

national labor day tournament

'V' FOR VIETOR ON LABOR DAY

A lot of people who win tournaments say, "There's nothing to it." They're wrong. This is my first win. It took a lot of work, a lot of concentration and good dice."

So said John Vietor of San Diego, CA after defeating Wendy Kaplan (IN) in the finals of the National Labor Day Tournament 30 Aug.-2 Sept. at the beautiful Radisson Plaza Hotel in Indianapolis, IN.

Over 100 backgammoners attended HBC directors Butch & Mary Ann Meese's 3rd annual holiday bash. Four days of well-organized non-stop action were provided.

Viotor compiled a 6-2 record in the Swiss Movement format. Then in the round-of-8, he rallied from an 8-1 deficit to defeat Terry Kuchenbrod (KY) 9-8. A victory over Ami Tennenbaum set up John's final match against "The Girl." John's 13-6 win earned him the first backgammon trophy of his life.

"I credit a lot of this victory to my sessions with Neil Kazaross. His style has had a definite influence on my game," commented Vietor. Also important was my learning how to say "I pass." Results: Δ

WARM MEMORIES OF

Monte Carlo

by Lewis Deyong

After being associated with the Monte Carlo World Backgammon Championships for 15 years, many people have asked me about my absence from the tournament this year. Let me set the matter straight.

Last winter, I advised André Rolfo-Fontana of the SBM that I would no longer be available to conduct the auction or host the prize-giving party at the 1991 World Championships. There were various reasons:

1. 15 years is a long time and the face of backgammon has changed enormously since 1976.
2. The auction has become progressively more and more difficult to do. There are fewer and fewer familiar names for me to "embellish." The Continentals are not really at home with the auction concept, and there is the general difficulty of addressing a large audience whose second (or third) language is English.
3. I enjoy spending a few days in Monte Carlo, but all my friends who are there now are of course gammoning from

morning till night. I myself have been forced into an early retirement from the game due to a chronic case of entry failure. (Such cases, if not treated, usually lead to terminal dementia, and I am assured by experts that my own case is already showing predisposition to that condition.)

Consequently this year, my wife Janie and I decided to holiday elsewhere. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those players who supported our efforts for so many years. We had, and I hope still have, a legion of friends among them all. I can assure you that the great years of the Monte Carlo tournament will always be among our most exciting memories.

Meanwhile, I wish the tournament every success for the future, under the capable direction of James Ballié. The only reason my name did not appear on the 1991 invitation was to avoid any confusion on the part of the players who might have assumed that the auction was "on" as usual.

For the record, our largest-ever auction was in 1979 with a total pool of \$259,000 and a high individual bid on Paul Magriel of \$12,000. Allowing for inflation, those figures would approach \$1,000,000 and \$40,000 today.

Perhaps pro tem, the Monte Carlo auction is best left a memory. Δ

1991 NATIONAL LABOR DAY TOURNAMENT

OPEN (37): 1-John Vietor (CA), 2-Wendy Kaplan (IN); 1C-Harry Cohn (IL), 2C-Carol Joy Cole (MI)

INTERMEDIATE (43): 1-Jane Lewandowski (MI), 2-Ed King (OH), 3-Carol Falk (MI); 1C-Lucky Nelson (IL), 2C-John Bashian (OH)

NOVICE (15): 1-Patrice Robertie (MA), 2-Holly Stowe (IN); 1C-Peg Simsic (IN), 2C-Judy McHale (IN)

DOUBLES (16): 1-Don Desmond & Marcy Sloan (IL), 2-Jake Jacobs & Bobbie Shifrin (IL).

MASTERS JACKPOT (8): 1-Joe Sylvester (MI)

AMATEUR JACKPOT (16): 1-Larry Whittenburg (IL), 2/3-Barry Miller (IL)/Wally Wolf (MI)

OPEN MICROBLITZ (64): 1-Yamin Yamin (IL)

LIMITED MICROBLITZ (64): 1-Gabe Stiasny (IN)

OPEN FAST BREAK (64): 1-Fred Badagnani (FL), 2-Denny Leatherman (PA)

LIMITED FAST BREAK (64): 1-Scott Arche (KY), 2-Lucky Nelson (IL)

OTHERS IN CHICAGO MAKE THEIR POINT



Thus far, we've discovered two other Chicago-area "Points." The logo on the left is for WPNT, Point Radio 100.3 FM. The "Point" on the right is a computer productivity training firm with offices in Chicagoland.

Although both logos bear some resemblance to that of CHICAGO POINT (created in Feb. 1988), we're sure that this is merely a curious coincidence. Δ

CHICAGO POINT

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

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CHICAGO POINT is published monthly. The subscription rate is \$20/year (\$30/year overseas airmail in cash or U.S. funds check).

Advertising Rates: 2 3/8" x 3 1/4" = \$25. 1/4 page = \$45. 1/2 page = \$75. Full page = \$130. If the ad is not "camera ready," request typesetting for an additional \$15 charge.

LETTERS

c/o CHICAGO POINT
2726 W. Lunt Avenue
Chicago, IL 60645-3039

MALCOLM'S RIGHT ON

Regarding Problem 173 in the Sept. POINT, I wrote a modified version of my Bearoff Quizmaster system to do exact calculations for bearoffs with checkers on the first four points, in order to approximate a solution. The calculations just got finished last week. Move the Black checker on the 5-point down to the 4-point and we have a position of this type—let's call it Problem 173A. 173A is a take worth 0.97. Black's cubeless probability of winning in 173A is about 0.1% better than in 173, so 173 is a take worth about 0.965. In short, Malcolm Davis's solution is right on the money.—
Walter Trice, Holden, MA

My compliments to Malcolm Davis for his incredibly accurate analysis of Problem 173. I set up the exact position using "Backgammon Base v2.1," a German computer bearoff program written by Johannes Schmitt. A 150,000 sampling of the position with no cube put White's winning chances at 23.2% which is exactly the figure Davis suggested.

coming attractions

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



by Carol Joy Cole
313/232-9731

* Denotes new or revised listing

NATIONAL

Sep 7-8	1991 Dallas Backgammon League Tournament, Ramada-Love Field, TX	214/620-7462
Sep 14	Connecticut Open, Hall of Fame Lounge, Southington, CT	203/755-9749
Sep 15	Milwaukee Club Sunday Bimonthly Tournament, John Hawks Pub, WI	414/463-2498
Sep 15*	NEBC Season Opener, Sheraton Commander, Cambridge, MA	617/641-2091
Sep 19	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada-Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Sep 22-26	Las Vegas Open Tournament, Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino, NV	708/470-9491
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 5*	Springfield Fall Open, Davy Byrne's, Springfield, IL	217/789-6275
Oct 6	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Braxton Seafood Grill, Oak Brook, IL	312/252-7755
Oct 13*	Special Sunday Tournament, Greentree Marriott, Pittsburgh, PA	412/371-5844
Oct 16*	Rscards Fall Computer Modem Tournament, GENie Bulletin Board	313/348-0580
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
Nov 1-3	9th New Hampshire Fall Classic, Sheraton Wayfarer, Manchester, NH	603/863-4711
Nov 2*	Springfield Series Kickoff, Davy Byrne's, Springfield, IL	217/789-6275
Nov 5	9th Bar Point Club Fall Trophy Tourney, Pat's Pub, Norridge, IL	312/338-6380
Nov 16	Connecticut Open, Hall of Fame, Southington, CT	203/755-9749
Nov 24	13th Annual Flint Area Club Championships, Ramada Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jan 15*	Rscards Winter Computer Modem Tournament, GENie Bulletin Board	313/348-0580
Jan 15-19	9th Nevada State Championship, Peppermill Hotel/Casino, Reno, NV	708/470-9491

OUTSIDE USA

Sep 15-22	Georgia International & World Cup, Colhety Hotel, Kobuleti, Tbilisi	305/937-0659
Sep 19-21*	AAB Torneo De La Nieve, Las Lefias, Argentina	54 01/790-4769
Sep 28	1991 Wiesbaden Cup, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122-16124
Sep 28-29	5th British Festival of BG, Morecambe Town Hall, Lancaster, England	061/946 0828
Oct 3-6*	Rio de Janeiro Open/91, Le Méridien Copacabana Hotel, Brazil	5521/2676033
Oct 7	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/8-461923
Oct 7-11*	10th South American Tourn., Punta Carrasco, Buenas Aires, Argen.	54 01/790-4769
Oct 12-13	Wansbeck Club's 1st Annual Tournament, Buccaneer Inn, Cambios, UK	0522/721630
Oct 26	1991 Wiesbaden Cup, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122-16124
Nov 1-3	Swedish Open Championship, Stockholm, Sweden	46/8-524099
Nov 4	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/8-461923
Nov 8-10	1991 NRW-Meisterschaft, Novotel Düsseldorf-Nord, Germany	02151/503591
Nov 13-17*	British Open Masters Tournament, Empress Hotel, Douglas, Isle of Man	0624/629914
Nov 24-25	BIBA Trophy Tournament, Post House Hotel, Crick near Rugby, England	0522/721630
Nov 30	1991 Wiesbaden Cup, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122-16124
Dec 2	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/8-461923
Dec 28	1991 Wiesbaden Cup, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122-16124
Jan 9-12*	1st Marriott Open Dutch Championships, Amsterdam Marriott, Holland	3120/6383832

Another 150,000 sample run considering the value of the cube increased White's stake-adjusted winning probability to 25.8%: only 0.1% off Davis's estimate of 25.9%.

Incorporating the match equity studies of Friedman, Muench, Cardwell and Underwood, "Backgammon Base v2.1" is the best bearoff program on the market. Using my IBM compatible 286 computer, BB solved a (15 on the 6-point) vs. (15 on the 6-point) bearoff in only six minutes!

The program is written in English; however the manual is in German. The approximate cost is USD \$180. For more information, write to: Joon Soft Div.; Robert Koch Str. 9; D-4130 Moers 2; Germany.—*Rick Janowski, Rochdale, Lancs., England*

PERFECT BACKGAMMON IS STILL A LONG WAY OFF

Backgammon differs from chess and checkers in an important way which makes it farther from "complete" solution by computer or any other means. Chess and checkers are *progressive* games. Pawns can only move forward, and "hit" pieces are forever off the board. Similarly for checkers, if we consider non-kings as "pawns."

Draws are possible, and indeed stipulated by the rules if there is no "progress" in a game: i.e. a certain number of moves without a pawn advancing or any piece being material, or repetition of moves. In backgammon, no draws are possible, and

[Continues]

the same position (following exchanges of hits) can recur indefinitely without any outcome being determined. That is because "breakouts from the loop" of repeated positions occur through *different rolls of the dice*, which—unlike the moves of chess and checkers—are produced randomly, not by the decisions of the players.

Supposing backgammon to have fewer "possible positions" than chess, it would still be the more complex game because of its many more *paths* from one position to another. There may be 20 different positions Black may face next in a chess game—depending on White's choice among 20 different moves. But in backgammon, the position Black will face depends on which of 21 possible numbers White rolls as well as White's choice of anywhere from one to hundreds of different moves possible with his roll.

Therefore, don't expect to see any backgammon program comparable to Jonathan Schaeffer's checkers program (mentioned in last month's "Amalgamation" column) in your lifetime or the after-life.—*Danny Kleinman, Los Angeles, CA*

NEW FORMAT TRIED IN DENMARK

We have recently held a 2-day backgammon tournament using the Monrad System, popular in chess tournaments. Players were guaranteed seven rounds of play and the vast majority felt they received more value for their entry fee.

Do any POINT readers have any comments or suggestions regarding this format? If so write the Danish Backgammon Federation; Gersonsvej 25 C; DK-2900 Hellerup, Denmark.—*Chris Ternel, DBF, Collingsgade, Denmark*

NOW HOW ABOUT EXPLAINING THE OLD FORMATS?

I'm putting together a Club Championship tournament this fall. After looking through a number of tournament brochures, I am confused about format-naming conventions. For example, how does a "Progressive Consolation" work?

I would enjoy an article on different formats of tournament play as well as an explanation of the various forms of chouette play.—*Lane O'Connor, director, Bloomington-Normal Backgammon Club, Normal, IL*

SOME THOUGHTS ON MAGRIEL'S MASTERPIECE

During my March visit to Chicago to participate in the Midwest Championship, I was lucky enough to obtain a copy of Paul Magriel's book *Backgammon*, to which I have dedicated much of my free time over the last months.

After a careful reading of the book, I believe that some authors and players have not given Paul Magriel the acknowledgment he deserves when they qualify "Backgammon" as a standard medium level book. For example, in the Introduction of his "Advanced Backgammon," Bill Robertie says: "I have assumed that the reader is a player of some experience, who has read at least a book on the level of Paul Magriel's *Backgammon*..."

On the back of his books, Danny Kleinman uses quotes from Barclay Cooke and others to imply that Magriel's book only

[Continued on page 4]

1991 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR

COMPILED
THRU 31 AUG.

TAK MORIOKA	22.32	Alice Kay	4.88	Barry Miller	1.28
JAKE JACOBS	17.52	Ken Bond	4.72	Bob Zavoral	1.28
YAMIN YAMIN	15.20	Phyllis Smolinski	4.64	Jerry Brooks	1.24
GARY KAY	14.08	Bobbie Shifrin	4.52	Barbara Levinson	1.24
DON DESMOND	13.44	Arline Levy	4.32	Dan Judd	1.04
DAVE CRAMER	13.36	Herb Roman	4.32	Richard Stawowy	1.00
JOANN FEINSTEIN	11.28	Bill Davis	3.96	David Curd	0.96
STU KATZ	10.56	René Wojtysiak	3.96	Dean Muench	0.96
PAUL FRANKS	10.24	Marcy Sloan	3.88	Greg Try	0.92
JOE KOUCHEARIAN	10.24	Harold Seif	3.84	Earl Risch	0.88
MARY FRANKS	9.36	Tim Serges	3.80	Peter Naguib	0.88
ALEX ITKIN	9.28	Beverly Klene	3.76	Mike Landau	0.88
DEEB SHALATI	9.28	Ed Buerger	3.04	Craig Chellstorp	0.88
LUCKY NELSON	8.48	Bob Ebbeler	2.88	Mickey Kaplan	0.80
JOHN DEMIAN	8.44	Betsy Miller	2.64	Ron Stur	0.80
GEORGE BARR	8.08	Stan Kucharz	2.40	Rich Galeba	0.80
HOWARD MARKOWITZ	8.00	Adam Kay	2.40	Kathy Rudnick	0.80
BRUCE WITTERT	7.76	V.W. Zimnicki	2.32	Roland Dieter	0.72
DON JAYHAN	7.72	Alex Caraplis	2.16	Sheila Arnold	0.72
LENNY LODER	7.52	Ed Bauder	1.92	David Rockwell	0.72
Steve Potashnick	7.44	Larry Lau	1.84	Tim Mabee	0.64
Jolie Lewis	6.48	Jeff Kane	1.80	Elaine Kehm	0.48
Frank Callea	6.08	John O'Hagan	1.80	Steve Katz	0.48
Norma Shyer	6.08	Kurt Schurecht	1.68	George Kirkby	0.44
Peter Berkman	5.84	Walter Schafer	1.68	Mike Cohen	0.40
David Rubin	5.72	David Orman	1.64	Kurt Warning	0.40
Ralph Levy	5.72	Harold Grote	1.44	Jeff Vaughn	0.32
Sarg Serges	5.60	Chris Stanford	1.44	Peter Kalba	0.32
Leslie Lockett	5.36	Bob Holyon	1.36	Mike Curcio	0.32
Femi Owiku	5.36	Don Marek	1.36	Mike Spiropoulos	0.24
Mark King	5.12	Paul Friedman	1.28	Larry Knoll	0.24
Howard Ring	5.04	David Lynn	1.28	Fred Gehlhoff	0.16

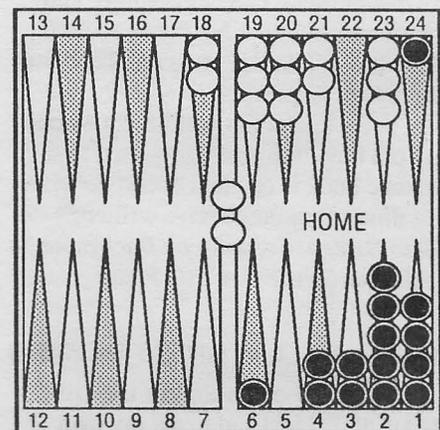
On the strength of a 6 August win and two semifinal finishes, **ALEX ITKIN** earned 4.32 points to become the Chicago Bar Point Club's August Player of the Month. A timely honor for Alex, who will be returning for a vacation in his home town of Buenos Aires, Argentina 19 September. Asociación Argentina de Backgammon, take note!

Tak Morioka (3.76) and Paul Franks (2.88) also made nice additions to their 1991 totals.

your move

PROBLEM #175

Money game. **BLACK TO PLAY 5-2.**



ASK DANNY

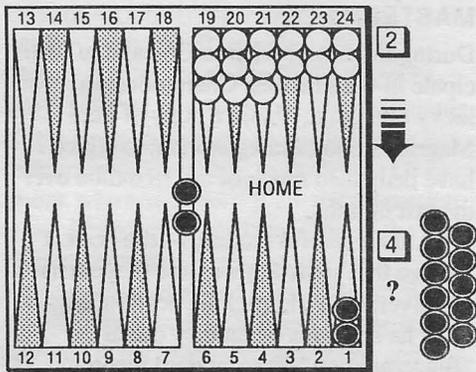


by Danny Kleinman

YOU CAN TAKE IT, BUT WILL YOU LIVE TO TELL ABOUT IT?

Dear Danny: Many years ago, Paul Magriel told me that in money play, this is a minimum take for Black:

Money game. White redoubles. SHOULD BLACK TAKE?



I find it very hard to believe. What's your opinion—Still A Doubting Thomas, New York, NY

DEAR THOMAS: Though backgammon boasts many fine players and analysts—Bill Robertie, Kent Goulding, Kit Woolsey, Mike Senkiewicz, Nack Ballard and Joe

Sylvester come to mind—Paul Magriel is the one person I'd call a "backgammon genius." Paul is fallible like the rest of us, but before disagreeing with him, I'd want compelling reasons.

My own sense of this position is that Black's second man on the bar is roughly the equivalent of seven extra men distributed on Black's lower home-board points. For the 25 pips it represents translate to about 3 1/2 rolls.

An astute backgammon player will notice that the second man on the bar actually costs Black more than 25 pips. When Black reenters the first man, that second man will usually remain on the bar, depriving Black of an extra half-roll. Then Black may continue to dance for one or more rolls.

As against that, Black's second man on the bar gains by constraining White's bear-off. White figures to waste a roll or two playing safely by clearing high points (instead of bearing men off lower points) so long as Black's man remains on the bar to strike at any blot White may leave.

I'd guess that these two considerations just about balance each other. If I'm right, then one man on the bar is indeed equivalent to 7 in a no-miss position. Paul's "minimum take" position, 11 men off with 2 on the bar, is thus like 5 men off with 1 on the bar. That is acknowledged by most authorities as the barest of takes; the legendary Manny Wong supposedly won heavily playing it as a "take versus pass" proposition in the early 1970s.

I say this not to dispute Paul, but to

show why I think he's right.

Incidentally, it may seem that Bill Robertie's rule (*Advanced Backgammon*, page 275) contradicts Paul's opinion and mine. For Robertie says that with two enemy men on the bar, you mustn't redouble until you have 10 or fewer extra men to bear off. In the position above, White, with 15 men, has 11 more than Black's 4. I think White should redouble. Much of the time he will reach a position with exactly 10 men more than Black, and thus be able to redouble Black into a take later. But some of the time (e.g. if he rolls 6-6) he risks losing his market by a clear margin.

The rationale for withholding the cube, for followers of Robertie's rule, is that White may not be able to bear any men off safely before Black reenters. For example, if White rolls 3-2, he'd better play safely with 6/4, 5/2; 5/Off would be far too risky. Then most middling rolls compel White to clear his 6-point, still bearing no man off. If Black counters with a 6 right away, White will no longer have a sound redouble.

I grant this, but think the sequence, combined with the chance that Black won't subsequently reach a sound redoubling position, to be remote enough to justify a redouble anyway.—*Yours, Danny. Δ*

Questions for Danny Kleinman should be addressed to: Ask Danny, c/o CHICAGO POINT, 2726 W. Lunt Avenue, Chicago, IL 60645-3039.

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 3]

told them what they already knew.

On the contrary, I am deeply impressed by the quality of this book, its logic rigor, inexhaustible source of suggestions, and extraordinary solidity. No doubt about it. As time passes, *Backgammon* will continue to strengthen its position as an authentic classic in backgammon literature. (As one of my old literature professors used to say, "A classic book is one that everyone who reads, thinks they could have written.")—*Antonio Ortega, Costa Rican Backgammon Association, San José, Costa Rica*

MAGRIEL STILL IN GREAT DEMAND

After reading a friend's copy of the CHICAGO POINT, I just had to get my own

subscription. Find a check enclosed.

Help! I am looking for Paul Magriel's *Backgammon*. March 1979 seems to be the last printing. If you or any of your readers know how and/or where I can purchase a copy, please let me know.—*Michael Flohr, Bloomington, IL*

Backgammon has been out of print for ten years. If anyone has a new or used copy for sale, write or phone the POINT and we'll forward the information to Mr. Flohr.—Ed.

USE PRECISION DICE FOR THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

I wish to express my disappointment with the Monte Carlo World Backgammon Championship this year for failing to require the use of precision backgammon dice. I understand the Championship of Great Britain used precision dice for all their matches. Why can't the World Cham-

pionships follow suit?—*Anthony Maltezopoulos, Greek Backgammon Players Club, Athens, Greece*

CONNORS A TRUE BACKGAMMON AFICIONADO

The Mark Palmer article on Backgammon at Wimbledon was enjoyable. I first played backgammon with Jimmy Connors (and Chris Evert, by the way) at the Beverly Hills Tennis Club in 1973. He was very keen and, like his tennis game, had an aggressive style of play.

The following summer, Wimbledon coincided with the British Amateur Backgammon Championships. This event was the largest I ever ran with 2700 players at venues all around Britain. The finals were at the London Hilton and Jimmy found time to come around to watch, often staying for hours. Eventually, he presented

[Continued on page 10]

THE RATING SYSTEM MUST BE IMPROVED

by Paul Weaver

The backgammon community owes a large debt to Kent Goulding for his efforts in producing a tournament rating system. Goulding's system is the only current method of assigning ratings based on tournament performance. Now in its ninth year, the KG rating system is keenly followed by many players throughout the world.

Although the theory behind Goulding's system is legitimate, in practice there are serious flaws. Bill Barron addressed these flaws in the 26 March 1990 issue of the Dallas Backgammon League's newsletter, *The Double*, where he wrote, "The tendency of some players and directors is to submit the draw sheets only when they do well in a tournament. This skews the ratings and defeats the purpose of objectivity."

I do not know to whom Bill Barron was referring, but I have investigated his assertions and found them to be true in the case of the New England Backgammon Club (NEBC). Many of NEBC's monthly tournaments have never been submitted to Goulding for rating even though monthly tournaments both before and after the unrated events were rated. In addition, some of NEBC's semiannual benefit tournaments were never submitted for rating even though the tournament brochures stated "All A Division results will be included in Kent Goulding's National Rating System."

During the 1987-88, 1988-89, and 1990-91 seasons, Bill Robertie was responsible for submitting NEBC draw sheets to Goulding to be rated. I have compiled Robertie's match record for each of these seasons, including main and consolation matches in the monthly and benefit tournaments and all matches in the end-of-season club play-offs. The results are shown in Table I:

TABLE I

NEBC Season	Bill Robertie's record in NEBC matches which he submitted for rating	Bill Robertie's record in NEBC matches which he did not submit for rating
1987-88	15-5 (75%)	15-14 (52%)
1988-89	23-11 (68%)	9-11 (45%)
1990-91	20-9 (69%)	6-12 (33%)
3 Season Totals	58-25 (70%)	30-37 (45%)

Author/analyst Danny Kleinman of Los Angeles, California has independently verified the data in Table I to be accurate to within one percent. The sources of this data are available for public inspection. The July 1990 and July 1991 KG rating books tell which NEBC events and which flights were rated. Robertie's match record can be determined from the tournament results and player standings published in each issue of the NEBC newsletter (now called *Anchors*).

Robertie's selective reporting of NEBC tournament results has inflated his own rating at the expense of depriving other NEBC participants of the opportunity to earn an accurate rating. For example, Herb Gurland, who cashed in seven of the unrated NEBC events, would have a rating 100 to 150 points higher if all results had been rated.

No tournament director or player should have the option of deciding after the fact, whether an event will or will not be rated. There must be a system of advance notification. Directors should notify Kent Goulding and the national and regional newsletters, identifying for each tournament, precisely which main and side events and which flights (main, consolation, last chance) will be rated. This information should also be printed on the tournament brochure. For the payment of a reasonable fee, anyone should be able to examine copies of the draw sheets from any rated tournament as well as the match record of any player during any specified time period. Only by implementing these kinds of measures can confidence in the rating system be fully restored.

A rating list with manipulated data is of no value to the backgammon community; however, a bona fide rating system would be of great benefit to all who love our exciting game. Δ

[Editor's note: Mr. Robertie was afforded the opportunity to respond to Mr. Weaver's findings and declined.]

A WINNER—FINALLY!

Bob & Steve

by Duane Jensen

You will recall that Steve has just played 3-3 illegally (Diagram A) when Bob said: "You played four 3s all right, but you played illegally. Play the roll legally and I'll consider a redouble since I will then be a favorite to win the game."

After playing all night, a "punchy" Steve thought he'd been hit and was on the bar. For his first 3-play, he brought in Bob's checker from the bar putting it on Bob's 3-point. Then he played the three remaining 3s from 4 to 1 in his own inner board. Bob insisted Steve play the roll legally, exposing another blot on his 4-point (Diagram B).

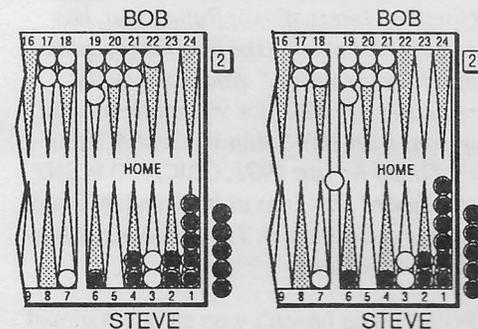


DIAGRAM A The position after Steve's illegal play. DIAGRAM B The position after Steve has played the roll legally.

Does Bob have a redouble? Bob has 27 of 36 numbers which hit at least one checker. More than a third of those numbers (which hit two blots or threaten same) are market-losers. Of course if Bob fails to hit any checkers, he gets gammoned. So it's certainly a close call.

Steve has five men off. When Bob is able to pick up only one man, he'll be happy that the cube is still in his possession. Close out one checker when your opponent has five or six men off and you have a powerful recube. Bob should not redouble.

ONLY THREE PEOPLE figured out that Steve's first '3' had been used to bring in Bob's piece off the bar: Phil Nutting (Kensington, CA), Art Benjamin (Claremont, CA) and Darrell Ridings (Castro Valley, CA). [Editor's note: It seems only California minds are up to the challenge of a Duane Jensen puzzle.]

Darrell saw the position as a recube. Art and Phil agreed with me that Steve does not quite have a recube. By random draw, PHIL NUTTING wins the \$35. Δ

WHO IS Wilcox Snellings?



Who is Wilcox Snellings? Good question. Here's a 32-year-old backgammon player without one national or even regional tournament title to his name. Yet at last month's Illinois State Championships, he received the highest auction bid in a field including Joe Sylvester, Neil Kazaross, Howard Markowitz and former world champion Lee Genud.

Germany's Phillip Marmorstein, ranked number one in the current Kent Goulding International Rating List, has called Snellings "...the best money game player in the world." And individuals regularly pay \$200 for 90 minute private lessons from this "Man Without A Title."

On 26 August 1991, CHICAGO POINT telephoned Snellings at his home in Santa Barbara, California. The following conversation transpired.

POINT: You haven't won an international tournament. I can't even recall a regional event that you've won. Yet in Europe and private clubs throughout the United States, you're often rated as one of the top five backgammon players in the world. How have you earned this kind of respect?

Snellings: Most of it comes through my reputation as a good money game player. Amongst some of the better players in Europe—the Germans especially, as well as some players from France and the Scandinavian countries—there seems to be a lot of respect for skill at money play. Part of this is due to the fact that matches, other than events on par with the World Cup, are just not long enough. One match usually equates to two or two-and-a-half hours of money play and that's simply not long enough to determine who's better.

As far as my tournament record, when I was playing ten years ago, it was largely for money. Having really only played extensively over the last two-and-a-half years, I've haven't entered all that many events.

My feeling about tournaments is that they're a lot like small scale lotteries. For example, at this year's World Championship in Monte-Carlo where you had 250 players, despite the fact that oddsmakers made Phillip Marmorstein 22-to-1, the true

odds on even the best player winning is probably closer to 50-to-1. So based on probability expectations, it should take the best player on average, over 30 years to win.

I know eventually that luck will break even for me. I really don't go into most situations rooting for great luck, or in tremendous fear of bad luck. If the luck just holds about even, I figure I'll eventually win my share.

POINT: How many players in the world are actually making their living off money backgammon?

Snellings: That's a tough thing to gauge. The key ingredient is how you define "making a living." There are some players who will be reasonably successful one year and have most, if not all of their income derived from backgammon. Some of these players are not all that good and are merely running hot. Then there are about 25 others who've done it year in and year out. Just looking at the last three to five years, you can probably add another 25 players.

And I've heard there are some players that no one even knows about who play exclusively in the Middle East. I'm sure these people do incredibly well.

POINT: Do you have a backgammon club that you frequently regularly?

Snellings: Well, right now, I'm not playing nearly as much backgammon as I was because I'm involved in a commodity fund with Stanley Tomchin who was considered a top backgammon player in the 1970s. So I don't really have that much time to play. When I do play, I try to get down to the Cavendish West in Los Angeles.

POINT: Of course you've spent many hours in New York City at the Coterie Club.

Snellings: Yeah, that was certainly . . . I would consider that to be one of the biggest learning advantages that I've had. When you're surrounded by the kind of talent and



genius that exists at the Coterie, even if all those players aren't always on a minute-to-minute basis, quite as good as their legends have it, you're bound to pick up a tremendous insight into the game. A lot of work has gone into a lot of the skill that's there.

POINT: You have 6 checkers on your 13-point, 3 on your 8-point, 2 on your bar point and 4 on your 6-point. What's your pip-count?

Snellings: [Five second pause] 140.

POINT: Is that correct?

Snellings: Well . . .

POINT: Let's figure out if that's right. I hadn't checked this.

Snellings: [Laughs]

POINT: There's a reason I asked this question. [Pause for calculation] . . . 140 is right. You know you answered that question in just a few seconds. I understand that you're also very quick at calculating take points and working out match equity and settlements. Tell us about your introduction to backgammon and how important a mathematical mind is in becoming a world-class player.

Snellings: Well, I sort of casually got involved in backgammon through . . . you know one of those things where you get a backgammon set for Christmas. I remembered hearing about a step-cousin of mine who had been very successful playing backgammon at the Mayfair Club in the late 70s. That was in the back of my mind when I started playing with my friends.

I already had played a good deal of poker and I was into probabilities—not in any heavy-duty sophisticated sense, but enough to have an advantage in casual games. The more I played, the more I was intrigued by the game and the question as

to exactly how well my step-cousin was doing. He was a few years older than I was, pretty bright and seemed to be fairly mathematical as well. I was told he made \$50,000 in one year. That was the first time I looked upon backgammon as a potential for making big money.

POINT: In school, were you good in math?

Snellings: I was considered as one of the top two in math in my class.

POINT: What was your Math SAT score?

Snellings: I scored 760. But my interest in higher math classes in high school was very limited because of my relationship with the teacher who I found to be on the bizarre end of the spectrum, which is not uncommon for math teachers. He and I just didn't relate at all.

I don't know if that was it or that I didn't figure I was going to have any practical application of calculus in my future. I kind of dropped my interest for math at that point and except for a couple of probability classes in college, I pushed myself more in the direction of English and philosophy.

POINT: What's the biggest game you've ever heard about?

Snellings: Some of the legendary games go back to the days when we had an oil crunch in this country back in the mid-1970s. Outrageous oil prices made some of the Arab money pretty preposterous. Those guys would come in to places like Vegas and gamble millions in the casino. Sometimes they'd also ask to be set up with a backgammon game for anywhere from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per point. I'm not sure that I know of anyone who played in those games. Some of the stories are kind of confused.

Personally, I've seen games that have been played for between \$500 and \$1000 per point.

POINT: Would you say there are people who play regularly for \$1000 per point?

Snellings: It's not that common. Games that do get up that high are usually very private. You may hear of them, but you're only going to be involved in them if you're a member of a very exclusive country club or some sort of very limited gaming club even more exclusive than the Coterie.

POINT: Can you recall the largest sum of money you ever won?

Snellings: When I was 20, I won over \$150,000.

POINT: Really?

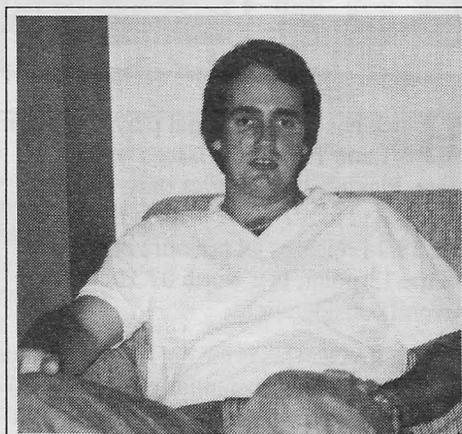
Snellings: Well that's not what I collected. In 1979, I was playing a guy at one of the small local clubs in New York. The guy was terrible. When the club closed around

midnight, he had lost like \$300 to me playing for nickels. As I was getting ready to leave, he said if I had an interest, we could go back to his place in Queens and continue the session.

I figured OK, why not? I'll just play until all hours of the morning and win another \$300.

As expected, I kept winning more and more and he kept on wanting to double the stakes. I was reluctant to do so, but I was up so many points that I said, "OK, what the hell." Eventually we doubled again, and then again and so on.

All the while we were playing, this friend of his was there watching intently. He claimed to be the cousin of Anthony Trafficanti, the big mob boss down in Florida, and during the session, casually let me know he was carrying a gun. If I made a suggestion about leaving after a certain number of games, he would say in a gruff



"All the while we were playing, this friend of his was there watching intently. He claimed to be the cousin of Anthony Trafficanti, the big mob boss down in Florida, and during the session, casually let me know he was carrying a gun."

voice, "Kid, just keep playing. Our money's good. Don't worry about the time."

We played for hours and finally at nine in the morning, the guy realized he just couldn't beat me. At this point, he owed me \$170,000 and all I'm thinking is that I just want to get home, basically. If I can get \$5000 out of this, I'll be thrilled. Just absolutely ecstatic.

I had been paid \$200 in cash and they said they would escort me to their bank to get the rest. So we all get into his car and drive to Manhattan and I'm thinking, "This isn't happening. This is fantasy."

We park a half block from the bank and the guy that lost the money gets out of the car and goes around the corner. We're just sitting in the car, and sitting and sitting and sitting. And I'm just laughing. I'm saying,

"This isn't serious. You guys don't have to continue this act. I know I'm not getting this money. I'm not an idiot. I was probably an idiot to go to Queens and play in the first place, but I'm not an idiot at this point. I know I'm not getting this money."

And the mob guy tries to maintain a straight face and says "No, kid. You're getting your money. We honor our debts. We're like family. This is how we operate."

So I say, "OK, fine."

Meanwhile, the minutes just keep ticking by. We've been sitting in the car for nearly an hour. I finally say, "Look. The guy probably isn't even in the bank. He went around the corner. He's probably long gone. You can just drive me home. It's OK. You don't have to continue this charade."

So finally, he sort of breaks a half-smile and says, "You know, I don't know what happened to him, but we'll be in touch with you. You'll get your money."

I say, "Fine," and he drives me home. That was the end of that.

POINT: Let me set up a hypothetical question for you. You're going to captain the 1992 U.S. Olympics Backgammon Team. Who are the other four players on your squad?

Snellings: [Pause] Billy Horan, Mike Svobodny, Jason Lester and Paul Magriel..

POINT: All Coterie Club players.

Snellings: Yeah, but to say that that's my crew, as it were, is not out of any disrespect towards any of at least 10 other great U.S. players. And since this would be a team event, I know these guys pretty well and would have more rooting interest with them.

POINT: Now name five international players that will certainly make their respective national teams.

Snellings: Phillip Marmorstein from Germany. [Pause] Can I stay in the same country?

POINT: I'd kind of like you to move to five different countries.

Snellings: [Laughs] OK. In France, Gerard Duguet-Grasser. In Holland, let's pick Rolf Schreuder. Let's see, where else are we going? For Italy, we'll go with Gherardo Crespi. And finally we'll try Canada which is a real tough issue. Let's go for Carl Sellars there.

POINT: You've named some of the best backgammon minds in the world. Assuming a computer program existed that played absolutely perfect backgammon, how many points would you expect it to win against one of these Olympic superstars in

[Continued on page 9]

AMALGAMATION

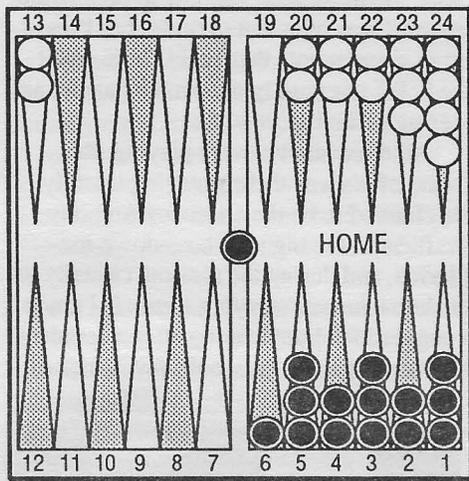
Dario De Toffoli's new book *Giocare a Backgammon* (Playing Backgammon) is now available. The handsome work contains 220 pages. The first half of the book uses 30 illustrations to discuss the history of backgammon. The second half incorporates 200 board diagrams in discussing the play of the game. Even if you don't read Italian, this book makes an attractive edition to your backgammon library. Cost: 35,000 lire plus postage. For more information, write: **Giorgio Tamaro** c/o Arsenale Editrice; San Marco 4708; I-30124 Venice; Italy, or FAX 041/522 1579... **Brian Linker**, manager of *The Cue Club* in Chicago (2833 North Sheffield, 312/477-3661) informs us that along with 10 billiards tables, darts and a comfortable bar and café... Congratulations to Professor **Greg Shore** who has taken a permanent position in the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa... Argh! An excellent analysis of Problem 173 in last month's POINT by **Malcolm Davis** and we mix up the colors in the second sentence. Please change it to read: *Immediately pursuant to the Box's (White's) pass, the Captain of the team (Black) verbally observed that he thought the position was "a take."*... This reporter and **Peter Kalba** took to the streets for **Jake Jacobs'** "Totally Recalled" Road Rally 10 August in Chicago's Northwest suburbs. We finished. Speaking of Jake, his beard disappeared last month and now the rest of him is gone—to Thailand and Korea. He'll return in October... Former Chicagoan **Arnold Zousmer** had rotator cuff surgery on his shoulder 9 August. He's out of golf action for three months but fortunately, it doesn't effect his "throwing the dice" at the San Diego Backgammon Club... **Hal Heinrich** now has over 1000 matches on file including new ones from the 1st Georgian Open and the 1991 Championship of Great Britain. The cost is \$1.25 USD per page. Mail \$2.00 for a complete listing of available matches to: Hal Heinrich; #402, 1122-15th Avenue SW; Calgary, ALB, Canada T2R 1K5... **Joann Feinstein** informs us that the new Prime Backgammon Club (Fridays at TJ's Lounge in Lincolnwood, IL) has space to accommodate far more than 32 players, the number mentioned on grand opening flyers... Sleep secure, Illinoisians! **Lucky Nelson** reports his daughter **Lisa** is serving in the Illinois National Guard... San Diego to San Fran-

last month's position

PROBLEM #174 SOLVED

by Kit Woolsey

Match to 9 points tied at 8-8 (double match-point). **BLACK TO PLAY 6-5.**



Black has only two legal plays for his 5: 6/1 and 19/14. The issues are quite clear. Playing 19/14 leaves only 11 shots, as opposed to 6/1 which leaves 17 shots. But 19/14 releases all pressure on the men on the 13-point. Is it worth it? There are several considerations:

- 1) **THE RACE.** This is the big consideration. If Black were substantially ahead, it would be clear to maintain contact with 6/1. In the actual position, Black will be up one pip and crossovers will be even after 19/14, which will make White (since she is on roll) about a 5-to-4 favorite in the race, assuming no blots are hit.
- 2) **NUMBER OF SHOTS.** This is a very important consideration. If either player gets hit, he immediately becomes a big underdog. Running to the 14-point leaves only 11 shots, while remaining on the 19-point leaves 17 shots. Although four of these shots (5-1 and 4-2) leave a direct shot return, the return will be hit only 11/36 of the time, so the difference

cisco: **Neil Kazaross** who begins training in Stock Options trading... New York to Chicago: **Jill Ferdinand-Brussel** who returns to her second grade teaching chores in Mt. Prospect. Looking forward to Husband **John** joining her soon... Five months of back pain is too much so BPC player **Barry Miller** is having an operation to repair a herniated disk in September. Best wishes... Another BPC player, **Bob Ebbeler**

in number of shots is really big.

- 3) **DUPLICATION OF ROLLS.** If Black moves to the 14-point, he is hit by aces, which are White's worst racing numbers. If Black stays on the 19-point, he is hit by 6s: White's best racing numbers. This argues somewhat for staying back; but since it is a fairly long race, this factor is not as important as some may think.
- 4) **RESULTING POSITION AFTER NON-HIT.** Obviously if Black moves to the 14-point and is not hit, it is always a straight race. However, if he stays on the 19-point and is not hit, it gets interesting. Six of White's non-hitters (5-4, 5-3, 5-2) leave a direct shot. In addition, 10 numbers (4-3, 4-1, 3-2, 3-1, 2-1) force White to play inside, costing her in the race.

On the other hand, by playing 6/1 with the 5, Black loses some in the race himself. Also, in the variations where White holds the 13-point, Black's gain by forcing White to play inside is balanced by the fact that the Black checker still has to get past the 13-point. There are many numbers which fail to do so, and if Black can't escape, White will have the first shot. If she hits, she gains a big advantage.

It looks close, but putting it all together it appears that the number of shots just has to be the big priority. Black's racing chances are good enough that he doesn't mind getting into a race. What he does mind is getting hit. The follow-up variation where the blot is missed may favor staying back slightly, but the most important swing is on the next roll. Six extra shots are just too much to leave against possible favorable swings down the road, since these swings involve favorable parlays which are much less likely.

It should be noted, however, that the closeness of the race makes 19/14 the correct play. If two of the men on the Black ace-point were on the 6-point, for example, the race would not be very close, and it would be clear to stay back. In the actual position, Black's best chance is simply to win the race, and therefore, he should run. Δ

is off for England and Spain 18 Sept... Pittsburgh Backgammon Association director **Steve Hast** informs us that his club has moved Tuesday night play to Murphy's Tap Room on So. Braddock Avenue. Call Steve at 412/371-5844 for the particulars... *Flint Area Backgammon* editor **Carol Joy Cole** apologizes to her subscribers for the delay in delivery of the August issue. Her laser printer is on the fritz. Δ

a 1000 money game series?

Snellings: [Long pause] After 1000 games, I'd figure the computer should win about 150 points against any one of these players.

POINT: So we have a ways to go, but if you compare the human loss to how much we would have lost ten years ago...

Snellings: Exactly. The figure could have been as high as 300 points.

POINT: Many people feel that backgammon computer programs will be a great tool for learning in the coming decade. Talk about the difficulties in programming a computer.

Snellings: There is more to the game of backgammon than simple computer analysis. A lot of backgammon is psychological. Knowing what your opponent knows in a sense is worth a tremendous amount. You can make the wrong play at the right time and have it actually be the correct play given your opponent.

But that's sort of a side issue. If we were assuming you were just trying to find the best technical play given the best technical responses from your opponent, the computer only has so much information. Even if you have an artificial intelligence system that can learn as it goes along, if the person programming the computer is not a true master player, then he is going to give it a somewhat limited knowledge base.

Other than Bill Robertie who I believe has spent some time trying to develop some computer advances in the game, we've had a lot of experts work on bearoff analysis, but that's about it. Very little on middle game checker or complex cube decisions.

Part of the problem is that computer backgammon programs have relatively limited commercial potential. Top level players are often too busy doing something else that is much more lucrative.

And also, some backgammon knowledge is at such an intuitive level that the ability to translate it into a computer system would be extremely difficult if not impossible.

POINT: In tournaments, how do you emotionally handle losses to weak players?

Snellings: In the few tournaments I played when I was in my early 20s, losing to a weaker player frustrated me as much as anyone I know. And I wasn't prone to literal tantrums, but the way it felt inside was like I was being cheated in some sense. Not literally, but it was the feeling like, "This is just unfair. This guy's a blooming idiot."

As I developed my own personality aside from backgammon, I started to develop more perspectives on life and things that seem unfair. Also as a professional over the last couple of years, I've come to realize that it just doesn't do me any good to have reactions that might convey I'm superior to the people I'm playing. It just isn't healthy as sort of a business thing.

With time, I've developed the ability to laugh at my misfortune. When the other person is rolling well, let him enjoy his success because I know that my times are going to come.

POINT: Continuing along psychological lines, tell a psychiatrist what makes people play backgammon.

Snellings: [Laughs] I'm sure that's one that would take hours to go through and you still wouldn't come to any absolute answer. There are so many reasons and a lot of them really don't seem to be all that healthy. I suppose some people are able to get out the worst aspects of their personality over the backgammon board and hopefully not take them out on people they really care about. I've certainly seen on average that a lot of the people that I know well are really very different people over the backgammon board. It's not always that masochism or sadism is involved in their temperament, but I've seen a good deal of that, too.

And on the other hand, you get people who are just games players and really enjoy a challenge. These types of people are going to be naturally drawn to a game like backgammon, especially if they have a little bit of gamble in their temperament, a somewhat hyper personality and are very bright. Those characteristics are just a total natural fit for a backgammon player.

POINT: What are your backgammon goals?

Snellings: I would certainly like to win at least one major tournament in the not-too-distant future and quiet a few of the people who are at least mildly skeptical of my ability to play tournament backgammon on a par with my money game skill. But it's not that big a deal with me.

I would also like to do something in the way of teaching over and above the lessons that I occasionally give. I've considered writing a book, but more recently, I've been turned onto the idea of doing backgammon videos largely designed for intermediate and advanced players, but with the possibility of doing some beginner tapes as well.

Although they have been used for chess and bridge, video tape teaching has not been tried in backgammon. I would like to

**WILCOX
SNELLINGS
PERSONALITY
SNAPSHOT**



Full name: George Wilcox Snellings

Date and place of birth: 1 Feb. 1959; Baton Rouge, LA

Height and weight: 5'-11"; 190 pounds

Living in: Santa Barbara, CA

Marital status: Married for two years

My wife Randi is: The best thing that's ever happened to me.

Hobbies: Tennis and now writing which is becoming very important to me.

Memorable win: Right after the 1990 Boston World Cup, champion Billy Horan and runner-up Tino Lechich brought their winnings to the Coterie Club where they both ended up paying me a lot more than just a visit.

Favorite non-backgammon book: Since none of the backgammon books are my favorites [laughs]... *The Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff.

Most beautiful movie star: Michelle Pfeiffer

Most respected politician, past or present: It better be past... F.D.R.

For my "last meal," I would order: It used to be lobster, but now I've decided it's too rich.

One place I still want to visit: Greece

have input from as many people as possible regarding the degree of interest there is at the beginner, intermediate and advanced levels along with the types of subjects they would like to see discussed.

I'd like to start work on this project in the next six months to a year as time permits in my reasonably crowded schedule. I'm getting very enthusiastic about this.

POINT: Give us an address where people can send you their ideas regarding backgammon videos as a learning tool.

Snellings: Sure. They should write to: Wilcox Snellings; 868 Highlands Drive 4; Santa Barbara, CA 93109.

I welcome all ideas, including suggestions on the marketing end of this project. And if people would rather receive my information in book form, I want to know that, too.

POINT: Thank you Wilcox, for taking the time to talk with us, and good luck with your new endeavors. Δ

LETTERS...

[Continued from page 4]

trophies to our winners. That's quite a nice gesture towards backgammon from someone whose personal appearance fees are still in the stratosphere.

Incidentally, a quick word to fans who know my young tennis protégé Paul Ryan (who used to work out in Monte Carlo during the tournament). He is now 16-years-old and ranked in the top six among juniors in the U.K. This summer, he won a couple of small Men's events in England and we are cautiously optimistic for his future.—*Louis Deyong, London, England*

THANKS FROM A DIRECTOR

On behalf of our staff and committee members, I want to thank all the players who attended our first Illinois State Championships at the Hyatt Hotel in Deerfield, IL.

Specifically, I thank Carol Joy Cole, Bill Davis, the Meeses and Christopher Stanford for their advice and help.

We hope to see you again next year.—*Yamin A. Yamin, director, Illinois State Backgammon Championships*

THE WORLD IS CHALLENGED

I challenge *anyone* to send me backgammon positions. Send them to me at 20218 Catalina Drive; Castro Valley, CA 94546.—*Darrell Lee Timothy Ridings, Castro Valley, CA Δ*



ILLINOIS ACTION



Bill Davis
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Sunday Bimonthly, 12:30 P.M. at Braxton Seafood Grill, 3 Oakbrook Center Mall, Oak Brook 708/574-2155.

PUB CLUB: Tournaments Monday, 7:30 P.M. at Fiddler's, 345 W. North Ave., Villa Park. V.W. Zimmicki (708/759-7105.)

SANGAMON VALLEY BG ASSN: Tournaments Tuesday, 6:15 P.M. at On Broadway, 210 S. Broadway, Springfield. Randy Armstrong (217/528-0117).

BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BG CLUB: Tourn. 1st/3rd/5th Tuesday, 6:15 P.M. at Ride The Nine, 503 N. Prospect, Bloomington. Lane O'Connor (309/454-1947).

WINNETKA BG CLUB: Tournaments Wednesday, 7:00 P.M. at 620 Lincoln, Winnetka. Trudie Stern (708/446-0537).

CENTRAL ILL. BG CLUB: Tourn. Thurs., 6:30 P.M. at Pizza Works, 3921 Prospect, Peoria. Sue Will (309/692-6909).

PRIME BG CLUB OF CHICAGO: Tourn. Friday, 6:45 P.M. at T.J.'s Lounge, Hyatt Hotel, 4500 W. Touhy, Lincolnwood. Joann Feinstein (708/674-0120).

NORTH CLUB: Daily side play except Sunday at 4747 W. Peterson (402), Chgo. Howard Markowitz (312/286-8417).

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THE LAS VEGAS OPEN BACKGAMMON TOURNAMENT

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