

2000 midwest backgammon championships

BIG PLAY WINS 2000 MBC FOR PAUL FRANKS

Sax Edges Ballard in Grand Crystal Beaver

Over 200 players from across America converged on the Radisson Lisle Hotel outside of Chicago 17-19 March to do battle at the 2000 Midwest Backgammon Championships. With eight of the top 19 ranked "Giants of Backgammon" players in the world attending (see "Giants" listing on page 9), the road to victory would not be easy.



A pair of winners from Chicagoland: Advanced Champ Joe Ausmann (at left) with 2000 Midwest Backgammon Champion Paul Franks.

The Chicago Bar Point Club's 17th annual charity extravaganza was directed by Bill Davis and staffed by Peter Kalba, Carol Joy Cole, Dru Heggen, Elaine Kehm and Mike Fujita. Pig-Rolling, Bocce Dice, BG Wheel of Fortune, the Pajama Game and other merriment added to the festivities. \$1600 was raised for the Anti-Cruelty Society of Chicago.

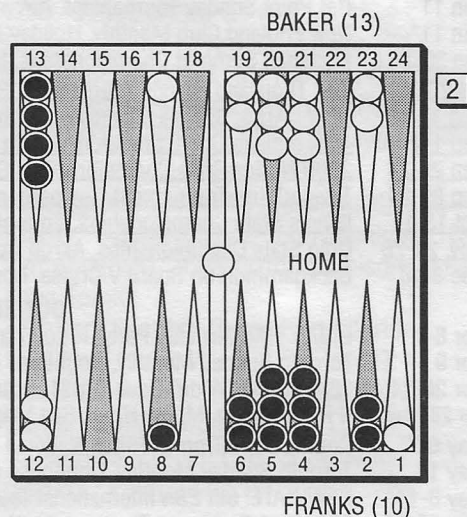
It was not a tournament for the heavy hitters as Ballard, Kazaross, Senkiewicz, Ring, Goulding, Jacobs and Wells struck out early. Of the individually-auctioned players, only Malcolm Davis (Texas) reached the fourth round.

The chance for an all-female finals added extra interest to the semifinal matches with Laila Leonhardt (Illinois/Denmark) facing Paul Franks (Illinois) and

Linda Rockwell (Illinois) against Ray Baker (California). But Franks and Baker would advance to spoil the chance of a "Ladies' Day."

The 15-point Championship finals saw the lead change hands several times. With Franks (the 1999 Chicago Open champion) trailing 13-10 and Baker on the bar and holding a 2-cube, a pivotal move developed:

Pos. 1. Midwest Championships 15-point finals. Ray Baker (White) leads Paul Franks (Black), 13 to 10. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-1.**



Midwest Championships staff in pajamas from left: Dru Heggen, Mike Fujita, Carol Joy Cole, Bill Davis (Director), Elaine Kehm and Peter Kalba.

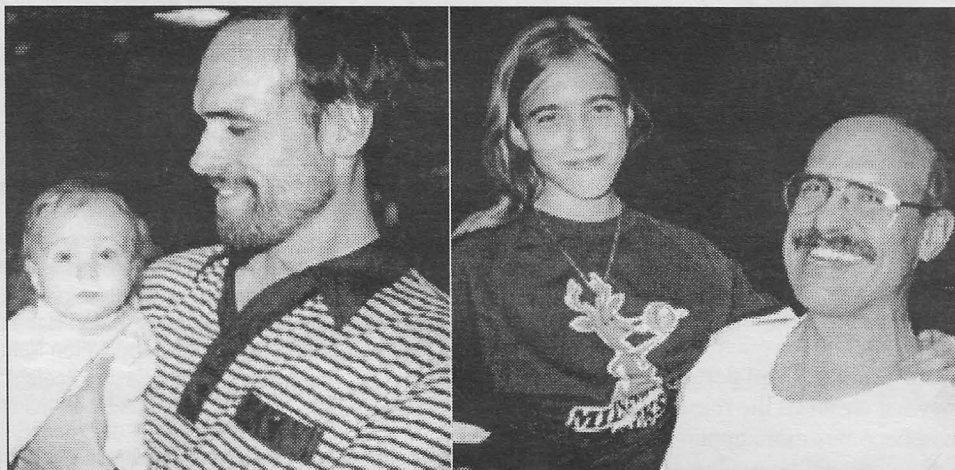
The conservative 13/8 is the quiet option, but Franks went for the big play: 5/1*, 8/7. It proved successful as Ray fanned, was eventually closed out, and lost a doubled gammon. Leading 14-13 Crawford, Franks took the next game for the title and the lead in the 2000 American Backgammon Tour (see page 3).

GRAND CRYSTAL BEAVER

The Grand Crystal Beaver is a \$600 entry fee event where first prize is \$6000 and a Swarovski Crystal Beaver trophy valued at

[Continued on page 5]

ELEVEN YEARS LATER



She doesn't remember it, but Dawn Vangsness (West Allis, Wisconsin) first attended the Midwest Backgammon Championships back in 1989 (photo at left). Father Jerry recreates the pose for us at this year's MBC.

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

c/o CHICAGO POINT

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STUPID, SILLY SIDE EVENTS

I checked out the www.gammonvillage.com website where your Midwest Championships article and link to MBC photos were posted. Excellent on all counts!

I always enjoy the Midwest Championships, partly because of all the "stupid, silly side events." Keep up the good work.—

Kent Goulding, Kensington, MD

PIP COUNT REQUEST

Increasingly with the use of Snowie™, JellyFish™, and now GammOnline, I and others are used to seeing the pip count quoted on all board diagrams. It makes the study of problems and particularly matches somewhat easier as the reasoning for some moves becomes more apparent when the pip-count is readily available. Having to calculate it each time can ruin the flow of one's study.

[Continued on page 3]

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



by Carol Joy Cole
810/232-9731

cjc@tir.com

* Denotes new or revised listing

NATIONAL

American Backgammon Tour events underlined.

Apr 7-9	45th Gammon Associates Invitational, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA	818/901-0464
Apr 8	Universal Spring Championship, Universal Mall, Warren, MI	810/558-4790
Apr 9	New England Club Monthly, Holiday Inn, Somerville, MA	781/938-7852
Apr 9*	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Anyway's Grill, Oakbrook Terrace, IL	773/252-7755
Apr 15	Springfield Grand Finale, Parker's Sports Bar, Springfield, IL	217/483-4028
Apr 20	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Days Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
Apr 23	Atlanta Monthly Tournament, Tony's American Grille, Roswell, GA	770/333-1876
Apr 25-30	International Twin Championships, Desert Inn, Las Vegas, NV	702/893-0043
Apr 29*	3rd Northern Ohio/Pittsburgh Challenge, Hast House, Pittsburgh, PA	412/823-7500
Apr 30*	Sunday Tournament, Toby's Restaurant, Forest Hills, PA	412/823-7500
Apr 30	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
May 1*	Lainer's Bimonthly Tournament on FIBS, via computer	lainer@fibs.com
May 1*	Official GamesGrid Monthly Tournament, via computer	tournaments@cyberarts.com
May 6*	Central Connecticut Championships, Holiday Inn Select, Southington, CT	203/596-1443
May 7	New England Club Monthly, Holiday Inn, Somerville, MA	781/938-7852
May 13*	Rocky Mountain Club Tourney, Arthritis Fdn. Bldg., Denver, CO	719/574-5598
May 14	Ace Point Doubles Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
May 18*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Days Inn, Flint, MI	810/232-9731
May 21*	Atlanta Monthly Tournament, Tony's American Grille, Roswell, GA	770/333-1876
May 28*	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
May 26-29	<u>21st Chicago Open, Wyndham NW Chicago Hotel, Itasca, IL</u>	<u>847/674-0120</u>
May 28	Ace Point Sunday Tournament, Ace Point Club, New York, NY	212/753-0842
Jun 11	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Anyway's Grill, Oakbrook Terrace, IL	773/252-7755
Jun 11*	New England Club Monthly, Holiday Inn, Somerville, MA	781/938-7852
Jun 30-Jul 3	<u>Michigan Summer Championships, Novi Hilton, Novi, MI</u>	<u>810/232-9731</u>
Jul 28-30	<u>Y2K Thousand Islands Tournament, Pine Tree Point, Alexandria Bay, NY</u>	<u>716/387-0767</u>
Aug 11-13*	<u>NEW DATES: Georgia Champs & Peach Cup, Holiday Inn Select, Atlanta, GA</u>	<u>770/333-1876</u>
Sep 1-4	<u>48th Indiana Open, Sheraton-Westin Hotel, Indianapolis, IN</u>	<u>317/255-8902</u>
Sep 22-24	<u>2000 Florida State Championships, Sheridan Suites, Ft. Lauderdale, FL</u>	<u>954/938-4304</u>
Sep 22-24	<u>Towpath Inn Tournament, Towpath Inn, Turin, NY</u>	<u>716/387-0767</u>
Oct 13-15	<u>Illinois State Championships, Springfield Hilton, Springfield, IL</u>	<u>217/528-0117</u>
Nov. 24-26	<u>Ohio State Championships, Akron Holiday Inn, Akron, OH</u>	<u>330/966-2811</u>
Dec 3-10	Backgammon on Board V Cruise, New Orleans-Montego Bay-Cozumel	773/583-6464

OUTSIDE USA

Apr 8-9	BIBA's 10th Birthday Party, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Apr 9	Toronto Sunday Monthly, Doghouse Riley's Toronto, ON, Canada	416/722-9709
Apr 20-24	12th Nordic "Wide" Open & U21, Scandic Hotel, Copenhagen, Denmark	4533-363601
Apr 28-May 1	II Recife Open, Monte Hotel, Boa Viagem Beach, Brazil	5581-4688216
May 6-7	County Cups Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
May 14	Toronto Sunday Monthly, Doghouse Riley's Toronto, ON, Canada	416/722-9709
May 8-14*	NEW DATE: 6th EBN International Tournament, Casino San Roque, Spain	34950-133009
May 18-20	500 Years Discovery Tournament, Hotel XAO, Porto Seguro, Brazil	5571-3511478
May 19-21*	Oslo Open 2000, Vika Atrium, Oslo, Norway	4722-360966
Jun 3-4	Copenhagen Open 2000, Frederiksgård Skole, Denmark	45436-416035
Jun 3-4	Hilton Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Jun 11*	Toronto Sunday Monthly, Doghouse Riley's Toronto, ON, Canada	416/722-9709
Jun 30-Jul 2*	1st Marbella Open, Casino Marbella/Hotel Andalucia, Marbella, Spain	3902-69018168
Jun 30-Jul 2*	Tammer Open, Hotel Tammer, Tampere, Finland	358-5068061
Jul 6-9	12th City of Venice Tournament, Casinò Municipale, Venice, Italy	3941-5900769
Jul 8-9	Andrew Sarjeant Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Jul 10-16	World Championship, Monte Carlo Grand Hotel, Monte Carlo, Monaco	USA: 954/527-4033
Jul 19-23	2nd Czech Open, China Palace Casino, Prague, Czech Republic	49911-409505
Jul 28-30	6th Kaiserbrunnen Cup, Hotel am Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	49521-64314
Aug 5-6	Studio Anne Carlton Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Aug 17-20	Grand Prix de Lugano 2000, Hotel Grand Eden, Lugano, Switzerland	4179-3374425
Aug 19-28	Mind Sports Olympiad/British Open, London, England	44152-2888676
Sep 1-3	12th European Championship, HIT Casino Park, Nova Gorica, Slovenia	3902-69018168
Sep 2-3*	Roy Hollands Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Sep 30-Oct 1*	Sandy Osborne Trophy, Hilton National Hotel, Coventry, England	44152-2888676
Oct 5-8*	3rd Austrian Open, Casino Seefeld, Seefeld, Austria	431-9715889
Oct 7-9*	6th Japan Open & 30th Championship, Nakano Sun Plaza, Tokyo, Japan	813-33733814
Oct 12-15*	Salvador Open, Clube da Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil	5571-3511478
Oct 14-15*	9th Abne Fynske Mesterskaber, Fyns Backgammon Union, Denmark	4565-912551
Oct 20-21*	Swiss Meisterschaft 2000, Zurich, Switzerland	4179-4015811
Nov 1-5*	7th German Open, Hotel am Kaiserbrunnen, Brakel, Germany	49521-64314
Nov 1-5*	Consulting Doubles World Championship, Lugano, Switzerland	4179-334425
Nov 3-5*	Grand Prix de Suisse 2000, Hotel Royal Splendid, Lugano, Switzerland	4179-334425

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 2]

I added this feature to my own newspaper column a few months ago and have received a positive response from readers. I wonder if the time has come for the POINT to add the pip count to its board diagrams?—Chris Bray, London, England

Part of solving a backgammon problem involves one's ability to make a quick and accurate pip count. In this department, practice makes perfect. CHICAGO POINT has no current plans to include pip counts on their board diagrams.—Ed.

IN DEFENSE OF GEORGE BARR

I don't agree at all with your criticism of George Barr's double when he was trailing Bob Bishop 9-1 to 13 in the finals of the Pittsburgh tournament [March 2000 POINT]. Far from being an error, I believe it was an excellent double. The position in question was: Bishop: 5-3 [8/3, 6/3], Barr: 6-6 [24/18(2), 13/7(2)], Bishop: 5-4 [13/8, 24/20]. Barr then doubled and Bishop took.

For money, this would be a premature double. But here, three factors make it correct to spin the cube:

1. Very limited recube vig. Barr can take and rewhip to 8 with as little as 10% winning chances. So Bishop has to wait until his winning chances are in the upper 80s in a straight race before redoubling.
2. Gammon wins are more valuable to Barr than in a money game. Single game swings are from 3-9 (17% match equity) to 1-11 (5%) while a gammon win makes the score 5-9 (25%). Gammon wins are therefore worth 8/12 of single game swings versus 1/2 for money.
3. Gammon losses are less harmful than for money. Single game swings are from 5% to 17%, while a gammon loss costs him the match. Gammon losses are therefore worth 5/12 of single game swings versus 1/2 for money.

I'd also like to point out that Kit Woolsey doubled the readers of *GammonOnline* e-magazine (www.gammononline.com) in a very similar position when he was trailing 8-4 in an 11-point match (Online match #2, game 8). The sequence there was:

Readers: 53 [8/3, 6/3], Woolsey: 66 [24/18(2), 13/7(2)], Readers: 52 [13/8, 24/22]. Woolsey: Double. Readers: Take.—John O'Hagan, Sauk Village, IL

BASIC PLAYING RULES

My boyfriend and I are feuding over a backgammon situation. Let's say I roll 6 & 3 and I don't have any possible 6 moves. But if I move a certain 3 first, then I can move the 6. Am I forced to move that 3 to make the 6 possible, or may I move any 3, and forget about the 6.—Simone, via e-mail

You must play your full roll if possible. If it is only possible to move one number, then you must move the biggest one. So in your case, you must move the 3 first, then the 6.

Playing rules are available at Tom Keith's excellent Internet website, *Backgammon Galore* (www.bkgm.com).—Ed.

NEW ROBERTIE BOOK

The word may have already gotten around at CHICAGO POINT, but I thought I'd let you know about Bill Robertie's new backgammon book I saw at Barnes & Noble last week. It's entitled *501 Essential Backgammon Problems*. This 376-page book costs \$19.95, and can be ordered at bookstores, as well as sites like amazon.com and bn.com.

Also, there are ads in the back of the book for a couple of electronic BG games by Saitek. Have you heard of them, and are they any good?—Steve Migala, Chicago, IL

We haven't heard anything good about hand-held games from Saitek, Steve. For now, stick with JellyFish™ and Snowie™ on a laptop.—Ed. Δ



ABT
AMERICAN
BACKGAMMON
TOUR ★ 2000


AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR ★ 1999

Top 100 compiled through 6 Sept. 2000 after 9 events
(Coming in September: Ohio State Champs and Towpath Inn Tourney)



ABT
AMERICAN
BACKGAMMON
TOUR ★ 2000

Paul Franks	22.88	Steve Maas	5.60	Steve Michelson	3.53	Joe Davidson	1.81
Bob Bishop	22.35	Walt Swan	5.47	Tom Leahy	3.21	Dee Webster	1.81
George Barr	15.39	Mark Anshus	5.20	Jim Price	3.20	Paul Lombardo	1.58
Joe Ausmann	11.44	Timothy Jaxon	5.00	Sal Chehayeb	2.50	Leon Weiner	1.46
Jeff Kane	11.40	Steve Kovach	5.00	Gary Fries	2.50	Tom Hodous	1.25
Ed Zell	11.20	Alan Gaarder	5.00	Phil Michelson	2.50	Bob Sexton	0.90
John Greci	10.75	Guy Nicosia	5.00	Ed King	2.50	Fran Miller	0.86
Andy Palumbo	10.59	Bill Tallmadge	5.00	Elayne Feinstein	2.40	Jeff Dillinger	0.68
Ray Baker	10.40	Matt Reklaitis	5.00	Tom Machaj	2.08	Tony Burbach	0.59
Sam Pottle	6.40	Laila Leonhardt	4.16	Don Heinsler	2.08	Glenn Martells	0.59
Sean Garber	5.70	Linda Rockwell	4.16	David Rubin	1.90		



CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 2000 PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 31 MAR.

Tak Morioka	6.96	Bob Zavoral	2.64	Ralph Byrns	1.28	Ken Bond	0.80
Herb Roman	6.24	Paul Klein	2.56	Paul Friedman	1.28	Bridget McCoy	0.80
Tim Mabee	5.80	Mike Sutton	2.48	Steve Klesker	1.28	Peter Kalba	0.72
Tim Carroll	5.68	Richard Lloyd	2.48	Joann Feinstein	1.28	George Marasas	0.64
Joe Wollick	4.16	Bill Keefe	2.16	Georgina Flanagan	1.20	Brian Barber	0.64
Paul Baraz	4.00	Mary Franks	2.16	Elaine Kehm	1.12	John Brussel	0.48
Phyllis Smolinski	3.88	Harry Cohn	1.92	Andy Natale	1.12	Rodney Bell	0.40
Jake Jacobs	3.84	Bob Steen	1.92	Marc Rosset	1.00	Roger Blaine	0.20
Romeo Kap	3.76	Joe Ausmann	1.84	Gary Kay	0.96	Richard Stawowy	0.20
Harold Elgazar	3.36	Don Jayhan	1.84	Reggie Porter	0.88	Ann Thomas	0.16
Sinan Yoyen	3.04	Paul Franks	1.76	Norma Shyer	0.88	Tom Machaj	0.12
Paul Lombardo	2.72	Carter Mattig	1.52	Mike Cyrkiel	0.88	Jon Sion	0.08
Bill Bartholomay	2.64	Ed Buerger	1.32				

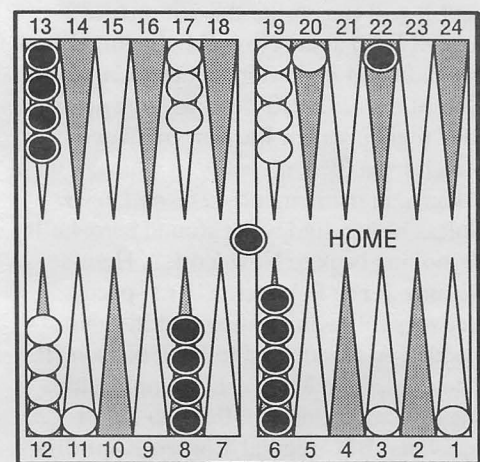
This month's top player is **HERB ROMAN**. Herb earned 3.84 points with 1st and 2nd place finishes in March. Runner's up were Paul Baraz and Tim Mabee, each with 2.56 points.

your move

PROBLEM #262

to be analyzed by Kit Woolsey

Match to 7 points. Black leads White, 6 to 5 (Crawford). **BLACK TO PLAY 6-1.**



DEAR MISS LONELYBLOTS

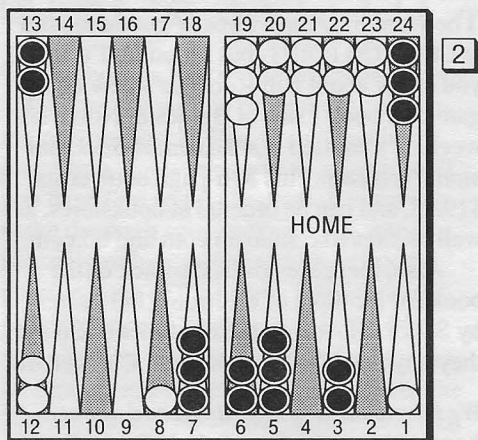


© 2000 by Danny Kleinman

DON'T BLAME FEAR

Dear Miss Lonelyblots: After playing backgammon online for over a year, I finally got up the nerve to enter a real live-action tournament: the Midwest Championships. It was an exciting experience, but far more difficult than I had expected. It's hard to explain, but I was very nervous. I really don't know why, as I'm always very calm playing online. And I think fear might have cost me my first match. I was Black in the following setup:

Match to 7 points. Black leads White, 2-1. **BLACK TO PLAY 6-6.**



This was really tough for me. I was afraid to bring out three men because if my

blot gets hit, I would be without an anchor and in serious gammon jeopardy. That really left only one choice: 13/1 (2). White entered on the 4-point and was able to escape. With my crashed ace-point game, there was no way I could take his recube three rolls later. So instead of a big lead my way, I trailed 3-2 and never scored another point.*

Miss Lonelyblots, what do you think? Was I a scare-baby? Should I have vacated the 24-point when I had the chance?—'Live' Newcomer

DEAR NEWCOMER: Don't blame Fear for losing the match. I knew Fear. I worked in the Senate with Fear for six years. Fear was my friend. And baby, in the position you show, you have plenty to Fear, double the Minimum Daily Requirement established by the U.S. Department of Bad Rolls.

After playing 13/1*(2) as you did, you must Fear the isolation of your three back men, who are separated from their brothers by 17 miles. You must Fear that if you are lucky and roll another 6 soon to spring a back man, the escapee will have to step gingerly through a minefield of enemy hitters in midcourt. You must Fear that the seven fat years of plentiful 6s will be followed by seven lean years of 6-famine, and your board will collapse before you can free your back men. You must Fear that when this happens, a hungry opponent will keep the cube and play on for a gammon.

Your first two 6s are mandatory: 24/18(2). Play them immediately. then you must weigh three plausible choices for your last two 6s.

(a) **13/7(2).** This has the merit of exposing

no new blot. White can hit your blot on the acepoint with any 5 or double 4s, but lacks the ammunition to be likely to cover before you reenter with a hitting ace. This is temporarily safe, but it is cowardly. Your escapees remain 11 miles from their brothers, your outer court comes under enemy control, and the pileup on your bar-point leaves you with an inflexible position.

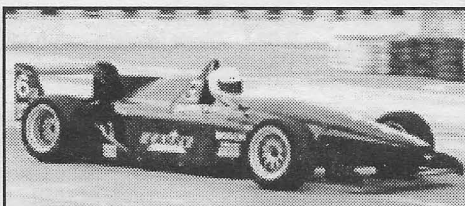
- (b) **24/18, 7/1*.** This has the merit of freeing your third back man while leaving only one blot. However, White can hit that blot with 11 rolls and reenter with another 16 rolls, six of which also safety his outfield blot.
- (c) **7/1*(2).** This exposes a new blot, but leaves White only four rolls to hit that blot, plus another four rolls to attack the blot on the acepoint. Now, however, you have a four point board on which White will dance with 16 rolls instead of only nine. And when he does, you have a chance to hit his outfield blot; though you still have much work to do, you'll have a modest gammon threat.

24/18(2), 7/1*(2) is the play that leaves you with the least to Fear, and your opponent with the most. Let Fear work for you, not against you.—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 CHICAGOPOINT, 3940 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. 504; Chicago, IL 60659-3155 or e-mail bg@chicagopoint.com.

AMALGAMATION

For those of you who usually celebrate the 4th of July with family at home, this year's Michigan Summer Championships is for you! It will run earlier this summer (30 June–3 July) at the Novi (Michigan) Hilton Hotel. For an invitation, contact **Carol Joy Cole** at 810/232-9731... *The good news:* BPC regular **Brian Barber** graduated in March from the University of Chicago with a degree in mathematics. *The bad news:* Unless he can find work around here, he'll be moving back to New York... Here's wishing **Jerry Feinstein** (IL) a speedy recovery following removal of his gall bladder. Also, our best to **Dick Nelson** (IL) who missed the Midwest Championships due to a car accident... Bet you didn't know that BPC regular **Romeo Kăpudija**



Romeo Kap in his Indy Car. [Photo by Mark Weber]

(Kap) is an Indy car driver in the CART series (the late **Walter Payton** was his team sponsor). He began his career racing go-carts... Maryland to California: **David Montgomery**... New Springfield, Illinois resident **Laila Leonhardt** is now editing the *SanGammon Backgammon Newsletter* (official publication of the Sangamon Valley BG Assoc.). For more info, contact Laila via e-mail at lady@bg-info.com. Laila is also busy resurrecting the **Kent Goulding** (KG) Backgammon Rating List (the 2000 Midwest Championship will be

rated). Watch her website (www.bg-info.com) for more news... If you enjoy a good cigar, former Pub Club director **Val Zimnicki** suggests that you visit the Oak Park Cigar Store (823 S. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park, IL). Val tells us they have a nice backgammon table in the back room...



Val smoking at the Oak Park Cigar Store.

Kathy Hill (NY) informs us of her plans to open the CNY Gammon Club. It's a new

[Continued on page 6]

FRANKS WINS MBC...

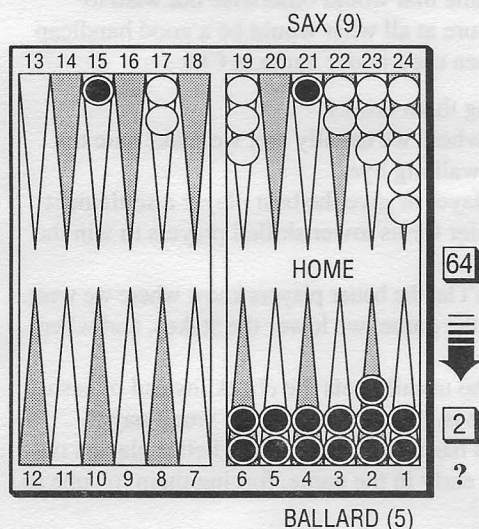
[Continued from page 1]

\$200. Kent Goulding (Maryland) was in the field defending his title but fell to Nack Ballard in the semifinals. Ballard's opponent in the 11-point finals was fellow Californian Steve Sax.

Sax, this year's Paris Open Blitz champion, would have the chance to "even the score" with Ballard who had defeated him 16 months earlier in the Super Jackpot finals at the 1998 Las Vegas Open. And it looked as though that might happen in relatively easy fashion when . . .

Pos. 2. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) leads Nack Ballard (Black), 9 to 5. Sax on roll.

CUBE ACTION(S)?



Sax took five minutes to double and Ballard took 10 additional minutes deciding whether or not to take. Considering the score, it's a gutsy cube for Sax, but according to Kent Goulding, it was the right play. Goulding also judged Ballard's take to be correct.



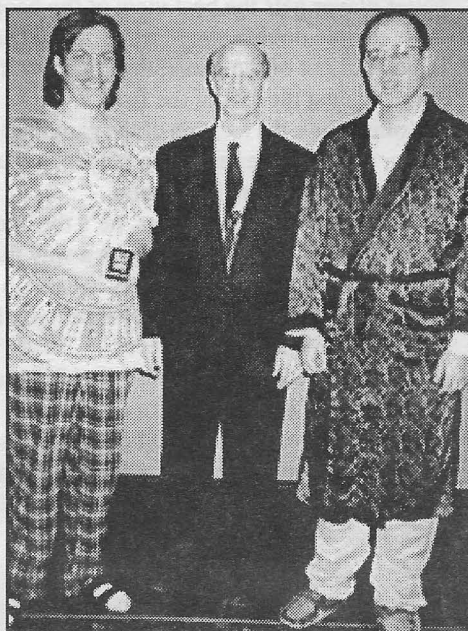
Grand Crystal Beaver Champion Steve Sax. Steve also won Pig-rolling.

Sax left an immediate shot with 6-1. Ballard then made the mandatory recube, rolled 3-2 (hitting) and brought the game home to knot the score at 9-all.

In the next game, Ballard put the match on the line with a quick advantage cube. The game developed into a race with Ballard in command. But Sax answered the challenge tossing double 4s and double 5s in the bearoff to gain Grand Crystal Beaver grandeur.

PAJAMA GAME

On Saturday, the entire Midwest staff dressed in pajamas and modeled them at the Calcutta Auction with Greg Tomlin (IL) providing the hilarious runway commentary. The challenge for the main tournament participants was to guess the total price of the sleepwear with the 16 closest guessers gaining entry into a \$500-added Pajama Game on Sunday. The catch was that to participate, they, too would have to wear pajamas. Scott Richardson (Illinois) sleepwalked through the field to grab the cash.



Bill Davis presents Pajama Game awards to winner Scott Richardson and runner-up Sam Pottle. [Photoby Peter Kalba.]

OTHER RESULTS

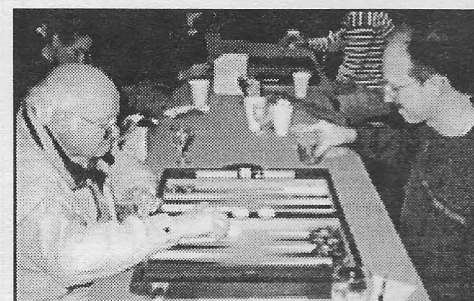
Jeff Kane (WI) returned to backgammon to win the \$140 Open title over Sean Garber (IN). Joe Ausmann (IL) took home the Advanced trophy in his first-ever tournament defeating Milwaukee veteran player Mark Anshus. And Terry Leahy (IL) bested Leon Weiner (TX) to prevail over the 36 player Limited division field.

Neil Kazaross (IL) and Betty Coppic (GA) overcame some incredible positions in their quest to win the Midwest Doubles

Championship prior to and during their final match against South Florida directors Elayne Feinstein and Don Heinsler. The 2000 Blitz Champ is Chicago's David Wells.



Sierra Kane displays the trophy won by her dad Jeff Kane (left) in the \$140 Open.



The Limited division finals. Terry Leahy (right) was the eventual winner over Leon Weiner.

The Backgammon Wheel of Fortune winner is Steve Kovach (GA). Kovach won a quarter ounce of gold by answering this question faster than the three other participants: "In a delicatessen, this is the way they identify a certain female soccer star who's hot at backgammon." Steve's final request for the letter 'e' gave it to him: "Hamm and she's on a roll."



2000 Midwest Doubles Champs Neil Kazaross and Betty Coppic with MBC staffer Mike Fujita (right).

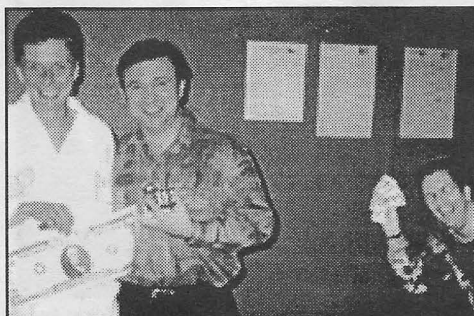
This year's Pig-rolling event, a 17-year Midwest Championships tradition hosted by "Pig Mistress" Dru Heggen, was captured

[Continued on page 6]

FRANKS WINS MBC...

[Continued from page 5]

by Steve Sax. Steve was just as proud of his coveted pig lapel pin and pig blanket as he was of his Grand Crystal Beaver victory. Well, almost as proud!



Dru Heggen awards Nack Ballard \$100 for winning Bocce Dice. Kent Goulding (far right) did almost as well with side bets on Nack.

All in all, a lot of fun. Complete results. Δ

2000 MIDWEST BG CHAMPIONSHIPS

CHAMPIONSHIP (64): 1-Paul Franks (IL), 2-Ray Baker (CA), 3/4-Laila Leonhardt (IL) / Linda Rockwell (IL); 1C-Ed Zell (IL), 2C-George Barr (IL); 1LC-Sam Pottle (WI).

OPEN (19): 1-Jeff Kane (WI), 2-Sean Garber (IN), 3-David Rubin (IL).

ADVANCED (64): 1-Joe Ausmann (IL), 2-Mark Anshus (WI), 3/4-Don Heinsler (FL) / Tom Machaj (WI); 1C-Steve Maas (MN), 2C-Elayne Feinstein (FL); 1LC-Jim Price (MI).

LIMITED (36): 1-Terry Leahy (IL), 2-Leon Weiner (TX), 3/4-Tony Burback / Glenn Martells (IL); 1C-Paul Lombardo (IL), 2C-Jeff Dillinger (OH); 1LC-Bob Sexton (IL).

GRAND CRYSTAL BEAVER (16): 1-Steve Sax (CA), 2-Nack Ballard (CA).

MIDWEST DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIP (32): 1-Neil Kazaross (IL) & Betty Coppic (GA), 2-Elayne Feinstein & Don Heinsler (FL), 3/4-Dana Nazarian & Hans Wang (MN) / Ray Baker (CA) & Julius High (MI).

SATELLITE DOUBLES (8): 1-Sean Garber (IN) & Mike Shanas (MO).

NACKGAMMON (32): 1-Steve Mellen (NY), 2-Ray Fogerlund (CA), 3/4-Jerry Vangsness (WI) / Betty Coppic (GA).

SHAMROCK SHAKE (32): 1-Sean Garber (IN), 2-Wally Swan (NJ), 3/4-Norma Shyer (IL) / Barbara Levinson (IL).

BLITZ (128): 1-David Wells (IL)

PAJAMA GAME WINNER (17): Scott Richardson (IL)

PIG-ROLLING WINNER: Steve Sax (CA).

L-C-R DICE WINNER: Dennis Culpepper (VA).

BOCCE DICE WINNER: Nack Ballard (CA).

BACKGAMMON WHEEL OF FORTUNE WINNER: Steve Kovach (GA).

Making Backgammon More Fair

by Phil Simborg

I first wrote this for GammOnline. Maybe POINT readers will find it interesting.—Phil Simborg

It occurs to me that one thing that really helps the popularity of both golf and bowling is that they have a handicap system that gives the weaker play a chance to compete with the better players. Without getting into a big debate about the fairness of handicap systems and the potential for abuse, it is clear to me that if we had a decent system in backgammon, it might well bring more players to the tournaments (and chouettes), and this is good for all, including the better players who have to give the handicaps.

Most big tournaments have a "Masters" division, and this can be with no handicaps to determine the *real* top player there; but the rest of the divisions could apply some kind of handicap system. It could be a system whereby the lower ranked player always starts the match with one, two, or three points, depending upon the skill rating and the length of the match.

Another kind of handicap I would like to see is financial. The ABT could pass a rule that the first time an entrant is in a new, higher division, he get's a 20% discount on the entry fee. Or maybe the first two times. And maybe, anyone who has won a division and reenters that division must pay an extra 10% (for, say, the next three years).

Chouette handicaps get more complicated and difficult, but here again, if there were a fair system, it would get more players into the game that would otherwise not wish to compete against clearly better players. I am not sure at all what would be a good handicap for chouette/money play, but here's some I've seen used in our game in Chicago:

1. When someone is really good, we keep buying them drinks.
2. If we are on a busy corner or interesting bar, where we usually are, we make sure the better player gets the best view of the people walking by.
3. If six people double, we often drop the best player or give the best player a settlement to get him out of the game, thus making it easier for us lower skilled players to win the game against the rest of the fish.
4. We often move the location of the game and don't let the better players know where we went.
5. When two or more really top players get into the game, we lower the stakes, and when they leave, we raise them again.
6. If someone consistently wins, he's the one who usually gets the check instead of cash, or we transfer the money in such a way that he is always owed by the worst payer.
7. When one of the poorer players is captain and has two or three of the better players on his side, he makes sure to play especially bad early in the game, forcing them to cube so they can consult.
8. Anytime there is an automatic double, or extras given, we make it a point not to let the better players in on this extra action.
9. Last, but not least, since the better players usually win, we passed a rule that requires them to pick up the check for the drinks and tip the waiters. Δ

AMALGAMATION...

[Continued from page 4]

backgammon club that will likely meet in Central New York at the Holiday Inn in Liverpool, NY. E-mail Kathy at cnygammonclub@yahoo.com for the particulars... Did you read **Michael Strato's** neat interview with **Jake Jacobs** (IL) at www.gammonvillage.com? Very well done... Beaver College (Glenside, PA) is considering changing it's long-standing name because some web browsers are now blocking the word "beaver." Maybe backgammon should follow suit with it's cube term "beaver"—*NOT!*... It was **Mark Twain** who said: "The very best thing in all this world that can befall a man is to be born lucky." That would make our game a lot easier now, wouldn't it?! Δ



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PUB CLUB: Tourn. Mon., 7:00 P.M. at Danny's Grill and Bar, 345 W. North Ave., Villa Park. Joe Wollick (847/755-0887).

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

SANGAMON VALLEY BACKGAMMON ASSOC.: Tournaments Wed., 6:30 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 (309/674-0557).

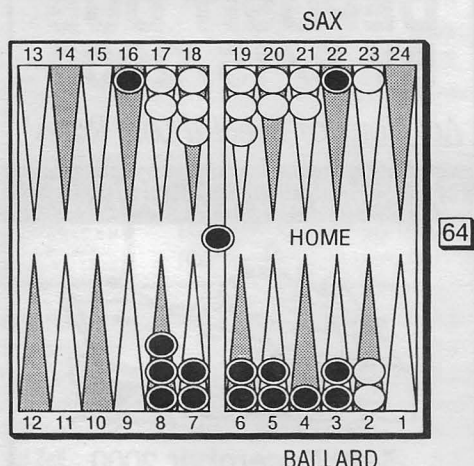
Quest for the Grand Crystal Beaver

— by Nick Ballard —

Now in its second year, the Grand Crystal Beaver is quickly becoming one of the most popular events in the country. The \$6000 first prize money is certainly an attraction. But just as attractive in another way is the trophy: a Swarovski crystal beaver on a mirrored base valued at \$200. Here is international master Nick Ballard's account of his 11-point finals match against Steve Sax, the eventual champion.—Ed.

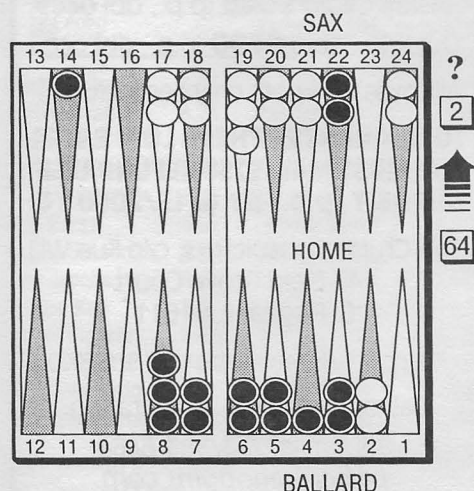
Early in the Grand Crystal Beaver finals, I had the following position, with a 3-2 to play from the roof:

Pos. 1. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) vs. Nick Ballard (Black). Early in the match. **BLACK TO PLAY 3-2.**



I chose to play Bar/22, 16/14 and Steve replied with a 6-1, leading to:

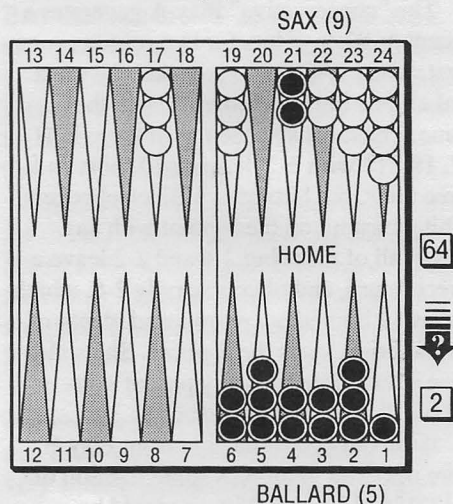
Pos. 2. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) vs. Nick Ballard (Black). Early in the match. Black on roll. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**



Here I doubled, and Steve made a tough but correct take, I think. I joked with 6-6, escaping and covering, to win that game easily.

But other games went Steve's way, until, leading 9-5, Steve (on roll) reached:

Pos. 3. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) leads Nick Ballard (Black), 9 to 5. White on roll. **CUBE ACTION(S)?**

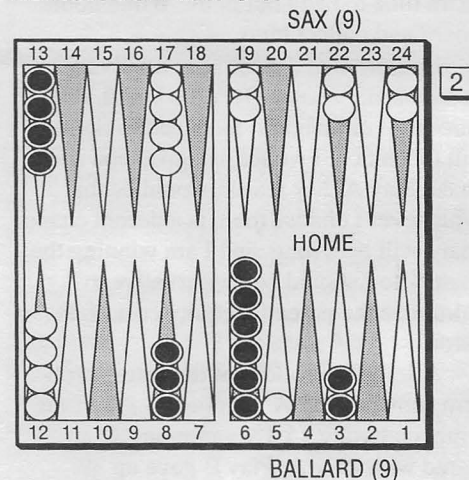


As I was trying to figure out if I had a take, Steve rolled, to my relief. (One of just a handful of errors in a well-played match.) He rolled a 5-2, playing 7/1, and I rolled a 6-4 (21/15, 5/1). Now Steve doubled the position diagrammed on page 5, which seemed to have improved slightly for me. I felt, after much thought, that I could squeeze out more than the 22% take point.

After the lucky 6-1 (shot), redouble, hit sequence, the match became tied at 9-9.

In the final game, I rolled an interesting 5-1, in this position:

Pos. 4. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) vs. Nick Ballard (Black). Double match-point. **BLACK TO PLAY 5-1.**



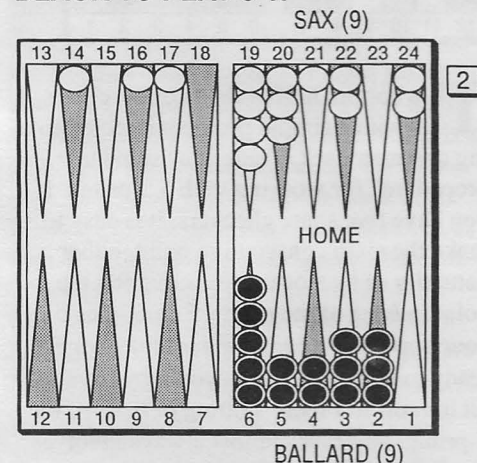
My first instinct was to hit, as was every other expert I showed the position to later. But at the table, after crudely guess-

ing what my chances were after each of the three scenarios (not hitting, hit/hit-back, hit/miss), I became certain that my risk/reward ratio was worse than the 15:21 necessary to justify hitting. So I played the cowardly-looking 13/8, 3/2, giving me a 12-pip lead, but off-roll.

Steve rolled a 4-3 and stayed (?). For the rabbit-hunters, had I hit, my next roll of 4-4 would have been even more crushing, and I would almost certainly have won the match.

As it was, I soon reached a straight race leading by 28 pips. A couple of rolls later it was less but I was still not worried. I had a 6-1 to play in this position. With a 23 pip lead following the play of my roll, the ace seemed innocuous:

Pos. 5. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) vs. Nick Ballard (Black). Double match-point. **BLACK TO PLAY 6-1.**

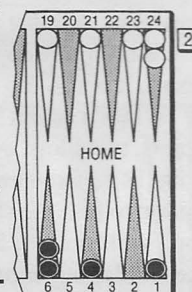


I played it 6/off, 2/1, which looked okay. But after the game, I rabbit-hunted the subsequent rolls and discovered that I would have won the match if I had played the ace from 6 to 5. I felt like I had butchered it!

Later, KG put the position into Snowie, which supported my ace after all. I just happened to roll a lot of 5s & 2s (instead of 6s & 1s). Irony, this backgammon.

Near the finish line:

Pos. 6. Grand Crystal Beaver 11-point finals. Steve Sax (White) vs. Nick Ballard (Black). **BLACK TO PLAY 5-2.**



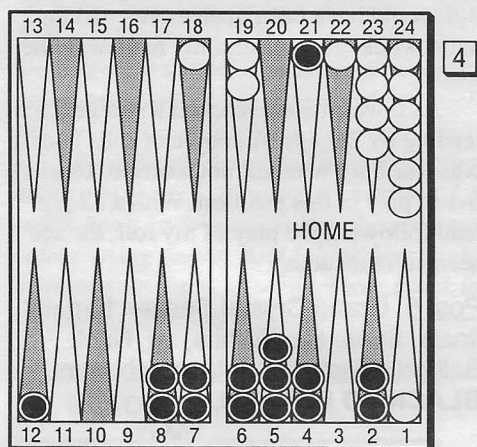
It is much closer than I thought, but 6/4, as played, was the correct deuce.

Steve rolled a 5-3 (6/3, 4/off) and I missed. Steve then rolled a 2-1 (just to make it interesting). I didn't roll a double, and Steve managed to avoid rolling a second 2-1 to win the Grand Crystal Beaver trophy in a close and exciting match!—Nick

PROBLEM #261 ANALYZED

by Walter Trice

Match to 7 points. No score with White holding a 4-cube. **BLACK TO PLAY 2-2.**



The bottom half of the board presents us with a simple problem in containing one man back. There is a "standard procedure" for working with a 5-prime. If you have five spare checkers, it is easy to make the sixth consecutive point, either naturally or by slotting and covering the point *in back* of the prime. Sometimes if your opponent's back man is at the edge, ready to leap with any 6, you may have to hit him off it. Freely slotting *in front* of the 5-prime, however, almost always involves an unnecessary risk.

But the specific formation in Problem 261—5-prime, gap, point—is an exception. Now, because two checkers are not available for carrying out alternative plans, slotting the gap becomes more attractive. The break-even point is somewhere between a four and a five point board for your opponent. Against a four point board, the slot is normally correct; against a five point board, it is still too risky.

White's actual home board, with three points, two blots, and an isolated high point, is so wretched that Black has no reason to fear the slot. Our Play A, therefore, will be 12/6, 5/3, and we can dismiss the similar but wimpy 12/4.

Beyond fear lies greed. How about a play that tries a little harder for the second (or third, and on rare but blessed occasions fourth and fifth) blot? My first alternate was 5/1*, 7/3, but leaving all those blots and abandoning the prime turns out to be too wild. The right idea is not so much to get hit as to stop White from moving, to gain a little time to roll a 3 and snag that

second blot. Play B is 12/8, 5/1*.

At a glance, you might expect Play B to result in the pickup of a second checker *much* more often than Play A. When I went through the rolls, though, and counted the sequences in 1296 where Black hits a second blot next turn, I got a rather modest edge of 337 hits for Play B versus 256 hits for Play A.

The "conservative" Play A generates a decent number of hits for two reasons. First, when White rolls a deuce, she must make some big plays to try to win the game. The most spectacular of these is 1/3*, 18/21* with 3-2, leaving 20 shots and three blots, but hitting two Black checkers. White must hit on the 3-point with any deuce; all of these but 2-4 and 2-2 leave a direct return, and of course only 2-6, which leaves 14 immediate returns and plenty of residual risk, leaps the 5-prime. Shots also arise after White rolls any pair of non-double "large" numbers, such as 3-4.

If the only possible gain from Play B were the extra gammons some fraction of $(337-256)/1296 = 6.25\%$, it would be immediately clear to pass up the aggressive play. A JellyFish rollout of Problem 261, modified by moving White's 18-point blot to safety on the 6-point, had Play A winning 86.5%, to 78.8% for Play B. That's a big difference, and it shows just how inefficient it is to put one of Black's three mobile checkers on the ace point.

But that is *not* the whole story. When Black hits a second checker, a clean close-out becomes less important, and this makes up for some of the games lost when the second blot is missed and the first one escapes. Furthermore, Black gains when he gets hit on the 1-point rather than the 3-point because White then needs two specific numbers to escape, which gives Black extra time to hang out in the White home board and collect blots.

In short, it is a close play involving some murky issues. Over the board, if by a rare burst of insight, I managed to figure out this much, I would just go ahead and make Play A. My reason would be that whichever I choose there is a decent chance that I will be wrong, and I am winning the match, so I should be conservative to minimize the potential equity cost of an error.

A JellyFish rollout of the actual problem showed Play A winning 85.8% of the time, including 15.4% gammons. Compared with Play A, Play B gave up 3% wins and gained 6.7% gammons. This was a cubeless (Level 6, 1080 trials for each play) rollout. Assuming a dead 4-cube and a match equity of 0.77 (from the Trice/

Jacobs table) at 4-0, these numbers would favor Play B by a match-winning chance difference of 0.013%. (Yes, that is about one hundredth of a percentage point, which qualifies as "close" in my book!)

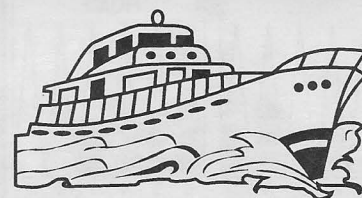
But you can be sure that White's ownership of a live 4-cube makes a difference. The live cube effectively increases the number of wins given up by Play B while decreasing the incremental gammons. Situations will arise where White escapes and gets good winning chances but remains in some gammon jeopardy, and she will be quick to redouble in these variations, rendering the gammon threat meaningless.

The cube value is clearly sufficient to make Play A correct, both at this score and (by the way) for money. Δ

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1999 Giants of Backgammon

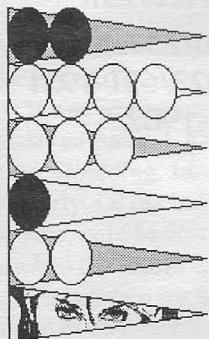


Yamin Yamin's biennial poll to determine the strongest BG players in the world was published last month in Carol Joy Cole's *Flint Area BackgammonNews*. The

Top 32 vote-getters are as follows:

#	Name	Country	Total Pts
1.	Jerry Grandell	Sweden	2135
2.	Nack Ballard	USA	2066
3.	Johannes Levermann	Germany	1815
4.	Neil Kazaross	USA	1671
5.	Paul Magriel	USA	1607
6.	Mike Senkiewicz	USA	1570
7.	Michael Meyburg	Germany	1392
8.	Dirk Schiemann	Germany	1226
9.	Mike Svobodny	USA	1208
10.	Kit Woolsey	USA	1187
11.	Howard Ring	USA	1079
12.	Malcolm Davis	USA	971
13.	Kent Goulding	USA	954
14.	Jake Jacobs	USA	847
15.	Bill Robertie	USA	842
16.	Billy Horan	USA	837
17.	Wilcox Snellings	USA	806
18.	Elliott Winslow	USA	799
19.	David Wells	USA	789
20.	Peter Jes Thomsen	Denmark	713
21.	Jörgen Granstedt	Sweden	686
22.	Phillip Marmorstein	Germany	496
23.	Hal Heinrich	Canada	485
23.	Abe Mosseri	USA	485
25.	Gustav Jacobsen	Denmark	475
26.	Joe Russell	USA	408
27.	Mike Corbett	USA	393
28.	Harald Johanni	Germany	383
29.	Frank Talbot	USA	371
30.	Peter Heitmüller	Germany	356
31.	Rick Barabino	USA	335
32.	Paul Weaver	USA	311

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WINNER'S CIRCLE



Apr.–May 1999

•**NEBC Sunday Monthly** (Somerville, MA; 6 Feb.)... EXPERT (16): 1-Seth Towle, 2-Nora Luna, 3/4-Jerry Padova / Bill Robertie; 1C-Mark Damish, 2C-Dan Chicoine. A/B DIV. (14): 1-Marcus Hermansen, 2-Chris Barnes, 3/4-Jim McKenna / Jim Glover; 1C-Jim McKenna, 2C-Bill Barrows.

•**Pro-Am Doubles & Amateur Jackpot** (Las Vegas, NV; 1–5 Mar.)... PRO-AM DOUBLES TOURNAMENT (20): 1-Mads Andersen (DEN) & Gianni Bizzarro (ARG), 2-Alex Barsel & Howard Markowitz (NV), 3/4-Perry Gartner (NJ) & Jake Jacobs (IL) / Malcolm Davis & Talmadge Tinsley (TX). SPECIAL LIMITED JACKPOT (16): 1-Stuart Hosen (TX), 2-Perry Gartner (NJ); 1C/2C-Mads Andersen (DEN) / Danny Mayfield (TX). \$1500 JACKPOT (8): 1/2-Mike Senkiewicz (NY) / Tom Zarrinam (CA). \$2000 JACKPOT #1 (8): 1/2-Paul Magriel (NV) / Mike Senkiewicz (NY). \$2000 JACKPOT #2 (8): 1/2-Michael Meyburg (GER) / Mike Senkiewicz (NY).

•**Springfield Series #6** (Springfield, IL; 4 Mar.)... 1-Mark Kaye, 2-John Jennings; 1C-Jeff Anderson, 2C-William Hutchison; 1LC-Greg Tomlin.

•**Slattery Scottish Open** (East Kilbride, Scotland; 11–12 Mar.)... OPEN (51): 1-Lawrence Powell, 2-John Hurst, 3/4-Jeff Barber / John Broomfield; 1C-Dave McNamara, 2C-Jeff Ellis, 3C/4C-John Slattery / Peter Chan; 1LC-Dod Davies,

2LC-Uldis Lapikens. HAGGIS (64): 1-Keith Robertson, 2-Graeme Campbell, 3/4-Peter Bennet / John Frame. FRIDAY KO (29): 1/2-Al Hogg / Ray Jansari. DOUBLES (11): 1-The Perves, 2-Battersea Dogs.

•**Fleet Underwood Charity Tournament** (Flint, MI; 12 Mar.)... OPEN (27): 1-Frank Talbot, 2-Ralph Dietz, 3/4-Gary Fritzsche / Takis Sakkalis (GRE). INTERMEDIATE (29): 1-Len Dangremond, 2-Gino Dinardo, 3-Larry Coulouris, 4/6-Nancy ishac / Jim Price / Mke Vechell. NOVICE (20): 1-Diane Dangremond, 2-Mark Burkhammer, 3/4-Nate Richardson / Jerry Thomas, 5/6-Dave Kiurski / Paul Peterson... *Director Carol Joy Cole reports that Registration fees benefitted the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund.*

•**4th Warsteiner Cup** (Brakel, Germany; 17–19 Mar.)... MASTERS (64): 1-Peter van den Bruck, 2-Leonid Riskin, 3/4-Ekrem Basdas / Andreas Franken; 1C-Jerzy Behnke, 2C-Harald Johanni; 1LC-Michael Schmidt. CHAMPIONSHIP (31): 1-Kikki Kerchhoff, 2-Vincent Versteeg (NL), 3/4-Ingrid Sonnabend / Markus Franken; 1C-Johann Vervust (BEL), 2C-Markus Vornweg; 1LC-Marc Steyvers (BEL). INTERMEDIATE 913: 1-Chris Unger, 2-Vivian Schepmann, 3/4-Marion Hött / Gerhard Lingau; 1C-Evelyn Siebrecht, 2C-Hans-Heinrich Kachstein; 1LC-Joachim Jedrasik. SUPER JACKPOT: 1-Sigurd Karwen, 2-Dirk Schiemann.

•**Ace Point Monthly** (New York, NY; 26 Mar.)... OPEN (23): 1-Mads Anderson (Denmark), 2-Jeff Acierno; 1C-Phil Laak, 2C-Brooks Burdette. INTERMEDIATE (9): 1-Eydie Noble, 2-Roy Appay, 1C-Robert Regan. Δ

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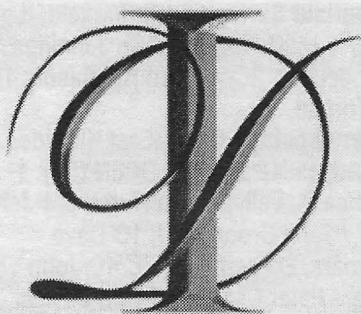
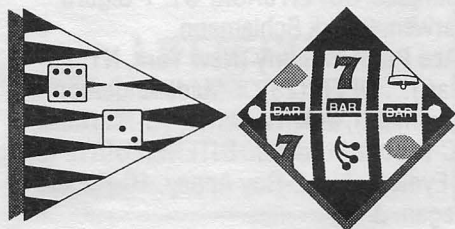
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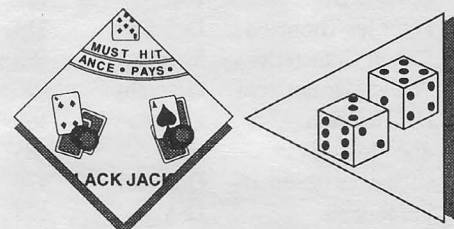
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