he covered his 5-point, he would have had very good gammon chances. And, more important, it would be impossible for White to spring back into contention in one roll. However Black failed to cover his 5-point, so he must rethink things.

Suppose Black makes the shifting play, and White hits. Black is no longer in such great shape. Both players will be on the bar against three-point boards, and Black still has some blots strewn around the board. Black could still consider doubling, but it looks like White has a pretty easy take. If White hits and enters with both checkers, now it isn’t clear who the favorite is. Thus, by playing 6/5, 6/2*, Black runs a serious risk of what I call “gaining his market,” i.e. going from where he had a cash on the previous roll to where his opponent now has a clear take.

Suppose instead that Black plays 14/10, 5/4 and White enters without hitting. Let’s say White makes the defensive anchor on the 2-point. Black’s gammon chances go way down, but he still has a good position. Now he can double, and it is a very powerful double. White might or might not have a take depending on exactly what she enters with, but it looks like White will have a close decision. Thus, in a lot of scenarios, Black will wind up with a very efficient double.

Note that after either play, if White rolls badly from the bar, Black will be able to continue to play on for the gammon if he chooses. However if White rolls well from the bar, Black will be able to cash (or be very close to it) if Black makes the safe play, while if Black shifts and White hits the shot, Black won’t be close to a cash.

It is true that the shifting play will produce more gammons, but that is not the number one priority right now. It may seem paradoxical, but often when you are playing on for the gammon, it is correct to make a play which gives you smaller gammon chances in order to maximize your probability of claiming with the cube if things start to go badly. Because of the cube access, I believe Black should play 14/10, 5/4.

This situation is somewhat analogous to the more common type of position where, with the cube in the center, you roll a joker which will probably give you a gamewinning cube next turn unless your opponent rolls well. When this happens, you often don’t make the most aggressive play unless you are planning on playing on for a gammon. You may make a more conservative play which is not the best play in a vacuum, but which limits your opponent’s good rolls so you can cash next turn.

In other words, you want to cut down on the volatility of your opponent’s roll. The situation is similar with this problem. You are willing to sacrifice some overall equity in order to ensure an efficient cube next turn. Δ

AMALGAMATION

Join us for tourney play at the Bar Point Club Sunday Bimonthly 11 April at Anyway’s Grill in Oakbrook Terrace, IL. Game time is 12:00 noon... BG player Andy Glazer has written a very entertaining and informative book titled Casino Gambling The Smart Way (Career Press). Both Wilcox Snellings (NV) and Jake Jacobs (IL) praise the book on its back cover... The next time you see the 1999 Midwest Backgammon Advanced Champion Mike Shanas (MO), you might not recognize him. Mike promised his son if he won the tourney, he would shave off his beard!... Congrats to Chicago Bar Point Club player Carter Mattig (IL) and bride Ericka Hladun who were married in Cañon City, CO on 14 March. Also to Mario Madrigal who took a bride in Costa Rica March 27: Patricia... Get well wishes go out to Gayle Wolf (MI) who is recovering from eye surgery... John O’Hagan’s job has moved him from Indiana to Sauk Village, Illinois... Mike Fujita (HI) e-mailed us regarding some great Southwest Airline $99 fares throughout-out the US. You can travel between 6 April and 4 August, but you must purchase your tickets by 27 April... Jeb Horton invites you to his new Charlotte Backgammon Club. They meet Mondays at 6:30 p.m. at East Side Mario’s. For more info, contact Jeb at 704/814-0850 or jeb@carolina.rr.com... Want to find some very unusual backgammon items including 100 year old boards or rare books? Try the auction site www.ebay.com on the Internet. A number of gammon players are scooping up bargains there. Δ
Backgammon by the Bay Monthly (Alameda, CA; 7 Feb.)... OPEN (14): 1-Jonathan Weinstein, 2-Paul Albert.


Springfield Series #5 (Peoria, IL; 6 Mar.)... OPEN (20): 1-Linda Woods, 2-Sue Will; 1C-Milad Doucet, 2C-Ben Zemaitis; 1LC-Randy Armstrong... If not for a heavy snowfall, the tournament might have filled at 32.


Fleetwood Underwood Memorial (Flinn, MI; 7 Mar.)... OPEN (28): 1-Gary Fritzsche, 2-Harry Brown, 3-Mike Giordano, 4-5-Carol Ayole / Dan Smith / Rick Todd. INTERMEDIATE (27): 1-John Lopetrone, 2-Joe Miller (OH), 3/4-Dave Brotherton / Bill Norris, 5-6-Tyler Longman / Chester Warzel (IN). NOVICE (7): 1-Sam Denno, 2-Clay Fenstermaker, 3-Fran Miller (OH)... A great showing considering the heavy snow over the weekend.

Colorado State Championship (Denver, CO; 13 Mar.)... OPEN: 1-Lawrence Wilson, 2-Duane Eshma; 1C-Peter Allikian.


Hong Kong Invitational (Hong Kong, China; 19-20 Mar.)... OPEN (15): 1-John Simon, 2-Melody Rae; 1C-Steve Nelson... Results reported firsthand by Chicago's Jake Jacobs.


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“After using **Harry's Folding Baffle Box™**, I recommend it for its compact efficiency & portability.” —Antoinette-Marie Williams, 1999 $35,000 Lady’s Treasure champion.

“Most serious players will want to own one.” —Clairina, 1995 Las Vegas Open winner and 1999 Midwest Championships finalist.


“Great addition to the game—and portable. All professionals should have one.” —Laila Leonhardt (pictured at left), 1998 Pittsburgh Masters’s winner.

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A Classic Reproduction.

This elegant full-color reproduction of the April 11, 1931 *Collier's Weekly* is now available, suitable for framing. The reproduction, measuring 10" x 13 1/2", is available with two types of 100% acid-free museum board matting: Regular ($30) or a Deluxe French matting w/decorative border ($40).

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