

Dice, Mini- Mechanics, and YOU



by Dean Muench

In a classic poker scene from one of his movies, W. C. Fields is asked, "Is this a game of chance?"

His famous reply: "Not the way I play it!" Unfortunately, considering the way many players roll their dice, Fields' statement is also applicable to the game of backgammon.

The scope of this article is limited to those players who are not practicing dice mechanics and who use good precision dice. I do not claim to be an expert on rigged dice or a magician's methods of control, but nearly twenty years of playing experience has given me some insight into the behavior of dice and I would like to share this knowledge with you.

The "Repeat" And "Flip-Flop" Factor

If you were to roll dice from a cup in a totally random fashion many thousands of times, you would find an apparent random roll distribution. Each set of doubles would occur about 1-in-36 (2.78%), and each non-set would occur about 2-in-36 (5.56%). Unfortunately, dice rolls in the game of backgammon are not always truly random.

Have you ever noticed that previously-rolled numbers tends to come back on the next roll more often than the expected 5.56% of the time? After rolling a set of doubles, have you further noticed that either it, or the set on the opposite side of the dice tend to return on the next roll more than the expected 2.78%? These phenomena are called the "repeat" and the "flip-flop" factors. I will now tell you why these factors occur.

The Technique

When dice are dropped in a cup, they tend to land with the same numbers facing

upwards as were up on the previous roll. This recurrence becomes more of a problem with small thin cups where, even after shaking, the same faces often remain up. When dice are rolled in a forward direction, they tend to tumble out and stay on one of the four faces that are straight in line with the previous face. The late dice and cards authority John Scarne referred to this tendency as a "blanket roll."

Take out a die and follow along with me. Suppose that your previous roll was 1-6. If your next cast was a perfect "blanket roll," the die that showed a 1 would tumble out in one of four possible ways: (1,2,6,5), (1,3,6,4), (1,5,6,2), (1,4,6,3). The die that showed a 6 would tumble out in these four ways: (6,2,1,5), (6,4,1,3), (6,5,1,2), or (6,3,1,4). In this example where the previous roll involved 1 and 6—two numbers that exist on opposite sides of a die—and an end-over-end roll allowed only four possible faces, the chance of a "repeat" roll is 12.50%. With each die, the chance of rolling a 1 or a 6 is 25%.

Now let's assume that your previous roll was 3-5: a case where the two numbers are not on opposite sides of the die. For

your next perfect "blanket roll," the die that showed a 3 could tumble out in only four possible ways: (3,1,4,6), (3,2,4,5), (3,6,4,1), (3,5,4,2). The die that showed a 5 could tumble out in these four ways: (5,1,2,6), (5,3,2,4), (5,6,2,1), or (5,4,2,3). In this example, the chance of a "repeater" is 7.8%.

Finally, let us suppose that your previous roll was double 2s. For your next roll, each die has the same possible four tumbles: (2,1,5,6), (2,4,5,3), (2,6,5,1), or (2,3,5,4). In this example, the chance of a "repeat" roll is 6.25%. Note that the chance of the "flip-flop" roll (in this case, double 5s) is also 6.25%.

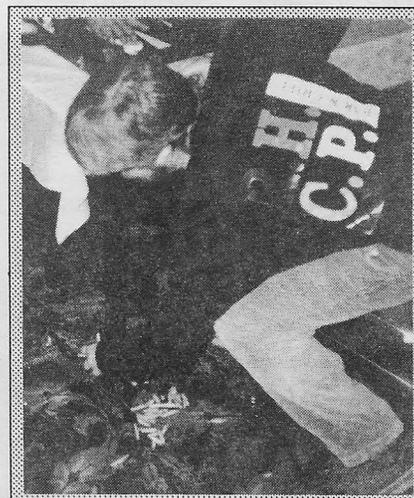
The preceding examples assume that:

- (a) the dice have been dropped in the cup and land with the numbers of the previous roll facing up;
- (b) the player's dice shake has not disturbed their faces; and
- (c) the dice have been rolled vigorously in perfect "blanket rolling" fashion.

If the dice are not rolled vigorously, these "repeat" percentages rise drastically.

[Continued on page 7]

IT'S A 'DROP' FOR THE WORLD CHAMP



World Backgammon Champion Hal Heinrich (Calgary, Canada) breaks for lunch at the recent Midwest Championships in Chicago. Hal accepted the hamburger, but dropped the french fries. Δ

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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LETTERS

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A VALID EXCUSE

Sorry I let my subscription lapse for a few months, but we were *kind of* busy over here. Incidentally, if they rename my home town "Ramat-Scud," I'll send you a change-of-address.—*Joel Schiff, Ramat-Gan, Israel*

AN APPEAL IN THE MAGGIE MISPLAY MURDER VERDICT

DEAR JUDGE: Mr. Larry Legleplay, our client, has been unjustly accused and convicted of murdering Ms. Maggie Misplay. New evidence has come to light illuminating faults in the Zavoralian logic.

Either Legleplay or Mr. Harry Hottemper is lying about the play of the game. Legleplay said: "Maggie's last play was crazy, but it was legal."

Hottemper said: "Her pieces were all in for the bear-off..." "...she played hare-brained—completely illegal."

The prosecution assumes that Legleplay is truthful and Maggie's play was legal. The assumption should imply

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

coming attractions



by Carol Joy Cole
313/232-9731

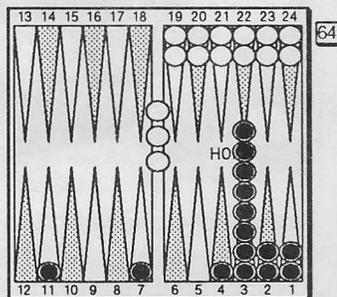
* Denotes new or revised listing

NATIONAL		
May 3-5	39th Indiana Open, Wyndham Garden Hotel, Indianapolis, IN	317/845-8435
May 16	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
May 18*	Atlanta Association Monthly Tournament, Taco-Mac, Atlanta, GA	404/921-0672
May 18-19*	Spring 1991 Gran Prix, Embassy Suites, La Jolla, CA	619/294-2007
May 19	Milwaukee Sunday Bimonthly, John Hawks Pub, Milwaukee, WI	414/463-2498
May 24-27	12th Chicago Open, Westin Hotel O'Hare, Rosemont, IL	708/674-0120
May 24-27	Boston Symphony Orch. Benefit, Sheraton Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/641-2091
May 30-Jun 2	Sertoma Spring Invitational Tournament, Winn Ranch, Leander, TX	512/267-3968
Jun 9	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Fields, Chicago, IL	312/252-7755
Jun 9	Year-End Tournament & NEBC Finals, Sheraton Com., Cambridge, MA	617/641-2091
Jun 15*	Atlanta Association Monthly Tournament, Taco-Mac, Atlanta, GA	404/921-0672
Jun 20*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 4	Special Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 5-7	Michigan Summer Championships, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 13-14	College Park Summer Championship, The Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Aug 2-4*	Illinois State Championships, Hyatt Hotel, Deerfield, IL	708/945-7801
Aug 2-4	Thousand Islands Tournament, Pine Tree Point, Alexandria Bay, NY	716/442-8221
Aug 4*	Dr. Bob Hill Classic, Old Westbury, NY	516/334-4833
Aug 12-18	Vermont Festival, Stratton Mountain Inn, Stratton Mountain, VT	305/527-4033
Aug 18*	Summer Cool Tournament, Braxton Seafood Grill, Oak Brook, IL	312/338-6380
Aug 30-Sep 2	National Labor Day Tournament, Radisson Hotel, Indianapolis, IN	317/845-8435
Sep 14	Connecticut Open, Hall of Fame, Southington, CT	203/755-9749
Oct 3-6*	Sertoma Invitational Doubles Tournament, Winn Ranch, Leander, TX	512/267-3968
Oct 4-6*	Rochester Club Tournament, Towpath Lodge, Turin, NY	716/442-8221
Oct 19*	College Park Fall Open Tournament, Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Oct. 25-27*	Chicago Fall Classic, Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL	708/674-0120

OUTSIDE USA

May 6	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918
May 6-12	Championship of Great Britain, Torrequebrada, Costa del Sol, Spain	44624/851045
May 25-26	BIBA Trophy Tournament, Post House Hotel, Crick near Rugby, England	0522/721630
Jun 3	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918
Jun 7-10	Australian National Championship, Melbourne, Victoria	03/266-4209
Jun 14-16	3rd International Tournament, Casinò Municipale di Veniza, Italy	041/521 1029
Jul 1	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918
Jul 11-14	San Remo International Tournament, San Remo, Italy	39/2 76003705
Jul 15-21	1991 World Championship, Hôtel Loews, Monte-Carlo, Monaco	305/527-4033
Aug 5	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918
Aug 15-18*	Palace Summer Championships, Badrutt's, St. Moritz, Switzerland	061/50 58 16
Aug 31-Sep 1	BIBA Trophy Tournament, Post House Hotel, Crick near Rugby, England	0522/721630
Sep 2*	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918
Oct 7*	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/3 689918

that Hottemper's two statements about the play are false. Therefore, Maggie's play was *not* illegal and her pieces *were not* all in for the bear-off. In fact, a roll of 6-1 in the following position played 11/5, 7/6 would have yielded the final setup.



Maggie Misplay and Crew (Black) vs. Viscount Miscoat (White). Black to play 6-1.

Your honor, my client, Mr. Legleplay was truthful when he said Maggie's play was crazy but legal. He should be released from the slammer immediately. Let justice be done!—*Duane "Loophole" Jensen, Attorney at Law*

Not so fast, Counselor. Just because Hottemper lied about one incident doesn't necessarily imply that he lied about them all. Not one person disputed Hottemper's claim that all of Maggie's pieces were in for the bear-off. The only disputed statement was whether or not Maggie's final play was legal.

[Continues]

Bother me with this kind of faulty reasoning again and I'll have you disbarred.—Judge

THE BARON CLAMPS DOWN ON PREMATURE ROLLERS

I want to thank Danny Kleinman for answering my premature rolling question in his March "Shades Of Gray" rulings column. Hopefully, Danny will continue with this column. I am asked to umpire many European tournaments (because I do it free); hence, the discussion of difficult ruling decisions is most enlightening.

Because I have had repeated trouble with premature rolling in the past, I am amending Rule 4.6 of the *U.S. Backgammon Tournament Rules & Procedures (USTR)* in accordance with Danny Kleinman's suggestions:

Revised 4.6. PREMATURE ACTIONS. All premature actions, including premature rolls, shall stand if otherwise valid. An opponent who has yet to complete his turn or act upon the cube may then do so with foreknowledge of the premature roller's numbers.

Every registration form at the upcoming Championship of Great Britain will inform the player of this amendment.—*Hercules, Baron of Culcreuch, Isle of Man*

Present USTR Rule 4.6 requires all premature rolls to be rerolled without exception. Directors in the U.S. will be interested to find out how your tournament players take to the modification Danny Kleinman has long advocated. Let us know.—Ed.

RETIRED, BUT NOT FROM BACKGAMMON

I've been busy with my retirement from the Board of Education, but not too busy to renew my subscription to the CHICAGO POINT. I decided to retire at age 62. If fact, today is my birthday [13 April].

My plans are to buy a home in Ithaca, New York next year. My two grandchildren need room to run around. Carol Joy Cole doesn't know of any backgammon clubs in that area. Can any of your readers help? Otherwise I'm stuck with my 11-year-old Mattel Backgammon Computer.—*Buddy Cummings, Long Island City, NY*

WORDS OF PRAISE FOR THE HONG KONG BACKGAMMON CLUB

While travelling through Southeast Asia, we made time to attend the Hong Kong Backgammon Club's monthly tournament at the Ladies Recreation Club. The small entry fee included a lovely buffet. For a little extra money, you could also partake in the Calcutta auction that preceded the friendly backgammon tournament (main flight and consolation).

We enormously enjoyed ourselves and want to publicly thank club president Jerry Godsey and director Steve Nelson for their hospitality. If you are ever in Hong Kong the first Monday of any month, be sure to visit this club. The phone number is 852/3 689918.—*Pierre & Patricia Zakia, Saint-Laurent, France*

WHERE'S THE CASH?

I didn't see the prize money listed anywhere in the last newsletter for the Midwest Championships. Did I just miss it or was it left out intentionally?—*Jim Lowe, Scottsdale, AZ*

You didn't miss it nor was it left out intentionally. Although a prestigious event, the Midwest Backgammon Championships is not a "big money" tournament. Championship winner Frank Talbot's first prize money was \$3708. That's only \$200 more than the entry fee for the biennial World Cup!

If you check past POINTS, you'll find that we rarely print prize money that doesn't exceed \$5000.—Ed. Δ

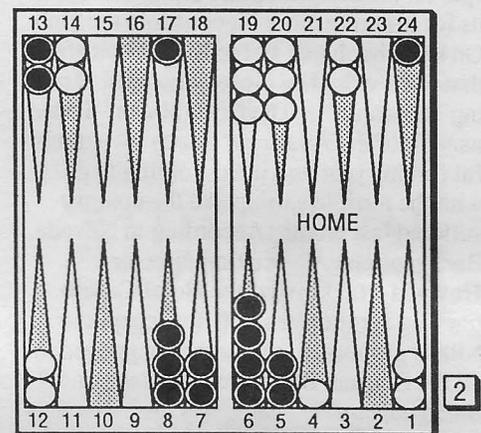
CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 1991 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR COMPILED THRU 30 APR.

TAK MORIOKA	12.88	Bill Davis	3.16	Jerry Brooks	0.92
DAVE CRAMER	9.12	Frank Callea	3.12	Mike Landau	0.88
GARY KAY	8.96	René Wojtysiak	3.00	Peter Naguib	0.88
JAKE JACOBS	8.80	Harold Seif	2.56	Kathy Rudnick	0.80
BRUCE WITTERT	7.76	David Rubin	2.40	Ron Stur	0.80
DON DESMOND	6.96	Adam Kay	2.40	Don Marek	0.80
YAMIN YAMIN	6.88	Peter Berkman	2.40	Richard Stawowy	0.76
RALPH LEVY	5.72	Herb Roman	2.40	David Rockwell	0.72
JOE KOUCHEARIAN	5.64	Tim Serges	2.28	Sheila Arnold	0.72
DEEB SHALATI	5.56	Jolie Lewis	2.24	Dean Muench	0.56
STU KATZ	5.20	Alex Itkin	2.24	Barbara Levinson	0.56
LENNY LODER	5.04	Betsy Miller	2.16	Howard Ring	0.56
GEORGE BARR	4.96	Norma Shyer	2.08	Dan Judd	0.56
HOWARD MARKOWITZ	4.96	Ed Bauder	1.92	Ken Bond	0.48
DON JAYHAN	4.76	John Demian	1.88	Mickey Kaplan	0.48
LUCKY NELSON	4.56	Phyllis Smolinski	1.84	Steve Katz	0.48
MARY FRANKS	4.48	Marcy Sloan	1.52	George Kirkby	0.44
LESLIE LOCKETT	4.48	Harold Grote	1.44	V.W. Zimnicki	0.40
STEVE POTASHNICK	4.24	Alex Caraplis	1.44	Mike Cohen	0.40
JOANN FEINSTEIN	4.08	David Lynn	1.28	Kurt Warning	0.40
Alice Kay	3.84	Barry Miller	1.28	Dean Muench	0.40
Paul Franks	3.60	Mark King	1.20	Jeff Vaughn	0.32
Femi Owiku	3.52	Ed Buerger	1.12	Larry Knoll	0.24
Sarg Serges	3.36	Larry Lau	0.96	Mike Spiropoulos	0.24
Beverly Klene	3.36	Greg Try	0.92	Stan Kucharz	0.16
Bobbie Shifrin	3.24				

Bar Point Club tourney wins on 16 and 30 April helped make JAKE JACOBS (5.60) April's Player of the Month. Leslie Lockett (3.20) also had a good month placing second. Dave Cramer, Gary Kay and Joann Feinstein all had 2.80 points to finish tied for third.

your move PROBLEM #171

Match to 5 points. White leads Black, 2 to 1. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-3.**



SHADES OF GRAY

A RULES AND RULINGS COLUMN

by Danny Kleinman

COURTESY IN BACKGAMMON

Dear Danny: I have just ordered a copy of the U.S. Backgammon Tournament Rules & Procedures. Are there courtesies in backgammon as well as strict rules?—George Berbiglia, Santa Ana, CA

DEAR GEORGE: Yes. You probably already have a good general idea what they are if you are a considerate person. Courtesy in backgammon resembles courtesy in life. An understanding of the spirit behind the rules of backgammon will help you be courteous. Let's examine some of the ways this applies to the USTR.

Rule 1.7 governs spectators, and lets a player ask the director to bar a kibitzer. To bar a kibitzer (except for cause) is discourteous, yet the rules do not mention cause. Why not? Because requiring a player to prove a case against a kibitzer is burdensome and disruptive to the player and may slow down the tournament.

Likewise, kibitzers should be courteous. For example, if you are watching your wife or your lady friend, you should suppress any audible or visible signs of glee at her lucky rolls, for this might irritate her opponent.

Rule 4.6 requires that premature rolls be rerolled. I'd love to change this rule, for I believe that illegal actions should incur some risk, lest a benefit accruing when an illegal action goes undetected spur rule violations. A better rule would condone premature rolls and permit the opponent to make his move (or cube decision) with foreknowledge of the roll. In the absence of my preferred rule, however, only courtesy deters "fast-rolling" (crowding the border between timely and premature rolls).

Rule 4.8 permits an opponent to condone an illegal move or demand a correction. As you may have guessed, I'd love to change the rule to put illegal movers at risk. But now, I'll imagine a scenario where courtesy apparently conflicts with the rules.

Suppose the tournament draw pairs you with Nack Ballard in an early round. You are enjoying the match, for Nack is a gracious and skillful player . . . and you are rolling exceedingly well. But in a crucial game, you roll the one number which forces a decisive shot . . . and inadvertently move illegally but safely. Inexplicably, Nack fails to notice your illegal move and condones it by rolling . . . a number which would have hit your forced blot. Just as you are about to turn the cube, a kibitzer draws attention to your illegal move . . . too late.

You mightn't feel so bad if your illegal play had put you at risk of a penalty, but as the rules stand, you're embarrassed and apologetic. Generously, you offer to wash

the game.

Courteous? Yes. But unfair. For if Nack accepts, you have both violated Rule 4.9 (which prohibits settlements). In so doing, you infringe the rights of others. If as a result of the wash, Nack wins the match, then some poor soul will have to face Nack instead of you in the next round. You've robbed that person of part of his equity in the tournament—the chance that he wouldn't have to play Nack. Even if you win the match despite the wash, you may have delayed the tournament.

Paradoxically, I'm pleased to report that something almost like this happened in a recent winner-take-all 16-player tournament. Joe Russell washed a game he'd otherwise have won through a condoned (because undetected except by a kibitzer) illegal move. His opponent, Otis Chenault, won the match as a result.

Unfair? No, courteous—or should I say, sportsmanlike. Because this was the *final* match, nobody else was affected. The spirit of the rules was not violated. Otis repaid the courtesy generously by splitting his prize with Joe. In my book, they're both winners.—Yours, Danny

Have you ever been involved in a questionable ruling? Get Danny Kleinman's opinion. Write to: Shades of Gray; c/o CHICAGO POINT; 2726 W. Lunt Avenue; Chicago, IL 60645-3039.

AMALGAMATION

Mark King returned to Bar Point Club backgammon 23 April after a three month "leave of absence." Mark spent his winter Tuesday evenings taking harmonica lessons... A bird got into Pat's Pub on 16 April, creating quite a disruption to the Bar Point Club tournament. Putting a positive spin on the incident, **Jake Jacobs** thanked us for bringing more pigeons into the club. On the other hand, **Peter Kalba** was afraid that Pat's would be closed down for serving "Mynahs."... The Costa Rican "Tournament of the Americas" looks very doubtful for this year and it has nothing to do with the terrible earthquake the country suffered last month. According to Nevada Backgammon Association director **Howard Markowitz**, the Hotel/Casino lined up for the event did not accept the NBA's proposals... What has happened to all the German Backgammon magazines? *Backgammon Info-Service's* last issue was January 1991 and *Backgammon Magazin*

hasn't published since last fall... Visiting the BPC in April: **Alex Itkin's** sister **Lily Kozak** from Buenos Aires, Argentina... **V.W. Zimnicki** has taken over direction of the Pub Club (7:30 P.M. Mondays at Fiddler's, 345 W. North Ave., Villa Park, IL) while **Ed Bauder** is on hiatus in Peoria... **Tom Johnson's Expert Backgammon™** receives a nice review in the June *MacWorld* magazine. For a Macintosh format demo copy of what most experts rate as the best backgammon program on the market, send \$5 to Komodo Software; 346 Costello Ct.; Los Altos, CA 94024... Condolences to **Tom Walthes** (IL) whose Mother died 27 April... *Games* magazine has returned with a new publisher, **Eli Segal**. For a one year, six issue subscription, send \$14.97 (U.S. orders only) to: Games; P.O. Box 55484, Boulder, CO 80323-5484... **Tim Serges** reports that last month, the CBS "This Morning" show originated from the new Universal Studios in Florida. One of their special exhibits is a tribute to **Lucille Ball**. Universal spared no expense constructing a heart-shaped studio

of memorabilia from the comedienne's life. There is even a re-creation of the den from Lucy's California home complete with her backgammon table. **Lucie Arnez** was on the show and asked by the CBS interviewer what her famous mother would say if she could see the tribute. Lucie's answer: "Mom would say, 'This is really great. Do you play backgammon?'" Δ

A good time.

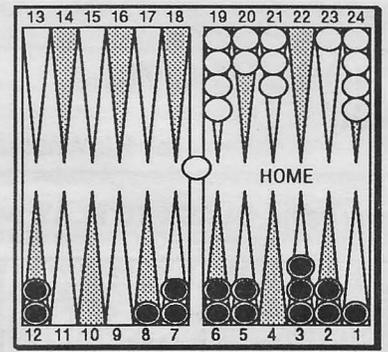
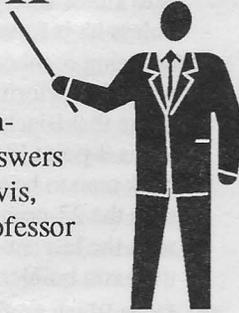
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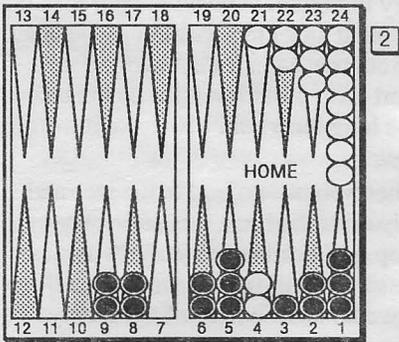
The Backgammon Exam II

Here's this year's actual exam compiled by Bill Davis and Danny Kleinman and given at the 1991 Midwest Championships for a \$25 entry fee. Joe Sylvester's score of 6 1/2 correct answers was enough to defeat (among others) Hal Heinrich, Malcolm Davis, Howard Markowitz and Frank Talbot and earn him the title: "Professor of Backgammon-1991." Now it's *your* turn . . .

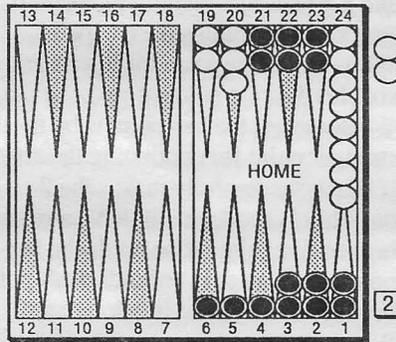


1 Tournament double match point. Black to play 4-1.

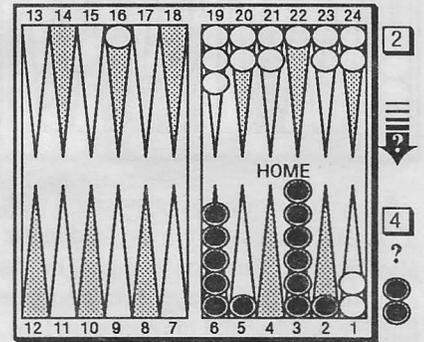
Instructions: You have 20 minutes to solve the following ten problems. When the actual exam was given, the second part of problem #10 was used to break ties. Solutions on page 7.



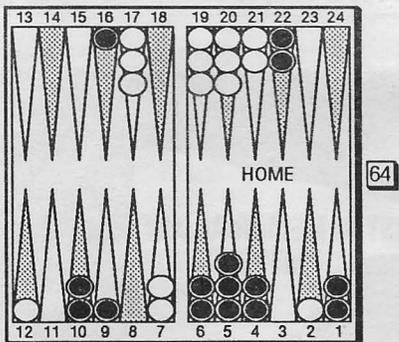
2 13 point match. Black leads White 8 to 1. Black to play 2-1.



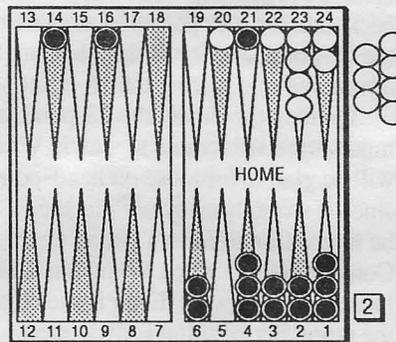
3 Money game. Black to play 6-5.



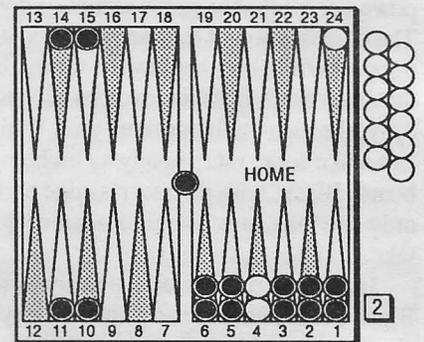
4 13 pt. match. White (on shake) leads Black, 8 to 7. Give the correct cube action for both sides.



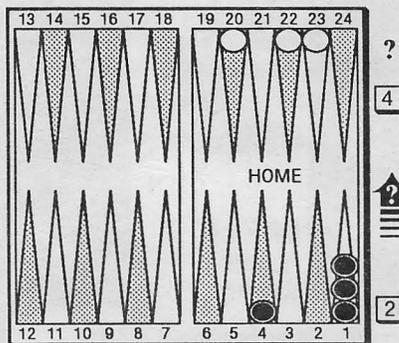
5 7 point match. Black leads White, 3 to 2. Black to play 3-2.



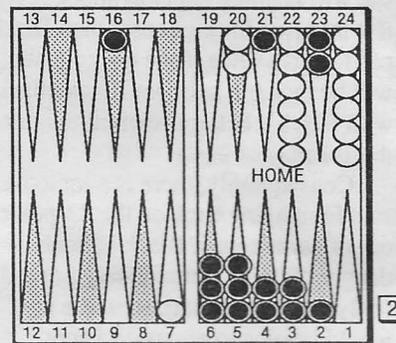
6 17 pt. match. Black leads White, 14 to 11. Black to play 3-3.



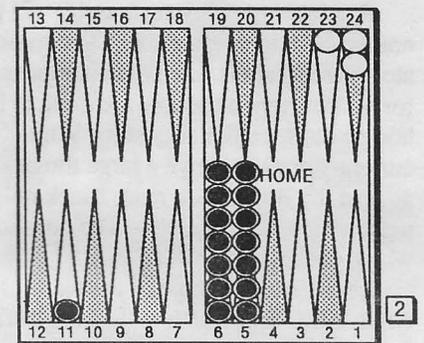
7 Money game. Black to play 4-1.



8 Money game. Black on shake. Correct cube action for both sides?



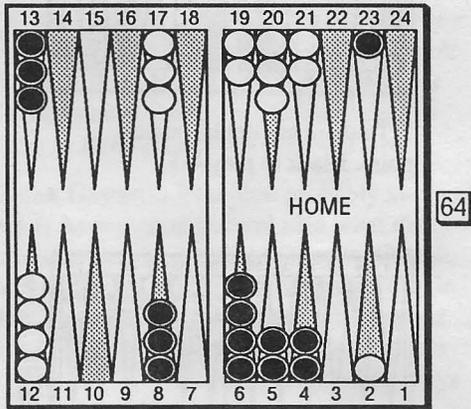
9 Money game. Black to play 6-1.



10 Money game. Black to play 2-1. Tiebreaker. Order next three plays.

**PROBLEM #170
SOLVED**

by Kit Woolsey

Money game. **BLACK TO PLAY 1-1.**

A nearly symmetrical position with Black having a ten pip lead in the race after the roll. This race lead may be insignificant, for if one player fires a successful blitzing number and his opponent fans, the game will end immediately via the cube. However, the race lead is important if one player escapes successfully and the other doesn't.

If Black escapes, he will have a very powerful (probably game-winning) double. The combination of the race lead and a trapped White checker is very strong. On the other hand, if White escapes successfully, the game will continue until White can make some more headway on her board. Black, with the racer's edge and only one man back, would have a very easy take.

It is clear from the above analysis that Black should not take any unnecessary chances. Attacking plays such as 6/2*, or 8/7(2), 6/4 could be great if they work, but if White hits a blot, Black's game goes from favorite status to likely immediate concession.

A safe tempo play such as 4/2*(2) is not the right idea, either. Black's immediate one roll gain is more than compensated for by the irreparable damage done to his home board, particularly since White currently does not have a large threat against the Black back man. Black must make a safe, but pure play. The question is which one?

Let's examine some of the features of Black's position which may change after the next roll:

- (a) Is it important for Black to distribute his men so as to create a third builder?

Yes, very much so. Black's main plan is to attack safely or beef up his board, unless he is fortunate enough to roll an escaping number. The extra builder is a very high priority. Thus, even if we judge that Black prefers his bar-point to his 8-point [8/7(3)] and we prefer the back man to be on the 22-point rather than the 23-point, we will still play 6/5 with the last ace—the value of having the extra builder is just too great.

- (b) Does Black prefer the 8-point or the bar-point? There are arguments both ways. The 8-point is currently more useful in retaining the White checker since potential fleeing numbers (e.g. 5-1 and 5-6) are successfully blocked. If Black instead builds the bar-point, White can make a run for it with any six plus 5-1.

However, the bar-point is by far the stronger point for continuing the attack. If Black successfully makes the 2-point on White's head, he will have a strong broken five prime if he holds the bar-point, but a mess if he holds the 8-point. Furthermore, should Black hit and White enter on the ace-point, the bar is preferred. Future considerations give the bar-point an edge over the 8-point.

- (c) Does Black prefer his back man to be on the 23-point or the 22-point? Again, there are arguments both ways. The back man is better poised to escape from the 22-point, and it has the additional advantage of covering the 16-point.

On the other hand, the 22-point is much more vulnerable to attack. White will be glad to hit loose on her 3-point, since if she gets away with it, she will be in position to form a strong board. Compare this to when White hits Black loose on her 2-point. Even if she closes the point, her position is disjointed. (Just like on the other side of the board, the 8-point and 2-point do not function well together.)

Since White is behind in the race, she will be more eager to attack (even if it involves hitting loose) than Black, particularly since if she doesn't, she will be facing a stronger Black attack with Black's better distribution after the 1-1 play.

Consequently, there is a lot to be said for staying back on the 23-point out of harm's way. Black is in no danger of being immediately primed (only a 6-1 does that), so while it would be nice to escape, it is not urgent.

PUTTING ALL THIS TOGETHER, my choice

is 8/7(3), 6/5 as opposed to the apparent second choice of 6/5, 6/4, 23/22. While White has more ways to escape, several of her escaping numbers (6-1, 6-3 and 6-6) are also great attacking numbers, so there is a fair amount of duplication.

Admittedly, the alternative play has some successful duplication on fives, but the vulnerability of the back checker is very important—White will attack on the 3-point given the chance. She will be much slower to attack on the 2-point.

Study the two fundamental themes in this position. They are common to the game of backgammon:

- (1) When you are short of builders, it is very important to position your men in the ideal attacking position if you have the chance, even if this involves a short-term cost elsewhere on the board. The long-term gain will make it worthwhile.
- (2) When you have a lead in the race and only one man back, it is often correct to keep the back man as far back as possible out of harm's way rather than move him to the edge of the enemy prime. This gives you the opportunity to build up your board while waiting for that one lucky escaping roll.

The player who is behind in the race will be eager to attack—don't give him the opportunity to do so profitably. Δ

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DICE...

[Continued from page 1]

Here's why. If a player has a short-rolling technique that causes the dice to drop out on only one of two faces (one of which was the previously-rolled number), the "repeat" percentages all raise to 25.00%. In addition, there are a few players who seem to be able to "non-repeat" more than they should—valuable if they are trying to avoid a certain number. This can be done by changing the angle of the cup when rolling in order to force a die on a short path that does not contain the previous number.

How Big Is The Mini-Mechanic's Advantage?

Let us examine shot-hitting, since this area causes the largest swings in the game. After rolling a 1-6, the player's chance of hitting a 1 shot with either die could be as high as 43.75% rather than the expected 30.55%. If he had previously rolled 1-1 and then short-rolls his dice, his chance of hitting the 1 shot with either die upper limits at 75.00%. If he had rolled a 2-4 and now needs to hit a 1 shot, then his ability to "non-repeat" would raise his chance of hitting to 36.00%.

In summary, a mini-mechanic operating his skill at 100% efficiency is on average, three times more likely to hit three crucial single shots in a row compared to the honest roller.

What Can You Do To Protect Yourself?

You could use your new knowledge culled from this article to become dishonest, but if you're caught, you risk ostracism from the game. Since the "repeat" factor will more often than not cause a bad roll in a game situation, it is in the best interest of every honest player to shake and roll as vigorously as possible. Using a large round, lipped cup that permits the dice to move randomly when shaken will also help.

You should be suspicious when you notice a player frequently change his rolling style, especially when he needs to hit a shot or repeat a set. Also, don't allow your opponent to practice rolling off the board while it is your turn. He may be "practicing" in order to set the dice on a good number. A dead give-away is when a player fails to shake his dice and simply drops out his next roll after previously rolling a great number.

In a money game, you could insist that a big cup be used to shake the dice before

dumping them into a baffle box. (Evidence from Los Angeles indicates that a baffle box alone is not sufficient because when the dice faces are aligned, sets hit about 30.00% compared to the expected 16.67%.) A better method is to simply avoid games where this type of cheating takes place.

In a match, your only recourse is to insist that a tournament official be present at all times in order to invalidate any dice roll that is not shaken and rolled in accordance with the *U.S. Backgammon Tournament Rules & Procedures (USTR)*. Otherwise, after a great roll has been intentionally (or even unintentionally) repeated, it is too late to complain.

Future Possible Solutions

Here are three possible ways to eliminate this type of rolling skill:

- (1) develop a new type of baffle box (possibly like an enclosed circular staircase) that would act to randomly change the dice face planes;
- (2) design 12-sided symmetrical dice. Each die would have two 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, and 6s on it thus allowing for a more random roll (the "blanket roll" would be impossible);
- (3) develop a random dice generator, possibly built into a chess clock apparatus, that can be run from batteries or from an electric outlet. (I prefer the chess clock idea because it could also be adapted for use at all backgammon tournaments that have time limits on matches.)

In Conclusion

Part of the fun of backgammon is to root for good dice and even mentally "try" to roll your best number. It is too bad that some experienced players have incorporated their knowledge of the "repeat" and "flip-flop" factors into their rolling style. This knowledge gives these mini-mechanics an unfair advantage over the other players who shake and roll fairly.

Who knows? Maybe in a few years Kent Goulding's *International Backgammon Rating List* will reflect only the relative backgammon skill of tournament players rather than their combined relative skills of backgammon and rolling. Δ

The preceding article was accepted without knowledgeable bias and does not necessarily represent the opinions of CHICAGO POINT or any of its regular contributing editors.

THE BACKGAMMON EXAM II—SOLUTIONS

[Exam appears on page 5]



1. 12/8, 2/1
2. 5/3, 9/8
3. 22/11
4. Redouble/Take
5. 5/2*, 4/2
6. 16/10, 14/8
7. Bar/21, 15/14
8. Redouble/Take or Drop. (*The cube decision is a mathematical toss-up. Deduct 1/2 point if you did not specify both Take and Drop.*)
9. 23/16
10. 11/8 is best followed by (11/9, 5/4), (11/10, 5/3), (5/3, 5/4).

For Danny Kleinman's analyses of "Backgammon Exam II" answers, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope (or \$1 U.S. overseas) to: Backgammon Exam II; 2726 W. Lunt Ave.; Chicago, IL 60645-3039.

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Goldilocks and the 3 "Bear"-Offs

by Duane Jensen

Once upon a time, a little girl named Goldilocks wandered far away from her home to take a walk in the deep, dark woods. As the hours passed, Goldilocks

realized that she was hopelessly lost. "What will I do now?" she cried. "What will I ever do?"

Good fortune shined upon her as she found shelter in a small cottage. No one was in the cottage, but Goldilocks found three backgammon boards. On each board was a "bear"-off position which asked the same question:

"HOW SHOULD BLACK PLAY 4-1?"

When should Goldilocks (Black) hit the blot on each board when bearing off, and when should she play safe?

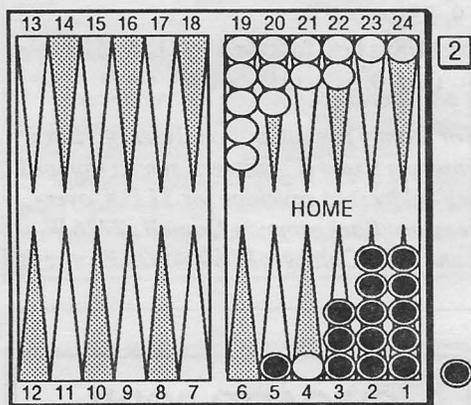
1st Board: Goldilocks figured the gammon would be *too hard* to win even by hitting. With such a great risk for such a small gain, she did not hit.

2nd Board: Goldilocks saw that the gammon would be *too easy* to win and that hitting was unnecessary. So she did not hit.

3rd Board: By hitting, Goldilocks judged her gammon chances to be, *not too hard and not too easy*. Still, she figured to win more this way than by playing safe. So Goldilocks hit because it was *just right*. Δ

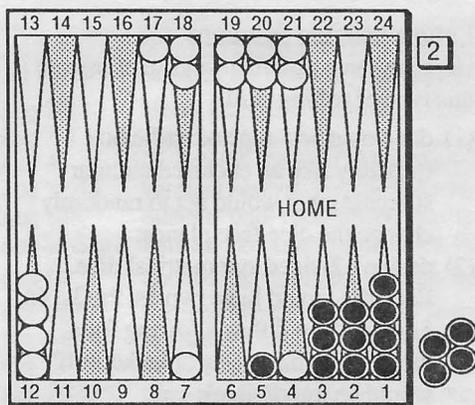
The 1st Board

"Too hard."



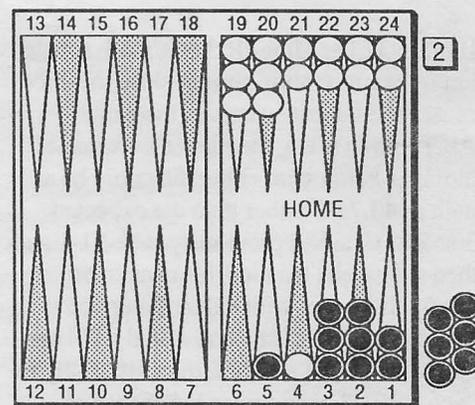
The 2nd Board

"Too easy."

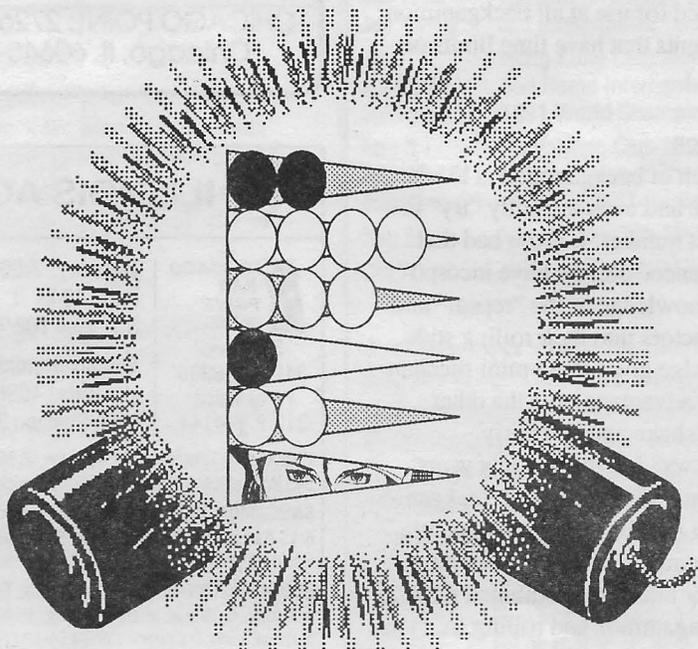


The 3rd Board

"Just right."



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TWO LEGENDS DIE

The Bridge and Backgammon world lost two legendary figures over the past few months: Charles Goren and Jim Jacoby.

CHARLES GOREN, former world champion bridge player and inventor of bridge's most widely used bidding system died of heart failure 3 April in Encino, Calif. He was 90.

Goren attained celebrity status in the bridge world in the 1950s. At the height of his popularity, his playing partners included President Eisenhower, Nelson Rockefeller and Humphrey Bogart.

Goren also authored a backgammon book in 1974: Goren's Modern Backgammon Complete.

JAMES JACOBY, the son of supreme gamesman Oswald Jacoby and a former world bridge champion, died of lung cancer in February. The 58-year-old bridge and backgammon author also reached the semifinals of the Monte-Carlo World Backgammon Championship in 1989.

Jacoby was layed to rest in Dallas, Texas 11 February. Malcolm Davis served as an honorary pallbearer.