



Hoosier
Backgammon
Club

Sept/Oct 1999



wondering is: why is it better?". There must be 407 reasonable plays here, so who cares if he made the 4th, or the 40th best play? Black cubed this and thinks his problem is how to play a 2-1?

In an effort to clean up the email boxes of America, I am going to set forth guidelines for selecting interesting and instructive positions. It just so happens I have such a position to serve as a model.

PROPER POSITIONING

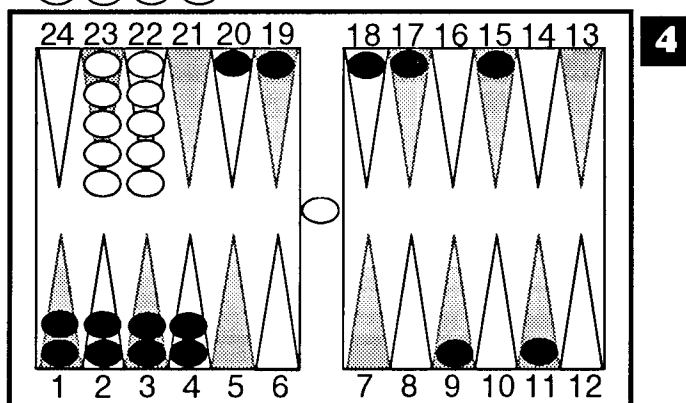
by Jake Jacobs

I don't know about you, but people are constantly giving me positions. It goes something like this: "How do you play a 6-3? I had a good board, either the six, five, and three-points, or it could have been the six, three, and two-points. I might have shifted. He had one checker on the bar, and I remember he had more blots around".

Some of my petitioners are more punctilious. One friend plays approximately 16 hours a day on-line, records and analyzes all of his matches, then forwards EVERY play flagged by Snowie for either side. He has to hire secretaries just to keep up with his backgammon correspondence. I have told him that instead he should just forward the plays he got right: it would cut down on the volume, and his friends would be more truly amazed.

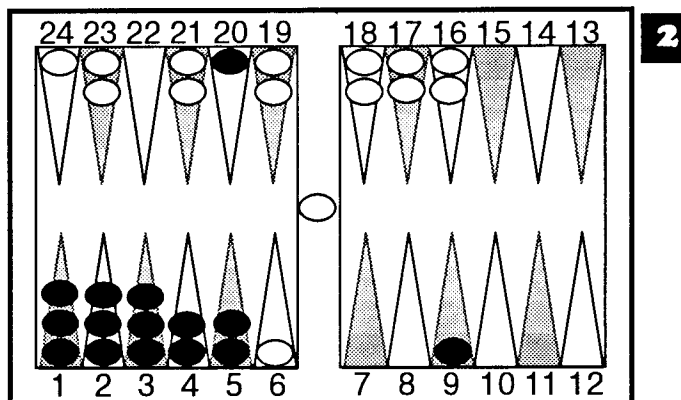
This is the sort of position that has no business darkening anyone's door.

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Black to play 2-1?

The query comes this way: "Snowie says my play was 4th best. By the way, I cubed the roll before. Should he have taken? What I'm

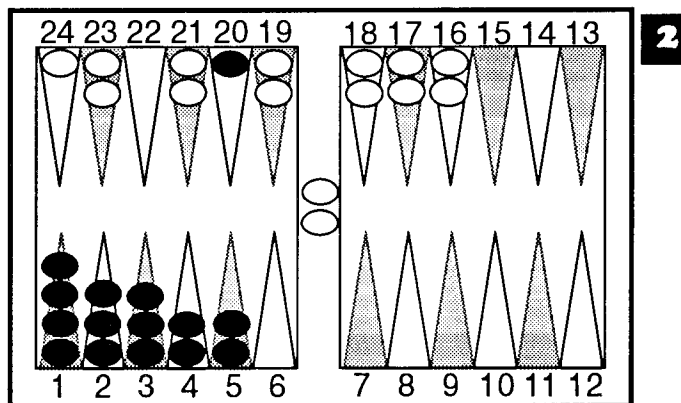


Money Game - Black to play 5-3?

Here's the little beauty now, coyly stepping into the spotlight. Let's see what makes her so attractive.

1. There is a significant difference between the candidate plays.

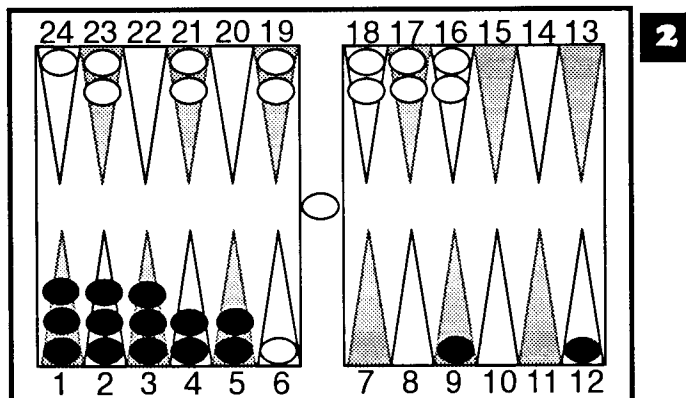
Unlike the imaginary position we first looked at, where every variation of 2-1 did nearly the same thing, the choices look like they lead to very different games. Compare these two:



After Black has played 9/6x/1.

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After Black has played 20/12.

In one case Black's most immediate jeopardy is crashing by failing to escape, while in the other the a fly shot is what may down this fleeing bird.

2. There is a significant difference in equities.

Some of these can be foolers: two plays will lead, through very different paths, to the same monetary result. Looking at the two choices above, we imagine that one will prove to be clearly better than the other, and our speculation is rewarded. There is a big difference in earnings between plays.

3. The position is generic.

That is to say, we expect this sort of decision in this case leap the prime versus pick-and-pass to confront us again and again in our games.

4. The position is memorable

Granting that my own memory is a little unusual, am I wrong in believing that, once we learn the correct play, memory of the general nature of this position and how to play it, will be retrievable from our memory banks, as a guide to playing similar positions as they arise? Moreover, having "learned" this one, should the next prove to have a different solution, we will be ready to compare both, and learn what specific feature led to the difference.

Those are the essential keys to finding good positions, but there is one more feature that separates the good positions from the great positions.

5. The correct play is unexpected.

Whatever his strengths and weaknesses as a writer (and both were considerable), O'Henry would be forgotten today were it not for the twist that he gave to his story endings. It is easy to forget which play was better, when you had spotted both and "*knew it was one of them.*" It is quite another thing when the winning play was one you didn't think of at all. I confess now to trying to mislead you above by showing you ONLY two choices for your 5-3: 9/6x/1 or 20/12. Make no mistake, 20/12 is per JellyFish rollout about 0.075 better than picking and passing (as was done by the player at the table), but the best play is over 0.1 better than 20/12. It is 20/15, 9/6x. While this leaves a direct shot, it escapes the back checker (very important) while winning so many more gammons than simply fleeing as to make it the clear winner.

*The Sangamon Valley Backgammon Association
presents the*

1999 Illinois State Backgammon Championships

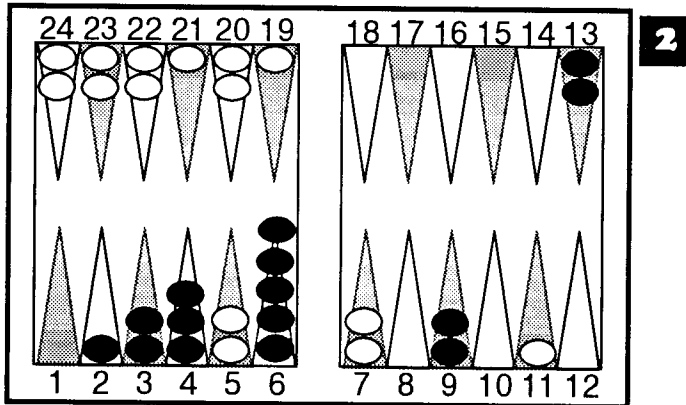
November 12-14, 1999

*Springfield Hilton
700 East Adams
Springfield, Illinois
(217) 789-1530 (800) 445-8667*

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Swinging for the Fence

by Chuck Bower



Money game. Black to play 5-2?

Take a look at the illustrated position. Black has a considerable race lead, has already doubled, and is just trying to walk home for the easy win. White has a decent board and two formidable defensive points. How should Black play 5-2? Two plays stand out as candidates: 13/11x/6 and 6/1, 4/2.

Over the last five years, we've learned a lot from the robots Jellyfish and Snowie. But even so, all of us have considerably more to learn. Trying to decide when to play for a gammon and when to look for the safe win is one road we still have a lot of miles to go. Sometimes there are so few gammon chances that it isn't worth the risk. Other times the gammon is assured if we avoid getting hit, so again the safe path is well lit.

In between there is a cusp where the choice to go for gammon is critical. Even allowing the opponent one roll to move towards home is too generous. The illustrated position is quite close to this transition.

In 1976, **Paul Magriel** wrote possibly the most instructive backgammon book in history. Its simple title, **BACKGAMMON**, does little to reveal the profound secrets within. Of all the valuable information, the favorite of seasoned players is the chapter **Safe Play vs. Bold Play**. Merely twelve

pages in length, yet immeasurable in its depth. Positional features which affect play decisions are enumerated there. Here is a summary, with a pointer to the appropriate candidate move in the illustrated position:

- 1) Relative strength of home boards: 6/1, 4/2.
- 2) Anchor in your opponent's board? 6/1, 4/2.
- 3) Opponent's home board blots: 13/11x/6.
- 4) Your home board blots: 6/1, 4/2.
- 5) Number of checkers you have on opponent's side: 6/1, 4/2.
- 6) Number of checkers your opponent has on your side: 6/1, 4/2.

It's not difficult to tally the votes: 5 to 1 in favor of the safe 6/1, 4/2. As strong as Magriel's **Safe vs. Bold** criteria are, the bots are unanimous in telling us that 13/11x/6 is clearly the better play, by 0.05-0.06 in equity units.

What are the features of the illustrated position which make going against Magriel the correct decision? For one, opponent has TWO home board blots, and covering checkers are quite distant. In addition, the HIGH points are the unmade ones, meaning if Black enters, s/he will easily escape. Another key feature is Black's impending difficulty in reaching home if the safe play is attempted. The two checkers on the midpoint are particularly vulnerable since there will be no spare 6's to play. Timing is on White's side if the slow route is chosen.

Lastly, the gammon wins after 13/11x/6 carry the decision. Jellyfish and Snowie agree that the bold play actually wins 1% fewer games, and loses 6% more gammons. But these deficits are easily overcome by 12% more gammon wins. Note that the TWO blots in White's board are important. If you move the single checker on White's 6-point just one pip to the 5-point, then Black's gammon win chances fall considerably and the safe play becomes the prudent choice.

Most of us watch out for gammon losses when we are on the short end, but play conservatively with a big lead. The robots have no such inhibitions. If a play nets two or more gammon wins for each non-gammon loss, then emulate Mark McGuire: swing for the fence!

1999 Hoosier Backgammon Club Gammon Point Standings as of September 1999.

HBC Player of the Month for August was **Butch Meese** with 154 gammon points.

HBC Player of the Month for September was **Woody Woodworth** with 212 gammon points.

1) Butch Meese..... 1018	Gabe Stiasny..... 80	Kevin Ward..... 20
2) Jim Curtis..... 996	Fred Kalantari..... 80	Michael O'Cain..... 20
3) Don Woods..... 890	Mogens Knudsen..... 80	Jim Roston..... 20
4) Chuck Stimming..... 872	Cathie Benneth..... 70	Julia Boyle..... 20
5) Sean Garber..... 862	David Smith..... 60	Carla Johnson..... 20
6) Mary Ann Meese..... 762	Chuck Bower..... 60	Julian Haley..... 20
7) Larry Strommen..... 748	David Schwind..... 48	Rick Reahard..... 10
8) Dave Groner..... 622	Terry Haffner..... 40	Stan Gurvitz..... 10
9) Gino Agresti..... 504	Jon Vietor..... 40	Mike Pratt..... 10
10) Al Gomez..... 380	Joe Miller..... 30	Reggie Porter..... 10
Woody Woodworth..... 282	Mary Franks..... 30	Bob Neumann..... 10
Peter Kalba..... 128	Luke Clippinger..... 30	Andy Liebenthal..... 10
Alan Tavel..... 128	Randy Foster..... 30	John Henn..... 10
Bill Julian..... 100	Jake Jacobs..... 30	Brian Nelson..... 10
John Brussel..... 100	Paul Franks..... 20	Jack Kissane..... 10
Per Sorensen..... 90	John Peek..... 20	Bill Yancey..... 10
Terry Bateman..... 90	Paul Spens..... 20	Jon Sinder..... 10
Jan Gurvitz..... 88	Roman Karbiak..... 20	

**HBC Sunday Tournament
December 5 1999**

**Bench Warmers
(Holiday Inn North)**

Open Division.....\$25 (\$10 optional sidepool)
Limited Division.....\$10

Registration 12 Noon
Play begins at 1:00 PM

Double Gammon Points

"ON" for 2000



17-19 March 2000

	<u>August 5th</u>	<u>August 12th</u>	<u>August 19th</u>	<u>August 26th</u>	
1st	Jim Curtis	Don Woods	Larry Stromman	Butch Meese	
2nd	Chuck Stimming	Butch Meese	Dave Groner	Jim Curtis	
2nd	Sean Garber	---	---	Gino Agresti	
	<u>September 2nd</u>	<u>September 9th</u>	<u>September 16th</u>	<u>September 23rd</u>	<u>September 30th</u>
1st	John Brussel	Per Sorensen	Woody Woodworth	Mary Ann Meese	Chuck Stimming
2nd	Chuck Stimming	Woody Woodworth	Butch Meese	Don Woods	Don Woods
2nd	Mogens Knudsen	---	Mary Ann Meese	Jim Curtis	Woody Woodworth
2nd	Fred Kalantari	---	---	---	---

Oct 27-31.....	1999 Las Vegas Open , Harrah's Casino & Hotel, Las Vegas, NV.....	(702) 893-6025
Nov 12-14.....	1999 Illinois State Backgammon Championships , Springfield, IL.....	(217) 528-0117
Nov 26-28.....	5th Thanksgiving Weekend , Belden Village Holiday Inn, Canton, OH.....	(330)-966-2811

Thursdays..... 7:00 PM at **Bench Warmers (Holiday Inn North)** (871-5655) 255-8902