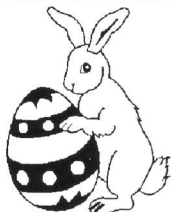




Hoosier  
Backgammon  
Club

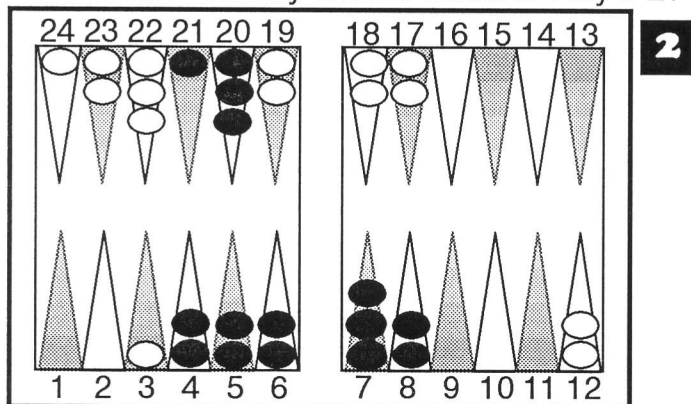
March 2003



## Does the Reward Justify the Risk?

by Chuck Bower

Position 1. Money Game. Black to Play 3-2?



Black has built a nice prime, but at a cost. White is way ahead in the race, threatening to escape, and Black's flexibility is severely hampered. The good news is that Black can quickly narrow his/her choices to three candidates: 8/3x; 7/2; or 8/5, 8/6. Which would you play here?

Let's go through these three options, listing their pluses and minuses. Playing 8/3x knocks White back from the edge of the prime, which is thematic, but at the cost of breaking the back of the prime. White gets 16 immediate shots. When this play works it works quite well, but when it fails...

Playing 8/5, 8/6 adds much needed flexibility, but at the cost of taking the prime from five points to four. It is definitely safe but gives White 5's and 6's to escape. That's a lot of freedom. If White can escape he is pretty much guaranteed a cube turn which Black should probably pass.

Playing 7/2 is a **tweener** play. It keeps the five prime but gives White 11 escapes. When it works Black will still have considerable work because his flexibility will have gone from bad to worse. As with clearing the 8-point, this move has a plus in that it is rather safe, for now.

Does the cube location have an impact? Possibly. We've already noted that if White can escape he will have a very strong double. If Black owned the cube this wouldn't be a consideration. But most likely the best play when owning the cube is the best play regardless.

There are a couple other issues that need to be looked into. We start with the question "*who is ahead, and by how much?*" This doesn't need to be answered quantitatively (as a bot would do), but just in general terms. White leads the race and has a better board. Black has a 5-prime with one opponent checker at the edge and an anchor. Both sides have about equal pluses and minuses. It looks like the game is fairly close. If Black were way ahead then he should give extra weight to safe plays because the rewards aren't likely to be great but the downsides can be costly. If Black were well behind then the risks often aren't that severe while the rewards are high. With the game a tossup, the situation isn't so clearcut, but the scales favor taking risk if it could lead to a nice reward.

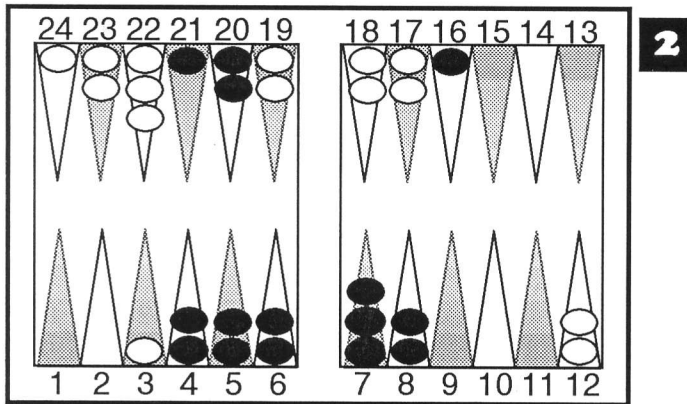
The last factor to consider is White's homeboard blot. This serves as a safety value for Black if he takes a risk and White rolls well. Unless White jokers with a hit AND cover, Black gets 11/36 shots from the bar if White hits.

The bottom line is that Black stands to gain considerably after 8/3x when it works. With the game a tossup AND the safety value of White's homeboard blot, a risky but rewarding play is called for. Snowie 3.2 rollouts say 8/3x is best by far, winning 6% more total games and 5% more gammons than the safe but inflexible 7/2 while losing only 5% more gammons. The cubeless equity difference is 0.12. Coming in last by a lot is the primebreaker which doesn't push White back: 8/5, 8/6. As mentioned above, after this move all White has to do is roll a 5 or 6 and he'll have a strong redouble.

...continued next page...

**HBCs 2002 Awards Tournament**  
February 23rd, 2002

1st...Larry Strommen  
2nd...Chuck Stimming  
2nd...Gabe Stiasny



Position 2. Money Game. Black to Play 3-2?

Let's see what happens if we move one checker around. In Position 2, we've taken Black's spare from the 20-point and put it on the 16-point. Now 16/11 becomes an option. This play brings a 12th checker over to the homeside which can help in prime-building. Black can keep the prime AND keep a builder on the 7-point, aimed at White's blot at the edge of the prime. To a lesser extent White's 6-1 escape can be offset if Black responds with an ace. If White jokers with 6-2 Black still gets the aceshot from the bar. Only White's 6-3 is a safe escape. Interestingly, 8/3x now comes in 4th place! Plays which use half the roll to advance the checker on the 16-point and the other half to move the checker from the 7-point homeward also leave a decent distribution, although the direct shots are too risky compared to 16/11. This quiet play wins 3% more total games than its nearest competitor, wins about as many gammons and loses 2% fewer gammons.

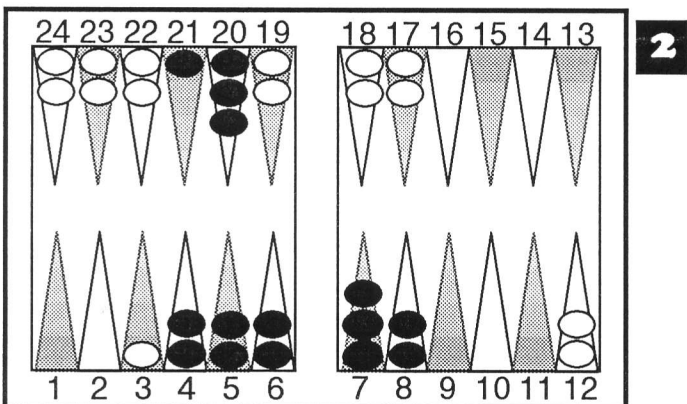
White's homeboard blot to be covered using the spare on the 3-point. The safety valve of getting a return shot from the bar has vanished. Now 7/2 and 8/3x are quite close. 8/3x still wins a lot more games (about 3.5% more) and 2% more gammons, but with the downside of 10% more gammon losses. In Snowie's judgement, the cube location favors 8/3x, but not by a large amount. The reason is that by taking away some of White's wins, you make it harder for him to get in position to use the cube. Just as important, many of White's good rolls will be overkill since he'll blow way past a cash.

	<u>February 5th</u>	<u>February 12th</u>
1st	Jim Curtis	Chuck Stimming
2nd	Larry Strommen	Woody Woodworth
2nd	Jon Vietor (CA)	Gabe Stiasny
	<u>February 19th</u>	<u>February 26th</u>
1st	Rick Steele	Rick Steele
2nd	Butch Meese	Scott Day
2nd	Mary Ann Meese	Jim Curtis

**HBC 2003 Gammon Standing**  
**The Player of the Month for February**  
 was **Rick Steele** with 188 points.

- 1 Rick Steele..... 326
- 2 Larry Strommen..... 292
- 3 Chuck Stimming..... 225
- 4 Jim Curtis..... 211
- 5 Sean Garber..... 204
- 6 Gabe Stiasny..... 167
- 7 Scott Day..... 143
- 8 Butch Meese..... 132
- 9 Terry Bateman..... 128
- 10 Mary Ann Meese..... 116
- Jon Vietor..... 76
- Woody Woodworth..... 74
- Dan Moore..... 50
- Josh Riddell..... 46
- Jack Scofield..... 22
- Dave Groner..... 20
- Kevin Heacox..... 20
- Bill Gheen..... 12
- Alan Tavel..... 12

*Correction:* The **Player of the Month** for January was **Larry Strommen**.



Position 3. Money Game. Black to Play 3-2?

Now let's go back to the original position but allow