Beware Of Unlearning
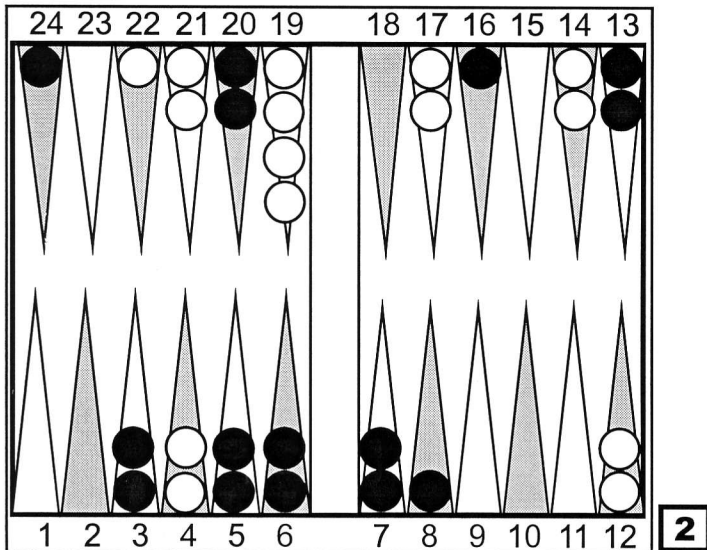### by Chuck Bower

7-point match, score tied at 4.
Black to play 2-2?

Choose your favorite play and second favorite play before reading further.

This position was originally published in an article in the cutting edge periodical from the 1990's -- **INSIDE BACKGAMMON**. It occurred in a match between Kit Woolsey and the revolutionary computer player TD-Gammon. The creation of IBM computer scientist Gerry Tesauro, TD-Gammon was the first backgammon program which challenged the top human players. It's neural net training became the norm in the field and was subsequently emulated by the familiar Jellyfish, Snowie, and GNU-backgammon. Tesauro wrote the original article and I wrote a followup article in the July-August 1995 HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB newsletter comparing TD-Gammon's evaluations and rollouts with similar analyses by the recently released Jellyfish 1.0 and the previous computer standard, **Expert Backgammon 2.1** for the PC. Currently

Mary Hickey is reviewing the ten positions from the articles on **GammOnLine**. This one piqued my interest.

Black has some things to think about here. After some contemplation, the hit looks very strong. Black is behind in the race, the back checker wants to move forward, and there are no super-strong alternatives (such as making a 6-prime).

Should Black lift the blot on the 8-point? The 8-point would be a strong addition. On the other hand, the chances of covering it aren't great. The 6-point lacks spares giving some incentive to add one with 8/6.

Playing 20/18(2) has merit. This play puts the freeze on White's midpoint, freeing Black's midpoint to become builders. Even though the opponent's barpoint isn't a true anchor it is often right to advance 20/18(2) because the 18-point can be easier to clear.

If Black chooses to keep the 20-point, giving up the midpoint is still a possibility, although 13/11(2) doesn't put those checkers in very good position (since Black already owns the 5-point, six spaces ahead of the 11-point). 13/9, 13/11 is too loose, leaving a position with four blots and many direct shots.

A conservative alternative to the above options is the continuation of the back checker all the way to the 16-point, covering the blot there. A downside to this play is Black's possession of seven points, coined **too many points (TMP)** by Kent Goulding. When you own seven points you are left with a single spare checker. It is likely you are going to break one of your seven points next turn whether you like it or not. This lack of flexibility is usually a liability and when faced with **TMP** one should always look for a reasonable alternative. Here there are many.

GNU-backgammon rollouts have one play out front with a 3-way tie for second. Surprisingly, the **TMP** play (24/22x/16) is better by 0.04 effective money game units. Tied for second are three plays beginning

with 24/22x and 8/6. The remainder of those three plays are alternately 13/11 (2), 20/18(2), and 22/18.

What is the lesson here? I think the real lesson is a very sublte one -- don't ignore solid principles just because they are occasionally wrong. The weakness of **TMP** has been solidly established. The exception here is due mainly to White's inflexibility. Another good principle is **_don't give an inflexible opponent easy outs_**, the outs being blots to shoot at. If Black plays conservatively, an entering White will likely either be forced to blot or forced to burn checkers behind Black's anchor, deep into his homeboard (that is, moving checkers off the 6-point). If White stays on the bar Black will be glad she kept the 8-point slot, even if the position is still awkward.

Backgammon at the intermediate and advanced level involves making plays which are consistent with established patterns or rules. At the highest levels, backgammon is all about knowing which rules to follow, which rules to break, and when to execute those actions. The key in Position 1 is recognizing that not giving an inflexibly placed opponent an easy out is more important than avoiding inflexibility yourself. If a player were to leave this position thinking that **TMP** is an overrated concept, he would be doing himself a disservice, unlearning a solid principle of the game.

HBC Standings As of June 2005	
Sean Garber	1063
Butch Meese	806
Scott Johnston	608
Rick Steele	506
Terry Bateman	439
Chuck Stimming	404
Larry Strommen	297
Scott Day	254
Jim Curtis	204
Mary Ann Meese	149
Merle Feldman	133
Woody Woodworth	127
Paul Berg	96
Dave Groner	74
Josh Riddell	69
Dan Moore	42
Charlie Haley	34
Mark Swanson	32
Jack Scofield	24
Mark Mikolon	20
Eric Luecking	18
Derrick Swanson	10

HBC Sunday Tournament June 5th	
1st	Sean Garber
2nd	Rick Steele
2nd	Scott Johnston

53rd Indiana Open
Labor Day Weekend 2005
Free Lecture by _Kit Woolsey_

Player of the Month of **June** was **Sean Garber** with 230 gammon points.

	June 1	June 8	June 15	June 22	June 29
1st	Jim Curtis	Sean Garber	Butch Meese	Sean Garber	Butch Meese
2nd	Butch Meese	Chuck Stimming	Scott Day	Woody Woodworth	Scott Johnston

Tournament BG Schedule
Jul 29-31　　**Wisconsin State Championships**, Radisson Hotel, Madison, Wisconsin..............608.516.9109
Aug 18-21　　**12th Annual Georgia**, Marriot, Atlanta, GA..770.333.1876
Sept 2-5　　**53rd Indiana Open Backgammon Tournament**, Sheraton, Indianapolis 317.255.8902
Wed 7 PM　　**Neon Johnny's,** 86th & Township Line Rd ....(Cells) 317.442.4065 or 317.430.7862