Details, Details by Chuck Bower
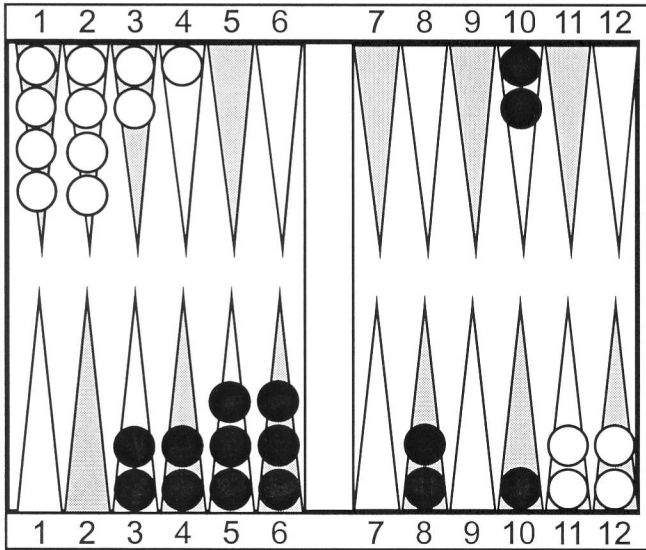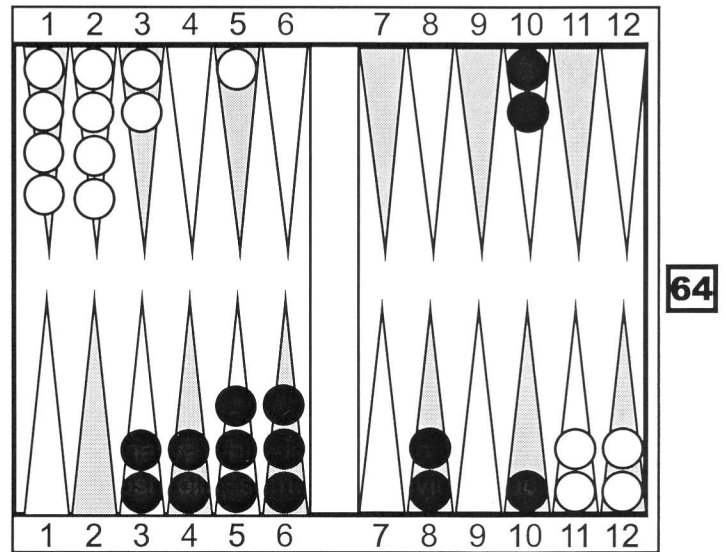

Position One.   Money Game.   Black to play 1-1?

Quiz questions tend to be different than garden variety situations that regularly arise during play. Often they have been singled out due to a surprising, particularly unexpected outcome. Putting too much emphasis on the importance of this kind of position can be dangerous.

Position One is from Ilia Guzei's quiz contest presented at the recent Wisconsin State Championships. Not surprisingly, the contest winner was Ray Fogerlund who has amassed over 50 American Backgammon Tour (ABT) points for high tournament finishes of the past two seasons, including winning the 2003 Indiana Open. How would you play this 1-1 roll?

Any candidate that doesn't include splitting the back checkers (15/14) is at least a Double Whopper (0.2 or greater cubeful equity error) according a GNU-bg rollout. (Best play is 15/14, 10/9, 8/7(2) although most other 15/14 plays are within 0.03 units of cubeful equity.)

Let's look at the reasons this provocative play is correct. For starters, White has a weak homeboard -- only three closed points. Secondly, White has a blot in that homeboard which will be difficult to cover and often difficult to lift. Thirdly, Black is way behind in the race and needs a hit to win. Fourthly, Black need not fear a gammon loss, again due to White's crunched board. Finally, White is forced to play the back checkers on most rolls, sometimes giving Black an immediate shot.

When explained this way, the conclusion seems obvious: how could NOT splitting ever be right in this kind of position?!

Position Two. Money Game.   Black to play 1-1?

Having seen Position One and its analysis, wouldn't you now make the same play in Position Two? The only difference is that now White's blot on his 4-point has been moved back one space to the 5-point. Yet another strong GNU-bg rollout says the safe play (10/7, 8/7) is probably best, by an admittedly small and not overly significant 0.02 equity units. How can this be? While contemplating that, look at Position Three where that loose checker has been moved back one more space.

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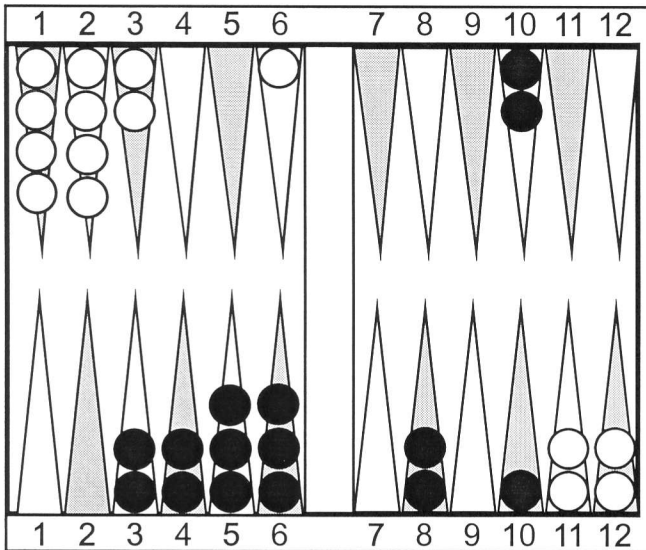

Position Three.
Money Game.
Black to play 1-1?

Now the best play is again the back split of 15/14, by 0.05 cubeless equity units. What is going on?

To figure this out, take a look at all 36 of White's upcoming rolls. You'll notice a big difference in the number of forced shots. In Position One, Black, without even being on the bar, will hit a direct shot 142/1296. Compare this to 40/1296 when White's blot is on his 5-point and 82/1296 when White's blot is on his 6-point. The farther out that checker sits, the easier it is for White to play his full roll in the homeboard, not having to blot in the outfield. Further, White gets more hit and cover numbers when the blot is higher in his homeboard. There are other more subtle differences, but the number of unhindered direct shots is the overriding factor.

The lesson here is that it is dangerous to take the result of a single position as a learning point. Best to modify the position and see what factors are important. The devil is in the details.

Player of the Month of **August** was **Rick Steele** with **194** gammon points.			
	August 4	August 11	August 18	August 25
1st	Butch Meese	Chuck Stimming	Rick Steele	Butch Meese
2nd	Jim Curtis	Rick Steele	Chuck Stimming	Jim Curtis
2nd	...	Scott Johnston	Jim Curtis	Rick Steele

Regional Tournament Schedule
Oct 8-10   **Illinois State Championships** Pere Marquette Hotel, Peoria, Ill............................(217) 528-0117
Oct 15-17   **Florida State Championships** Sheraton Suites, Fort Lauderdale, FL ....(954) 564-0340
Weekly 7PM   **Neon Johnny's** (86th & Township Rd)............................... (Cells) 317.442.4065 or 317.430.7862