



# Hoosier Backgammon Club

January 2005

## Back Game by Danny Kleinman

Back games (games in which one player holds two or more anchors in the other player's board, at least one of which is a low point) occupy little place in today's expert backgammon games. However, in an earlier era—two, three or four decades ago—they were popular. So much so that the best books of that era devoted considerable space to them. To their credit, top experts—people like Oswald Jacoby and John Crawford, Barclay Cooke and Bill Robertie—advised players, even then, to avoid back games.

Alas, this advice, if followed strictly, would lead to inferior ultra-safe early-game play. You must be willing to leave blots early, else you cannot play flexibly enough to build a good board or prime. If your opponent rolls hitting numbers, the price you pay is a back game.

In *The Backgammon Book* (1970), Jacoby and Crawford attempted to rank the quality of various back games by polling a small panel of experts, finding **almost unanimous** agreement that the 1-2 and 1-3 back games were the most promising, and that the 1-3 was **slightly superior** to the 1-2, but widespread disagreement about the relative merits of other two-anchor combinations.

During the 1970s, a new generation of backgammon experts disagreed with these rankings, touting the 2-3 back game as superior to the 1-3. One author, Jeff Ward, thought the 2-4 back game best of all.

For many years, my personal rankings conformed to the new consensus: best was the 2-3, followed by the 1-3 and then the 2-4, with the 1-2 far behind. Now, after accumulating more experience playing back games, I have changed my opinion: the 1-3 back game looks clearly best, with all others far behind.

Here are the general principles that I have learned from experience:

1. Anchors that are widely separated generate relatively few shots.
2. The farther back your rearmost anchor, the greater your shot potential.

## Butch Meese: 2004 Player of the Year.

Butch Meese had a commanding lead at the end of November (+269 points). Sean made the best run at it with 240 gammon points in December, which was good enough to over take second place from Jim Curtis. This is the fourth time Butch has won Player of the Year in the last 21 years.

The real dog fight was for 10th place between Terry Bateman and Scott Johnston (who joined the club in early May). It came down to the last meeting of the year with Terry holding on. Watch out this year, Terry.

3. The acepoint is especially valuable, as if you don't own it your opponent can bear in safely behind you.
4. You cannot always maintain all your anchors. Most back games are fragile. Sometimes inconveniently large numbers force you to break your front most anchor ... or wreck your board. That is one reason the 1-3 back game is better than the 2-3 back game. If you are forced to break the 3-anchor, you are much better off with a resulting acepoint game than a resulting deucepoint game.
5. As Jacoby and Crawford noted three-and-a-half decades ago, a 1-2 back game lets your opponent **kill** his large numbers, in effect stalling while you must move forward and are at risk of wrecking your board.
6. If the deucepoint is your most advanced anchor, you'll seldom be able to run from it and will often have to play your large numbers by wrecking your own board. That is one reason the 1-3 back game is **much** better than the 1-2 back game.

During the late 1970s, many experts, favoring a **pure** style, moved 13/8, 13/10 with an opening 5-3 instead of making the 3-point. Perhaps an appreciation of the value of the 3-anchor to the opponent in a back game put an end to that **modern** play.

The ranking of various back games has limited relevance, as you seldom get to choose your anchors. Occasionally, however, you do.

Suppose you are lucky enough to roll a small doublet in the position on the next page.

Sunday, December 12, 2004 One-Day Tournament

1st Terry Bateman  
2nd Scott Johnston

Hoosier Backgammon Club

Butch & Mary Ann Meese

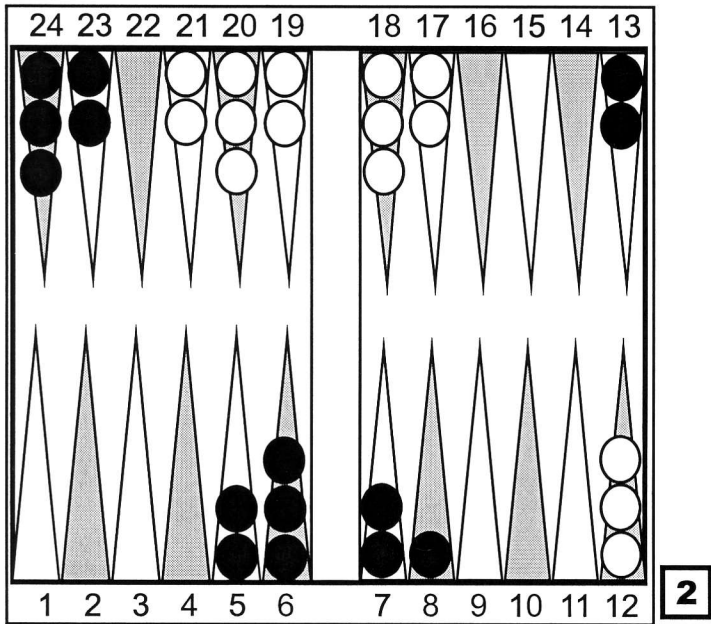
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1) Black to play 2-2? 2) Black to play 1-1?



To play 2-2?

Move 24/22(2) with your first two 2's, making the vital 3-anchor. If instead you use three of your 2's to make your 4-point, you risk crashing quickly.

Use your third 2 to put a spare on the newly-made 3-anchor, so that you can spring a man if you roll a 6. You should not seek to *keep* more men back in a back game. Rather, you should want to *have more men sent back* in order to avoid having to move forward, and to keep men circulating through the outfield.

Then move 6/4 with your fourth 2 to start your 4-point.

To play 1-1?

Move 23/22(2) with your first two aces, switching to the best back game.

Then move 24/22 with your last two aces, putting a spare on the 3-anchor as before. Starting your 4-point can wait. Do *not* remake the 2-anchor by moving 24/23(2); unless you have no reasonable alternative, avoid relinquishing the acepoint, your last hope of salvaging an otherwise losing position.

HBC Final 2004 Standings			
Butch Meese	1578	Mark King	54
Sean Garber	1283	Terry Leahy	48
Jim Curtis	1269	Paul Franks	48
Rick Steele	1058	Jeff Flowers	46
Chuck Stimming	935	Randy Foster	38
Larry Strommen	924	Al Gomez	36
Woody Woodworth	779	Lucky Nelson	36
Scott Day	738	Peter Kalba	34
Mary Ann Meese	706	Mark Swanson	30
Terry Bateman	592	Karen Chung	30
Scott Johnston	519	Geoff Arnold	30
Dan Moore	308	John Baron	24
Gabe Stiasny	244	Mark Drabing	18
Eric Luecking	145	Chuck Bower	18
Merle Feldman	143	Mark Mikolon	18
Josh Riddell	120	Derrick Swanson	12
Frank Scott	109	Jack Scofield	12
Mary Franks	60	Kevin Heacox	10
John Hill	58		

Congratulations to **Ellen Schremp** who received the Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Volunteer of the Year award for 2004. Condolences to the family of **Gabe Stiasny** who passed away December 25, 2004 from complications of cancer, and to **Chuck Bower** on the death of his mother on January 6, 2005.

Happy New Year

Player of the Month of December was Sean Garber with 240 gammon points.					
	December 1	December 8	December 16	December 22	December 29
<b>1st</b>	Scott Day	Sean Garber	Sean Garber	Butch Meese	Woody Woodworth
<b>2nd</b>	Terry Bateman	Jim Curtis	Scott Day	Jim Curtis	Butch Meese
<b>2nd</b>	Scott Johnston	Scott Johnston	Chuck Stimming	...	Jim Curtis
<b>Regional Tournament Schedule</b>					
Feb 18-20	<b>27th Pittsburgh Championships</b> , Holiday Inn, Pittsburgh, PA.....			412.823.7500	
Mar 18-20	<b>Midwest Championship</b> , Wyndham Lisle, Lisle, IL .....			773.583.6464	
Wed 7 PM	<b>Neon Johnny's</b> (86th & Township Rd).....			(Cells) 317.442.4065 or 317.430.7862	