HBCs 2005 Player of the Year
## Sean Garber

Sean Garber started the year in high gear and never let up winning **Player of the Month** honors 6 times. Sean's real hot streak came in late August and early September when he won 14 matches in a row (the 16,000 in 1 club!!!!). This is the second time Sean has won the **Player of the Year**. Scott Johnston finished in the Top 10 for the first time. Congratulations to both.

What Do You See? by Jake Jacoks

It's been said that backgammon is a visual game. We all look (or ought to be looking) at the whole board, yet some of us see the mountains, while others notice the valleys.
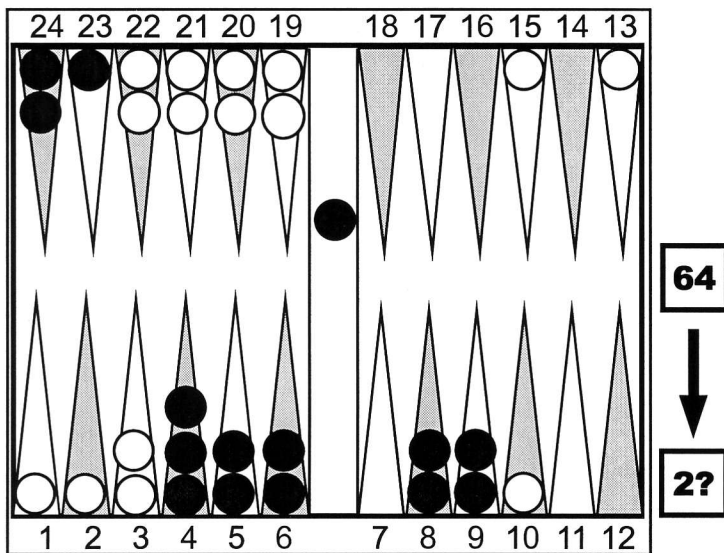
Take a look at the position above.

It comes from a real game, played for real money (quite a bit of real money). I don't recall what supposedly happened; it was the sort of game where

if you simply assume that whatever each player did was wrong, you'd be right more often than they would.

Perhaps the actual Black passed. It is a pass, but he got it right for the wrong reason. He saw his checker on the bar facing a four-point board, and three more checkers back; he saw a valley that was too deep to climb out of. A more expert player sees that this might be a take (I saw it as a close take, Snowie sees it as a close pass). He sees the valley, but also sees his own broken five-prime, which is holding four of White's men; he sees the mountain he has built. A Snowie roll-out sees that this is quite a big pass. The rollout reveals something hard for anyone to see properly (we see it, but dimly) that Black's timing is just too bad. White escapes with 4s, 5s, and 6s. Meanwhile, if Black enters he is more likely to break his prime than not, and if he is lucky enough to leap into White's outer board, White is poised to hit him, giving him another chance to crack. Meanwhile, White's spares are in place to extend the prime, further trapping Black.

Yet timing, as I remarked, is only seen dimly by mere humans. The final detail, hardest to see, is that a very small change in position of the puniest checker on the board can swing things from big drop to clear take. I speak of Black's spare on the four-point.

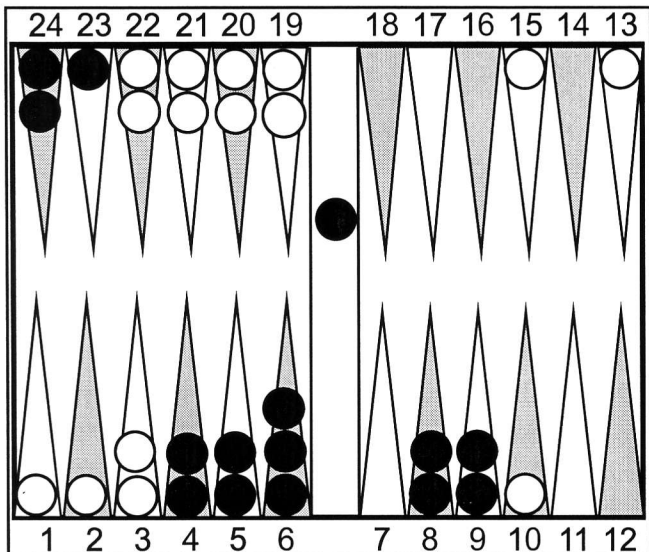## HBCs Awards Tournament
Noon, March 5th, 2006
Arni's Restaurant
86th & Michigan
(next to Wal-Mart)

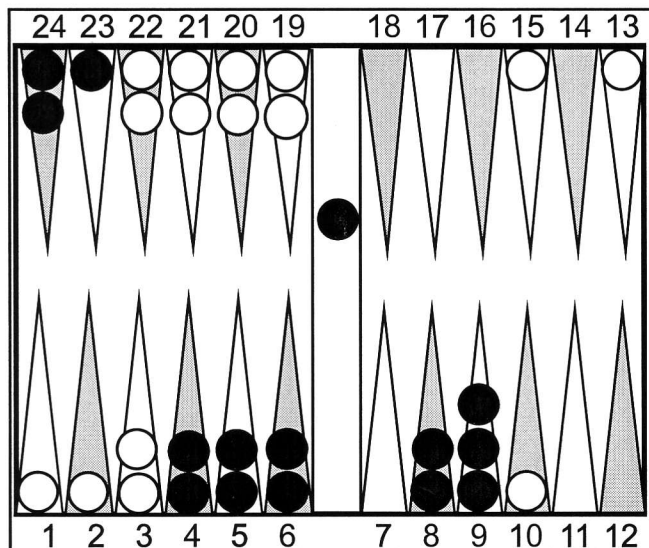### Splot: new term for the backgammon dictionary.
Splot (noun): a play that both slots at the front and splits from the back. (see Page 3.)

Snowie now sees this as an easy take. A rollout once again shows that it is a pass, but not quite as severe as the original. The first was a 1.2 drop, this is a 1.07.

Snowie sees this as not even a double. It is a double, but at last we have a clear take; the position is only 0.9 if taken.

I'd like to digress for a moment. Those of us writing backgammon articles, and many of those reading them, now take for granted that the reader understands what is meant by a **0.9 take**. In case not, a brief review won't hurt. For the position immediately above a Snowie rollout (2-ply) found that White won 67.2% of the games, 31.5% were gammons, and 3.7% were backgammons, while Black countered with 32.8% wins, 11.6% gammons, and 0.9% backgammons. These percentages can be confusing because Snowie includes all gammons and backgammons in its total win figures of 67.2% and 32.8%, and includes all backgammons in its gammon figures.

Translated, if Snowie played this game 1000 times it would find White winning 37 backgammons, 278 gammons (315 minus 37), and 357 games (672 minus 315), while Black would win 9, 107, and 212 respectively. If you multiply White's backgammons by three (37x3 = 111), gammons by two (278x2 = 556) and wins by one (357x1 = 357), then add them you have 1024. Do the same for Black (9x3 = 27, plus 107x2 = 214, plus 212x1 = 212, equals 453). Now subtract Black's wins from White's (1024-453) and divide buy 1000 (since we converted from thousands to whole numbers originally), giving .571, which luckily for us matches the number that Snowie displays in its rollout result.

We know that dropping a cube costs 1 point, so taking costs double 0.571 (the sum of all the things that could happen, on average), or 1.142 points. That, however, only happens if the game is always played to the end. Owning the cube Snowie uses an algorithm (which is a funny Greek word from *algos* meaning **wild**, and *rithmus*, meaning **guess**) to calculate about how much better you do with the cube than you would without it. Snowie's guess is that you lose nine-tenths (.9) points if you take, a savings of a tenth of a point over passing.

Back to the position; why does shifting that one checker matter so much? As we saw, Black has built a formidable structure, and even if bad things happen, he probably will retain at least an anchor in White's board, and his best three points in his own board. But cracking the nine-point, or even just being forced to leave a blot inside with numbers like an entering 13 is a serious flaw, requiring a drop. Putting the spare back on the nine-point means that Black can handle any entering roll without breaking up his position.

Finally, when Black's spare is on the six-point we learned it is a 1.07 drop. In one sense that is huge: paying a seven percent premium is worse than what you would pay the casino to bet on a spin of the roulette wheel. On the other hand, when small changes swing so much equity, there is a **money fish factor** to consider. In tournament play it is often correct to take more aggressively against weak opponents if the position is complex. The same is true when playing for money. If your opponent will consistently make bad decisions if you redouble to four (to say nothing of the bloody mess he makes of his own position when moving the checkers) you should take with the spare on the six-point, as long as you promise faithfully not to do any butchering of your own.
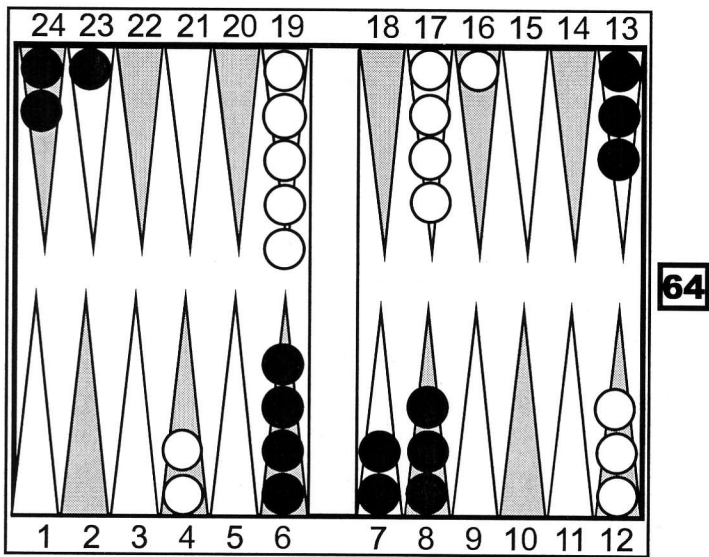
Splot!
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Back in July, at the request of Ilia Guzei, I put my collection of Splot problems together and sent it to Ilia and Chuck Bower. As you may know, Chuck coined the term **Splot** to describe a play that both slots at the front and splits from the back. I would expand this definition to include any play that leaves you with the functional equivalent—that is, I feel a **Splot** is a product, not a process.

Splots don't feel right to us, because they do something we've all been conditioned to believe is wrong. Magriel recommended against it and in general it's true that we don't want to leave ourselves weak in two areas of the board at the same time. But as with all principles in backgammon, there are sure to be exceptions. (OK, make it *almost sure*, in case somebody has already found one without any exceptions.)

Here are some Splots from my files:

Splots #1. Black to play 4-1?

Splot #1 is from a game I played on July 18, 2003, in a money game on GamesGrid. I recognized that I needed to split, but after moving 24/20 I not only missed the **splot**, I made the 23-point with the ace. Playing 8/7 was second choice, not what I did.

The Splot has a lot going for it here. Strategically, it starts both 5-points, and takes the risk of doing so while the opponent's position is undeveloped on the offensive side. Tactically, it takes one of the spares from the 6-point to the only place left for it to want to go, now that the opponent has the 22-anchor, and it also duplicates aces.
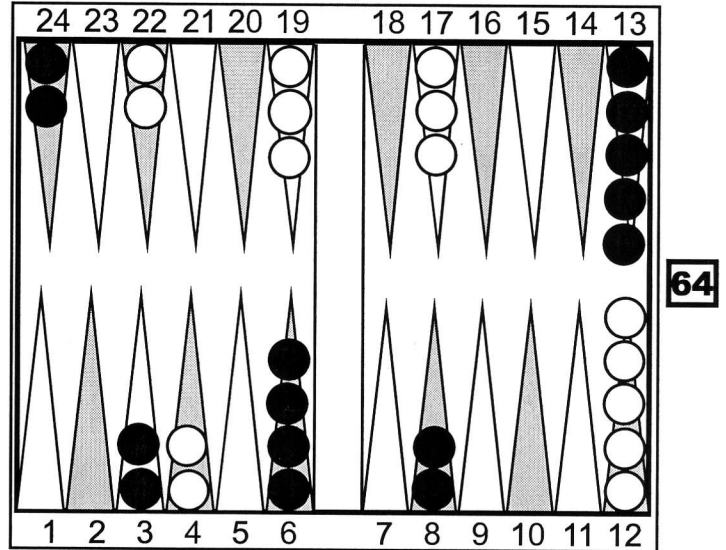
Splot #2. Black to play 6-1?

Splot #2 was from a game I played September 19th, 2003 against Ggraccoon (GamesGrid ID name). I made the wrong Splot with the excessively dangerous 24/18, 6/5. Better was 13/7, 24/23.

The same tactical considerations apply here as in Splot #1, that is, unstacking of the 6-point to where its spares want to go, and the duplication of aces. However, the strategic elements are different since the split I made allows him to hit me outside, leaving fewer returns and he's more dangerous because he has a point in his board.

Another way to see that the split to the bar point is wrong here is to consider the opponent's strategic objectives. He has built his defense, and also started his board, but with a point that's a bit deep. This means he wants to bring spares down from midpoint to help him fill in the gaps on the 5-, 4-, and perhaps bar points. My splitting to the bar allowed him to do work toward this goal more effectively. If I'd split to the 23-point instead, I'd have hindered him by giving myself

Splot #3. Black to play 5-3?

Splot #3 came from a match I played on April 1, 2004 versus an average player. The right play here is the functional equivalent of a Splot.

You have the opportunity to hide the checker from the 7-point in combination with an obviously needed split, by playing 7/2, 24/21, but the 7/2 hide-the-blot play is so yucky that I looked around for something better. It's possible to Splot with 23/18, 7/4, which isn't unreasonable since unlike Splot #2, your opponent isn't anxious to hit you from the midpoint. This play would be better than hiding the blot with 7/2, but better yet is 13/8, 24/21, which fortunately I found and did.

The weakness of the 7/4 slot is apparent when you set it up and see what happens if it's missed. Unless you can cover with a 2 or in rare cases a 9 next roll, you will have to leave it again, hide it, or cover it with a 4, breaking your still-valuable 8-point. Also, if a hitting contest develops on his side of the board, this blot in your home becomes a liability. In contrast, the bar slot allows you to cover with either 6s or 1s, and isn't as likely to be hit if you send one of his checkers back on the next sequence.

Splot #4. Black to play 4-3?

Splot #4 was missed on June 10, 2005 against me by an excellent Danish player. I suppose I should have been unhappy that he lost a chance to not only to make a better play, but also to Look Really Cool! But I didn't feel bad at all, why do you suppose that was? Did you think this game was free? (I did mention that the opponent was Danish, right?)

Black leads in the race and can't afford to get hemmed in on the ace point, and finally be forced to run from it when my board is bigger. This means the 24/21 split is mandatory here, while I still have only a two point board. The 8/4 slot that accompanies it is strategically good because he needs the 4-point to have an effective cube against my anchor on his 22-point, and it also works tactically because of the ace duplication. Other than double ones, what ace would he be scared to have me roll here? His chances of covering before I hit are pretty good, really.

Splots in the Opening

At the Columbus Backgammon Club and also at GammonLine's message board, there's been controversy lately about the **right** 62 response to a 21 opening roll played slotting. You are at a disadvantage of about −0.2 regardless of what you do, but there are six or seven ways to get there. I prefer 24/22, 13/7, and I will admit it's partly because it Looks Really Cool, but this Splot is also good enough to be essentially tied with

24/18, 13/11 in the current strong rollouts by a new kid on the block who calls himself **Stick**. (Here in Columbus, we all know his real name, but we're having a lot of fun pretending we don't. And yes, we are indeed easily amused.)

I also like the 13/7, 24/21 Splot with a 63 after the opponent's 21 played 13/11, 6/5, though rollouts may show the simple run to be better. Bart Brooks' short rollouts prefer the run at most scores, but like the Splot at Gammon Go. When I sneaked a peek at the Weaver-Ballard manuscript, I saw that their stronger rollouts make a stronger case for the Splot. I won't think of it as settled after any rollout, because you always have to consider your opponent, and yourself too, in making close decisions about opening rolls and responses.

A good example of the Opponent Factor occurs when you run into the occasional player, usually from the Middle East, who runs with an opening 62. If you roll a 62 in response, JellyFish likes you to just run also, with 24/18, 24/22 and 13/5 as close choices for 2nd/3rd. However, against this type of opponent, I like the highly complicating Splot, 13/7, 24/22 much better. This will tend to lead into a type of game he's unlikely to like or play well, and to me that's well worth a small piece of theoretical equity on a response play.

Splot Principles: Splots as responses to opening rolls are a class by themselves, but we can generalize a bit more about later Splot decisions. Here are some general Splot principles that work for me:
1. You don't normally Splot in front of one checker back, or against split back checkers. The typical Splot is in front of an anchor.
2. The purpose of a Splot is to gain a quick advantage when you have negative equity in the –0.2 to –0.3 range. If you already have a strong position, Splots tend to be too risky. If you're winning, they tend to be unnecessary.
3. Splots are not restricted to when you're losing the race. Their desirability isn't tied to racing potential, which isn't surprising since they're highly positional plays.

Final HBC Standings For 2006	
Sean Garber	1575
Butch Meese	1126
Scott Johnston	1068
Rick Steele	867
Jim Curtis	745
Chuck Stimming	681
Larry Strommen	665
Terry Bateman	638
Scott Day	546
Woody Woodworth	489
Mary Ann Meese	485
Merle Day	207
Jeff Flowers	120
Bob Frydell	108
Paul Berg	96
Dave Groner	74
Dan Moore	70
Josh Riddell	69
Pat Gibson	51
Tami Jones	48
Dragan Stevanovic	38
Charlie Haley	34
Mark Swanson	32
Ron Bartov	30
Lucky Nelson	30
Jack Scofield	24
Mark Mikolon	20
Terry Leahy	20
Eric Luecking	18
Mark Drabing	18
John Baron	18
Derrick Swanson	10
Gino Agresti	10
Larry Liebster	8
Larry Whittenburg	8
Chip Olson	8

Hoosier Backgammon Club…..The Times are Changin'.

After 20+ years of running the **Hoosier Backgammon Club**, Butch & Mary Ann Meese have turned the weekly activities over to Sean Garber. The Meeses will still be in charge of the **Indiana Open** over Labor Day weekend. For those who have been wandering why there has not been a newsletter for months, the Meeses have moved out of their condo to a home in Westfield. This is the last newsletter with the Meeses as editors.

"We are truly blessed to have made so many friends over the past 20 years. We want to give a big thanks to all who have contributed their articles to the newsletter. We could not have done it without you all. We wish Sean much luck and will continue to support the club. See you over the board!"

Butch & Mary Ann Meese

	September 1	September 7	September 14	September 21	September 28
1st	Sean Garber	Sean Garber	Woody Woodworth	Scott Johnston	Terry Bateman
2nd	Tami Jones (ID)	Scott Day	Mary Ann Meese	Jim Curtis	Jim Curtis
2nd	Pat Gibson (CA)				

	October 5	October 12	October 19	October 26	
1st	Woody Woodworth	Scott Johnston	Larry Strommen	Butch Meese	
2nd	Rick Steele	Jim Curtis	Scott Johnston	Woody Woodworth	
2nd			Terry Bateman	Larry Strommen	

	November 2	November 9	November 16	November 23	November 30
1st	Mary Ann Meese	Chuck Stimming	Mary Ann Meese	Mary Ann Meese	Jeff Flowers
2nd	Sean Garber	Sean Garber	Bob Frydell	Larry Strommen	Jim Curtis
2nd	Scott Day				

	December 7	December 14	December 21	December 28	
1st	Scott Johnston	Scott Johnston	Jeff Flowers	Larry Strommen	
2nd	Jim Curtis	Larry Strommen	Larry Strommen	Jim Curtis	

Player of the Month of **September** was **Sean Garber** with 174 gammon points.
Player of the Month of **October** was **Jim Curtis** with 115 gammon points.
Player of the Month of **November** was **Mary Ann Meese** with 160 gammon points.
Player of the Month of **December** was **Larry Strommen** with 160 gammon points.

Tournament BG Schedule
Feb 17-19   **28th Pittsburgh Backgammon Championships**, Holiday Inn-Airport, Pittsburgh … 412.823.7500
Mar 17-19   **2006 Midwest Championships**, Wyndham Lisle Hotel, Lisle, Illinois ………………….773.583.6464
Apr 7-9   **12th Ohio State Championships**, Airport Marriott Hotel & Cleveland, Ohio ………..330.268.4610
Wed 7 PM   **Neon Johnny's,** 86th & Township Line Rd……………..(Neon) 317.879.1212 (Sean) 317.241.0605