



**Hoosier
Backgammon
Club**

Octoboo 2001



"Opinings" On The Board by Sawdust

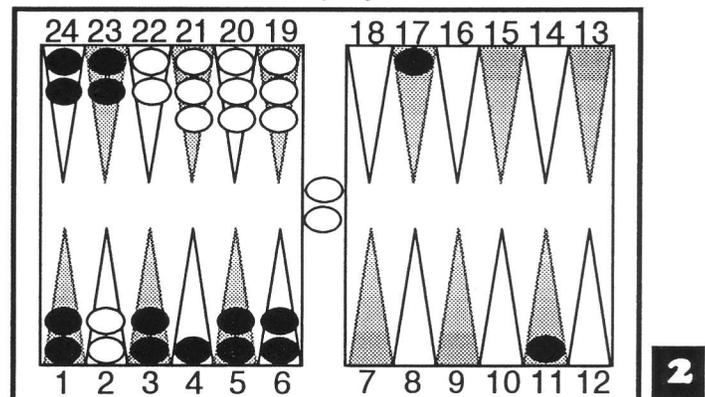
I love backgammon. I love the sound of the game; the rattle of the dice in the cup, the dull clatter of the dice as they tumble across the playing surface, the clicks of the checkers as they are slid into their new temporary lodging spaces on the playing field, the occasional involuntary grunt or groan of the participants as the dice dispense their wounds and dash hopes of blot invincibility. I love the feel of the game; the heft and shape of a well made hardwood dice cup, the slick surface of the checkers, the dice bouncing against my palm as I shake the cup and transmit my wishes to them. The visual aspect of the game is equally pleasing to me in its demand for concentration across the board of symmetrically placed points and their brightly colored occupying forces in ever-changing arrays. Even the smell of the game....not the players, certainly; but the game is a sensory delight when I open a new board and the aroma of wood finish and fresh leather greets my nose.

I love backgammon even when all the above elements are missing. I'm talking about playing the game on the computer-against the unblinking eye and unwavering logic of Snowie. The mental workout is still there even if the sensual nuances are missing. While I'd much rather joust with a human opponent, the last time I called a fellow club member to play a match just for fun at 3:00 AM, I was unable to convince him that it would be an enjoyable way to pass a few early morning hours before going to work. Snowie didn't mind a bit. I hadn't bathed or shaved and was minimally clad. Snowie didn't notice. I put my feet, shoeless, up on the table and did not offer to share my coffee. Snowie sat there obliviously. During a match, I can be extremely lucky, or obnoxiously vociferous in my unluckiness and Snowie reacts not at all. But, I don't like Snowie-I hate Snowie.

I hate Snowie because it deprives me of any satisfaction of victory even when I am able to trounce it at zero in a 9-point match. Using its analysis, I invariably find out that I was incredibly lucky and played merely at the middle expert level (which in human double-elimination tournament terms means I might win one match in the Advanced division prior to

consignment to the side events). In those rare matches where I am rated world class, I am similarly deprived of reward to the psyche because I am probably on the short end of the score. Snowie almost always plays at a level it describes as **extra-terrestrial**. How does one compete with that? Last time I checked, even Jim Curtis was a tad short of that level. What is really galling about Snowie, though, is its ability during analysis of a match to rank every possible move for every throw of the dice that each player makes, and inform the opponent how much equity he has lost if he did not make the **best** move. Furthermore, Snowie establishes thresholds of such equity surrender. Below about 3.5% from the best move, it's merely an error. Below about 10.5%, it's a blunder. A blunder!! That's pretty much like sitting across from a human opponent and picking up your dice after a play you see the cartoon balloon over his head and it reads, *what an idiot-how did he ever think he could play in this bracket. I wonder if I can get him in a money game after this match.*

**9-Point Match, Black-5 White-2,
Black to play 5-1?**



**HBCs Fall Tournament
Sunday - December 9th, 2001**

**Arni's Restaurant (875-7034)
3443 West 86th Street
(west of WalMart)**

**Registration: 12:00 PM
Play Begins: 12:30 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**

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

At last, I come to the point of this article. The position you will see displayed somewhere nearby came up in one of my wee-hour matches with my hexadecimal speaking opponent. I'm up 5-2 going to 9-points and own the cube at 2. I had caught a break and two loose blots (it's rare that Snowie ever leaves two blots in danger-lesson 427a) and Snowie did a dance for me. I now have a 5-1 to play. Now, those of you that know me, are most likely aware that I rarely need 5 seconds to make a play. However, you don't get to rank me or rate my plays as blunders as does Snowie. This decision took me more than 5 minutes. I know this because my screen saver activated while I'm still trying to decide between 4 or 5 plays. To make a long story short, I made the play and won the match by trapping 4 checkers on my deuce point and scoring a gammon. With an audible **take that, ET**, I directed Snowie to analyze the match and expected good grades for my performance. WRONG!! My match-defining move is a BLUNDER!! I'm still an idiot and won't be a threat to Kit, Neil, or Jake any time soon. My play didn't even make the top ten. I know I'm doomed because the play Snowie initially said was best is one I discarded in the first ten seconds of deliberation. However, after 200,000 rollouts of the top two plays, Snowie had a change of heart and decided to play the ace 5-4 instead of 4-3. I at least considered that one.

The point of having this position published in the newsletter is to provide you with something to ponder while you are not otherwise mentally occupied. What play would you make? Even Snowie is not sure at its normal level of play (3-ply in this case) as after many thousand rollouts, its ranking of moves changes significantly, because the position is extremely volatile. There is a world of difference in how this game progresses after Snowie's next shake. Are you optimistic about rolling sufficient 5's and 6's even after probably using one of those to cover the unlifted blot or to get into position to control the outfield (and lift the blot) before Snowie enters and makes use of his better board? Or, do you envision an eventual 1-2 backgame in which you retain fair chances if you can time it out advantageously? This is a good example of a **type** position which, while it may not commonly occur, can yield a player significant advantage if he knows how to proceed while his opponent does not.

Editor's Note: This position was shown to me during HBC weekly play and I asked a panel of experts what would be their play over the board. What follows are their responses:

Jake Jacobs

I would play 23/18, 5/4. I cannot believe lifting is correct; I just have too much work to do (and if he rolls a 5 you may still recover). I shift because I have more covers, and he has fewer shots. I come out because I have four men behind a prime - time to do something about that!

Kit Woolsey

A truly great problem. Several different thematic approaches available, all of which are quite different.

My choice is 23/18, 4/3. Black can't expect to ever play any kind of a decent backgame. Getting hit on the four point would be the end of the world. Black must try to win frontwards. In addition, Black has to worry about getting stuck behind White's blockade and being forced to crunch. Black's main assets are outfield control and equality in inner board strength, and I believe he should try to build on these assets. My play avoids the disastrous hit and solves the problem of getting stuck. The game plan is to scramble another checker or two out and make it a dogfight in the outfield. If Black can establish an outfield point or two he will be in decent shape, as well as cutting down on the gammon danger considerably.

Walter Trice

Seems worth while to try to win this, which means you have to (a) make a 5-point board and (b) get the back men out. Hence 11/10 (direct cover for the 4-point) for (a) and 23/18 for (b).

Neil Kazaross

I play 11-10, 23-18 because I think it's worth the risk to cover versus lifting. This isn't a backgame and while this play may get absolutely crushed I think that 23-18 is a better 5 than 17-12 since I'll need to jump the 4 prime soon and if I cover without escaping after 17-12 I may crash.

Dave Groner

I think I would go all out to make the four by playing 17 to 12 and 11 to 10. Unless black makes his four point he has little chance of bringing his back checkers home safely and should not leave his defensive position on the 1 & 2 points.

Alex Caraplis

Well too bad Black didn't cover! Now is not the time for a cowardly play so lifting the blot is a definite no. Black has to make a stand now to win the match with a gammon here. The open 4-point is too much of a future liability so now is the time to go for the jugular. Also, it is easier to clear the 6-point in the bearoff with your opponent anchored on the 5 then the 4 anyway. This is assuming he anchors but perish the thought for now. Shuffle plays with the 17 and 11 point leave Black in timing danger 3 rolls out with consecutive 33 or 44 and the added covers don't compensate for the crash potential with 4 checkers back. So they may be eliminated. 23-18 has to be the five and then one must extract max coverage of the blot on the 4-point. 11-10 with direct 6s is good but the man on the 17 doesn't contribute to covers. So try 5-4 and recount. Now 6s still work with the 17 point adding 12s (3-3,4-4). So this looks best 23-18, 5-4.

Mary Hickey

First, I would recognize that I can't play this as a backgame, no matter how many extra checkers I get sent back. He has four checkers to bring around, and I am too far advanced generally plus have made my own ace point. The only way I can reasonably expect to win this is by going forward.

For these reasons, and probably also because it doesn't suit my style anyway, I wouldn't consider any play that lifts the blot on the 4 point. Instead, I would greatly increase my chance to cover it next roll by moving the ace 11/10, giving me a direct 6 to do so next roll if I'm not hit. I'd then move the 5 23/18, recognizing that my 6s are duplicated as covering and escaping numbers, and I may need to be able to handle a couple of rolls that consist of other numbers. This will be especially important if he enters with a single 2. I feel this consideration heavily outweighs giving myself extra 8s to cover with 17/12, especially since 44 extra is rooted.

The match score is some consideration here, but not because I'd be worried about the gammon. If I lose this game, I'll likely get gammoned anyway. The problem I see is that by playing to win, I risk getting **backgammoned** and having him jump from solidly behind all the way to Crawford-4-away, if I end up with a big stack of checkers on the 24 point. That is the one factor that would make me even look at safer plays that leave fewer blots. However, I think that particular Wuggy Ump is far enough away that I'd try to win the game, and perhaps even a gammon for the match, rather than go into damage-control mode at this time. At this score, and also for money, I'd **play to win** with 23/18, 11/10.

Malcolm Davis

Play 23/18, 11/10 seems clear. Timing is impossible for a backgame, at this stage. Need a direct cover for the 4-point. Would prefer to retain the 23 point, but can't afford the luxury. It might not be necessary to come out with the 5, but I would do it.

If the 4-point can be made, you are in good shape. If you get hit, you then might have time to play some sort of back game, if you can re-establish the 23-point.

Bob Glass

This is my over the board answer: 11-10, 17-12.

Bob Glass

Change my mind! 17-12, 5-4.

Dean Adamian

Move 11-6 and 17-16. Must make the 4-point to have time to extricate back 4 checkers from White's home board. If it fails, can still come around and somewhat control outfield.

Chuck Bower

My play is 17/12, 11/10. There is no rush to vacate the safety of the second anchor before making the 5th homeboard point. For the ace, although 5/4 gives Black one more cover number if he survives, the difference between an open 5-point compared to an open 4-point (when White enters by hitting) is too much of a gamble, in my opinion. Just don't tell me White fails to hit and then Black rolls double 4's!

Elliott Winslow

I play 11-10, 17-12. I'm prioritizing my game as 1) cover 2) escape, while hanging onto that 23 point if I get hit. Probably warped.

Douglas C. Roberts

I would not give up the 23-pt until I have made my 5-pt board, due to the extreme danger of being gammoned and losing the match, if my opponent were to bring in a blot and hit me after I have given up a back-anchor. If all goes well, I may be able to make the board and then leap smoothly without crashing, while my hapless opponent fans. Let's compare three possible plays that retain, for now, my two back-anchors, while I bring builders into range: [a] 11-10; 17-12 with 19 covering numbers [17 combination sixes, plus 5-3], [b] 5-4; 17-12 with 21 covers [17 combination sixes, plus 4-3 and 5-2], and [c] 11-6; 17-16 with 14 covers [11 simple twos, plus 1-1, 6-6, and 3-3]. None of these plays can handle the 4-4 root number. Play [c] can be discarded, due to the reduced chance of covering and making the board, so the real choice is between [a] and [b].

Play [a] avoids switching and keeps the 5-pt, which may be slightly better positionally, while play [b] switches to the 4-pt and makes the opponent's entering 2-2 joker much more awkward. Since play [b] offers slightly more covering chances than play [a], as well as blunting the opponent's 2-2 joker, I would pick play [b] over-the-board, despite the loss of purity from point-switching.

David Montgomery

I would play 23/18, 11/10. Black has to close the fifth point to obtain a strong position, so it's important to have a direct cover for the slot. 23-18 is better than 17-12 because it is harder to escape than to bring around additional offensive material. So what's the right play? Do you have rollouts?

Chuck Bower

I ran the position and Snowie is convinced that you must bring a back checker out. I ran 3-ply (small, 33) untruncated, cubeless. 23/18, 11/10 and 23/18, 5/4 are tied for first. 23/18, 4/3 and 24/18 are tied for 3rd (back 0.10 -- borderline whopper) and the plays which don't bring a checker around -- 17/12, 5/4 and 17/12, 11/10 are 0.15 behind according to the rollout. I didn't roll out 17/12, 4/3 but Snowie evaluation had that well behind, too.

In terms of winning chances, the two top plays win 50%, the next two 47%, and the last two 45%. All plays lose about the same percentage of gammons: 24-26% of all games.

End of comments.

It is interesting to note that Snowie rates lifting the home board blot and trying to win by controlling the outfield and the race as a statistical dead heat with improving covers for the blot and hoping to pin the opponent on the deuce point and bringing the back checkers around at comparative leisure.

Regardless of your choice of moves in this position, I think you can see the value of having a digital opponent who can record all your matches and show you where you are going wrong. It is truly humbling to find out how lucky I've been over the last several years. I now wonder how I manage to win any matches. Got to be the dice! For all of us less-than-world-class players, once you've read the necessary bibles of basic instruction, there can't be a better investment in improving your game than Snowie. I hate it, but I love it. Now, if I could just roll the dice and smell the wood finish!!



Hoosier Pips: HBC will continue to play on Wednesday evenings. HBC welcomes new players George Burroughs and Chris Sellick.

2001 Hoosier Backgammon Club
The Player of the Month for September was
Sean Garber with 172 gammon points.

- 1 Jim Curtis..... 1145
- 2 Butch Meese..... 1093
- 3 Sean Garber..... 1069
- 4 Mary Ann Meese..... 721
- 5 Gabe Stiasny..... 693
- 6 Woody Woodworth..... 672
- 7 Chuck Stimming..... 639
- 8 Larry Strommen..... 556
- 9 Dave Groner..... 546
- 10 Scott Day..... 395
- Rick Steele..... 369
- Al Gomez..... 297
- Terry Bateman..... 277
- Jeff Flowers..... 273
- Ron Black..... 122
- Kevin Heacox..... 102
- Steve Brown..... 100
- David Schwind..... 80
- Chuck Bower..... 80
- Charley Haley..... 79
- Timothy Jaxon..... 69
- Karen Davis..... 61
- Frank Scott..... 48
- Jack Kissane..... 36
- Ray Kershaw..... 34
- Alan Tavel..... 30
- Russ Haley..... 28
- Bill Benneth..... 24
- Bob Zavoral..... 24
- Robb Zeigler..... 20
- Jeff Arnold..... 20
- Brian Nelson..... 20
- Jake Jacobs..... 20
- Jeremy Bagai..... 20
- Carter Mattig..... 20
- Luke Clippinger..... 18
- Jim Roston..... 18
- Chris Sellick..... 18
- John Perkins..... 16
- George Burroughs..... 10
- Jon Stephens..... 10
- Paul Franks..... 8
- Doug Roberts..... 8
- Dana Nazarian..... 8

| | <u>September 5th</u> | <u>September 12th</u> | <u>September 19th</u> | <u>September 26th</u> |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1st | Sean Garber | Woody Woodworth | Sean Garber | Dave Groner |
| 2nd | Woody Woodworth | Rick Steele | Terry Bateman | Jim Curtis |
| 2nd | Jim Curtis | Kevin Heacox | Al Gomez | Sean Garber |

Nov 2-4.....**48th Gammon Associates Invitational**, A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA..... (818) 901-0464
 Nov 16-18..... **Minnesota State Championships**, Thunderbird Hotel, Bloomington, MN..... (612) 378-1536
 Jan16-21..... **1st Boston Open & Masters' Jackpot**, Hyatt Harborside Hotel, Boston, MA..... (781) 641-2091
 Wednesdays.. 7:00 PM at **Neon Johnny's**, 86th & Township Line Rd (Cellular 442-4065)..... HBC 255-8902