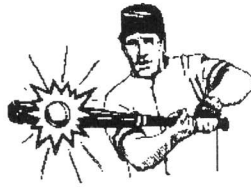




Hoosier  
Backgammon  
Club



July  
2001



## National Lampoon's Vegas Backgammon Tournament



by  
Jim Curtis



My first trip to Las Vegas. I made all the prudent preliminary preparations. I cut up my credit cards, I froze my bank accounts and I gave my wife, Helen, my power of attorney. I also notified my probation officer, got the local number for gambler's anonymous and as a final protection had my mother's telephone number tattooed on my arm. I was ready to depart.

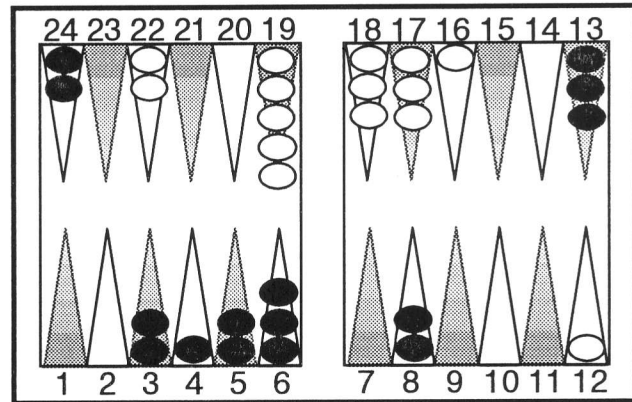
I was lucky to have a personal tour guide. Unfortunately he had not been there in awhile or imbibed too much on the plane. The first night we must have hiked ten miles looking for the **sights I must see**. First he would say, *its right around the corner*, which would be followed by ***They've moved the building!*** I was relieved when he suggested that we should see a show. The special effects of EFX show were outstanding.

It seemed unamerican to be in Vegas and not to visit the casino. My protector had gone off to make his fortune at something called Spanish 21, so I wandered. I sat down at a blackjack table (the only game I understood). The dealer was always calling out different things, so I didn't realize I was potentially in trouble when she yelled *splitting tens*. A lineman from the NFL dressed in a tuxedo immediately appeared and did not look happy. He watched my technique for awhile and then said, Mr. Curtis, we would be happy to have you play with us anytime. I suspected that I might be missing some nuance of the game so I packed it in for the night. I left a winner, but had the uncomfortable feeling that I had been very lucky.

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## Robertie's Doubling Rule

by Chuck Bower



Position 1: 7-Point Match, Black-3 White-4  
Cube decision both sides?

At the recent **Michigan Summer Championships** in Novi, Michigan, Butch Meese and Chuck Bower teamed up in the Open Doubles. In the second round, our opponents were Carl Sorg and Gregg Cattanach of Atlanta. We held the black checkers in the above position and had a tough doubling decision. Should we pin the entire match on this game now by doubling or should we wait until our position improves?

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## HBC Summer Tournament

Sunday - July 29th, 2001

**Arni's Restaurant (875-7034)**

3443 West 86th Street  
(west of WalMart)

**Registration: 12:00 PM**

**Play Begins: 1:00 PM**

**Open Div: \$20 with \$10 Op SPool**

**Limited Division: \$8**

**Format: Main-Consolation**

Pre-register: 255-8902 or  
meese@worldnet.att.net

Hoosier Backgammon Club  
Home Page: <http://home.att.net/~meese>  
E-Mail: [meese@worldnet.att.net](mailto:meese@worldnet.att.net)

Butch & Mary Ann Meese  
1008 Tuckahoe, Indianapolis, IN 46260-2215  
(317) 255-8902

## Robertie's Doubling Rule

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The match score definitely plays a role here. If we lose a gammon, the match is over, regardless of whether we redouble or not. If we keep the cube and lose a simple game we will have about one chance in six of winning the match, not great, but still doable. If we get to a cashable position owning the cube, we will take the match lead at 5-4/7 and have 60% match winning chances (MWC). If we redouble and they take, then the game winner is the match winner.

Assuming 1/4 of our losses are gammons, then doubling risks 13% MWC to gain 40%. That means we only need about 25% game winning chances (GWC) to consider redoubling! From White's side, a pass leaves them with 40% MWC while a take is for the match, so they must win 40% or more of all games in order to be able to take.

In the above position, only the most (overly) optimistic players would double in a money game, and White would have a huge beaver. But at this score, Black definitely wins more than 25% so a double could be right. Black has an easy take since they are the game favorites -- definitely better than 40% GWC. So, should Black double?

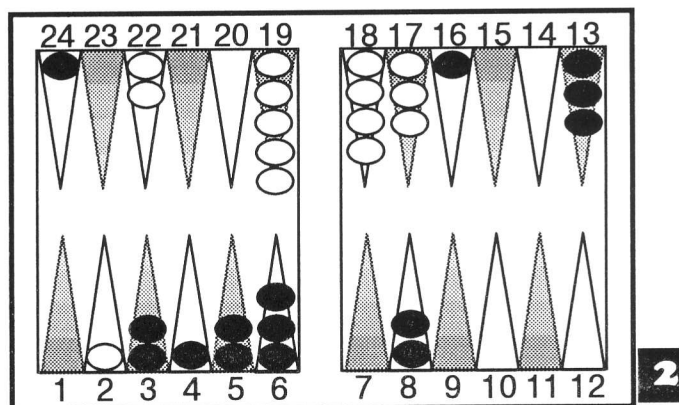
Nearly two years ago I wrote an article here on **Woolsey's Doubling Rule**. In short, that rule says: *If there is any doubt in your mind that your opponents have a take, you should double.* In the above position we were sure that our opponents had a take. Does this mean we **should not** double? Not at all. It just means that Woolsey's Doubling Rule does not indicate what to do in this position. What now?

In his classic two volume **Advanced Backgammon**, Bill Robertie gives advice on doubling which I have coined **Robertie's Doubling Rule**. It goes like this: 1) Assume you throw an above average roll, but not your best. 2) Assume your opponents then throw a below average number, but not their worst. 3) If after that sequence your opponents still have a take, then you should hold off doubling. If after that sequence they should pass, then double now.

An above average roll for us is a hit, which happens with any 1 or with 5-3 and 4-4. That's 14 hits. 4-4 is clearly our best and 5-3 is probably better than the 1's, but any hit is above average, so assume we roll a 1.

If hit, White must enter. 9/36 times they flunk, but that is their worst. Below average is some kind of entry without escaping and without return hitting. If that happens, do they have a take? This

is the hard part -- judging their drop/take decision next turn. At the table, it wasn't obvious to Butch and me if they would have a take, but it certainly wasn't a clear pass. Therefore we applied Robertie's Doubling Rule and decided that we would gain by waiting. We were rewarded for our patience by rolling a 5-3 while Gregg and Carl responded with 6-2. We then were faced with Position 2, another redoubling decision.



Position 2  
7-Point Match, Black-3 White-4  
Cube decision both sides?

Now **Woolsey's Doubling Rule** does apply. Is there any doubt if this is a take or pass? Can White win 40% or more here? We didn't know, so that made our action easy -- redouble! Now Carl and Gregg had the tough decision.

After some discussion, they decided to put the match on the line by taking. A Snowie rollout later showed their decision was correct, but barely. They win 40.7% of games so they are better off taking than passing and having only 40% MWC.

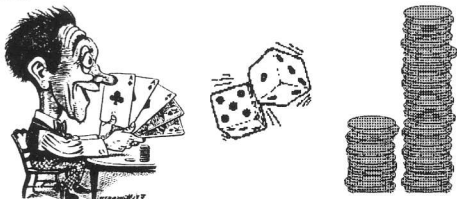
The game produced good winning changes for both sides, but in the end they won the game and the match. They went on to place second in the Doubles. They lost in the finals to Michigan's Ralph Dietz and Chicago's Peter Kalba. Showing that their doubles performance was no fluke, Carl won first place and Gregg finished third in the 73 player Intermediate.

**Important News: Weekly Play**  
Starting July 11, HBC will play  
on **Wednesday** evenings.  
We will remain at **Neon Johnny's**.

## Vegas Tournament

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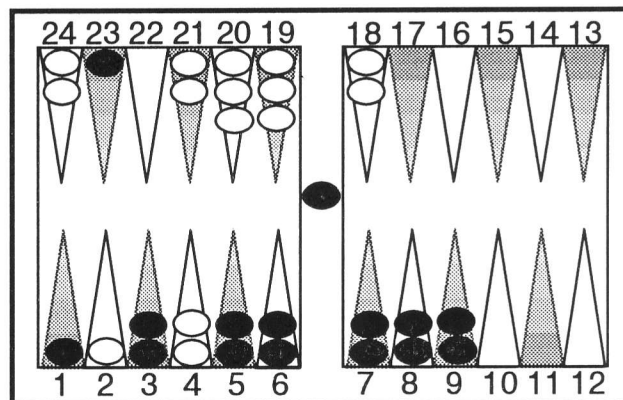
The next night, after an unsuccessful backgammon tournament run and seeing a great show (Danny Gans), I again ended up at the blackjack table. I kept hearing voices behind me, but ignored them until this sultry voice intoned *Can I get you anything?* I was playing blackjack on a bar stool. When I turned around I found myself nose to chest with a very well endowed, but obviously economically deprived young lady. She could barely afford to put clothes on her back or anywhere else. I became so flustered that I passed on the drink, but took a hit on the twenty I had showing on the table. It did not go well. I took this as another sign that I should quit and returned to my room. The dealers move things so quickly, I'm never quite sure what's happening. I only had three chips left, but one of them had a five hundred on it, so unbelievably I had come out ahead again.



The next day started well. I was winning some matches and was significantly ahead when my opponent asked to take a fifteen minute break. I said that was fine, and told her I would run back to my room in the adjoining hotel. If you have never been to Vegas, you have to understand the hotels are really huge castles. Besides that they hide the rooms. I got back to my hotel in good time, but couldn't find the rooms. I was watching the time and ultimately decided I just needed to return to the tournament. By this time I was totally lost and could not find my way out of my own hotel. In desperation I went through a door marked **Exit**. I was in the desert. All I saw was lots of sand and two men with shovels. There was a third man prone on the ground. Later I learned he had entered a tournament below his apparent skill level. I decided that's not where I wanted to be and quickly reentered the hotel. Eventually some security guards took pity on me and got me pointed in the right direction. When I got back to the playing room, my opponent was very gracious. Apparently I was sunburned, disheveled and in some distress. Her only comment was *You've never been to Vegas before, have you?* The answer was obvious.

Despite my losses in the initial tournament, I

was throwing pretty good dice and playing reasonably well (the former always enhances the perception of the latter). I had made several serious errors, but was able to recover until I got to the money round of the Nevada tournament. In a tight match, I encountered the following position:



Black to play 2-1?

I panicked about leaving two blots in her home board by moving Bar/22. After looking at the option quickly, I elected to hit her from my three point. My thinking was that being hit would not seriously hurt me since I had a home plus an extra point to come in on, while any non-sixes would further hurt her timing. I played too fast and did not give proper consideration to the fact that I was stripped of timing myself and in danger of being forced to break my prime. This is in fact what happened. I was hit and immediately came in, but had to break my prime. I avoided the gammon, but lost what I believe was a crucial swing game. In retrospect, I should have moved Bar/22. My opponent had ten pointing rolls, but four of them duplicated the twos she needed to extricate her back checker. All pointing rolls left me at least one place to enter and further deteriorated her timing, while preserving mine. Any six she rolled would either leave me alone or give me another blot to zero in on. I might not have won the match, or even the game, but I gave away my best chance for both by moving too quickly. If anything is to be learned from my games, it is probably this.

The above loss was particularly disheartening, because if I would have won, I would have played my friend and roommate, Alan Tavel in the semi-finals. Alan and I are fairly evenly matched, but in the tournament, he did a much better job than me of taking his time and considering all options. He was rewarded by winning our division. I, too, was properly rewarded by getting to the money rounds two or three more times and blowing them all, although in one case I don't think better play would have made any difference.



Let me return to the casino, because that's far less painful. On the third night I'm back at the blackjack table thinking I've found a new profession. First I'm playing with a nice German fellow who gets a pair of eight's while the dealer is showing a face card. The European says *I surrender* and throws in his cards. I don't say anything, but think to myself *Why don't you at least try because you aren't going to lose anymore.* A little while later it happens again, except this time I notice the dealer giving him money back. Upon inquiry I learn that I can play twice as long for the same amount of cash, so I start *surrendering* on every hand. What a fun game!

Later in the evening, my mentor appears to give me a **few tips**. Actually I'm proud of myself because I am again significantly ahead of the house. The first thing my friend does is pull out this sheet telling you what to do with particular cards. It's the size of a poster board. The pit boss explains that the casino has no objection to the information and actually provides the same data on a small card that can be held in the hand. My friend explains that he is too drunk to read the fine print. After looking at my friend's glassy eyes, the pit boss says **Play away**. Thus started my first professional lesson in how to play blackjack. It did not go well. My friend is trying to advise me what to do on every hand, but is having trouble focusing on his chart. He gets insulted when I do not heed his instructions and follow my own instincts. We often compromise which just brought a smile to the dealer's face. Within an hour the casino has reclaimed its ducats and is now into my pocket. I am madly searching for the number of gamblers anonymous. My friend has had some wild swings, but has recovered the mortgage on his house. He puts the chart under his arm and says he is going to try another game. I decide that I can't afford another lesson and go to bed.

Saturday and Sunday continue with lots of good and interesting backgammon, although little financial success. One pleasant surprise was how many people were there from outside the United States. I played several people from both eastern and western Europe, as well as Japan and

Canada. Almost without exception, I enjoyed them all. Not only were they good competitors, but they were friendly and willing to discuss their homelands and travels. Director, Howard Markowitz, was pleasant as always, as was the staff of John Brussel, our own Mary Ann Meese, John Carrico, Carol Joy Cole, Kari Ginther, Troy Longman and Joann Feinstein.

All in all I had a good time and intend to return. Next time I hope to take my wife who is not a games person at all. Consequently, I don't know how I can coordinate it with a BG tournament, but I would like to. I may just have to make two return visits.

**Editor Note:** HBC would like to congratulate Alan Tavel for his big win in Vegas.

**2001 Hoosier Backgammon Club**  
**The Player of the Month for June was**  
**Chuck Stimming with 168 gammon points.**

- 1 Jim Curtis..... 844
- 2 Butch Meese..... 717
- 3 Sean Garber..... 699
- 4 Mary Ann Meese..... 498
- 5 Chuck Stimming..... 492
- 6 Woody Woodworth..... 457
- 7 Larry Strommen..... 381
- 8 Gabe Stiasny..... 333
- 9 Scott Day..... 305
- 10 Dave Groner..... 238
- Rick Steele..... 237
- Al Gomez..... 220
- Terry Bateman..... 201
- Jeff Flowers..... 142
- Ron Black..... 122
- David Schwind..... 80
- Chuck Bower..... 80
- Frank Scott..... 48
- Alan Tavel..... 30
- Robb Zeigler..... 20
- Jeff Arnold..... 20
- Brian Nelson..... 20
- Luke Clippinger..... 18
- John Perkins..... 16
- Charley Haley..... 10

	June 7th	June 14th	June 21st	June 28th
1st	Chuck Stimming	Woody Woodworth	Jim Curtis	On
2nd	Woody Woodworth	Chuck Stimming	Chuck Stimming	Vacation
2nd	Butch Meese	...	Scott Day	

Aug 9-12..... **Georgia State Championships & Peach Cup**, Hilton Garden Inn, Atlanta, GA.... (770) 333-1876  
 Aug 31-Sep 3... **49th Indiana Open**, Sheraton Hotel & Suite, Indianapolis, IN..... (317) 255-8902  
 Sep 21-23..... **Florida State Championships**, Sheraton Suites, Ft. Lauderdale, FL..... (954) 564-0340  
 Wednesdays.. 7:00 PM at **Neon Johnny's**, 86th & Township Line Rd (Cellular 442-4065)..... HBC 255-8902