

The Most Common Backgammon Mistakes

by Phil Simborg

Phil Simborg has been playing Backgammon for over 40 years and considers himself to be an expert on making mistakes.—Ed.

I have made every mistake in the book; but the more I play, the more I notice other players making the same mistakes. I hope that by pointing out some of the most common errors, people will be more aware of them and improve their game as a result. So here are the most common mistakes we “ordinary” players make:

- 1. A common mistake for beginner and intermediate players is not looking at the whole board before making a move.** They get a roll and see that they can hit their opponent, and they just do it. Then they pick up their dice and realize that maybe they should have made a 6-point prime on the other side of the board! Or maybe they could have hit two checkers. The point is, before you make a move, look at the entire board and consider all the options. The “obvious” move is not always the best move.
- 2. We forget about the score.** Or even if we know the score, we don’t stop to think about how the particular score changes the strategy of the game. There are some scores where you should turn the cube very quickly, and others where you should almost

never turn the cube. There are scores where you need to play very aggressively to try to win gammons, and others where you need to play more safely to prevent gammons.

3. We don’t count pips. If you don’t know how you are doing in the race, you really don’t know what your strategy should be. In almost every game, at almost every score, in almost every situation, the pip count has some bearing on cube and checker play.

4. We don’t know match equities and take-points. I know these are hard to learn . . . it takes study and memorization, and it gets complicated. Even many Open level players don’t know their tables and just estimate from experience. But if you don’t have a pretty good idea of what either you or your opponent needs in terms of winning percentages to take a cube at a given score, you can’t really make an informed decision about whether to give or take a double.

5. We don’t study our opponents. Unless you are playing against one of the better players in the world, your opponent has weaknesses. If you learn what they are, you can exploit those weakness to your advantage.

6. We get way too involved with the luck of the game. We start counting how many doubles our opponent rolls, or how many times we fail to come in on a 3 point board. The more we think about how unlucky we are, the less we are concentrating on how to play and when to double. In fact, this will cause us to play worse, and the worse we play, the worse we will roll (because there

will be more bad rolls and fewer good rolls because our checkers are in a worse position).

7. We don’t think enough about the importance of gammons. I have seen many players take cubes that are huge drops because of the gammon risks. Conversely, many players make the mistake of giving the cube when they should play on for the gammon. And the same thing applies to checker play. Some plays that might win you more games just aren’t worth the gammon risks, and there are times when you should take bigger risks to win gammons.

8. Perhaps the biggest mistake that many players make is lack of mental preparation. If you want to play well, or “play your best,” when you sit down at the table, you need to be concentrating on backgammon. Not that hamburger you’re eating while you play, and not your cell phone, or the big game on the TV. Backgammon is not an easy game, and even the best players in the world need to concentrate hard to play their best. If you approach the game casually, it will be reflected in your play.—Phil Simborg Δ

BAR POINT SUNDAY BACKGAMMON
April 6, 2008 at 12:00 noon
Holiday Inn • 5615 Cumberland
Info: Bill Davis 773/583-6464



ILLINOIS ACTION



Bill Davis
773/583-6464
Peter Kalba
312/316-1432

Tuesday, 6:30 P.M. at Holiday Inn O’Hare, 5615 N. Cumberland Ave., Chicago. 773/693-5800.
Sunday Bimonthly, 12:00 NOON at Holiday Inn O’Hare, 5615 N. Cumberland Ave., Chicago. 773/693-5800

BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BG CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 6:00 P.M. at Ride The Nine, 503 N. Prospect, Bloomington. Michael Flohr (309/662-7967).

SANGAMON VALLEY BACKGAMMON ASSOC.: Tournaments Wednesday, 6:30 P.M. at Capitol Teletrack, 1766 W. Wabash Ave., Springfield. Randy Armstrong (217/528-0117).

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

PUB CLUB: Tournaments Thurs., 6:45 P.M. at Playoffs Bar, 720 E. North Ave., Carol Stream. Tim Mabee (630/606-2388).

PEORIA BG CLUB: Tourn. Thurs., 6:30 P.M. at Peoria Pizza Works, 3921 Prospect, Peoria. Ed Zell (309/689-1964).

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 2008 PLAYER OF THE YEAR				COMPILED THRU 29 FEB.	
Nora Luna Righter 7.28	Bill Bartholomay 2.64	Mike Wolock 1.20	Linda Rockwell 0.56		
David Rockwell 6.64	Bob Zavoral 2.48	Bill Keefe 1.20	Lucky Nelson 0.56		
Herb Roman 5.52	Oleg Raygorodsky 2.32	Nicole Tibbs 1.12	Sherry Nelson 0.56		
Steve Klesker 5.24	Jacob Moreno 2.16	Tom Machaj 1.12	Kathy Sorci 0.52		
Rory Pascar 5.00	Adrian Rios 1.92	Jerry Brooks 1.08	Roger Hickman 0.48		
Phil Simborg 5.00	Ken Tibbs 1.84	Georgina Flanagan 0.96	Alex Owen 0.48		
Michael Ginat 4.08	Mike Sutton 1.60	Mary Franks 0.96	Bob Steen 0.48		
Gary Kay 3.24	Richard Stawowy 1.44	Alice Kay 0.88	Eric Johnson 0.40		
Bill Davis 3.08	Wayne Wiest 1.44	Tim Mabee 0.72	Roz Ferris 0.32		
Royal Robinson 3.04	Albert Yakobashvili 1.36	Mike Pufpaf 0.60	Paul Baraz 0.32		
Tak Morioka 2.76	Larry Goldstein 1.28	Wendy Kaplan 0.60			

HERB ROMAN collected 4.80 points to become February’s Player of the Month. David Rockwell (3.36) and Rory Pascar (2.52) finished 2nd and 3rd respectively.