

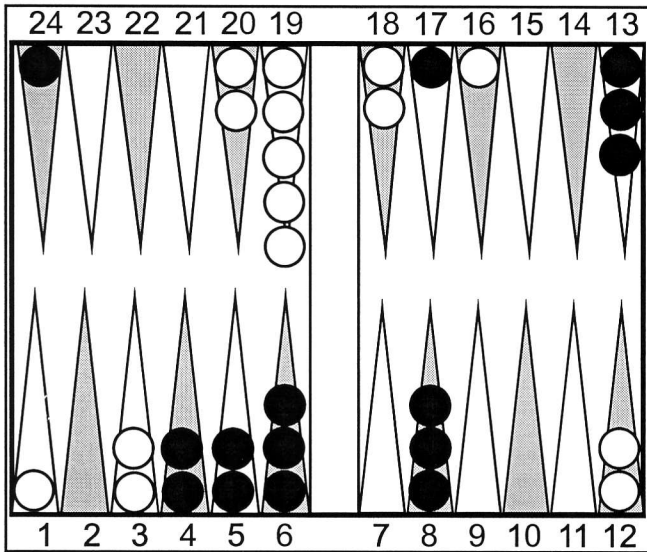


Hoosier Backgammon Club

August 2005

Step Up or Stay Back?

© 2005 by Mary Hickey



Money Game. Black to play 4-2?

When you have a lone back checker that needs to escape, but cannot do so with what you rolled, you often have the option of moving Junior up to a better position to do so next time. However, that usually also means you move him out of a relatively safe dark corner and into the light where your evil opponent can see better to attack him! How do you know whether to step up or stay put?

Kit Woolsey and Hal Heinrich discuss several factors that enter into these decisions in New Ideas in Backgammon, Problem 98. Four key ones seem to be:

- 1) How many other blots you have elsewhere,
- 2) if the opponent doesn't yet have enough Crisloid® (see note below) in place to blitz you effectively, but is likely to later,
- 3) whether moving up will create a distraction to prevent his carrying out other important objectives, and
- 4) the race.

Studying my collection of problems in this class has led me to believe three other issues are also important:

- 5) how productively the alternatives play,
- 6) whether you currently have a direct escaping number, and if so whether you're likely to have it next roll also, and
- 7) relative board strength.

In the following position, Black can step up and try to run next turn with 17/14, 24/22. He also has the reasonable alternative 17/11 (which is surely better than the inflexible, not to mention weenie, 17/14, 8/6). As we consider the seven points mentioned in the preceding two paragraphs, it seems safe enough to limit our discussion to these two plays and the game plans they represent.

- 1) How many blots elsewhere are too many? The second blot isn't a killer for 17/11 since if it's hit, you have a good chance to anchor or escape before the game slips out of your control. Still, the fact you can step up without any other blots on the board argues for doing so.
- 2) How many attackers-in-waiting is too many? In Kit's problem, there were only three active builders working on the man who moves up, and two were on the same point. There were only eight total checkers in the Zone at all. It's rare that eight checkers represent **Critical Mass Crisloid** (see note below). Depending on the rest of the position, he may need anywhere from nine to eleven checkers there to seriously scare you. Here, he has 10 checkers at the ready, which argues for caution even though they aren't well-diversified. The alternative play of 17/11 is relatively safe, and could lead to Black locking up three of White's checkers behind a five prime.
- 3) The distraction factor Kit mentions is present here because White needs to escape, and wants to use his next 6 for that purpose if possible. This results in duplication of the new attacking number created by stepping up.
- 4) Black's pip lead (134-157 after his play) argues strongly for moving up.
- 5) The productive nature of the alternative 17/11 argues in its favor. Though it produces a new blot, it's one that's relatively safe from being hit, and could serve as a useful builder for the

bar, which Black would love to have.

- 6) Since Black has no direct escaping number now, he may find himself out-timed if 17/11 doesn't work out. If Black fails to make the bar or at least the 9 point, but White manages to lengthen his block, that back checker may find itself feeling rather claustrophobic. One ill-timed big double for Black, and the back man could end up stranded.
- 7) Black has the better board right now, but may not after next turn. This favors his taking the risk now, before it's more dangerous.

The above position contains all the elements we have identified as factors in a middle-game decision to step up or stay back. The preponderance of them, including the all-important race, seems to favor stepping up here even though it means coming **under the gun**. A long JellyFish full Level 6 (nominal 2-ply) rollout confirms moving up is correct by .052 money cubeless equity. It produces 2.7 percent more wins for Black, which means it rates to be best cubeful also.

HBC Standings As of July 2005	
Sean Garber	1099
Butch Meese	890
Scott Johnston	628
Rick Steele	604
Chuck Stimming	506
Terry Bateman	485
Scott Day	298
Larry Strommen	297
Jim Curtis	288
Woody Woodworth	275
Mary Ann Meese	195
Merle Feldman	141
Paul Berg	96
Dave Groner	74
Josh Riddell	69
Dan Moore	42
Dragan Stevanovic	38
Charlie Haley	34
Mark Swanson	32
Jack Scofield	24
Mark Mikolon	20
Eric Luecking	18
Derrick Swanson	10

53rd Indiana Open Backgammon Tournament

Labor Day Weekend 2005

Free Lecture by Kit Woolsey

Player of the Month of July was Woody Woodworth with 148 gammon points.

	July 6	July 13	July 20	July 29
1st	Butch Meese	Woody Woodworth	Woody Woodworth	Rick Steele
2nd	Chuck Stimming	Chuck Stimming	Jim Curtis	Jim Curtis

Tournament BG Schedule	
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
Sept 16-18	Florida Championship , Sheraton, Ft Lauderdale, FL 954.564.0340
Wed 7 PM	Neon Johnny's , 86th & Township Line Rd.....(Cells) 317.442.4065 or 317.430.7862