



"Everybody's so depressed this year"

Andy Dixon 1930

The official laws of Backgammon

BY JULIAN JEROME

■ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** With the revival of the popularity of Backgammon, a number of misapprehensions regarding the rules have occurred, making it difficult for many players to adapt themselves to the special methods of the play observed by their opponents. *Vanity Fair* presents in the following article a set of rules which are substantially in force at many fashionable clubs whose members play according to the rules in this article—The Racquet Club of Chicago, The Racquet Club of Philadelphia; The Knickerbocker Club, The Racquet & Tennis Club, Brook Club, The Cavendish Club, The Coffee House, and the Embassy Club of New York; and, on Long Island, Piping Rock and The Atlantic Beach Club. These rules have also been approved by the following writers and authors on the game—Harold Thorne, Lelia Hattersley, Elizabeth Clark Boyden, Ralph Bond, and the Egyptian expert, Georges Mabardi, whose book *Backgammon to Win*, soon to be published by *Vanity Fair* in collaboration with the firm of Horace Liveright, will include these rules.

■ If there was ever any definite set of rules for the game of Backgammon, it has long since been lost in the haze of antiquity, and the present renaissance of this ancient

diversion has reached its incredible peak of popularity without benefit of official law.

Like the British, of whom a great statesman once said, "They always muddle through," modern backgammoners have managed with no other authority than their own consciences and the indications of tradition, to muddle through countless games to satisfactory and pleasant conclusions. But no matter how ancient a tradition, nor how "gentlemanly" the player himself may be about it all, the time invariably comes, either in Tournament Play, in Chouette, or in an individual game for monetary stakes, when the players, forsaking their consciences, and suspending momentarily their charming gestures of *noblesse oblige*, are forced to look to some higher, more impartial authority on Backgammon rules. And although the omission of a standardized set of rules has not prevented an almost nationwide enjoyment of the game, it is in moments such as these that they are sadly missed.

It is beside the point to say (as more than one writer on Backgammon has done) that the game is "for fun, anyway"—the fact

remains that it is quite as much, if indeed not more of, a gambling game—involving financial risks and rewards—as Contract bridge. Therefore, the player who cites rules against a careless adversary is more than justified in saying, "Fun's fun . . . but the idea is to win . . ."

■ Moreover, if a game is worth playing at all, it is worth playing according to rule—one might almost have said according to Hoyle, if it were not, in this particular instance, that Hoyle's thirteen rules on Backgammon contain at least three which are so needlessly drastic, and exact such severe penalties, that it is not surprising that they have never been and never will be accepted by any but the most punctilious of Backgammon players.

The consensus of Backgammon opinion, a consolidation and simplification, as it were, of rules as suggested by various accredited modern authorities on the game, has shown the following table of rules to be the most generally accepted and adhered to by experts everywhere. It covers also, in as brief a form as possible, every (Continued on page 112)



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The laws of Backgammon

(Continued from page 68)

point which may, in the course of a game, develop into a moot question. Therefore, *Vanity Fair*, at the request of the leading backgammon writers, teachers and experts, was asked to codify and issue the Official laws of Backgammon, and Chouette for the year 1931.

DICE

1. Each player must always throw his dice into the table on his right hand.
2. If either die jumps into the other table, on the bar, or off the board, both dice must be thrown again.
3. To constitute a fair throw each die must come to rest flat upon the board; and if either die is "cocked" against the other, or against the edge of the board, or a man, or in any way so that it does not lie flat on the board, both dice must be thrown again.
4. If a player throws his dice before his opponent's play has been completed, and his opponent's dice have been returned to his box, the throw is void and the player must throw again.
5. If a player picks up his dice, returning them to the box before he has completed his play, his opponent may declare the throw void and compel the player to throw again.
6. The men should be set up with the inner tables nearest the light. To determine choice of this position and color of the men, each player throws one die. The one whose die shows the greater number of pips has the choice of both.
7. To determine the right to play first, each player throws one die. The one whose die shows the greatest number of pips, adopts both numbers as his throw and makes his opening move accordingly.

8. A man is considered "played" when it has been moved the correct number of points, in accordance with the dice, and has been quitted.

9. When a man has been moved the correct number of points, and quitted, the play is considered completed and cannot be changed.

10. If a player moves a man an incorrect number of points, fails to enter a man before moving, or enters a man incorrectly, or bears off any of his men, when all his men are not in his inner table, his opponent must require the move to be corrected before another throw of the

dice is made; otherwise the error stands, and cannot be corrected except by mutual consent.

11. The pips on both dice of a throw must be played if this is possible. If either, but only one of them can be played, it is obligatory to play the highest number.

12. In bearing off, the highest number of the throw must be played first.

13. The player first removing all his men wins the game.

14. If at any time after the game has begun, it is discovered that the men have been incorrectly set up, play ceases, and that game is declared void.

SCORING

15. If, on the throw for the right to play first, a tie results, the stakes of the game are automatically doubled. If the second throw also results in a tie, the stakes are again automatically doubled, and so on for as many ties as may be thrown. Automatic doubling may be limited to one, two or three doubles, or eliminated entirely, by mutual agreement, before the game starts: otherwise it stands.

16. After the initial throw, or any other throw, either player may, before throwing his dice, propose a double.

17. If a player rejects a proffered double, he forfeits the game to the doubler.

18. There is no limit to the number of times the stakes may be doubled, provided that the doubles are offered alternately by each player.

19. The stakes are automatically doubled when the loser has not borne off one of his men. This is a *gammon*, and is scored in addition to all other doubles. The stakes are automatically tripled when the loser has not borne off one of his men, and also has a man, or men, in the winner's inner table or on the bar. This is a *backgammon*, and is scored in addition to all other doubles.

Perhaps the rule about which backgammon authorities most often disagree is Rule 8 which defines when a man is considered played. Mabardi is strongly in favor of having this and Rule 9 incorporated into one rule which shall read: A man touched *must* be played, if possible. This would be an excellent rule and one which, if observed, would certainly cause Backgammon to be considered

(Continued on page 122)

Bridge alibis

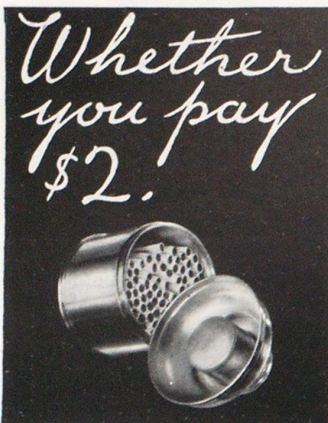
(Continued from page 80)

second lead of Clubs should have been permitted to win, South discarding a heart that he has absolutely no use for. If West can now find a lead that will save the game, he may go to the head of the class. The Declarant must take four Spades, five Diamonds and the Ace of Hearts and obtains a discard of one perfectly good alibi.

Alibis, especially when coupled with

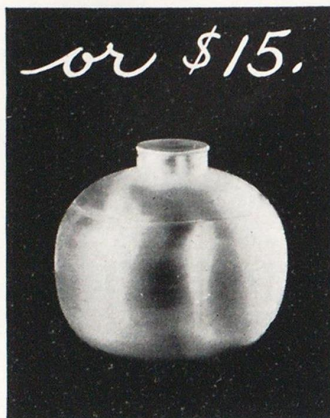
ing Card Club on Park Avenue in New York a player who freely (and often) admitted his superiority went to his one remaining friend there for advice and condolence.

"I know I am not well liked at this Club," he admitted, "and just now a member offered me five hundred dollars to resign. Don't you think it a bit of an insult?"



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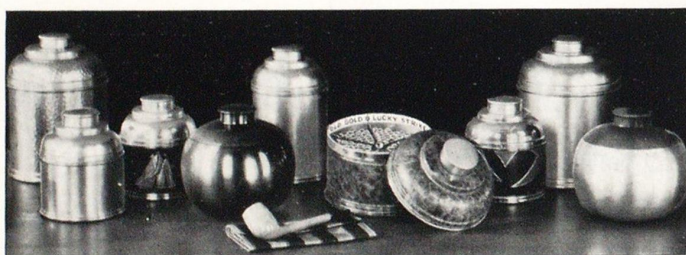
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The laws of Backgammon

(Continued from page 112)

a more serious game than it is at the moment, but the enormous and obvious difficulty in enforcing it would only make it, like the Eighteenth Amendment, a noble experiment in self-control, but one which by being constantly broken, would bring all the other laws of Backgammon into disrepute. The Official Rules 8 and 9 as they now stand are temperate and enforceable among the vast majority of players.

Rule 12 is observed by many excellent players, but it is still under discussion, and has not the approval of many other good players. It is included on the advice of Georges Mabardi, who considers it of prime importance. The final decision on this rule will be announced later.

Rule 10 comes in for a certain amount of criticism, some backgammoners of a more severe school of play insisting that when a player, by error, has borne off a man or several men while he still has a man on the bar, or in the outer tables, his opponent may force him to reenter in his opponent's inner table, not only the man on the bar, but *all the men he has already borne off*, before he can continue to play. This penalty is not only severe, but can be very unfair, since it is conceivable that an opponent, observing that a player is bearing off with a man on the bar, may call it to his attention only after it is too late for him to win, and by forcing the player to reenter a number of men, assure the opponent of a gammon or a backgammon.

Rule 20, which defines a backgammon, is the second rule which great numbers of backgammoners are wont to ignore completely,—a great mistake and a decided handicap to the player who is combating a backward game. For not to observe the backgammon permits his opponent to leave a man, or two men, as a constant threat in the player's inner table until the player's last man is borne off. This gives an undue advantage to the lucky opponent who may, by a fortunate throw, pick up the player's last man or one of his last men, which even the most skillful or conservative player is sometimes forced to expose. Few opponents would remain so long in the player's board if they knew that to be left with a man there would cost them a triple game.

CHOUETTE

1. To start a Chouette, each of the three or more players throws

one die, and the player who throws the highest number is said to be "in the Box" and plays *against* all the other players combined.

2. The player throwing the next highest die becomes the Active Player, and plays *for* all the remaining players, who are termed his partners.

3. In the case of a tie on the throws, only the tying parties throw again, the others retaining their positions as indicated by the first cast of the dice.

4. Each of the partners and the Active Player plays for a single stake, while the man in the Box plays for a total to match, paying or collecting (with all doubles) on this basis.

5. The man in the Box remains there until defeated, and then resigns his position to the Active Player who defeats him.

6. When the Active Player becomes the man in the Box, he plays against his former partner (or, if more than three are playing, the player who threw the third highest number at the start of the match), who then becomes the Active Player, playing with the remaining partners and the defeated Box.

7. Promotion to the position of Active Player is made in rotation, the Active Player changing after every defeat at the hands of the Box.

8. The players against the man in the Box may consult as to plays. In case of disagreement the final decision rests with the Active Player and is binding upon his partner or partners.

9. The players against the man in the Box may consult as to the acceptance of doubles and redoubles but any partner may reject a proffered double by forfeiting his stake up to the time of the proposed double, in which case the Active Player must assume that partner's responsibility and take over his position whether for profit or loss.

10. If an Active Player elects to refuse a proffered double of the man in the Box, he forfeits his stake up to the time of the proposed double, and resigns his position as Active Player to the next partner in line who elects to accept the double.

11. In Chouette the laws are the same as for the two-handed game, and all doubles are scored.

In Chouette, five players are the limit for comfort, and three is the most successful number of players.

Balancing the books

(Continued from page 117)

I see I'm going to have to keep these reviews shorter. So many swell books; so many temptations to expand upon them. Milt Gross' hilarious *He Done Her Wrong*, for example, a burlesque novel in wood-cuts that is one long sustained laugh. Or *The Wreck of the Dumaru*, a true tale of cannibalism in an open boat, recorded by Lowell Thomas, a cadaver in prose which I found as exciting in its way as *Robinson Crusoe*. Or *Madman's Drum*, Lynd Ward's superb new novel in wood-

portant biography by Claude M. Feuss, readable and valuable to student and casual reader alike. Or (am I going too fast?) the grand good time Knut Hamsun (of all people) really has in *Vagabonds*, his delightful new novel. Or the grand good time the readers have with Margaret Kennedy's *The Fool of the Family*; and if you loved *The Constant Nymph* as utterly as I did, that should be all I need to say. I do not even need to say that much about Ernest Hemingway's reprinted