

**GammonLine!**

Your Direct Line to Better Backgammon

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*After One Year*

Intro by Chuck Bower

It's been a year since Kit Woolsey launched his novel online backgammon monthly magazine: **GammonLine**. In that time, he has acquired over 500 subscribers. From the beginning, the foundations of the periodical have been a monthly annotated match, a monthly quiz of eight problems with solutions and expert commentary the following month, cutting edge articles, and an ongoing match with daily plays by the combatants--Kit vs. the subscribers.

During the past year, a chat room and bulletin board (forum) have been added. The latter sees daily postings, including questions of general interest, challenging positions, and an almost continuous debate about what the best play is for the ongoing match.

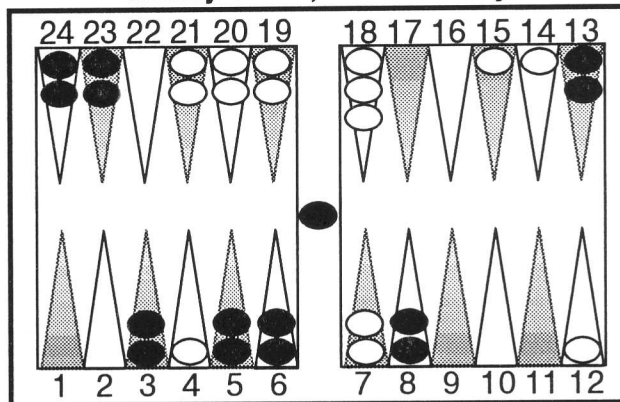
The daily match has been contested at such a high level that the first complete 11-point match has been published by Gammon Press. This book, titled **Master vs. Amateur**, is available from Carol Joy Cole (810-232-9731 or [cjc@tir.com](mailto:cjc@tir.com)) for \$20 + \$3 shipping. Members have online access not only to the complete moves and annotations (currently in the 3rd match with the subscribers leading 8-4/11) but also to full Snowie analysis.

**GammonLine.com** is an enjoyable daily experience and a valuable learning source for players of all levels. At \$36 per year, equivalent to only \$3 per issue, it's the best value in backgammon.

### Sample Quiz Problem

The following interesting position comes from the September 1999 Quiz (#8). The players get a whole month to vote for their plays of the eight positions. The solutions are published each month with commentary from top players. Each play is given a score from 100 to 0. The subscribers can compare their score with the top players.

### Money Game, Black to Play 1-1?



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Readers had 6 possible plays to choice from

- 1) B/22, 23/22
- 2) B/24, 23/22(2), 13/12x
- 3) B/22, 13/12x
- 4) B/24, 23/22, 13/12x(2)
- 5) B/24, 23/22, 5/4x(2)
- 6) B/24, 13/12x, 5/4x(2)

### Chuck Bower: B/22, 23/22.

Can Black win this position forward? Answering that question goes a long way to deciding the best play. Here an old fashioned hand rollout works nicely. B/24, 13/12x, 5/4x(2) is a forward going move so I did 36 (sequential dice) hand rollouts. Black did not do so well here. Most of Black's wins were from backgames, which answered the question rather convincingly. Black must win backward. Black's timing is questionable. Thus hitting White seems a mistake. With questionable timing, the 1-2 backgame is out, so grab the 22-point with B/24, 23/22(2). Now we are left with a single ace to play, and there is only one which is consistent with the gameplan--24/23. This checker can be used subsequently to either jump the prime (assuming White doesn't make his 8-point) or improving from the 1-3 to 2-3 backgame. The old cliché *the best two points for the backgame are the ones you have* fails once again. The 22-point combines well with EVERY other possible defensive point in the opponent's home board. Grab it now and entrench! B/22, 23/22.

### David Montgomery: B/24, 13/12x, 5/4(2)x.

If Black hits once, it seems he should play 13/12(2)x. Black isn't concerned with White anchoring, and sending another checker back makes it more likely White will ultimately have to make some concession. Hitting with a single checker 13/12x gives White too many returns with perfect diversification. This narrows it down to three candidates: not hitting, hitting once, or hitting twice. Of these, I like the look of hitting twice best. This play appears to me to give Black the best chance to win going forward, while still leaving Black good chances for a backgame if necessary.

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**2000 Hoosier Backgammon Club**

Gammon Point Standings as of June 2000.

The **Player of the Month for June** was **Butch Meese** with 140 gammon points.

The **Player of the Month for July** was **Jim Curtis** with 168 gammon points.

- 1) Butch Meese.....770
- 2) Larry Strommen.....740
- 3) Gino Agresti.....562
- 4) Dave Groner.....538
- 5) Jim Curtis.....472
- 6) Mary Ann Meese.....449
- 7) Sean Garber.....368
- 8) Chuck Stimming.....327
- 9) Al Gomez.....316
- 10) Don Woods.....303
- Gabe Stiasny.....267
- Terry Bateman.....225
- Ron Black.....188
- Woody Woodworth.....115
- Richard Larsen.....52
- David Smith.....45
- Philip Degen.....38
- Luke Clippingier.....36
- Alan Haas.....36
- David Schwind.....26
- Paul Horstman.....20
- Scott Day.....18
- Ross Ratzov.....16
- Jeff Flowers.....10
- Lance Jenkins.....10
- Jan Gurvitz.....10
- Frank Hanley.....8
- Austin Bennett.....8

**Steve Clark: B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x.**

Don't play back games at any score. Particularly don't play 1-2 back games. You end up with all your checkers stacked up on your (or your opponent's) ace point. One way out of the back game is to hit him twice, B/24, 13/12x, 5/4(2)x. This has the advantage of paralyzing him while we try to escape. Maybe we can pick up his other blots in the mean time and turn this around. The problem with this approach is that he will be able to come in eventually. Our back checkers are so badly positioned that we will have trouble making significant improvement before he starts forward again. What about the opposite approach of B/22, 23/22. This gets as many checkers up to the starting line as possible. It leaves our opponent's extra checker on the 18-point with nowhere good to go. Unfortunately it also leaves him with complete flexibility on his next turn. He will be happy to have a chance of adding a fifth point to his growing prime. I think we have to hit something here. And if we are going to hit only one blot, it look like it has to be on the 12. This keeps a better board and takes away an immediate builder. After that I suppose it can't be right to leave blots on the 13 and 12 points. They would just invite the super crunched back game. By process of elimination B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x must be the right play. I suppose so but I haven't even convinced myself.

**Snowie: B/22, 23/22.**

Doesn't anybody know how to play a back game? The highest priority is to make the advanced anchor. Everything else is secondary.

**Walt Swan: B/24, 23/22(2), 13/12x.**

Black does not have enough timing to play a backgame here. The 22-point is the best remaining point in the opponents board, so use two of the 1's to make it. Shifting points in your home board will just worsen your board, so leave those checkers alone. With White on the bar, half of his typical roll will be used to enter, so only his 11 roll will allow him to build his 8-point--a very good priming/blocking point for him, and the point blue definitely does NOT want to see White make. With White on the bar, he is going to have trouble cleaning up all of those blots. Maybe Black can send some more back. Black is going to have to live with the gammon danger for a long time, so go ahead and make the best play to win the game forward and ignore the gammon loss possibilities.



	<u>June 1st</u>	<u>June 8th</u>	<u>June 15th</u>	<u>June 22nd</u>
1st	<i>Butch Meese</i>	<i>Dave Groner</i>	<i>Gabe Stiasny</i>	<i>Gino Agresti</i>
2nd	<i>Alan Haas</i>	<i>Jim Curtis</i>	<i>Al Gomez</i>	<i>Gabe Stiasny</i>
2nd	<i>Al Gomez</i>	...	...	...

	<u>July 6th</u>	<u>July 13th</u>	<u>July 20th</u>	<u>June 27th</u>
1st	<i>Larry Strommen</i>	<i>Dave Groner</i>	<i>Larry Strommen</i>	<i>Jim Curtis</i>
2nd	<i>Jim Curtis</i>	<i>Butch Meese</i>	<i>Jim Curtis</i>	<i>Dave Groner</i>
2nd	...	...	<i>Butch Meese</i>	...

**George Klitsas: B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x.**

Play #1 (B/22 23/22). If Black is trying strictly for a backgame, he lacks the timing. In reality, Black is hoping that White's difficulties to lengthen his 4-point prime and bring the rest of his checkers home, will permit him to win some games by going forward and a number of games by forcing Black to give him a well-timed backgame. In practice, things don't work usually in White's favor and he often ends up in a hopeless backgame with a crashed inner board. Crucial is the first roll of White - when he makes his eight point forming a 5-prime, Black should be happy to save the gammon. In 36 games, Black's equity was -0.83 ppg. Plays #2 (B/24 23/22(2) 13/12x), #3 (B/22 13/12x) and #4 (B/24 23/22 13/12x(2)). From this group that hits the White blot on Black's 12-point, I think that play #4 is superior, since it leaves no additional blots in the outfield in exchange for less costly losses in White's inner board. Play #4 is a step towards the real demands of the position - to go forward. By pointing on White's blot on the 12-point, Black removes a most needed builder for the extension of White's four-point prime and the overall control of the outfield. By now Black can jump in the outfield with back checkers without much fear and even make points there resulting in less times being gammoned and in more wins. Black's equity in 36 games was -0.44 ppg. Play #5 (B/24 23/22 5/4x(2)) Pointing on the inner blot instead of the outer one (in comparison with play #4). One problem with this play is that it does not remove White's third builder in the outfield. Another and more serious, that, in order to remove it in the future, Black must break the midpoint losing control of the outfield. Black often has to break the midpoint anyway with 3's and 4's, when he is not able to activate his back checkers. In 36 games Black's equity was -0.64 ppg. Play #6 (B/24 13/12x(2) 5/4x(2)) Pointing on both blots, in an effort to gain more time and win by going forward, but failing to put a checker on the 21-point. Is this (failure) crucial and to what extent? (more or less than one things at a first sight?). The answer is more than one thinks. Black will usually have a hard time trying to extricate his back checkers, ending up in busted backgames or bad-timed ace-point games. His occasional wins when he scoops White's outfield blots and doubles him out, are not many in number, to make play f the winner. Actually, in 36 games that I played, Black's equity was -0.67 ppg. A very difficult problem, one that would be best answered by extensive human rollouts - hardly by abstract arguments of any type. Unfortunately, the kind of rollouts that in all variations

are time consuming, each move's difficulty reflecting the overall difficulty of the initial position and the branch-positions #1 through #6, as well, kind of fractal-position(s). I will vote for play #4, the typical winner, according to these short rollouts of mine, with a decent probability of being correct, I guess.

**Hal Heinrich: B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x.**

This is an extremely important play in a difficult position. I don't have much confidence in the play I've chosen. Just making the 22-point expresses a confidence in Black's backgame chances that I just don't share. Let's reject this and try to win front wards. So now we've come in from the roof and hit with 13/12x. This is key because it removes a builder for the fifth point of White's prime. Certainly putting two checkers up against a three point board with 5/4(2)x merits consideration. The prospect of catching one or both of White's dangling blots is certainly tempting. Although this play may turn out to be right, it feels wrong. Not only do Black's back checkers remain badly placed behind White's prime, but Black is in serious danger of losing all presence in the outfield. In addition, Black is poorly placed to continue attacking the blots that's been sent to the roof. Let's make the 12-point with our third ace, and hang onto our meager outfield control. The last ace is now easy: 23/22. This steps up to the edge of White's prime preparing to escape, anchor, or pick off White's dangling blots. The risk in breaking the 23 point anchor is tolerable. White is a little short of ammo, and needs to come in from the bar first anyway.

**Rob Maier: B/24, 13/12x, 5/4(2)x.**

If it were just a question of picking the better back game, then B/22, 23/22 would be best, as it requires less timing to avoid crashing our home board. Here, however, our timing is so bad that we should be looking to try to win going forward. With White's two ADDITIONAL blots, we should definitely hit twice first and ask questions later. White could easily spend the next several rolls up on the bar. Don't make the mistake of **compromising** between offense and defense with B/24, 23/22(2), 13/12x. The race is too close, and White's position too strong, to expect to be able to play anything resembling a well-timed backgame, and even if White fans with the single checker, we will wish that the second checker were already on the roof. Backgame? After hitting two, we could easily be WINNING the race in two rolls.

Aug 11-13....	<b>Georgia Championships &amp; Peach Cup</b> , Hilton Garden Inn, Atlanta, GA....	(770) 333-1876
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Sept 22-24..	<b>2000 Florida State Championships</b> , Sheraton Suites, Ft Lauderdale, FL...	(954) 938-4304
Oct 13-15....	<b>Illinois State Championships</b> , Springfield Hilton, Springfield, IL.....	(217) 528-0117
Nov 17-19....	<b>Minnesota State Championships</b> , Thunderbird Hotel, Bloomington, MN...	(612) 378-1536
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Thursdays..... 7:00 PM at **Wildcat Brewing Company** (872-3446) ..... HBC 255-8902

**Ron Karr: B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x.**

Despite having 5 checkers in back of a 4-prime, I don't want to play this as a backgame. The timing looks poor, plus I have chances to make forward progress, with White's four blots as possible targets. I want to hit something for sure, to prevent White from making a 5-prime, among other things. But if I hit two, my back checkers could be trapped & my position could fall apart quickly. So I think 23/22 for sure, to diversify the back checkers. Likely I can make the 22 point later if necessary, or hit a fly shot. Then 13/12(2)x to send that checker back. If White can't anchor, I may be able to keep hitting; or else I'll circulate some back checkers.

**Kit Woolsey: B/24, 23/22, 5/4(2)x.**

Black's timing is suspect for a back game. If he just makes the defensive 22-point, White has some rolls which make the five-prime and Black will be in big trouble. On the other hand, Black needs his midpoint as a lifeline. The shifting play may gain Black some time to get the back checkers out into the outfield, without letting White make an anchor.

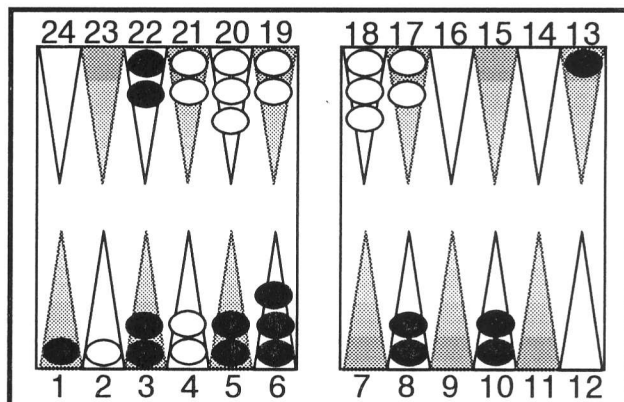
**Michael Zehr: B/24, 23/22(2), 13/12x.**

Four is more than you think, and it takes a long time to rescue five checkers from behind a four prime. That makes moving up to the 22 my number one objective. With my last ace I'll hit on the 12 to prevent White from having a full roll to make a five prime. An attacking plan (hitting twice) still leaves Black needing three 1's and 2's and five 5's and 6's -- a tall order while also trying to contain White using only ten checkers. That plan looks more likely to lead to Black crunching than anything else.

**Summary:** the popular choice was to shift in the outfield and maybe try to go front wards. I still have my doubts if the timing is adequate for that approach. Interesting that Snowie preferred not to hit at all, instead locking up the 22-point anchor. Who said that bots are afraid to play back games?

<u>Play</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Score</u>
B/24, 23/22, 13/12(2)x	4	100
B/22, 23/22	2	80
B/24, 23/22(2), 13/12x	2	70
B/24, 13/12x, 5/4(2)x	2	70
B/24, 23/22, 5/4(2)x	1	60
B/22, 13/12x	0	40

**Summer Construction  
Season Means Roadblocks**  
by Chuck Bower



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Money Game, Black to play 1-1?

Black has quite a variety of approaches to choose from: 1) hit on the 2-point? 2) shift the outfield blockers? or 3) move the blot off the 13-point?

Hitting here is weak. It doesn't present any particular problems for White, regardless if s/he enters or not. And if Black chooses to hit and leave a home board blot, getting that sent back behind White's 5-prime would be quite costly.

Many players would be tempted to leave the loose checker on the 13-point (or slip it up one space to the 12-point) hoping to pick up White's back checkers as they attempt to escape. Here, that is the wrong plan. It's not just that leaving the checker there is dangerous. White only hits with 4/36 rolls, and if this were the only factor then keeping the deep fielder could probably be justified. The problem is that the checker on the 13-point is one of the only checkers black can afford to move!

As is often the case in prime-vs-prime positions, timing takes on extra importance. White desperately wants to get the checker off Black's 2-point. Right now only 5's do that well. (2's just delay the problem.) Black moving 8/7(2) looks neutral but it actually gives white a convenient 6 to play. In addition, Black's checkers on the 10-point efficiently block sixes from White's anchor, both now and in the future. That makes 10/9(2) undesirable as well.

Snowie rollouts say that the awkward-looking 13/10, 6/5 is clearly Black's strongest move, winning over 3% more games than its nearest competitors. Keeping most 6's blocked on the nearside often forces White to move a checker to his/her acepoint soon and maybe even to break the prime in a couple rolls. Keeping your opponent's path home strewn with roadblocks is often the best way to find your own escape route.

**HBC Welcomes** new players:  
Austin Bennett, Scott Day,  
Jeff Flowers and Paul Horstman.