

HBC's Player of Year **Chuck Stimming**

Chuck started 1994 hot winning **Player of the Month** for January and February. Although he did not win that honor again during 1994, he maintained his lead. At the end of November, Butch Meese was 135 points away, and was within 70 points after play on December 5th. But Chuck finished in first place two of the last three weeks to secure the top spot. This is the first time *Lucky Chuckie* has won this honor. It is the third year in a row Butch Meese finished second. Congratulations to all the players who finished in the 1994 **Top Ten** (listed on Page 2) and especially to Jan Gurvitz for her first time showing.

1994 Players of Month

January..... Chuck Stimming
February..... Chuck Stimming
March..... Butch Meese
April..... Woody Woodworth
May..... Cyrus Mobed
June..... Jim Curtis
July..... Butch Meese
August..... Woody Woodworth
September..... Woody Woodworth
October..... Woody Woodworth
November..... Butch Meese
December..... Wendy Kaplan

HBC Awards Tournament

Sunday, February 19th at **SPATS**.

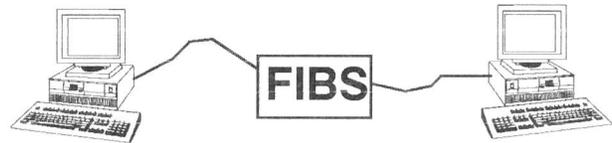
It's time to award the **Best of 1994**. As in past years, the **1994 TOP TEN** will be awarded engraved doubling cubes along with cash prizes and gift certificates. Everyone is welcomed.

Open Division \$60 (Optional \$20 Sidepool)
Advanced Division \$20
Format: Main-Consolation, 90% Return

Master of Ceremony: *Chuck Stimming*

In Memoriam: The backgammon world is mourning the loss of two gentlemen of the game, **Willis Fitton** of Peoria, IL (80) and **Ami Tennenbaum** of New Jersey (51). A note from Bobbie Fitton expressed Willis' enjoyment of the game after he retired. And we will all miss Ami and his *expensive* cigars.

Fair or Foul...Playing on **FIBS**



by Jeff Seidel (jeffs@shadow.net) (JeffS on FIBS)

Playing on **FIBS** is usually an enjoyable experience. There are, however, certain practices, types of behavior, and even common rules of backgammon that can be considered odious. Some of these are rather petty, others are tantamount to cheating. Hopefully, new **FIBS** users will never try some of these *tactics* and learn to avoid those who do. Please let me emphasize an important point about the **FIBS experience**. You will encounter players that not only vary widely in terms of their skill level (checker play and cube) but also in terms of the environment they play BG in. Quite a few (perhaps a majority) have never been to a real backgammon tournament. Many have only played casually on a *real board* prior to entering the realm of *BG-by-wire*. Finally, there are some whose introduction to BG has been solely via an electronic medium such as **FIBS**. **FIBS** (and its ilk) are therefore not only places to play BG, but also social gatherings.

It is in this aspect of the *on-line arena* where serious *real life* players meet *electronic coffeehouse* players that misunderstandings occur. If you are a straight laced traditionalistic *real board* player that can't tolerate a bit (or a lot) of chaos in your BG, you probably aren't right for *BG by wire*. While there are ways to mitigate the madness, you'll never be able to totally eliminate it. Given this caveat...the brave and adventurous (and those willing to take a joke and/or the frustration inherent in modem connections and server outages) may continue onward. There are five main areas of contention that are due to inexperience with the rules of backgammon. These will be dealt with case by case.

1) **Post-Crawford Doubling.**

Some players feel that the practice of immediately doubling the leader in the first post-Crawford game (and other post-Crawford games if the trailer is really behind) is some form of unfair/unsportsmanlike behavior. Experienced backgammon players know that this is an established tactic and perfectly legal. It usually takes a third party to explain this to the offended player and justify it's usage. This is usually handled in a part of the Internet called **Usenet**. **Usenet** has an area called *rec.games.backgammon* (one of 1000+ newsgroups) where you can post a gripe, ask for input on a position, get information and talk about backgammon with the world. Needless to say, this is really a non-problem but it does come up.

...continues Page 3...

Hoosier Backgammon Club's Newsletter for HBC members and subscribers.

Subscription rate: \$12/year (Canada \$14 and overseas \$16). Let us know if your address changes.

Butch & Mary Ann Meese: (317) 845-8435. 7620 Kilmer Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46256-1634 E-Mail: butch@inxs.att.com

1994 Final **HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB** Gammon Point Standings.
HBC Player of the Month for November was **Butch Meese** with 208 gammon points.
HBC Player of the Month for December is **Wendy Kaplan** with 212 gammon points.

1) Chuck Stimming.....2086	Gabe Stiasny.....270	Marilyn Faller.....110	Frank Scott.....32
2) Butch Meese.....1919	Rick Reahard.....252	Scott Richardson.....97	Jill Ferdinand.....30
3) Don Woods.....1567	Wendy Kaplan.....252	Bill Hodes.....88	Jeff Baker.....20
4) Ellis Bray.....1412	Dragan Stevanovic....237	Dr. Bob Hill.....84	Jim Dooling.....20
5) Woody Woodworth.....1160	Bill Gheen.....229	Dave Cardwell.....84	Donna Susens.....20
6) Larry Strommen.....920	Bill Julian.....225	Lara Simsic.....72	Gino Agresti.....20
7) Cyrus Mobed.....912	John Brussel.....200	Rick Bieniak.....70	J.A. Miller.....20
8) Jan Gurvitz.....828	Brian Nelson.....170	Ed Pavilonis.....70	John O'Hagan.....20
9) Mary Ann Meese.....742	Sean Garber.....160	Craig Hampton.....68	Marta Hilworth.....16
10) Jim Curtis.....645	Richard Heinz.....155	David Smith.....64	John Klotz.....10
Kevin McLeaster.....584	Steve Perlman.....148	Stu Sherman.....60	Bob Cassell.....10
Mick Dobratz.....539	Jon Stephens.....140	Lou Ramer.....60	Jamie Curtis.....10
Neil Ezell.....536	Al Faller.....128	Lance Jenkins.....60	Krystal Shaffer.....10
Dave Groner.....480	Jon Vietor.....120	Alan Tavel.....50	Angie Jones.....10
Alan Haas.....282	Chuck Bower.....118	Andy Palumbo.....42	Peg Simsic.....10

JellyFish First Impressions!

JellyFish Tutor 1.0, a new backgammon program for the PC, is now available. Kit Woolsey states "Fredrik Dahl's masterpiece, **JellyFish**, is a breakthrough for backgammon." For the more technical types **JellyFish** is a neural network program. For everyone, Kit also says it is an enjoyable and challenging competitor playing at an expert level. It requires Windows 3.1 to run therefore checker movement is done quickly and efficiently with the mouse.

You can play single games and matches. You can play against the program or against another human. With the manual dice generator, you can replay your recorded matches. The program tells you when it finds a play or cube decision it likes better, making the program a valuable tutor and it understands match equities. The program evaluates positions as shown below:

	WINS	G or BG	BG
JellyFish	54.0	22.9	1.0
Player2	46.0	12.6	0.6
	Equity Player2: -0.186		

The display is nice and easy to see and if you do not like the colors or direction of play, you can change them.

JellyFish Tutor 1.0...US\$ 110.
JellyFish Analyzer 1.0...US\$ 220.

The **Analyzer**, in addition to the **Tutor**, contains a rollout module. It will be released sometime early this year. If you own the **Tutor**, the **Analyzer** may be purchased for the difference in price. If you order the **Analyzer** before it is released, the **Tutor** will be shipped immediately, followed by the **Analyzer** when ready.

Order from: **EFFECT Software A/S**
 P.O. Box 56 Skoyen
 N-0212 OSLO
 Norway.

Please use International Postal Money Order, or Visa. If you use Visa, send the account number, date of expiration, amount and signature. You may also send a check, but in that case please add \$10 for expenses.

Hardware requirements: 386sx
 Software requirements: Windows 3.1
 The **JellyFish** programs come on 3.5" diskettes.

More information in future issues.

<u>November 3rd</u>	<u>November 7th</u>	<u>November 10th</u>	<u>November 17th</u>	<u>December 1st</u>
1st Kevin McLeaster	Butch Meese	Don Woods	Don Woods	Larry Strommen
2nd Neil Ezell	Larry Strommen	Mick Dobratz	Mary Ann Meese	Rick Reahard
2nd Butch Meese	---	Butch Meese	Dave Groner	Cyrus Mobed
<u>December 5th</u>	<u>December 8th</u>	<u>December 15th</u>	<u>December 22nd</u>	<u>December 29th</u>
1st Dave Groner	Chuck Stimming	Mick Dobratz	Chuck Stimming	Larry Strommen
2nd Butch Meese	Woody Woodworth	Dave Groner	Wendy Kaplan	Don Woods
2nd ---	Wendy Kaplan	Ellis Bray	Kevin McLeaster	Wendy Kaplan

Backgammon Tournament Schedule

Feb 7-12.....	2nd World-Wide Twin Championships , Eldorado Hotel, Reno, Nevada.....	(702) 893-6025
Feb 17-19.....	17th Annual Pittsburgh Championships , Greentree Marriott, Pittsburgh, PA.....	(412) 823-7500
Mar 24-26.....	1995 Midwest Championships , Marriott Hotel, Oak Brook, Illinois.....	(312) 338-6380
Ma29-Ap02...	Vermont State Backgammon & Ski Festival , Stratton Mountain Inn, Vermont.....	(305) 527-4033
Apr 19-23.....	4th Tournament of Americas , Herradura Hotel, San Jose, Costa Rica.....	(312) 252-7755
Apr 28-30.....	New England Championships , Oak & Spruce Center, South Lee, Mass.....	(603) 853 4711
Thursdays.....	7:00 PM at SPATS (842-3465) Castleton Square (between J.C.Penney's & L.S.Ayres)...	845-8435

Fair or Foul...Playing on FIBS

...continues from Page 1...

2) Sucker Doubling.

Sucker Doubling (my term for it) usually occurs when playing a *one-point match*. A player will double their opponent when the cube is meaningless. There are several reasons for trying this tactic, three are harmless in their intent and the other is considered unsportsmanlike by some. Some players will turn the cube in this situation because they think it will improve their **FIBS** rating (it doesn't) by winning with a higher cube value (a one-point match is a **one-point match**). Others may turn the cube if they're assured the win and their opponent doesn't resign. This can save on-line time. You can get excited and forget it's only a one pointer and wind up doubling before you remember it doesn't matter. Finally, some players try to use this tactic to get an unwary/inexperienced player to drop what is obviously a trivial take and make an easy win. This is not a strategy I use or necessarily agree with but it is legal on **FIBS**. It can catch the inattentive player and I have no real problem with players who try it. Others, however, feel it's not in the spirit of good gamesmanship. If you stay alert, you'll never be burned by this.

3) Pip Counters.

FIBS has a pip counter that may be toggled on/off by either player without notice. Some players will turn it off because they feel that since you can't have one in *over the board* play, you shouldn't have access to one on **FIBS**. Others will turn it on when they need it, then turn it off so their opponent can't use it (if either player toggles the counter off, it's off for both players). I can sympathize with the former concept (although I never deny access to the counter to my opponent) but the latter tactic is just plain bad news. If you try to access the counter and find it off, be sure to ask your opponent why. Also several of the **FIBS** GUI's have built in counters so it winds up being fairly futile to try to consistently deny an opponent access to a pip counter for whatever reason.

4) Dropping Matches.

This happens all too often. A player who is losing will just cut their connection and abort the match (the match is saved though) to avoid a loss. Not all dropped connections are of a sinister nature and you may wind up resuming the match later. The offending player has absolutely no obligation to resume the match and **FIBS** has no method of forcing them to do so (as yet). About all you can do is keep hounding the player to resume the interrupted match and if they continue to ignore your requests you can post a complaint about the player in *rec.games.backgammon* so others know to avoid the person in the future. Just make sure you make an effort to resume the match before blasting the player's name all over the *Net* as a quitter. Be aware though, that there is still one final *trick* this person can try to play on you. There are several scenarios for this. You might forget and offer the player a new match (invite dropper 5) which will wipe out the previous match if the dropper accepts. On the other hand, the dropper may offer you a new match (which **FIBS** will warn you about) and if you make a bad selection...the old match will be wiped out. If you

have some unfinished matches, make sure you check on them (using *show saved*) and use the proper *invite* format and avoid a *bad join* (when warned).

5) Lags and Slow Play.

As in over the board play, **FIBS** can be plagued by slow play. Aside from the *normal* reasons for it, the fact that you're playing over a phone line adds to the problem. Some players can get very upset by slow play no matter what it's cause. Try to play with a minimum of a 9600 baud modem and connection. If you're using one of the GUI's and are experiencing consistently slow responses from **FIBS**, you might want to consider discontinuing using it in favor of a less resource intensive display. (GUI's can also contribute to item #4 by locking up from time to time and forcing you to drop your connection while you reboot). If you have to run to the bathroom or answer the phone/doorbell be sure to let your opponent know.

There are other, less significant things that happen on **FIBS**. **FIBS** allows you to resign either *normal* (1x the cube), *gammon* (2x the cube), or *backgammon* (3x the cube). Some players may try to resign *normal* when you actually have a chance for a *gammon*. You may reject their offer (as well you should). Your opponent may get extremely indignant at this point; do not be bullied into making a bad decision. The opposite of this can also happen. It may look to you like you're going to lose and you offer a proper resignation but your opponent refuses to accept it. Why? Some players will refuse to accept a match ending resignation if you have the slightest probability of pulling it out. They view this as doing you a favor. Others will refuse a resignation to *punish* you and force you to play on so you can admire their fine checker play. I accept all resignations (of proper value). If I think an opponent still has a winning chance, I will ask them if they are sure before I accept their resignation. Some players pay quite a bit for their access time, so if they want to cut out of what might be a long struggle against the odds, I'll let them. How you deal with this situation is up to you but at least communicate with your opponent to find out their rationale.

As you can see, **FIBS** has quite a few of the same problems that occur in over the board backgammon plus a few that are unique to the medium it's being played on. Many of the problems can be eliminated or mitigated by simple communications. Other problems are related to player's behaviors and quirks of the system that are much more difficult to resolve. The problems cited may intimidate some but they really are rare and not the rule. Some problems may never occur no matter how long you're on **FIBS**. The main point is to stay alert, particularly when dealing with someone you've never played before. Don't be afraid to ask someone about a particular player (generally done on **FIBS** or via *E-Mail*). Don't be intimidated into a bad decision. If you think you have a slight *gammon* chance, don't accept a resignation for a single point no matter how mad they might get. On the other hand, don't hang onto a sure loss/win just to see how it goes...do the right thing (double/resign) when it's appropriate.

**Annotated match
Kit Woolsey vs Jeremy Bagai
FIBS - 9 Point Match**

In February, Kit Woolsey and Jeremy Bagai played a match and then annotated it for FIBS* players so they could see the thought process of the more experienced players. They played a fairly interesting match, logged it, and then annotated it independently. You will see reasons for their plays and cube decisions, as well as their second thoughts upon later analysis which often came to a different conclusion than their original choices.

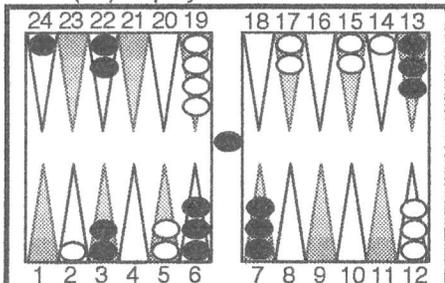
Gerry Tesauro also volunteered TD-Gammon's valuable help. TD analyzed the whole match and listed its top 3 choices for each play along with its estimated equities. These equities are always assuming a 1-cube and they do not take into account cube ownership. Thus on a pass-take decision an equity of -0.50 would be a break-even decision (not taking cube ownership into account -- that would probably make it a little higher), since that would translate to an equity of -0.100 on a 2-cube. TD was also nice enough to comment on the game, giving its reasons behind its choices as well as getting in a few snide remarks about their mistakes. Mark Damish (MA), first formatted the commentary for the Internet*.

Internet*: In short, the Internet is a network of computers. People login to an Internet server. Each server has a subset of features which may include email (electronic mail) and server-to-server connections. One of the servers provides a means for players to play each other - FIBS (First Internet Backgammon Server).

Editor's note: I felt that the material was too good to restrict it only to the Internet. I received permission from Kit, Jeremy, Gerry and Mark to reprint the match and I thank them. In the backgammon positions, Kit is the black checkers and Jeremy the white. The board numbers are shown from the player on-roll point of view.

Game 3 Continues

Black (Kit) to play 21?



B/23 24/23

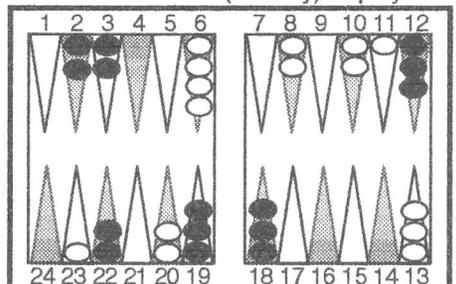
Kit: I'm not planning to play a back game, of course, but this seems to be as good a place as any to make a stand while I see which way the wind is blowing.

Jeremy: I think this is the right play. Kit is not trying to play a back game; he will jump at an advanced anchor as soon as he can. However his play is better than B/22 because that would deny him the chance to play a back game if it comes to that.

TD-Gammon: You guys aren't going to like this one. The best play by far is B/23, 22/21. What? you say. Give up the anchor and strew four blots in the Jeremy's inner board. That's right! Take a look at the whole position, not just a piece of it. This figures to be a long positional struggle, where outfield control has priority. Advanced anchors are vital, and the 22 point simply isn't advanced enough. My play makes Kit a big favorite to get a more advanced anchor, and the risk is relatively minimal since Jeremy has no board and few builders with which to attack. It is well worth it. Take my word for it -- I'm good at this type of position.

B/23, 22/21.....	-0.187
B/23, 7/6.....	-0.260
B/22.....	-0.262
B/23, 24/23.....	-0.279

White (Jeremy) to play 53?



23/20 13/8

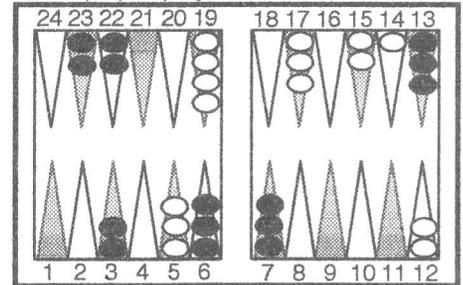
Kit: Good play. Jeremy can't afford to make the five point, since this would leave a double shot at the blot on his eight point. The builder he places on the eight point is very handy, and bringing the back checker up to the 20 point gives him some breathing room to handle awkward numbers.

Jeremy: Making the five point is not worth three blots in the outfield. No other play is close.

TD-Gammon: Best. Jeremy found a good positional play.

23/20, 13/8.....	+0.200
13/8, 11/8.....	+0.181
23/15.....	+0.177

Black (Kit) to play 54?



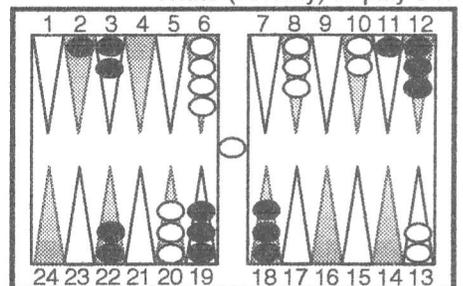
23/14x

Jeremy: Obviously better than making the two point or starting the four point, but what about anchoring on my bar? Hitting sends me back and slows my development but it does nothing long term. I'm not going to be primed or blitzed and the checker will just recirculate. Meanwhile, I've got three points of a possible six-prime waiting to fall into place. I think Kit should give himself an even game by making my bar point.

TD-Gammon: Sorry Jeremy, but you are a bit confused on this one. Hitting and ripping away the builder, gaining in the all-important race, and springing one back checker is much better. Kit obviously knew this, since he didn't even bother to comment on the play. This is a battle of outfields; the hit puts one of Kit's checkers there and removes one of yours.

23/14x.....	-0.028
23/18, 22/18.....	-0.118
22/13.....	-0.305

White (Jeremy) to play 54?



B/20 8/4

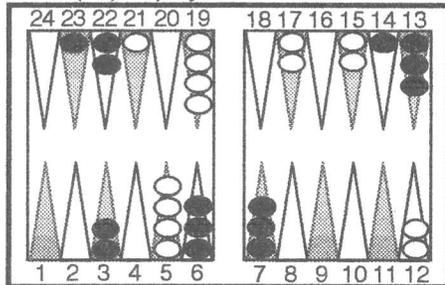
Kit: I don't care for this play. Jeremy is basically throwing his valuable spare on the eight point to the wolves. He leaves a double shot, and if he is hit his position will be very awkward to play with his outer board completely stripped and four checkers on the 20 point. Even if he is missed it may not be very convenient to cover the blot. I think he should play B/16. This also leaves a double shot, but the cost of being hit here is much less severe. He would keep a well-balanced position and just enter and try again.

Jeremy: I like this play. B/16 leaves the same double shot but doesn't start an important point. B/20, 10/6 breaks an important outfield point and stacks my six point all in the name of safety when I have the best anchor. B/20, 6/2x is still the wrong idea, attacking behind Kit's anchor and starting a much less valuable point.

TD-Gammon: I hate to say it, Jeremy, but your play stinks. Kit has the right idea here -- just shove the back checkers into the outfield and leave the guys up front alone since they are already where they belong.

B/16.....	+0.031
B/21, 20/15.....	+0.008
B/20, 6/2x.....	-0.014
B/20, 8/4.....	-0.098

Black (Kit) to play 63?



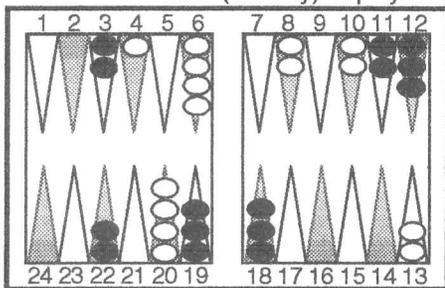
23/14

Jeremy: I don't see anything better.

TD-Gammon: Don't worry -- this time there isn't anything better.

23/14.....	+0.027
22/13.....	-0.000
13/4.....	-0.087

White (Jeremy) to play 31?



8/4

Kit: This is typical of what might have been expected. I missed the shot, but Jeremy still has problems. He doesn't have much else he can do, but now he has given up the important blocking eight point as well as leaving me a shot.

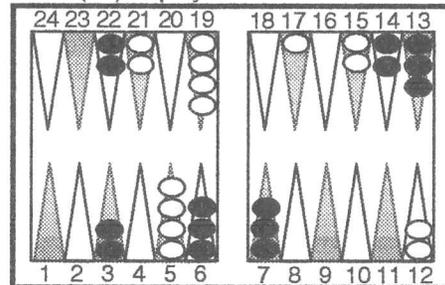
Jeremy: The five point would be nice, but I don't want to leave two direct shots.

TD-Gammon: Close, but making the five point is, in fact, a bit better. The position obviously calls for a bold play, since Jeremy already has four checkers back and an advanced anchor. Making the five point has three things going for it.

- 1) The five point is better than the four point.
- 2) Making the five point unstacks the six point.
- 3) After making the five point, the checkers on the ten point are still in play. The four point and the ten point do not work well together, since two points six away do not part of the same prime make.

8/5, 6/5.....	-0.143
8/4.....	-0.154
20/16.....	-0.164

Black (Kit) to play 62?



13/7 6/4

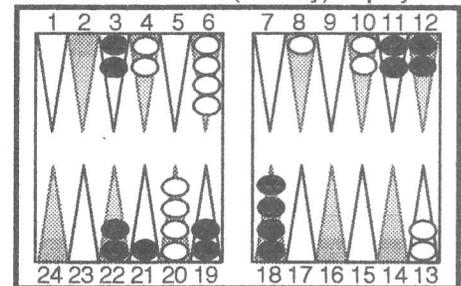
Kit: Running away with 22/14 is certainly a serious candidate. I am ahead in the race and Jeremy's position is too disjointed to carry out an attack, so that might not be a bad idea. I decided that I could afford to hold the anchor for a while and try to build my board, although things could get sticky and I will soon have to give up one of my outfield points. I would make the same play again, but 22/14 isn't bad.

Jeremy: Once again, Kit sees a different position than I do. His play looks awful. He gives himself two stripped points in the outfield, stacks his bar point, and strips his six point. The only plus is that he slots his four point. Isn't there anything better? What about 22/14? Look closely and you see that Kit is actually 18 pips ahead after he plays. He should be trying to disengage. He would leave one blot open to attack -- but it's only two builders and it's only a two point board. If he can escape the rear checker he would be one or two rolls away from an efficient double.

TD-Gammon: Jeremy has it right. 22/14 is by far the best play. Kit simply failed to follow the theme of the position, which is to get the checkers out and around while Jeremy has his four checkers stuck on Kit's five point.

22/14.....	+0.136
22/20, 13/7.....	+0.014
22/20, 22/16.....	+0.006
13/7, 6/4.....	+0.000

Move 22. White (Jeremy) to play 61?



20/13

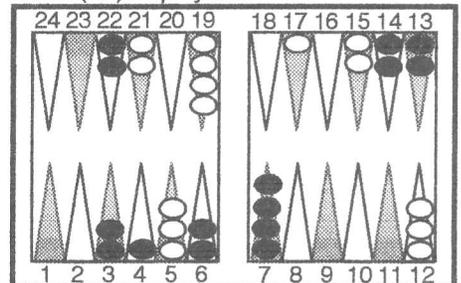
Kit: Clear. This balances out his position -- now he may be able to make some improvements. The safe 8/1 is sick, and 13/7, 8/7 leaves me a double shot as well as giving up the crucial bar point. Outfield control is very important this game.

Jeremy: Making my bar point would be nice, but it leaves two direct shots and gives up my midpoint, isolating my four back checkers. My play is safer and much more flexible.

TD-Gammon: Correct. Getting that fourth checker off the 20 point quickly is a MUST.

20/13.....	-0.036
20/14, 8/7.....	-0.089
20/14, 6/5.....	-0.091

Black (Kit) to play 22?



22/20(2) 13/11(2)

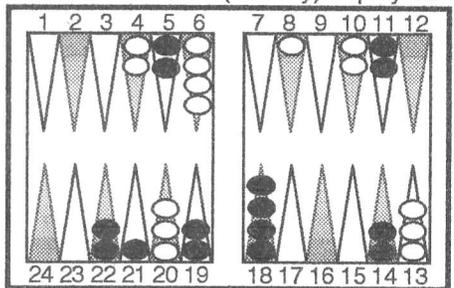
Kit: Making the 11-point is very important when your opponent is camped on your five point. It restrains him from clearing off the anchor safely for the rest of the game. Also, the advance to Jeremy's five point is quite important.

Jeremy: A big improvement, but Kit still has three isolated, stripped points to deal with.

TD-Gammon: Kit's natural play is clearly best.

22/20(2), 13/11(2).....	+0.103
22/18(2).....	+0.053
22/14.....	-0.005

White (Jeremy) to play 62?



10/4 10/8

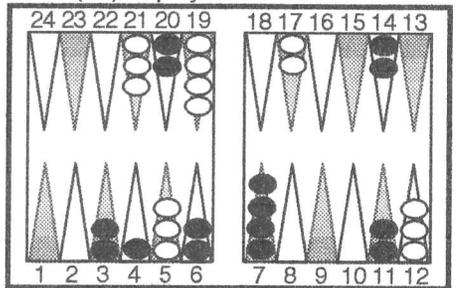
Kit: Jeremy's play is OK, but I have a slight preference for 8/2, 6/4. I think that when one's opponent has an advanced anchor, the farther back your blocking point is the better. This blocks one of his big doubles, and makes it harder for him to clear the anchor successfully. In this position I believe that the ten point is a more valuable point to hold than the eight point.

Jeremy: The alternative is 8/2, 6/4, which looks better for creating inside points but leaves the ten point hanging a long way from safety. Once again I think I chose the flexible play.

TD-Gammon: Kit outthought himself in his analysis. Flexibility is the key, as Jeremy notes. Also, remember that the ten and four points do not go well together. Jeremy's play is best.

10/8, 10/4.....	-0.112
13/7, 7/4.....	-0.156
8/2, 6/4.....	-0.169

Black (Kit) to play 32?



7/2

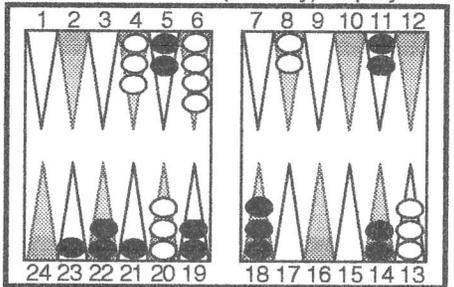
Kit: Not great, but it does start another point I will eventually need. I certainly won't give up any of my outfield points at this stage.

Jeremy: The alternatives are 4/1, 3/1 and 7/4, 3/1. Making the ace point is nowhere near as bad as most people think in this kind of position -- a point Kit makes repeatedly in Matchqiz. Neither of us are going to be priming the other, so all inner board points are pretty much equal. It also has the benefit of saving some sixes which might be important considering how stripped Kit's position is. This last consideration makes it my play, although either of the others could be right.

TD-Gammon: I don't think much of Jeremy's concept. Getting the junk off the bar point is much better. Saving sixes is not important here, particularly since the saved sixes will be going to the already made ace point after Jeremy's play. I like 7/4, 3/1, although Kit's play is just about as good. Also, don't overlook making the strongest offense and getting off the anchor now while it is relatively safe to do so with 20/18, 7/4. That play is thematically consistent with the position, and is just as good as the others.

7/4, 3/1.....	+0.052
20/18, 7/4.....	+0.052
7/2.....	+0.048

White (Jeremy) to play 63?



13/7 6/3

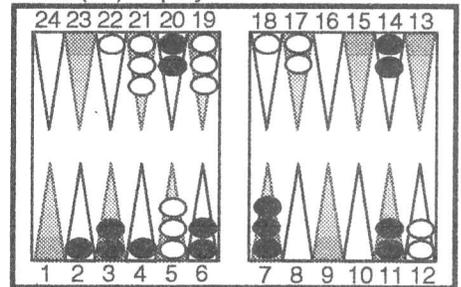
Kit: Good play. My board is such a mess that I might not be able to afford to hit the shot even if I can. Jeremy is putting his checkers where they belong. The safe 13/4 will lead to awkward problems in the future, while after the actual play the next roll or two figures to play smoothly.

Jeremy: I have nothing to fear from Kit's board (two blots and the best anchor), so I again choose the most flexible play. I'm not leaving blots just for style's sake -- 13/4 would produce many fewer comfortable rolls next turn.

TD-Gammon: A fine play. I couldn't argue the case any better.

13/7, 6/3.....	-0.093
20/17, 13/7.....	-0.131
13/4.....	-0.134

Black (Kit) to play 31?



7/4 3/2

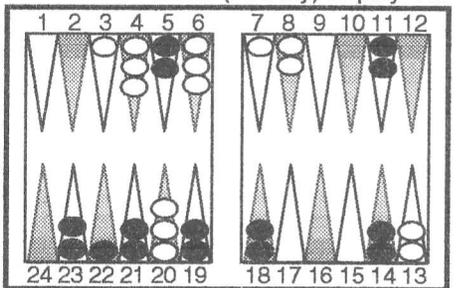
Kit: I believe this shift is better than 7/4, 2/1, even though the three point is better than the two point. The key is the blot which would be left on the ace point. It would be difficult to cover, and if covered the ace point is the least valuable point of all. However if it is left uncovered it might be hit at exactly the wrong time. After the actual switching play if I can fill in the three point I will have done the best I can with my inner board.

Jeremy: Again, I would make the ace point with 4/1, 2/1: no blots and saves a six.

TD-Gammon: 7/4, 2/1 looks best to me, since at least the made points are the ones we want. However, Kit's play is not bad. Once again, I don't like Jeremy's concept of making the ace point to save a six -- too ugly for me.

7/4, 2/1.....	+0.079
7/4, 3/2.....	+0.057
4/1, 2/1.....	+0.029

White (Jeremy) to play 44?



20/16(3) 7/3

Kit: A great roll for Jeremy. He is quite happy to take this opportunity to get off the anchor safely. Now the harassment value of the checkers on my 11 point goes down considerably.

Jeremy: The first thing to look at in a position like this is the race. If I'm winning it I want to disengage; if I'm losing it I want to play for contact. That's a general principle throughout all of backgammon and has tremendous impact in holding games like these when someone rolls doubles. Robertie has written in *Inside Backgammon* that a common characteristic of the beginning player is a general desire to break contact, regardless of the race. Don't make that mistake. When one player wants to break contact the other generally wants to maintain it, and you won't know which player you are until you look.

In this case the race is very close -- I lead 126 to 131 after the roll, and since the average roll is a little more than eight pips this race is nearly dead even. So that criterion won't help me.

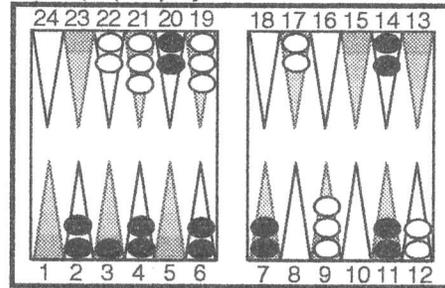
The next thing to look at is who is more awkward. If Kit is more likely to be leaving blots than I am I want to stick around; if he is more flexible than I am I want to leave. In this case if I play the contact play of 20/8, 7/3, Kit will have a little bit the worst of the timing. His bar point will go while I have a spare on my eight point, so he may be facing the ugly rolls sooner (note that this is a direct consequence of his failure to conserve sixes on his last two plays). If I play the semi-disengaging play of 20/16(3), 7/3 the timing looks to favor Kit slightly because he'll be able to break his 11 point past me, while I'll have only one spare outfield checker to play with. So this indicates staying back. Note that 13/9(2), 7/3, 6/2 gives me the worst of both worlds in that my back checkers will be isolated and Kit's 14 point will be free to move. A final consideration in positions where none of the above are conclusive is that you should tend to keep contact against weaker players because it's easier for them to botch plays in complex holding positions than it is in simple racing positions. This was not on my mind when playing Kit ranked ninth in the world Woolsey.

It looks like I should have played 20/8, 7/3.

TD-Gammon: Sorry to waste that thorough analysis, Jeremy, but your actual play is better. The key is getting off of Kit's five point where you are pinned down by his checkers on his 11 point. You need some breathing room, and moving off the anchor is the way to get it.

20/16(3), 7/3.....	+0.132
20/8, 7/3.....	+0.102
20/12, 7/3, 6/2.....	-0.026

Black (Kit) to play 65?



11/5 11/6

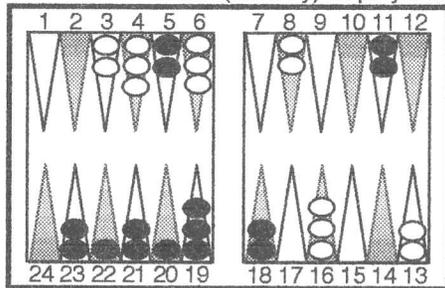
Kit: Since the 11 point no longer restrains anything, there is no reason to hold it any longer. 7/2, 7/1 is awful for building my board, and would just lead to more problems next turn. My other outfield point will do the job of keeping an eye on Jeremy's back checkers while I get to work building my board.

Jeremy: As advertised, Kit breaks the 11 point.

TD-Gammon: Kit's play is clearly best. Everything else is much too awkward or dangerous.

11/6, 11/5.....	-0.123
14/3.....	-0.181
7/2, 7/1.....	-0.255

White (Jeremy) to play 66?



16/10(2) 13/7(2)

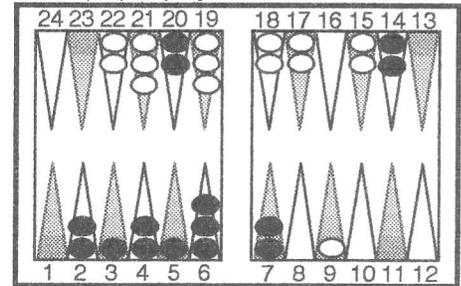
Kit: Jeremy volunteers a shot now rather than playing the safe 16/10(2), 16/4. He reasons that he will be in great shape if he gets away with it, possibly having a game-winning double. If he is hit my board is a mess, so he might have some juicy return shots. And if everything goes badly he still has a strong blockade against my back checkers. Sounds reasonable, but I don't buy it. I have a lot of hit and cover numbers, and then he could be in trouble. The blockade against my back checkers won't be all that effective if I can hit and make a prime or close him out. After the safe play he will have some problems, but his position would still be pretty flexible and he might be able to clear everything without leaving a shot. I pretty strongly believe he should have played 16/10(2), 16/4.

Jeremy: This puts me in the lead, so I try to run for it. Playing safe with either 13/7(2), 8/2(2) or 16/10(2), 16/4 would be a big mistake. Remember the criteria for paying now vs. paying later. Is his board improving? Yes. It's swiss cheese now but may be five points tomorrow. Will I leave more and worse shots if I pay later? Yes. I'll have one stranded point or three stripped points far from home in the outfield. Will I be home free if missed? Yes. I pay now.

TD-Gammon: Sorry, Jeremy, but you are way off base on this one. Getting away with it is far from gin, and getting hit could be very bad. Remember, when in doubt, pay later. Kit is quite correct here.

16/10(2), 16/4.....	+0.402
16/10(2), 13/7(2).....	+0.295
16/4, 13/7(2).....	+0.293

Black (Kit) to play 32?



14/9x

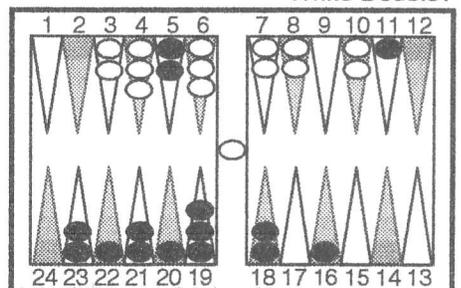
Kit: No choice. I can't just punt and not hit, since I am too far behind in the race. My board is as big as his, and if I get away with it I will be in great shape.

Jeremy: Well, what about 7/5, 6/3? Kit would have a perfect board but would be an underdog to ever get another shot, much less hit it. Hitting now looks right, but I would be curious to see a rollout.

TD-Gammon: Actually very close for such widely differing plays. I like hitting, but simply locking up the board and waiting is not far behind.

14/9x.....	-0.375
7/5, 6/3.....	-0.383
7/5, 7/4.....	-0.448

White Double?



Kit: This is a gamble. Jeremy will be in great shape if he hits one of my blots, although I still figure to have play since I have an advanced anchor and he still has to bring the back checkers around. On the other hand if he flunks the game could go my way quickly. The position is very volatile and he could certainly lose his market quite easily, so the double is reasonable. The real question in my mind is whether or not he is all that much of a favorite. I don't think that he is. If he fails to hit my builders are well enough distributed to cover at least one of the points, and then I may be instant favorite. I would have been inclined to hold off.

Jeremy: Don't forget that cube? Doubling here may look scary, but is in fact mandatory. My 24 hitting numbers are very, very strong and even my nine dancing numbers leave Kit with a lot of work to do. My only truly bad number is 6-1. This is a must double.

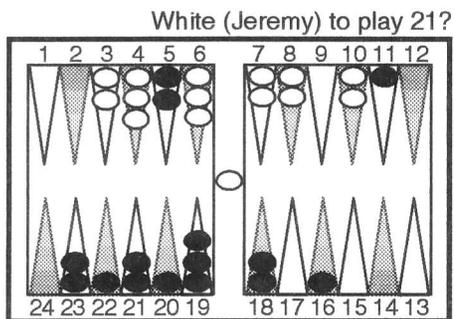
TD-Gammon: Right on, Jeremy! Equity of .375, and volatility in the sky! A great double, one which would be missed by a lot of players, although I'm surprised Kit was one of them since rumor has it that he is a very aggressive doubler.

Black Takes.

Kit: The take is trivial. I have plenty of winning chances if he doesn't hit, and even if he does I am far from dead. Not even close to a pass.

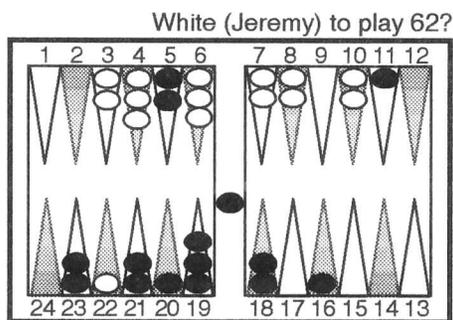
Jeremy: This looks like a take. Kit has an anchor which will provide real winning chances even after being hit, and provide good insurance against being gammoned which is very important. It just looks like Kit has a lot of play left.

TD-Gammon: Very clear take with equity of -0.375. It's nice for a change to see a couple of humans who aren't afraid to throw the cube around and catch it when it comes their way.



B/22x

Black (Kit) dances with 64?



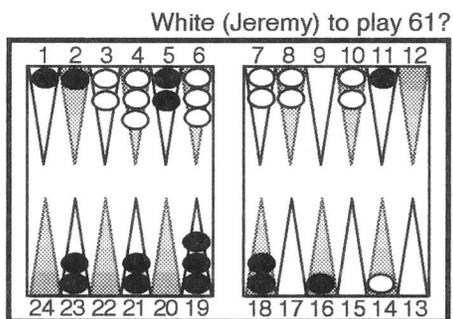
22/20x/14

Jeremy: Making the two point is nice, but leaves a second blot open to many return shots. Hitting the second checker makes everything safer. I hit on the 20 point because I don't want Kit to make it for a long time.

TD-Gammon: Didn't even consider making the two point -- that's not on the list of things to do. Jeremy's play is clear.

22/20x/14.....	+0.990
22/16, 10/8.....	+0.960
22/16/14.....	+0.957

Black (Kit) moves B/23 B/24 with 21?



14/7

Kit: Things certainly have gone Jeremy's way. The question now is should he push his luck with the attack and play 8/2x/1x or should he go quietly as he did. I'm far from sure on this one, but I think I would be inclined to go for the attack. It could easily result in a gammon for him if he gets away with it. After his actual play if I roll an ace my defensive structure will be quite strong anyway. In addition, even if he gets hit my board isn't all that strong so he could still enter and escape in time. I think it is worth the risk.

TD-Gammon: Oink, oink! I love pigging it for gammons. Kit's suggested attacking play is correct, and by a lot! There are risks, of course, but the potential gains easily outweigh them. Jeremy just chickened out, and then never even considered the play in his analysis. Wake up, Jeremy. Open your mind to new things.

8/2x/1x.....	+0.872
14/7.....	+0.738
.14/8, 4/3.....	+0.717

...Game 3 continues next issue...

