



Hoosier
Backgammon
Club

April 2003

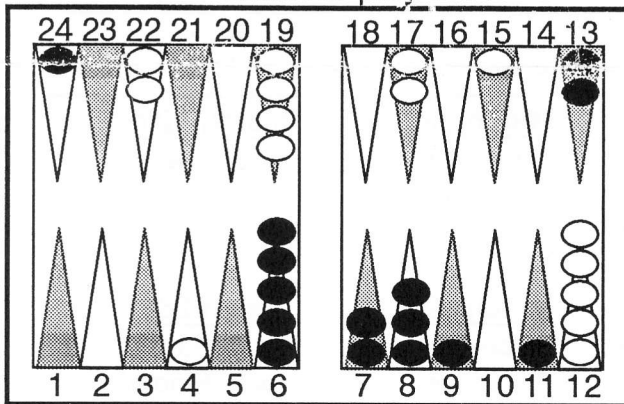
Go.....



The Score Breaks The Tie

by Chuck Bower

Black leads 4-0 in a 7-point match.
Black to play 6-5?



The difference between backgammon matchplay and backgammon money play can be significant. At proper money play, the doubling cube has very little dependence on location, and even less dependence on magnitude. In theory, the proper cube action when the game value is 2 is the same as the proper action when the cube is on 32. The odds are the same; only the size of the transaction is different.

Early in a match, especially when the cube is centered, the proper doubling decisions are similar to money play. When one (or both) players nears the winning goal, things change considerably. The simple view is: **go conservative when ahead; be aggressive when behind.** This is comparable to **protecting a lead or going for broke** at many other competitions. But when studied in detail, this strategy misses the mark rather frequently. No form of backgammon can be mastered with a few broad principles.

Take a look at the position. What play would you make at the table? 99.9% of players can narrow the choices down to three candidates: 24/13; 11/6, 9/3; or 9/3, 8/3. The three plays

come from different gameplans. Is your choice affected by the matchscore? If so, how? Let's take a look at the three choices.

Moving 11/6, 9/3 appears to be the **safest**, but is it? It certainly eliminates any chance of getting a second checker sent back this turn but does nothing to improve Black's offensive structure and doesn't get the back checker moving. If you chose this play at any score, you are being unnecessarily safe. This type of play is branded with the title **playing not to lose**: a paradox. By playing not to lose, one increases his/her chances of losing. Moving 11/6, 9/3 wins less than half the time and is wrong by 0.2 cubeless equity units or more at any form of scoring.

The other two plays are reasonably close...at money play. I would guess that 95% of regular money and/or tournament players will choose one of these two. But it takes a serious student of matchplay to make the right choice when leading 4-0 in a 7-point match. We have now reached the second paradox of this position.

The key to this position, and often the key issue for a player with a large lead in a short match is this: minimize the gammon threat. Gammons are much more valuable to the trailer than the leader. Just the threat of a gammon can alter leader's takepoint considerably.

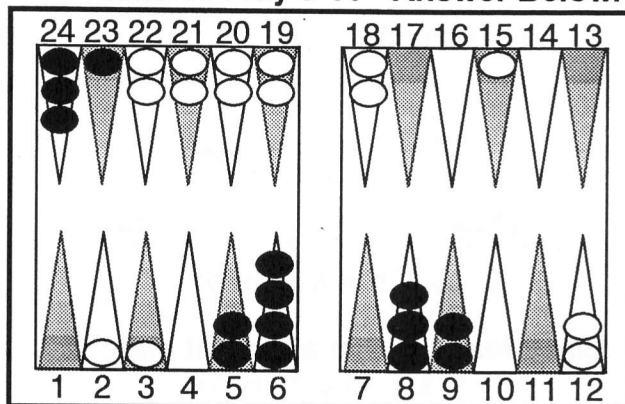
Making the 3-point leads to 7.6% more gammon wins for Black. It also gives White only 2/36 chances to hit a blot on Black's side of the board -- a seemingly safe alternative to the 15/36 shots White gets after 24/13. But the downside to making the 3-point is that this play loses 3.3% more gammons, along with 3.2% more total games. Counting gammon wins as half as important as total wins, the two plays are pretty comparable, with 24/13 better by 0.02 units of cubeless equity. Deciding between two plays this close in value can be difficult. However, when you fold in the matchscore and White's advantage for cube turns in gammonish games, it's not a contest. 24/13 wins 0.85% more matches, with an adjusted money game equivalent equity difference of 0.14.

The third and final paradox is the following: **a top level money player with no knowledge of matchplay strategy would have a decent chance at finding the right play.** That is because the play which leads to more wins usually has the edge when the cube is alive. The play with the most wins is more likely to lead to a money double. Gammon threat has value, but not nearly as much as total winning chances. The most efficient wins involve doubling the opponent out (or in) when he still has reasonable

winning chances. But how does one see that 24/13 wins the most games? Note that after 24/13, Black is pretty much out of trouble if White misses the 15 shots this turn. By leaving the checker back on the 24-point, White is guaranteed to have one Black prisoner. Except for the 5-2 double-hitting joker Black is guaranteed to have no more checkers back after 24/13 than the alternatives and is likely to have none at all.

In the final analysis, the play which leaves 15 direct shots (including 2 double shots) at checkers on the homeside is the **safest** move in the long run. Minimizing trailer's gammon chances breaks the tie between two otherwise close plays at this matchscore.

Bonus Position, 5 Pt Match, Score Tied at 0. Black to Play 6-1? Answer Below.



HBC 2003 Gammon Standing
The **Player of the Month** for March was **Butch Meese** with 120 points.

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 | Rick Steele..... | 386 |
| 2 | Larry Strommen..... | 368 |
| 3 | Sean Garber..... | 314 |
| 4 | Jim Curtis..... | 306 |
| 5 | Chuck Stimming..... | 287 |
| 6 | Butch Meese..... | 252 |
| T7 | Gabe Stiasny..... | 211 |
| T7 | Scott Day..... | 211 |
| 9 | Terry Bateman..... | 148 |
| 10 | Josh Riddell..... | 136 |
| | Mary Ann Meese..... | 132 |
| | Dan Moore..... | 94 |
| | Woody Woodworth..... | 84 |
| | Jon Vietor..... | 76 |
| | Jack Scofield..... | 22 |
| | Dave Groner..... | 20 |
| | Kevin Heacox..... | 20 |
| | Katya Beshparova..... | 20 |
| | Bill Gheen..... | 12 |
| | Alan Tavel..... | 12 |

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|-------------------|
| | <u>March 5th</u> | <u>March 12th</u> |
| 1st | Scott Day | Butch Meese |
| 2nd | Josh Riddell | Larry Strommen |
| 2nd | ... | ... |
| | <u>March 19th</u> | <u>March 26th</u> |
| 1st | Butch Meese | Sean Garber |
| 2nd | Jim Curtis | Josh Riddell |
| 2nd | Dan Moore | Rick Steele |

Bonus Position Stats....

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | 24/17 | Equity: -1.029 |
| | 0.2% 5.6% 21.8% 78.2% 37.6% 2.6% | |
| 2. | 23/16 | Equity: -1.124 (-0.096) |
| | 0.2% 4.7% 18.1% 81.9% 38.7% 2.1% | |
| 3. | 23/17 6/5 | Equity: -1.138 (-0.109) |
| | 0.2% 4.5% 18.3% 81.7% 41.4% 3.3% | |
| 4. | 24/23 8/2 | Equity: -1.145 (-0.116) |
| | 0.1% 4.6% 19.0% 81.0% 40.7% 2.9% | |
| 5. | 24/23 9/3x | Equity: -1.174 (-0.146) |
| | 0.2% 4.5% 18.3% 81.7% 41.4% 3.3% | |

| | | |
|----------------|--|----------------|
| Apr 30-May4. | 20th Nevada State Tournament , Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas, NV..... | (702) 893-6025 |
| May 23-26..... | 24th Chicago Open , Oak Brook Hills Resort Oak Brook, IL..... | (847) 674-0120 |
| Jun 6-8..... | 51st Gammon Associates Invitational , A.R. Private Club, Los Angeles, CA..... | (818) 901-0464 |
| Jul 3-6..... | Michigan Summer Championships , Hilton, Novi, MI..... | (810) 232-9731 |
| Jul 25-27..... | 1st Wisconsin State Championships , Radisson Inn, Madison, WI..... | (608) 267-8144 |
| Aug29-Sep1.. | 51st Indiana Open Backgammon Tournament , Sheraton Hotel, Indianapolis, IN... | (317) 255-8902 |
| Wednesdays.. | 7:00 PM at Neon Johnny's , 86th & Township Line Rd (Cellular 442-4065)..... | HBC 255-8902 |