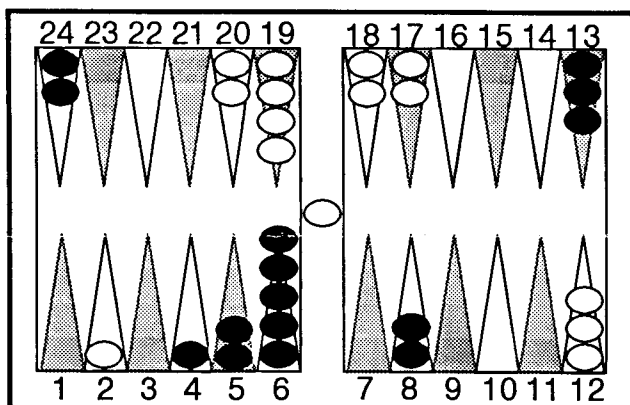




# Thinking It Through

by Chuck Bower



**Black Trailing 0-2 in a 7-Point Match.  
Black to Play 6-1.**

Black was feeling better after White rolled 6-5 from the bar, missing 19 shots in the process. Then it was Black's turn to roll poorly, tossing one of his four worst (6-5 being the other). Now what? In general one should strive to make plays quickly. When a play stands out, make it and move on. Occasionally the best play is far from obvious. Here is how I would approach making a decision here.

**Step 1:** There are only three legal 6's: 13/7, 8/2x, and 7/1 (this one after starting 8/7). Immediately Black can eliminate 8/7/1 since he leaves more shots compared to 8/2x. He may as well inflict the extra pain by putting a second checker on the bar.

**Step 2:** Look for the ace after hitting 8/2x. Playing 24/23 is a candidate. Splitting give Black future chances to take some sting out of White's 4-prime by moving up, possibly even anchoring on a point that isn't blocked. Another reasonable ace is 6/5 which creates a new builder. Other aces (2/1, 4/3, 5/4, and 8/7) don't do much more than shuffle around a builder and are inferior.

**Step 3:** Look for the ace after playing 13/7. 24/23 and 6/5 make improvements. 8/7 is out compared to these because the 8-point is better for blocking. Moving 7/6 is the safest ace, leaving the fewest shots and the fewest blots.

**Step 4:** Does the cube location affect the decision? Will one play lead to a different cube action than another? Black should first see that he'll be

taking, regardless. Whether White even has a Double isn't clear. In any case, White will be on the bar needing to roll decently or possibly be facing the cube herself within the next few rolls. Because Black can use 8-points a lot more than White can, White needs to be a bit more conservative in offering a volatile initial cube. There are too many things that can go wrong when on the bar. Conclusion here is that whether Black hits the second checker or not probably won't affect White's cube decision.

**Step 5:** We have only narrowed down the candidates to five, but now one thing should jump out. The big decision is whether or not to hit. Solving that problem will eliminate roughly half of the remaining candidates. Let's count some shots, but just comparing 13/6, 13/7 (not lifting), and 8/2x.

Moving 13/6 leaves the same 19 shots as last turn. Moving 8/2x gives White all 2's (11), all remaining 4's (9), plus 1-1 (1) for a total of 21 shots. That is ONLY two more shots than the **safe** play. However, it does leave three blots on the homeseide compared to only one after 13/6. Finally, 13/7 gives White the same shots as 13/6, plus 1-6 and 3-5. That's 23 including some double shots. Summary: 19 shots after 13/6, 21 shots after 8/2x, and 23 shots after stopping on the barpoint with 13/7.

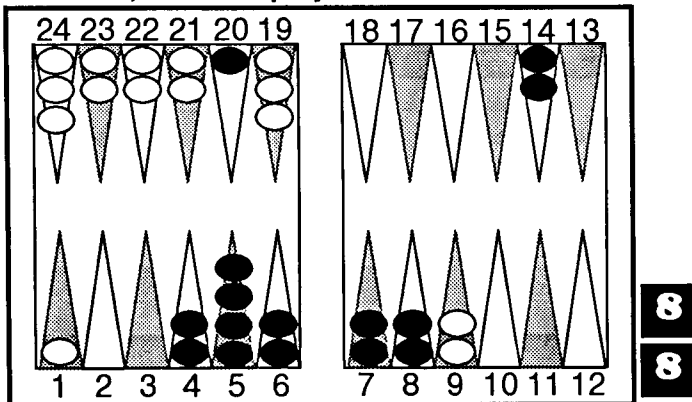
The downside to hitting is a couple extra shots and a couple extra blots. What's the upside to hitting? A second opponent checker on the bar is pretty big. If she rolls a 5 or 6 (20 times in 36), only half the roll can be played. Only the four smallest doublets give White any options at all. Tying your opponent's hands is a strong play. Compare this to only 4 rolls which take away White's decision-making with the non-hitting options.

The last issue for the hit/not decision regards who's winning the game. If Black were way ahead then the extra value of the hit would be diminished. Here White is ahead by quite a bit, with her powerful 4-prime blocking Black's two back checkers. If Black plays safe he ensures White will maintain her solid lead. Black's best chance to wrestle his way into the lead is by shackling White. A provocative move is called for; making hitting the right choice.

**Step 6:** After 8/2x it's between 24/23 and 6/5. As discussed earlier, both have their positives. One thing that makes 24/23 less valuable than the typical split is that in the resulting position, both of Black's back checkers are still efficiently trapped. The 4-prime is still blocking 6's. Future anchoring on the 23-point won't be much better than just staying anchored on the 24-point. If Black could advance to a point that isn't blocked (like the 22-point or 21-point) then this play would be more attractive. (The observant reader will notice that in those cases Black could then use the 6 to jump into the outfield, so the problem would be completely different, anyway.)

...continues next page...

**Chouette, Black to play 6-5? Answer Below...**



**Thinking It Through (continues)**

Another factor in favoring 6/5 over 24/23 is that the action is on Black's side of the board. Note that if Black loses this battle by getting more checkers sent back, he may end up having to pass an upcoming cube anyway. If 6/5 weren't of much value then going for a bit of damage control would be prudent. Here 6/5 definitely improves Black's frontside assets.

Rollouts by both Snowie3.2 and GNU-bg0.14 prefer 8/2x, 6/5 slightly over 8/2x, 24/23 by between 0.02 and 0.03 equity units. Any non-hitting play is at least 0.10 worse.

Working through a decision like this over the board can be time consuming and should be done at most only a few times per match. With practice this technique will come naturally and progress quickly.

**Answer to Position at top of this Page.**

1. 20/15, 14/8	Equity: +0.004
0.3% 7.5% 54.8% 45.2% 16.4% 0.6%	
2. 14/3	Equity: -0.089 (-0.094)**
0.4% 10.5% 52.6% 47.4% 23.7% 1.0%	
3. 20/14, 8/3	Equity: -0.089 (-0.094)**
0.3% 8.0% 51.1% 48.9% 18.6% 0.8%	
4. 20/15, 7/1x	Equity: -0.300 (-0.304)**
0.4% 8.3% 45.1% 54.9% 27.6% 1.3%	
5. 7/1x, 7/2	Equity: -0.387 (-0.391)
0.5% 8.6% 40.7% 59.3% 27.2% 2.0%	

\*\* Blunder

**HBC 2003 Gammon Standing**  
**The September Player of the Month**  
 was **Sean Garber** with 130 points.

1	Sean Garber.....	1011
2	Chuck Stimming.....	930
3	Jim Curtis.....	926
4	Larry Strommen.....	780
5	Butch Meese.....	736
6	Rick Steele.....	697
7	Terry Bateman.....	601
8	Woody Woodworth.....	564
9	Josh Riddell.....	540
10	Scott Day.....	488
	Mary Ann Meese.....	450
	Gabe Stiasny.....	306
	Al Gomez.....	224
	Dan Moore.....	146
	Terry Leahy.....	80
	Jon Viator.....	76
	Dave Groner.....	74
	Katya Beshparova.....	68
	Kevin Heacox.....	66
	Kirk Holmes.....	58
	Mike Friedman.....	54
	Joe Miller.....	51
	John O'Hagan.....	45
	Rica Tarnoff.....	36
	Laura Pinkerton.....	36
	Mark Swanson.....	34
	Jeff Flowers.....	28
	Stuart Thomson.....	28
	Dave Cardwell.....	26
	Peter Kalba.....	24
	Ben Elliott.....	24
	Jack Scofield.....	22
	Steve Brown.....	20
	Dr. Bob Hill.....	20
	Brian Nelson.....	18
	Sam Shade.....	16
	Ray Woo.....	16
	Bill Gheen.....	12
	Alan Tavel.....	12
	Charlie Haley.....	10
	Larry Buckingham.....	10
	Fred Kalantari.....	10
	Debra Rosenblum.....	8
	Six More.....	8

	<u>September 3rd</u>	<u>September 10th</u>	<u>September 17th</u>	<u>September 24th</u>
1st	Chuck Stimming	Butch Meese	Josh Riddell	Sean Garber
2nd	Larry Strommen	Sean Garber	Larry Strommen	Chuck Stimming
2nd	...	...	...	Larry Strommen

Oct 31-Nov1..	<b>Minnesota Open</b> , Mystic Lake casino Hotel, Prior Lake, MN.....	(651) 699-6758
Nov15-23.....	<b>Pro Am/Las Vegas Open</b> , Riviera Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas. NV.....	(702) 893-6025
Jan 16-18.....	<b>4th Carolina Invitational</b> , Holiday Inn, Woodlawn, Charlotta, NC.....	(704) 814-0850