

## The Money Game

Its origins are almost as old as civilization itself. It was once the pastime of Roman emperors, the "game of kings and the king of games." An upper-crusty Englishman observed that "it has ever been a game for the higher classes and has never been vulgarized or defiled by uneducated people." The elegant diversion is backgammon—and although it has long been enjoyed by an elite few in the private clubs and fashionable resorts of Europe, in the U.S. it lay face down in obscurity on the backside of a checkerboard. Until recently, that is.

In the past several years the ancient game has become the newest enthusiasm of the Bored-and-Beautiful, and its star-pointed game board has moved from the exclusive gaming rooms of Europe to the casinos of Las Vegas and the crowded parties in Hugh Hefner's Los Angeles mansion. Hefner and his friend Barbi, Bridge Star Oswald Jacoby, Ari and Christina Onassis, Prince Radziwill, Polly Bergen and Jill St. John have all discovered the social charms of backgammon: it is easy to learn, fast and exciting to play, and an enjoyable way to win, or lose, a lot of money.

The prize money in the tournament staged four weeks ago in Las Vegas was an impressive \$98,000. But the prizes paled in comparison to the enormous amounts—as much as \$100,000 per game—changing hands in side wagers. Winner Oswald Jacoby walked away with \$4,000 in prize money. Another \$20,000 was taken home by sideline bettors, who "bought" Jacoby (top players are auctioned off before the tournament) for \$2,000.\* Englishman Phillip Martyn, a high-ranked contender who lost, sold for the day's top price of \$4,200.

**Snob Appeal.** It is not by accident that backgammon has been rediscovered. Ten years ago, Prince Alexis ("Obie") Obolensky, a member of the jet set and a shrewd entrepreneur, set out to make backgammon a popular game. Phase 1 of his elaborate strategy was to exploit backgammon's snob appeal. He haunted the posh watering places from Palm Beach to Gstaad, talking up the game. "I made people think they should be doing it, that only the best people were involved," he recalls. "We brought in snobbism. Only in America can that kind of thing be done in a big way."

Phase 2 of Obolensky's plan was to develop a tournament system. There are now about a dozen a year held in such resorts as St. Martin, Monte Carlo and Cannes. The first such tourney, held in 1964 in Freeport, offered only about \$40 in prize money and attracted only

\*Which entitled them to the winner's share of the auction-money pool.

a handful of players. In contrast, 270 competitors turned out for the Las Vegas tourney this year.

Phase 3, which Obolensky is working on now, will bring backgammon to the masses. He is getting a hand from *Playboy* magazine, which this month is sending Bunnies to several veterans' hospitals to dispense game boards and instructions. He is also being helped by Seagram Distillers Co., which sponsors tournaments and pays him a consultant's fees.

The game itself is deceptively simple. Each player arranges 15 checker-like counters on four of the 24 trian-

a-point games can sometimes drop \$10,000 in an evening.

The prospects of winning such huge amounts are luring a growing number of professional players into the game. Among them are several bridge champions such as Tobias Stone and Jacoby. There is also a young mathematics professor from New Jersey named Paul Magriel who makes calculations so quickly that his opponents have dubbed him "the Computer." In the past two years he has won over \$40,000 in tournament prizes—and far more in private games. The intrusion of these professional players into what before Obolensky's promotion was strictly a genteel, upper-crust diversion has proven upsetting to some members of the old-school backgammon establishment. "Gammon

DEREK BAYES



LEWIS DEYONG & POLLY BERGEN PONDERING OVER BACKGAMMON BOARDS

gular "points" that line two opposite edges of the rectangular board. The players take turns moving their counters from point to point according to the throw of dice—white going one way, black the other. When a player has collected all of his counters on his "home" points, he can begin to "bear off" (remove his pieces); the first to remove all his pieces wins. He is awarded a single game, a double game ("gammon") or a triple game ("backgammon"), depending upon the position of his opponent's counters at the end of the game.

But there is also a provision that makes backgammon especially enticing to gamblers, so much so that playing without money takes the competitive edge off the game. At any stage, a player who feels he is likely to win can immediately double the stakes, leaving his opponent with two options: to concede immediately or to accept the double, and perhaps redouble later if his own position improves. Because there is no limit to the number of times the stakes can be doubled, losers of high \$200-

is supposed to be fun," says Lewis Deyong, a London businessman who is one of the world's top-ranked players. "But with all these bridge types in the game it has become kind of a war of nerves." One common complaint is that the bridge players take too long to make their moves in what is supposed to be a fast and lively game.

But the war of nerves is not the only thing backgammon buffs have to watch out for. There is also a new breed of hustler lurking: the backgammon shark. Charming and sociable, sharp-minded and able to drink heavily without impairing their skills, they haunt the fashionable resorts and hope to get into a game with a wealthy pigeon like the notorious European buff who has reputedly dropped \$500,000 or so in the past three years at the backgammon board. "You can make \$1,000 to \$1,500 a week by playing these people," says one hustler who tries to remain anonymous to keep out of trouble with the Internal Revenue Service. "Your real problems develop when you try to figure some



# Confidential LOANS

## \$1,500 to \$12,500

■ The nationally recognized financial service used regularly by over 20,000 professional, executive, and technical men and women like you.

■ A quick and extremely confidential source of credit for immediate needs or as a credit line whenever you need it.

■ No collateral... no embarrassing investigation. No charge for establishing your credit line.

■ Simple details handled over the phone or by personal mail from the privacy of your home or office.

■ THE quiet service for your financial needs. Dial our private, toll free, number 800-328-7328 or write Charles R. Donner, Executive Loan Director.

**ic Industrial Credit  
Financial Services**

276 Hamm Building,  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102  
Member: American Industrial Bankers  
Association since 1937.



**What do you do when  
a smooth-talking agent  
signs your secretary  
to a career in show biz?**

*Answer:*

Tell your wife the "good" news.  
Or call Manpower Temporary  
Services. We'll get the job done.  
No matter what you're up against.  
Look for us in your white pages.

**MANPOWER®**  
TEMPORARY SERVICES

## MODERN LIVING

way to make a tax return. I have no legitimate job. All I do is play backgammon. What do you declare?"

Most of the pigeons, of course, are wealthy enough to take their losses in stride. Indeed, says another hustler, one of the rules of the trade is "never take money from people who cannot afford it. That can give the game a bad name."

## Old Man and the Sea

*I must go down to the seas again,  
For the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call  
That may not be denied.*

—Sea-Fever, John Masefield

When does a pastime become a life-sustaining passion? For Yachtsman Cornelius ("Kees") Bruynzeel, a Dutch timber tycoon, it began when he set his first sail at age five. Now, at 73, Bruynzeel still has an acute case of sea fever. But it is tempered by a serious heart condition. Nonetheless, he was determined to enter this year's prestigious Capetown-to-Rio yacht race if it killed him. The 3,500-mile ocean grind might do exactly that, Bruynzeel's doctors warned; they ordered him to remain on the dock. He refused, explaining that a bracing sea voyage "is better for my health than sitting around thinking about it."

Like any good skipper, Bruynzeel prepared his 53-ft. ketch *Stormy* for every contingency. Unable to pack an intensive-cardiac-care unit on board because it was too heavy, he did the next best thing by adding Nurse Diana Goodliffe, 33, to the crew. A member of Dr. Christiaan Barnard's heart-transplant team, she came prepared with equipment like an oscilloscope to check the pattern of Bruynzeel's heartbeat and

the culinary qualifications to serve as ship's cook. Once at sea, says Bruynzeel, "Diana never forgot to give me my pills six times a day." Each evening, he never forgot to take a belt of Scotch before retiring. Though Bruynzeel denies published reports that he stowed a weighted burial bag in the aft cabin, he had told his crew that in the event of his death, they should bury him at sea and continue the race.

It was hoped that the first of the 39 boats entered in the race would arrive last week and receive a grand welcome from the 200,000 or more sunbathers who crowd Rio's Ipanema and Copacabana beaches on Sunday afternoons. Instead, 100 late diners at the Rio de Janeiro Yacht Club were startled when the first boat arrived at the yacht-club dock unannounced shortly before midnight Saturday with a new record time of 21 days 12 hr. Even more remarkable was the fact that the winner was *Stormy*, piloted across the finish line by the old man of the sea himself.

"We were extremely lucky," said Bruynzeel afterward. He had gambled by piloting *Stormy* on a longer northerly route, hoping to make better time by picking up more favorable trade winds. It proved a providential tactic; the heavily favored *Ondine*, skippered by U.S. Ship Broker Sumner ("Huey") Long, took the shorter southern route, and was so repeatedly becalmed that she had to drop out of the race.

Why had Bruynzeel defied doctors' orders? "Nobody can order me around after I set my mind on something," he said. Announcing that he is going to sail off to a new home he is building on the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, the jaunty little skipper looked more tanned and fit than when he had left Capetown. The race, he confided, was "a cure in itself."

UPI



WINNER CORNELIUS ("KEES") BRUYNZEEL WITH MEMBERS OF "STORMY'S" CREW

In the event of death, a burial at sea.