

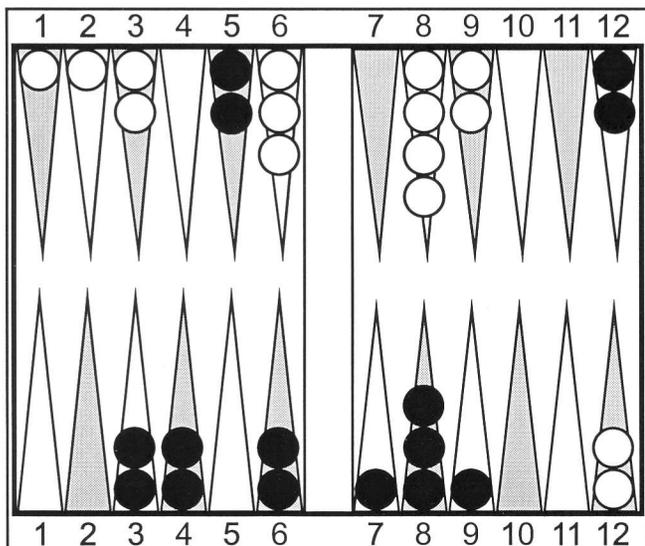


Hoosier Backgammon Club

January 2004

Think Before You Reach!

By Chuck Bower



Position 1.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.

Black to play 5-5?

I suspect over 95% of the readers of this (and most) backgammon newsletters play backgammon over-the-board (OTB). Most of them also prefer problems presented as they would occur OTB. In contrast to playing on the computer, when you're playing on a real board there is no display telling you the pipcount, so you don't see a pipcount on the above diagram either.

Some players never count pips and others only do so when they're faced with a racing cube decision. There are supposed shortcuts where you count crossovers only, or assign the same pipcount to any checker in a certain zone. Sometimes these shortcuts work, but then so does flipping a coin. Serious players long ago

2003 *Player of the Year* Sean Garber

Sean has been playing with the club almost 10 years with Sean's game showing marked improvement in the last couple years. By midyear, Player of the Year started to look like a two-player race between and Sean and last year's Player of the Year, Jim Curtis. By November, it was a true two-player race with only a 39-point lead by Sean. Sean won Player of the Month 4 times and Jim twice in 2003. It came down to the last Wednesday of the year with Sean coming out on top. Congratulations to Sean with his first **Player of the Year** award.

HBCs 2003 Awards Tournament

Sunday - February 8th, 2004

Arni's Restaurant (875-7034)

3443 West 86th Street (west of Walmart)

Registration: 12 Noon

Awards: 12:30 PM

Play Begins: 12:45 PM

Open Division: \$20 with \$10 Op Spool

Limited Div: \$8

Format: Main-Consolation

realized that pipcounting, although not the most exciting part of the game, is sometimes necessary to maximize the equity of a decision.

There are many pipcounting techniques and it's not my purpose to even recommend one, let alone step through them. Nack Ballard is currently writing a book on the subject (hopefully spending considerably more time explaining how to apply the pipcount once you know it). Magriel did a nice job in his classic **BACKGAMMON** in detailing different methods. That's always a good place to start.

Often the relative pipcount (difference between individual players' pipcounts) is sufficient, and that's the case in the Position 1. If you haven't already counted, stop now and at least get the relative count before continuing.

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Think Before You Reach! ...continues...

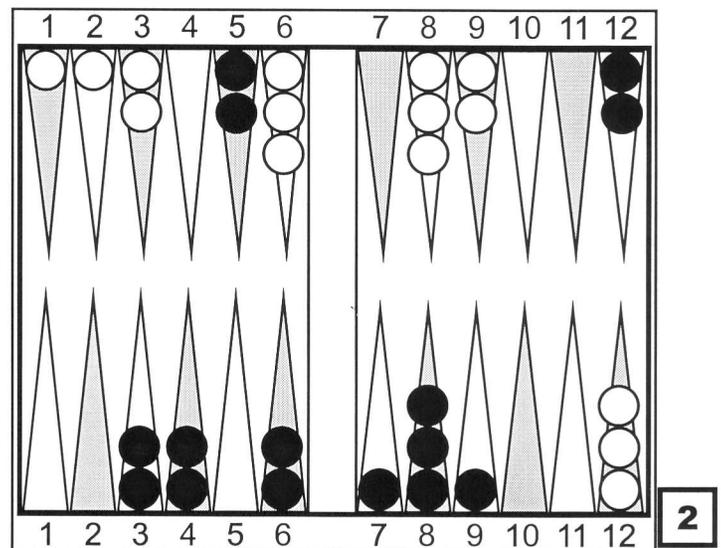
5-5 is a great racing roll. I wonder how many players when faced with the above position OTB would simply reach across the table and grab the two checkers off the 20-point without giving the position much thought. Many more would look for alternate plays, see that not only is the 3-point made but the 8-point is stacked, and then reach, again without thinking about the pipcount.

Before rolling, Black trailed by 29 pips, meaning that White will be on roll with a 9-pip lead. In a straight race, that much of a lead would be an initial money double most of the time (actually anytime White's pipcount is 110 or less) and a money pass if White has fewer than 70 pips. Black should realize that his winning chances aren't very good if he chooses to convert this to a straight race by playing 20/10(2).

Most of the time when the opponent still has checkers on the midpoint, a player owning the 20-point has an easy money take, regardless of the pipcount deficit, and if the opponent has stripped outfield checkers or other awkwardness, the position might not even be a double. Combining these two doubling benchmarks, Black should see that staying behind is a serious contender compared to running.

What about stopping partway, moving 20/15(2) and then either 13/8(2) or play two checkers into the home board (such as 8/3, 7/2)? This isn't much different than the straight running play since White will have several chances to jump over that outpost with 4-5, 4-6, 5-6, 2-2, 4-4, 5-5, or 6-6, a total of 10/36 clearing rolls every time he tosses the dice.

As awkward as this roll plays, a GNU-bg rollout indicates any play which includes moving the back checkers is an error by 0.04 equity units (2% game winning chances) or more. Several plays are in close competition for **best**. In fact, choose any four of the following: 13/8, 13/8, 8/3, 9/4, 7/2 and you'll be within less than 0.02 of the best play. The two top finishers were 13/3, 13/8, 7/2 and 13/3, 13/8, 9/4.



Position 2.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.

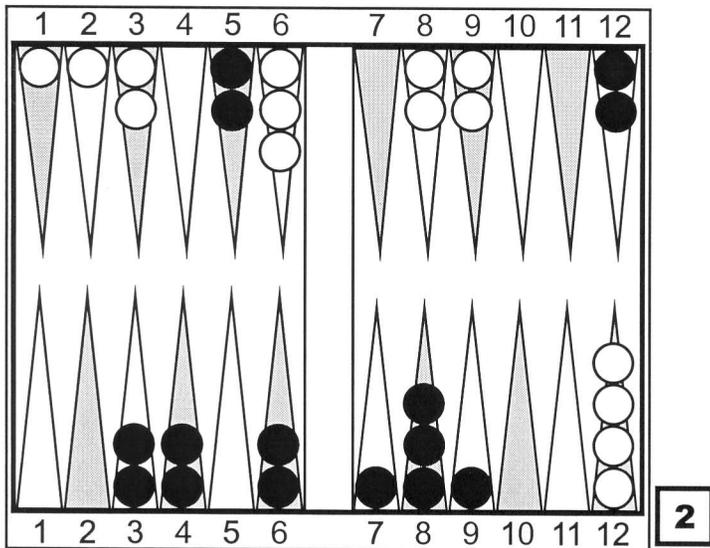
Black to play 5-5?

Here I've moved one of White checkers from his 8-point back to his midpoint, a change of 5 pips. Now after moving, Black will trail by only 4 pips. He's still behind, but not by so much. How much does that change affect the choice of plays?

A GNU-bg rollout says this matters quite a bit. Now staying on the 20-point is at least 0.02 equity units worse than simply turning this into a straight race by moving 20/10(2). 20/15(2), 13/8(2) is almost as good as running completely since one side or the other will likely break contact soon.

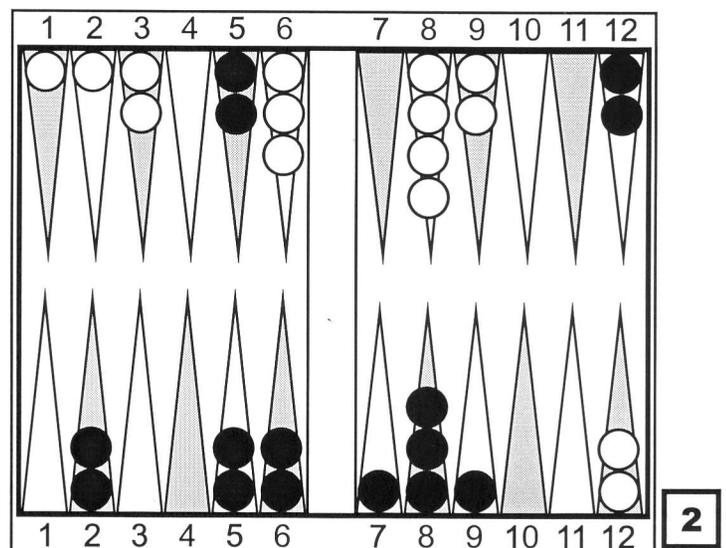
The change in choice of moves isn't completely due to game winning chances, although that is most of it. The match score and cube location are such that White's gammon wins are worth considerably more than Black's gammon wins. Staying back leads to a bit over 1.5% gammons by each side. Getting the worst in that deal, Black is better off breaking contact.

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Position 3.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.
Black to play 5-5?



Position 4.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.
Black to play 5-5?

Here I moved another checker from White's 8-point to his midpoint and now the pip-count difference is 19, converting to a difference of only 1 after Black's move. Black is still an underdog to win the game but now staying back is quite costly, at the level of 0.09 equity units. Black wins 3.5% more games by running and avoids the few (2%) costly gammons. Note that as the race gets close, Black may be forced to run off the 20-point before White bears in, taking away some expected shot equity from the **stay behind** play.

The veteran student of the game knows that few real-life situations are never as simple as is presented in the books or newsletter articles. Position 4 drives home this point. I've taken Position 2 and kept the pipcount the same (White ahead by 24), but I've rearranged Black's home board. In all previous positions Black held the 3- and 4-points, causing most 5's to stack up on already held points. Instead in position 4 Black owns the 2- and 5-points. Now 8/3(2) in particular and also 9/4 fill in the home board.

In Position 2, running was correct by 0.02 over staying. In Position 4 with the same pipcount as Position 2, staying back on the 20-point is once again best. 13/3(2) wins 0.8% more games than plays which stop on the 15-point and 1.3% more games than running all the way. The 1.6% gammon losses offset the advantage of staying back somewhat, but in a fairly close contest, staying on the 20-point is between 0.010 and 0.024 better than departing.

Player of the Month of December was **Butch Meese** with **179** gammon points.

	December 3	December 10	December 17
1st	Jim Curtis	Butch Meese	Butch Meese
2nd	Josh Riddell	Sean Garber	Alan Haas
2nd	Butch Meese	Terry Bateman	...

HBC 2003 Final Standings					
Sean Garber	1469	Mark Swanson	79	Dr. Bob Hill	20
Jim Curtis	1402	Jon Vietor	76	Brian Nelson	18
Butch Meese	1057	Kevin Heacox	76	Sam Shade	16
Chuck Stimming	1015	Dave Groner	74	Ray Woo	16
Larry Strommen	866	Katya Beshparova	68	Bill Gheen	12
Rick Steele	860	Mike Friedman	54	Alan Tavel	12
Terry Bateman	697	Alan Haas	54	Charlie Haley	10
Woody Woodworth	691	Joe Miller	51	Larry Buckingham	10
Scott Day	675	John O'Hagan	45	Fred Kalantari	10
Josh Riddell	612	Rica Tarnoff	36	Derrick Swanson	10
Mary Ann Meese	502	Laura Pinkerton	36	Merle Feldman	10
Gabe Stiasny	306	Jeff Flowers	28	Debra Rosenblum	8
Al Gomez	294	Stuart Thomson	28	Jim Roston	8
Dan Moore	242	Dave Cardwell	26	Martha Ghio	8
Kirk Holmes	154	Peter Kalba	24	Jake Jacobs	8
Frank Scott	154	Ben Elliott	24	Karen Davis	8
Chuck Bower	116	Jack Scofield	22	Janice Gordon	8
Terry Leahy	80	Steve Brown	20	Mary Franks	8

ABT Backgammon Tournament Schedule

Jan 16-18	Carolina Invitational Charlotte, NC Jeb Horton 704.814.0850
Feb 13-15	Pittsburgh Championships Pittsburgh, PA Steve Hast 412.823.7500
Feb 26-29	2004 Southern Open St. Simons Island, GA Dave Cardwell 770.333.1876
Mar 19-21	2004 Midwest Championships Lisle, IL Bill Davis 773.583.6464
Apr 16-18	Ohio State Championships Cleveland, OH Joe Miller 330.966.2811
May 28-31	25th Annual Chicago Open Oak Brook Hills, IL Joann Feinstein 847.674.0120
July 1-4	Michigan Summer Championships Novi, MI Carol Joy Cole 810.232.9731
Jul 30-Aug 1	Thousand Islands Tournament Alexandria Bay, NY Renée Rosenbloom 585.396.0969
Jul 30-Aug 1	Wisconsin State Championships Madison, WI Tom Machaj 608.516.9109
Aug 12-15	Georgia Championships Atlanta, GA Dave Cardwell 770.333.1876
Sep 3-6	52nd Indiana Open Indianapolis, IN Butch & Mary Ann Meese 317.255.8902
Oct 8-10	Illinois State Championships Springfield, IL Randy Armstrong 217.528.0117
Oct 15-17	Florida State Championships Ft. Lauderdale, FL Elayne Feinstein 954.564.0340

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