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JUNE 1979

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from the EDITOR'S DESK



If you haven't noticed, there's a game in town that's demanding attention. Backgammon, of course, has been around for some 4,000 years, and it has a well documented history. The game originated in Persia and then slowly made itself known across the Middle East. Eventually, its popularity spread across Western Europe. A primitive set was unearthed from the tomb of Tutankhamen, giving testimony to its favor as a game of royalty.

Backgammon has retained its popularity throughout the ages. Caesar's armies played it, as did the Crusaders of the Middle Ages. The name itself seems to have been derived from two Welsh words, *bac* and *gamen*, meaning "little" and "war."

During the seventeenth century backgammon remained a highly favored game. History has recorded its prominence at the Court of Louis XIV. In more recent history, Samuel Pepys, Thomas Jefferson, and Sir Winston Churchill were among those who played the game of backgammon.

Now, with its recent renaissance in the United States, backgammon has firmly established its place in

the hearts of all who seek excitement at the gaming table.

This resurgence of backgammon has the added benefit of timeliness. It's a game that's better enjoyed when stakes are involved. Today's social acceptance of casino gambling is a perfect accompaniment to backgammon—an illustrative point being the number of backgammon accommodations that can be found in Las Vegas. Over a dozen lively places offer the availability of backgammon accommodations to their guests. The Desert Inn and Country Club features beautifully inlaid ivory backgammon tables in their rooms. Michael Maxakuli, publisher of the Las Vegas backgammon magazine, also hosts players at the Rumors Discotheque on the strip in Las Vegas. Incidentally, Michael points out that there is no table charge anywhere in Las Vegas for playing backgammon.

World-wide backgammon tournaments are rapidly becoming well attended major events. Notable among those upcoming are: the California Open to be held in Los Angeles in June; the Monte Carlo World Championship to be staged in July; and the First International Backgammon Championships of Puerto Rico to be held in August. *Gambling Times'* backgammon editor Sidney Jackson is a director in the above named tournaments.

Other than tournament play, wagering on backgammon is considered illegal. Yet, backgammon is a game in which gambling is almost a necessary adjunct. The many private clubs which accommodate backgammon players could easily accommodate a modified type of allowable gambling. These clubs are refined, well run, quiet and orderly establishments. Within the confines of a private club, a five dollar wager should not be an illegal activity.

Backgammon tournament action is further heightened by the cal-

cutta pools. The Monte Carlo event, for example, offers a possible \$250,000 *calcutta*. Briefly, a *Calcutta Auction* provides competitive bidding for each player. The bidding is done by the assemblage of spectators and even players who may bid on themselves. The money collected at the auction goes into a pool. Then, when the tournament is ended, the proportionate share of the pool money goes to those who bid on the winning players.

As a matter of fact, some variation of the *calcutta* auction could create even greater interest in the poker tournaments held in Las Vegas and Reno. Allowing spectators to wager on selected entrants would add a new dimension of gambling interest and excitement to these poker tournaments. Most of the people watching a poker, blackjack or gin rummy contest are there because they're interested in gambling. It would certainly make sense to give them an opportunity to bet on the outcome of the contest they're watching. There would be very few hearty souls in the stands watching a horse race if there were not an opportunity for wagering.

We'd like to see Jack Binion, Amarillo Slim, and other poker tournament promoters give this idea some thought. The more people that get involved in watching, betting, and rooting for a favorite player, the better it is for the tournament.

In closing this month's editorial get together, I'd like to call your attention to the story by Leonard Wise on page 34 of this issue. There's something more here than just a good backgammon story. It's a narration that will give us all something to think about. And on that note of confidence, I leave you to

*Keep on winning,
Len Miller, Editor*

Gain and Maintain the Initiative

by Gaby Horowitz and Dr. Bruce Roman

The early game is the key to strong positional backgammon. It is as important to the development of your game as childhood is to a man. The better player will definitely overwhelm his weaker opponent in this stage of the game. Anyone can build a board with 3-1, 4-2, 6-1, etc., but the superior player gains his advantage by turning his bad rolls into good rolls.

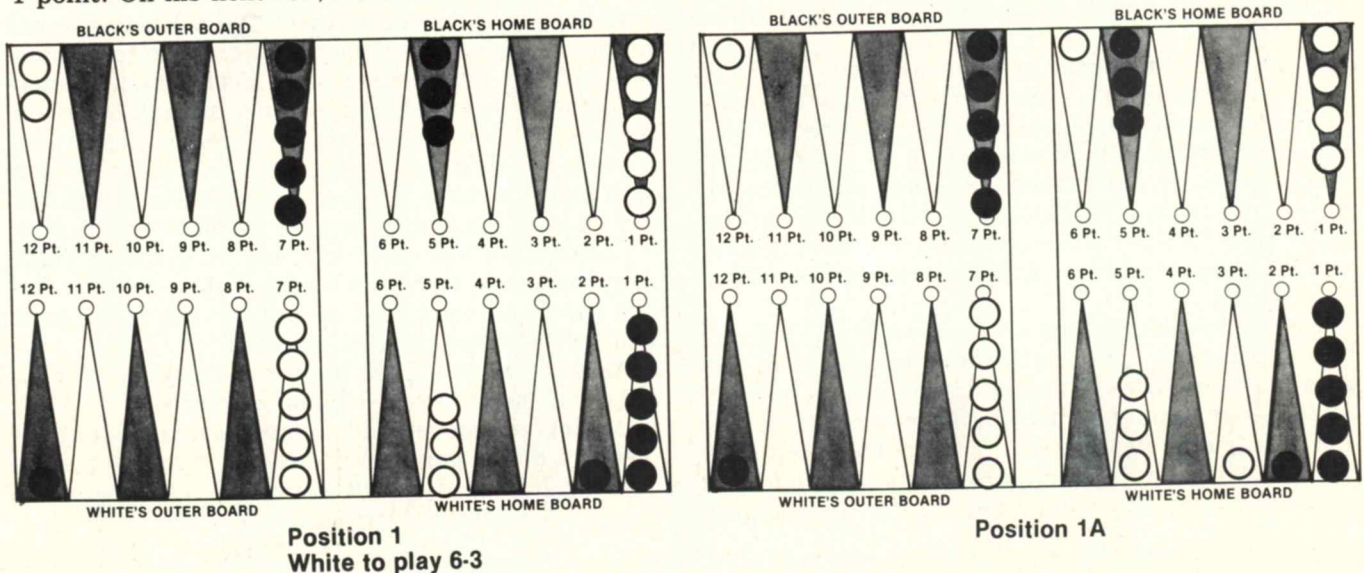
It is the early game when you can afford to be hit without having it cost you the game because the inner boards are weak and you can re-enter more easily. You want to gain enough advantage in the early game to double your opponent first. In this article we will discuss one very important principle that will enable you to obtain that essential early edge. It will serve you well in those times when you don't get good rolls.

In Position 1, one of Black's back men has escaped. Most inexperienced players do not give sufficient importance to the fact that one of his opponent's back men has escaped. Any move that would fail to create contact would be an inferior move. Therefore, White *must* come to Black's bar point (Position 1A). This will tend to create contact because Black will find it more difficult to avoid leaving a direct shot on his next roll than if both of White's men were still on the 1 point. On his next roll, Black would like to safety

his man on White's 11 point, hit White on his bar point without leaving a blot, and escape his last man from his opponent's inner board. That's a lot to do with one roll. White, by moving to Black's bar point, now exerts control in all four quadrants of the board.

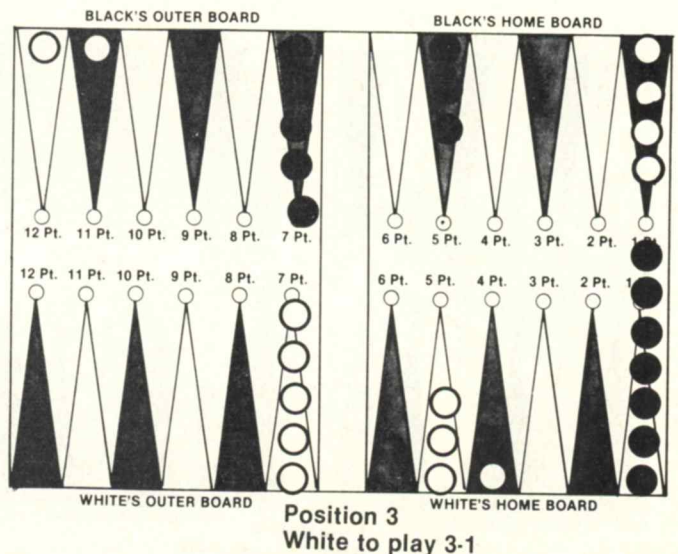
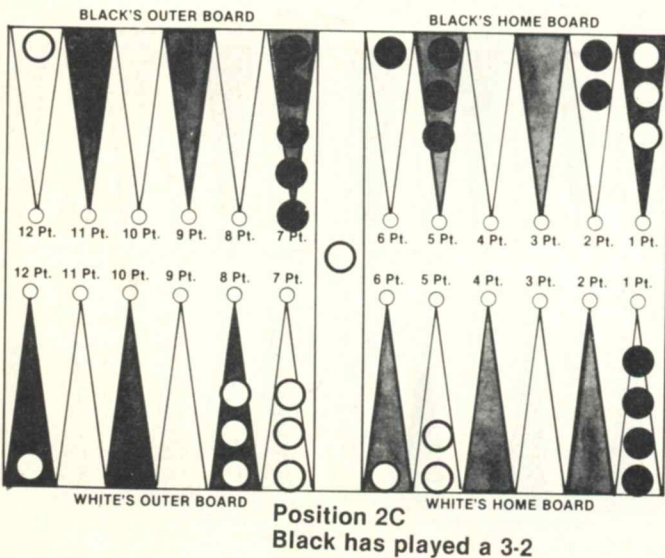
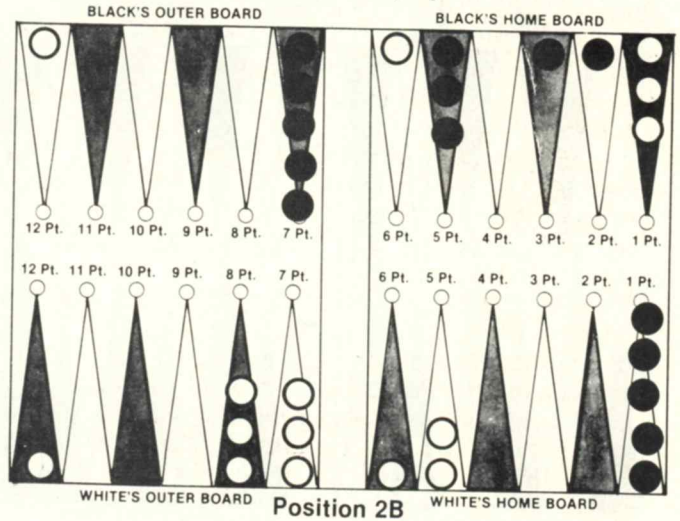
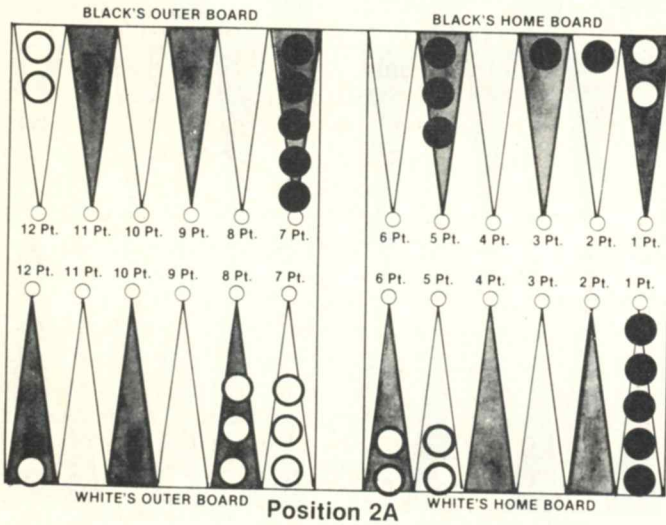
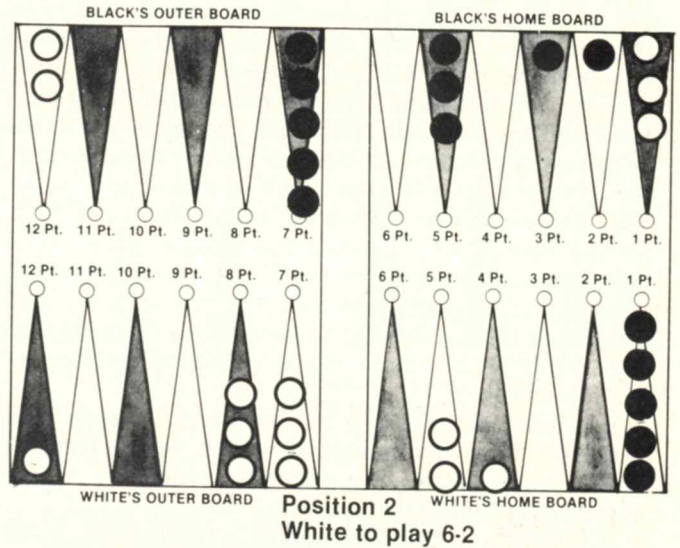
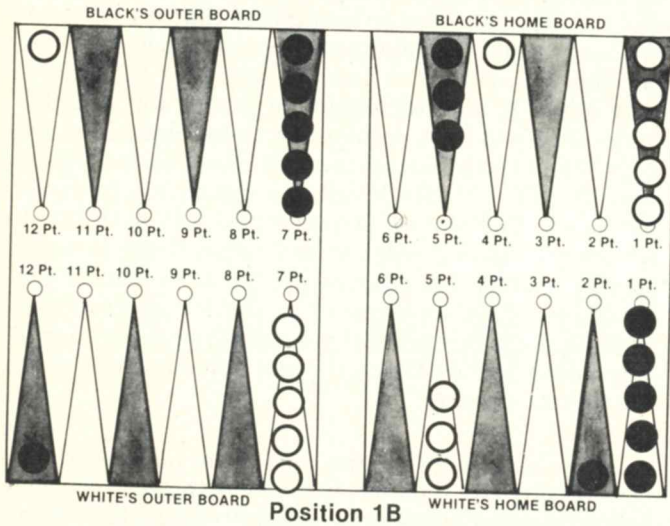
It would be incorrect for White to come all the way out with his back man to Black's 9 point because Black would have too many chances to hit his blot (22 out of 36) with only 3 return shots from the bar (5-5 and 4-6) (Position 1B). Additionally bringing the man down from the midpoint increases White's chances of making either his 4, 5 or bar point on his next roll.

In Position 2 Black has succeeded in escaping both of his back runners. The obvious move of making the bar point (Position 2A) is much too passive. It should be very alarming to White that both Black's back men are no longer in the inner board. White must create contact *now* by coming up to the bar point (Position 2B). Black will make the bar point on his next roll regardless of whether White has a man there or not. He has 15 numbers that make the bar point (1-1, 1-3, 1-4, 1-6, 3-3, 3-4, 3-6, 4-6, and 6-6) but 21 numbers which will not allow him to point on White. If he doesn't point on White he may hit him, leaving a blot



on his bar point, giving White 14 shots at that blot from the bar (Position 2C). If the blot is not hit he may have direct shots at Black's blots or establish a holding position by making his bar point on his next roll. The 2 should be used to slot his bar point rather than played inside because if he does get a shot, he would not want two blots in his inner board.

In Position 3, Black again has escaped both his back men. White cannot afford to let him make outside points easily so that he can bring his men home safely. Making his 5 point (Position 3A) would allow Black to bring men down from his midpoint with much less chance of getting hit than the correct move of coming up to his opponent's 5 point (Position 3B).



From the 5 point he has direct control over Black's outfield. White's position after the correct move is actually superior to Black's because Black will find it very difficult to bring his men home without leaving several direct shots for his opponent. Slotting his own 5 point helps White build his board quickly while waiting for a shot at Black.

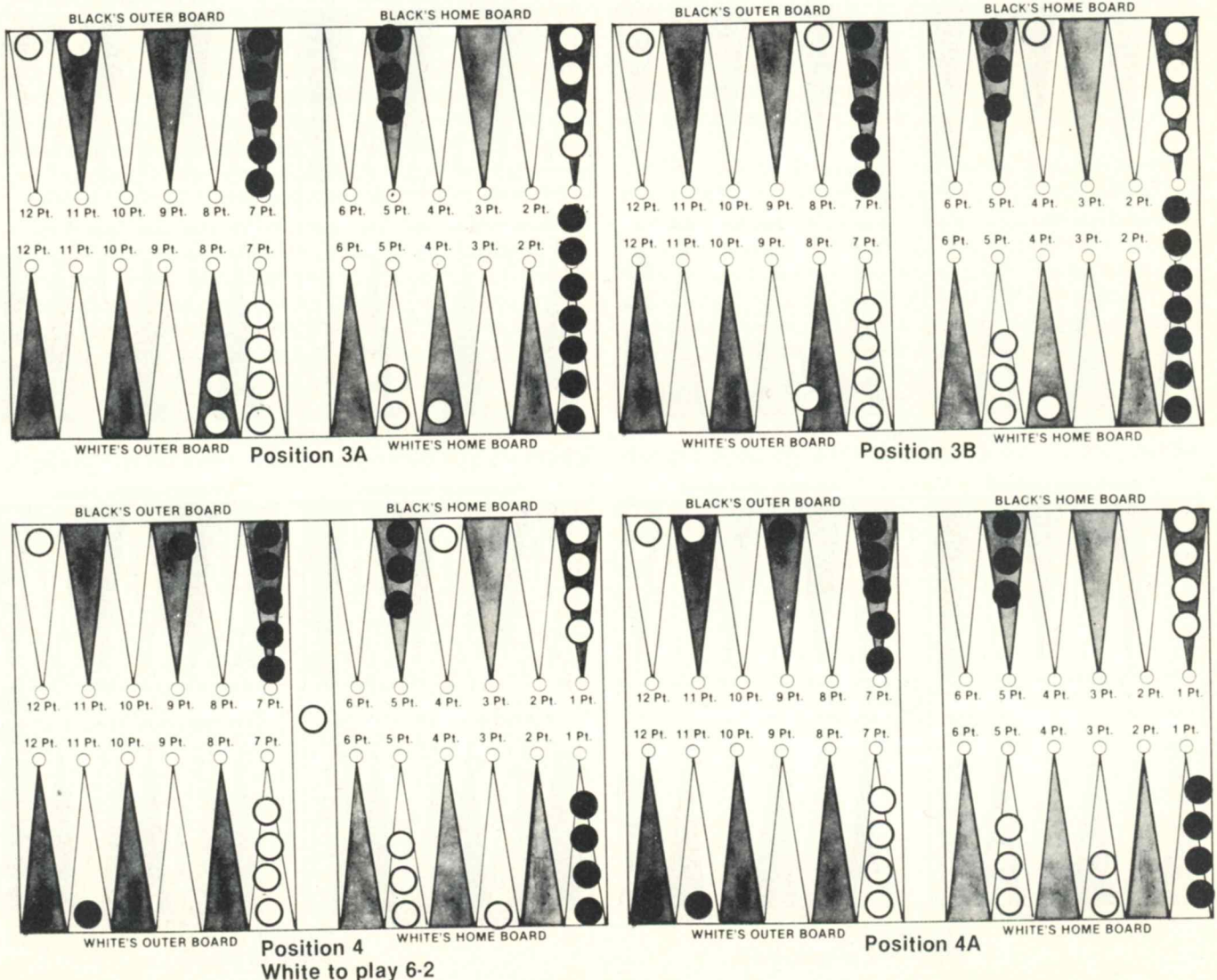
In Position 4 White has rolled a 6-2, a rather poor roll in this position. He must come in with the 2 and play a 6. He has lost the initiative and therefore should be deciding his next move with the idea of *regaining* the initiative. The obvious move of making his 9 point will totally relinquish the initiative to his opponent (Position 4A). Black will then have 26 numbers on his next roll with which to make his 4 point. This will make him a favorite in any upcoming blot-hitting contests (by having two points in his inner board as compared to one for White). White must hit Black off his 2 point (Position 4B), *not* with the idea of making the 2 point but to keep Black from making his 4 point, and to make Black waste half of his next roll coming in.

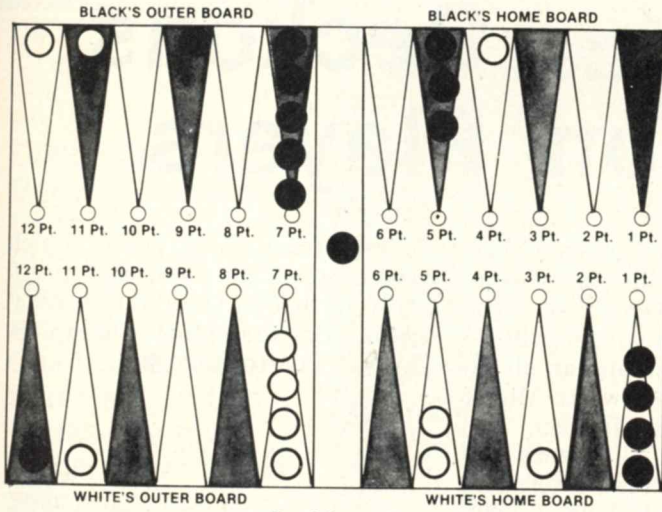
You must do anything in your power to stop your opponent from making good points. Many times it is necessary to hit your opponent elsewhere on the board to accomplish this end.

In Position 5, White is again on the bar and has a

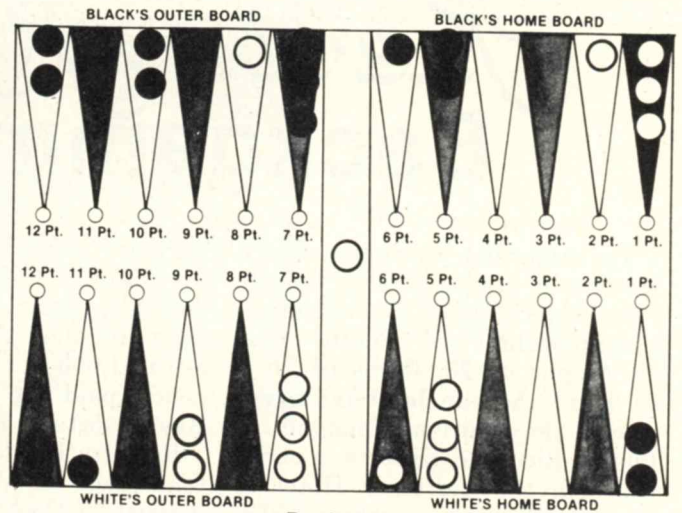
2-6 to play. By this time you should be able to help White with the correct play. What is it and why? White must come in on the 2 point from the bar. He could escape with one of his back men and make Black's 11 point (Position 5A). He could also make the bar point (Position 5B). Black would then have very few bad numbers on his next roll. There is another move which takes away half of Black's next roll and puts the pressure on him rather than on White. It is always good to make your opponent perform,* experience the pressure, and feel like he's fighting to stay alive. It also wins a lot of games for you. The move that will best accomplish these objectives and gain White the initiative is to hit Black on his 2 point (Position 5C). If Black fails to return hit from the bar he will find himself struggling to stay in the game with White having shots at additional blots. It would be very instructive to play this position out several times, using all three plays to see for yourself how much more aggressive the correct play is and how you would feel as Black if your opponent did make the correct play. 9

*perform: a) having to throw a particular number or numbers in a pressure situation. b) having to throw a good number on the next roll to avoid a switch in advantage from one player to the other.

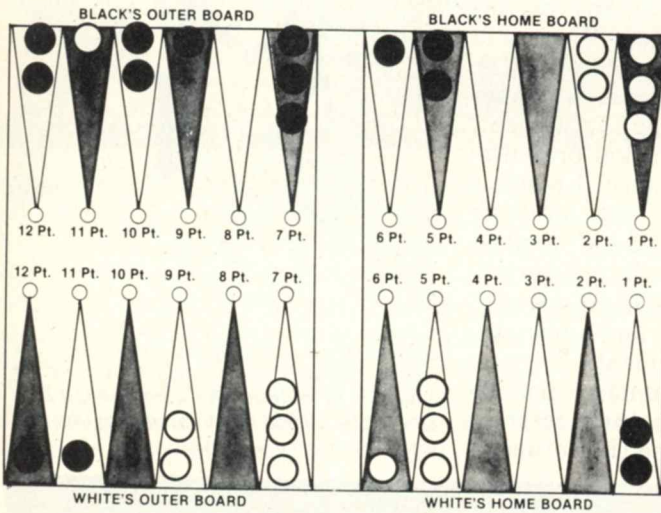




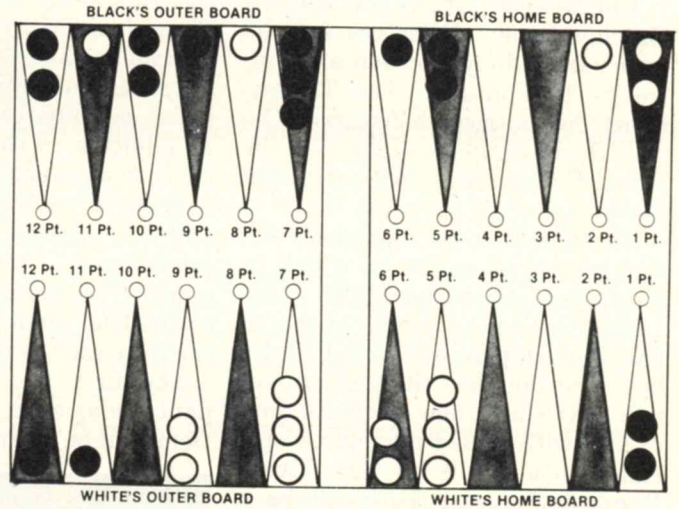
Position 4B



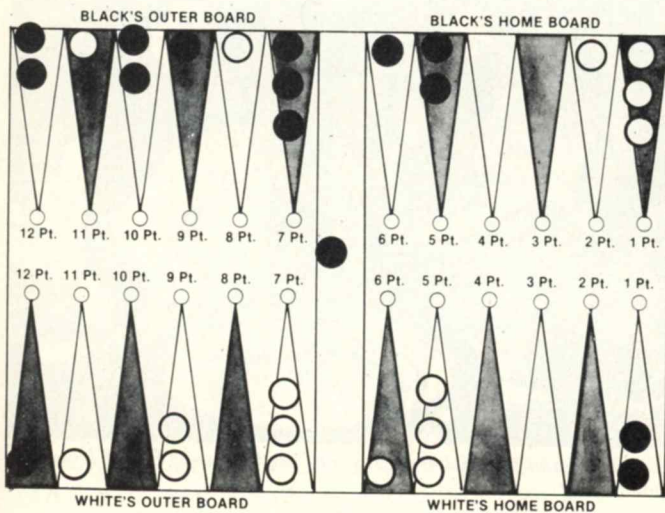
Position 5
White to play 6-2



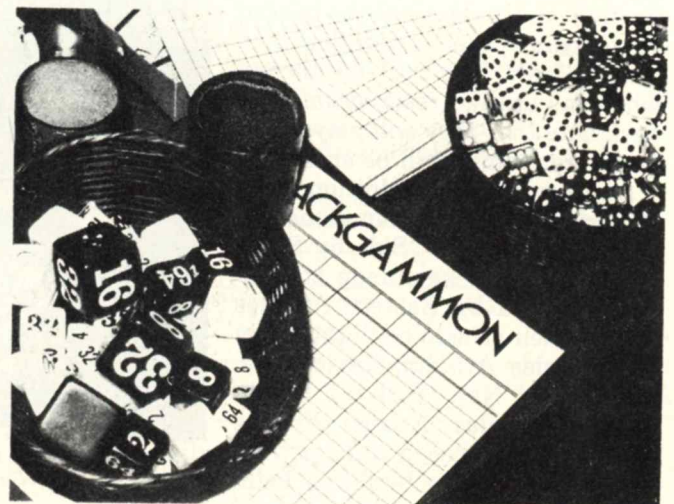
Position 5A



Position 5B



Position 5C



Puerto Rico Beckons Backgammon Players

The luxurious Cerromar Beach Hotel will be the setting for the First International Backgammon Championships of Puerto Rico on August 20-26. Rums of Puerto Rico (the official tournament drink), the Tourism Company of Puerto Rico and Eastern Airlines will join the Cerromar Hotel as hosts for the championships. There will be over \$30,000 in prize monies, surpassing all other invitational backgammon tournaments.

Tournament Chairman will be Barclay Cooke. Directors for the event are Sidney Jackson and Joffre de la Fontaine. The Tournament Committee Chairman is Oswald Jacoby and presiding over the Rules Committee will be Malcom Davis.

Backgammon "aficionados" will find plenty of action in which to participate throughout the week. In addition to the regular events of championship, intermediate, beginners and doubles, the tournament will introduce new formats and events with added money. Of special mention will be the "Rums Randoms" event. This will be a series of five events in which entry is limited to 16 players per event, and \$1,000 will be added to each of the five events. There will be no seeding and names will be placed on the draw sheet according to a lottery draw. The first 80 players who send in their reservations and designate that they will play in the "rums randoms" will be entered.

Another exciting addition prior to arriving at the championships will be a no entry "Side by Side" by Z & Co. backgammon tournament, hosted by Eastern Airlines aboard their scheduled flights from Los Angeles, Atlanta, Mexico City, Miami and New York to Puerto Rico on Monday, August 20. The "Side by Side" board is the patented design of Bruce Zemby of Palm

Springs, California. Finalists of all the "Side by Side" flights will compete in a special event later in the week in which the winner will receive \$1,000 in cash and an all expenses paid trip for two to Mullet Bay Resorts in San Marteen.

Registration for all events will take place on Monday afternoon, August 20. Cocktails, black-tie dinner, and calcutta festivities will begin at 8:30 that evening.

Rums of Puerto Rico will provide the refreshments for the parties throughout the week. They will also make the presentations at the Saturday evening awards dinner which culminates the tournament. In addition to the usual presentations and awards, special plaques will be give for "best hardluck story," "luckiest roller," "loudest participant," "most intent participant," "Surgeon General Award" to the best smoker, and a few others for added enjoyment.

The first one hundred participants who send in their reservations will be awarded the "official"

21 inch tournament board, which was designed and embossed specifically for use in the First International Backgammon Championships of Puerto Rico. 9

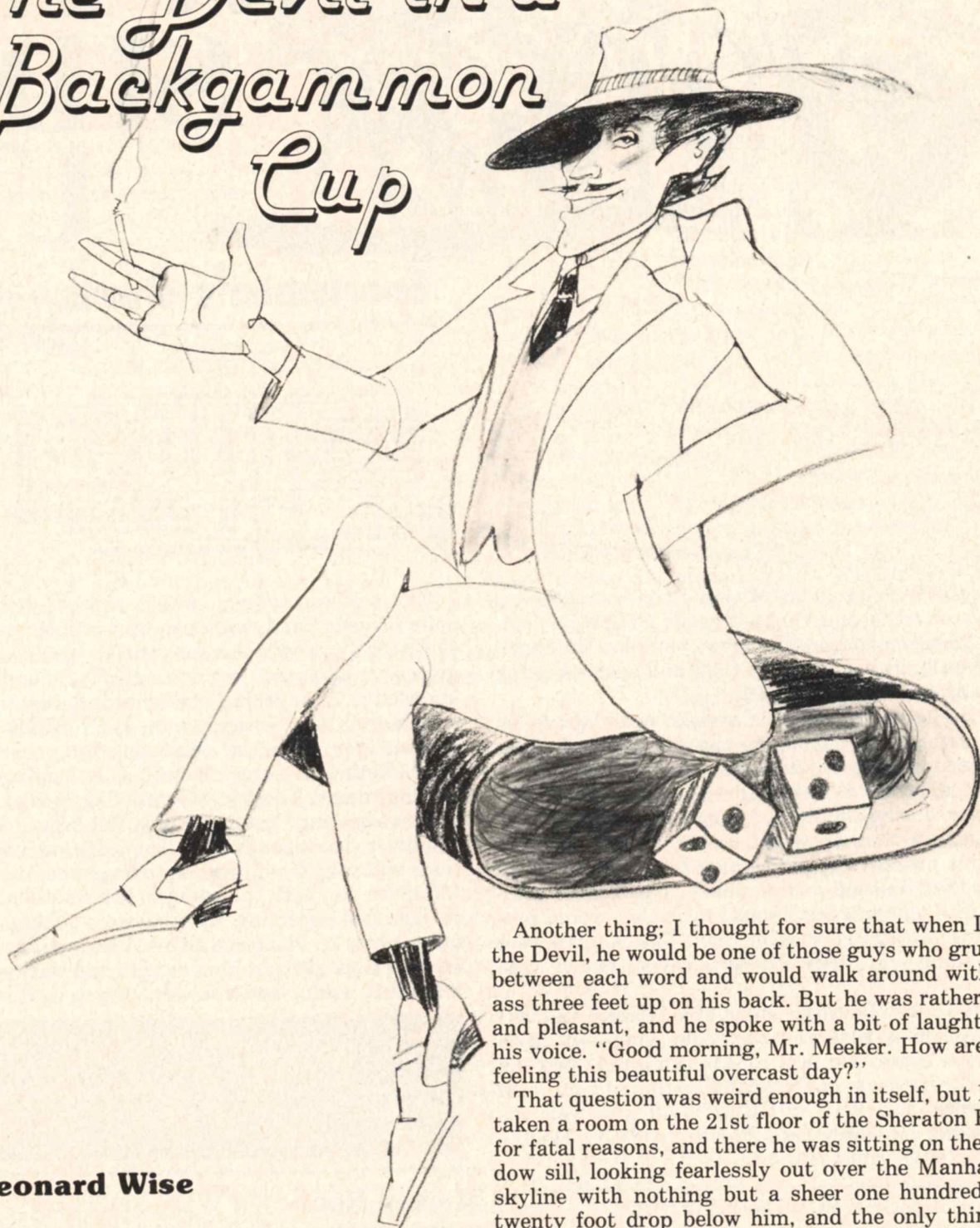


Backgammon tournament contestants, as well as viewers, will surely find time for some fun in the sun. The warm sand of Dorado Beach is ideal for sunning, jogging, just walking, or even a siesta.



Gambling is legal in Puerto Rico, and the casino facilities at the Cerromar Beach Hotel are both luxurious and accomodating.

The Devil in a Backgammon Cup



by Leonard Wise

It's a funny thing, but I always thought that if and when I met the Devil he would be wearing this sinister, flowing black cape, long red underwear, and have bloodshot eyes and horns sprouting out of his head. Not true. He was rather cool actually. He was dressed in a three-piece, dark blue pinstripe suit, blue silk shirt, and a hundred dollar polka dot tie.

Another thing; I thought for sure that when I met the Devil, he would be one of those guys who grunted between each word and would walk around with his ass three feet up on his back. But he was rather nice and pleasant, and he spoke with a bit of laughter in his voice. "Good morning, Mr. Meeker. How are you feeling this beautiful overcast day?"

That question was weird enough in itself, but I had taken a room on the 21st floor of the Sheraton Hotel for fatal reasons, and there he was sitting on the window sill, looking fearlessly out over the Manhattan skyline with nothing but a sheer one hundred and twenty foot drop below him, and the only thing to catch him was a New York sidewalk made of steel-hard asphalt. But there he was, leaning back as nonchalantly as you please with the sun at his back and death lurking beneath him.

"Who the hell are you, and what the hell are you doing in my room?"

Oh, yes, I forgot to mention. Before that day, I wasn't a very nice person or pleasant either. No one

liked me or cared to be with me, and I could count all of my friends on one finger. Her name (not my finger) was Gertrude Bunion, and she was my only friend. Actually, I didn't count her as my friend, but she was the only person who was friendly with me.

"Go away, Gertrude," I used to say to her whenever she came on to me.

You see, she and I used to work in the basement mailroom of the law firm of Stigman, Styman, Stutz, and Stueberminn. We were together from morning till night. Every morning at 8 a.m. I would arrive grumpy, bitter, and pouting. Gertrude, a rather chunky girl with light brown hair and glasses, would arrive smiling, cheerful and friendly.

"Good morning, Petie."

"You're going to get your Petie, Gertrude. I told you a million times, my name ain't Petie. It's Peter. Peter Meeker, and you'd better start calling me by my right name if you know what's good for you."

"Oh, Petie, you don't mean that and you know it. Besides, I weigh more than you do, I'm a good inch taller than you, and if you ever tried anything like that I'd simply laugh right in your face."

"Oh, you think so, huh? You just watch. One of these days I'm going to really let you have it."

And that's how it would go almost all day long. Me yelling and screaming and complaining at her, and she remaining as calm and as cool as a cucumber and ignoring my threats. Gertrude was a smart girl. Very smart, and when the firm offered to move her upstairs as a file clerk or freshman secretary, she said positively not.

"That's stupid, Gertrude. Really goddamn dumb. This is the chance you've been waiting for and you say no!"

I wasn't so much mad at her as I was that they didn't offer to move me upstairs. They didn't even think about it. As a matter of fact, while Mr. Styman was down there in the mailroom talking to Gertrude real nice and friendly like, he didn't even bother to look over at me one time—and he was down there with us for less than fifteen full minutes.

Screw you, Styman.

I guess it's not too hard to figure out what was happening. Gertrude had a crush on me. She finally broke down and told me one afternoon when we had finished our work.

"That's the damndest, dumbest thing I've ever heard, Gertrude."

"I agree," she said.

"Well, wait a minute, you're not the first girl to flip over yours truly here. I've had plenty of girls."

Gertrude sort of smiled and shrugged that statement off. She had the patience of a sloth.

"I like you Petie, but you are the world's biggest pain in the ass."

"Go away, Gertrude. Just go away."

Like I said, Gertrude had the patience of a sloth, and when there was slow action down in the old mailroom, she would teach me to play backgammon. I had always hated games. Hated them with a passion, but she was so good at it that it became a challenge to

beat her, which I finally did after several months and at least five hundred games.

"Do you think you're ready to play for a little cash?" she said to me one afternoon.

Not being a complete fool, I said, "How much?"

"Oh, we'll start off with something reasonable, like how about a penny a chip without the cube?"

"I don't know the cube that well yet."

"That's why I said without the cube."

"All right, you're on."

Of course, I thought I knew the game. And I knew she knew the game better, but you tell me how in the hell can someone lose \$49.36 in one week playing a penny a stone? I did.

As if this wasn't bad enough, Styman, John A. Styman, who was one of the founders of the four-year-old company, began to spend a lot of time down in the old mailroom. Too much to suit me. And it became obvious after a while what the blubber belly was after. Yeah, he had a fat gut, a bald head, bow legs, and those funny-looking little stubby fat fingers. It made me sick just to look at him. I was looking at him and he, in turn, was gaping at Gertrude. Boy, did it tick me off. Not because I was jealous or anything like that, because I wasn't—honest. It just that he thought he could do any old damn thing just because he was one of the owners, and founders, and builders, and presidents of the damn company.

I mean, there we would be, me and old Gert heavily into a game of backgammon, and there he would come, his little fat belly bouncing with each step down the old mailroom steps.

The first time he caught us I nearly shit in my pants. After all, we were down there to sort the mail and to get it ready for the mail boys, not to be playing penny backgammon. I jumped completely out of my chair, while Gertrude simply sat there staring at me as if I had gone completely wacko.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Styman," I said really quick and friendly-like to try and smooth things over.

He completely ignored me and said, "It's all right, Gertrude. Continue playing. I'm starting to take up the game myself."

Did you get that? He said, "It's all right, Gertrude," just as if I wasn't there. As if I didn't exist. I hated that blubber-gut sonofabitch. And I feared him.

As we continued with our game, he sat at the table between us, but he had his chair cocked so that he could gaze right into Gertrude's eyes. And he would talk kind of soft and come-ony to her; again as if I wasn't there.

"I simply cannot understand you, Miss Bunion, why you would choose to be down here in this basement rather than on the top with the executives."

"I couldn't possibly leave Petie."

Would you believe my heart almost left my body.

It was the first time Mr. Styman ever came close to looking at me. He turned his head just a smidgen; not all the way, you understand, and I could barely see his eyeball when I laughed. "Oh Gertrude, you're such a kidder. Oh boy, oh boy. What a kidder."

I knew for sure that my job and my ass were going simultaneously right out the old basement window.

"It's the truth," Gertrude added, much to my detriment I thought.

"Oh, come on, Gertrude," I chuckled. "Quit fooling around (please!). Mr. Styman is being very serious."

Once again Styman acted as if I wasn't even there as he continued to gaze at Gertrude and speak softly. "I've heard of a private game club here on the east side. It cost a thousand dollars to join, but since you're so positive about the game, I thought it was well worth it. Some evening I would love to take you there."

"Only if Petie can go as well."

I laughed again, but it was painful. "Oh, please, Gertrude, it isn't necessary for me to go anywhere. I really think you should appreciate what—"

"We don't have to go this week," Styman interrupted me, again as if I wasn't there. "I'll leave it strictly up to you."

"I think that's a marvelous idea."

"Why don't you want to go?" Gertrude asked me.

"Me? Why me? I never go anywhere. Hell, I don't even know the game."

"You do so."

"Look, please, Gertrude, the man asked you, you alone."

It went back and forth like this for a few more minutes and then Mr. Styman finally gave up, but before he left he gave me a look that could kill a moose. Somehow I knew it was the death knell.

I arrived the next morning to find a pink slip on my desk in the old mailroom. It wasn't hard to figure out why it was there and who was responsible.

Gertrude came in shortly after I did, and when I showed it to her, I have never seen her so mad.

"That fat twerp," she yelled. "I'll fix his wagon."

And then she stomped out of the room.

I was all packed up by the time she got back and she now acted as if she was angry with me. "Where in the hell do you think you're going?" she snapped.

"You mean I'm not fired?"

No, you're not fired. I just got you a raise of twenty dollars a week; and you'd better start treating me a lot better."

Well, needless to say, I was quite impressed.

From that point on our relationship took on a completely different turn. I was still grumpy in the mornings, and Gertrude was her usual efficient sweet self. We began to take some lunches together, and I have to admit that I was growing quite fond of her. And I thought for sure she was beginning to feel the same way about me. We began to talk, really talk, and for hours sometime. She is the only person that I ever told about Room 2113. That's my old death room in the Sheraton Hotel. Whenever anything really bad would happen to me, like the time I came home to my apartment on East 15th Street and found it completely wiped out by burglars, I would go and purchase Room 2113 for the night and contemplate suicide. One time I went so far as to sit on the ledge. When no one noticed me after two hours, I climbed back into the room and went to sleep.

But getting back to me and Gertrude, there was about five weeks when we really had a marvelous time together. Everyday we worked, lunched, and played backgammon. Mr. Styman stopped coming down to the old mailroom to bug us, and we were just getting along terrifically. Then the goddamn roof fell in.

One morning, Gertrude came to work looking so ravishing I could hardly believe it was her. But it was, and she was having a fit of mixed emotions. Styman had taken her to the private game club the night before and was going to take her to "21," only the greatest restaurant in the world, for lunch. She was afraid, and she told me that he was going to ask her a very important question. Then she confessed that she had been seeing quite a bit of him lately. Almost every night. She said she really didn't want to go and that she didn't know what she was going to say if he popped the question.

"Gertrude, I . . ."

She waited for me to finish, but I couldn't. I wanted so badly to tell her how I felt about her. To tell her that I loved her, but shyness had never been one of my lesser problems.

"Say it, Petie. Say it to me."

After grimacing, straining and finally losing the battle, I shouted, "You're going to get your Petie. My name ain't Petie. It's Peter!"

I turned and ran all the way from 44th Street and Park Avenue to 56th and Seventh Avenue where I took Room 2113 in the Sheraton Hotel. During the night I went to the window sill three times. Once, I sat there but still couldn't jump. Somehow I felt that I hadn't lost Gertrude, that I could go back to the old mailroom the next morning and she'd be there. But my second thought was more realistic. Styman. Dirty Styman had taken her to "21" not only for the delicious food but to entice her into saying yes to his question. It would almost be as if she didn't have a choice. Rich guys have all the luck.

I had lost her. I knew for sure I had lost her and with her everything that was near and dear. I wanted so badly to be able to go out there and sit on that ledge and lean forward until I fell, but I couldn't. Life, fear, or maybe Gertrude held me back.

Well, anyway, I finally fell to sleep and woke up the next morning with the Devil sitting there.

"The word is out that you could use some help."

I stared at him for a long time and then asked, "Are you going to tell me who you are or do I have to guess?"

"I go by many names. The Devil, Satan, many others. My close friends call me Mr. D."

"Is this a joke?"

"Would I be sitting up here like this if I wasn't who I say I am? And how do you think I got into your room with your bolt lock and chain on the door?"

I looked on the door and he was right. "But I don't think I put the chain on it."

"Regardless, I don't have time to talk about locks and chains. I'm here to discuss souls. Yours in particular."

"My soul? Why?"

"You get nothing for nothing. You have been hav-

ing some trouble with a gentleman by the name of John A. Styman. I can fix it so he won't be in your way anymore in exchange for your soul."

I really couldn't believe this was all happening, so I closed my eyes, shook my head, pinched myself to see if I was awake, and then opened my eyes just as Mr. D was climbing down from the window sill.

"Let's not beat around the bush, Peter. The chances of someone like you going to heaven are slim at best. Your older brother tried to assassinate you when he was ten and you were five. Every kid in your neighborhood took their turns beating you up, or in the least chasing you home. You couldn't buy a date to your senior prom, and when you reached the age of eighteen, your parents sent you to the store and then promptly moved away without leaving a forwarding address. Every person that you have come in contact with, with the exception of Miss Gertrude Bunion, has either disliked you, hated you, or despised you, and some all three."

Looking back over my life, I had to admit he was absolutely right.

"Oh, by the way, do you smoke?" he asked.

When I shook my head, he said, "That's too bad." He then snapped the fingers on his left hand and produced a cigarette, and then he snapped the fingers on his right hand and produced a flame to light the cigarette.

"How did you do that?"

"How do you think?" was his impatient reply. "So there we are, Peter. A chance for revenge on John A. Styman, an opportunity to win Miss Bunion, and the possibility of living happily ever-after. And all in exchange for your worthless soul when you're done with it."

"If it's so worthless, what do you want with it?"

"Good mail clerks are hard to find these days. Do we have a deal?"

After a moment of thought, I said, "Are you positive I'm not going to heaven?"

"As sure as there is a hell."

"All right, what the hell. Oh, excuse me."

"Go home Peter, and put on your finest garments. Your name has been left at the door of the private game club. At approximately eight o'clock tonight, your Mr. Styman will arrive. Offer to play him a game of backgammon at one hundred dollars a chip with the cube."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm perfect. If he refuses to play, insult him in front of his friends by calling him a little fat nerveless twit."

"There goes my job for sure."

"Now, when you sit down to play him, don't doubt for one moment that you're going to win. Play with extreme confidence. Don't play foolishly; play it straight and by the book but with the assurance that you will win no matter how far behind you get."

"But suppose I lose anyway?"

"You're not going to lose."

"But suppose he made a better deal with God?"

"God doesn't make deals."

"He doesn't? Why not?"

"He has no favorites."

"And you do?"

"Anyone who has a soul to sell, I'll buy."

"Thanks. That makes me feel real cheap."

"What makes you think you're not?"

"Thanks again. But I don't care what you say, I'm still worried about tonight."

"There's nothing to worry about."

"Why?"

"Because I will be in your cup."

Mr. D smiled then, nodded, and turned to go back out of the window. He changed his mind and started for the door.

"Why don't you go out the way you came?"

"I arrived at night. No one saw me. If I go out there now it would probably cause a panic in the streets, and then He . . ." Mr. D looked upward. ". . . would have to top it. We try to keep such things to a minimum when we can."

I was waiting at the club that night when Styman walked in as proud as punch with Gertrude on his arm.

"How in the hell did you get in here?" were his first words. Gertrude simply smiled at me.

"How do you think?" I answered in Mr. D's fashion.

"This club won't last with the likes of you being allowed in."

"Shut up, Styman," I said, "and tell me whether or not you want to try me in backgammon for one hundred dollars a chip?"

Styman couldn't believe his ears. After staring at me in disbelief for a moment, he threw his head back and laughed as loud as he could. "You pipsqueek, I'll kill you at a backgammon table."

"Action speaks louder than words, Styman."

"They do, huh? Then why don't we play for five hundred dollars a chip?"

"I thought you'd never ask." How was that for confidence?

"You got a bet, kid," said Styman. "You're going to be sorting a lot of mail for a lot of months for no pay."

"We'll see who'll be sorting the mail from now on."

Whenever such events take place there are always dozens of onlookers, and boy, did we have them. Some of the richest people in New York must have belonged to that club, and there I was sitting in the center, dressed in my one suit, a dark green plaid, with a white shirt and a black bowtie. Even with the Devil in my cup, I have to admit that I was nervous. But then I looked up and saw Gertrude standing in back of Styman and I became as solid as a rock. She was going to be mine. Mine in a matter of minutes and for life.

"Let's play, Styman. I'm sick of looking at you."

"I'm ready. A one game freeze-out, kid. You lose and that's it. You don't cry for another game."

"I don't cry period, Styman." My confidence was growing.

I started the game with a one-two roll which means that I had to leave a man open. And as luck would have it, Styman threw a six-four and immediately

knocked me off. A few moves later he knocked another one of my chips off, so I ended up with four men in the backboard and decided to go for a back game.

Styman threw double fours and double threes back-to-back and was several moves ahead. Sneering at me, he turned the cube to two and asked if I would take it.

"Does a chicken have lips?"

I managed to cover my backboard men on the two and five spots and knew that Styman was going to have a difficult time getting around them. Meanwhile, I was jamming up my home board, attempting to cover all six spots so if and when I knocked him off he would have a tough time getting back on.

Styman ended up with three men on his six-spot when he started to go off. He threw a five and a six and had to leave one man stranded. All I had to throw was a one or a four and I could knock him off. I hesitated a moment and then threw the prettiest pair of double fours you have ever seen in your life. Not only did I knock him off, but I was able to close up my homeboard so he couldn't come back on. When I handed him the cube at four, he tried to con me by saying, "You're nuts for handing me the cube. I've already got four chips off. You know I'll be able to get him back around before you get that many men off. And who's to say I won't knock one of your men off?"

"I'm saying it. If you're so sure, then why don't you hand me the cube back at eight."

Have you ever seen a grown man snarl. Styman did. A real "Grrrr!" When I laughed at him, it made him furious, and he took the cube and said, "Let's play."

I was able to get my four back men around, but as I started to takeoff, I got caught on my five-point with an odd number, and he came back on and sent me back to left field.

We both now had four men off and a runner coming around the track and trying to get by without getting knocked off. Styman decided to hold his man exactly 13 spots away. When it was my turn, I decided to gamble and put my man nine spots away from his. Styman handed me the cube at eight. He figured he would either knock me off or get by me and win the game. I took the cube and he did neither. He threw a five-three and decided to put his chip next to mine, thinking I wouldn't throw a one. I took the cube, and not only did I throw a one, I threw double ones.

Styman rolled double ones also and couldn't get back on the board. I rolled double sixes, brought my trail man over and took off three men.

"Life is not always what we would have it be, is it, Styman?"

"Play the game, idiot."

"I'm playing the game, Styman. I'm not only playing the game, I'm winning the game . . . and you're losing." I looked up at Gertrude then and we smiled warmly at each other, and then I went back to Styman and said, "But it's not all you're losing."

I watched the blood drain from his face as I slowly lifted the cube and handed it to him at 16. "In case you're interested," I said. "That means we're playing

for eight thousand dollars a chip. Are you sure you can afford it?"

"I can afford it more than you can."

"Glad to hear it. Then you might as well take the cube, because if you forfeit at eight thousand dollars a cube times fifteen is . . ."

I looked up at Gertrude, and naturally she was ready with the answer. "One hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"I already have four chips off," Styman informed me.

"I'll allow that. So you only owe me eighty-eight thousand dollars. Do you want to write me a check or pay me in cash?"

"Roll the dice, punk."

Backgammon is a weird game. You never know what you're going to roll. I was taking my men off and the four, five and sixth spot were open and poor old Styman threw double twos, a three-one, and a two-one, and couldn't get on board until I was nearly all off. And when he did get on board he couldn't get the man around to his home board, so I gammoned him and he had lost the game for a total of \$176,000.00.

Rich guys got it made. Styman sat there nonchalantly and took out the old check book and wrote it. As he handed it to me, he said, "One more game for the road?"

I looked at him, smiled, and said, "In your words, Styman, it was a one game freeze-out. No crying."

Styman chuckled and nodded in agreement.

"Are you ready, Gertrude?"

She and Styman looked at each other, and then she turned to me and said, "I've been ready for a long time."

As we walked along Park Avenue in the warmth of a summer night, we held hands without a word. Occasionally, we would look at each other and chuckle. Once we kissed and kept walking.

Finally, I decided to break the silence and tell Gertrude the truth of what happened. I knew she wouldn't believe me, but I wanted to start off our relationship with honesty.

"Do you know how I did it, Gertrude?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"With confidence."

"That too, but there was something else. Last night I went to the old Room 2113 to try and commit suicide again. Naturally, I couldn't do it. So this morning, I woke up, and sitting on my window sill was the devil, dressed in a blue pin-striped suit."

Gertrude started to laugh.

"I know this sounds silly, but there he was. Sitting on the very edge of my window sill 21 floors straight up."

Gertrude continued to laugh and was now doubling over.

"Gertrude, listen to me."

"It wasn't the Devil, Petie."

"Huh?"

Continued on page 83

SKLANSKY ON POKER

Continued from page 77

- text. Good players don't make this mistake. If you get the 'super reader' confused, he's got no chance.
- III. Don't disguise your hand at other times, namely against bad players, many players, a large pot or with large early bets. It is especially important to play a good hand strongly if the pot is large. (The only exception would be when you have a cinch and want to wait a round to make your move for even greater profits.) Likewise, don't push weak hands in this situation. Don't make an exact play on an idiot.
- IV. Disguise your hand most often on early rounds of a no-limit game or pot limit game. (They are special cases of the previously mentioned criteria.)
- V. Remember that the best deception against tough players may be to play your hand normally. An example from seven-card stud:
- If a tough opponent acts before you and raises, RERAISE just as you would against a sucker. He knows you could just as easily have reraised against him with a three flush as well as a variety of other hands, so you still have your deception as well as an extra bet. ♣

DEVIL IN BACKGAMMON

Continued from page 38

"It wasn't the Devil."

"But of course it was the Devil. He came into my room through the window. He had to, because the chain was on my door. And he pulled a cigarette out of mid-air and lit it with his finger. He told me God doesn't make deals and that my soul was worthless but that good mail clerks are hard to find."

Gertrude was now laughing so hard that she had to take a seat on the stone wall that surrounded the flower beds.

"Go ahead and laugh, Gertrude, it's not your soul but mine that is condemned to hell for all eternity."

She finally got control of herself, and taking my face in her hands she began to explain. "Petie darling, you're right about one thing—God doesn't make deals. But the Devil did not fly into your room, you're not going to spend eternity in hell, the Devil wasn't in your backgammon cup, and you didn't put the chain on your door."

"But, but . . ."

"The man who was sitting on your window sill is a second-rate, out of work actor and magician . . . who I hired for twenty dollars an hour."

"What!?"

"You did it, Petie. You and you alone, and I love you for it."

"But, Gertrude, I was playing backgammon for eight thousand dollars a chip!"

"But, Petie, you won."

I didn't hear what she said, because I had fainted dead away and toppled over backward into the flower beds. ♣



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The Mathematics of Gambling

The Black and White Classic Invitational Backgammon Tournament

by Edward O. Thorp

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Roulette will be continued next month so I can tell you about the Black and White Classic Invitational Backgammon Tournament in Pebble Beach. I was invited as one of several journalists, through the kind auspices of Sid Jackson, President of the American Backgammon Players' Association. Participation was by invitation only and the level of player was consequently very high.

The championship division included 100 players and in the intermediate division, 32. The entrance fees were \$150 and \$175 respectively, with total prize money of \$17,500. Entrance fees were for the benefit of the Monterey Peninsula Boy's Club, and prize money was provided by Black and White. The eventual championship flight winner got \$5,000 and also received a \$1,000 backgammon table, and there also was a Gold and Diamond brooch ladies prize. In its sixth year, the tournament is hosted annually by the Pebble Beach Corporation.

This is the first backgammon tournament I've attended and I wanted to see what they were like. What impressed me the most weren't the details of play or who won, rather the fascinating people that were there and the ideas we exchanged. So that's what I'll write about.

Paul Magriel and I met for the first time and talked at length. I was surprised to learn that he has had a long time friendship with Mr. X and Mr. Y of Beat the Dealer (the men who financed my first test of my blackjack system in Nevada). I asked Paul what he thought the odds were that X would leave a blot. We are assuming that O has enough other men (not shown) to move so that he can hold the X one-point as long as necessary. Paul gave the odds as about 8:1 in favor of X leaving a blot. He also said that it was fairly accurately established that the odds were about 12½:1 in favor of an O win in Figure 2. Here O has one man on the bar and all other men off. But with two men on the bar, as in Figure 3, the odds shift to 2:1 in favor of X. Readers who have the patience can give these statements a rough test by playing out a

hundred or so of each situation and keeping a tally of what happens.

Before the tournament, Sid Jackson had asked me what the odds were in situations like that of Figure 1, so I had already thought about how to solve it.

The way we have allocated the fifteen X men on X's five free home boards is only one of $19!/(14! 5!)=19 \times 18 \times 17 \times 16 \times 15/1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5=11,628$ different ways to do this. As Sid pointed out, the answer to the question will in general vary for the 11,628 choices. Also, X will often have a choice of how to move his men, and this will affect the answer. The problem is so huge that modern high speed computers cannot solve it by a direct game tree analysis. However, I have invented a short cut procedure for solving all end game pure racing or no-contact positions, which I call "the fast recursion method." Even though this is not a pure racing position since men can still possibly be hit, it turns out that the fast recursion method works and yields a solution which can readily be found with currently available computers.

Figure 4 illustrates an easier problem along these lines, which I will work out for the ideas and techniques it shows.

Problem: Suppose O holds the X one-point and X had n men on the X two-point. Also X has borne off all his other men and O has enough men so far from home that he can hold the X one-point until the game ends. Suppose play begins with O's turn. What is the probability that X will leave a shot before he finishes bearing off?

In $n=0$, then all the X men are already off and the game is over so the probability O gets a shot is zero. In $n=1$, then X has a blot on the two-point, and the probability O has a shot is 1.00. This gives the first two entries in Table 1. Suppose $n=2$. Then O has no shot at first. If X rolls 1-1 on his next turn, he cannot move. If X rolls any 1-A with A greater than 1, he bears off only one man and O has a shot. This happens in 10 ways out of 36. If X makes any other roll,

namely no ones, both men come off and O has no shot. This happens in 25 ways out of 36. Thus there are 35 (equally likely) ways (out of 36) that the situation is changed. Ten give a shot, 25 give no shot. Therefore, the probability is $10/35=2/7$ that O will have a shot when $n=2$. The part of Figure 5 labelled "Case $n=2$ " illustrates this schematically.

Now consider the case $n=3$. If X rolls double twos, threes, fours, fives or sixes (5 ways), he is off, i.e. we advance to the $n=0$ case. If X rolls 1-1, we stay in the $n=3$ case (1 way). If X rolls 1-A with A greater than 1, he bears off exactly one man and we advance to the $n=2$ case (10 ways). For all the other rolls, which are just those rolls where X rolls neither ones nor doubles, we advance to the $n=1$ case. There are 20 ways. Thus 5 ways ($n=0$) are safe, 20 ways ($n=1$) leave a shot and 10 ways ($n=2$) lead to a $2/7$ chance that there will be a shot later. Hence the probability of X ever leaving a shot starting with $n=3$ is $[20 + 10 \times 2/7]/35 = 160/(7 \times 35) = 32/49$.

Mathematical readers: The analysis for $n=3$ applies to the general case and gives the recursion rela-

tion $P_{n+3} = (10/35)P_{n+2} + (20/35)P_{n+1} + (5/35)P_n$ or $P_{n+3} = 2P_{n+2}/7 + 4P_{n+1}/7 + P_n/7$. Thus, $P_4 = 64/343 + 8/49 + 1/7 = 169/343$. We could derive a general formula for P_n . Table 1 is a computer calculation of the first 20 values. The values to five decimal places are 0.53846 thereafter. Proposition bet: for $n=4$, bet that X does not leave a shot. For $n=5$, bet that X does leave a shot.

It is fairly easy to use the same method to analyze the case where all X men are on the two and three points. The reason is that there is only one choice for how to play any roll. But when some men are on the 4, 5, or 6 point there may be more than one choice for playing a roll. The added complexity that results requires a more powerful method ("fast recursion") than the simple one I've given.

Next, we discussed a straight race, where (for simplicity) all pips for each roll count towards moving men off. Then there is no wastage of pips and no loss of part or all of a roll due to being blocked. Assume X has a pip count of n and he is on roll. For what O pip count should: X double? O accept? X redouble? O ac-

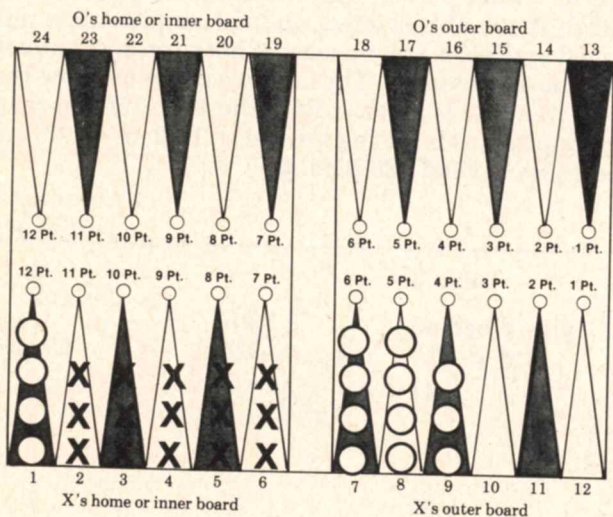


Figure 1

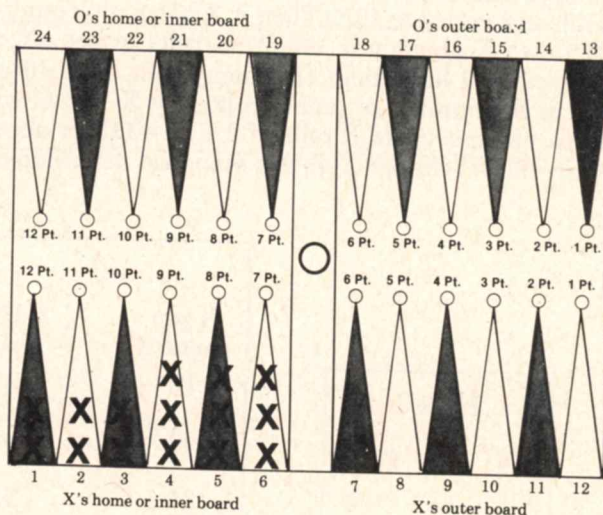


Figure 2 O 12:1 Favorite

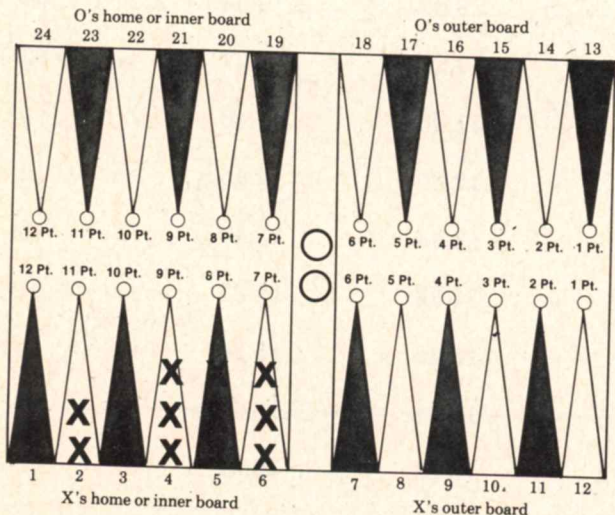


Figure 3 X 2:1 favorite

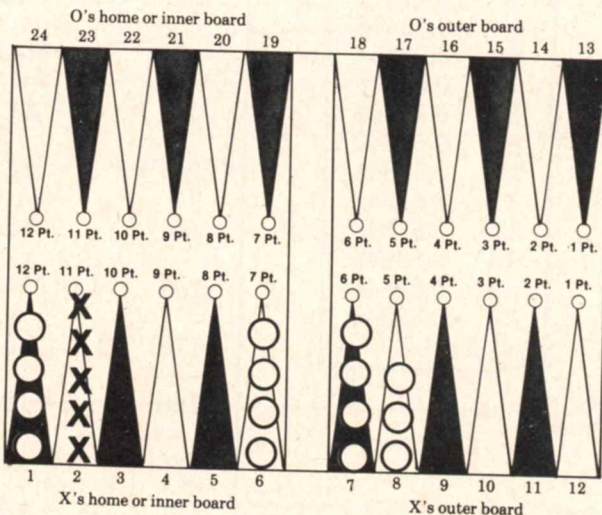


Figure 4

cept? I solved this exactly by fast recursion. Approximate solutions have been given by several authors. Schematically we might represent the situation by curves, as in Figure 6. Paul expressed the belief that there was an upper limit (or asymptote) both to $d(n)$, the number of pips O needs to be behind, for X under best play to double, and $f(n)$, the number of pips O needs to be behind in order for O with best play to fold.

I believe that $d(n)$ and $f(n)$ behave like n times a constant. Therefore, they have no upper limit as n increases. Here is a sketch of my argument: as n increases, this backgammon race is better and better approximated by the "continuous game" discussed by Keeler and Spencer in "Optimal Doubling in Backgammon." There they show that for this continuous approximation, X should double or redouble, and O should fold when the probability of X winning the race reaches 0.8.

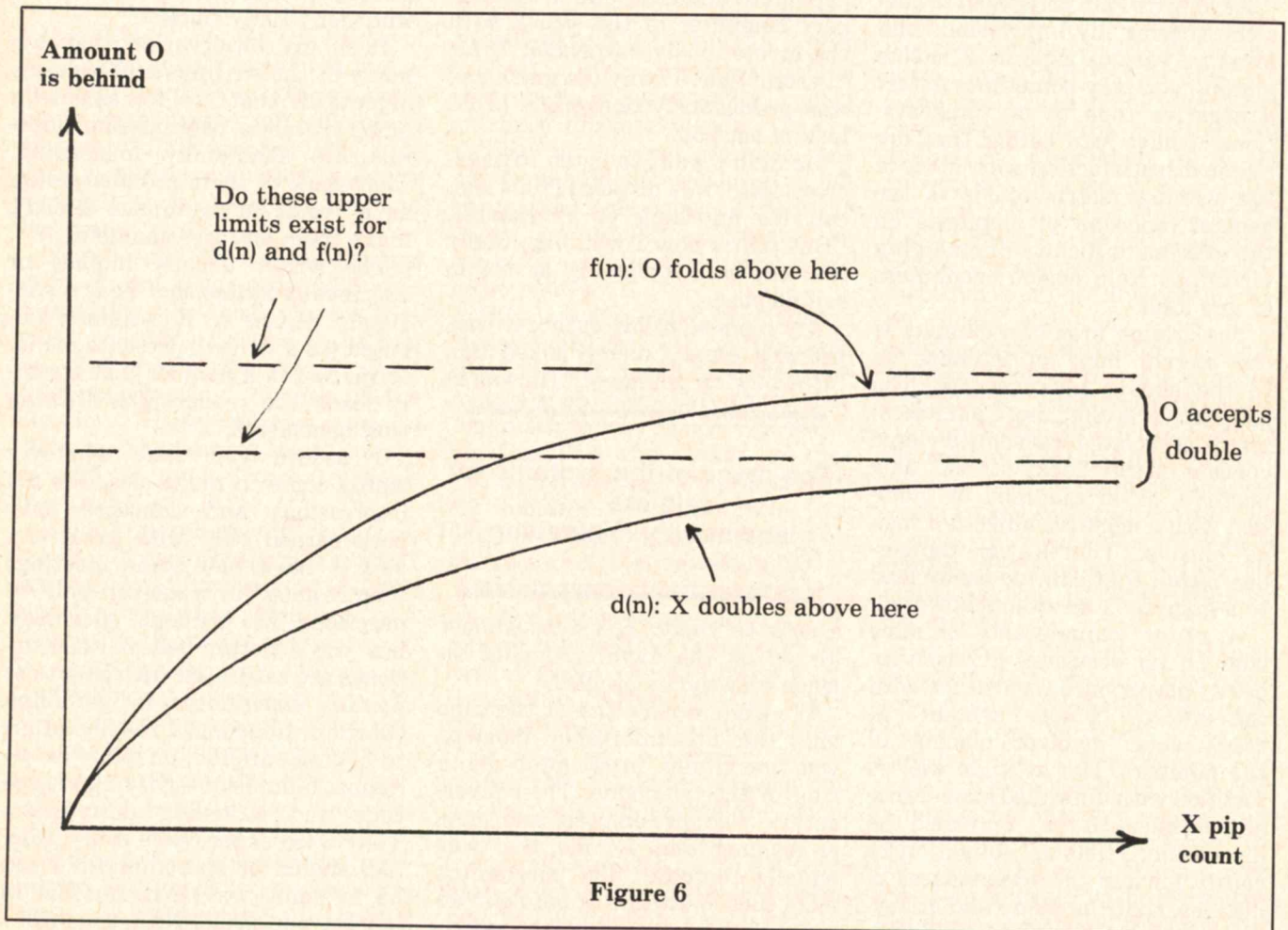
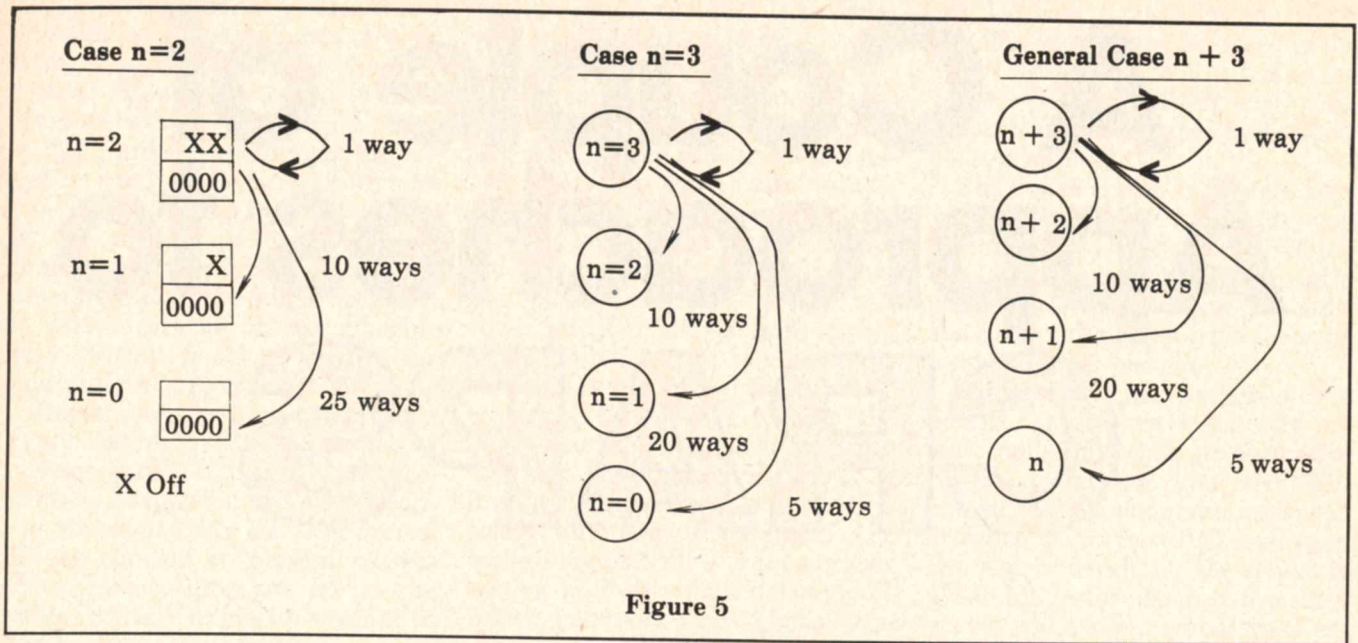
Now each roll of the dice has a mean number of pips equal to $49/6$ and a variance of 19. For a very large number of rolls, the total number n of pips rolled by X has approximately a normal distribution with mean $49R/6$ and variance $19R$. Then if X has a pip count of n it takes X about $n \div (49/6) = R$ rolls to get off, so the game will last about this many rolls. The difference in the number of points rolled by X and O will have a variance after R rolls of $2 \times 19 = 38R$ or about $38n \div 49/6 = 228n/49$. This is a standard deviation of

$228n/49 = 2.1571 n$. Now if X starts ahead by a certain number of pips, he'll tend to be that far ahead at the end. But the "spread" of his lead will have a standard deviation of about $2.1571 n$. For X to be ahead at the end with probability 0.80, he needs to start with a lead of about 0.842 standard deviations (from table of normal probability distribution), or $1.82 n$. However, the player who has the turn has an effective lead of about $49/6 \div 2 = 4.08$ so the actual pip count lead X needs is about $d(n) = f(n) = 1.82 n - 4.08$.

For those who doubt this argument, I admit that (a) all the details are not absolutely "tight," and (b), it only applies to "large" n and I haven't said how "large" n needs to be to make this formula good. One might expect it to have to be hundreds or even millions. Now, prepare to be amazed. Table 2 compares the exact computed values for various n with the values from my formula. They are remarkably close even for $n=30$. The values used for P, the probability the first player wins, in Table 2 have been obtained from my four place table of P values for all pip counts up to 168 for either player. The similar table published by Zadeh is too abbreviated, and the similar table published by Keeler and Spencer is both too approximate and too abbreviated. The last two columns show that $1.82 n - 3.83$ is a better fit in the 40 to 150 pip range but appears to be losing ground to $1.82 n - 4.08$ as n increases beyond 130 pips. ♣

N	P(N)
0	0
1	1
2	0.28571
3	0.65306
4	0.49271
5	0.55476
6	0.53334
7	0.53978
8	0.53824
9	0.53842
10	0.53851
11	0.53842
12	0.53847
13	0.53845
14	0.53846
15	0.53846
or more	

X pip count n	$1.82 \sqrt{n} - 4.08$	pips O behind for P=0.8	$1.82 \sqrt{n} - 3.83$	Error
10	1.68	0.41		
20	4.06	3.91		
30	5.89	5.92		
40	7.43	7.61	7.68	+ .07
50	8.79	9.00	9.04	+ .04
60	10.02	10.25	10.27	+ .02
70	11.15	11.40	11.40	0
80	12.20	12.45	12.45	0
90	13.19	13.44	13.44	0
100	14.12	14.38	14.37	- .01
110	15.01	15.26	15.26	0
120	15.86	16.11	16.11	0
130	16.67	16.90	16.92	+ .02
140	17.45	17.68	17.70	+ .02
150	18.21	18.42	18.46	+ .04



Break for Backgammon



Showgirls Kathy Price and Mary Ann Davidson pause between shows on the set of the Follies Bergere at the Tropicana Hotel to play some backgammon.



Backgammon, Side by Side

As backgammon becomes more popular, it's only natural that various types of playing apparatus will become available. The newest board is called Side-by-Side. Here pictured are Barclay Cooke (left), author of the newly published Random House book, "Paradoxes and Probabilities." Sitting alongside is the inventor of Side-by-Side, Bruce Zemby.

Hot "Tuna" Cools Maverick in Hold 'em at Harold's

Hans "Tuna" Lund (center) was the big winner of the two day Texas Hold 'em elimination, Beat Maverick Poker Tournament, held in February at Harold's Club Reno. Jack Kelly (left) of T.V.'s Maverick fame, took on the eight finalists. The highlight of the final round was when "The Tuna" had only about \$400 in front of him, then won several hands in a row. When the smoke cleared, "Tuna" was in first place. Second place was Harold "Whitie" Wibye of Reno, and third went to another Reno man known only as "Dirty Doug." Jack Kelly and the card room manager, Curt Zard (right), congratulated 28-year-old "Tuna" when \$7,000 was counted out to the Reno gambler. Not a bad investment for a \$150 buy-in.

