

# CHICAGO POINT

NUMBER 47

A Prime Source of Backgammon Information

JUNE 1992

## HONG KONG

### LEARNING THE YIN AND YANG OF BACKGAMMON

by Jake Jacobs



*Jake Jacobs returned to Chicago the end of May following an extensive five month tour of Southeast Asia. His final stop was a visit to the crown colony of Hong Kong. Here's a first person account of his adventures over there—backgammon and otherwise.—Ed.*

To understand how high we are, it is necessary to think of descending. The ascent is accomplished in taxis and elevators with a minimum of steps, but the descent can be a long and arduous thing.

My friend's penthouse is on the 35th floor, but merely riding an elevator 35 stories down to "G" is insufficient. Continue down to "P1"; next, walk through the parking garage to building 84 and ride another elevator down to its "G." From there, you can walk to the Hopewell Center where you will find yourself entering on the 17th floor. An elevator down to "3," two escalators to street level—already you've reached Queen's Road. From there it's a short cab ride downhill to the Wan Chai night club district.

The night sky in Wan Chai is a blaze of neon. From where we sit, it is so far down, it might be fireflies in a distant grotto. And the jumbo jets taking off from Kai Tak might be dragon flies rising off of a lake. 4000 years of Chinese culture, and the administrative might of the British Empire have combined to somehow put us here, high above Hong Kong. This place was meant for contemplation—for celebration of the elevation of the human spirit—far removed from the crassness and dirt and noise of more lowly abodes.

"You sod! Enough is enough. Come on, dice change!"

"You can't have a dice change, John. The game isn't over."

"Yes it is. I pass."

"I haven't doubled."

"I don't care. I pass anyway! Now

let's have those bloody dice!"

Actually, John is in a good mood. The *South China Morning Post* has this morning quoted him extensively in an article about malaria. John is the colonies' top epidemiologist.

"It's a mark of distinction, John, that when people think of loathsome diseases, yours is the first name that comes to mind."

We are joined by Patrick. The sixth race has ended and he has wandered over to kibitz.

My friend Alan is a horseplayer. On racing days, he stays in his office, transmitting bets by CRT and modem hookup directly to the Jockey Club. However, he employs a small army (well, three) of Chinese assistants who are sprawled around the living room barking additional bets in rapid-fire Cantonese over various telephone lines. In front of them is a giant television with up-to-the-minute racing info and live race coverage. In the middle of the floor is a computer terminal trailing thick black wires like a disemboweled octopus. Patrick has temporarily abandoned his post to offer trenchant commentary on the action.

"Only double 3s hit you! And maybe 6s, too. I am not sure. Anyway, if he doesn't hit you, you don't get gammoned, John."

"Patrick, go away, or I'll hit you with my shoe."

"How much are you playing for?"

"Jake is playing for 100, and Alan has a 150 dollar extra."

"Okay. I bet 100 on Jake, but I can advise."

"I appreciate your vote of confidence, Patrick, but aren't you worried about the vital energy I have to expend ignoring your good advice?"

[Continued on page 4]

13th chicago open

## TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY IN CHICAGO

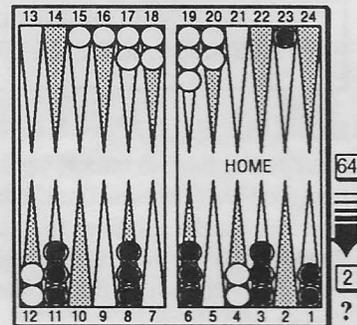
Chicago expert Don Desmond sat undefeated in the double elimination Chicago Open finals. His opponent for the Prime BG Club's 13th Memorial Day annual (Westin O'Hare Hotel, Rosemont, IL) was Ralph Schaffner of Canada. Ralph would need two wins in a row to grab first place.

The last time these two met in the finals was at the 1990 Michigan Summer Championships. There, it was Desmond who needed and won two matches in a row to knock Schaffner out of the catbird's seat.

Turnabout is fair play. Schaffner won the first match 13-2 and the second 13-7 for sweet revenge.

The second match was closer than the score indicated. Note the potential swing involved in the following position:

13 point  
finals.  
Schaffner  
(Black)  
leads  
Desmond  
(White), 11  
to 7. White  
doubles.  
**SHOULD  
BLACK  
TAKE?**



Ralph made what most experts considered a very questionable take. Desmond fired a 6-2 completing a 5-prime and Schaffner responded with a 1-6, hitting Don on the 16-point.

"Yes!" Schaffner cried, pounding his fist on the table. Desmond never recovered. Δ

13th CHICAGO OPEN

**CHAMPIONSHIP (37):** 1-Ralph Schaffner (CAN), 2-Don Desmond (IL), 3-Jeff Acierno (NY); 1C-Joe Russell (CA), 2C-Yamin Yamin (IL). **INTERMEDIATE (44):** 1-Bob Zavoral (IL), 2-Fred King (TX), 3/4-Jeff Baker (IN) / David Orman (WI); 1C-Jill Ferdinand-Brussel (IL), 2C-AI Meinecke (IL). **DOUBLES (16):** 1-Dean & Kevin Muench (IL), 2-John Bashian (OH) & Larry Strommen (IN). **SPECIAL \$500 (4):** 1-James Colen (MA). **\$50 JACKPOT (32):** 1-Don Desmond (IL), 2-John O'Hagan (IN).

# CHICAGO POINT

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## LETTERS

c/o CHICAGO POINT  
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## MONTHLY POINTS ARE PREFERRED

Glad you're back to monthly publication. Enclosed is my stamped, self-addressed envelope for the solutions to Backgammon Exam III. By the way, isn't it about time for another contest?—*Ed Maslansky, Silver Spring, MD*

Your wish is our command. See page 7.—*Ed.*

Your CHICAGO POINT is the most concise source of backgammon information since the *Las Vegas Backgammon Magazine*. I for one am elated at the renewal of it on a monthly basis.—*Merrill Schragar, Milwaukee Backgammon Club, WI*

## TOUCHÉ, YAMIN!

I really don't mean to take up space in your publication again, but I feel that I must reply to Yamin Yamin's letter in the May POINT.

How ironic that his reply to my letter should appear in the same issue that Danny Kleinman addressed cheating ("Ask Danny"). Danny explained it best when he said, "So long as substantial sums [of

coming attractions

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

BACKGAMMON						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

by Carol Joy Cole  
 313/232-9731

\* Denotes new or revised listing

### NATIONAL

Jun 7	Bar Point Sunday Tournament, Braxton Seafood Grill, Oak Brook, IL	312/252-7755
Jun 7	San Francisco Monthly, Greeley's Restaurant, San Francisco, CA	415/387-0429
Jun 14	NEBC Yearend Tourney & Club Finals; Sheraton-Comm., Cambridge, MA	617/641-2091
Jun 14*	Bimonthly Sunday Tournament, Greentree Marriott, Pittsburgh, PA	412/823-7500
Jun 14*	Las Vegas Warm-up, Cavendish North, Southfield, MI	313/642-9616
Jun 17-21	1992 Las Vegas Open, Sands Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, NV	708/470-9491
Jun 25*	Special Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jun 28	NY/NJ Co-op Regional Tourney, Best Western Oritani, Hackensack, NJ	201/833-2915
Jul 5	Milwaukee Backgammon Bimonthly, John Hawks Pub, Milwaukee, WI	414/463-2498
Jul 11-12	College Park Summer Championships, Promenade, Bethesda, MD	301/530-0604
Jul 15	Rscards Summer Computer Modem Tournament, GEnie	800/638-9636
Jul 23	Special Thursday Tournament, Holiday Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Jul 24-26	Michigan Summer Championships, Holiday Inn & Holidome, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Aug 2*	15th Annual Bob Hill Summer Classic, Hill Estate, Old Westbury, NY	516/334-4833
Aug 3-9	World Cup III & U.S. Open, Harvey's Bristol Suites Hotel, Dallas, TX	301/299-8264
Aug 10-16	Green Mountain Vacation Tournament, Stratton Mountain Inn, VT	305/527-4033
Aug 15-16	Riverboat Gambling and CIBC Annual, Peoria/Sly Fox Pub, Lacon IL	309/692-6909
Aug 20*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Aug 23	Summer Cool Tournament, Braxton Seafood Grill, Oak Brook, IL	312/252-7755
Sep 4-7*	National Labor Day Tournament, Raddison Hotel, Indianapolis, IN	317/845-8435
Sep 17*	Third Thursday Bonus Tournament, Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	313/232-9731
Sep 30-Oct 4*	Illinois State Championships and America Cup, Hyatt Hotel, Deerfield, IL	708/945-7801

### OUTSIDE USA

Jun 5-8	Mats Jonasson Australian Nat'l Championship, Regent Hotel, Melbourne	03/822-3730
Jun 25-28	Brazilian Circuit, Le Méridien Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	5511/843-8664
Jun 27*	German Merkur Championship 1992 #6, Curio Haus Hamburg, Germany	0521/64314
Jun 30-Jul 5	First Olympiad of Backgammon & 4th City of Venice Tournament, Italy	041/521-1029
Jul 4*	1992 Kater Cup#4, Café Chantant De Kater, Enschede, Holland	31-53-353115
Jul 6	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/846-1923
Jul 9-12	7th Federal International Tournament, Casino of San Remo, Italy	392/76003705
Jul 13	Victoria Winter Tournament, Botanical Hotel, South Yarra, Australia	03/822-3730
Jul 13-19	1992 World Championship, Loews Monte Carlo Hotel, Monaco	305/527-4033
Jul 22-26	Riveria's Cup Championship, Hôtel Martinez, Cannes, France	142/88 66 45
Jul 31-Aug 3	Australian Open Championships, NSW, Australia	02/369-3620
Aug 3	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/846-1923
Aug 8-9	Weisbaden Cup 1992, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122/16124
Aug 13-16*	Palace Summer Championships, Badrutt's Hotel, St. Moritz, Switzerland	061/331 5816
Aug 15-16*	Sjaelland Open, Frederikssund, Denmark	039/40 06 07
Aug 27-30*	2nd Mitteleuropa Tournament, Casino Nova Gorica, Slovenia	392/48019343
Sep 7*	Hong Kong Club Monthly Tournament, Ladies Recreation Club	852/846-1923
Sep 7*	Victoria Monthly Tournament, Botanical Hotel, South Yarra, Australia	03/822-3730
Sep 12-13*	BIBA Trophy Tournament No. 3, George Hotel, Solihull, England	0522/721630
Sep 26*	Weisbaden Cup 1992, Hotel Fürstenhof-Esplanade, Wiesbaden, Germany	06122/16124

money] are at stake in backgammon, cheaters will be attracted like Willie Sutton to a bank . . . Those who value money and winning more than sport will stay awake nights figuring out new cheating techniques and spend their mornings practicing."

Danny goes on to say that we will not necessarily be capable of detecting the cheaters and then gives us a list to educate us on what to look for. After reading Danny's column, I am surprised that he still wants to play a game where "eternal vigilance" is necessary.

Mr. Yamin and others were wrong in thinking the game "passed me by." I passed

the game by when I realized that life itself is more of an exciting gamble than sitting in a hotel room shaking a dice cup wondering what cheating technique some pathetic pseudo-gambler had invented to use against me.

While I met many wonderful people during my backgammon career, their friendships were not enough to offset the downside of the game. I enjoy stopping by tournaments occasionally to greet people from my past, but it would take a very special, specific circumstance for me to ever play again.

[Continues]

Sometimes I resent the cheaters who "stole" a part of my life. Money can always be replaced, but once integrity is lost, it is gone forever. And sadly, there is very little integrity left in backgammon.—*Kathy Posner, former backgammon player, Chicago, IL*

### "PROBLEMS" WITH THE BACKGAMMON EXAM

The Backgammon Exam III was very interesting. I studied it from two viewpoints. First, how long it took to find the answers and second, what answers I got correct.

My time for comfortably solving the problems was 31 minutes. I had different answers on three of the problems. I question the solutions to Problems 3, 6 and perhaps 8.

In Problem 6, I'm especially interested to know why 6/3, 13/12 is judged superior to 5/3, 13/11. True, Black gets 29 vs. 27 covers with the suggested answer. However, look at the difference when White rolls a joker doubles from the bar. Following 6/3, 13/12, a White 6-6 is devastating

to Black, giving him only four return fly shots (2-5, 4-5). When White rolls 5-5 following Black's 5/3, 13/11, Black gets the four fly shots plus an additional 11 ways to hit White (all aces).

I'd sure be interested to know Danny's thinking on this one.—*Larry Strommen, Indianapolis, IN*

There is a flaw in the solution to Problem 7 of the backgammon exam. In a "call your roll" game, Danny advocates calling an ace for the opening roll which he claims will result in you winning the game *unless* your opponent also calls an ace (which would result in a draw).

In fact, if you call an ace and your opponent calls a 6, you are going to lose if the opponent plays correctly. Here's how to play it:

Opponent: 6-1...13/7, 8/7  
 You: 4-4...24/16 (2)  
 Opponent: 6-6...24/18 (2), 13/7 (2)  
 You: 6-6...16/4 (2)  
 Opponent: 3-3...7/4 (2), 6/3 (2)  
 You: 5-5...3/8 (2), 13/3

Opponent: 4-4...13/5 (2)  
 You: 5-5...13/3 (2)  
 Opponent: 6-6...8/2 (2), 7/1 (2)

At this point, if you bring in four checkers, your opponent hits you and wins. If you bring in only three checkers, your opponent calls 6-6 and wins the race.—*David Rubin, Chicago, IL*

*The answer for Backgammon Exam Problem 3 was questioned by a number of readers. Malcolm Davis offers his analysis of Problem 3 (our Problem #181) on page 8.—Ed.*

### PUB CLUB REUNION

I want to thank all of the players who attended the Pub Club Reunion tournament 11 May. While it was good to see a large group playing, it was also a pleasure to meet and speak with so many (to me) "new" people—or should I call them "oldies"?

Reading the Pub Club newsletters from 1980 which you thoughtfully brought was both amusing and informative. It is good to have an historical—yes, even a cultural appreciation of events from backgammon's past.—*V.W. Zimnicki, director, Pub Club, Villa Park, IL*

*31 players showed their support for the longest-running backgammon club in Chicagoland (and the current state Challenge Cup champions) for a special tournament filled with memories. See "Winner's Corner" on page 6.—Ed.*

[Continued on page 9]

## CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB 1992 BPC PLAYER OF THE YEAR COMPILED THRU 31 MAY

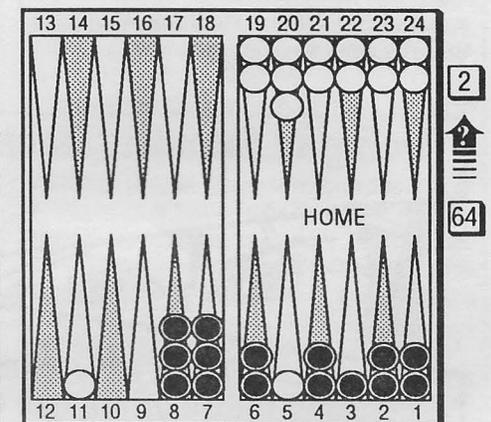
DAVE CRAMER	9.92	Sarg Serges	3.20	Steve Sacher	1.28
GARY KAY	9.92	Herb Roman	3.20	Georgina Flanagan	1.20
DEEB SHALATI	9.60	Peter Berkman	3.20	Bill Davis	1.12
MARY FRANKS	9.04	René Wojtysiak	3.12	Frankie Farjood	1.04
STU KATZ	8.72	John Demian	2.88	Arline Levy	0.96
DAVID ROCKWELL	8.48	Bill Cox	2.80	Leslie Lockett	0.96
DAVID RUBIN	7.84	Ralph Levy	2.80	Kathy Rudnick	0.88
LUCKY NELSON	6.96	John Stryker	2.80	Ron Stur	0.88
PAUL FRANKS	6.48	Joann Feinstein	2.76	Dan Judd	0.76
LENNY LODER	6.40	Ed Buerger	2.72	Patrick Desmond	0.76
PHYLLIS SMOLINSKI	6.24	Barry Miller	2.56	Kurt Warning	0.64
HOWARD MARKOWITZ	6.16	Devin Dallaire	2.56	Stan Kucharz	0.64
YAMIN YAMIN	5.76	Paul Friedman	2.56	Tak Morioka	0.64
DEAN MUENCH	5.68	V.W. Zimnicki	2.56	Jeff Kane	0.56
CHRIS STANFORD	5.28	Bobbie Shifrin	2.36	Larry Lau	0.56
HOWARD RING	5.20	Tim Mabee	2.28	Amy Trudeau	0.48
REGGIE PORTER	4.80	James Colen	1.92	Harold Grote	0.48
BOB EBBELER	4.72	Alice Kay	1.92	Karen Kertz	0.40
JOHN BRUSSEL	4.72	Paul Klein	1.76	Joe Koucharian	0.32
CHRIS KENIK	4.32	Harold Seif	1.68	John Macaluso	0.32
Don Jayhan	4.24	Steve Katz	1.60	Phil Simborg	0.32
Peter Kalba	4.16	Les Moshinsky	1.56	Betsy Miller	0.24
Jolie Lewis	3.72	Femi Owiku	1.28	Fred Gehlhoff	0.24
Judy Brown	3.44	Norma Shyer	1.28	Jill Ferdinand-Brus	0.24
Alex Itkin	3.44	Rich Galeba	1.28	Ken Bond	0.24
Bob Zavoral	3.28	Richard Stawowy	1.28	J.A. Miller	0.20
George Barr	3.20	Scott Goode	1.28	Larry Yakowenko	0.16

For the second month in a row, **DAVID ROCKWELL** is Player of the Month. David earned master points at every BPC May tournament to total 4.40 points. The 8.48 points that Dave has scored over the past two months are enough to place him sixth after five months of 1992 play. A great run, Dave!

May runner's up were Herb Roman (3.20) and Lenny Loder (2.56).

### your move PROBLEM #182

1992 Chicago Open 13 pt. finals. Ralph Schaffner (Black) leads Don Desmond (White), 8 to 5. **SHOULD BLACK DOUBLE? After Double/Take, BLACK TO PLAY 2-1.**



# HONG KONG...

[Continued from page 1]

"Don't worry! I'll only help when you make the wrong play."

During the races, I have an advantage in level of concentration. The last time I bet a trifecta, it was on a trio named something like "Muc-i-Lage," "Stick With Me," and "Soon to be Glue," so I'm the only one in the house not betting.

Well, not actually the only one, but Phil is out jogging, and his girlfriend Becky is out shopping with Alan's girlfriend Nora, and John's fiancée Glerry is meeting a friend from Manila. But I'm the only one in the house... except for Remi, their amah, who is upstairs cleaning right now. And since it is evening, and Remi has seen Phil, and Becky, and Nora, and Glerry all go out, and since John and I are in the living room playing backgammon, and Alan is in his office, the odds are good that there is no one still upstairs sleeping—though one never knows who (or what) might turn up in Alan's room.

If I were Remi, I would pick this time to haul out the vacuum cleaner and vacuum the living room—but Remi doesn't. Perhaps she lacks my exquisite sense of humor.

Alan's last amah, Wilma, had a remarkable sense of humor. Wilma lacked the drive and stamina to attempt something as complex as vacuuming, even in jest. Generally, she sat gazing vacantly at the wall. But if one could breach her remote exterior, one discovered an unexpected well-spring of mirth underneath.

"What's that you're eating, Wilma? French fries?"

"French fries! Ha! Haha! Haha! Haha! Haha! ..."

In the movie "The Sunshine Boys," Walter Matthau claims that words containing the letter K are funnier than other words. It's a damn good thing Wilma wasn't eating Knackwurst.

## Michigan Summer Backgammon Championships

July 24-26, 1992

Holiday Inn & Holidome  
Flint, Michigan

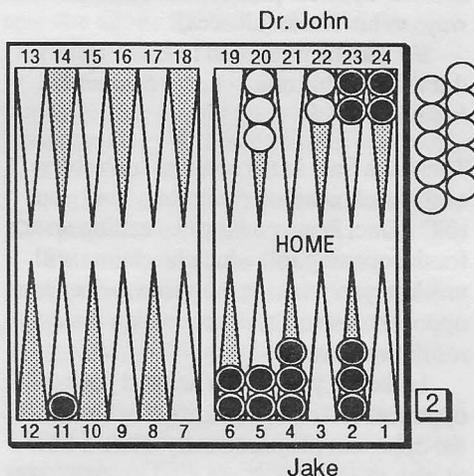
Featuring: World Cup Qualifiers,

100% Return on Open entry fees, July 23 Bonus Tourney.

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MEANWHILE, back at the game...

Money game. **JAKE (BLACK) TO PLAY 5-5.**



Maybe I should break both points, but I play 24/9, 11/6.

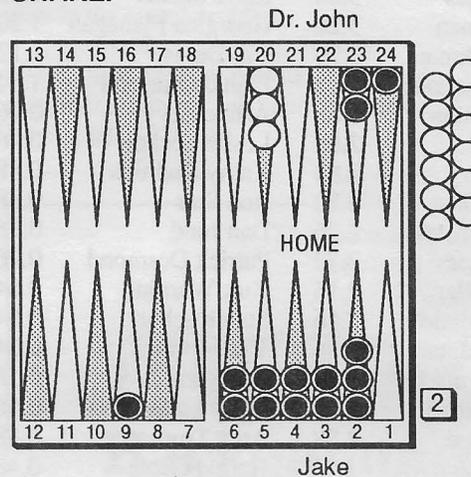
"4-1. Just give me a 4-1."

"Very sporting, John! Only a greedy pig would root for 2-2."

3-3. Just as well I didn't break the 2-point.

3-1. I make my own 3-point.

Money game. **DR. JOHN (WHITE) ON SHAKE.**



2-1!

"Your worst, John. Your very worst."

Patrick has prudently moved beyond arm's length before pointing this out. Not, however, beyond the range of a flying dice cup.

"If I'm giggling, John, it's at Patrick's discomfiture, not yours. After all, what sort of inhuman wretch (hee hee) would snicker at another's (hee hee hee) overwhelming misfortune? Patrick! You should be ashamed. Chinese are supposed to be inscrutable. You have altogether too much scrute!"

I take a deep breath, and empty my mind of impurities. Before me is one of Phil's paintings: a daydreaming penguin standing on an ice floe. Behind him is a string quartet, and emanating from his head is a cartoon thought balloon. In the thought balloon is a penguin standing on an ice floe. Logical. I'm relaxed. I want a roll that is yin, not yang. 1-1 would be all right.

6-5...!!

"Oh, no! The worst. The very worst!"

"In just a minute, Patrick, I'm going to hit you with John's shoe."

5-5.

TO A TAOIST, there is no winning and losing—only a shifting of Yin and Yang. I dismiss the trivialities of earthly existence from my mind and contemplate how long it takes for a backgammon board to drift serenely downward before it smashes into a million fragments among the neon lights of Wan Chai. Δ



### 1992 GOLDEN CIRCUIT

Top 20 through six tournaments

1. Richard Ciecioroko	France	22.36
2. Japp Vischschraper	Holland	14.19
3. Maurice Djemal	Panama	12.90
4. Talmadge Tinsley	Texa	9.03
5. Emil Mortuk	Michigan	7.31
6. Martin De Bruin	Spain	7.26
7. José Salema	Portugal	6.24
8. Uli Koch	Germany	6.02
9. Dove Melo	Holland	3.96
10. Hans W. Capel	Holland	3.96
11. Peter Naguib	Germany	3.72
12. Mario Sequeira	Portugal	3.63
13. Gerhard Scheisser	Germany	3.60
14. Thomas Wolf	Switzerland	3.60
15. Claude Lambert	Belgium	3.12
16. Michel Serrero	France	3.12
17. Bob Wachtel	Pittsburgh	3.12
18. Eric Guedj	France	2.82
19. Neil Kazaross	California	2.52
20. Jason Lester	New York	2.52



# THINKING ABOUT BACKGAMMON

## Part 2

by Chris Bray

In Part 1 of this article (December 1991 CHICAGO POINT) I discussed ways to structure your thinking when on roll. In this article I want to look at what to do when your opponent is on roll. Let's look at two important areas:

- (a) When your opponent is taking a long time thinking about a play, and
- (b) When your opponent doubles you.

Take easier case (a) first. Sometimes the pace of play is such that no time is available for constructive thought. If however, your opponent is taking his time over a move, how best to use that time?

(1) **If you are happy with the position, then mentally switch off and relax.** Long sessions of backgammon are mentally very tiring and an odd moment's respite can help to refresh you. No one can "think" continuously for long periods without respite. Knowing when to think and when to relax is a key to successful backgammon.

(2) **Think about the position in general terms**—i.e., consider your strategy. Chess players are very used to using their opponents' thinking time to plan their basic strategy. I believe that backgammon players should do the same. This is the time to check your basic game plan.

For example, your blitz has stalled and you should now be considering switching to a running game. Far too often, players continue to follow a plan long after the dice have dictated that a change in strategy is required.

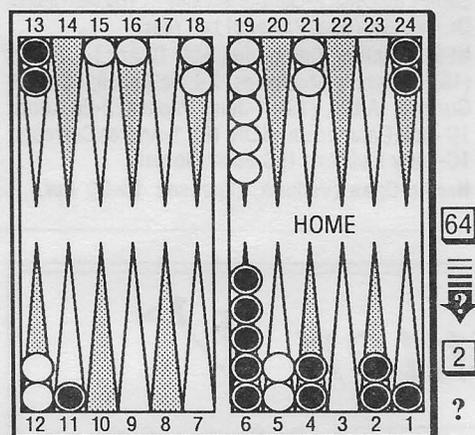
(3) **Imagine how the position will look after your opponent has made his best play** (in your opinion) and then consider how you would play certain dice rolls such as the small doublets which often present a myriad of choices.

Of the above I would stress ensuring that you have the correct strategy. Too little time is spent at all levels of backgammon thinking about game plans—this is an ideal opportunity to correct that mistake. You will be surprised how often your perception of a position changes with just a few moments of calm thought.

Now let's turn to (b)—the complex area of doubling. It's impossible to cover the theory of doubling in one article; however,

here are some general pointers. Consider this position:

Money game. White doubles Black. **SHOULD BLACK TAKE?**



As Black, you are doubled. Do you accept? I'll come back to this position at the end of the article. For now, just write down your decision and your reasons for making it.

Now let's consider some of the points you should have taken into consideration:

(1) **99% of all players take and drop far too quickly.** In a typical game of backgammon, a player may have to make anywhere between five and 50 checker decisions. Typically he will be doubled only once.

It is a well-proven fact that errors in cube decisions account for far greater swings in equity than most checker play errors (obviously, there are exceptions). Yet, players still make cube decisions in an instant, consistently giving up huge chunks of equity with erroneous takes/drops.

In our example, how long did you take to make your decision? Anyone who can access all the factors of this position and make the correct cube decision in under one minute is, in my opinion, a genius. Most people, even when concentrating, think very inefficiently. They tend to go over the same ground more than once and are often diverted into irrelevant side issues. I would defy anyone to obtain a full understanding of the diagrammed position in under five minutes.

I well appreciate that social pressure often does not allow us the luxury of such a long time to think, but I would stress again that *cube decisions are critical*. Try to take as long as you need. Don't be hurried by your opponent (or by your chouette partners) into a hasty decision.

(2) **What would your general strategy be and what percentage of gammons would you lose by adopting this strategy?**

Again, the speed merchants amongst you probably won't have given this a thought. I believe that the single most ignored factor in drop/take decisions is the gammon percentage. However, this should be a major factor in your decision. A slight increase in the gammon percentage can turn an apparent take into a crystal-clear drop.

Different game plans lead to different gammon percentages so it is vital to have a clear idea of your strategy and the risk (in terms of gammons) that this strategy will incur. I'll wager that not more than one in 50 readers considered their strategy or the type of games that could evolve from the diagrammed position.

(3) **Consider the volatility of the position.** Many people make their cube decisions by simply comparing the position based upon their memory of similar positions (i.e., their experience). For example, "I have a 3-point holding game with racing equity. It must be a take."

*Experience alone is insufficient. Each position has unique features.* Volatile positions such as ours require considerable thought. The next round of rolls will be crucial.

How many rolls are market-losers? Several articles in Roy Friedman's excellent *LeadingEdge* magazine showed that moving a checker one pip could make the difference between a drop and a take. Sadly, for the lazy player, analysis of specific rolls or groups of rolls is a requirement for a full understanding of volatile positions.

Obviously, the opponent factor must also be taken into account, but this is less of a problem when being cubed than when offering the cube. The three factors I have briefly discussed are crucial to the accuracy of the decision-making process of taking and dropping.

**HAVING READ THE BODY** of the article, take time to reconsider your initial decision before reading further. And now . . . the solution:

This position occurred in a 1991 Monte Carlo World Championship match between Michael Meyburg (White) and Paul Magriel (Black). Although Meyburg elected not to double, in the post-match analysis, two world class players thought the double to be clear with the only question being whether it was a drop or a take.

Eventually, they agreed to play it as a proposition. The result was that the taker soon packed his bags and slunk away into the night. This is a drop and by a substantial margin. The reason? Because Black is so

[Continued on page 7]

who did what

# WINNER'S CORNER



Apr.—May 1991

**Circuito Del Rio De La Plata** (Buenos Aires, Argentina; Mondays in Apr.)... Championship Winners: Oscar Franco, Ricardo Ruax, Christian Guerra, Sergio Gelabert. Junior Winners: Daniel Zylberman, Juan Balayan, Daniel Branchesi, Paula Estacolchic... AAB tournament director Claudio Salamone reports an average Monday night attendance of 200 players.

**Sunday Bimonthly Tournament** (Pittsburgh, PA; 5 April)... Open (16): 1-Ron Weingrad, 2-Abbas Zaltash, 3-Marc Ringuette.

**4th GNYBC Invitational Championship** (Woodbury, NY; 10 Apr.)... Club Championship (7): 1-Dr. Bob Hill, 2-Fast Eddie Pavilonis. Mini-Blitz (64): 1-Fast Eddie Pavilonis, 2-George Sackley... The win makes Dr. Bob GNYBC's Player of the Year.

**NEBC Monthly** (Cambridge, MA; 12 Apr.)... Expert (18): 1-Connie Machakos, 2-Linc Bedell; 1C-Herb Gurland. A Div. (19): 1-Jerry Padova, 2-Ed Ahola; 1C-Julia Garabedian. B Div. (8): 1-Andres Corredor; 1C-Larry Liebster; 1LC-John Cloherty.

**Nordic Open** (Vedbæk, Denmark; 16-20 Apr.)...

Championship (45): 1-Michael Herbst (DEN), 2-Manfred Hollenderer (Ger); 1C-Mario Sequeira (Por); 1LC-Carlos Mayer (Ger). Advanced Intermediate (48): 1-Johan Aschan (Swe), 2-Di Bella (Ita); 1C-Lasse Madsen; 1LC-Wolfgang Griese (Ger). Intermediate (64): 1-Jakob Kristensen (Den), 2-Niels Winther (Den); 1C-Georges Velando (Den); 1LC-John Andersen (Den). Beginner (59): 1-Theis Hansen (Den), 2-Jens Overgaard (Den); 1C-Torben Jensen (Den); 1LC-Thomas Boel (Den). Viking Kickoff—Odin's Raven (128): 1-Jerry Grandell (Swe); Thor's Hammer (256): 1-Jens Neergaard (Den). Team Event (28): 1-"Akropolis" of Denmark (Bill Nördstrom, Jan Fania, Menashe Tal). International Challenge: 1-Sweden, 2-Denmark. Ladies Challenge: 1-Sweden, 2-Denmark.

**Rscards Spring 1992 Modem Tourney** (GEnie; Apr.—May)... Open: 1-Jim Wilson (MI), 2-Kurt Schurecht (IL), 3/4-Blake Sorem (MD) / David Montgomery (CA).

**13th Granite State Open** (Jaffrey, NH; 1-3 May)... Open (24): 1-James Colen (MA), 2-Ed Pavilonis (NY); 1C-Antoinette Williams (NY), 2C-Sethe Towle (MA). Intermediate (10): 1-Gil Evans, 2-Andres Corredor (RI); 1C-Jerry Padova (NH), 2C-Gardner Soule (VT).

**1992 Kater Cup No. 3** (Enschede, Netherlands; 2 May)... Championship (28): 1-Thomas Kondring (GER), 2-Vincent Versteeg (NL); 1C-Jeroen Sikkema (NL). Beginner (21): 1-Joachim Weterling (NL), Petra Jost (GER); 1C-Alex Slegt (NL).

**Milwaukee Sunday Bimonthly** (Milwaukee, WI; 3 May)... Open (11): 1/2-Jeff Kane / Bob Holyon; 1C-Fred Gehlhoff.

**1st Annual Mid-Illinois Doubles** (Normal, IL; 9 May)... Open (4 teams): 1-Gary Daniels & Lane O'Connor, 2-Cinda King & Tak Morioka.

**Pub Club Reunion Tournament** (Villa Park, IL; 11 May)... Open (31): 1/2-Yamin Yamin / Earl Risch / 4-Bobbie Shifrin / Jim Opre. 1C/2C-Judy Feinstein / Harold Grote... Current Pub Club director V.W. Zimmnicki reports that faces from the past gathered to honor the longest-running backgammon club in Chicagoland (Est. 1979). The entrants included Pub Club founder/director Jeff Henry and Pub Club West director Dave Utermark.

**Isle Of Man Backgammon Championship** (Douglas, Isle of Man; 16-17 May)... Championship (28): 1-Hercules Robinson, Baron of Culcreuch, 2-Peter Haslett, 3/4-Michael Haslett / Ralph Haslett; 1C-Joey Crook; 1LC-John McCabe.

**4th Championship of Great Britain** (Douglas, Isle of Man; 25-29 May)... Championship (35): 1-Jerry Grandell (SWE), 2-Brian Busfield (UK), 3/4-Rudi Huber (SCOT) / Robert Wachtel (US); 1C1st-Antoinette Williams (US), 1C2nd-Steve Bibby (GB); 2C1st-Sami Akirov (GB), 2C2nd-Alan Steffen (US); LC1-Dr. Khadr (GB), LC2-Rick Janowski (GB). Intermediate (18): 1-Jonathan Bennetts (CAN), 2-Hercules Robinson, Baron of Culcreuch (IOM); 1C1st-Peter Ozanne (GB); LC1-Paul Turnbull (GB). Viking Kickoff: 1-George Rolf (HOL), 2-Rick Janowski (GB). Teams of Three (15): 1-"Men at Work" (Jim Moore, Donald Hatt, Harry Beere)... Hercules and Bridget announced their retirement from organizing backgammon tournaments at this event. However, they will continue to remain active in the game.

**Boston Symphony Orchestra Benefit** (Cambridge, MA; 15-17 May)... Expert (12): 1-Roy Friedman, 2-Rick Barabino; 1C-Ed Abou-Zeid. A Div. (8): 1-Bob Mojahed, 2-Ed Ahola; 1C-Bill Barrows. B Div. (5): 1-Jeremy Bagai, 2-Patrice Robertie. Δ

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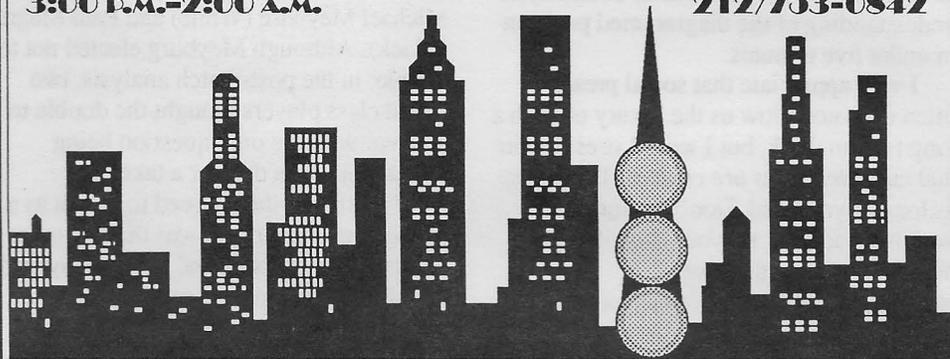
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## A CLASSIC RECORDING

Contest by Rick Janowski

Shown below is an excerpt from *Back-Gammon, or The Battle of the Friars, A Tragic Comic Tale* poetically written by Daniel Bellamy in 1734. This 258-year-old passage includes, to my knowledge, the earliest recording of a backgammon game. The next recorded game that I am aware of appears more than 100 years later in *Backgammon: Its History and Practice* (1844).

**THE CHALLENGE:** Diagram the final position following Vituleo's sixth move that according to the last line of the poem, eventually results in him backgammoning Fabris for three points. *Hint:* The rolls are shown in italics. Some deduction will be necessary.

**PRIZE:** \$25 and a *Lady Luck* wristwatch.

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For the first Onset Fabris did prepare,  
And *Quator Size* began the mighty War.  
(This was a Service he perform'd by Rote,  
And got the Point that suited with his Coat.)  
Vituleo then, *two Sixes* by his Side,  
Came rushing forward with a manly Stride.

Fabris as yet conceal'd  
his inward Pain,  
*Duce Ace* oppos'd, but  
Oh! oppos'd in vain:  
Homeward three Paces  
mov'd, he singly  
stood,  
And stopt directly in  
Vituleo's Road.  
This is my Pris'ner, Sir,  
Vituleo cries,  
And if he meets me  
once again, he dies.



Fabris attempts to place him in the Field,  
And *Sixes* were his Buckler and his Shield.  
With those, alas! he no Admittance found:  
The Enemy began to seize the Ground.  
With *Treys* into an empty Space he ran,  
And got a Guard too for his Naked Man.

*Trois Ace* for Fabris did Admittance gain,  
And he possess'd him of the homeward  
Plain.

*Duce Ace* stept forth, and took him on the  
Pate;  
He falls a Victim to his adverse Fate:  
And when he came again; he came too  
late.  
No Room for his untimely *Quators* now;  
*Two Treys* again pursu'd the fatal blow,  
Filling a Space, and  
moving forwards too.

Fabris attempts the  
Trenches once again;  
But *Cinque* and  
*Quator* made th' At-  
tempt in vain.  
Vituleo presses on with  
*Cinque* and *Duce*,  
And made the future  
Blows of little Use.  
This for a Rampart he  
design'd to keep,  
Or'e which the nimblest Warrior could  
not leap.

In safety now the Olive Squadrons move;  
In vain the Ethiopian Pris'ners strove,  
In Number Three; they could no farther  
go;  
Coop'd up within the Trenches of the Foe.  
The Friar almost did his Faith renounce;  
And lost a tripple Victory at once. Δ

## Thinking . . .

[Continued from page 5]

stripped he has to split men as soon as possible to have any realistic game-winning chances (otherwise he ends up with a busted ace-point game). White then quite often blitzes Black and wins a gammon, his 5-point anchor providing him with long-term equity in variations where the blitz fails.

**TO GET A FEEL FOR THE POSITION,** I rolled it out 36 times with the following results:

White won a gammon 10 times.  
White won a single game 19 times.  
Black won a single game 7 times.

White's net gain was 64 points (!) in 36 games compared with 36 points if Black correctly drops. Mine was only a small sample but it certainly convinced me not to take the take side in a proposition.

Most people I show this position to completely overlook the gammon factor when evaluating their cube decision. The expert who played the take side of the proposition no doubt made the same mistake. Δ

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Chi's, 4415 N. Rockwood, Peoria. Sue Will (309/692-6909).

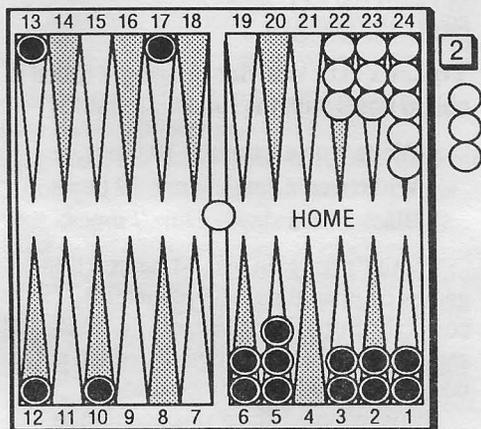
**PRIME BG CLUB OF CHICAGO:** Tourn. Friday, 7:00 P.M. at  
TJ's Lounge, Radisson Hotel, 4500 W. Touhy, Lincolnwood.  
Joann Feinstein (708/674-0120).

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

**PROBLEM #181  
SOLVED**

by Malcolm Davis

Problem #3 from Backgammon Exam III. 11-point match. White leads Black, 10 to 8. **BLACK TO PLAY 4-3.**



I've long contended that backgammon's deceptive appearance conceals its identity as the most difficult of all games. Problem #181 is an excellent case in point.

Finishing near the bottom of the class, I'm sure, in the challenging Backgammon Exam III offered at this year's Midwest Backgammon Championships (20-22 March in Oak Brook, IL), I was especially curious to know the right answers to the ten questions included in the 20 minute exercise.

Upon reading the official solution to Problem #3 (10/6, 17/14), I casually remarked to Midwest Championships director Bill Davis that I was willing to play my solution of 13/10, 12/8 against the given answer as a proposition.

When pressed to expound, I gave my usual reason: "It is just *clearly* the right play." This, in spite of the fact that at least two world class players "got it right" and were supported by a third.

Last month, I was asked to defend my play in the June CHICAGO POINT. Realizing that in this instance, my usual reason would not be sufficiently persuasive, I embarked on a two-week investigation to either prove or disprove the correctness of my solution.

Utilizing Tom Johnson's and Tom Weaver's excellent, but yet unfinished computer program work ("Expert Backgammon" for the IBM), I "rolled out" a 1296 cross-section of every possible "slotting" play after 10/6, 17/14 by Black assuming a fan by White. (The ability to slot with almost any number on the next roll, as well as maximum outfield coverage, was given by the experts as the reason

for 10/6, 17/14. The computer did not slot when left to its own devices.)

Weighing the "non-fans" with consistent assumptions suggests an approximate no-cube equity for Black of +0.11. Incidentally, not slotting "plays out" to a higher no-cube equity for Black (around +0.13), but the reader should draw no firm conclusions regarding whether slotting is correct, as this is not our focus.

A 1296 cross-section roll-out of 13/10, 12/8 produced an equity for Black of +0.15.

This summarized research was concurrently supplemented with data from another program. With some help from Gerry Tesauro at IBM Corporation, the new "TD-Gammon" (recently reviewed in *Inside Backgammon*) supported the superiority of 13/10, 12/8 with a no-cube roll-out winning percentage of 63% vs. 59% for 10/6, 17/14. (By the way, "TD-Gammon," having played around 300,000 games of backgammon in it's learning "lifetime," did not rank 10/6, 17/14 in its top four plays.)

A close choice, but I believe the eight vs. three "close-out" number advantage swings the equity in favor of 13/10, 12/8.

The foregoing is admittedly a non-tournament, cubeless analysis employing several "loose" assumptions and utilizing computer programs that play less than perfectly. Additionally, White is allowed full value for gammons which is not the case in the actual problem.

Nevertheless, I believe there are enough indicators to provide the reader with more than an "off-hand" reason to favor 13/10, 12/8.  $\Delta$

**AMALGAMATION**

Visiting BPC in May: **James Colen (MA)**, **Jon Viotor (CA)**, **Mario Madrigal (Costa Rican Backgammon Association)**... Michigan Summer Championships director **Carol Joy Cole** couldn't be prouder of her son **Chris Cole** who last month, won the U.S. National Racquetball Championship in Houston, TX... **Tom Johnson** will have his program "Expert Backgammon" in Dallas, Texas at World Cup III (3-9 Aug.) to challenge two-time World Champion **Bill Robertie** in an even money exhibition ... Although the Isle of Man's **Hercules and Bridget (Baron & Baroness of Culcreuch)** have retired from the organizational end of backgammon tournaments, they are available to direct events anywhere in the world. Their fee? Air fare and hotel accommodations only... The Chicagoland Pair O'Dice Backgammon Club suspended operations last month. The management of Flat Tops Sports Bar (Norridge, IL) felt there was more profit to be made on Friday evenings in the renting their banquet room out to larger groups. Director **Gary Kay** has not ruled out reopening his club at a later date. Incidentally, we wish Gary a speedy recovery from his emergency surgery last month... We wonder how many backgammon players feel about BG like **Billie Jean King** feels about tennis when she says: "I hate to lose far more than I love to win."  $\Delta$

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## CUT DOWN TO TWO DIVISIONS AT MEDIUM-SIZED REGIONAL TOURNAMENTS

by Steve Hast

I had an idea that could be an improvement for medium sized regional events such as our Annual Pittsburgh Charity Tournament. We usually draw 60-70 players with divisional breakdowns of Open: 25-29, Intermediate: 25-29, and Novice: 10-14.

Wouldn't it make more sense to cut down to two divisions, say Open/Advanced and Intermediate/Novice, thereby surely filling at least a 32 bracket in each division?

Top division entry fees would be based on the Advanced level (i.e., \$125) with a mandatory side pool fee for all Open level players (i.e., \$100). Naturally, the Advanced players could pay the additional side fee and thus give themselves the chance to win more money; however, that would be their option.

The draw sheet could be drawn in one of two ways: either segregate the Advanced and Open players for as long as possible, or have a totally random draw. This method provides Advanced players with top level competition at a lower entry fee and a reasonable chance to cash. Perhaps this inexpensive Open experience would give borderline players the confidence to step up to Open level competition at other tournaments.

The Novice/Intermediate division would work the same way. It could have a \$25 entry fee with an Intermediate side pool charge of say \$35.

A Calcutta auction would be held for the Open/Advanced division only, thus giving the borderline money-oriented players no additional incentive to compete below their level of ability.

I firmly believe that most, if not all players like to win, and the more they can win, the better. For those people travelling to out-of-town tournaments, the problem of providing them with a decent field to allow them the opportunity to cover expenses and win additional money must be addressed.

Please, please, please write to me or the CHICAGO POINT with your thoughts on this subject. Your answers and suggestions could be instrumental in changing the format of the Pittsburgh Charity Tournament next February.—Steve Hast, president, Pittsburgh Backgammon Association, 3560 Ridgewood Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235

## LETTERS...

[Continued from page 3]

### TROUBLE IN OHIO

Thanks for sending me organizational info on backgammon. I agree with you about the desirability of having food and drinks to go along with the games. Over the years, I've organized both chess clubs and some chess events at restaurant for this reason.

Unfortunately, the liquor laws in Ohio and the busy-beaver activities of Ohio Liquor agents make it inadvisable, if not impossible to have a game like backgammon at any place with a liquor license. I recently reconfirmed this with the manager of a local Bombay Bicycle Club restaurant. (In Ohio, attempts to hold USCF-rated chess tournaments—a game of supposedly 100% skill—at bars have resulted in raids with the owners hauled into court!)

I'm thinking of looking for meeting rooms at restaurants that don't have a liquor license, but there may be very few such places that also meet location, price and "atmosphere" objectives for the club. And the outlook may not be bright because in any case, we have to contend with the state gambling laws and the super-moralistic county prosecutor and sheriff.

But if a backgammon club ever gets off the ground here, I'll be sure to notify you.—David Moeser, Cincinnati Chess Fed. Δ

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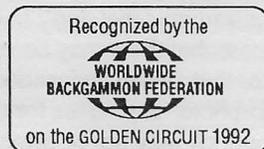
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at Park Hotel.  
8:00 p.m. Welcoming cocktail in Park Hotel lounge.

### Tuesday, 25 August

- 10:30 a.m. Visit to Postojna Cave.  
6:00-7:30 p.m. Second Blackjack seminar at the Casino.  
7:30-8:00 p.m. Registration at Park Hotel.  
8:00 p.m. Blackjack cocktail.

### Wednesday, 26 August

- 10:30 a.m. Trip to Lipica.  
5:30-6:00 p.m. Final registration: Blackjack tournament  
(100.000 Italian Lire).  
6:00-9:00 p.m. Blackjack tournament at the Casino.  
9:00 p.m. Blackjack cocktail.

### Thursday, 27 August

- 10:30 a.m. Casino Nova Gorica Tennis Cup for players  
and friends.  
7:00-8:00 p.m. Registration at Park Hotel.  
8:00 p.m. Tennis cocktail in Park Hotel lounge.  
10:00 p.m. Public draw for BG Warm-up tournament.  
10:30 p.m. Warm-up tournament commences. Play in  
Jackpots and Speedy Mini-Jackpots begin.

### Friday, 28 August

- 10:30 a.m. Casino Nova Gorica Tennis Cup continues.  
7:00-8:00 p.m. Backgammon registration at the Park Hotel.  
8:00 p.m. Welcoming cocktail in Park Hotel lounge.  
10:00 p.m. Final registration: Main Backgammon tour-  
nament (Open-300.000, Advanced-100.000,  
Limited-50.000 Italian Lire).  
10:30 p.m. Public draw and start of play. Play in Jack-  
pots and Speedy Mini-Jackpots.

### Saturday, 29 August

- 10:30 a.m. Casino Nova gorica Tennis Cup continues.  
4:00 p.m. Main tournament continues.  
5:00 p.m. Start of Progressive Consolation tournament.  
5:30 p.m. Start of Jackpots and Speedy Mini-Jackpots.  
8:00 p.m. Backgammon cocktail in Park Hotel lounge.  
8:00-10:30 p.m. Dinner with Auction.  
10:30 p.m. Franz Josef Super Jackpot. Play continues.

### Sunday, 30 August

- 3:00 p.m. Start of Last Chance tournament, Finals,  
Jackpots and Speedy Mini-Jackpots.  
8:30 p.m. Schöbrunn Dinner Party and Awards Cer-  
emony at Park Hotel.

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