



HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB

Special 8-Page Issue!
Tribute To Ralph Roberts
Interview with Kent Goulding

March 1991
Volume VIII No. 3

HBC 1990 Awards Tournament		
Open Division (13)	Intermediate (12)	Novice (4)
1st Don Desmond - Chicago 2nd Butch Meese - Indy 2nd Mick Dobratz - Indy	1st Dave Sandler - Louisville 2nd Peg Simsic - Indy 2nd Kevin McLeaster - Indy	1st Lara Simsic - Indy

Weekly Results	Feb 7th	Feb 21st	Feb 28th
Open 1st	<i>Ken Bruck</i>	<i>Jeff Baker</i>	<i>Butch Meese</i>
2nd	<i>Wendy Kaplan</i>	<i>Judy McHale</i>	<i>Brian Nelson</i>
2nd	<i>Larry Strommen</i>	<i>Chuck Stimming</i>	<i>Ken Bruck</i>
Intermediate		<i>Holly Stowe</i>	<i>Holly Stowe</i>

HOOSIER PIPS: Wendy Kaplan's store, **The Trading Library**, was voted the friendliest store of the month in Broad Ripple...This special issue left no room for the match between Neil Karazoss and Mika Lidov but will continue next month...HBC welcomes new players Holly Stowe and John Danyluck...HBC incorrectly reported Ken Bruck winning second on January 3rd - It should have been Mick Dobratz...Congrats to Judy McHale who placed for the first time on February 21st...HBC is searching for a new place to play on Thursday evening. If you have any suggestions call the HBC Hotline.

1991 HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB Gammon Point Standings as of March 1st.						
HBC Player of the Month: Butch Meese with 2.12 points.						
1)	Don Woods	4.00	Dave Sandler	0.80	John Stryker	0.20
2)	Ken Bruck	3.74	Brian Nelson	0.78	Dave Fey	0.20
3)	Butch Meese	2.76	Howard Givel	0.72	Mark Mikolon	0.20
4)	Kevin McLeaster	2.54	John O'Hagan	0.64	Frank Scott	0.20
5)	Wendy Kaplan	2.42	Woody Woodworth	0.62	Philip Degen	0.20
6)	Chuck Stimming	2.08	Dave Cardwell	0.60	Scott Kaplan	0.20
7)	Mick Dobratz	2.02	Gabe Stiasny	0.60	Frank DeSandre	0.16
8)	David Smith	2.00	Kay Beck	0.40	Russ Osborne	0.16
9)	Judy McHale	2.00	Jim Curtis	0.40	Lee Ann Dobratz	0.10
10)	Terry Kuchenbrod	2.00	Ves Johnson	0.40	Amber Wiesler	0.10
	Mary Ann Meese	1.84	Holly Stowe	0.40	Cynda White	0.10
	Rick Reahard	1.76	George Crawford	0.32	Triston Wilbrandt	0.10
	Don Desmond	1.60	Lara Simsic	0.30	Stu Whitcomb	0.08
	Jeff Baker	1.60	Greg Varbinov	0.28	Donna Susens	0.08
	Larry Strommen	1.34	Gino Agresti	0.26	Russ Hoser	0.08
	Peg Simsic	1.24	Cyrus Mobed	0.24	Tom Hendryx	0.08
	Monte Bowman	0.92	Scott Richardson	0.24	Susie Henderson	0.08
	June Werner	0.80	John Danyluck	0.20		

Schedule of BACKGAMMON Events (Information and entry forms available thru HBC)		
MAR 10th	HBC One-Day Doubles Tournament - Grisanti's, Indianapolis	HBC Hotline
Mar 22-24	1991 Midwest Championships - Marriot Hotel, Oak Brook, IL	(312) 338-6380
April 6th	Springfield Spring Open BG Tournament - Springfield, IL	(217) 789-6275
Apr 5-7	12th Granite State Backgammon Tournament, Woodbound Inn, NH	(603) 863-4711
May 03-05	39th INDIANA Open - Wyndham Garden Hotel, Indianapolis	HBC Hotline
May 24-27	12th Chicago Open - Westin Hotel, Rosemont, IL	(708) 764-0120
Jul 5-7	Michigan Summer Championships - Ramada Inn, Flint, MI	(313) 232-9731
Aug 13-19	Vermont Backgammon Festival - Ascutney Mt. Resort	(305) 527-4033
Au30-Sep2	National Labor Day Backgammon Tournament, Indianapolis	HBC Hotline
Oct 25-27	1st Chicago Fall Classic - Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Rosemont, IL	(708) 764-0120
Nov 01-03	Granite State - New Hampshire	(603) 863-4711
THURSDAYS	7:00 PM at Grisanti's - Northside of Castleton Square on 86th St	842-8323

HBC's monthly newsletter for active HBC members and subscribers.
Subscription rate: \$10/year (Canada \$12 & overseas \$14). Let us know if your address changes.
HBC Hotline: Butch & Mary Ann Meese: (317) 845-8435. 7620 Kilmer Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46256-1634

Inside Kent Goulding

by Wendy Kaplan

Kent Goulding is truly a guru to the world of backgammon. He is not only one of the leading experts on the game itself, but has compiled an impressive list of accomplishments within the backgammon community. Goulding's excellent series of annotated matches, *Backgammon with the Champions*, was among the first backgammon publications which exhibited expert-level backgammon theory and commentary. A marvelous tool for students at every level of expertise, *Backgammon with the Champions* set the stage for today's relative abundance of recorded and annotated matches. He is also the co-editor of the new periodical, *Inside Backgammon*, another expert contribution to backgammon literature. His credits also include the development and publishing of the International Backgammon Rating List. He is the co-director of the **World Cup**, one of the most prestigious, quality-oriented backgammon tournaments in the world. He is also arguably the finest and most entertaining Calcutta auctioneer in backgammon, and is unquestionably one of the best backgammon players in the world today.

HBC: Kent, how did you first get involved in playing backgammon?

KG: I was born playing.

HBC: No you weren't, KG.

KG: I was something of a chess junkie from the age of six. I was captain of my high school chess team.

HBC: So how did you go from chess to backgammon?

KG: I dropped out of college, playing chess and hanging out at a local bridge club in Washington, D.C. I saw some people playing backgammon in the early '70's and it just kind of hit me that I could play this game. I played all sorts of games my whole life; games were an escape for me from the real world. I didn't do drugs - I did games. I started playing backgammon with a few friends who were mostly bridge players. I very quickly became better than anyone else anywhere near me. The game just clicked for me.

HBC: What was your first real involvement other than just playing with your friends? Did you go from there into tournaments, writing, or what?

KG: I didn't go to writing until I got some credibility. My friends were not just some local-yokel bozos, they were top-notch competitive bridge players - not just a couple of guys over lunch at the office.

HBC: Where did you go from there?

KG: The owner of the local bridge club had bumped into Prince Alexis Obolensky and was swept up with the backgammon craze of the early '70's. I was unemployed at the time - a college drop-out - so I hung out at this bridge club watching people play bridge and basically doing nothing - I was the young long-haired weirdo. There was a guy there from New York who was a talented, bright individual who had been privy to the NY

game of backgammon. In those days, most people did not know how to play backgammon. There were the people who could really play, and the people who couldn't. There really wasn't anyone in between, like there is today. The people in New York could really play.

HBC: Did you ever play at the Mayfair Club in New York?

KG: No. I absorbed from this guy who had all the knowledge - he really knew backgammon. I'd be hanging out at the bridge club and he'd come in and say, "Alright, KG - let's talk backgammon." I was already a good player. They started organizing backgammon at the club and the owner bought all sorts of boards. I met Kit Woolsey around then. He originally played chess, but he also hung out at the bridge club. It wasn't a matter of years in which I went from knowing nothing to being quite good - it happened a lot faster than that, maybe a year. Kit put together an impromptu tournament one night at the club and I won. I just sort of dominated. Kit and I started learning backgammon together, as modern players play it, as opposed to the blind stupidity where no one knew what was going on.

HBC: You mean another form of Parcheesi?

KG: That was how the game was being played, and no one really figured out that it wasn't Parcheesi - that leaving blots and getting them hit wasn't necessarily bad. The whole concept of backgames and slotting points was alien to 99% of the backgammon players. I got a glimpse into the minds of the great ones through this guru from NY and I picked up the ball and ran with it. And I very quickly learned that there was NY snobbery, and rightfully earned - there were the NY players, and then there was everyone else. Sure, there were some others who could play, like Detroit Joe (Monro).

HBC: What was your first big tournament outside of D.C.?

KG: The first tournament that I went to, I was driven there by the bridge club owner, but I was so sick that he turned around and drove me back to Washington. I didn't even play. This was about 1972 or 1973. I continued to dominate locally, and not much later there was a tournament held in Philadelphia. Once again I went with the owner of the bridge club, but this time I wasn't sick. That was where I met Paul Magriel - we became friends right away. I made it to the finals and lost to Mike Carson. This was the first time anyone outside of D.C. had seen me play. I was treated as a talking dog - a freak of nature. No one knew where I had come from, and from that point on there was a begrudging acknowledgment that I could play. I made it a point for at least ten years that I would never stoop so low as to play backgammon in New York.

HBC: When did you start annotating matches and publishing *Backgammon with the Champions*?

KG: I spent a lot of time in Florida around 1977-1978 and there was a girl, Nancy Laiderman, who was dating Paul Magriel and recording his matches. She then

started to record a lot of other matches and sell them. This was a new concept - it just wasn't done. Kit Woolsey recorded a match that I played. There was no backgammon literature akin to chess literature, and I really craved this while I was learning the game. There were no annotated games at all. No one had the skills or the knowledge to record and annotate games. Backgammon was much more a social game at that time. I really, really felt that someone had to write and annotate games and matches. Get the games of the masters and the comments of the masters and read them. That's the way you learn. I did a little bit of recording. Nancy reluctantly allowed me to use some of her matches and annotate them. By this time, I had won many tournaments and had made a name for myself in the backgammon world. So I decided that if no one else was going to do this - then I would do it myself. This is what started *Backgammon with the Champions* - this was in 1980 or 1981. The first one was somewhat tentative. I treated both of the players with "kid gloves" - not because I was a wimp, but because of the incredible flack I was getting from good players who wanted to know why I was letting the cat out of the bag. One player from Florida said, "My God, you've educated the great unwashed." People did not want that to happen. People also objected to the price.

HBC: What was the price?

KG: It was \$60.00 for six issues, or \$15.00 per issue if you wanted to buy piecemeal. These were properly bound, with diagrams and commentary from an expert.

HBC: Did everyone believe that you were an expert - qualified to write *Backgammon with the Champions*?

KG: I have never once - before, during or since - heard anyone question my qualifications. Even before that time, in the early 1980's, I was considered very, very good. Before Magriel won the (1978) **World Championship** - which he barely did over my dead body - I was the only other person that was even mentioned in the quest for that tournament. My name is mentioned in that capacity in the *Sports Illustrated* article written about Magriel. There was even a small group of people who felt that I was the best player in the world. I think they were wrong, but I was getting recognition like that.

HBC: Who do you think was the best player in the world then?

KG: Magriel.

HBC: Why did you stop publishing *Backgammon with the Champions*?

KG: I did it for two years - 12 issues - it was an enormous amount of work. I had a child then. All of a sudden, I had a newborn to dedicate a great deal of my time and energy to.

HBC: Did you also have an actual job at that time?

KG: Yes, I traded stock options.

HBC: Was *Backgammon with the Champions* a natural lead-in to *Inside Backgammon*?

KG: It was, but there was a big gap in time there - almost 10 years. With the very last issue of *Backgammon with the Champions*, I sent out a questionnaire, asking "What would you like to see in a backgammon publication?" What I had envisioned in a publication, and what was pretty much the response I had gotten, became *Inside Backgammon*.

HBC: Let's talk about *Inside Backgammon*. What's your opinion of the first issue?

KG: I think it's excellent.

HBC: What kind of articles can we expect to see?

KG: You can never get enough of what you saw in the first one. Maybe some different authors. Issue No. 2 will have little or nothing by Kent Goulding in it. There's just so much to publish. I will contribute heavily with annotated games. You can't get too much of those. If you really want to learn backgammon, that's the way to do it. Look over the games of the masters playing in the big tournaments. I'm really disappointed that there haven't been more annotated games by qualified people.

HBC: What do you think about Bill Robertie's article geared toward the intermediate player?

KG: I think it is actually excellent, but not presented very well. When I read it as a non-intermediate, I found it somewhat condescending and degrading. However, there is a great deal of value in there.

HBC: Do you think intermediate players can follow match annotations?

KG: Some yes, some no. There is a broad spectrum of intermediate players. An intermediate of any level can set up a board in the interest of improving his game, and follow through an annotated match. There will be some places over his head, but the very act of playing through the game is going to help him. I can't stress that too much. Just playing through the game, even if you don't understand what is going on, will force you to get some insight into backgammon. Looking at the plays being made by experts and looking at the **alternate** plays as well - that is enormously helpful to an intermediate or beginning student. That is the way to learn the game. People resist learning this way. They really want me to say what is the right play and wrong play in every situation. I can't do that - it's not that easy. They want rules to follow but there are no rules, they don't exist. The best way to learn the game is to play through the games of good players. There are going to be a lot of annotated games in *Inside Backgammon*, and they're going to be annotated by me.

HBC: Are you planning to publish *Inside Backgammon* indefinitely?

Inside Kent Goulding
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Reflections of Ralph Roberts (1913-1991)

Some are unaware that, in 1974, maybe 10 or a Baker's Dozen of us each put up \$100 to fund the Hoosier Backgammon Club, to which we elected ourselves Charter/Life Members, with the messianic mission of buying and fabricating teaching aids...I think Art Overbay built a large display board with magnetically attached men...and volunteered our energies as instructors to groups of any and every description, wherever we could find an assembly of people who wanted to learn. Except [for the people who played] on the 3rd floor of the I.A.C., there simply wasn't anyone in central Indiana who knew about the game.

Of the group, Ralph qualified as the #1 or #2 Zealot, fanatically committed to the evangelistic effort...which required physical strength, stamina, considerable time and more tolerance/patience with inept and unqualified pupils than should be expected of any teacher, let alone a volunteer...and Marie's contribution was invaluable, as Ralph kept the torch lighted in his own way, long after interest had waned among the other Founder Members.

Yes...there might be a Hoosier Backgammon Club today if Ralph had dropped the torch early on, but it is arguably doubtful. Positively, there are many who learned the thrill of the game because Ralph kept the torch lighted!

Alex Somerville

Ralph epitomized the phrase "a gentleman of the old school". I will miss him very much.

James Knauer

I'll miss Ralph Roberts. He was a good friend and a thoroughly nice person. His leadership made the old round-robin backgammon sessions fun. I grieve for his wife, Marie - for her loss and for those of us who knew and loved him.

Margaret Roberts

Ralph was instrumental in fashioning my early impressions concerning the game. His humor, sense of fair play and concern for the new players was responsible for me staying with backgammon, and he encouraged me to learn as much as I could about the game. I really appreciate what he did for me and backgammon.

Anonymous

I first knew Ralph 43 years ago as a Squash Racquets Champion. He competed with class and vigor; he was always a perfect gentleman on the court. Just like he was at backgammon and in life.

Charles E. Stimming

My memories of Ralph Roberts and his Hoosier Backgammon Club goes back to the late 1970s when I first attended the Indiana Open. During those years, it was held at the Indianapolis Athletic Club. Although the accommodations were dated, the club maintained a unique touch with the ways of the past. On Friday prior to the Doubles tournament, we would enjoy dinner and dancing in one of the IAC's dining rooms. It was a sociable beginning to a fun tournament weekend. Of course one April weekend in 1979 was especially "fun" for me as I reached the finals in both the Championship and the Doubles events.

Although I wouldn't say that Ralph was the most organized director, his friendly tournaments were among my favorites. Ralph always greeted his players with a smile on his face. If Ralph ever erred in the way he directed his tournament, it was in attempting to be *too* accommodating to everyone.

At one of his tournaments, I remember talking to Ralph about ways to boost attendance at my National Backgammon League tournaments. He told me of the many department store promotions he had conducted in the Indianapolis area a few years prior when backgammon was at it's height of popularity. These promotions featured lessons of short one-game tournaments for prizes. Whereas the stores were concerned with how many boards they could sell, Ralph was interested in how many new players he could expose to the game he loved.

Ralph Roberts was a kind gentleman and one of my links to backgammon's past. I will miss him.

Bill Davis

Ralph was unique to me. Early in his career he was closely associated with several people in my industry and we often reminisced about them and the "early days". Conversation with Ralph added a broader dimension. He loved a good raucous story, coved discourse with the intellectuals, and had a real insight into business and what makes the world go round. His backgammon was legendary. He taught me that "we double to win, not to raise the stakes." I'll miss him.

Bill Julian

Ralph was a fun player to have in a chouette. I'll always remember when I first played with him as captain. He was sipping his bourbon on the rocks while contemplating his move. Having decided on his play and over all objections, he picked up his dice and dumped them into his drink. Responding to the resulting chuckles he said, "If you've never done that, you are definitely a novice player." I commented, "That explains what determines a novice and an intermediate player but when does one become an expert?" Ralph replied, "After you've cast

Reflections of Ralph Roberts (1913-1991)

your ice instead of the dice!"

And then there is the story about the "Ralphie" move. Ralph never wanted the 10 pips gained by an opening roll of 6-4 to be lost with the opponent rolling a simple 2 so he would always make the 2 point. This got so boring for his friends that they all decided whenever Ralph made that play, they would double him. Ralph lost so often from then on with that play that eventually he abandoned it. In HBC we now refer to making the 2 point as the "Ralphie" play.

Ralph, now that you have started the journey that we will all embark on one day, I'm sure your travels will take you to the land of Pelucidar. There I know you will find Meggar, the guru of Backgammon knowledge, for he will be surrounded by many beautiful women. Please ask him that question we all seek an answer to - "How does one determine the probability of winning and thus be able to determine the best play, from any position on the board?" And when you know, send us the word. PEACE & GOOD WILL.

Larry Strommen

I was saddened to receive the news of Ralph Roberts death. Ralph's dedication to the Backgammon community will always be remembered by those of us lucky enough to have known him. The memories of the ambience and fellowship of Ralph's tournaments at the Indianapolis Athletic Club will remain some of my most enjoyable Backgammon experiences.

Tom Walthes

Ralph was like a cat. He moved through the jungle of egos never disturbing anything and blending in with the environment. He was always up beat and made the people around him feel good. That is the art of a businessman and he practiced it well.

However, there was something deeper in Ralph beyond being a master of his vocation. He enjoyed people and was happiest when he could genuinely lift their spirits. He practiced this avocation as diligently and deftly as he did his business life.

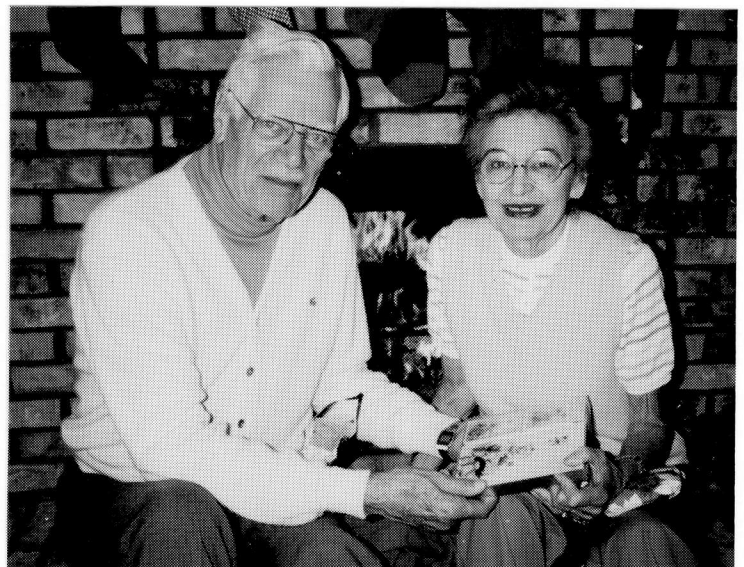
I met Ralph in the late '70s when backgammon for fun was at its zenith. Ralph's energies were directed to teaching and encouraging the largest group possible on how to enjoy what is often called "the cruelest game". Not only was he able to do this well, but he used every means at his disposal to protect players from the harsher realities of the game. I have seen him nag, cajole, be stubborn and even express anger to promote and protect his vision of how the game should be practiced and promoted. I believe few people beyond Butch and Mary Ann Meese understand how much the Indianapolis and even Midwest backgammon community owe to Ralph.

We all thank you, not only for the game, but teaching us how to enjoy ourselves together.

There was another side of Ralph which I appreciated and admired. He was human and had the same problems we all encounter through the path of life. When in a small group in which he felt comfortable, those concerns occasionally were vocalized, not in terms of self pity, but merely something that had to be handled. These encounters merely humanized and personalized Ralph more. Over the past twelve to fourteen years I observed Ralph in varied situations and moods, but there was one constant. He was a family man and honored Marie. In the early years, when she participated, he would cater to what was reasonable for her. Since this was usually done outside her presence, I doubt she ever had a full appreciation for the quiet and unusual standards Ralph would impose on himself in those chauvinistic environments. Beyond that and especially in the later years, there was one constant in his life and that was his wife. Ralph deeply enjoyed gaming and socializing and perhaps by some standards may have taken it to an extreme. However, in the male psyche, Ralph showed great restraint. It was often in quiet and subtle ways that Ralph expressed that Marie was the apple of his eye. Sometimes the unknown compliments are the best. Marie, he loved you deeply.

Ralph enjoyed himself in this life and made a lot of other people happy in the process. Somehow I don't think that will change in the next world. I envision Ralph sitting in a swivel chair with a backgammon set on one side and a bridge table on the other. Ralph, we will try to emulate your joy in this world and hope to join you in the next.

Jim Curtis



Inside Kent Goulding
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KG: with the idea that if all goes well, we will continue - but with no guarantees that we will continue after the first year. There will be a complete Volume One of *Inside Backgammon*. If someone signs up to buy it, they will be buying the first six issues. You are not buying a year's worth of issues from the time you sign up. All new subscribers get issues 1-6. We may offer notebooks in which to bind your first six issues, and then offer Volume Two. Somewhere near the end of each year we will decide whether or not to continue. A lot will depend on the acceptance by the backgammon community. So far, that's been excellent.

HBC: There are rumors that some selectivity is occurring over which tournaments get rated and which do not. Will you comment on how the rating system works and which tournaments do get rated?

KG: I didn't design it, and I really don't understand all of the math involved. It was designed by Larry Kaufman, and there will be an article by him in the next issue of *Inside Backgammon*. It is modeled after the chess rating system - the Elo system. It is not really master points, not something you accumulate. Your rating will go up or down, depending on whether you win or lose, how much higher or lower your opponent's rating is than yours, and the match length. If you only play a 5-point match, not many points change hands - regardless of how much difference there is between you and your opponent's rating, and no matter whether you win or lose. If you play a 41-point match, that's a different story - the number of points up for grabs is much higher.

HBC: Which tournaments do get rated?

KG: I rate everything that is submitted to me. The decision to rate or not rate a tournament is not a decision made by Kent Goulding. The tournament directors decide whether or not to send results to me.

HBC: How can a player ensure that a tournament does get rated? If a player wins a tournament and wants to make sure that you've received the results, what should he do?

KG: If the tournament organizer is Carol Cole or Butch Meese or another trustworthy organizer, the player really has nothing to worry about. Those tournaments will be rated. If he is unsure, he should go early and often to the director and request that the organizer submit it. If he is still unsure, he can copy down the draw sheets and send them to me.

HBC: Is that a guarantee that the tournament will be rated?

KG: There are some things I don't rate, but for the most part I rate everything. Sometimes, someone will send me the consolation of a beginners tournament, consisting of 1-point matches. I probably won't rate those.

HBC: What do you think about a rating system for

intermediate players?

KG: First, it's much too much work to segregate those, and who really knows who's an intermediate player and who isn't? Second, the vast majority of intermediate players will, from time to time, play in what is considered an "open" tournament. So they all get mushed together, anyway.

HBC: Do you think the rating system is a good barometer by which intermediate players should really be playing in the championship field?

KG: Absolutely yes!

HBC: What should the cut-off point be?

KG: It depends on what tournament we are talking about. Very different standards apply.

HBC: What about the major Reno tournaments, for example?

KG: They are as big an intermediate tournament as there is, with the possible exception of Monte Carlo. There are going to be exceptions in both directions, but I think as a fair guideline, anyone rated over 1600 should not be allowed to play in the intermediate division. I have made exceptions to this, but I consult with other directors who may know the players better than I do.

HBC: How about the **Indiana Open**, as another example?

KG: I would go to 1500 or 1550. Again, you have to use your judgement. If someone comes in with a random rating of 1602, but no one really knows him - let him play intermediate. Mike Svobodny and certain others have ratings lower than 1600, but it would be ludicrous for him to play in an intermediate event. Of course, they can't play. Another thing the 1600 thing will do: if we make him play in the open and he doesn't win any matches, then his rating will slide below 1600 and he will once again be allowed to play in the intermediate field.

HBC: Then the rating system really should be used as a Bible to determine which field players should be allowed to enter?

KG: Barring knowledge to the contrary, and allowing for obvious exceptions. For example, Carol Cole had a rating below 1600, but I don't feel that she is an intermediate player. The only other way to determine an intermediate from an open player is by speaking to reliable players who are familiar with the players. There are other gross attempts - like how much money a player has won, etc. - but these are really far less accurate than the rating system.

HBC: Can directors help you when turning in their draw sheets by giving you background information on players with whom you might not be familiar?

KG: That information is very rapidly outdated. There are always going to be players on the cusp. The true intermediates are the "not very good" open players. I'm a firm believer in pushing players up. I think most players are in a constant state of improvement. They

may be on the cusp for a while, but then they become open players unless they are brain dead or very old. Just because you are good enough to win at intermediate tournaments, but not good enough to win open tournaments - that does not mean that you shouldn't be in the open tournament.

HBC: Most players want to stay in the intermediate field - some players feel they don't have a chance in the open division.

KG: There are some players who regularly play in the open division who have no chance. The players who complain are generally the ones who are too good to stay in the intermediate field. The very fact that they want to stay in the intermediate division is an indication that they probably don't belong there. The difference between your top open player and your top intermediate player is almost immeasurable. But again, there are some players who have won intermediate tournaments that are really terrible, and by the same token, it might take me forever to win an intermediate event. There are going to be exceptions to any rule.

HBC: Let's talk about the tournament you direct - the **World Cup**. What are your plans for **World Cup III**? Any truth to the rumors that you may not be holding the tournament in Boston next year?

KG: Yes.

HBC: Do you know where you will be holding it?

KG: We don't know. Right now, there are two possibilities. This, of course, assumes that we are going to hold the tournament again. It is our wish to do so, but we haven't made the decision yet.

HBC: How did the **World Cup** get started? What events led up to a tournament with a \$3500 entry fee?

KG: It was a natural follow-up to the **US Invitational II**.

HBC: Didn't the entry fee go up substantially?

KG: As I recall, the entry fee to **US Invitational II** was \$2000. The problem was that too many people wanted to play. The **US Invitational I** was probably the strongest field of 16, ever.

HBC: Wasn't that a "by invitation only" tournament?

KG: Yes. I sent out 30 invitations and I had a waiting list within a week. The **US Invitational II** was the same with many more people wanting to play than I had room for. Some people who didn't even get an invitation wanted to play. There was a demand for a high-quality, high entry fee backgammon tournament.

HBC: Now it seems that anyone who can come up with \$3500 can play in the **World Cup**.

KG: Right. It changed. Under ideal circumstances, we really wouldn't have had a problem filling a field of 64. Circumstances conspired last year to keep attendance at **World Cup II** down. There were a number of other tournaments near the same time, and players were burned out. After I ran the first two **Invitationals**

alone, Bill Robertie and I formed a partnership - **US Backgammon Enterprises**. We decided to make it technically by invitation, but in fact, an open event. We couldn't limit this tournament to 32 players, there were just too many players who wanted to play. We wound up in the low 40's. We thought that **World Cup II** would be bigger, but it was actually a few players smaller. The interest was clearly there. I'd like to point out that the objectives of both **Invitationals I and II**, and then the **World Cups**, were to put together an absolutely top quality backgammon tournament with top players, and to be a true test of backgammon skill.

It was to be a tournament that would have a great deal of prestige, and one which would really separate the masters from the laymen. Robertie and I believe we have accomplished that. There is no other tournament that provides the facilities, players, format or equipment that these tournaments have provided. There isn't even a close second. I'm very proud of this accomplishment.

HBC: How about Kent Goulding, the auctioneer? I understand that this is not your favorite role in the backgammon world. Do you still enjoy doing Calcutta auctions?

KG: Sort of. I have inside of me this desire to be a stand-up comic. If I had the guts and the training, I might have pursued this line.

HBC: You are very quick-witted when you run an auction. Do you plan any of your repartee?

KG: Some of it is prepared, but it is 99% spontaneous.

HBC: Do you ever put the fields together with one-liners in mind?

KG: I may occasionally plan some one-liners, but I don't have anything to do with putting the fields together.

HBC: Not even in Reno? You don't have any input there?

KG: I have at some of the tournaments, but there is so much going on in Reno that I decided I didn't want to have anything to do with it. If people got upset by their fields, they might blame me.

HBC: Are you going to continue to do auctions when you are asked?

KG: Not necessarily. I have to admit that some of the most fun I've ever had was in doing auctions. The first auction that I ever did was in Chicago. It was spontaneous, and I got a standing ovation. The organizer was annoyed with me afterward for not raising enough money, but everyone in the room had a good time. I got a tremendous reception. Unfortunately, it's getting to the point that I fear doing an auction, rather than look forward to it - we'll see.

HBC: Who else do you think is a good auctioneer?

KG: On a good day, Lewis Deyong.

HBC: Some people are getting turned-off to Calcutta auctions. Do you think that tournament directors will continue to hold them?

KG: I don't know. At the last World Cup, we didn't hold an intermediate auction. Auctions shouldn't exist strictly as a way to scrape up a few bucks for the organizer. Most people who attend an auction are not showing up to bid, they show up for the entertainment. It's supposed to be the other way around. Without interest in the auction, the entertainment isn't going to be very good. I play off the crowd - if the crowd doesn't participate, no one is going to have much fun. There have been some auctions that were so dull that I swore that I would never do an auction again.

HBC: Is there an alternative to a Calcutta auction, or should that aspect of backgammon tournaments be phased out?

KG: I'm still fascinated by Calcutta auctions. I don't think they should be completely abandoned. They can be modified. There is no need to auction the whole field, for example. Directors can wait until the final subset has been reached, and then auction those players. Then players can bid to hedge - that can be a much more interesting proposition. Directors can reorganize their time frame and hold the auction for a smaller group of people. I think it's a good idea for a big tournament to have some sort of kick-off dinner. This is an enjoyable feed-in to the tournament. Everything else should be shut down, with no competing jackpot tournaments - everyone should attend the kick-off function. We have tried at the last two **World Cups** to provide some sort of entertainment. The local weekend tournaments probably don't have the budget or the facilities to accommodate this sort of thing, but I like it.

HBC: You have contributed so very much to backgammon - why?

KG: I enjoy it. Backgammon has been very, very good to me.

HBC: What has been your favorite endeavor?

KG: I have gotten a great deal of satisfaction from all of the things I have done for backgammon. I am quite proud of my record and my ability as a player.

HBC: Have you made any money from backgammon, or have most of your endeavors been charitable contributions?

KG: I have avoided losing money. Well, I lose money on the Rating List. I had a sponsor, but the deal fell through. Backgammon needs the rating system, and I just can't stop it at this point in time. I derive a great deal of personal pride and satisfaction in a job well done.

HBC: Are there any players who intimidate you?

HBC: There are players I would rather not play, but there are none that I would bet on against myself.

HBC: Who would you rather not play?

KG: Most of the top players, I would rather not play. There might be some players who are better than me, but I'm not sure who they are.

HBC: In closing, what would you ask Kent Goulding?

KG: "Why backgammon?" That's an important question. I've played a lot of chess and bridge, even Go. One of the wonderful aspects of backgammon is that within the game, destruction can hit you at any moment. It's the gambler's paradise. No matter how great your game is, you can still lose it. You can achieve a great position, and then with one roll - it all collapses. There's an element of self-destruct. Maybe there is a self-abuse within these backgammon gamblers. Most chess players run from backgammon. If you get a good position in chess, you win. In backgammon, you don't win until the very end.

The biggest appeal for me about backgammon is not the game - it's the people. From day one, I was fascinated by the tremendous cross-section of humanity, the enormous variety of people that you meet - literally billionaires to bums. I have found games players a breed unlike any other that you meet in the real world. What I enjoy most about backgammon is that it's a way to avoid the real world and enjoy yourself. There are a number of really exceptional individuals who either don't want to or can't fit into "the real world." I am severely afflicted by "Peter Pan Syndrome." I don't want to know what I'm going to be when I grow up, because I have no intention of growing up. Going to a top backgammon tournament is like going to the zoo. But it's a good zoo, not a smelly zoo. I really enjoy the company of these eccentric geniuses. Hosting the **World Cup** is like having my own private party - I love it!

Inside Kent Goulding

HBC thanks Wendy Kaplan for this Interview.

National Labor Day Backgammon Tournament

August 30, 31-September 1, 2, 1991
Radisson Suite Hotels
Popular 9-Match Format

8th Fleet Underwood Backgammon Tournament - Flint, Michigan \$700 raised for American Lung Association

Open Division (29)

1st Sandy Glassman - MI
2nd Carol Joy Cole - MI
3rd Emil Mortuk - MI

Intermediate Division (30)

1st Jim Roland - OH
2nd Wally Wolf - MI
3/4 **Mary Ann Meese - Indy**
3/4 Abdul Alchalabi - MI
5/6 Ian Rogers - CAN
5/6 Sandy Grassel - MI

Novice Division (11)

1st Jim Kennedy - CAN
2nd Mike Wesley - MI
3rd Todd Hay - MI