

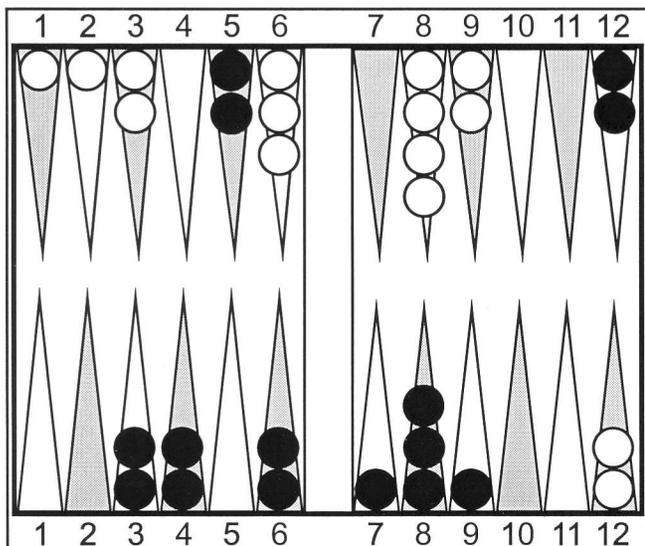


Hoosier Backgammon Club

January 2004

Think Before You Reach!

By Chuck Bower



Position 1.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.

Black to play 5-5?

I suspect over 95% of the readers of this (and most) backgammon newsletters play backgammon over-the-board (OTB). Most of them also prefer problems presented as they would occur OTB. In contrast to playing on the computer, when you're playing on a real board there is no display telling you the pipcount, so you don't see a pipcount on the above diagram either.

Some players never count pips and others only do so when they're faced with a racing cube decision. There are supposed shortcuts where you count crossovers only, or assign the same pipcount to any checker in a certain zone. Sometimes these shortcuts work, but then so does flipping a coin. Serious players long ago

2003 *Player of the Year* Sean Garber

Sean has been playing with the club almost 10 years with Sean's game showing marked improvement in the last couple years. By midyear, Player of the Year started to look like a two-player race between Sean and last year's Player of the Year, Jim Curtis. By November, it was a true two-player race with only a 39-point lead by Sean. Sean won Player of the Month 4 times and Jim twice in 2003. It came down to the last Wednesday of the year with Sean coming out on top. Congratulations to Sean with his first **Player of the Year** award.

HBCs 2003 Awards Tournament

Sunday - February 8th, 2004

Arni's Restaurant (875-7034)

3443 West 86th Street (west of Walmart)

Registration: 12 Noon

Awards: 12:30 PM

Play Begins: 12:45 PM

Open Division: \$20 with \$10 Op Spool

Limited Div: \$8

Format: Main-Consolation

realized that pipcounting, although not the most exciting part of the game, is sometimes necessary to maximize the equity of a decision.

There are many pipcounting techniques and it's not my purpose to even recommend one, let alone step through them. Nack Ballard is currently writing a book on the subject (hopefully spending considerably more time explaining how to apply the pipcount once you know it). Magriel did a nice job in his classic **BACKGAMMON** in detailing different methods. That's always a good place to start.

Often the relative pipcount (difference between individual players' pipcounts) is sufficient, and that's the case in the Position 1. If you haven't already counted, stop now and at least get the relative count before continuing.

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Think Before You Reach! ...continues...

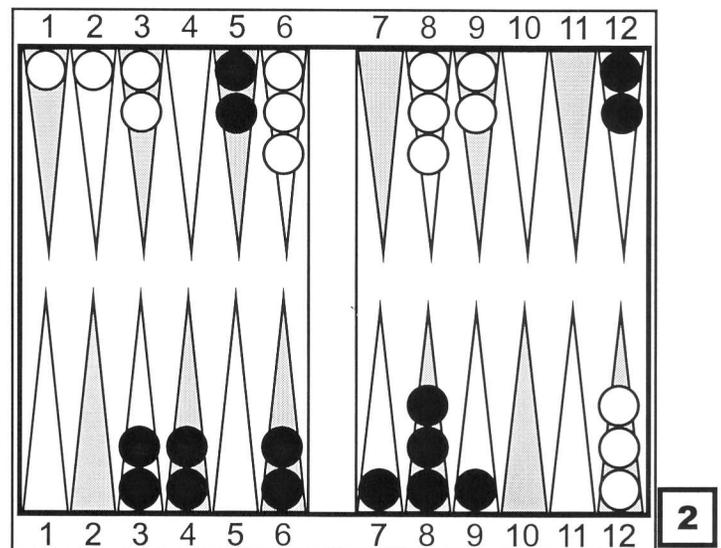
5-5 is a great racing roll. I wonder how many players when faced with the above position OTB would simply reach across the table and grab the two checkers off the 20-point without giving the position much thought. Many more would look for alternate plays, see that not only is the 3-point made but the 8-point is stacked, and then reach, again without thinking about the pipcount.

Before rolling, Black trailed by 29 pips, meaning that White will be on roll with a 9-pip lead. In a straight race, that much of a lead would be an initial money double most of the time (actually anytime White's pipcount is 110 or less) and a money pass if White has fewer than 70 pips. Black should realize that his winning chances aren't very good if he chooses to convert this to a straight race by playing 20/10(2).

Most of the time when the opponent still has checkers on the midpoint, a player owning the 20-point has an easy money take, regardless of the pipcount deficit, and if the opponent has stripped outfield checkers or other awkwardness, the position might not even be a double. Combining these two doubling benchmarks, Black should see that staying behind is a serious contender compared to running.

What about stopping partway, moving 20/15(2) and then either 13/8(2) or play two checkers into the home board (such as 8/3, 7/2)? This isn't much different than the straight running play since White will have several chances to jump over that outpost with 4-5, 4-6, 5-6, 2-2, 4-4, 5-5, or 6-6, a total of 10/36 clearing rolls every time he tosses the dice.

As awkward as this roll plays, a GNU-bg rollout indicates any play which includes moving the back checkers is an error by 0.04 equity units (2% game winning chances) or more. Several plays are in close competition for **best**. In fact, choose any four of the following: 13/8, 13/8, 8/3, 9/4, 7/2 and you'll be within less than 0.02 of the best play. The two top finishers were 13/3, 13/8, 7/2 and 13/3, 13/8, 9/4.



Position 2.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.

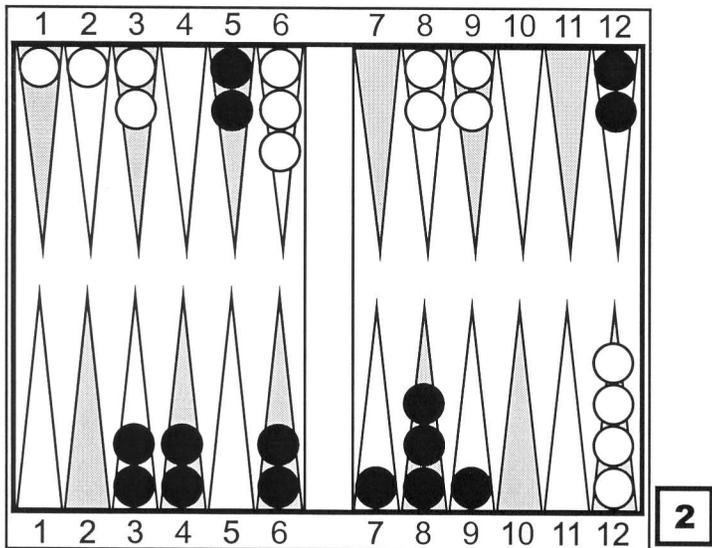
Black to play 5-5?

Here I've moved one of White checkers from his 8-point back to his midpoint, a change of 5 pips. Now after moving, Black will trail by only 4 pips. He's still behind, but not by so much. How much does that change affect the choice of plays?

A GNU-bg rollout says this matters quite a bit. Now staying on the 20-point is at least 0.02 equity units worse than simply turning this into a straight race by moving 20/10(2). 20/15(2), 13/8(2) is almost as good as running completely since one side or the other will likely break contact soon.

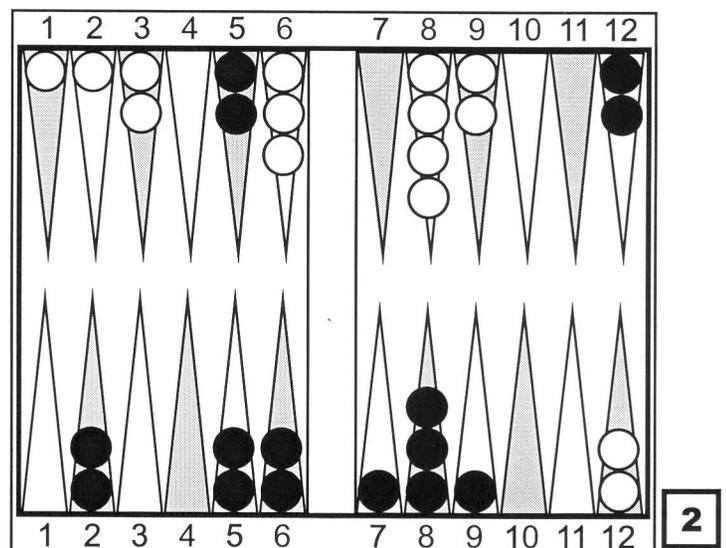
The change in choice of moves isn't completely due to game winning chances, although that is most of it. The match score and cube location are such that White's gammon wins are worth considerably more than Black's gammon wins. Staying back leads to a bit over 1.5% gammons by each side. Getting the worst in that deal, Black is better off breaking contact.

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Position 3.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.
Black to play 5-5?



Position 4.

Black leads 4-1 in a 7-point match.
Black to play 5-5?

Here I moved another checker from White's 8-point to his midpoint and now the pip-count difference is 19, converting to a difference of only 1 after Black's move. Black is still an underdog to win the game but now staying back is quite costly, at the level of 0.09 equity units. Black wins 3.5% more games by running and avoids the few (2%) costly gammons. Note that as the race gets close, Black may be forced to run off the 20-point before White bears in, taking away some expected shot equity from the **stay behind** play.

The veteran student of the game knows that few real-life situations are never as simple as is presented in the books or newsletter articles. Position 4 drives home this point. I've taken Position 2 and kept the pipcount the same (White ahead by 24), but I've rearranged Black's home board. In all previous positions Black held the 3- and 4-points, causing most 5's to stack up on already held points. Instead in position 4 Black owns the 2- and 5-points. Now 8/3(2) in particular and also 9/4 fill in the home board.

In Position 2, running was correct by 0.02 over staying. In Position 4 with the same pip-count as Position 2, staying back on the 20-point is once again best. 13/3(2) wins 0.8% more games than plays which stop on the 15-point and 1.3% more games than running all the way. The 1.6% gammon losses offset the advantage of staying back somewhat, but in a fairly close contest, staying on the 20-point is between 0.010 and 0.024 better than departing.

Player of the Month of December was **Butch Meese** with **179** gammon points.

| | December 3 | December 10 | December 17 |
|------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1st | Jim Curtis | Butch Meese | Butch Meese |
| 2nd | Josh Riddell | Sean Garber | Alan Haas |
| 2nd | Butch Meese | Terry Bateman | ... |

| HBC 2003 Final Standings | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------|------------------|----|------------------|----|
| Sean Garber | 1469 | Mark Swanson | 79 | Dr. Bob Hill | 20 |
| Jim Curtis | 1402 | Jon Vietor | 76 | Brian Nelson | 18 |
| Butch Meese | 1057 | Kevin Heacox | 76 | Sam Shade | 16 |
| Chuck Stimming | 1015 | Dave Groner | 74 | Ray Woo | 16 |
| Larry Strommen | 866 | Katya Beshparova | 68 | Bill Gheen | 12 |
| Rick Steele | 860 | Mike Friedman | 54 | Alan Tavel | 12 |
| Terry Bateman | 697 | Alan Haas | 54 | Charlie Haley | 10 |
| Woody Woodworth | 691 | Joe Miller | 51 | Larry Buckingham | 10 |
| Scott Day | 675 | John O'Hagan | 45 | Fred Kalantari | 10 |
| Josh Riddell | 612 | Rica Tarnoff | 36 | Derrick Swanson | 10 |
| Mary Ann Meese | 502 | Laura Pinkerton | 36 | Merle Feldman | 10 |
| Gabe Stiasny | 306 | Jeff Flowers | 28 | Debra Rosenblum | 8 |
| Al Gomez | 294 | Stuart Thomson | 28 | Jim Roston | 8 |
| Dan Moore | 242 | Dave Cardwell | 26 | Martha Ghio | 8 |
| Kirk Holmes | 154 | Peter Kalba | 24 | Jake Jacobs | 8 |
| Frank Scott | 154 | Ben Elliott | 24 | Karen Davis | 8 |
| Chuck Bower | 116 | Jack Scofield | 22 | Janice Gordon | 8 |
| Terry Leahy | 80 | Steve Brown | 20 | Mary Franks | 8 |

ABT Backgammon Tournament Schedule

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Jan 16-18 | Carolina Invitational Charlotte, NC Jeb Horton 704.814.0850 |
| Feb 13-15 | Pittsburgh Championships Pittsburgh, PA Steve Hast 412.823.7500 |
| Feb 26-29 | 2004 Southern Open St. Simons Island, GA Dave Cardwell 770.333.1876 |
| Mar 19-21 | 2004 Midwest Championships Lisle, IL Bill Davis 773.583.6464 |
| Apr 16-18 | Ohio State Championships Cleveland, OH Joe Miller 330.966.2811 |
| May 28-31 | 25th Annual Chicago Open Oak Brook Hills, IL Joann Feinstein 847.674.0120 |
| July 1-4 | Michigan Summer Championships Novi, MI Carol Joy Cole 810.232.9731 |
| Jul 30-Aug 1 | Thousand Islands Tournament Alexandria Bay, NY Renée Rosenbloom 585.396.0969 |
| Jul 30-Aug 1 | Wisconsin State Championships Madison, WI Tom Machaj 608.516.9109 |
| Aug 12-15 | Georgia Championships Atlanta, GA Dave Cardwell 770.333.1876 |
| Sep 3-6 | 52nd Indiana Open Indianapolis, IN Butch & Mary Ann Meese 317.255.8902 |
| Oct 8-10 | Illinois State Championships Springfield, IL Randy Armstrong 217.528.0117 |
| Oct 15-17 | Florida State Championships Ft. Lauderdale, FL Elayne Feinstein 954.564.0340 |

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