



Hoosier
Backgammon
Club

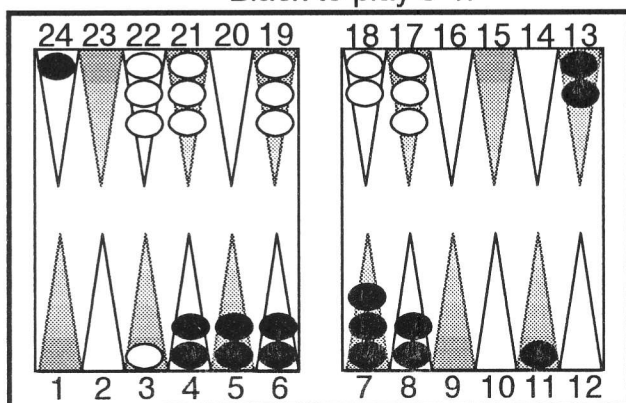
March 2002



Don't Forget The Cube

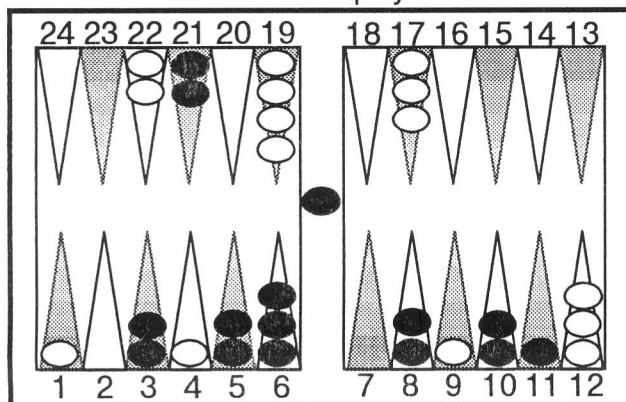
by Chuck Bower

Position One. Money Game.
Black to play 5-1.



64

Position Two. Score 0-0/7.
Black to play 6-1.



64

An all too common error in backgammon is to forget about the doubling cube. This error is typically made before rolling by a player with cube access. If you allow your opponent an extra turn, bad things can happen. S/he might have had a close take, but you roll well and now s/he has a big pass. Or your opponent might have had a pass but you roll poorly and now s/he has a take, or worse, you're not even good

enough to double! The best players never (well, almost never) lose track of the cube because they don't want to miss a chance to use it.

It is also important to keep the cube in mind **after** you roll. The cube location can have an impact upon your play. The two positions are good examples of this, but in different ways. Start with Position One. Each side has five points of a six-prime, and each side has one checker trapped behind his opponent's prime. The position is fairly even here. White is at the edge of Black's prime, but Black gets to roll first. Black kept the cube in mind before rolling, but correctly refrained from doubling. (White actually would have had a beaver.)

Black has several candidate plays, but they break into two categories, and the important part of the decision is: hit 8/3x, or not. Hitting is a volatile play. When it works, it can work really well, but when it fails, the result can be disastrous. This type of play has been nicknamed a **big play**. Holding the 5-prime and not hitting is less volatile. You don't gain as much when it works but you don't lose as much when it fails. This kind of move is known as a **quiet play**.

If White owned the cube in Position One, it turns out it wouldn't matter much which type of play Black chose. Both plays average out to about the same equity. With cube access, the big play has two advantages. When it works and White fans, Black has a very efficient double. White can't gain much by either taking or passing. This is the ideal doubling situation.

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2001 Club Champion Woody Woodworth

HBC's best of 2001 compete in the Club Championship. The road to victory was not easy. In the semifinals against Butch Meese, Woody had to come back from being down 4 to 11 to win 13 to 11. In the 17-game final against Chuck Stimming, Woody won 13-8. Congrats to Woody Woodworth for winning his third Championship. He also won in 1994 and 1999.

HBC's Awards Tournament

1st Larry Strommen
2nd Peter Kalba (Chicago)
2nd Jim Curtis

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HBC 2002 Standings

The **Player of the Month for February** was

Jim Curtis with 194 gammon points.

- 1 Larry Strommen..... 378
- 2 Butch Meese..... 299
- 3 Jim Curtis..... 289
- 4 Woody Woodworth..... 247
- 5 Mary Ann Meese..... 239
- 6 Sean Garber..... 232
- 7 Rick Steele..... 180
- 8 Al Gomez..... 133
- 9 Terry Bateman..... 89
- 10 Gabe Stiasny..... 86
- Scott Day..... 76
- Peter Kalba..... 69
- Chuck Stimming..... 42
- Alan Tavel..... 39
- David Schwind..... 36
- Stan Denski..... 26
- Jeff Baker..... 22
- Charley Haley..... 12
- Mark Swanson..... 10
- Roger Blaine..... 10
- Frank Scott..... 8
- Bob Weeks..... 8

Don't Forget The Cube

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When the big play fails (particularly White's rolls of 3-3 and 5-3), often White blows way past Black's takepoint. In those cases White's doubles are very inefficient. So the volatile play is good for Black when it works, and even sometimes when it fails! Actually, the Jacoby Rule plays a big part of this latter gain, because much of White's equity comes from gammons s/he can't collect.

The quiet play almost never leads to an immediate efficient double for Black, although that doesn't preclude later efficient doubles. When White gets a really good roll (especially 6-5 and 6-6) s/he still cashes, but those scenarios don't blow past Black's takepoint nearly as much as his/her jokers after Black's big play. Thus White's doubles after the quiet play are more efficient.

Snowie rollouts say 8/3x, 7/6 is better than 11/5 in Position One by 0.13 equity units. If White already owned the cube at 2, the big play is still better, but by less than 0.04 equity units. If the game were being played without a doubling cube (but still with gammons and backgammons) 11/5 is better than the best hitting play (in this scoring, 8/3x, 11/10) by 0.04 units of equity.

If **big** is better in Position One, then does it follow that hitting is better in Position Two? Whether or not your backgammon intuition has told you the answer is **no**, I'm sure your quiz-taking intuition has!

In Position Two, with a race lead, an anchor, and a better homeboard, Black is already in the driver's seat. S/he doesn't need much improvement to be able to offer a sound cube. In fact, if Black goes quietly with bar/24, 11/5, White is under great pressure to consolidate two of his blots or face a cube. Snowie evaluations say Black will have a double and White a clear take after six rolls (6-2, 5-4, 2-2, 1-1), a double and either close take, borderline take/pass, or close pass with seven rolls (4-4, 4-1, 6-1, 6-4), and a clear pass after two rolls (4-2). Meanwhile, White's best rolls still make him/her no better than even in the game.

If Black makes the big play, s/he will still end up with eight efficient doubles next turn, but White's nine fans blow Black way past White's takepoint, while after White's good rolls (twelve of them) Black becomes an underdog. Here, even at matchplay (no Jacoby Rule), there isn't enough gammon vig to offset the loss of cube efficiency.

Snowie rollouts say that at the illustrated matchscore, hitting costs 0.09 equity units compared to the safe alternative. At money play (with Jacoby rule) the difference is 0.10. Cubeless the safe play is better by a mere 0.02.

To summarize, when two plays seem close without cube considerations, make the play which leads to efficient cubes by you (when the play works) and/or inefficient cubes by your opponent (when it doesn't). Thanks to Neil Kazaross for his help with Position Two.

	<u>February 6th</u>	<u>February 13th</u>	<u>February 20th</u>	<u>February 27th</u>
1st	Jim Curtis	Woody Woodworth	Butch Meese	Mary Ann Meese
2nd	Mary Ann Meese	Jim Curtis	Al Gomez	Sean Garber
2nd	Woody Woodworth	...	Sean Garber	Woody Woodworth

Mar 22-24.....	2002 Midwest Championships , Wyndham Lisle, Lisle, IL.....	(773) 583-6464
Apr 12-14.....	8th Ohio State Championships , Radison Cleveland, Middleburgh Hts, OH.....	(330) 966-2811
May 24-27.....	23rd Chicago Open , Oakbrook Hills Resort, Oakland, IL.....	(702) 893-6025
July 4-7.....	Michigan Summer Championship , Novi Hilton, Novi, MI.....	(810) 232-9731
Wednesdays..	7:00 PM at Neon Johnny's , 86th & Township Line Rd (Cellular 442-4065).....	HBC 255-8902