Behaving Well at Backgammon Tournaments

Tournament backgammon is a highly competitive activity that makes great intellectual and emotional demands on participants.

Ask the Tournament Director!
Remember that the tournament director is responsible for all aspects of tournament play. If you have matches yet to play, be sure to confirm that a meal break or retiring for the night is allowable before leaving the tournament room. Other players may be able to answer some of your questions, but none have the *authority* to make judgments regarding rules or match scheduling.

Follow the Tournament Rules & Conventions
Be aware of the operating tournament standards, which can vary somewhat among ABT tournaments. It may be allowable to adopt certain behaviors, like "dice on checkers," by mutual consent, while clocking requirements remain absolute. Be very wary of agreeing to any measure at odds with the stated event standards. You should also keep score on a piece of paper even if a scoreboard is in use, as you will be at a disadvantage if a scoring dispute arises and you do not have your own record of game results.

Use of Headphones and Noise-Cancelling Devices
Although there are many players who object to the practice of wearing headphones during play, at present they are universally allowed. Players who use them find that music or sound-dampening measures help them concentrate, while detractors feel that they spoil the social aspect of the game, discouraging pleasantries and light banter. Tournament backgammon, however, is essentially a competitive activity, not social one, and no one can insist that an opponent engage in conversation during a match, with or without headphones. And there has been no substantial concern raised that headphones enable cheating.

Rolling for Board, Color, Direction
Try not to make a big deal out of any of these things, but it's natural enough to prefer your own board. If you get your way with board choice, perhaps allow

your opponent to choose color and direction or risk seeming petty by demanding to roll for every aspect of play.

Adopt a Champion's Demeanor

Begin and end each match with a courteous acknowledgement of your opponent, and try to avoid overt expressions of emotion during play, keeping your glee and dismay alike under wraps. Complaining about your dice, or making petty digs like "nice roll" when your opponent gets a lucky shake will make you look small — and should make you feel small as well, especially when you subsequently roll a super-joker of your own. Take note of behaviors you find annoying in your opponent so you can resolve to avoid that sort of thing yourself.

Handle Checkers, Dice and Cubes with Scrupulous Care

There is a great deal of sloppy play in backgammon. You can keep arguments to a minimum by observing a highly formalized manner of play.

- When making a provisional checker play, "offset" the checkers on their new points by placing them a centimeter high on their points so it is clear which have been moved.
- Make no gesture towards the doubling cube until you have firmly decided to double.
- When repositioning the dice on the playing surface, do not cover them with your hand. Rather, pinch them from the sides or push them with fingertips so that the tops remain visible at all times.

Handling a Dispute with your Opponent

Occasional disagreements are bound to arise. Try to calmly reach a mutual understanding of the situation, and if you cannot agree on an appropriate solution, seek guidance from the tournament director. It's a good idea to take a picture of the board, including clock and score, early in any intractable dispute.

Hedging

If you are fortunate enough to reach the "money round" in an event (where the winner will win a cash prize), you may ask or consent to "hedge" some amount of money as a consolation prize to the loser. Essentially, you make a bet with your opponent that you will lose the match! Some players prefer never to hedge while others are eager to lock in at least a small $ prize — perhaps the original entry fee of the event. There is no expectation that anyone should agree to hedge, and you should be aware that a stronger player would be giving up meaningful equity by agreeing to a 50-50 "even" hedge with a less experienced

opponent. If you do hedge, be sure to write the agreement on paper to avoid memory lapses. If your opponent's character is not known to you, or if the prize is quite large, it is best to inform the Tournament Director of your hedging agreement before playing.

Spectating
Few players will object to your watching their match from a respectful distance, though they are free to do so. As a spectator, you must do nothing that could conceivably affect the match in any way unless you are directly requested to do so by both players. Even a seemingly harmless action like asking another spectator if they know the score might alert one of the players to a salient aspect of the position that they had not noticed. If you think you see something inappropriate, address your concern to the tournament director, not the players.

Women in Backgammon
Women participating in ABT tournaments must be respected as serious competitors. Unfortunately, men often adopt a patronizing attitude when playing against them — offering advice that was not solicited, taking it upon themselves to critique their play, or otherwise making remarks that show they do not regard them as equals across the board. It should go without saying that sexual insinuations or remarks about an opponent's appearance are inappropriate. Simply follow the rules of courtesy you would adopt when playing against any renowned grandmaster on a live-streamed match.

Further questions are welcome if you've got 'em — see you at the Open!

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