

# — Chouettes — Individual Cubes Variation

by Mary

How many times have you found yourself on a team with a captain who has a large minus on the score, and doubles on the second roll of the game, before you have a chance to say "Boo"? If you have ever been the victim of this situation, consider trying this new type of chouette, where individual cubes are used. That is, each player on the team has his own cube, and may double — or not double — whenever it suits him, regardless of the actions of the others. Conversely, the box may accept the double from some members of the team but not others, and may double team members individually at different times if he so chooses.

At my club, the Cavendish Club of Philadelphia, this new variation caught on fast after its introduction by the redoubtable Ami Oged. Ami got the idea three years ago at a tournament in New York, but only recently began teaching it to other players.

The rules of this game that differ from those of straight chouette are as follows:

1. The man in the box must show a profit in order to stay in the box.
2. When a team member offers a double, the box may not answer until all the players have decided whether or not they want to double.
3. The box is allowed to double his opponents one by one, waiting to hear each player's decision.
4. When the box drops the captain's double and takes one from another player, who then wins the game, the former captain gets the box, even if he won fewer points.

Partners can be taken in this variation, as in regular chouettes. However, I do not recommend the practice, since the rationale for taking partners is to reduce the risk when in the box. When individual cubes are used, one can easily reduce one's risk by dropping some of the players when doubled. Taking partners can turn mere confusion into total chaos even in a regular chouette, and when individual cubes are used there is no need for it.

I do not intend to expound upon the strategy of this game in much depth here. However, a few observations are in order regarding appropriate strategies for players at the extremes — the strongest or the weakest in their games.

First, if you are a very strong player and are known to be such, the other players (unless they are total wimps) will quickly learn to double you "out" rather than "in," and drop your doubles when they are in the box. You will then have the profitable but boring experience of being sidelined with an

extra point in many of the games. To stay in, you may have to double considerably earlier than you normally would.

Second, if you are the weakest player in your game, you may find yourself presented with extraordinary opportunities. The box may decide to drop all the other players and beaver you (in order to insure that he will make a profit if he wins), figuring that you'll probably butcher the game once your stronger advisers have been silenced. However, if you really put your best foot forward when this happens, you can potentially win some pretty big games. You may actually be at an advantage relative to the second — or third-weakest players, who will probably not be given these opportunities.

Who benefits from this new arrangement? Opinion varies. Several average and below-average players have indicated to me that they prefer individual cubes because it's "cheaper." Yet some very strong players also prefer individual cubes.

I have come to the conclusion that a good player can win more than ever when playing in a chouette with individual cubes. In general, he can keep the box longer and win more games by doubling out the stronger players among his opponents. In addition, he runs less downside risk because he can protect himself against a huge loss in the box by taking only one or two players when the decision is close.

So why do the weak players feel that individual cubes makes the game cheaper? Probably because they, too, are protected against large downside swings. Also, they are in the box less often, which in general is beneficial to them. In addition, the very weakest players may profit, at least occasionally, from the unusual opportunities described earlier.

Then who is losing? My suspicion is that, as with income taxes, it is the guy in the middle who is picking up the lion's share of the tab. The average player is at a disadvantage as a team member because his stronger partners are likely to have been doubled out by the time he really needs their advice.

For awhile, it looked as though this new form of chouette would completely replace "straight" chouette here in Philadelphia. Now the tide has turned, and many players have returned to the old, familiar variety. However, the new game still has a dedicated following that never plays the old way any more.

The experiment has been a lot of fun for all of us here, and I recommend you give it a try. The insights you gain will undoubtedly make you a tougher opponent in any chouette.

## "Vibing the Dice"

### Northern Nevada Backgammon Association

The NNBA is considering passing an ordinance prohibiting the telling of "hard luck" dice stories within Reno city limits. This director has heard them all. What goes around comes around, so be patient. We all win some of the time. Why, I still remember the last time I won back in '76. It gives me a warm glow just to think about it. I'm going to take this time to pass on a little backgammon tip that you won't find in any available book on the game. It concerns the metaphysical approach to backgammon. "Vibing the dice" is what we're talking about here. Many of you probably engage in this practice from time to time, but there is a right and wrong way to go about this telekinetic phenomenon. I have seen it work too often to write it off as chance. I have seen it defy the laws of probability. The secret in vibing the dice is to *visualize* the dice you want to see before they stop spinning. You can practice this on your dice and your opponent's dice. Most professional tournament players swear by it. Further, the more people concentrating on a certain roll, the greater the likelihood that roll will appear. This explains the reason many national tournament players discourage spectators at their matches. They have an intuitive feeling that the laws of probability will be bent with someone silently rooting for their opponent. It requires concentration, but I think you'll agree after some practice that the results can be startling. There are certain times when this technique seems to work better than other times. Why, I don't know, although one's attitude and energy level I feel play a distinct role. All things being equal, this "vibing the dice" can be the winning edge. For more on this and other things you know nothing about, consult my book, *Mystical Backgammon Secrets*, with such chapters as "Hexing Your Opponent," "Fast Eddie's Dice Loading Tips," and "Hypnotizing Your Opponent Through Dice Cup Shaking Techniques," found in finer used book stores everywhere.

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