

PRIMETIME

BACKGAMMON

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE USBGF

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2016

2015 ABT PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Dorn Bishop's superb
results in 2015 earn
him the ABT title

AMERICAN BACKGAMMON HALL OF FAME

Four of the game's greatest
contributors are lauded

U.S. BACKGAMMON FEDERATION

GOULDING & SENKIEWICZ

Bob Stoller interviews two
of backgammon's most
notable innovators

Merit Open

Highlights from the colossal
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JANUARY - FEBRUARY ISSUE

PrimeTime Backgammon

By Karen Davis, Managing Editor

Wishing the whole backgammon community a happy new year, we kick off 2016's first issue of *PrimeTime Backgammon* by announcing the induction of four new members to the American Backgammon Hall of Fame. The ceremony honoring these backgammon greats took place at the Texas Backgammon Championships in San Antonio on February 5, 2016. Bill Riles presented plaques to the inductees who are profiled in this issue, and Jeremy Bagai contributes an essay on the honorees.

In our first feature, we train the spotlight on two of last year's Hall of Famers, as USBGF historian Robert Stoller presents a lively interview with Kent Goulding and Michael Senkiewicz: pioneers whose acute analysis of the game in the pre-bot era helped raise the level of professional play.

Next, we move from the distant past to the recent past. This issue includes lists of

top performers in 2015 — including the ABT point list topped by Dorn Bishop, the USBGF cumulative Elo over the period from 2009-2015 headed by Joe Russell, the newly instituted USBGF National Master Point list for 2015 with Ray Fogerlund finishing first, and the USBGF 2015 Online Master Points Leaderboard headed by Jan Honza Černý from the Czech Republic.

All these champions! Can you become one too? Improve your game with Marty Storer, our Feature Editor for Annotated Matches. Next up in this issue: Marty analyzes 11 key positions from the USBGF Online Tournament of Champions final match, between Israel's David Presser and Germany's Frank Simon. David and Frank were among the 23 winners of 2014 USBGF online tournaments who qualified for a coveted slot in the event.

After doing your homework with Marty, relax and let your mind wander with tour-

nament reports from our far-flung correspondents: Ray Fogerlund on the Seattle Backgammon Classic; Jake Jacobs on the Japan Open; and Sabri Büyüksoy on the 3rd Merit Open in Cyprus.

A craftsman, the saying goes, is only as good as his tools. It is 2016, and by now we all know how to use programs like XG, but how many of us can remember all the replies to the opening moves? The solution may lie with an app created by American expert Jeremy Bagai. Jeremy calls his app, which uses the efficient learning-technique of flashcards, "FlashBack." But before we rush to buy the app, let's read the reviews. Canadian Bruce Farquhar lets us do just that, ably assessing FlashBack's features and promise.

But backgammon is played by people, so we move from mathematical apps to mathemagicians, profiling the extraordinary accomplishments of USBGF Board

member Art Benjamin. The second "person of interest" we introduce to our readers is a Rip Van Winkle character: Cleveland's Ray Cifani, who is attacking the game with fresh enthusiasm after a three-decade layoff!

This issue opens with USBGF President Bill Riles' updates on the recent Board of Directors election and his thanks for the generous contributions of 32 Founding Sponsors, Prime Benefactors, and major donors — who contributed over \$40,000 in 2015. Looking towards a bright 2016, Bill previews his plan to implement a 1000-member campaign.

Check out the live and online tournament rankings and master points, Prime Clubs, upcoming events, and Get in the Game! ♦

"Get Into the Game — Become a Member"

Karen Davis



⬆ KAREN DAVIS

Karen Davis is Chairman of the USBGF Board of Directors and Managing Editor of *PrimeTime Backgammon*.

PrimeTime Backgammon January - February Issue



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*Featuring the 2016
American Backgammon
Hall of Fame and
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↑ FRANK SIMON REACHES FINALS

Frank Simon, one of Germany's top players, was finalist in the 2014 Online Tournament of Champions, losing to David Presser who tops the USBGF Online Leaderboard.



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↑ 2016 HALL OF FAME

The 2016 American Backgammon Hall of Fame inductees are revealed.

← EXCELLENT RESULTS

Michael Senkiewicz, shown here at his 2015 Hall of Fame induction, recently won the New York Metro Open Championship, and finished second in the Liberty Cup Masters.

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Sabri Büyüksoy captures the beauty, glamour, and celebration of the 3rd Merit Open.

BY SABRI BÜYÜKSOY

ENDLESS LIGHTS OF TOKYO ↑

International visitors to the Japan Open took in the breathtaking sights of Tokyo and feasted on its outstanding cuisine.

→ 3RD MERIT OPEN

Sabri Büyüksoy, a top Turkish modern backgammon player, shares his photos and insights at the 3rd Merit Open. Sabri won the 2012 European Pro Championship and 2012 European Backgammon Tour, and is currently ranked #58 on the Giants list. Sabri works as a [human resources consultant](#).



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Questions or comments about *PrimeTime Backgammon*? We want to hear from you! Contact us via e-mail at info@usbfg.org.

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TARA MENDICINO

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← **ON THE COVER**

Dorn Bishop, member of the USBGF Board of Directors, won the Chicago Open, finished second in the Las Vegas Open (losing to Akiko Yazawa), and won the Consolation at the California State Backgammon Championship to claim the #1 spot on the 2015 ABT. Photo courtesy of Tara Mendicino.

→ **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, AKIKO!**

At the recent Las Vegas Open, Akiko Yazawa invited everyone present at the Calcutta to join her in celebrating her birthday. Carter Mattig pulled out all the stops by bringing boxes full of beautiful and delicious cupcakes!



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See the latest leaders from USBGF online tournaments, plus wins, losses, and tournaments won.

BY TARA MENDICINO

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BACKGAMMON

Staff & Volunteers



MARK ANTRANIKIAN

Mark Antranikian, Assistant Editor, was a member of the USBGF Team Championships winning team, Scared Hitless.



BOB WACHTEL

Bob Wachtel, Editor of *PrimeTime Backgammon*, is a renowned author ranked #8 on the 2013 Giants of Backgammon.



FROM THE EDITOR

Opinions expressed in these pages are those of the individuals and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the U.S. Backgammon Federation.

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TARA MENDICINO

Tara Mendicino, Production Editor, Vice President and member of the USBGF Board of Directors, and co-director of the Texas Backgammon Championships.



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Off and Running in 2016

By Bill Riles, President and Executive Director

In our last issue, I reviewed 2015 and discussed goals and objectives for 2016. I want to update a couple of those topics and share a bit of additional information.

Board of Directors Election

With the recent completion of this year's election, we have accomplished the objective of the entire Board having now been democratically elected by the membership. I think this is so significant. Every member has the opportunity to directly participate in the management and operation of the Federation as a stakeholder.

Congratulations to the successful candidates in the election. Frank Talbot and Marty Storer were newly elected to the Board. Tara Mendicino and I were re-elected. We look forward to working together with these new and returning Board members to continue the USBGF's mission of promoting and growing the game.

I would like to thank retiring Board members Steve Mellen and Justin Nunez for their service on the Board and to backgammon. Steve Mellen served as Board Secretary; kept our records in good order; and with his legal expertise, provided invaluable advice. Justin headed our Local Clubs Initiative — today we have over 60 Affiliated Clubs and 18 Prime Clubs. Such contributions of service are requisite for the sustained success of any non-profit membership organization. I appreciate Steve and Justin as friends and colleagues, I've enjoyed working with them, and I wish them all the best in the future.

I would also like to acknowledge Linda Rockwell, Howard Markowitz, and Patty Geoffroy Knapp for being willing to stand for election. Each is a terrific contributor to the backgammon community, and I hope that they will be willing to devote their skills to the organization in other capacities. Personally, I want to thank the membership for the faith and support they

have entrusted in me by my re-election. 2015 was a tumultuous year for me with medical and personal turmoil; hopefully, 2016 can be all backgammon.

Hall of Fame

The inductees for the second year of the American Backgammon Hall of Fame have been selected. The USBGF Hall of Fame Committee, the Board of Directors, and the Hall of Fame electors (including the Board members, Committee members, Hall of Fame members, and select individuals) have done a wonderful job in weighing the many attributes evident in the elite nature of the Hall of Fame, and extensive consideration of numerous outstanding candidates.

Congratulations to this year's exceptional inductees — Patrick Gibson, the late Tim Holland, Danny Kleinman, and Howard Markowitz.



USBGF LIVE STREAMING PROGRAM

Michelle Steinberg heads the USBGF Stream Team, streaming key matches at Prime Tournaments which enables backgammon aficionados around the world to enjoy watching and learning from top players. The Stream Team is a group of volunteers who transcribe pre-recorded matches and analyze them with eXtreme Gammon software. The archive of transcribed and analyzed matches is a tremendous resource for backgammon players seeking to improve their game.

Membership

We concluded 2015 with 865 members. This represents an approximate 20% increase for the year. We've previously discussed reasons for the increase — these include the Prime Tournament Initiative, membership promotions, the online tournament program, the significant streaming program, and the attraction of the renowned *PrimeTime Backgammon* magazine. In 2016, we intend to capitalize on this membership growth and momentum by continuing the Prime Tournament program, by seeking new online players through a new online offering with cash prizes — the Federation Cup, by seeking new international players through the 4th International Backgammon Championship, and by collaboration with international federations to achieve synergy for our common goal to grow the backgammon community.

In 2016, we will also have at least one new significant ABT tournament with the Silicon Valley Backgammon Open in San Jose, California. Many thanks to Ken Bame

for taking on organization of this exciting new venue. The greater Bay Area is home to a large number of players and is a great destination for a tournament. We wish this tournament all the best.

Sponsors

We welcomed a number of new Founding Sponsors, Prime Tournament Benefactors, and other donors this year. Thirty-two major donors contributed \$41,500 to the USBGF in 2015. From inception, we now have over one hundred twenty Founding Sponsors, Prime Benefactors, Streaming and Education Sponsors, and other major donors who have contributed in excess of \$130,000.

Such contributions are requisite, providing the resources necessary to allow the USBGF to address our priority goals. A list of Founding Sponsors is included elsewhere within this magazine.

Master Points

We made significant progress in our Master

Points system. Year-end leaders may be seen in the tables at the ending section of this issue — the leaders will be recognized at the 2016 Texas Backgammon Championships in San Antonio.

Our 2016 plans include real-time implementation of Master Points, so members can follow their results throughout the year on as close to a real-time basis as possible. We also hope this year to begin integration of local club tournament Master Point results with our national tournament results to attract local club players.

We're poised for another superlative USBGF year, as was 2015. Let's all work toward improving the USBGF and providing more valuable resources to our members. Your volunteer assistance is both needed and appreciated! ♦

"Get Into the Game — Become a Member"

Storer and Talbot Join USBGF Board of Directors

STORER AND TALBOT JOIN USBGF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Welcome our Newest Directors

The U.S. Backgammon Federation is pleased to announce that Marty Storer and Frank Talbot have been elected to the Board of Directors through a highly participatory web-enabled election held in an open, transparent, inclusive, and democratic manner. Upon being informed of the result, Bill Riles, President and Executive Director of USBGF, issued this statement: “The U.S. Backgammon Federation is fortunate to have Marty Storer and Frank Talbot as members of the Board of Directors. Marty is a renowned backgammon author, recently rated as a Grandmaster by the Backgammon Masters Awarding Body (BMAB). He brings to the Board his experience as USBGF Feature Editor for Annotated Matches for the *PrimeTime Backgammon* magazine and software engineering skills. Frank Talbot’s extensive tournament experience and strategic planning skills will be invaluable to the Board. The pair’s exceptional backgammon accomplishments, leadership skills, and visibility in the backgammon community will serve the USBGF well in our campaign to grow the backgammon community.” Riles further

noted: “With this election all members of the Board have been elected by the membership, one of my top goals when I became President and Executive Director in October 2013.”

Bill Riles and Tara Mendicino were reelected to the Board. Both have been vital contributors to the USBGF, serving as President and Executive Director, and Vice President and USBGF Online Tournament Director, respectively. The newly-elected directors join Art Benjamin, Dorn Bishop, Karen Davis, Patrick Gibson, Julius High, Neil Kazaross, Rich Munitz, Joe Russell, and Michelle Steinberg on the Board of Directors. The Board members bring extensive experience in academia, business, engineering, finance, health care, law, marketing, nonprofit management, software design, and technology.

Karen Davis, Chairman of the Board, thanked out-going Board members Steve Mellen and Justin Nunez for their three years of service on the Board. Steve has ably served as Board Secretary and Justin has led our successful Local Clubs Initiative. In welcoming the new Board



⬆️ MARTY STORER AND FRANK TALBOT

Marty Storer (l) brings exceptional backgammon analytic and communication skills, as well as software engineering skills, to the Board. Frank Talbot is a top-ranked player who has a strong understanding of what attracts players to attend tournaments and how to advance participation, education, and enjoyment of the skill-based game of backgammon.

members she noted that “Marty Storer and Frank Talbot provide fresh energy, talent, and prestige to the organization. We look forward to working with them and to their future contributions.”

Marty Storer hit his stride in the backgammon world in 2015, finishing 7th in the ABT reflecting his win of the Michigan Summer Championships and the USBGF National Championship East, accumulating a 17-1 win-loss record in those two events and a PR of 3.3 in recorded, streamed matches. For this performance, he earned the title of BMAB Grandmaster. He won the inaugural American Backgammon Tour in 1993, helped by his victory in the star-studded Boston Open. His two-volume book *Backgammon Praxis* published in 2005

by Fortuitous Press received rave reviews, as did his 2011 book *What’s Your Game Plan? Backgammon Strategy in the Middle Game*, co-authored with the intrepid, two-time U.S. Open winner Mary Hickey. He is the Feature Editor for Annotated Matches for *PrimeTime Backgammon*, and regularly contributes to articles and match analysis in Gammon Village and other publications. He lives in a white-picket-fenced New Hampshire house with his wife Nona, their three children, three pet mammals, and several pet bots. He will serve as Chair of the USBGF Editorial Advisory Board.

Frank Talbot is a frequent presence on the American Backgammon Tour. He has been voted in the top 32 Giants of Backgammon five times, and in the top 64 on

nearly every list since it started in 1993. His achievements include: 2015 Illinois State Backgammon Champion, 2015 and 2014 NY Metro Championship finalist, 2015 U.S. Open Doubles Champion with his wife Monica, finalist in the 2015 Ohio Masters Jackpot, 2014 Atlanta Wilensky Memorial Masters Jackpot winner, 2012 New Mexico State Championship, and many more distinguished backgammon achievements. He is a USBGF Gold Founding Sponsor and generous sponsor of the Michigan Summer Championships Frank Talbot Newcomer Freeroll. He practices as a pharmacist and lives in Troy, Michigan, with his wife Monica. He will serve on the USBGF Executive Committee and Rules and Ethics Committee.



PRIME TOURNAMENT INITIATIVE

Report on the First Year

By Karen Davis

The U.S. Backgammon Federation launched a three-year program, called the “Prime Tournament Initiative” (PTI), in January 2015. The PTI provides cash prizes to USBGF members at participating national tournaments in the U.S. Its goals are: to increase USBGF membership, increase tournament attendance, and enhance USBGF role, visibility, and influence. The PTI was funded with the generous donations of Prime Benefactors. The USBGF publicized PTI-enhanced tournaments (“Prime Tournaments”) through email, social media, the *PrimeTime Backgammon* bi-monthly magazine, and the usbgf.org website.

How the Initiative Worked in Practice

- » 15 out of 20 national tournaments elected to participate.
- » The initiative provided \$12,500 in added money for USBGF members.
- » Membership growth accelerated, climbing 25 percent after the PTI’s announcement in the fall of 2014 through the end of 2015. Enrollment at tournaments markedly increased: 188 USBGF members joined or renewed their membership at national tournaments — a more than three-fold increase over the 56 of 2014.
- » Attendance at national tournaments is up 13% over 2014, reversing an earlier decline in attendance: 1818 entrants to Main division events in 2015, compared with 1609 in 2014. Unique entrants increased from 879 in 2014 to 946 in 2015.
- » The percentage of players at Prime Tournaments who are USBGF members increased from 55% without tournament signups to 67% after signups. 83% of Open Prime Tournament players are members; 53% of Advanced players, and 36% of Limited players.
- » Tournament directors were given wide discretion to structure added money. Some tournaments elected to add money to the Main events for USBGF members advancing the furthest. Others had side events — e.g. blitz, mini-match, DMP events — with added money for USBGF members advancing the furthest. Others provided door prizes to entrants who were USBGF members, while some used a combination of methods.
- » The Texas and Michigan tournaments, which sponsor the USBGF National Championship West and East events (128 entrants each), had the most USBGF members and the most tournament sign-ups. Many of the side events with added money drew record numbers of entrants (California State DMP event — 160 entrants; NY Metro Mini-Match 128 entrants).
- » Many thanks to Prime Benefactors contributing toward the program: Geoffrey Parker Games, Robert Stoller, John Bird, Karen Davis, Saba Bejanishvili, Art Benjamin, Carol Joy Cole, Patrick and Carla Gibson, Bill Riles, Victor Ashkenazi, Julius High, LEW Webber, and Dorn Bishop.

Prime Tournament Initiative

Prime Tournament Initiative Results

Prime Tournament	Added \$	Entrants	% USBGF	Open	Advanced	Limited
New York Metro Open	\$1,000	136	63%	90%	50%	44%
Texas Championships	\$1,000	150	85%	99%	69%	60%
Capital Classic	\$750	85	69%	88%	53%	75%
Ohio State Championships	\$750	69	77%	92%	73%	0%
U.S. Open Las Vegas	\$1,000	137	54%	79%	32%	16%
Atlanta Classic	\$500	62	68%	91%	37%	N/A
Chicago Open	\$1,000	80	78%	85%	48%	60%
L.A. Open	\$1,000	116	65%	76%	52%	43%
Michigan Championships	\$1,000	151	74%	91%	69%	8%
Wisconsin	\$500	54	74%	88%	72%	20%
Carolina Invitational	\$750	80	78%	90%	75%	46%
Seattle	\$500	47	34%	50%	19%	34%
Connecticut	\$750	60	72%	90%	52%	50%
Las Vegas Open	\$1,000	176	54%	63%	48%	10%
California State	\$1,000	116	61%	75%	48%	33%
Prime Tournaments (15)	\$12,500	1,519	67%	83%	53%	36%
Non-Prime Tournaments (5)	None	299	49%	70%	37%	24%
Total	\$12,500	1,818	Avg: 63%	Avg: 80%	Avg: 50%	Avg: 33%



KAREN DAVIS



USBGF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EAST

The Michigan Summer Championships hosted the USBGF National Championship East, won by Marty Storer. Tournament director Carol Joy Cole devoted \$500 of the USBGF added money to the USBGF National Championship which had 128 entries and the remaining \$500 to the Charity Blitz to support the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan which had 80 entries.

Prime Tournament Initiative

Prime Tournament Formats

Prime Tournament	Added Money Format	Added Money Winners
New York Metro Open	Mini-Match (128)	T. Wuersch
Texas Championships	Freeroll (96), Nat'l. Champ. (128)	S. Ahmed, Clarine, K. Davis; G. Fries
Capital Classic	Blitz (48), Door Prizes	LEW, Dima; B. Finneran, B. Macklin, L. Zloutskaya, C. Mattig, P. Weaver
Ohio State Championships	Open/Advanced Side Pool	B. Calton; B. Balance
U.S. Open Las Vegas	Champ./Intermediate Side Pool	J. Russell; D. McFarlin
Atlanta Classic	Freeroll (38)	D. Culpepper; J. Hickey; F. Dama; J. Jemal
Chicago Open	Quickie (64), Interm./Nov. Side Pool	R. Williamson; C. Haley; O. Alsac; D. Ostrow
L.A. Open	DMP Tournament (96)	G. Merriman
Michigan Championships	Charity Blitz (80), Nat'l. Champ. (128)	S. Grund; M. Storer
Wisconsin	Championship/Advanced Side Pool	T. Morioka, Dan Wittkopf
Carolina Invitational	Prime JPs - \$50, \$25, \$25 (64, 32, 8)	C. Cole; G. Al-Kinani; A. Azamat
Seattle	Prime Tournament (64)	E. Rosenblum
Connecticut	Open/Advanced Side Pool	J. Pack; J. Barnett
Las Vegas Open	Ten \$100 Door Prizes	R. Tansi, R. Fogerlund, C. Pappas, J. Bird, G. Contos, D. McKenzie, D. Roberts, J. Cohen, M. Davis, J. O'Hagan
California State	DMP Tournament (160)	B. Glass, B. Newberg

Summary and Recommendation

In short, the PTI has proved a very successful strategy for encouraging national tournament players to become USBGF members. It has accounted for a major portion of USBGF membership growth over 2015. The PTI has benefited players, provided marketing assistance to tournament directors, and generated good will for the USBGF. The Board of Directors has voted to continue the program in 2016. ♦

- KAREN DAVIS



Growing Membership & Growing the Game



The goals of the three-year USBGF Prime Tournament Initiative are to increase USBGF membership among tournament attendees, increase tournament attendance and participation in events, and enhance the USBGF role, visibility, and influence. Approximately 2,000 players have participated in ABT tournaments since 2009 — only 25% are USBGF members. We want to encourage the remaining 75%, and many others, to become USBGF members; enjoy our resources; and help us fulfill our mission to promote and grow the game. The Prime Tournament Initiative attempts to accomplish this and allows the USBGF to target a membership of 1,000 by the end of 2016. We need your support to reach our goal. Learn more at usbgf.org/media/prime/pt-initiative.pdf Contribute at usbgf.org/media/prime/benefactor/

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2016

AMERICAN BACKGAMMON

Hall of Fame inductees



2016 American Backgammon Hall of Fame Inductees

Patrick Gibson - Los Angeles, California

Known as the quintessential tournament director, Patrick Gibson has gained widespread affection and universal respect for his fairness, integrity, and dedication. He has directed 76 Los Angeles Open and California State Championships, over 3,600 weekly tournaments in the Los Angeles area, and, beginning in 2000, sixteen Vietor Cup tournaments in La Jolla (the oldest tournament in the U.S.). He has served as co-director of numerous tournaments — including a number of start-up tournaments — and is a trusted source of advice to tournament directors across the U.S. He established the Gammon Associates Club in 1978, and nurtured its growth into the largest USBGF Prime Club today.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

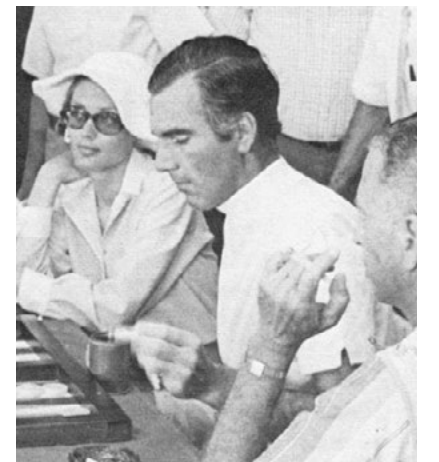
- » A founding member of the U.S. Backgammon Federation Board of Directors, including service on the Executive and Hall of Fame Committees. Guided the development of a rankings and statistics database derived from the entry of drawsheets for main events and major jackpots of all national tournaments since 2009 — an invaluable resource to the backgammon community and historians of the game.
- » Won the Nevada State Championship in 2010, the Michigan Summer Championships in 2007, and the San Diego Grand Prix in 1994. Finished in the top three ABT rankings in 1994 and 2007.

Tim Holland (1931-2010) - New York City and Miami, Florida

The first modern backgammon superstar, Tim Holland won three World Championships and three International Backgammon Championships — more major backgammon championships than anyone else in the history of the game. Tim was also a successful author and renowned teacher. He opened the Park 65 Backgammon Club in New York City in 1978 and introduced many to the glamour of high-stakes backgammon. His three popular books, *Beginning Backgammon* (1973), *Better Backgammon* (1974), and *Backgammon for People Who Hate to Lose: The Psychology of Playing a Winning Game* (1977), helped trigger the backgammon boom of the 1970s.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

- » Won the World Backgammon Championship three times, more than any other player. Won the first World Backgammon Championship in 1967, and also won in 1968 and 1971
- » Won the International Backgammon Championship, played in London, in 1966, 1972, and 1973.



FROM TOP: ROBERT AMADOR; UNKNOWN

2016 American Backgammon Hall of Fame Inductees



Danny Kleinman - Los Angeles, California

Backgammon's first mathematical theoretician and analyst; Danny Kleinman's insight, wit, and satire entertained and educated backgammon players for decades. He was a prolific author and a renowned, beloved columnist. Danny was the first to use mathematics to explain correct checker play and cube decisions.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

- » Authored *Vision Laughs at Counting, Volume 1 and Volume 2* (1980), *Meanwhile, Back at the Chouette* (1981), *Wonderful World of Backgammon* (1981), *Double-Sixes From the Bar* (1982), *How Can I Keep From Dancing* (1983), *Is There Life After Backgammon?* (1983), *The Dice Conquer All* (1984), *How Little We Know About Backgammon* (1985), *The Other Side of Midnight* (1986), *But Only the Hogs Win Backgammons* (1991), *A Backgammon Book for Gabriel* (1994), and *Long Road to Gammon* (1995). Co-authored, with Antonio Ortega, *Backgammon: Costa Rica 1994* (1996), *Cubes and Gammons Near the End of the Match* (1997), *Jerry Grandell: His Most Important Matches* (1999), and *Backgammon with the Giants: Neil Kazaross* (2001).
- » Wrote three popular columns in the *Chicago Point* newsletter for a number of years: "Miss Lonelyblots," "Ask Danny," and "Shades of Gray".



Howard Markowitz - Chicago, Illinois and Las Vegas, Nevada

For over thirty years, Howard Markowitz has put his own unique stamp on backgammon tournaments, with his high payouts attracting the largest number of entrants and drawing top players from around the world. He directed the PartyGammon Million in the Bahamas in 2007, and between 2009 and 2012 co-directed the Monte Carlo World Championships.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

- » Organized/directed the Chicago Open from 1981 through 2009, and the Las Vegas Open and Nevada State Championship since 1992.
- » Won the Michigan Summer Championships in 1984 and 1993, the Midwest Backgammon Championship in 1990, and, in 2012, won both the Los Angeles Open Championship and Super-32.
- » Is in the top 50 all-time in American Backgammon Tour points. He was 3rd in the ABT ranking in the inaugural year of 1993. He finished 17th in the ABT in 2003 and 8th in 2012.



FROM TOP: UNKNOWN; UNKNOWN

AMERICAN BACKGAMMON

Hall of Fame

The Inductees

By Jeremy Bagai

Has it really been a year since the first class of thirteen was inaugurated to the American Backgammon Hall of Fame? I suppose it has.

This year's process differed from last year's in that there were new questions to ponder: How should new nominees be proposed to the committee? How should the committee consider nominees from last year that were not voted in? And what ideal number of inductees should the committee set its sights on? The main work of the committee was to consider these issues and come up with clear procedures. Our results:

- » USBGF members were able to submit their nominations (online) for consideration on this year's ballot. The HOF committee evaluated these submissions and voted on their inclusion.
- » Any nominee from last year that received at least one vote was automatically placed on this year's ballot.
- » Our preferred class size was 2-6 based on the voting distribution, with four considered ideal.

Thirty-two Hall of Fame electors voted on twenty-four nominees, and four candidates separated themselves from the pack. Once again, Karen Davis asked me to write some notes on the incoming class. So here are some personal reflections on four individuals that nicely span the history of modern backgammon.

Tim Holland

The first modern superstar, known for his tournament results (won the first two World Championships in 1967 and 1968, and then a third in 1971), high-stakes gambling, and his three popular books: *Beginning Backgammon* (1973), *Better Backgammon* (1974), and *Backgammon for People Who Hate to Lose* (1977). Instrumental to the 70's backgammon boom, and the prototype of the "Professional Gentleman Gambler."

As luck would have it, *Backgammon for People Who Hate to Lose* was the second BG book I read, and it grabbed me. It took me (and you) into the back room of a high-stakes money session, right by Tim's side. For better or worse, I was hooked. The colorful discussion of the psychology of gambling (and of gamblers) stays with me to this day. He passed in 2010, but I'm proud he lives on in our Hall of Fame.

2016 American Backgammon Hall of Fame Inductees

Danny Kleinman

A singular figure in the history of backgammon. Not known for tournament wins, and certainly not a “Professional Gentleman Gambler.” Instead, Danny Kleinman was backgammon’s first modern analyst.

If Paul Magriel’s *Backgammon* (1976) showed us how to move the checkers, it was Danny Kleinman’s *Vision Laughs at Counting* (1980) that explained the math behind those moves. And indeed, the wealth of math behind the cube. (Turns out, there’s quite a bit of math in backgammon once you look for it.)

Danny wrote a dozen backgammon books by himself, and four more with Antonio Ortega. (Their *Cubes and Gammons Near the End of the Match* remains my favorite book on match-play to date.) He also wrote more than three dozen books on bridge, a book on Oh Hell, a book on voting systems, and a book of songs. In our world, he will be known forever for Miss Lonelyblots, the backgammon advice columnist who explicated chouette dynamics. Thanks, Danny, for all the humor, all the reporting, and yes, all the math. It wouldn’t have been the same without you.

Howard Markowitz

Players differ. Some enjoy casual games,

while others yearn for big paydays. Tournament directors differ too. While the U.S. trend has been toward inclusivity by way of lower entry fees, Howard has always made sure there was at least one event where someone would go home with a big sack of cash. For over thirty years, from Gammon’s of Chicago to the Nevada Backgammon Association, Howard has run the biggest events with the highest payouts, and was the first to consistently draw an international crowd. It only made sense that Howard would be asked to direct the Party Gammon Million, and more recently the Monte Carlo World Championships. (He also plays the game — just ask anyone who attended the 2012 Los Angeles Open, where he won both the Open and the Super-32.)

I went to Monte Carlo in 2001 and surprised myself by getting to the finals of the Super Jackpot. This presented a nice problem: I didn’t want to carry that much cash around Europe for my next two weeks of sightseeing. What to do? I asked Howard, figuring he would know. “I’ll hold the money for you, and then FedEx it to you when we’re both in the states,” he said. “Huh, that sounds great. Thanks.” I handed him a couple of envelopes. I left, but a minute or so later returned to his suite. “Uh, forgive me for asking this, but what happens if, say, your plane goes down?” Howard’s quick reply:

“Well, that will be a lot worse for me than for you.”

Patrick Gibson

Like Howard, Patrick Gibson has been running major tournaments in the U.S. for over thirty-five years: over seventy of his own Gammon Associates events in Los Angeles, sixteen Vietor Cups in La Jolla, dozens of co-directorships, and well over *three thousand* weekly events. (One of which was my very first tournament. Thanks, Patrick.)

But what sets Patrick truly apart is his service to the community. Ask Howard for advice and you’ll be sure to receive some wisdom. Ask Patrick, and more likely than not he’ll hop on a plane to help you run your event. (This is not hyperbole. I’ve seen it happen a number of times.) He’s been a member of the USBGF Board of Directors since its inception, managed the creation of the USBGF ratings and statistics database, and has chaired the Hall of Fame committee for its first two years. Deep respect to my friend, the MFIC.

Sincere congratulations to the four new members of our Hall of Fame. ♦

- JEREMY BAGAI

About Jeremy

Jeremy Bagai wrote the critically acclaimed *Classic Backgammon Revisited*, and published it along with

Backgammon Boot Camp (Trice) and *Backgammon Praxis* (Storer) through his company The Fortuitous Press.



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AMERICAN BACKGAMMON

Hall of Fame

Kent Goulding and Michael Senkiewicz, Part I *Abridged Interview by Robert Stoller*

Robert Stoller: My name is Bob Stoller. I am a Founding Sponsor and historian of the U.S. Backgammon Federation. It is Friday night, January 30, 2015. We are here in the Mary Northen Moody suite at the historic Menger Hotel in downtown San Antonio, Texas.

For most of the United States, this is Super Bowl weekend, but for our national backgammon community, this weekend has a far greater significance. Tonight we have inducted the inaugural class of the U.S. Backgammon Federation's Hall of Fame, and I have the great honor and privilege to have sitting with me two of our initial inductees, Kent Goulding and Mike Senkiewicz. Thank you both for being here.

Mike Senkiewicz: If I had tickets to the Super Bowl, I might not have been here.

Kent Goulding: What's the Super Bowl?

Robert Stoller: I wanted to get the two of you together because I know that at least at one point in your backgammon careers, you worked together.

What I have here is Volume 1, Number 1 of a publication called *Inside Backgammon*. This was published by two guys named Kent Goulding and Bill Robertie, and one of the articles is *K.G.'s Game of the Month*, by Kent Goulding. He's playing against Howard Ring in the seventh Nevada State Championship, and the contributors to the analysis panel alongside this game consist of ...

Kent Goulding: Bill Robertie, Mike Senkiewicz, and Kit Woolsey, plus me.

Mike Senkiewicz: Three Stooges.

Robert Stoller: How did you guys get together to coordinate on this? How did that happen?

Kent Goulding: Well, I would have done it. I mean, Robertie and I were working together all the time on this, but I would get together with Michael and say, "Here's this position" or "Here's this segment of the match, what do you think about this play, what do you think about that play?"

As a side note, if there was a backgammon tournament to be played in, one of the things that would make me go or not go would be whether some of my fellow good players would show up. Mike was one of them.

So we would talk a lot about backgammon and about positions in his matches, positions in my matches, positions in matches we watched. We didn't have any computers. We had our own knowledge and our own ability to analyze, and we went back and forth with each other.

Now, it wasn't just Michael and me, either. I saw backgammon learning — particularly

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz



KENT GOULDING

An innovative force in the game, Kent Goulding is esteemed as a backgammon player, publisher, director/organizer, witty auctioneer, and raconteur extraordinaire. He introduced the first U.S. backgammon rating system, and as director of the World Cup, he instituted the use of clocks and recorded matches.

with the frustrations I had early on, with so few resources, so few books, there were so few games to look at — as a collaborative effort. So I would help bring in other voices and blend them together.

Robert Stoller: I think I've started in the middle of things, and I want to go to the beginning. How did you each get into backgammon in the first place? You came to backgammon from chess?

Kent Goulding: Both of us did.

Robert Stoller: So what's the story behind that?

Mike Senkiewicz: I was manager of the Manhattan Chess Club, which just hap-

pened to be in the same building as the Mayfair Club, which was a backgammon club. They had a kitchen, and the chess club didn't, so I'd go up there to get food. And it turned out that a lot of the players were chess players.

Robert Stoller: What year was this?

Mike Senkiewicz: '72, maybe, '71, something like that. At some point after having read some rudimentary books on the game, I played in a chouette, and it was a \$2-a-point chouette, and I won 56 points. And I knew nothing about the game. I was really hopeless. But because of that, everybody overplayed against me and I was pretty lucky. But it was more money than I was making managing a chess club

downstairs, so I thought "Maybe I can supplement my income with this."

Robert Stoller: Kent, how did you get into backgammon?

Kent Goulding: Oh, it was not entirely dissimilar. I was in college, rejected by the U.S. Army, and mostly out of work. And I went with a friend of mine, who was several years my senior, who was a very good bridge player, to the DuPont Circle Club in Washington, D.C., where they had an old-time crowd of interesting characters who'd show up in the daytimes and play money bridge. You know, penny-a-point bridge was sort of standard; occasionally they'd go crazy and play two-penny-a-point bridge, which is not a lot of money. This

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

wasn't high stakes.

And they often had 6 players or 12 or 14 players or some non-multiple of 4, so there'd be two or three odd men out rotating in and out. I'd kibitz. I was a bad player. I didn't want to play for money, but my friend was trying to make a living, so I'd watch and have a good time.

But the odd men out would go over in the corner where they had some old, strange wooden box set with a couple of broken checkers in it and dice. They were playing backgammon. I watched and thought, "Well, this is interesting. Maybe I can learn this game."

And as this is happening, backgammon's exploding. I mean you would go into whatever the equivalent of a Barnes & Noble was back then, and they would have a whole rack of backgammon sets. Celebrities played backgammon. It was a fad. I would guess this was 1975. I went out and got this book —

Robert Stoller: Which is what I wanted to ask you about next: This is the Jacoby book, Jacoby and Crawford, *The Backgammon Book*, copyright 1970.

Kent Goulding: So I went out and bought this book to try to learn something about the game. And I liked it, and, for whatever reason, I took to it like a duck to water, I mean, very, very quickly I'm beating my friends.

Robert Stoller: When the two of you got into backgammon, was there a backgammon tournament community?

Kent Goulding: No. And whenever I found something lacking like that, I would try to fix it. When I arrived in junior high school, I looked around: "Where is the chess club?" Because I liked chess. Well, there wasn't a chess club. So I made a chess club. You know, I said, "What do you have to do to get a club going? I hear there are clubs in junior high. There's no chess club." Well, you have to get a sponsor, you have to get people, you have to make an announcement. Okay, I can do all that.

So I put together a chess club. "Well, where's the chess team?" "Well, we don't have a chess team." "Well, who does have a chess team?" "Well, the high school has a chess team." "Oh, okay."

Trot over to the high school. "Where's the chess club?" "Do you go to school here?" "No, I go to the junior high school. So, what? Where's the chess club?" "It's down there. Meets on Wednesdays."

Show up at the chess club. "Where's the chess team? I want be on the chess team." "But you don't go to school here." "But I will soon. I want to be on the chess team." So I make it happen.

Somewhere along the way Kit Woolsey, a very good bridge player ten or so years my senior, who also knew how to play backgammon, dropped by the club. We

knew each other a little teeny bit from chess, but Kit wasn't much of a chess player. He already had a very good reputation at bridge, and I wasn't that much of a player. But I was learning backgammon quickly. And Kit glommed onto that. Now, he already knew how to play, but hadn't really applied himself.

So we started studying along with a couple other people, and Kit and I started to pull away from the pack.

And at some point, backgammon's getting more popular and guys are coming to the club to play backgammon, not to play bridge, and the owner of the club buys backgammon boards and sets up more tables, and more people come in.

And one night Kit said (Kit did; I'm amazed it wasn't me), "You know, we could have a tournament. We could actually have a tournament."

I said, "Well, how would we do that?" "Well, how many people are here?" "I don't know, twenty?" "Okay, we're having a tournament, everybody. Who's got ten bucks? We'll play five-point matches."

And I said, "How are we going to do this, Kit?" He said, "Don't worry." Gave me this piece of paper. "Who's going to play? Take the entry fees. Okay, you play you. You play you. You play you. If you win or lose, whatever, come tell me what happened."

And we had a backgammon tournament.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

And it sort of goes without saying, I won it.

But we also saw it as a bit of a business model, and the guy who owned the club — this is a nickel-and-dime operation where you're lucky if you can pay the rent — saw it as a little more income.

So, okay, we announce that we're having tournaments. We're going to have Monday night tournaments, with a \$20 entry fee tournament every night.

Now, backgammon is blossoming, and some guy who came into the club says, "You know, I've got an idea. I'm going to go around to some of the bars or pubs around D.C. and Georgetown, and get fancy people, better people to show up. I just need some schlub who knows how to run a tournament, who knows how to play backgammon, who for 50 bucks a night or whatever, will bring in all the sets, set it up, and we'll have backgammon night at the Georgetown Grill, or have backgammon night at this pub, we'll have backgammon night at this bar."

I didn't have anything better to do, so I started running around D.C. to night-clubs and bars, having drunk people play backgammon tournaments. And I'd get paid some minimum wage type thing to do this. And, of course, if they needed an extra person to round out a bracket or whatever, I'd play, in which case I got paid for running the tournament, plus I got all the prize money because I beat them all.

Robert Stoller: So this was a labor of love for you?

Kent Goulding: Oh, yeah. But it also worked. I mean, yes this was a labor of love, but I was also feeding myself because I was good at it. And the better it was for other people, the bigger the tournaments got, the better it was for me.

Robert Stoller: When did the two of you first meet? It was in chess, backgammon, or something else?

Kent Goulding: Backgammon.

Mike Senkiewicz: Backgammon, right.

Robert Stoller: Where and when?

Kent Goulding: I know when we first played. I'm not sure when we first met. We played in Les Boyd's Tournament of Champions in 1977 on Paradise Island, Bahamas. I won the tournament.

Robert Stoller: Are you serious?

Kent Goulding: We did. We did. I was scared shitless.

Mike Senkiewicz: Was that the deal where they gave you 11 nights for \$99 or nine nights —

Kent Goulding: Something like that. It was the summertime in the Bahamas or whatever, and this is —

Mike Senkiewicz: No, this was winter-time, December.

Kent Goulding: Paradise Island wasn't as big and fancy as it is now. I couldn't afford the main hotel, so sometimes I found some pretty grubby places. But I played in a lot of tournaments there.

Mike Senkiewicz: It was an awesome deal. It was ten nights and 11 days for \$99, and the suites were like 700 square feet.

Robert Stoller: How did you hear about this tournament? What got you down there in the first place?

Mike Senkiewicz: Oh, I have no idea. Don't remember the slightest detail at all. I do think that was when we first met, though. It was hard to spot him. He didn't cast a shadow in those days.

Kent Goulding: I was very, very skinny. I was — Mikey served our country boldly. I got drafted and flunked the physical for being too skinny. Stayed out of the Army that way, otherwise I could be dead in southeast Asia somewhere.

(interruption)

Robert Stoller: So while we were changing the battery, Mike Senkiewicz mentioned that his experience was a little different. He went to backgammon college.

Mike Senkiewicz: That's right.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

Robert Stoller: Tell us about that.

Mike Senkiewicz: It was called the May-fair Club. And at the time it probably held three-quarters of all the top players in the country. When I started going there, I'd play for small stakes with the bad players, and then I would watch the really good players play at higher stakes. There were chouettes where they argued over moves.

So what I did was, for two years I kept score for the game, and I just watched. And that's basically how I learned: listening to a lot of good players argue over moves.

Robert Stoller: Who were some of the good players?

Mike Senkiewicz: Well, one was Tim Holland, who should have been inducted today. He was clearly the best player in the world at the time. And Arthur Dickman.

Kent Goulding: Arthur Dickman left New York and moved to south Florida. He was at least a generation older than me, which makes him only a little bit older than Michael.

Mike Senkiewicz: He's not alive now.

Kent Goulding: No. He must be long gone. I don't know when I lost track of him. But I lived in south Florida for a couple years at the end of the 1970s, and Arthur was down there, retired, but still very much a backgammon player, and there was lots of backgammon action by then. Les Boyd

was running tournaments all over the place in south Florida and in the Bahamas, and there were other tournaments popping up, and when we learned where they were, we went to them. They were within reach at first, and later —

Robert Stoller: How were they publicized?

Kent Goulding: It was something of a closed community, so you might hear, "Hey, there's going to be a tournament here," "Hey, there's going to be a tournament there." Eventually you started getting people like Carol Joy Cole and Bill Davis sending little newsletters, or tournament organizers would send out notices and brochures. Max Maxakuli had his *Las Vegas Backgammon Magazine* going on. Les Boyd was trying to publish his international backgammon magazine, each one scratching and clawing.

There was no U.S. Backgammon Federation until very, very recently. It was more of a feudal, city-state sort of thing. Each organizer, each group, each locality, struggling: "Can we put together a tournament, who can we draw here, who can we not draw here?"

Internationally, Louis Deyong and Prince Obolensky did all kinds of work to popularize the game amongst the jet-setters, and to strike deals with hotels or resorts or sponsors. So we got our info partly by word of mouth, partly through brochures, partly by checking out what limited information we could get from Maxakuli's magazine, from Les Boyd's magazine.

Les and Sue Boyd lived in south Florida and ran local tournaments, but they also ran bigger events — which is how I met Michael in the Bahamas. He came down for the cheap clam chowder and the low-rent rooms.

Mike Senkiewicz: Oh, that was like heaven. It was in winter, you'd go to the Bahamas —

Kent Goulding: Cod chowder was the food of the gods.

Mike Senkiewicz: Just had to wait an hour to get it.

Kent Goulding: Yeah, service was a little slow. But great cod chowder.

Mike Senkiewicz: So you ordered three at a time.

Robert Stoller: But the available literature to learn the game —

Kent Goulding: It's right in front of you.

Robert Stoller: This was the only book.

Kent Goulding: Well, only one worth anything until Magriel came along.

Mike Senkiewicz: It was all useless. The best way to learn backgammon at the time was to listen to great players.

Kent Goulding: Like Arthur Dickman.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

Mike Senkiewicz: Arthur was one. Magriel was starting out, and he and Arthur didn't particularly see eye to eye — they'd clash —

Kent Goulding: That's — knowing both of them, that's easy to see.

Mike Senkiewicz: But there was a whole school of great players that came along. Some of them have been inducted. Jacoby'd show up every now and then. Barclay Cooke

would come in, or his son, who was very good, and —

Robert Stoller: Which brings me to another topic: Some of our inductees have passed away — in particular, Oswald Jacoby and Barclay Cooke and Walter Trice. And I was hoping that among my interviewees, there would be people who actually knew these folks and could say a word about them. Did one or both of you actually know Oswald Jacoby?

Mike Senkiewicz: Played a couple of times.

Kent Goulding: I played with him. He was already — aside from backgammon, he was an absolute legend to any games player. By the way, I think both Michael and I are in one of your categories here for Averbakh players.

I have recently reached a level where I feel I can actually win bridge tournaments.

Averbakh Players

Soviet chess Grandmaster Yuri Averbakh's categorization of the six groups of great chess players.

From the book, *Centre-Stage and Behind the Scenes: The Personal Memoir of a Soviet Chess Legend*, by Yuri Averbakh (translation by Steve Giddins), (New In Chess, The Netherlands, 2011), pages 238-239.

"In battles at the highest level, especially matches, it is extremely important to understand the opponent's psychology and be able to identify the type to which he belongs. Based on my experience, I would divide all great players into six groups.

Group one — the killers. These are the ones who, in the language of boxing, try to knock out their opponents.

Group two — the fighters. The circumstances of battle inspire them and enable them to mobilize their full fighting spirit. They fight to win, but it is not important to them to destroy their opponent.

Group three — the sportsmen. For them, chess is a form of sport, like tennis, for example. Once the game is over, they become absolutely normal people.

Group four — the players. They are attracted by every form of game — cards, backgammon, etc.

Group five — the artists. For them, it is important not just to win, but to win elegantly, and to create works of art.

Group six — the explorers. This group strive first of all to understand chess, and to divine its secrets. For them chess is a subject for scientific study.

"We notice that the first four types have the strongest motivation and will-power, incomparably stronger than the last two. It is no coincidence that all the great champions are representatives of the first four types...."

Kent Golding describes himself as definitely Group one — the killers, although confesses to having a bit of all types in him. Michael Senkiewicz characterizes himself as a combination of Group two (the fighters) and Group four (the players), although in other games, he thinks of himself as having a healthy dose of Group five (the artists).

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

And there’s a sort of adrenaline rush and, you know, a hunter-killer instinct that I’m ready to mop up the floor with these bozos. And I realized, “My God, I’ve done that in four games.” I go to the World Series main event at poker, and I expect to do well, maybe not win, but I can hold my own, I can get into the money, I can get in there and acquit myself well. And I go in with confidence. And that feeling, that feeling is some sort of drug which beats anything manufactured by humans.

Robert Stoller: And that’s what Jacoby had?

Kent Goulding: Jacoby was a player all over the place. I don’t know that it’s true, but the rumblings were that during World War II he worked with the U.S. version of the Turing code-breaking group. He was a gin rummy player, he was a backgammon player, he was a —

Mike Senkiewicz: Scrabble player.

Kent Goulding: — legend beyond legend bridge player.

Mike Senkiewicz: He was a confident man.

Robert Stoller: You knew him? You played against him?

Mike Senkiewicz: Well, I knew one particular story. He was playing Scrabble, and his opponent played a word, and he said, “That’s not a word.” The opponent

said, “Yes, it is.” So he bets him \$20 it’s not a word. So they look it up in the dictionary, and there it is; it’s a word.

So now he bets the guy another \$20 that the dictionary’s wrong. He was a confident man.

Robert Stoller: The other book we have from that era was written by Barclay Cooke, who is, regrettably, no longer with us. He wrote three books that I’m familiar with. The first one was *Backgammon: The Cruellest Game*. The second was *Paradoxes and Probabilities*. And then there is this one, *Championship Backgammon*, which I personally enjoyed the most. So, first question, did either of you know Mr. Cooke?

Mike Senkiewicz: I knew him. He was a nice guy, really good guy.

Kent Goulding: I played him a match in Las Vegas. My first tournament outside of D.C. was in Philadelphia, which is where I first met Paul Magriel. This must have been 1976 or something. As a little aside before we get back to Barclay Cooke, something that stuck with me that I share with anybody who brings such things up: I met Magriel; he was already Magriel, even though he hadn’t stolen the World Championship from me yet, which he did that year —

Mike Senkiewicz: Semifinals.

Kent Goulding: I was 11-0 in the semifinals, and he tied it up. At that point he had the audacity to say: “New favorite.” He finally nipped me at the end.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

Mike Senkiewicz: It takes a certain level of confidence to play games.

Kent Goulding: There weren’t a lot of players in 1978 that could sit down and play a long match with Paul Magriel and have a chance. But Mikey could have. And I had a chance, even in a 21-point match, as I demonstrated. I was up 11-0, and then it was a tortoise and the hare thing: I’d get to 12; he’d get to 2. I’d get to 13; he’d get to 4. I’d get to 15; he’d get to 6. And, you know, like at 22-all or whatever, I got a little... and then I lost. It was horrible. Lots of pressure: crowds of people, standing on chairs, going crazy. Of course, Magriel was Magriel already.

Robert Stoller: Was he wearing sunglasses when he played you?

Kent Goulding: I don’t remember. Probably. Hell, I might have had some, too, because you can get glasses which aren’t even sunglasses but are silvered on the front. He didn’t like anyone to see where he was looking.

Robert Stoller: Well, this anticipates where I’m going to go in a little bit, but do you recognize this?

Kent Goulding: That’s *Backgammon with the Champions*. This was the result of huge frustration on my part in learning backgammon.

Robert Stoller: And the guy with the dark glasses is...?

Kent Goulding: That’s Paul Magriel.

Robert Stoller: Now, what was the significance of the tinted or the dark glasses or the silvered glasses?

Kent Goulding: You get all kinds of weird things out of Paul. Partly a psych job, but there was some legitimacy to it: he wants to look around the board and see what’s going on, but he doesn’t want his opponent to know where he’s looking. You know, he wants to look over and check out the other guy’s home board, look at his own home board, survey the outfield. Maybe look over at the cube. Maybe look at his opponent and see if he’s twitchy or whatever. But he wanted to do it behind a cloak of secrecy. I think it’s partly the psych job, look cool, be different. There’s a little bit of the showman in Paul.

I actually went out, back in those years, to an optician and got non-prescription glasses that were mirrored so I could do what Paul was doing. If you tried to look at my eyes, you’d just see yourself.

Robert Stoller: Okay. Back to Barclay Cooke.

Kent Goulding: Okay. There was a big, big tournament in Vegas, maybe 1980 or ‘81; I don’t remember when he died. And I got paired against Barclay Cooke, and it’s a 15-point match. This might have been when Henry Watson started running his tournament, the World Amateur.

I was never allowed to play in the World Amateur. They designated me a pro, but they had a big tournament for good players, too. And I believe it was in that that I played Barclay Cooke.

One of the things I set out to do, as I realized I was getting good, I set out to meet and beat both of these guys. I got friendly — a bit — with Jacoby, who would know me by sight and say “Hi,” et cetera. And I got friendly at tournaments with Barclay Cooke. And we got paired with one another. He was a great ambassador and sweetheart of a man.

On the other hand, Jacoby was non-offensive, but there was something a little bit scary there that I didn’t see in Cooke. He pulled ahead in the match 1-0 to 15, and the next game the match ended.

Robert Stoller: The cube got to 16?

Kent Goulding: The cube got to 8 and I gammoned him.

Robert Stoller: (laughing)

Kent Goulding: People weren’t recording matches then, but I was young and had a brain, so I went off and set up all the key cube positions, because I remembered them all, wrote them up, and published them in one of Maxakuli’s *Las Vegas Backgammon* magazines. You know, this little twerp writing up this final game with the legendary Barkley Cooke where the cube got to 8. Two game match, 0-1, 16-1, Kent wins.

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And, by the way, he was a gentleman throughout the whole thing. He wasn't cursing and kicking the chair. He was just like he's my dad congratulating me. That was really kind of neat.

Mike Senkiewicz: Barclay worshiped the three B's: baseball, Bach, and backgammon.

I knew him briefly in two respects. The first time I went to Monte Carlo, he wrote me a letter with money enclosed, which said, "I really love the way you and Jim Pasko play. Would you bet on yourselves with this?"

Kent Goulding: With the bookmaker. They always had an officially sanctioned bookmaker at the backgammon tournament.

Mike Senkiewicz: I still have the letter. It was very complimentary. We didn't win, but he seemed perfectly fine with that.

Then the next time I met him, I played him in Monte Carlo. I think it was a long match in either the consolation or the main event, and he beat me. And I was a bad loser. I didn't like to lose. I still don't, but I'm —

Kent Goulding: I'll attest to that.

Mike Senkiewicz: — a little better about it than I used to be. But he was so nice. And he said, "I am so proud to beat you. This is one of the best days of my life." And he went on — I was so ashamed to do anything wrong or say anything nasty. It would have been intolerable for me to have misbehaved

there. But that's the kind of guy he was. He made you feel good about losing. He acknowledged that he beat a better player, and that's something that you don't get from many players.

Robert Stoller: The third of our inductees, who unfortunately has passed away, was Walter Trice, and his monumental work was *Backgammon Boot Camp*. Did either of you know Mr. Trice?

Kent Goulding: Of course.

Robert Stoller: Tell us about him.

Kent Goulding: When I first became aware of Walter, he was a very strong regional player from the Boston area. I might have categorized him as what I used to call, "Wooger clones," Wooger being W-G-R, which is my techno name for Bill Robertie, because of his initials, WGR, pronounced "Wooger."

He kind of liked it, even. We entered the Monte Carlo team championship one year, me and Senk and Robertie and probably Nack. Nack and I were running the book, and there were three-man teams. So we had four, and one of us would take care of the business while the other three played in the team championship. And we kept trying to come up with clever names. And was it you, Michael —

Mike Senkiewicz: I think so.

Kent Goulding: Wooger was one of our

guys, and somewhere along the way he was winning the stupid World Championship, so we called ourselves the Boogie Woogers.

And Bill — it might sound like it's insulting — first of all, he didn't mind Wooger. He still doesn't mind Wooger. He likes Master Zero a little better, but that's another story. But Wooger, he'll respond to it, at least coming from me. But Mikey comes up with Boogie Woogers. Robertie, instead of going, "Oh, shut up, don't be a jerk," Robertie lights up, it's cool. The team is going to be named after him, and he's got Ballard, Goulding, and Senkiewicz.

Mike Senkiewicz: There's the master, and then there are the plebians.

Kent Goulding: Bill Robertie — he was the king of Boston. Now others will say, "Oh, no, no, I was better than Robertie." But when you get several good players working together, whether they like it or not, it's like in tennis or other sports, there's an upward spiral. I mean, me and Nack and Mikey spent years playing in the famous Harvey Huie chouette....

Robert Stoller: Okay, so let's go back to Walter Trice.

Kent Goulding: Walter Trice was a very strong player who came out of the Boston syndicate, where Bill Robertie was sort of the plutonium which drove the reactor. Walter Trice came out of this reactor. And I originally viewed Walter as a very friendly, but — and I mean this in a flattering way

— a geekish, nerdy kind of guy.

Billy Eisenberg was more Broadway Billy, like Joe Namath. I think I even called Billy Eisenberg "Broadway Billy." He was mainly a bridge player, but he played backgammon; he played backgammon very well, until he left it for bridge altogether and eventually left bridge for snooker. But Trice —

Robert Stoller: Trice was more of the scholastic —

Kent Goulding: Yes. Scholastic with an endearing twist, okay. He focused on learning the game, whether you thought he was a cool dude or a nerd or not, it didn't make any difference. And he was always friendly and pleasant, within that context.

Robert Stoller: We were chatting with Neil Kazaross earlier this evening, and we were talking, in the context of Walter Trice, the "effective pip count." Does that phrase mean anything to either of you?

Mike Senkiewicz: Not to me. I never did anything mathematical in backgammon.

Kent Goulding: It rings a bell. It has to do with adjusting for wastage and not using raw pip count as the only measure to evaluate a race. To take an extreme example: ten checkers on the ace point is ten pips, and one checker on the ten point is ten pips, but that's not the same position. And my recollection is that Walter was attacking that problem.

Mike Senkiewicz: When was this book written?

Robert Stoller: My recollection is 2004. Here it is. 2004. I've got the second printing, 2007.

Mike Senkiewicz: I've just recently seen it. I assume it's a very good book, but it wouldn't be a book that I would be attracted to. The kind of books I liked had a lot of mistakes in them, and the idea for me was to find them without anybody else telling me where they were. So for example I liked Barclay Cooke's book, *Paradoxes and Probabilities*.

Robert Stoller: Joe Dwek's *Backgammon for Profit*, I think that was subtitled.

Mike Senkiewicz: Which has six positions where the move he says is the best move is actually the worst move. And when you do the work to find those flaws, you get much better than being told something that is correct, because it's now in you. It's imbued in your memory and your aesthetic sense.

So books of this kind, as much as I admire their organization and accuracy, I don't find useful, because I don't get as much out of them. Just reading doesn't make you understand things.

Robert Stoller: And the critical issue is the understanding.

Mike Senkiewicz: Yes, because you have to execute. You have to do it over the board.

So in some ways, unless you can teach or do it, you really don't know it. And the best way to do it is to dismantle books, as opposed to read them. And good books are less useful for that purpose.

Robert Stoller: Well, we have an author here of at least a number of journals, articles, publications —

Mike Senkiewicz: Yeah, full of mistakes. They were very good.

Kent Goulding: Thank you, Michael.

Robert Stoller: So let's get to that. I have here Volume 1, Number 1, *Backgammon with the Champions*, and this is a deeply analyzed match, analyzed by K.G., Kent Goulding. And our two players are Paul Magriel and Billy Eisenberg. So how did this come into existence?

Kent Goulding: There was a massive void, in my view of the backgammon world and community, which needed filling. And coming from a chess background, I learned chess by playing through games of the masters, of the champions. There were chess publications that only contained lots and lots of grandmaster chess games with minimal annotations — good move, bad move, whatever. You have to work out why it's a good move or bad move, but you get game after game after game after game after game.

There was no sense of "this is proprietary information, my games are my art, you can't

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MIKE SENKIEWICZ

Master chess player, Scrabble legend, backgammon champion, and mainstay of the New York games scene for four decades, Mike Senkiewicz (l) raised the level of backgammon play since the early 1980s with his insightful analyses of the game.



take that away from me, you can't exploit that without paying me or without my legal permission." All games played by chess grandmasters were in the public domain.

Backgammon had — I won't say zero, because there were here and there people before I came along, certainly including Magriel, working to record backgammon games so that they could be replayed and analyzed. But it was peripheral to the mainstream community.

In fact, there was a sort of an attitude in the mid to late 70s which I tried very hard to overcome, because I didn't like it, of top players being inaccessible. If one of the common people came up and said, "Hey, what about this position, or what about

that position, they'd get: "You want me to teach you? You've got to pay me." Or you play a match, a guy makes a move, maybe the poor guy loses, you crush him like a bug. He says, "You know that 4 cube I took and you gammoned me, was that a take?" And they get: "How did it work out for you, Bozo?"

I had to put up with that, and I didn't like that. It was not only mean-spirited, it was counterproductive. The way I looked at it, the more people play and enjoy backgammon, the more fish I have to feed on. And if I can allow the fish to have a little bit of knowledge, well, maybe that's not a bad thing either.

Mike Senkiewicz: Well, there's a counter-

argument to that. For my part, I never withheld information except if it was directly interfering with something I was doing. But I would say over three-quarters of the questions were asked of me by people who knew the answer and wanted to vindicate their own belief by getting a more recognized name to back them up. And in effect, what they were trying to attain was power: "Look, he says I'm right. You're all idiots." That sort of thing. And I never wanted to support that.

So I was reluctant to respond to people who were coming off games, where they knew somebody had made a mistake, but wanted to vindicate themselves in the eyes of others.

ROBERT AMADOR

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But if somebody comes up to me and asks me about something I think is a legitimate question, I'll be happy to answer it. Truth is, most people don't get anything out of that anyway, because knowledge without context is useless.

Robert Stoller: That's the point you were making a few minutes ago; you've got to do your own spadework to really learn.

Kent Goulding: This magazine was not put together in some professional studio somewhere. It was all done in my house. The mechanics of it, the writing, the diagrams, what went into the graphics here circa 1980 when we didn't have home computers, this was all homemade.

Robert Stoller: Let's develop that idea. Volume 1, Number 1, copyright 1981. So Barclay Cooke's book was published at about the same time, but my recollection is there was essentially no literature in backgammon comparable to the chess literature that you've described, games that you can study and analyze and work through. And what I see in this is Kent Goulding says, "Goddammit, there should be, and I'm going to make it happen."

Kent Goulding: That's exactly right.

Mike Senkiewicz: Remember, there was no software at the time. The only other person who contributed to the literature was Hal Heinrich from Canada, and he certainly deserves an exception to the American-only Hall of Fame restriction.

[The American Backgammon Hall of Fame does not have a restriction in place requiring that inductees must be American citizens. -Ed.] He did a colossal amount of work getting matches recorded and distributed. He was also World Champion.

Kent Goulding: Yes, and he collaborated on a newsletter.

Robert Stoller: — on a book which has a title that resonates with chess: *New Ideas in Backgammon*.

Mike Senkiewicz: That was with Kit Woolsey, right? That's a really good book. That was one of the first books that used computers to test various positions.

Robert Stoller: But that's like 15 or 20 years in the future. Here we are in 1981 —

Kent Goulding: So there were really cool challenges which were fun for me. Part was just the physical production, how am I going to put it together, how am I going to design it, how am I going to make it work.

Robert Stoller: So how did you do that?

Kent Goulding: Well, backgammon has always been, throughout all the *Inside Backgammon*, throughout running the World Cups, a fun hobby with the added goal of improving the backgammon world.

If I can show the backgammon community this, if I can show the backgammon community a rating list, if I can show

the backgammon community a proper magazine, if I can show the backgammon community how to run a big, international tournament, including the setup for the players — everything has to be great, if you're going to bring in championship players, you've got to make them feel like champions.

I have never been to a tournament except for the World Cup where the playing space allotted for each match was that great, where the conditions, the lighting, the tablecloths were that nice, where the equipment was provided and of high quality — not where everybody brings their own equipment.

Back in the old days, there were crap boards, or the organizer provided cheap-as-possible sets. I got the best sets I could afford, and ran tournaments the way they should be run, in order to show the rest of the backgammon community how to do it.

Sadly, after 16 years of my tournaments, they didn't quite catch on. And people still say: "Well, when are you going to do another World Cup?" "What do you mean, me? Everybody has seen it done. You guys do it." But they don't do it.

Each player had a professionally constructed executive nameplate which said "Mike Senkiewicz" or "Kent Goulding." If you happened to have either won a World Cup or the World Championship, it would say "Bill Robertie, World Champion 1983, 1987," or whatever the years were. If you had won a previous World Cup, "Mike Svobodny,

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World Champion, 1980,” whatever, that would be on your nameplate.

And two years later, when you showed up at the World Cup again, you’d have a new nameplate. If we got something wrong or if you were entering and had not told us in advance you were coming, we had the engraving shop within a stone’s throw: “Ballard, quick, quit your game, get down there, and get me this nameplate.” And in addition to a nameplate, there would be a little flag, USA-Germany, a little stand with two flags.

Robert Stoller: Like the chess —

Kent Goulding: Yes, like you see in the chess tournaments. And we really knocked them dead when we moved the World Cup to Dallas. The first big tournament I ran to show I could do it and to show the world what it should be like was in D.C. Then the next couple or three were in Boston.

Robert Stoller: At the Sheraton Commander.

Kent Goulding: The Sheraton Commander. And then Harvey Huie caught me in Monte Carlo one year and said — and I barely knew him then – “Kent, you’ve got to move the World Cup to Dallas.” And I said politely, “Who the heck are you, and what are you talking about?” “Well, I’m Harvey Huie, and you’re going to move the World Cup to Dallas.” I said, “Mr. Huie, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Convince me.” And he said, “Come to Dallas. Be my guest.”

And we moved the World Cup to Dallas.

Mike Senkiewicz: Yes. He was very convincing. Should have been inducted.

Robert Stoller: Well, he may yet. This is just the first year.

Kent Goulding: For different reasons. There used to be, in the early, fancy days of backgammon — you’d go to Cannes and Monte Carlo, and it’s black-tie dinners.

I showed up at one of my first big international tournaments in Cannes. You know, I’m a 20-something-year-old twerp. And we had read in the brochure, Monte Carlo was the next week. It was the European Championships then. The World Championships were being held in the Bahamas.

The tournament which was the European Championships, thanks to Lewis Deyong, I believe, became the World Championship. And the Monte Carlo setting was spectacular. But this year, 1975 or ‘6, it was — there was a big tournament in Cannes, and then the European Championships in Monte Carlo. And I went with a family of backgammon players. We stayed in Nice, and had a great time there.

And the brochure for Monte Carlo said black-tie auction dinner. So I got myself a tuxedo, as did the people I was traveling with. They probably already had them. I was a wet-between-the-ears twerp. But the Cannes brochure just said “auction dinner.”

So I wore a business suit to Cannes, as did my traveling companions. We were the only ones not in black tie. And it didn’t even say black tie on the brochure. That’s my kind of backgammon community. That’s the way it’s supposed to be.

But in the U.S. this stuff wasn’t happening. Okay, I’m going to have an auction dinner. And once we move to Dallas, we’re going to have rockabilly live, cool, semi-local headlining artists, compliments of Malcolm Davis’ good buddy Ronnie Dawson, who died recently, who was a musician.

All the little details were there. This wasn’t just show up, get a beat-up backgammon board and play some backgammon, and — you had to look your best, you got good food, you got music, you got the best conditions you could possibly play in, you got an auction dinner, the dinner was reasonable, and you got an auction conducted by a professional brilliant auctioneer with acerbic wit who could keep talking forever and keep the action going and who came cheap.

Robert Stoller: My guess is one of those guys might have had the initials K.G.

Kent Goulding: That was me. Yes. And, look, if I can do this, if I can put all these pieces together, why can’t anybody else? So for 16 years I did that.

Robert Stoller: Let me respond. I think that, from what I know of the World Cup, the American Backgammon Tour is a

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monument in its own right, but not in the same league as the World Cup. And I’ve been asking myself why that might be.

Kent Goulding: Me, too.

Robert Stoller: Do you have any theories?

Kent Goulding: No.

Robert Stoller: Okay.

Kent Goulding: No. (laughing)

Robert Stoller: ABT, however, is fabulous in its own right.

Kent Goulding: They’re doing a spectacular job. One thing I failed to ever accomplish, not that I could have done it on my own, was to bring all the little fiefdoms in the U.S. together into a coherent entity with responsible, well-meaning, intelligent, hardworking people at the helm.

I laid out bits and pieces of the puzzle with *Backgammon with the Champions*, with *Inside Backgammon*, with the K.G. rating list, with “here’s how tournaments are run.” I laid out all the bits and pieces, but I could not pull everything together and get a U.S. Backgammon Federation.

I didn’t actually try to do that, but people from time to time did. We’re going to have a meeting. We’re going to have a meeting at the end of the tournament, at Henry Watson’s tournament in Vegas, we’re going to get together with Carol Joy Cole or with

Pat Gibson or with Les and Sue Boyd, we’re going to get together with Bill Davis, or K.G. or Patti Rubin, or whomever. What can we do to make everything better for all of us?

I even attended one of these meetings way back when with people whose names I don’t remember. They were from the previous generation. And there were kind words and interesting thoughts, but it never went anywhere.

Really, in the years since I stopped playing a lot, the last dozen years or so, the USBGF, which has evolved and which has honored Michael and me this evening, has done a spectacular job.

Robert Stoller: Well, I guess I’ll clamp onto that with the idea, that this is the legacy you established that they now need to pick up and run with. But let’s go back to something that you mentioned earlier. In 1981 you do *Backgammon with the Champions*. I have here an international rating list dated 1993. When did you start doing that?

Kent Goulding: My recollection is that it was much earlier, but I could have it wrong. Somewhere along the way, years went by, and I had been out to Vegas, I’d been to Monte Carlo, I’d been to New York, I’d been to wherever there was a backgammon tournament, been to the Bahamas. The Bahamas are like a suburb of Ft. Lauderdale, Miami.

Mikey and I were traveling around wherever

there was a decent tournament in the U.S. or maybe abroad, we’d sometimes go to it.

Anyway, I finally decided to run an invitational tournament. At the U.S. Chess Invitational Championship they invite something like the 16 top-rated American players to determine who’s really the best, okay?

So I wanted to run a tournament with a side event that invited the 16 best players in the U.S. and see if they’d come. That side event would be a showcase. I would hope to draw in lesser players, not necessarily to play in the Open division or the Intermediate division, but just to make it more of a spectator sport. Make the invitees, the champions, special.

We got big, oversized photos on foam board, put up on the wall above or below the banner, you know, Billy Horan, you know, 1992, boom, Mike Svobodny. Those were pictures like you see at the World Series of Poker, though obviously that did not exist yet. That was years in the future. They stole that from me, where you go in to play and on the rafters are big pictures of the 1982 champion, the 1983 champion. There was ugly old Danny Harrington up there.

Mike Senkiewicz: They stole that from the NBA.

Kent Goulding: Well, sort of. We had pictures, not just jerseys. And let me tell you, the players fed off of it, they’d preen and puff out and feel good.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

Robert Stoller: Well, I hope that the USBGF listens to this interview —

Kent Goulding: They’ve seen it before. They’ve been blind.

Robert Stoller: Maybe this will open their eyes. That’s my hope.

Kent Goulding: So I’m going to bring in the 16 best players, if they’ll come. Build it, and will they come? I was a little nervous. I ran around town, I negotiated with the hotels, I found a place, I did the convention-manager sort of job.

Robert Stoller: But how are you going to choose the entrants?

Kent Goulding: Well, I am.

Robert Stoller: And how are you going to do that?

Kent Goulding: There are two things. One is, I know them all, and I have my own brain to judge who’s good and who’s bad. I was pretty good at that.

I couldn’t necessarily tell you where I fit in the hierarchy, but I had a pretty good idea. I knew who was competitive with me. And those guys I wanted in here. Then there were reputations. There are certain people, whether or not you buy into their rep, who had such star power that they had to be included, okay?

And then I think I had started at least the

fledging K.G. rating list before I ran the first U.S. invitational. That could be an old geezer getting his facts a little screwed up, but I recollect I wanted to bring in one or two players who would not otherwise get in, but who had ratings in my lists that were the equivalent of the pretty boy superstars, okay?

And how many people am I going to have to invite in order to get 16? Am I even going to get 16? So I made a list. I might have consulted with some of my buddies, Mikey or Robertie or Kit, probably all those people and more.

And I knew all the players, I competed with them. It wasn’t like I was some stranger who popped out of nowhere or just a random organizer trying to draw them in to such-and-such a tournament. I was one of them.

But I wasn’t going to be playing; I was going to be running this, and I was going to show the world how it could be done. First of all, I was going to be proud of myself and get a big ego trip out of it. And it was going to be cool, a lot of fun.

I sent out maybe 21 invitations just to see who would respond. The first 16 people that get a deposit into my post office box are in, okay? And I sent them out across the USA, normal mail. And I said to myself “Oh, my God, I’ve got to go to the post office box to see if anything’s there.”

And within the two or three days it would take the mail to get out to New York, to

Boston, to Los Angeles, to Las Vegas, to wherever, if the person got the envelope, opened it, read it, went, “Holy crap,” wrote a check, and sent it back, what am I going to get?

There was about a four-day span, and I had 17 checks, out of 21 people. (laughing) So now I had a waiting list.

Robert Stoller: You’re on a roll.

Kent Goulding: Boom. People were really into it, and —

Robert Stoller: Why did it not continue? Why did it fail?

Kent Goulding: It didn’t fail. *Inside Backgammon* didn’t fail. The World Cups didn’t fail. The world moved on. You know, Kent got another hair up his ass and decided to do something different.

Robert Stoller: Okay.

Kent Goulding: I needed a new drug, you know?

Robert Stoller: Amen to that. And there was nobody, however, to follow up on your legacy?

Kent Goulding: Just me.

Robert Stoller: Okay.

Kent Goulding: And I get to my next step. I mean, I do this for how long — what

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

was the gap between 1982 or ‘3, whenever I stopped this — and when Bill and I decided, “Oh, let’s do something a little bit different.” When did *Inside Backgammon* get going?

Mike Senkiewicz: The work ethic to do stuff like this! These projects require organization, consistency, and real skills. And there are very few out there that can do this sort of thing. I mean, if there were, they certainly have been keeping quiet all these years. Think of how many backgammon books are worth reading.

Robert Stoller: Well, that’s precisely my point, and earlier in this week some of my colleagues who are not part of the backgammon community have asked me, “Well, how come I know a lot about chess even though I’m not a serious chess player or tournament player, but I really haven’t had any exposure or awareness that there was a backgammon tournament community?” So what do you think about that? Is the chess community inherently larger or more —

Mike Senkiewicz: There are more books about chess than all the other games combined, so it’s a little unfair to compare the two. The thing that separates chess from backgammon, in terms of popularity, is chess has a very strong aesthetic appeal. You show beautiful games, beautiful combinations and moves, and people who understand the game really are drawn to it.

In the 40 years I’ve been playing backgammon, I have never been shown a beautiful game of backgammon.

Kent Goulding: Got to look at my games.

Mike Senkiewicz: No, I mean, people coming up to me and saying, “Look at this game I played.” I have, in those 40 years, heard several thousand bad-luck stories. It’s a totally different perspective.

Kent Goulding: Well, Michael’s hitting the nail on the head obliquely. There’s a huge difference between what backgammon historically has been and to a certain extent as it exists today, which is not the case at all in either bridge or chess, and that’s — I don’t want to drop the G-bomb on a G-rated network here. That’s “gambling.”

I mean, backgammon players — Michael talked about cutting his eyeteeth grinding in the \$2 chouette, the \$1 chouette, the \$5 chouette. Well, that’s all about money. It’s all about gambling. It sounds like dirty, low-life poker players, because it is.

Backgammon is a blend between a gambling game and a mind game, a game of skill. And with games like this, things quickly get problematic. Even in the legalities of it, look at the horrible throes that poker has gone through in certain jurisdictions within the United States with the “Is poker a game of skill or is poker a gambling game?” If it’s a gambling game, then everybody wants to know, “There’s lots of money involved, why is this even legal? Why can you do this? Why can you have online bridge sites and online chess sites but not have online poker sites?”

The money gets big, it attracts attention, and the G-bomb gets dropped. “This is gambling; this is illegal.” This society shuns gamblers, convicts gamblers, prosecutes gamblers.

Mike Senkiewicz: Hey, we come from England, which is the biggest gambling country in Europe.

Kent Goulding: Right. Well, it’s things like this, now that we’ve dropped the G-bomb all to be edited out later, it’s things like this tournament that were an attempt to prove that this is not a gambling game; this is a game of skill.

It’s things like the U.S. Invitational as opposed to the thousand-dollar jackpot. Well, what sounds like a gambling game, the U.S. Invitational Championship or the thousand-dollar jackpot?

People ask me, “Well, what was the entry fee to the World Cup?” Just like with the poker events. Well, where is Eric Seidel today? Eric Seidel is in Melbourne, Australia. He was a great backgammon player in the early years, came out of the Mayfair, sweetheart of a guy who turned to poker and set the world on fire. He’s in Melbourne, Australia, right now at the final table of a hundred-thousand-dollar-entry-fee tournament where everybody at the final table’s already got \$350,000 wrapped up, and the winner is going to walk away with \$1.7 million. And I don’t care how you convert Australian dollars to U.S. dollars; it’s a lot of money.

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

But it’s poker. You think poker, you don’t think chess, you don’t think bridge. You think gambling and money.

Mike Senkiewicz: Why can’t it be a game of skill you gamble at?

Robert Stoller: Which is exactly what I was going to ask you. That is the precise question.

Kent Goulding: As Magriel would say, it’s making order out of chaos. I mean, fundamentally it’s a dice game, and there’s chaos there. And our challenge is to control that chaos. But that also is a huge detriment to putting backgammon on the same plane as chess or bridge. There are fine points of law: can you do this legally?

Mike Senkiewicz: Shouldn’t be comparing them.

Robert Stoller: I would say you’re both right. You are looking at the gem from different facets. I personally never play backgammon for money. I’m happy to pay an entry fee, but the way my parents raised me, gambling debts were not acceptable under any circumstance. Curiously, my dad was a great poker player, and my mother forced him to share his winnings with her. But she was adamant, no gambling ...

Mike Senkiewicz: Your father was a great poker player; he wasn’t gambling.

Robert Stoller: Well, amen, because it was the game of skill that he was better at

than his contemporaries. I love backgammon, and I love chess, and I also love Go, which I teach up in Anchorage. But they’re different kinds of experiences that I love.

We had Neil Kazaross here just ahead of you guys, and he’s got a quip from his interview with Chicago Point: “Backgammon, like life, is decision making under a constant circumstance of uncertainty.” And that’s exactly right. Now —

Mike Senkiewicz: Yeah, but you’re leaving out the stress element. If you’re not playing for anything, there’s really no stress.

Robert Stoller: Does it have to be stressful to be enjoyable?

Mike Senkiewicz: Well, no, but it’s a challenge. In life, you experience the stress of uncertainty, because wrong decisions lead to big consequences.

Robert Stoller: That’s right.

Mike Senkiewicz: This is sort of like a miniature of that, where you practice making decisions and keeping a level head under adversity.

Robert Stoller: Neil Kazaross made that exact point sitting right over there about an hour ago.

Mike Senkiewicz: I was listening behind the door there. To play backgammon for no money really reduces its effect.

Robert Stoller: Well, I’ll take your word for it.

Mike Senkiewicz: I play backgammon online on GridGammon, and I experiment all the time, mostly to see where my limits are and what’s possible and what isn’t. But if I were playing for money, I could never do that. I would have to find a straighter path to the truth. And I think it diminishes the game to play for nothing.

Kent Goulding: How many players do you think would be here at this tournament today if the entry fee was five dollars across the board?

Robert Stoller: Well, that’s a good question. Probably the beginners, and possibly me. No, certainly me, I would say, I would absolutely be here for that, and probably nobody else. That would be my guess.

Kent Goulding: But that’s where the charge comes for a lot of people, good players or bad alike. The good news is that there is an element of luck involved; otherwise, I could never beat Mikey. But there’s also a big element of skill, as the people you’re interviewing have proven over decades and decades and decades.

Robert Stoller: Absolutely right.

Kent Goulding: The thrill — we used to play for a long time in a high-stakes chouette that traveled the world, rotating — some players kicked in, some players croaked out, some players thought, “This is going

Backgammon Hall of Fame: Goulding and Senkiewicz

to be easy; I’m going to jump in the chouette and pick on the soft touch in there.” And they realized there was one pigeon and seven wolverines. So it didn’t work: if you couldn’t claw with the wolverines, you weren’t getting anywhere near making any money out of this thing.

Mike Senkiewicz: You had to fight in the pecking order, basically, and if you weren’t strong willed and had good nerves, you were going to fail.

Robert Stoller: Okay. So the next thing I want to go to is a fabulous statement that you have at Volume 1, Number 1 of *Inside Backgammon*. Do you remember the movie Citizen Kane?

Kent Goulding: I have it in my collection.

Mike Senkiewicz: Overrated.

Kent Goulding: I haven’t watched it in forever.

Robert Stoller: Okay. So Orson Welles —

Mike Senkiewicz: Clearly only the second best movie of all time.

Robert Stoller: Okay. So Orson Welles is playing Charles Foster Kane, and he’s just picked up this little newspaper that he thinks it might be fun to run, and they’ve remade the front page about 17 times, and the new front page is this statement of principles for the *New York Inquirer*.

So now this is page 2, the inside cover, Volume 1, Number 1, “Welcome to *Inside Backgammon*.” Quote, “Compared to most other games of skill, backgammon is nearly devoid of quality, instructive literature. Both of us” (that is, Kent Goulding and Bill Robertie, the publishers and editors) “have our game-playing background in chess. When we first took up backgammon, we were extremely frustrated by the lack of books and magazines from which to learn. We have tried in the past to fill some of that void, and we like to think we’ve succeeded, at least to a degree. We have now joined forces to produce what we think will be some of the best backgammon literature ever. *Inside Backgammon* is intended to be everything we both looked for years ago. This is not a newsletter. The first six issues, taken as a unit, will be the equivalent of an excellent book, covering all aspects of the game. The majority of the work will be produced in house by the two of us. We will also endeavor to solicit quality articles from other top experts, including Mike Senkiewicz.”

Kent Goulding: I couldn’t have put that better myself.

Robert Stoller: Amen. And, to me, this is like the Charles Foster Kane statement of principles for the opening issue of the *New York Inquirer* after his character in Citizen Kane takes it over. I love this.

But here’s my proposition to you. What I have observed among the really strong

players whom I watch is everybody now worships at the altar of the bots. I think the bots have killed the market for books.

Mike Senkiewicz: Well, I think poker has killed backgammon. Nothing more than that. Backgammon’s not growing in this country.

Kent Goulding: You’re partly right. And that’s, sadly, more the fault of the consumer than anything else, because there is tons to be learned — the bot will give you answers which may or may not even be right but are mostly right, but you’ve got to work out for yourself why.

Robert Stoller: Right. And that, to me, is Bill Robertie’s genius, as exemplified here in *Modern Backgammon*. It’s a meditation on the reasoning behind the neural net’s choices. How can I tell myself a coherent story? What are the principles the bot is using?

Now Kent, you have a match, which I insist you play. And if it turns out your match is over in two games because the cube gets to 64, come back and keep chatting with us.

Mike Senkiewicz: Just turn it to 16, that’s all.

Kent Goulding: Okay. I’m around all weekend. I can talk forever. ♦

- ROBERT STOLLER

DAVID PRESSER VS. FRANK SIMON

Final of the Online Circuit Tournament of Champions

By Marty Storer with additional commentary by David Presser

Twenty-three players won USBGF online tournaments in 2014, qualifying for the [USBGF 2014 Online Circuit Tournament of Champions](#). The 2014 events included Circuit Monthly tournaments; Masters, Advanced, and Intermediate Divisional events; and the National Internet Championship for Open, Advanced, and Intermediate players. The format of the USBGF 2014 Online Circuit Tournament of Champions was single elimination beginning with 11 point matches and advancing to 19 points in the final. The finalists, David Presser (Israel) and Frank Simon (Germany) received free membership extensions, as well as an analysis of their final match by USBGF Editor for Matches, Marty Storer, which is included here.



DAVID PRESSER

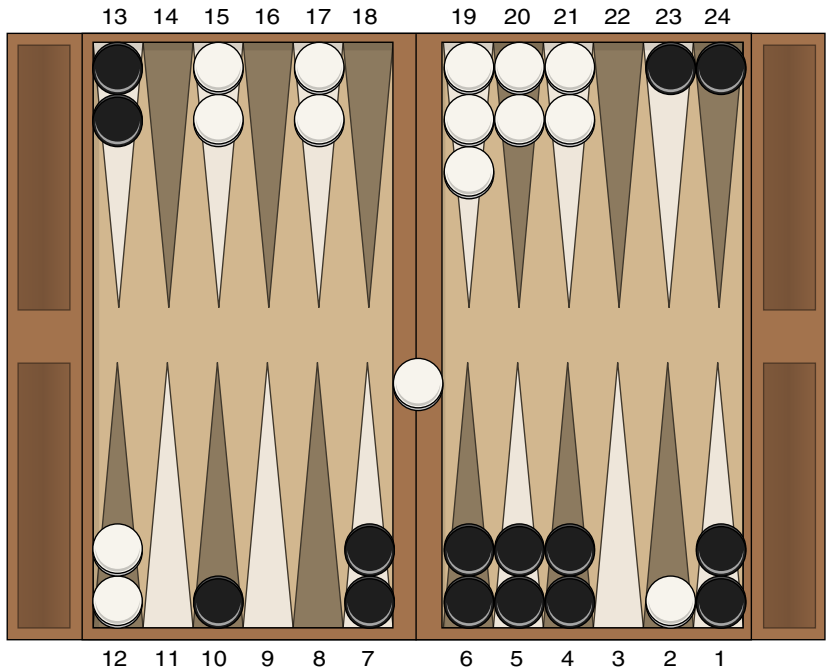
David Presser is #1 on the USBGF Online Leaderboard out of over 650 players, having won 8 USBGF Online Circuit tournaments, accumulating an Elo rating of 1984, and achieving a phenomenal 75% win-loss ratio in over 100 matches. He's also had success on the national tournament circuit, winning the 2014 Minnesota Masters Jackpot, the 2014 NY Metro Limited Jackpot, 3rd in the 2013 Las Vegas Open Limited Jackpot, and finalist in the 2014 Wisconsin Badger Classic.



David Presser vs. Frank Simon

In the first game, David had a stronger board and Frank had a vulnerable blot plus a man on the bar. Was this enough to justify doubling?

Position 1



Pip: 146
Frank Simon
19-Away

19-Away
David Presser
Pip: 129

Game 1, Move 5: Black (David) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	58.20% (G:33.66% B:0.58%)	58.48% (G:35.28% B:0.48%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	41.80% (G:12.76% B:0.83%)	41.52% (G:12.93% B:0.86%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.375	+0.800
Cubeful Equities		
🎲 No double:	+0.496	±0.014 (+0.482..+0.510)
✓ Double/Take:	+0.467 (-0.028)	±0.020 (+0.448..+0.487)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.504)	
Best Cube action: No double / Take		
Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 5.3%		
Rollout details		
1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

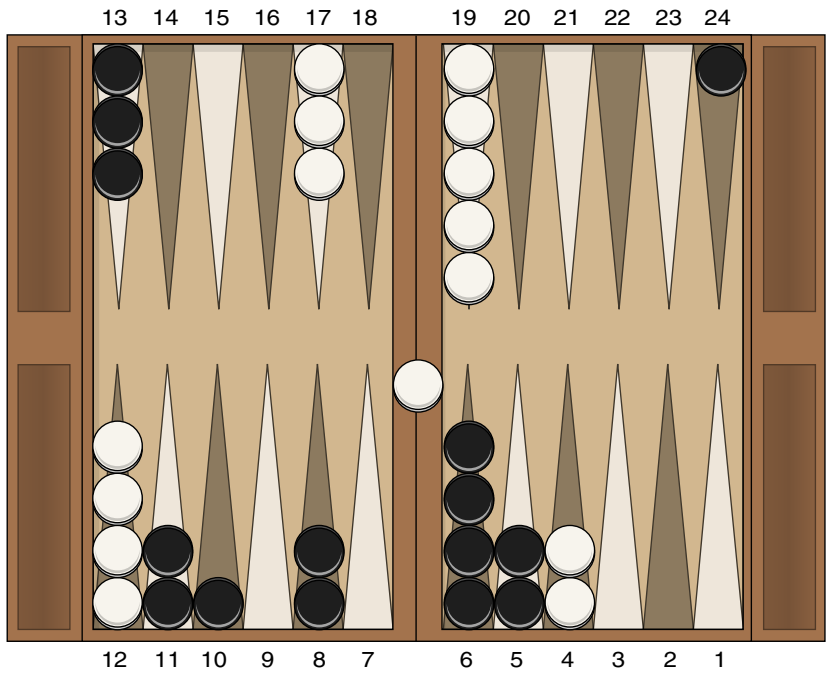
KAREN DAVIS

A double is somewhat optimistic. Black has reasonable attacking chances, but owns the ace point and therefore can't rely on blocking. White is behind in the race and on the bar against Black's stronger board, but White's board is good and his blocking position isn't bad either. Black figures to have trouble escaping both back checkers, and will likely be in trouble if White anchors or hits. loose with a 5, Frank missed the return, and David won a four-point gammon after closing his board.

David doubled and Frank took. David hit Frank won a point in the second game, and David got an edge in the third.

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Position 2



Pip: 173
Frank Simon
18-Away

15-Away
David Presser
Pip: 145

Game 3, Move 4: Black (David) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	69.85% (G:16.23% B:0.59%)	69.93% (G:16.65% B:0.64%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	30.15% (G:5.28% B:0.17%)	30.07% (G:5.33% B:0.16%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.516	+1.049
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	+0.789	±0.011 (+0.778..+0.801)
✓ Double/Take:	+0.771 (-0.018)	±0.014 (+0.757..+0.784)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.211)	
Best Cube action: No double / Take		
Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 8.1%		
Rollout details		
2592 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

David doubled. About the only thing to be said for Frank’s position is that he has a strong advanced anchor. But that’s plenty! Although he’s behind 28 pips with a checker on the bar, he has an easy take. David still has a checker back, and Frank figures to enter easily, perhaps creating a trailing blot that would increase his shot equity.

A rollout indicates that David’s double is a bit light — but only if you don’t consider the real possibility that even a strong opponent might pass. XG says that a mere 8.1% passing chance is enough to justify the cube-turn, so David’s double seems to be the best practical choice.

If the scores are reversed, Black has a small double. At a score of 0-0, the double is borderline.

David: *Indeed Frank had an anchor, but I thought that with a 28-pip lead, stronger board, and a checker on the bar it is a clear money double (a bit optimistic I guess).*

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Without my back checker, I would think the take-pass decision is in question. My real problem was the unfamiliar score of 18a-15a. I know I would not send the cube if it was something like 10a-7a, but wasn’t sure how to adjust to the score. When I am in doubt, I tend to send the cube. There is always a chance that my opponent will drop,

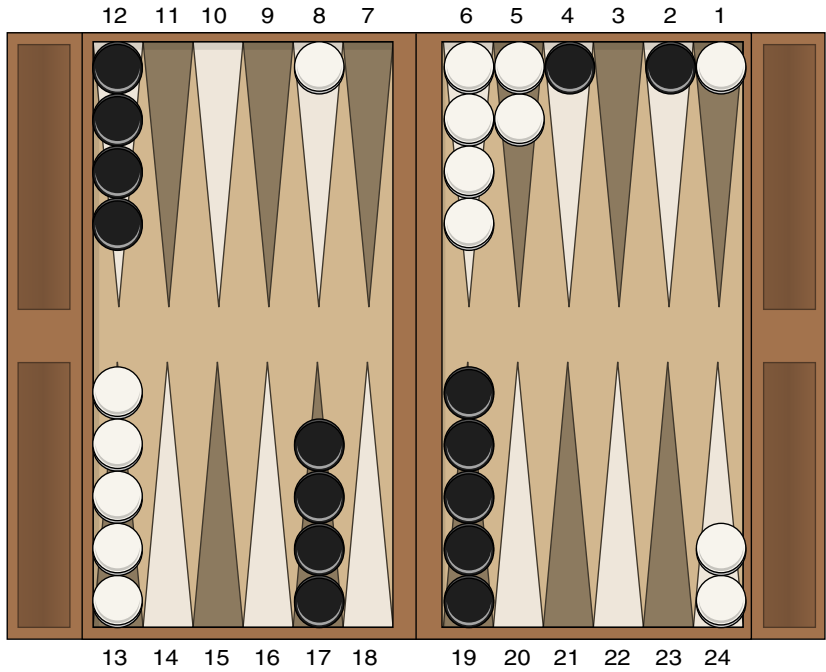
especially when on the bar.

Frank took the cube. David rolled 53 and correctly ran to the 16 point. Frank entered with 51, but David rolled double 3 to make his 7 point and safety both blots. From there, he bore in safely and won two points to take a five-point lead.

The fourth game turned into a race, and Frank won a point after rolling boxcars.

The fifth game was exciting. Frank opened with 31 and David split with his 52 reply. Frank rolled 52 and hit twice — too loose a play — and David entered both checkers with 42.

Position 3



Pip: 156
Frank Simon
17-Away

13-Away
David Presser
Pip: 158

Game 5, Move 2: White (Frank) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	52.79% (G:18.73% B:0.49%)	52.79% (G:18.69% B:0.51%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	47.21% (G:12.75% B:0.72%)	47.21% (G:12.94% B:0.71%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.109	+0.245
Cubeful Equities		
✎ No double:	+0.210	±0.015 (+0.195..+0.224)
✓ Double/Take:	-0.017 (-0.226)	±0.021 (-0.038..+0.005)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.790)	
Best Cube action: No double / Take		
Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 22.3%		
Rollout details		
1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

Best Cube action: No double / Take
Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 22.3%
Rollout details
1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.

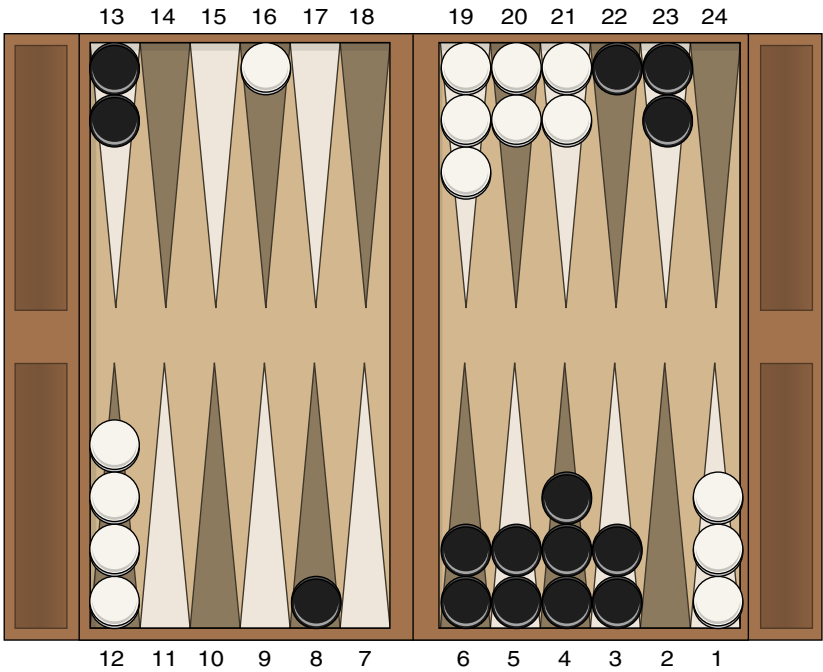
David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Frank doubled! White has some attacking chances, but his eight checkers in the Zone are offset by his two blots and inflexible forward position. Joe Sylvester's PraT heuristic says you can generally double with an advantage in two of three categories:

Position, Race, and Threats. Frank's position falls short of that requirement. His threats are nowhere near overwhelming, the race is close, and David has no positional weaknesses. Even at a four-point deficit, this double is a double whopper.

Frank rolled double 1 to hit and make his 4 point. David missed the return shot, but anchored on the 23. He was able to trap three of Frank's checkers behind a four-prime, and had a 17-number shot in the following position.

Position 4



Pip: 169
Frank Simon
17-Away

13-Away
David Presser
Pip: 142

Game 5, Move 9: Black (David) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No redouble	Redouble/Take
Player Winning Chances:	63.79% (G:33.44% B:6.52%)	63.43% (G:33.73% B:10.18%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	36.21% (G:9.94% B:0.61%)	36.57% (G:9.70% B:0.62%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.548	+0.870
Cubeful Equities		
✓ No redouble:	+0.636	±0.016 (+0.621..+0.652)
Redouble/Take:	+0.271 (-0.365)	±0.029 (+0.242..+0.300)
Redouble/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.364)	
Best Cube action: No redouble / Take		
Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 50.1%		
Rollout details		
1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

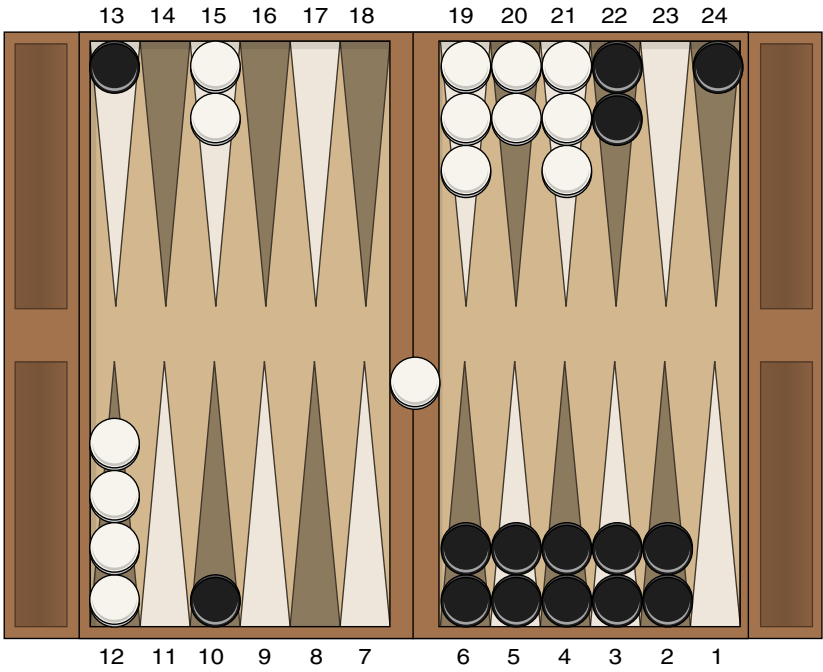
David Presser vs. Frank Simon

This would be a good redouble for money or at 0-0 to 19, but at this score it would be terrible. White still has counterplay, and can

expect to occasionally turn things around and redouble to 8. With the cube on 8, he would get full value from his gammons,

while Black's would be somewhat inefficient with three points of overage. David kept the cube and then increased his edge.

Position 5



Pip: 137
Frank Simon
17-Away

13-Away
David Presser
Pip: 131

Game 5, Move 17: Black (David) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No redouble	Redouble/Take
Player Winning Chances:	71.64% (G:41.56% B:0.66%)	72.97% (G:41.07% B:1.05%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	28.36% (G:6.38% B:0.32%)	27.03% (G:6.46% B:0.41%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.774	+1.384
Cubeful Equities		
No redouble:	+0.894 (-0.106)	±0.004 (+0.889..+0.898)
✓ Redouble/Take:	+1.001 (+0.001)	±0.009 (+0.992..+1.010)
Redouble/Pass:	+1.000	
Best Cube action: Redouble / Pass		
Rollout details		
5184 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

Now David redoubled and Frank took. XG says the cube is perfectly efficient. David figures to win many gammons, but Frank may do well if he comes in quickly, sometimes reaching a strong redouble. David may have trouble escaping his three

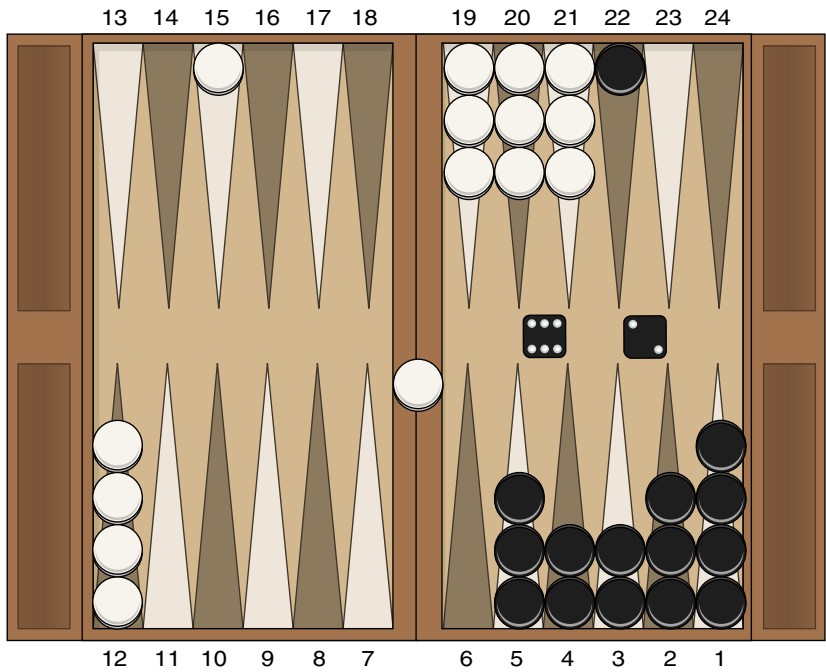
back checkers, and he will often face tough choices as he tries to do so. One such decision came up at Move 26. David: At such a score and in such a game it can easily develop into an 8 cube and that is

the last thing I want. I am holding the cube until I know it is a pass or a close call. If the take looks easy, then I prefer to hold the cube. I was fortunate to get to a position where I can send a perfectly efficient cube. OTB I obviously didn't know that, but I had no idea

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

whether it is a take or a pass, so I decided it was time to send the cube. Admittedly, I would have preferred that Frank pass, as there was a lot of game left and I still feared playing this game on an 8 cube.

Position 6



4 Pip: 132
Frank Simon
17-Away

13-Away
David Presser
Pip: 61

Game 5, Move 26: Black (David) to play 62

1. 🎲	Rollout ¹	22/14	eq: +1.014
	Player:	88.33% (G:43.96% B:0.07%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+1.010...+1.018) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	11.67% (G:0.54% B:0.01%)	Duration: 1 minute 43 seconds
2. ✓	Rollout ¹	22/16 5/3	eq: +0.889 (-0.125)
	Player:	83.01% (G:47.26% B:0.16%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+0.885...+0.893) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	16.99% (G:0.83% B:0.02%)	Duration: 2 minutes 18 seconds

¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 19561810
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

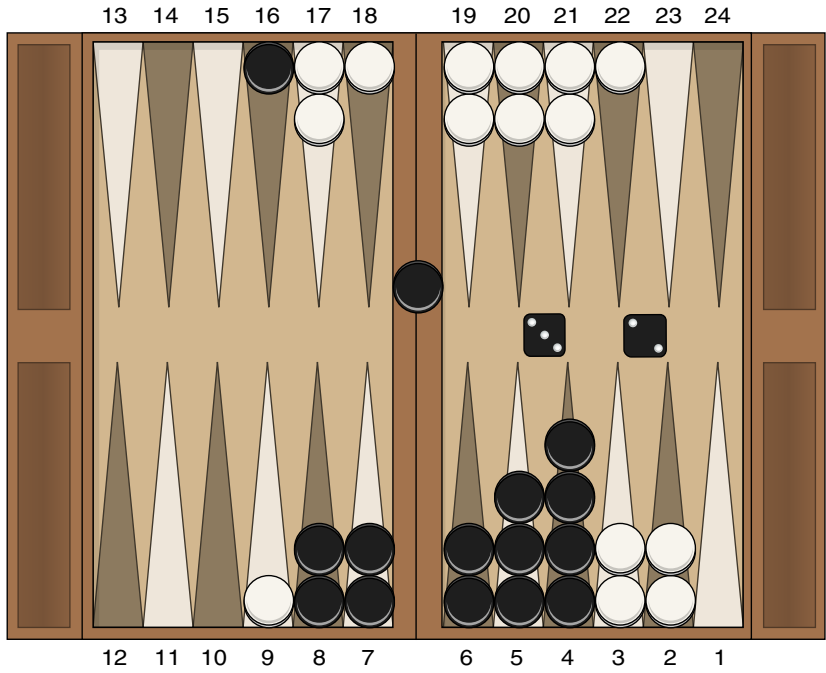
David played 22/16 5/3, hoping to hit Frank's blot. This was a whopper; it's best to run to the 14 point, saving two immediate shots and getting closer to home. David may not need a second checker in order to score a gammon.

Frank stayed on the bar and David rolled 55 to leave a direct shot. But Frank fanned again, and David won eight points.

Down by 12 points in Game 6, Frank got into a 2-3 backgame. In this position, he also had chances to go forward. David had to play 32.

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Position 7



Pip: 162
Frank Simon
17-Away

5-Away
David Presser
Pip: 114

Game 6, Move 13: Black (David) to play 32

1.	Rollout ¹	Bar/23 4/1	eq: +0.145
	Player:	57.41% (G:25.63% B:2.04%)	Conf.: ± 0.016 (+0.129...+0.161) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	42.59% (G:9.28% B:0.38%)	Duration: 18 minutes 25 seconds
2. ✓	Rollout ¹	Bar/22* 16/14	eq: +0.089 (-0.056)
	Player:	54.19% (G:30.55% B:3.56%)	Conf.: ± 0.018 (+0.071...+0.107) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	45.81% (G:8.07% B:0.40%)	Duration: 27 minutes 59 seconds
3.	Rollout ¹	Bar/23 16/13	eq: 0.000 (-0.145)
	Player:	53.71% (G:25.53% B:2.37%)	Conf.: ± 0.016 (-0.016...+0.015) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	46.29% (G:10.89% B:0.52%)	Duration: 20 minutes 03 seconds

¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 325624567
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

He decided to hit, not wanting to risk cracking his five-prime. Indeed it would have been a whopper to play bar/23 16/13, leaving a direct shot at a second checker. But the best move is bar/23 4/1, which makes good use of the 3 and refuses to give Frank more timing. This play is also best at 0-0 to 19, but by a smaller margin.

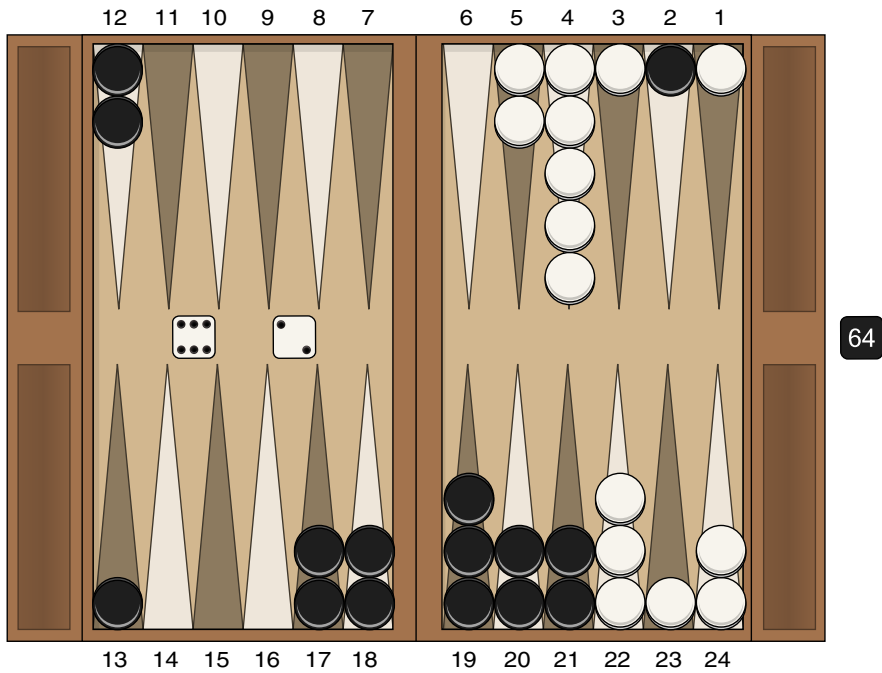
Frank fanned and then David hit on the 18 point. Although the hit set Frank back 18 pips, David was right to exit Frank's board while he could. Besides, he retained chances to force Frank to crack, perhaps gaining timing after slotting his ace point and being hit. Frank held onto his board, but missed an 18-number shot as David bore in. David

left no more blots, cashing the game when he had only the 4 point to clear.

In the next game, Frank played another backgame, but his board cracked and David was playing for gammon. Frank rolled a good number, 62, but misplayed it.

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Position 8



Pip: 171
Frank Simon
17-Away

4-Away
David Presser
Pip: 127

Game 7, Move 18: White (Frank) to play 62

1. 🎲	Rollout ¹	22/16 4/2*	eq: -1.210
	Player:	17.33% (G:0.84% B:0.03%)	Conf.: ± 0.017 (-1.227...-1.193) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	82.67% (G:46.92% B:8.93%)	Duration: 40 minutes 10 seconds
2.	Rollout ¹	22/14	eq: -1.259 (-0.049)
	Player:	15.23% (G:0.65% B:0.02%)	Conf.: ± 0.013 (-1.272...-1.246) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	84.77% (G:45.03% B:7.51%)	Duration: 31 minutes 16 seconds
3.	Rollout ¹	22/16 5/3	eq: -1.288 (-0.078)
	Player:	14.12% (G:0.56% B:0.02%)	Conf.: ± 0.012 (-1.300...-1.275) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	85.88% (G:45.50% B:6.98%)	Duration: 31 minutes 44 seconds
4. ✓	Rollout ¹	22/16 3/1	eq: -1.344 (-0.134)
	Player:	11.87% (G:0.53% B:0.01%)	Conf.: ± 0.010 (-1.354...-1.335) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	88.13% (G:45.85% B:5.94%)	Duration: 26 minutes 15 seconds

¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 325624567
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

Perhaps reasoning that David might cash the game any time, Frank played 3/1 with the 2, minimizing blots and hoping to save the gammon. He should have played 4/2*. You can't be gammoned if you win, and the best way for White to win is to recirculate checkers. Black's cube actions may prove difficult, and White's position may become

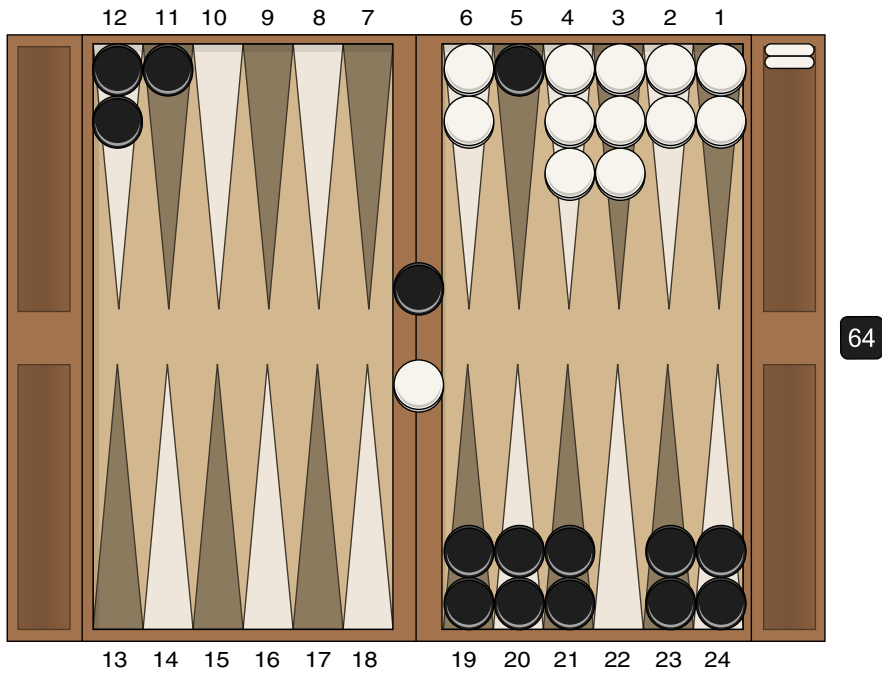
takable before Black can double him out. The last thing Frank wants is to hurt his timing and future priming chances by burying two men on the 1 point. David hit on the 9 point and Frank had to bury more checkers. But he had enough men in play to create winning threats, which

eventually forced David to cash.

In this position from the following game, both players had a man on the bar against a five-point board. Frank had two checkers off and was on roll.

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Position 9



Pip: 64
Frank Simon
17-Away

3-Away
David Presser
Pip: 121

Game 8, Move 15: White (Frank) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	58.32% (G:30.16% B:0.57%)	57.90% (G:30.32% B:0.49%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	41.68% (G:0.00% B:0.00%)	42.10% (G:0.00% B:0.00%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.423	+1.061
Cubeful Equities		
✓ No double:	+0.739 (-0.261)	±0.004 (+0.735..+0.743)
🎲 Double/Take:	+1.012 (+0.012)	±0.007 (+1.005..+1.019)
Double/Pass:	+1.000	
Best Cube action: Double / Pass		
Rollout details		
2592 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		
Dice Seed: 19561810		
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller		

Frank did not double, but he should have. Down by 14 points, with a big gammon threat, he has little to lose and much to gain by increasing the stake. Despite winning chances of over 40%, David would have had to pass. Frank would also have had a clear double at 0-0 to 19, but the take

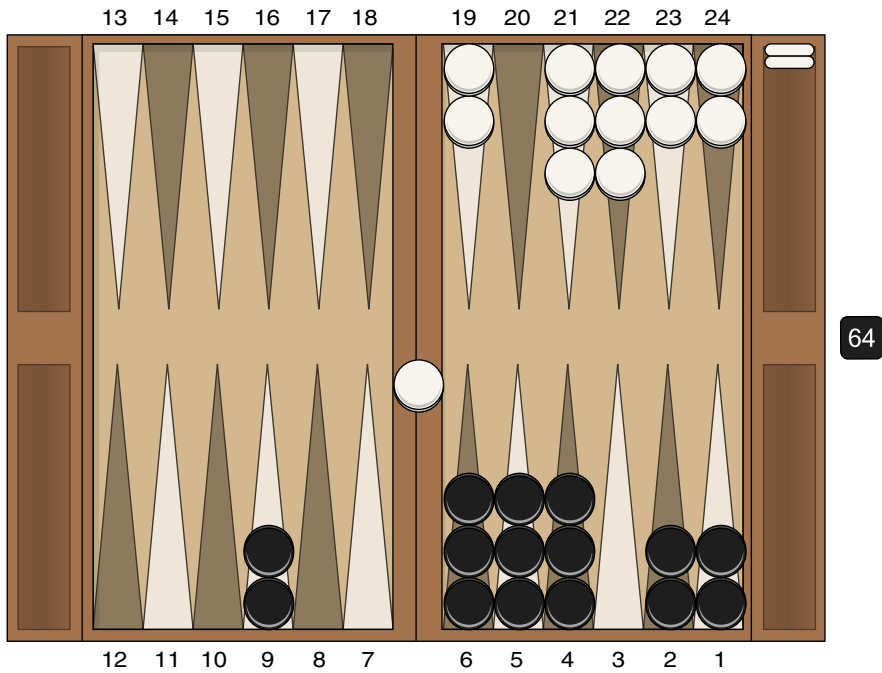
would have been easy.

David: *With such a lead, I am inclined to drop cubes whenever there is high volatility or gammon chances. This was such a position. I was surprised by the rollout which showed the pass as close.*

Frank fanned, David fanned, and the cube decision repeated. Frank did not double and fanned again. David entered with 52 and soon had cube decisions of his own, including this one.

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Position 10



Pip: 64
Frank Simon
17-Away

3-Away
David Presser
Pip: 69

Game 8, Move 22: Black (David) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	85.52% (G:0.00% B:0.00%)	85.74% (G:0.00% B:0.00%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	14.48% (G:0.09% B:0.00%)	14.26% (G:0.09% B:0.00%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.710	+1.139
Cubeful Equities		
✓ No double:	+0.830 (-0.158)	±0.002 (+0.828..+0.831)
🎲 Double/Take:	+0.987	±0.004 (+0.983..+0.992)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.013)	
Best Cube action: Double / Take		
Rollout details		
2592 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.		

David wins about 85% of the time. At the lopsided score, Frank can take. But David’s decision not to double was a whopper with cheese. With a large lead and a big advantage, cube actions are difficult; most players are too conservative in that situation, understandably wanting to avoid big swings.

David: My “problem” was being so lucky

that I got to a score (17a-3a) where I had no idea nor feeling for the take points. I can compute the TP for 3a-Xa OTB for any X up to 11, but this was too much. I didn’t have a real clue except for thinking that it must be significantly lower than for 11a-3a. Since I wasn’t sure, my practice is to wait until I lose my market or close to it. Normally it doesn’t cost too much equity and avoids premature cubes which could be huge blunders. This

was an exception. I had a perfectly efficient cube here, and blundered by not sending it.

David rolled 44: 9/5 9/1 4/off. Frank fanned, and David had lost his market.

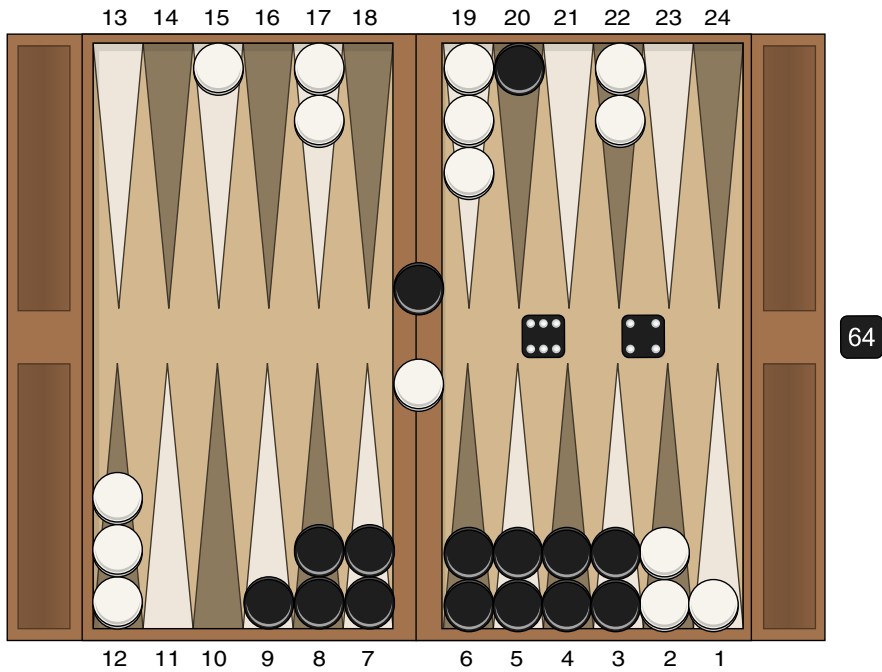
In Game 9, David got a decent 22-anchor game, but was unlucky to get gammoned after Frank correctly doubled. In the tenth game, David quickly got a big edge, but

David Presser vs. Frank Simon

Frank came back to gain good priming chances. David had plenty of play left, but was forced to pass Frank’s double in a gammonish position.

In the eleventh and final game, David built a six-point prime and was playing for gammon when he rolled 64 in Position 11.

Position 11



Pip: 184
Frank Simon
12-Away

2-Away
David Presser
Pip: 120

Game 11, Move 11: Black (David) to play 64

1. 🎲 Rollout ¹	Bar/21 7/1*	eq: +1.211
Player:	78.13% (G:58.80% B:32.54%)	Conf.: ± 0.015 (+1.196...+1.225) - [100.0%]
Opponent:	21.87% (G:2.27% B:0.14%)	Duration: 27 minutes 10 seconds
2. ✓ Rollout ¹	Bar/15*	eq: +1.069 (-0.142)
Player:	74.62% (G:53.14% B:29.01%)	Conf.: ± 0.014 (+1.054...+1.083) - [0.0%]
Opponent:	25.38% (G:1.17% B:0.07%)	Duration: 23 minutes 16 seconds

¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.

David’s bar/15* was a whopper. He should have attacked on his 1 point. Frank would have real winning chances in a 1-2 back-game, so David’s first priority is to stop him from making his 24 point. Once David closes that point, he will have an excellent chance to win the match with a gammon, and he can often pick up the extra checker at his leisure.

David: My not hitting on the ace blunder was a result of being too protective of the score. I was easily dismissing plays that add volatility. Hitting on the ace is very clear for money and DMP, and adds so many win% in addition to gammons that I should have gotten off autopilot and considered it carefully.

Frank brought in a checker with 52, and

David replied with 43, this time hitting loose on the ace point. Frank was not able to make a double anchor, and David won a gammon for the match. ♦

- MARTY STORER

David Presser vs. Frank Simon



About Marty

Marty Storer is the USBGF Feature Editor for Annotated Matches and the 2015 Michigan Summer champion, as well as the 2013 New England Backgammon Club champion.

His two-volume *Backgammon Praxis* was released in 2005 to rave reviews. With the intrepid co-author, two-time U.S. Open Champion Mary Hickey, he has contributed to another book, *What's Your Game Plan? Backgammon Strategy in the Middle Game*.

Marty lives in southern New Hampshire with his wife, three children, three pet mammals, and several pet bots.

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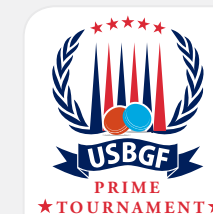


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One Man's Meat

ONE MAN'S MEAT

By Jake Jacobs

Readers may recall my setting off for Tokyo last year to rescue Carter and Phil from the trouble I knew they were ready to track down, sniff out, or maybe just stumble into. (See *Lots of Fish*, *PrimeTime Backgammon* January-February 2015.) It doesn't feel like a year has passed, but the calendar says otherwise. I might have left them to their own devices this year, trusting that I had taught them enough Tokyo survival skills to be able to forage on their own. Then Kenji and Mochy made an offer I couldn't refuse. Kenji booked the private room at Saito's new location. That restaurant is booked six months to a year in advance. Killing two butterflies with one stone, I packed two copies of *The Battered Butterfly* (all I had in stock), planning to eat Japanese food and sell a few books. Come to think of it: "battered butterfly" sounds like Japanese food; no wonder I was hungry!



Ah, Japanese food! You might think I am kidding, but this burger's provenance is obvious, not only from the Japanese written on the wrapper. It's medium rare, with a double slice of real cheddar. Take a close look at the veggies, in particular the onion slices. That's a Freshness Burger; they don't make them like that in your neighborhood fast-food outlet.

After that hearty breakfast the rest of the day was a countdown to the real event. I nearly missed it. When we've eaten at Sushi Saito during tournaments past it has always been on a Friday, and always the 9 pm seating. I booked my flight accordingly. A few days before the tournament, comparing notes with Carter, I mentioned that I was landing at about 10 pm on Thursday.

"You're missing the dinner?"



That's when I learned that this year's reservation was at 7 pm Thursday. Whoops! Even a morning flight from Singapore would arrive at Narita too late for dinner. Luckily there was still a seat on the Haneda flight on Wednesday.

Many years ago I coined the phrase: "Meet Kenji; eat sushi!"

Dinner, as so many have been over the years, was courtesy of John Koonmen. John might have been one of the Giants of backgammon today, but instead he moved to Japan, became a famed wizard of finance, married a lovely woman, and is raising a family. In other words, he could have been a backgammon player, but chose to waste his life.

John is scowling for a reason. He owns the best Neapolitan pizzeria in Tokyo, and Carter Mattig and I just got through telling him that Neapolitan cannot compare with Chicago-style.



↑ KENJI

Meet Kenji; eat sushi!



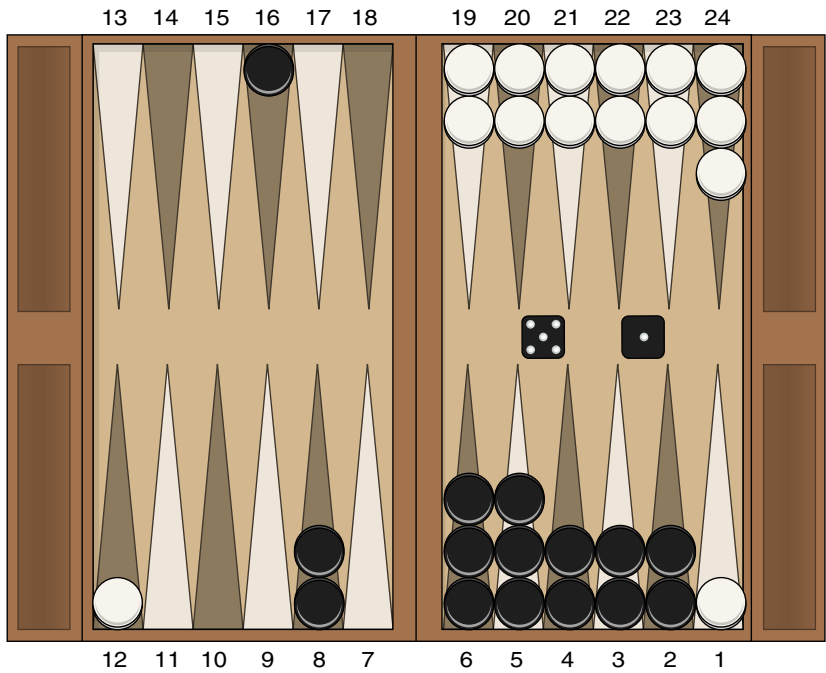
↑ DINNER AT SAITO

Phil Simborg's ear, Shaun Lawson's peace sign, and John Koonmen's scowl.



One Man’s Meat

Position 1 - Othello Quiz



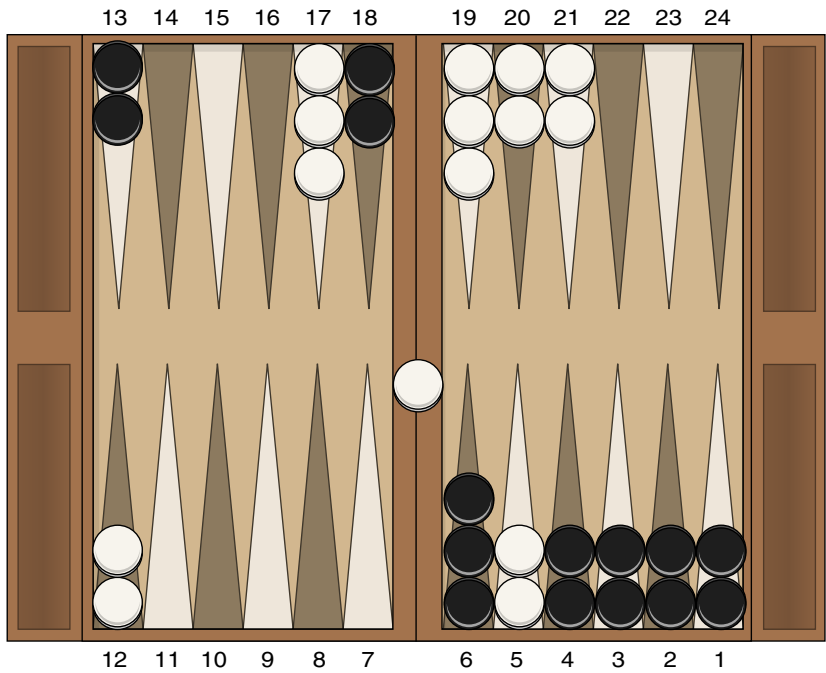
2
Pip: 80
White
Unlimited Games

Unlimited Games
Black
Pip: 83

Money Game: Black to play 51

This is Problem #3 from this year’s Othello Quiz. It is a money game; how should Black play 51? The quiz positions are posted on the wall as you enter the hall in Shidax Tower, so they are the first positions you see at the Japan Open. Take your time thinking about this one; I will give the answer at the end of the article.

Position 2



64
Pip: 151
White
Unlimited Games

Unlimited Games
Black
Pip: 100

Money Game: Black on roll. Cube action?

One Man’s Meat

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	67.98% (G:26.58% B:0.16%)	67.80% (G:26.19% B:0.09%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	32.02% (G:4.91% B:0.20%)	32.20% (G:5.37% B:0.21%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.576	+1.126
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	+0.698 (-0.169)	±0.007 (+0.692..+0.705)
Double/Take:	+0.867	±0.015 (+0.852..+0.882)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.133)	
Best Cube action: Double / Take		

The second set of positions you will see, if you choose to take it, are on the Backgammon Proficiency Test. This year’s authors were Mochy, Michy, and Kazuya Nagai. Fifty questions test the player’s knowledge of all facets of the game. Along with a book of commentary, the player is provided a set of scores broken into early, middle, and late-game results, checker play and cube handling, and finally letter grades on both the number of errors and the magnitude of one’s errors. My errors were of small magnitude, and I scored an A, but made

so many I ended up with a B overall. I was weakest in the early game, having learned and clung to some outdated opening rolls. Damn you, Bruce Becker!

The position above is also from a money game; the question is whether Black should double, and whether White should take, drop, or beaver if doubled. The authors note that because White loses many gammons and Black has market losers, Black must double. But if White enters immediately she has a strong position and might turn

the game around quickly. Also, Black has two antijokers: 11 and 66. White must take. If Black’s checkers on the 18pt were split 18-16, taking would be a 7% error.

Tests like these were made even tougher because we were out late the night before. Dinner at Saito was on Thursday night; the tournament began Saturday morning; I spent Friday’s daylight hours at my office, which left Friday evening free for wholesome activity.



⬆ JAKE, MOCHY, & KENJI

What are we celebrating? We are celebrating dinner at Yuji. Yuji is one of the best yakiniku restaurants in Japan. Yakiniku is the Japanese version of Korean barbeque, and Yuji gets some of the best beef in Japan.



⬆ YAKINIKU AT YUJI

The restaurant is very small, very hard to get into, and often the seats are preempted by Prime Minister Abe, who is a big fan. We were lucky to get two tables where the ten of us settled into enough space for about four of us.

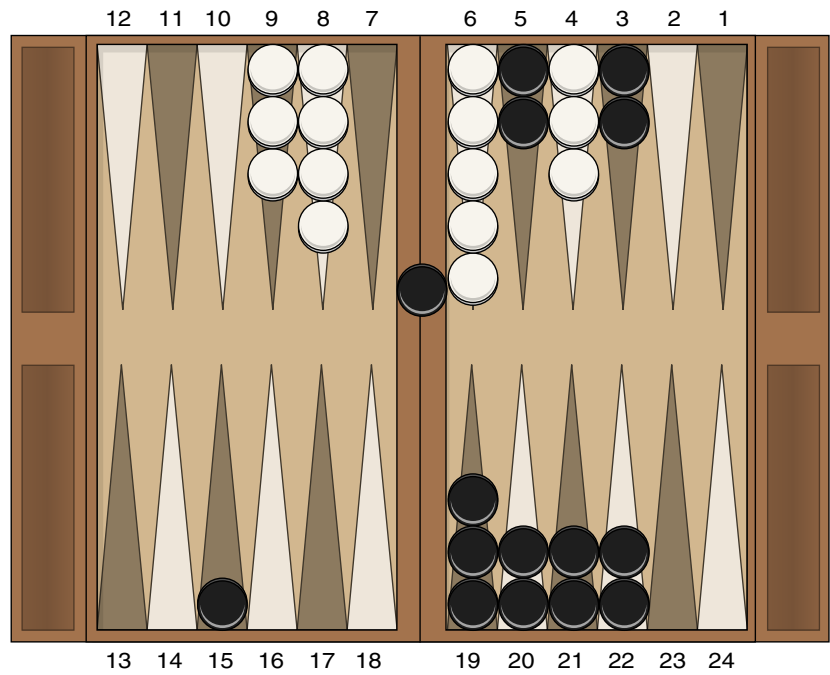
One Man’s Meat



TABLE FOR TEN

Kenji, Kelly, Carter, Cliff Pappas, Frank Simon, and Jake at Yuji.

Position 3



Pip: 101
Kanade Kubota
9-Away

11-Away
Jake Jacobs
Pip: 161

White (Kubota) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	59.71% (G:18.09% B:0.31%)	59.81% (G:18.19% B:0.31%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	40.29% (G:6.51% B:0.24%)	40.19% (G:6.42% B:0.22%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.312	+0.630
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	+0.424	±0.014 (+0.410..+0.439)
Double/Take:	+0.247 (-0.177)	±0.021 (+0.226..+0.268)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.576)	
Best Cube action: No double / Take		



TABATA

First-round opponent in the Main.

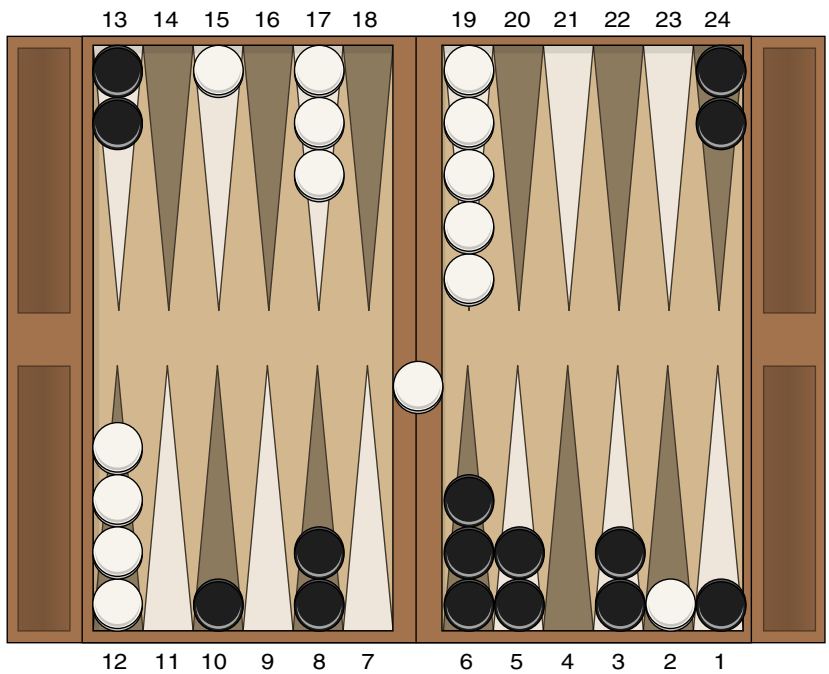
One Man’s Meat

My first match was in the Super Jackpot. I didn’t know it yet, but Kanade Kubota would be my nemesis this tournament. This double is pure bluff; offering it is a major error if your opponent takes, as I did. I won four points, and went on to lead 9-2. But Kubota

came back to win 11-9.

The first round of the main flight, against Tabata, got off to a fine start. I was ahead 8-1 when I offered this double at Position 4.

Position 4



Pip: 164
Tabata
14-Away

7-Away
Jake Jacobs
Pip: 135

Black (Jacobs) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	73.53% (G:49.87% B:2.18%)	73.66% (G:50.58% B:2.48%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	26.47% (G:5.85% B:0.30%)	26.34% (G:6.14% B:0.31%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.930	+1.692
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	+0.945 (-0.055)	±0.014 (+0.931..+0.959)
Double/Take:	+1.227 (+0.227)	±0.024 (+1.204..+1.251)
Double/Pass:	+1.000	
Best Cube action: Double / Pass		

Even trailing 14-away, 7-away this is a big pass, but Tabata is a deep taker. I won a gammon to lead 12-1, and three games later led 13-3. Then I lost eight games in a row, cutting my lead to one

point. But I won the next two to advance to the 2nd round, to be played the next morning. By the time our group was ready to head for dinner it was after 9. No matter, our reservation was for 10 pm.

One Man’s Meat



Yes, it was time for the Official Sushi Party! Fukumoto Sushi has only one Michelin star, but they may have deducted a couple because they couldn’t find the place. I’ve been eating his sushi



That root on the cutting board is wasabi, real wasabi. Unless you have been to Japan you have probably never seen real wasabi. Fukumoto abraded the tip on the smaller board, and is scraping the residue. He’ll tell you which pieces of sashimi could use a dab, and which go better with a pinch of salt. When the sushi courses appear, the wasabi is set aside; you should eat those pieces just the way he serves them.



since the previous century, so I knew where to go. Above, Fukumoto presents a large plate of assorted sashimi.



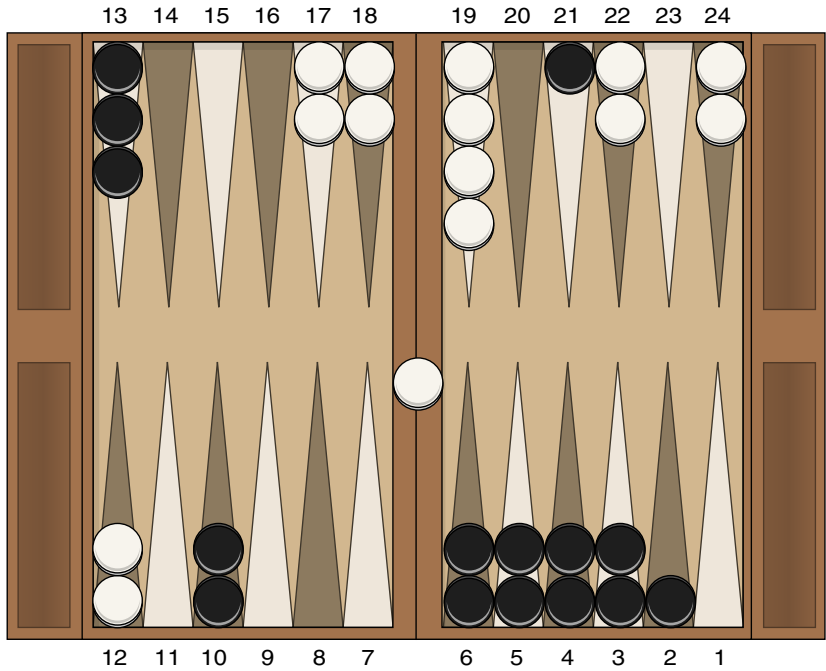
The block of tuna he is slicing probably cost several hundred dollars at Tsukiji Market. The following day I won my first two matches, and reached the Round of 8. The winner would be in the money; the loser would have a long road ahead in the Consolation. I drew Kubota, who had not lost a match all weekend.

⬅ KUBOTA

After our match, he still hadn’t lost a match all weekend.

One Man’s Meat

Position 5



Pip: 113
Frank Simon
4-Away

7-Away
Jake Jacobs
Pip: 118

Black (Jacobs) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No redouble	Redouble/Take
Player Winning Chances:	69.01% (G:26.25% B:0.87%)	69.58% (G:28.95% B:1.19%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	30.99% (G:9.82% B:0.28%)	30.42% (G:12.59% B:0.37%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.574	+1.747
Cubeful Equities		
No redouble:	+0.948 (-0.052)	±0.007 (+0.940..+0.955)
Redouble/Take:	+1.747 (+0.747)	±0.012 (+1.735..+1.759)
Redouble/Pass:	+1.000	
Best Cube action: Redouble / Pass		

My opponent in the Consolation, Frank Simon, had also lost in the money round. The difference was that I had a long break; he was playing our match minutes after his loss. Perhaps that’s why he took this redouble; it’s a big pass. A big, big pass. I won a gammon to advance.

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One Man’s Meat



⬆️ PIZZAKAYA

Hell Sausage Meatball pizza!

I can’t get good pizza in Singapore, so as much as I liked the sushi, Sunday night was “free night” as far as I was concerned, and I stopped at Pizzakaya on the way back to the apartment. (There are lots of dining choices in Japan, and one popular option is the izakaya, a casual spot for beer and assorted noshes, hence the name “Pizzakaya.”) The pizza above is my own concoction: Hell Sausage Meatballs, pepperoni, onions, jalapenos, chilies, and



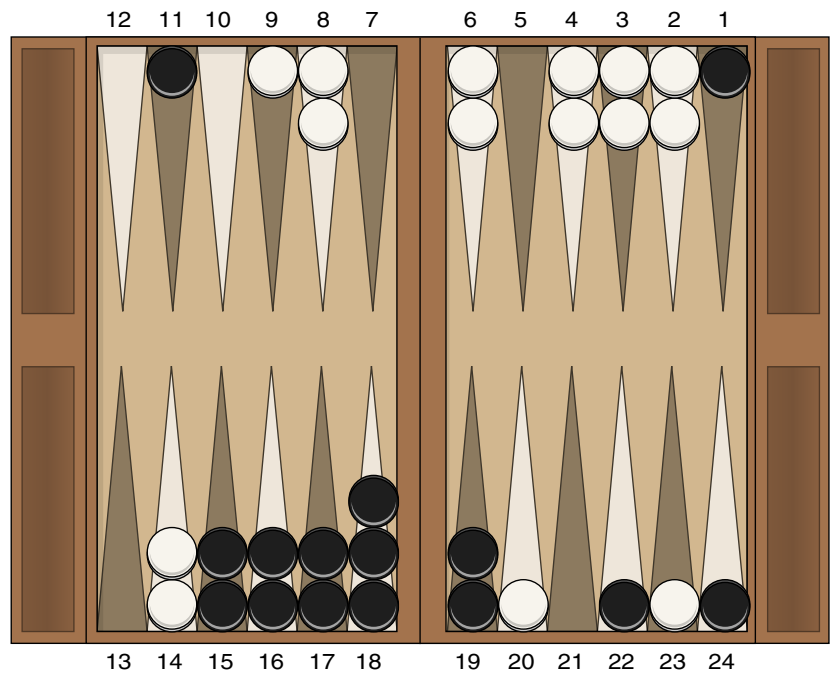
⬆️ CONSOLATION FINAL

Jake Jacobs wins the Consolation final, over Kenji Shimodaira.

extra cheese on a white base. Shake on some pepper flakes, and pour some Tabasco over the top, and it will justify the craft beer you are downing.

The pizza must have agreed with me, as the next morning I breezed through my matches until I faced Kenji in the Consolation final.

Position 6



Pip: 126
Kenji Shimodaira
8-Away

2-Away
Jake Jacobs
Pip: 129

White (Kenji) on roll. Cube action?

One Man’s Meat

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	57.48% (G:25.14% B:1.22%)	58.18% (G:25.66% B:1.04%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	42.52% (G:7.75% B:0.52%)	41.82% (G:7.23% B:0.47%)
Cubeless Equities	+0.287	+0.873
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	+0.699 (-0.173)	±0.019 (+0.681..+0.718)
Double/Take:	+0.873	±0.034 (+0.839..+0.906)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+0.127)	
Best Cube action: Double / Take		

It isn’t pretty, but it’s a take. Despite a few scares along the way, the five-prime was sufficient to contain one of Kenji’s checkers, and one was all I needed for the game and match.



Kubota having finally lost a match, it was England versus Israel in the Open final. Israel’s Razi Bobrov (r) defeated Jericho Eric McAlpine in a hard-fought contest. But Kubota did win the Super Jackpot, beating poker maven Kihara Naoya in that final.

Mochy, Razi, Jake, Eric, Kenji, Kubota, and Kaoruko are pictured with their trophies.

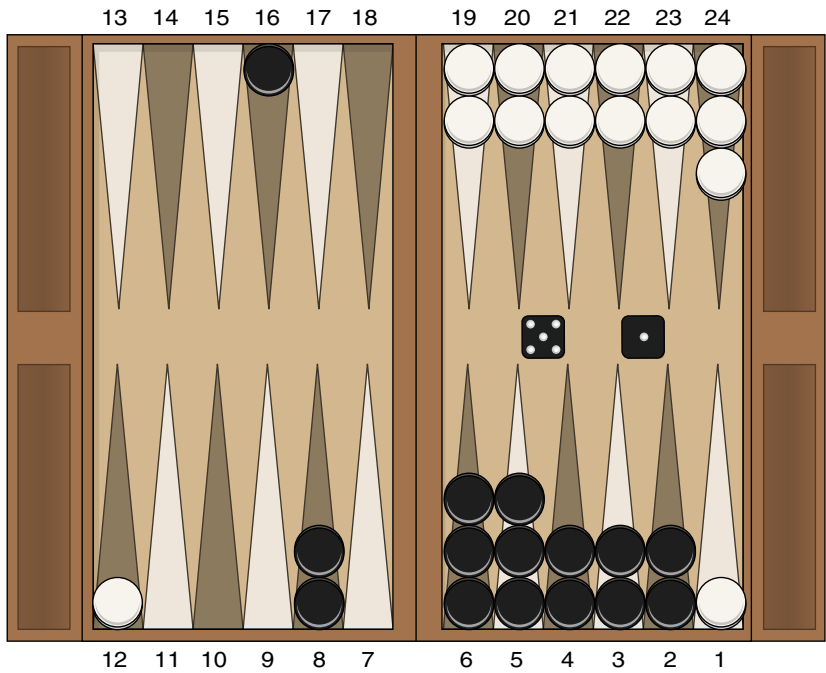


I had to work the next day, but for my last dinner in Tokyo, DevilCraft offers twenty craft beers, the selection varying depending upon what turns up. They specialize in Chicago-style deep-dish pizza.

They served the Bacon-Cheeseburger Pizza with ketchup and mustard on the side. It didn’t stay on the side for long.

One Man’s Meat

Position 1 - Othello Quiz Answer



2 Pip: 80
White
Unlimited Games

Unlimited Games
Black
Pip: 83

Money Game: Black to play 51

1. 🏆	Rollout ¹	6/1* 2/1	eq: +0.439
	Player:	71.47% (G:18.19% B:0.44%)	Conf.: ± 0.005 (+0.435...+0.444) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	28.53% (G:9.98% B:0.13%)	Duration: 57.5 seconds
2.	Rollout ¹	16/11 5/4	eq: +0.375 (-0.065)
	Player:	71.74% (G:1.83% B:0.04%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+0.371...+0.379) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	28.26% (G:1.23% B:0.02%)	Duration: 1 minute 15 seconds
3.	Rollout ¹	8/7 6/1*	eq: +0.372 (-0.068)
	Player:	72.12% (G:17.41% B:0.43%)	Conf.: ± 0.005 (+0.367...+0.377) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	27.88% (G:18.18% B:1.44%)	Duration: 1 minute 36 seconds
4.	Rollout ¹	16/15 6/1*	eq: +0.361 (-0.078)
	Player:	69.04% (G:16.38% B:0.40%)	Conf.: ± 0.006 (+0.355...+0.368) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	30.96% (G:9.85% B:0.13%)	Duration: 1 minute 31 seconds
5.	Rollout ¹	6/1* 5/4	eq: +0.354 (-0.086)
	Player:	68.88% (G:16.83% B:0.41%)	Conf.: ± 0.005 (+0.348...+0.359) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	31.12% (G:10.17% B:0.13%)	Duration: 1 minute 10 seconds
6.	Rollout ¹	16/10	eq: +0.347 (-0.092)
	Player:	70.66% (G:1.70% B:0.03%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+0.344...+0.351) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	29.34% (G:1.03% B:0.01%)	Duration: 1 minute 00 second

¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 3274860
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

One Man’s Meat

About time you solve the Othello Quiz problem!

The correct play is to make the acepoint: 6/1*, 2/1.

The rest of the quiz may be found at [Othello Quiz 2015](#).

It was a successful trip. I sold both copies of *The Battered Butterfly*, one heading for Hong Kong, the other for Norway. I had some great sushi, some world-class grilled beef, and a couple of excellent pizzas. On top of all that, I won the Consolation. Time to head back to Singapore. I wonder what they are serving for dinner on my flight? ♦

- JAKE JACOBS

About Jake

Jake Jacobs is a member of the USBGF Board of Governors and serves on its Education Committee.

He is a prolific writer, well-known to those in the backgammon community for his wit and insight. He also manages interconnected companies in Singapore and Japan.

Mr. Jacobs spends a lot of time in Tokyo, but lives in Singapore with his wife Khampha and daughter Sasithon.



JAKE JACOBS
THE BATTERED BUTTERFLY
Available in paperback, 286 pages. [1st English Ed. 2014]
[Amazon.com](#) \$13.10 + shipping

3RD MERIT OPEN

By Sabri Büyüksoy

The 3rd Merit Open, held at the Merit Park Hotel in Kyrenia, on the Turkish (northern) side of the beautiful Mediterranean island of Cyprus from the 4th to the 8th of November, was bigger even than its two huge predecessors. The tournament attendees were comprised of 408 competitors, hailing from 42 countries. The more the merrier, of course — even though the enormous crowd did create a formidable logistical challenge — a challenge adeptly handled by the twin kingpin

tournament directors, Arda Findıkoğlu and Marco Fornasir, the organizers of a circuit of European tournaments under the WBF (World Backgammon Federation) banner. To follow are the tournament results, a few observations on how I feel this already-great event could be improved upon, and a photo album.

The Masters event (283 players!) was won by England's Gaz Owen. His path was indeed an arduous one — after losing his second-

round match, he had to win ten consecutive times to take the first prize! Second place was taken by Leon Dorel (Romania), and third by Jakob Garal (Ukraine). The doubles event, named in memoriam to the Romanian champion Ion Ressu, who tragically died in an automobile accident at last year's tournament, was outsized (132 teams) as well. After all the blots had been hit, the German pair of Götz Hildsberg and Kimon Papachristopoulos emerged victorious. Due to scheduling considerations, the

Super Jackpot was held as two 32-player events instead of one 64-player bracket. With a prize pool second only to that of Monte Carlo, the cash was taken down by Yoshiyuki Nakamura and Julian Minwalla, of Japan and Great Britain respectively. The Intermediate event, with 111 players, was also the year's largest. Olcay Lökbaş (Turkey) won it. He was followed by Katalin Veszeli (Hungary) and Kemal Sağındık (Turkey).

I feel good when I think about the track

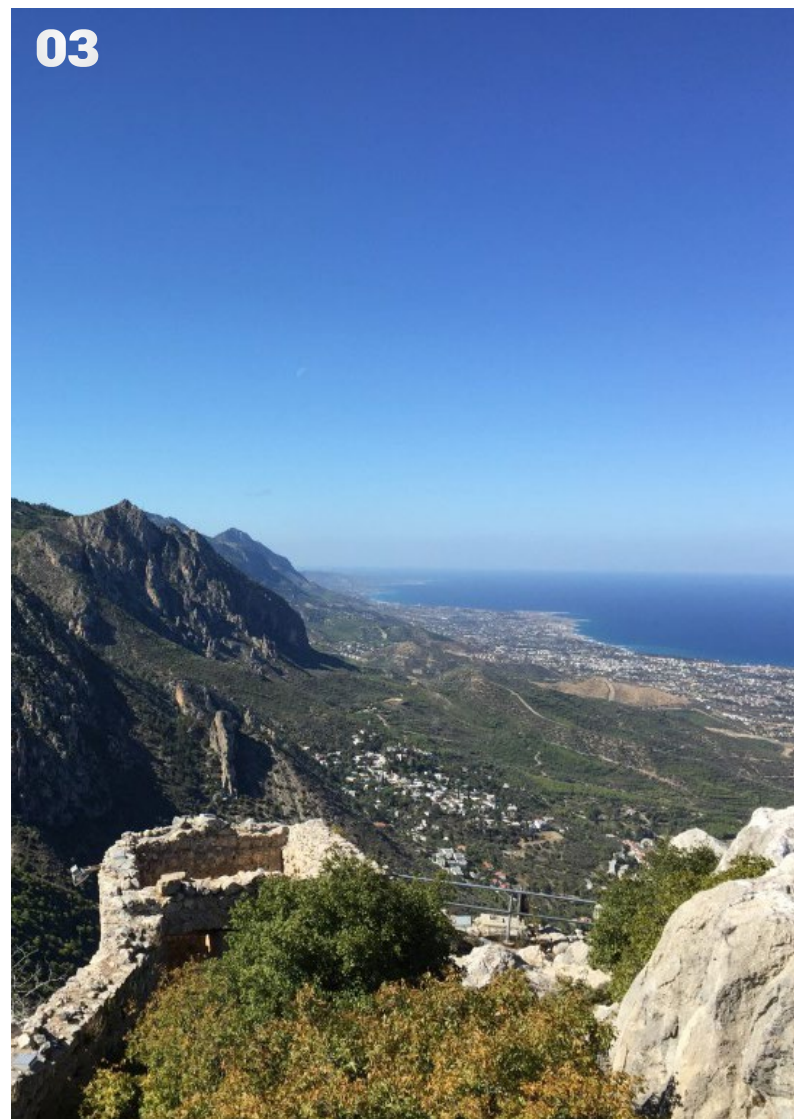
this tournament has followed in three years. This is a good opportunity for me to mention some aspects which might make it even bigger and inspire positive action for backgammon. If this tournament (as expected) continues to grow, we may not be able to fit all the players into even the great ballroom, where it has been held up to now. That ballroom's capacity was tested even in this go-round, as was the organizers' scheduling capability. There were too many announcements made during play, and the

overall noise level was a distraction. Nor do five days seem to be enough for such a large tournament. I am hoping that, in the future, we may find some extra space, and be able to automate the draw and posting of results. I believe that, given the wonderful environment and added money provided by the Merit Group, it is our responsibility to meet these challenges.



3rd Merit Open

3rd Merit Open



3rd Merit Open

01 The Gamblers Inn (Kumarcılar Han) in Nicosia :) Not suitable for backgammon players since ours is a mind sport.

02 The Saint Hilarion Castle lies on the Kyrenia mountain range on the island of Cyprus. It was originally a monastery, named after a monk who allegedly chose the site for his abbey.

03 The tournament venue from afar. The Hilarion Castle overlooks Kyrenia.

04 A patisserie in Famagusta. The name of the oven is "wachtel." :)

05 The great bazaar (Büyük Han) on the Turkish side of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus.

06 A lovely historic street in Kyrenia.

07 The tournament venue as seen from Hilarion Castle.

08 The Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque and also St. Nicholas Cathedral in Famagusta.

3rd Merit Open



01 The opening cocktail was held outside in lemonade-and-sugar weather.

02 The organizers.

03 Having fun with the Americans. "Baldız baldan tatlıdır". Translation: "Sister-in-law is sweeter than honey."



04 I wish I could sing Ochi Chernye to these people.

05 The French entourage in their usual high spirits.

06 Happiness.



07 The opening cocktail party, Russian style.

08 This is like a backgammon factory. 408 players filled every inch of the great ballroom.

09 Rest in peace Mario. From his last tournament with his lovely wife Louisa Sequiera.



10 I like colors, especially red :) Very nice dress. There are too few ladies in the backgammon world.

11 A happy proposal-like moment. :)

12 Turkish stars.



13 Exam time. Tournaments are like schools, thanks to Mochy.

14 Kids are welcome.

15 Training and education are nowadays a routine aspect of tournaments. I prefer just playing.



16 Two world champions, Akiko and Cihangir, teaming up against Giant #2 Michy and Yan.

17 The director and two colorful characters. :)

18 Backgammon is sometimes a very serious business.

3rd Merit Open

3rd Merit Open



19

19 The triumphant winner, Gaz Owen.



20

20 All the winners on stage.



21

21 It is not a tournament without a cake. Thanks to everyone for helping make backgammon more sociable.



22

22 Merit Open gala dinners always have quality music.



23

23 Last year's winner and fine backgammon players from our neighbor (Greece).



24

24 Iranian-Turkish dance trio. :)



25

25 Carter runs the show and others go along for the ride. I wonder what they were talking about.



26

26 Winners and friends enjoying the simple game of backgammon.



27

27 Latin dance show at the gala dinner.

3rd Merit Open

Tournament Results

WBF - 3rd MERIT OPEN INTERNATIONAL BACKGAMMON CHAMPIONSHIP November 4-8, 2015; Kyrenia, Northern Cyprus

MASTERS (283): 1-Gaz Owen (England), 2-Leon Dorel (Romania), 3-Jakob Garal (Ukraine/Germany), 4/5-Boris Danelja (Georgia) / Avraham Eytan (Israel), 6/8-Laura Monaco (Italy) / Toni Bernaba (Lebanon) / Kasper Nielsen (Denmark), 9/12-Carsten Simonsen (Denmark) / Maik Stiebler (Germany) / Alexey Askurava (Russia) / Josefin Bichler (Germany); 1LC-Stepan Nuniyants (USA), 2LC-Götz Hildsberg (Germany), 3LC/4LC-Zafer Tas (Turkey) / Shahab Ghodsi (Iran/Norway).

INTERMEDIATE (111): 1-Olcay Lökbas (Turkey), 2-Katalin Veszeli (Hungary), 3-Kemal Sagindik (Turkey), 4/5-Vladimir Olchanski (Germany) / Yordan Kirchev (Bulgaria), 6/8-George Miltiadou (England) / István Éger (Hungary) / Moti Manzon (Israel); 1LC-Rochus Wegener (Germany), 2LC-Rosey Bensley (England).

SUPER JACKPOT #1 (32): 1-Yoshiyuki Nakamura (Japan), 2-Petko Kostadinov (USA), 3/4-Zafer Tas (Turkey) / Freddie Noer (Denmark).

SUPER JACKPOT #2 (32): 1-Julian Minwalla (England), 2-Suren Karatorosyan (Armenia), 3/4-Rassoul Zomorodi (Iran) / Akiko Yazawa (Japan).

WARM-UP (245): 1-Sebastian Wilkinson (England), 2-Rainer Witt (Germany), 3/4-Carter Mattig (USA) / Kakhaber Natchkebia (Georgia).

869 BG TROPHY (128): 1-Volker Sonnabend (Germany), 2-Philippe Boncenne (France), 3/4-Boris Martinello (Italy) / Eric McAlpine (England).

ION RESSU MEMORIAL DOUBLES (132 teams): 1-Götz Hildsberg (Germany) & Kimon Papachristopoulos (Germany), 2-Peter Carlsson (Sweden) & Liz Johansson (Sweden), 3/4-Luca Martino (Italy) & Vincenzo Riceputi (Italy) / Yasar Gözel (Turkey) & Kagan Karakaya (Turkey).

LADIES TOURNAMENT (45): 1-Antoinette-Marie Williams (USA), 2-Linda Sjörin (Sweden), 3/4-Lise Nielsen (Denmark) / Sibylle Altermatt (Switzerland).

ONE-POINT TOURNAMENT (128): 1-Linda Sjörin (Sweden), 2-Franck Stepler (France), 3/4-Hamidreza Shahrokhi (Iran) / Kamil Karaali (Turkey).

MOCHY'S QUIZ (134): 1-Sevdalin Tsvetanov (Bulgaria), 2-Giannis Pasialis (Greece). They scored 7 out of 8 correct answers; Sevdalin had a lower error rate on the one problem they missed.



- SABRI BÜYÜKSOY



ART BENJAMIN

A Player You Can Count On

Interview by Phil Simborg

Q&A

Professor Art Benjamin serves on the Board of Directors of the USBGF and chairs the Education Committee. Because of his family, book writing, and mathematical performing, he doesn't get to travel to too many tournaments, but he maintains a great love for the game. As you will read, Dr. Benjamin is a truly a player that you can count on!

First, a little history: Tell us where you grew up and a little about your family. If you don't mind, tell us about your education and your interests and hobbies as a child.

I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and graduated from a decent public school. My father was

an accountant by day and a community theatre actor and director by night. My mother was a teacher and career counselor at a school for emotionally disturbed kids. She earned an advanced degree in Special Education to understand her very hyperactive son, me. I was born in 1961 and people didn't understand ADHD kids too well back then. I was put on medication (Valium!) from about age 4 to age 13. As a kid, my passions were (and still are) games, puzzles, theatre, magic, and math. In high school, I did magic shows for kids' birthday parties as "The Great Benjamini!" My goal was to become a professional magician or a Broadway lyricist. I was a very strong math student, and loved applying it to analyze games of chance, like backgammon. I went to Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh where I studied applied mathematics, then



MATHEMAGICIAN

Art Benjamin, a member of the USBGF Board of Directors, Chairman of the USBGF Education Committee, and a Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, is an internationally famous mathematician, with over 12 million views of his top-rated 3 TED talks, appearance on *The Colbert Report*, and *New York Times* Best-seller list of Education books for his latest book, *The Magic of Math: Solving for x and Figuring Out Why*.

.....
earned my PhD in Mathematical Sciences from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Along the way, I discovered how much I enjoyed teaching at the college level. The students seemed to really like the way I explained things, which I attribute to my years of performing magic for audiences.

HARVEY MUDD COLLEGE

Where do you live now and what is your daily life like?

Since 1989, I have been a professor of mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, in Claremont, California. HMC is a small private college with 800 students, all of whom major in math, science, or engineering. I love my work, my students, and colleagues.

Are you married? Any kids?

I met my wife Deena at Johns Hopkins. We were married at the Magic Castle, in Hollywood, in 1993. We have two teenage daughters, Laurel and Ariel.

Tell us about your profession and anything you think is noteworthy or interesting.

My other full-time profession is public speaker, entertainer, and "mathemagician." In college, I began combining my loves of math and magic to create a show in which I demonstrate and explain how to do math in your head faster than a calculator. I have performed this show thousands of times (about 100 shows per year), and it's part of my life goal of bringing math to the masses. I have given 3 TED talks, which have been viewed over 12 million times, and I appeared on *The Colbert Report* in 2010. I have written several books, the most popular of which have been *Secrets of Mental Math* and my newest book, *The Magic of Math: Solving for x and Figuring Out Why*. I am pleased to say that my new book made the *New York Times* Bestseller List for Education books in September. I have also created four DVD courses for The Great Courses, one of which is on *The*

Art Benjamin: A Player You Can Count On

Mathematics of Games and Puzzles.

What else are you really good at besides backgammon? Have you won any titles, awards or distinctions in those areas?

I was captain of my high school chess team and I studied the game pretty seriously then. I played in some tournaments, but my rating never went above 1800.

I find it interesting that you were also a fine chess player. Maybe I'm missing something, but it doesn't seem to me that math plays much of a part in chess. Is it possible that the same mental abilities required to do math also apply in some way to chess?

The games are similar in that you look ahead to visualize the anticipated flow of the game, but I agree that there is no arithmetic in chess (which is probably why I prefer backgammon). Also the games do not require you to remember what happened previous to the current position. You can be an absent-minded, distractible person and still do well in both games. I'm a mediocre bridge player because I sometimes forget which cards have been played.

How did you get involved in backgammon?

I think it was around 1974. I was in junior high school and my mother came home one day and said that she saw a backgammon table at someone's home. She said that it was so beautiful that she would even learn to play the game. This got me very excited, because she was not a game player.

So I got some books from our library and learned how to play. And since I learned backgammon strategy right off the bat, I was a better player than all of my peers. I read Paul Magriel's book in high school and anything else I could find. I played in my first local tournaments in college with the Pittsburgh Backgammon Association and in grad school with the College Park Backgammon Club in Maryland. I was still an intermediate player back then, but I studied the game a lot. My first big tournaments were in Los Angeles and Las Vegas starting around 1990.

What is your favorite backgammon book of all time?

In grad school, I learned a ton from Bill Robertie's books on *Advanced Backgammon* (now called *Modern Backgammon*).

What trophies or awards have you won in the ABT or elsewhere?

In the 1990s, I got very serious about the game and did very well in tournaments in Los Angeles, Reno, Vegas, and especially San Diego. The ABT began in 1993, just as I began an incredible winning streak in the San Diego regional tournaments. I cashed in 7 straight tournaments, winning 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 1st, 1st, 1st. I was in the top 8 of the ABT every year from 1993 to 1997, finishing 2nd in 1993, 3rd in 1996, and 1st in 1997, when I won in San Diego and Michigan. I was the all-time points leader for the ABT for many years, and I'm still number 9 on the all-time list, even though I have won very few points since 1998. What happened in 1998? Laurel was

Art Benjamin: A Player You Can Count On

born that year, and I knew that life would have to change to make time for being a dad. I played much less backgammon after that. I also became much busier as a mathematician, author, and public speaker.

Have you been using computer programs such as Snowie and XG? Do you have strong computer skills and a good understanding of the bots?

I'm afraid I started to slow down my studying of backgammon just as computers were starting to get really good. I enjoy playing against and learning from XG, but I have not yet had the time to study the game as intensely as I would like.

What particular traits do you have that make you a strong backgammon player?

I'm not afraid to do math over the board. I may not be one of the strongest players around, but I'll put my pip counting skills against anyone.

You are indeed a very fast pip counter. Do you use Jack Kissane's Cluster Counting or have you developed a method of your own? Help us out here.

Although I developed my pip counting methods independently, they are very similar to Jack's cluster counting method. Here are some of the main ideas. Count the pips horizontally instead of vertically. For example, if your inner board has two checkers on the 6, 4, and 3 point, three checkers on the 5 point, and one checker on the 1 point, then I first count the two layers of checkers on the 3, 4, 5, and 6

point, which is $2 \times 18 = 36$ pips, then add an extra checker on the 5 and 1 point for a grand total of 42 pips. If you have two checkers apiece on the 7 and 8 points, that's an instant 30. Two checkers apiece on the 8 and 9 points is an instant 34. For checkers in your opponent's home board, the count is 20 times the number of checkers plus adjustment from the 5 point. For example, if you have two checkers on the 20 point, and one checker apiece on the 23 and 24 point, then I count $(4 \times 20) + 3 + 4 = 87$ pips.

I once had the pleasure of playing Jack at a tournament and we had fun counting the positions that arose in practically the same time. He recognized more clusters than I did, but I was quicker at the raw number crunching.

Are there any other math shortcuts you have developed specifically for backgammon that would help my game? For example, I don't find it very easy to divide by 1296 which often has to be done.

Just divide by 13. For example $310/1296$ is essentially $310/13$ percent. 13 goes into 310 twenty times, with a remainder of 50, and 50 divided by 13 is close to 4, so $310/1296$ is about 24%. To get more practice dividing by 13 and other numbers, see my book *Secrets of Mental Math*.

As a teacher, I have advised all my students to read that book. Have you ever thought about writing a book or pamphlet on the math of backgam-

mon? I'd sure buy a copy if you did.

That's a good idea. I'll add it to my bucket list!

Have you memorized all of the take points and the match equities for a typical 13 point match, and if not, how do you figure them out over the board?

I use a phonetic code called the major system, where every digit gets a consonant sound. It has been in the English language for over 200 years, and it's explained in my book. Briefly, here it is: 1 = t or d; 2 = n; 3 = m; 4 = r; 5 = l; 6 = ch, sh, or j; 7 = k or g; 8 = f or v; 9 = p or b; 0 = s or z. By inserting vowel sounds, you can turn numbers into words. For example, 12 = TINY and 68 = SHOVE. When the score is 1-away 2-away, the leader has a 68% chance of winning the match. I encode this by remembering TINY SHOVE. Similarly, 1-away 3-away gives the leader 75%, which I store as DIME CALL. I use this to memorize the equities up through a 9 point match.

There is no question that your exceptional math skills have contributed greatly to your becoming a top backgammon player. Do you think it is possible to become a top player without excellent math skills? Can players become great by visual skills, or feel, or experience?

Yes, you can often substitute math with memory or rules of thumb. For instance, you know instinctively that there are more ways to hit a checker that is 5 or 6 away than when it is 1 or 2 away. Except for

counting pips, I probably only "calculate" once or twice per game, on average. Most of the game is just applying sound principles (which are based on mathematics or reference positions).

What recommendations would you give to an intermediate player to help him become a top championship player?

Play against the computer a lot, and learn from your mistakes. Eventually you will get a feeling for the right time to double or take.

What are your future plans for tournaments next year, and the following years?

I'll have to wait 5 more years until both of my kids are in college before I can travel to many tournaments. My brother Stephen still lives in the Cleveland area, and he is a very strong player. I hope we can play doubles together in Ohio, Pittsburgh, or Michigan someday soon.

Who are your heroes in backgammon — the people you look up to both as players and leaders?

I recommend everything written by Bill Robertie, Kit Woolsey, Walter Trice, and Jeremy Bagai. I am also extremely grateful to Patrick Gibson for singlehandedly sustaining the backgammon community here in Southern California.

Art Benjamin: A Player You Can Count On

What are your pet peeves about tournaments and tournament play?

In a double elimination tournament, I think that the winner of the consolation bracket should only have to beat the undefeated winner once, instead of twice, to win the tournament. The winner of the consolation bracket typically must defy the same sort of odds to make it to the finals. Who would you rather bet on? The player with a 6-0 record or the player with the 8-1 record? Not so clear. And if the 8-1 player beats the 6-0 player in the finals match, then who deserves first place? I would say the 9-1 player (especially since he just beat the 6-1 player)! To make them play one more match just prolongs the tournament. Some directors have adopted this suggestion, and I wish more would do so.

Are you a member and supporter of the USBGF or another backgammon federation? Any thoughts about what they have done or should do to popularize the game?

I am a proud member of the Board of Directors of the USBGF and serve as chair of the Education Committee. For the last few years, I have run backgammon workshops, mini-courses, tournaments, and social events at some of the national collegiate mathematics meetings. I would like to see us attract more college students to the game. I would like to update our online materials, and streamline

the educational materials that we offer to students and teachers. I am very proud of what the USBGF has accomplished in a short period of time and I am excited to see how it evolves in the future.

What do you think about the subject of teaching backgammon to young children and school children?

That's a tricky question because of the gambling nature of the game. On the other hand, people tend to have more time and desire to play games when they are young, and the game can be enjoyed without bringing money into it, just as people do with games like chess and bridge. Besides, the more you know about the math behind games of chance, the less likely you are to be attracted to casino games. I can't think of any other game where knowing just a little bit of math goes such a long way. I think backgammon promotes logical and analytical skills. I am fine with teaching backgammon to high school students.

What are your plans for the future? What you would like your life to look like 10 years from now?

In 10 years, I expect to be retired from teaching, and my kids will be grown, so I hope to be playing a lot more backgammon! ♦

- PHIL SIMBORG

ARTHUR BENJAMIN
THE MAGIC OF MATH: SOLVING FOR X AND FIGURING OUT WHY
 Available in hardcover, 336 pages. [1st English Ed. 2015]
[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1444714444) \$14.84 + shipping

Ray Cifani

“

BackgammonAce has improved my game. It's fun and handy for a few games at lunch. It gives you your PR right after the match. You play anonymously, with no chatting. It works on the smartphone. Go to lunch, bring phone, play a couple of games. You're playing a real person. [...] That's the kind of game that could hook the millennials. They are attached to their phones and apps.

RAY CIFANI

Winner of USBGF Advanced Divisional X

Interview by Karen Davis

When and why did you start playing backgammon?

My group of card and boardgame players discovered backgammon during the mid-seventies boom. Bobby Fischer was headlining the nightly news, and everybody was playing chess. I believe that kicked off the public backgammon craze. Backgammon was more fun to play, and it seemed like every neighborhood bar in Cleveland had a board.

The Cleveland Backgammon League was formed in 1979. I was a founding member. There were weekend tournaments. My wife Lin and I played in a local tourney in September 1980. The next morning she gave birth to our first daughter. Needless to say, I went to the hospital instead of back to the tournament and missed the final! I didn't play in a live event for the next 32 years. So I'm a boomerang to the game.

Joe Miller took over the Cleveland Backgammon League and brought it to Akron as the Ohio State Backgammon Club. I met Joe six years or so ago at the Cleveland Airport Marriott, when I played in the warm-up event of the Ohio Championship. Last year I won the Ohio Amateur Jackpot, so now I'm all in to get back into the game.

How have you tried to improve your game?

A few years ago, I dusted off my Crisloid, my first edition Magriel, and studied newer material from Robertie and Trice. The game had changed! Make the 2 point with 6-4? What are bots? Many acronyms. After a year my game plateaued until I got XG. I've improved a lot by watching USBGF videos of top experts — seeing the pace they play at, and their contrasting styles. The Japanese seem to think about every single combination. With the Turks, the checkers are flying around like crazy. I try



↑ LIN AND RAY

Like many backgammon players, Ray took time off from backgammon while focusing on his career and helping his soulmate Lin raise their two daughters. Now that they've grown, he's come back to backgammon.

to anticipate what players will do. When they make a play I didn't expect, I stop the video to study the position. I've recently read Trice's *Backgammon Boot Camp*. I like Mary Hickey's style of writing.

BackgammonAce has improved my game. It's fun and handy for a few games at lunch. It gives you your PR right after the match. You play anonymously, with no chatting. It works on the smartphone. Go to lunch, bring phone, play a couple of games. You're playing a real person. It's easy to use. It provides commentary along the way — e.g., letting you know you lost -.02 on that move. That's the kind of game that could hook the millennials. They are attached to their phones and apps. It could be instrumental in making backgammon popular with that generation. Get to play people like Mochy. Fast action games.

Bots now dominate the thinking. At my firm, we try to recruit the best college kids. We note that they often come in with preconceived best practices, something I call “academic excellence.” We need to stress to them that even if their knowledge foundation is strong, one can't always follow the book. The quest for low PR reminds me of this. I appreciate the instructive value of rollouts, and realize the best players have the lowest PR, but I don't enjoy playing BG strictly for “PR excellence.”

Tell us a little about your life outside backgammon.

I've been married 39 years, with two wonderful daughters. Being the son of music teachers, I enjoy banging on the piano, and I still ride a BMW. I'm very lucky. I have a great (and tolerant) family, and am still able to do the things I enjoyed 45 years

ago: piano, motorcycle, and backgammon!

In my day job, I'm the senior manager of a forensic data analytics team in the Fraud Investigations and Dispute Services practice at Ernst & Young.

My wife Lin is an artist. My two daughters are grown and living in California. Nicole is in San Francisco working to develop and market [Chosen](#), a video-based talent-competition app. Angie works at Medtronic in Southern California, assisting local surgeons who are using deep brain-stimulation techniques to help Parkinson's patients.

Do you play in live tournaments as well as online? Which do you prefer and why?

To me, playing head-to-head or in a chouette enhances the competitive experience

Ray Cifani

and lessens the need to focus on PR. So I much prefer to play live; but so far I have only entered the Ohio tourney. We have some very capable players in Ohio and in surrounding states that I'd like to see more often. Hopefully, I'll soon be able to do some traveling to meet and play my online opponents in ABT events.

What have been your most memorable experiences playing live, online?

I thought of myself as a hotshot in my 20's. I once played a disabled WWI veteran who played slowly and could barely move the pieces. I was impatient. He crushed me. Not long after that, I lost to an eight-year old at a Masonic temple, his little brother standing next to him, snickering when I made a move. First impressions are often wrong. Since then, I've never forgotten to try to stay humble, and to not form an opinion based on a first impression or stereotype.

Do we all remember details of losses more than wins? Near the end of an online match with Michelle Steinberg, she congratulated me in the text box on a win; then she proceeded to bear off 12 checkers in 3 rolls for the match. The Cruellest Game indeed.

I won the Ohio Amateur Jackpot last year, so that's my most memorable win!

How did you find your experience participating in the USBGF Online Circuit?

There's a lot to like. Good match length, excellent competition, and a feeling of a well-run organization behind it all. The website and data management are outstanding. The professionalism of the USBGF officers, staff, and volunteers is to be commended. First-rate!

PrimeTime Backgammon is such a nice magazine. It's much better than anything you can buy on the shelves. Please bring an issue when you come to Cleveland in March. It stands the test of time. They are collector's pieces.

What suggestions would you have for USBGF to enhance playing opportunities for members?

I would like to see an "unweighted rating" of online match play. Now that we have years of historical match results in the USBGF database, it would be interesting to go back and simulate a restart of player ratings, starting everyone at 1500. This would produce a much truer ranking of online play to date.

There's an untapped player market within the millennial generation. The bright young folks I work with play Sudoku, but largely

have never heard of our game. When introduced, they're intrigued. Perhaps we need a public figure playing backgammon whom social media can latch onto. Something like LeBron James and NBA players playing a game. Mochi is doing just that in Japan.

Backgammon will never become as popular as poker, which is a good thing. Everyone's an "expert" at the poker table, where no bot metric exists. When you play a bot, it exposes mediocre play. That kind of metric doesn't exist in poker, so everybody thinks they are above average and can successfully compete.

BG players have to be mature enough to deal with the amount of study and self-examination required to be competitive. That's a good thing. Everyone I've played seems really smart. Do we really want 6000 people at a tournament? The optimal number of players in live tournaments is closer to 300. We recently had a Carnegie Mellon engineering student come to Akron to play in our monthly tournament. He liked that it was a game of skill with a random element. Let's always emphasize those two factors, skill and luck. To me, that's what makes backgammon fascinating and exciting. ♦

• KAREN DAVIS



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2015 Seattle Backgammon Classic

2015 SEATTLE
BACKGAMMON CLASSIC

By Ray Fogerlund

So much had changed during the last year. For one thing, I remembered my flight this time and was not forced to drive for 18 hours to attend Seattle's ABT event. As a result, I was not so tired. The flight was quite pleasant and both seats next to me were empty and the plane only about half full. I rented a car and went in on Wednesday so that I could visit a friend who lives in Washington, and upon hearing my plans, Molly and Pete Anderson invited us to come visit them for lunch and a boat ride on Lake Washington. Apparently one of their neighbors is Bill Gates, though an alarm in the boat kept us from making it all the way over there to take a look-see.

The weather was nice. We sat on Pete and Molly's deck, eating bagels and cream cheese and chatting amicably. My friend Elizabeth fit right in with the Andersons as they shared many common interests. I think I will be in the dog house if I ever come over

without Elizabeth in the future! All in all it was a great day to become acclimated to the Pacific Northwest.

Previously, the tournament had been held in a giant sports bar in the Seattle area, but this year the venue was a local hotel: the Baymont Inn and Suites. At under \$90 per night, the accommodations were very reasonable, though Ed O'Laughlin found something cheaper across town, as usual. This time there was a designated tournament room. My room was just fine, the Internet was free, and I had a car to get around, so I was doing well indeed.

In addition, the hotel provided a free continental breakfast. I chose to patronize the restaurant next door rather than fight the crowd for a sticky bun. The restaurant served pies and apparently it was blackberry season! I had a waffle with blackberries a couple of times. My doctor may have a coronary, or I will, but one has to die of

something!

At the last Seattle event the staff, led by Kristina Vig, seemed confused at times and perhaps a bit tentative, though they were capably assisted by Patrick Gibson. I believe this is quite a normal growing pain for anyone stepping up to run a new American Backgammon Tour event. This time, Kristina led her gang of at least six volunteers with confidence and conviction; and though Patrick was again available, he was not needed. The only thing I noticed that might cause a problem in the future was that the playing room was small. But since there were only 27 players in the Open division and 16 Intermediates, it did not become overcrowded. When people find out what a nice event the SBC is, they will come, and the players will need more space. Perhaps the hotel had more space, but we didn't need it this time?

The tournament started on Friday afternoon

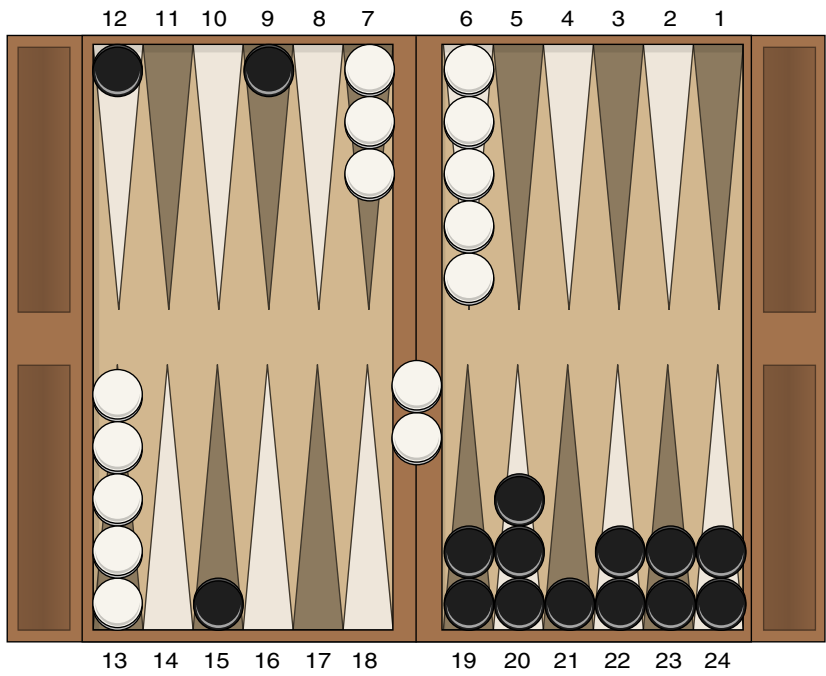
2015 Seattle Backgammon Classic

with the Super Jackpot and Doubles events. I played in both with poor results. Eventual SJP finalist Pete Anderson eliminated me in the first round and stated that the boat ride normally costs \$500, so we were even. Pete proved it was not an accident by beating Ed O in the semi-finals, and he took a big lead on Mark Ferrin in the finals too. Mark overcame a 3-10/13 deficit to take the title. In 2014, these two had squared off in the ABT event finals with the same result. So, one might want to watch out for them when they come to Seattle....

However, the elephant in the room continues to be Stepan Nuniyants. I believe I have come to Seattle 5 times now, and played him 4 times. Stepan has four ABT Championships to his credit, and I the resultant bad-beat stories. Not that all of

them were bad beats, mind you... Stepan may have outplayed me every time, and he most certainly did so when we played each other in the finals a few years back. This time seemed sort of typical to me. Trailing 3-4/11, I had reached a very strong position early in the next game. In fact, if you look at Position 1 closely, you will see that very little can go wrong.

Position 1



Pip: 166
Stepan Nuniyants
7-Away

8-Away
Ray Foglerlund
Pip: 82

White (Stepan) on roll. Cube action?

Analyzed in Rollout	No double	Double/Take
Player Winning Chances:	6.10% (G:0.91% B:0.05%)	6.16% (G:0.87% B:0.05%)
Opponent Winning Chances:	93.90% (G:87.07% B:0.50%)	93.84% (G:87.04% B:0.51%)
Cubeless Equities	-1.810	-3.858
Cubeful Equities		
No double:	-1.839	±0.005 (-1.844..-1.834)
Double/Take:	-3.946 (-2.107)	±0.009 (-3.955..-3.937)
Double/Pass:	+1.000 (+2.839)	
Best Cube action: No double / Take		

2015 Seattle Backgammon Classic



STEPAN NUNIIYANTS

Stepan defended the Northwest backgammon honor by winning the 3rd Seattle Backgammon Classic over DC-based Ed O'Laughlin.

Ed O, proposed a 3-point match, but Stepan firmly but politely refused. One thing you have to know about Stepan is that the man has absolutely no fear over a backgammon board. I doubt many players would decline an opportunity to decide things more quickly in a shorter match against Ed, who has become something of a master technician. He is widely acknowledged as the best player in perhaps the best club in the USA: The Beltway Backgammon Club.

Epilogue: Stepan breezed to victory over Ed in the finals. Four times in five events, Stepan has taken down the trophy in Seattle. This goes to show you how much of an advantage it is to play at home. Check out the results at chicagopoint.com if you don't believe me. There are many similar examples.

I would highly recommend putting the Seattle tournament on your itinerary in the future. Who knows? We might get Pete Anderson to drop the price on his boat rides, and Molly makes great cookies! ♦

- RAY FOGERLUND

Stepan was on shake, shooting at the blot on my 4 point. He did not roll 44 this turn, but he managed a single 4. I responded with 24 and brought another builder down rather than safetying the blot on the 10 point. Then Stepan pulled out his 44 caliber and shot me in the chest with it. He entered and anchored, hit my man on his 9 point and pointed on me on his deuce point. My response was also typical... 26 (from the bar). LOL. With two more blots to shoot at, Stepan was quite right to play on. He failed to hit either with his next roll, but he found something else to do with his 33. Eventually I managed to establish an anchor on his ace point. Then Stepan rolled a number that left me a double shot at two blots. My final indignity in this game was that I missed those shots. Stepan gammoned me routinely. Having expected to take the lead in the match 5-4/11, I found myself down 3-6/11. What happened afterwards was not particularly interesting. Suffice it to say, my remaining equity left town.

One thing I really like about the way Kristina Vig runs a tournament is that she pays more places! I didn't know it at the time, but my match versus Stepan was a money-round match. Looking at it another way, there were ABT points at stake, and those are a precious commodity for someone trailing the leader by less than 5 ABT points like I was. I had failed to cash in North Carolina, despite going 5-0 on day one of their Swiss-movement format, and now I had flubbed here too. I would not go sleepless in Seattle, but I would prove in the Last Chance that the above two failures were not a fluke when I lost in the finals to Jack Edelson. In memoriam, I would like to say that I reached some pretty strong positions in Seattle, but I still lost. The following week in the Vietor Cup would go better... but I find myself flailing in my specialty: the American Backgammon Tour.

Stepan was right at home in the finals of the Seattle Backgammon Classic. His opponent,



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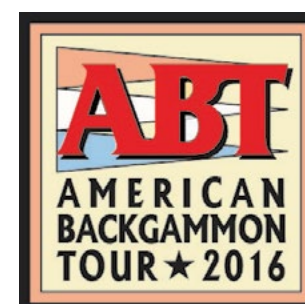
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App Review

FLASHBACK APP BY JEREMY BAGAI

Backgammon Flashcards for Android and iOS Devices

Review by Bruce J. Farquhar

I have both a professional and personal interest in learning theory. As a consultant, I not only develop techniques in my field, but also work to ensure they are adopted. I’ve also had a long career in field hockey, playing at a high level myself and coaching in the very competitive environment of college athletics in the USA. I am now trying to apply what I’ve learned in those very different environments in my quest to become a better backgammon player.

Learning to Learn

A lot of people are probably familiar with the theory that 10,000 hours of practice are needed to develop expertise in a subject. Whether you agree with this or not, there is no doubt that backgammon is not something you can master overnight. If you read interviews with players like Matt Cohn-Geier or Stick, for example, who have had relatively meteoric rises through the ranks, you learn that they spent an awful lot of time studying the game. There is a caveat even to that 10,000-hours theory: Ericsson (K. Anders Ericsson, Ralf Th. Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Rome, *The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance*, *Psychological Review* 1993, Vol. 100. No. 3, 363-406), whom Malcolm Gladwell cites in his book *Outliers* as the author of the theory,

stressed that not any old 10,000 hours of study would get you there. No, you can’t just sit on GridGammon mindlessly playing away.

Ericsson uses the term “deliberate practice,” which he defines as a highly structured activity with the specific goal of improving performance. He identifies four essential components of deliberate practice:

- » You must be motivated.
- » The practice should be appropriate to your level of expertise, taking into account your preexisting knowledge.
- » You should receive immediate feedback.
- » You should repeatedly perform the same or similar tasks.

Ericsson maintains that deliberate practice is different from work, play, or simple repetition of a task. It requires effort, it has no immediate reward, and it is not inherently enjoyable. We might consider that one thing that sets elite players apart is their willingness to engage in such activities and commit to a more rigorous approach to studying the game.

Modern Backgammon Learning Tools

In the past, students of the game played out propositions or rolled out positions by hand. Nowadays, we leverage our processing power and set up and roll out positions with our bot of choice. We then tinker with the position, the dice, and the match score to gain a better insight into different aspects of our beloved game. These are examples of deliberate practice. Their teaching value is not a matter of dispute.

Sometimes, however, we hit a wall — and the question is not so much whether we understand the concepts, but can we apply them in the heat of battle. In many cases, this is due to the sheer number of permutations that exist. Take, for example, the reply to the opening move. Once we factor in even just the classic match scores of double match point, gammon-go, and gammon-save, we quickly arrive at nearly 2,500 combinations of the opening move and reply. Add in other match scores, and even more complexity follows.

Bagai’s FlashBack App

In the September-October 2015 edition of *PrimeTime Backgammon*, Jeremy Bagai wrote an article introducing a longer paper of his: *Bagai’s Replies: Mastering the Second Roll*. In that paper, Jeremy presents a complete system for learning and memorizing all the money-game replies. What sets Jeremy’s system apart is that he not only describes the system itself (contributing some original thinking to a well-researched phase of the game), but provides an app to implement it.

The app uses flashcards, which display (for an extremely reasonable \$20) all the money replies

and replies at double match point, gammon go, and gammon save. But reducing the app to this level does Jeremy a great disservice. What’s equally important is what’s under the hood. Fortunately for us, Jeremy’s background is in psychology, with a specialization in decision-making.

Flashcards are a great tool to implement “spaced repetition.” Basically this is a technique that displays the cards not by chance, but in frequencies which optimize the student’s ability to retain the information. If you take a peek at the training statistics the app provides, you’ll see that there are eight categories: unseen cards and learned cards to be sure, but also other six groups. These groups reflect the journey a card takes from the time that you first see it until it is learned. Each time you view a card and rate it as easy, it moves up one group. If you rated it so-so, it stays in the same group, and if you rated it hard, it goes down a group. At the very least, then, you’ll have rated the card as easy six times before it is counted as learned. The cards, however, don’t disappear; they will

always reappear, but with a frequency that reflects their status. All of this has been shown to be the best method for memorizing such information. The spaced repetition algorithm as well as the sheer number of cards (over 2,500) together ensure that the student will not simply become overly familiar with the cards but will instead learn the underlying concepts. You are also given valuable feedback about your progress, which helps keep you motivated.

This is one of the features I value most in Jeremy’s app, for it is vital to your study efficiency. This also sets FlashBack apart from other apps offering more limited sets of problems that provide an introduction to specific issues. The application of a

Stats	
Selected Decks:	Money DMP, GG, GS
Selected Cards:	60
Unseen cards:	33
Cards in group 1:	1
Cards in group 2:	2
Cards in group 3:	2
Cards in group 4:	1
Cards in group 5:	5
Cards in group 6:	9
Learned cards:	7
Clear Training for Selected Decks	
Clear All Training	

FlashBack App by Jeremy Bagai

systematic study strategy allows FlashBack to provide a means to learning information that might be contained in decks with hundreds or even thousands of cards. I don't know whether it is my advancing years, but it increasingly seems to me that time is the most valuable commodity we all have, and we need to be very selective in how we use it to achieve our goals. Stick and many other writers have lectured us on the importance of learning both the opening moves and the concepts that underpin them. Jeremy's discussion of this topic, which I found in his app's help file (under the heading "Why FlashBack?"), convinced me of its value.

He confessed there that he has always hated memorization and had spent the past twenty years focusing on concepts rather than data. Because memorization is work, it's easy for us to convince ourselves that this is a sound approach. However, we find time and again that we don't apply the knowledge we have (or think we have) in our matches. This is certainly the brick wall I have run into many times after my return to backgammon. We ought to see memorization not as a party trick of the fool, but as an exercise that develops the reflexes we need to apply our knowledge and skill consistently.

In the space available for this review, it's not possible to go into adequate detail about the other decks Jeremy provides. They address other aspects of backgammon knowledge ideally suited to this approach, such as two- and three-checker bear-offs, match equities, and take points. In the case of bearoffs, Jeremy again provides some

useful paraphrasing of the rules established by Bob Koca (Curing Your Short Bearoff Blues, Backgammon Galore, July 2007), who built on the lists developed by Danny Kleinman (*Vision Laughs at Counting with Advice to the Dicerlorn*, 2007 edition) and Jeff Ward (*The Doubling Cube in Backgammon*, Aquarian Enterprises, San Diego, CA, 1982). Jeremy provides very useful help files for match equities and take points as well. The focus again is on putting basic information at your fingertips, allowing you to allocate calculation time to more complex issues.

Jeremy also kindly gave me an advance build of the Boot Camp deck that will shortly be available on FlashBack. This will display all the positions contained in Walter Trice's classic book. At present, the deck only contains the first two chapters: Basic Training and Advanced Training, but that has only whetted my appetite for the rest.

Stocking Your Tool Chest

Like all motivated students, I'm quick to adopt new technologies or tools. I even bought an Android tablet just so I could get the MindGamesCenter app and the apps developed by gammonfreak (pipcounter, cubetrainer, and last roll). Jeremy's app already complements these other tools very nicely, but the framework he has established could host many different decks, providing a whole series of thematic problem sets along the lines of the excellent MindGamesCenter app — which sadly hasn't seen any new topics added for some time now.

I would dearly love to see some decks devoted to cube reference positions. There are already some flashcard decks out there, but a collection using the FlashBack algorithm would be a boon for players of all abilities.

The new format could also breathe new life into some of the existing backgammon literature. In addition to some of the classics, Walter Trice's "Tactics and Theory" column on GammonVillage constitutes a worthy sequel to his *Boot Camp*. Recently, I've also been reading some of the great articles written by Steve Sax.

The Bottom Line

In conclusion, I think FlashBack is a great contribution to the backgammon community. It already represents a tremendous achievement and has great potential. The minor expense of purchasing the decks is justified many times over simply through the study time they save.

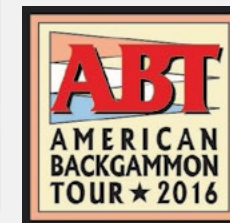
Unfortunately, the limited market for backgammon training aids has left a trail of unfinished projects in its wake. Jeremy is therefore to be commended for the effort he has made to bring this project to fruition. What he has already achieved with FlashBack is worthy in itself, but I hope he will find the support he deserves to complete the Boot Camp deck and add many more useful decks and features in the future. ♦

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Qualifying Prime Clubs



QUALIFYING PRIME CLUBS
Local Affiliated Clubs List

The U.S. Backgammon Federation provides support to local affiliated clubs with ten or more USBGF members including the club director, designated as Prime Clubs, to help promote the growth of backgammon in their communities.

Prime Clubs with 10-19 USBGF members receive one gift USBGF Premium membership to award to an individual selected by the Prime Club Director; those with 20-29 USBG members receive two gift Premium memberships; and those with 30+ receive three

gift memberships. The awards are made on an annual basis. For more information, contact info@usbgf.org.

At the end of December 2015, eighteen clubs qualified as Prime Clubs, including for the first time the Connecticut Backgammon Club, the Columbus Backgammon Club, the Hoosier Backgammon Club, and the Plymouth Backgammon Club. Congratulations! The clubs listed below have received the Prime Club designation.

GAMMON ASSOCIATES

Director: Patrick Gibson **Location:** Los Angeles, California
Phone: (818) 901-0464 **E-Mail:** pgibsonmfic@gmail.com **Website:** GammonAssociates.com
Details: The first club to reach the goal of USBGF Prime Club status is Gammon Associates. As of December 31, 2015, it had 45 USBGF members. For more information about Gammon Associates, please visit gammonassociates.com.

NYC BACKGAMMON

Director: Richard Munitz **Location:** New York, New York
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** rich@usbgf.org **Website:** nycbg.com
Details: USBGF liaison Richard Munitz and NYC Backgammon have achieved Prime Club designation. As of the end of December 2015, NYC Backgammon has 32 USBGF members. For more information, please visit nycbg.com.

BACKGAMMON BY THE BAY

Director: Ted Chee **Location:** San Francisco Bay Area, California
Phone: (831) 261-4583 **E-Mail:** ted@bgbythebay.com **Website:** bgbythebay.com
Details: Backgammon By the Bay had 28 USBGF Premium and Youth members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about Backgammon By the Bay, email Ted at ted@bgbythebay.com.

BELTWAY BACKGAMMON

Director: Barry Silliman **Location:** Washington, D.C.
Phone: (240) 674-7222 **E-Mail:** sillybaz@beltwaybg.org **Website:** beltwaybg.org
Details: Beltway Backgammon had 26 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Beltway Backgammon club, please visit beltwaybg.org.

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB

Director: Bill Davis **Location:** Chicago, Illinois
Phone: (773) 583-6464 **E-Mail:** online@chicagopoint.com **Website:** chicagopoint.com
Details: The Chicago Bar Point Club achieved Prime Club with 20 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Chicago Bar Point Club, please visit chicagopoint.com/bpc.html.

FLINT AREA BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Carol Joy Cole **Location:** Flint, Michigan
Phone: (810) 232-9731 **E-Mail:** cjc@flintbg.com **Website:** flintbg.com
Details: The Flint Area Backgammon Club had 18 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Flint Area Backgammon Club, email Carol Joy Cole at cjc@flintbg.com.

ATLANTA NORTHSIDE BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Jerry Godsey **Location:** Atlanta, Georgia
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** jerrygod2000@hotmail.com **Website:** N/A
Details: The Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status as of December 31, 2015 with 17 USBGF members. For more information about the Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club, email Jerry at jerrygod2000@hotmail.com.

ARIZONA BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Doug Amenda **Location:** Phoenix, Arizona
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** doug@amendainsurance.com **Website:** N/A
Details: The Arizona Backgammon Club had 16 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Arizona Backgammon Club, email Doug at doug@amendainsurance.com.

CONNECTICUT BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Ross Gordon **Location:** Fairfield, Connecticut
Phone: (203) 521-7866 **E-Mail:** ross@rossrunners.com **Website:** [Connecticut BG Club](http://ConnecticutBGClub)
Details: The Connecticut Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status as of December 31, 2015 with 15 USBGF members. For more information about the Connecticut Backgammon Club, email Ross at ross@rossrunners.com.

Qualifying Prime Clubs

HOUSTON BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Bill Riles **Location:** Houston, Texas
Phone: (281) 703-9304 **E-Mail:** billriles@sbcglobal.net **Website:** N/A
Details: The Houston Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status, having 14 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Houston Backgammon Club, email Bill Riles at billriles@sbcglobal.net.

LAS VEGAS BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Tony Anton **Location:** Las Vegas, Nevada
Phone: (702) 458-0926 **E-Mail:** tonyantton@earthlink.net **Website:** vegasbg.com
Details: The Las Vegas Backgammon Club had 13 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Las Vegas Backgammon Club, email Tony at tonyantton@earthlink.net.

AUSTIN BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Scott Butki **Location:** Austin, Texas
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** sbutki@gmail.com **Website:** austinbackgammon.com
Details: The Austin Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status as of December 31, 2015 with 12 USBGF members. For more information about the Austin Backgammon Club, please email Scott at sbutki@gmail.com.

COLORADO BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Lynda Clay **Location:** Boulder, Colorado
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** info@coloradobackgammon.com **Website:** coloradobackgammon.com
Details: The Colorado Backgammon Club had 12 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Colorado Backgammon Club, email Lynda at info@coloradobackgammon.com.

COLUMBUS BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Jason Marshall **Location:** Westerville, Ohio
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** jason@columbusbg.org **Website:** columbusbg.org
Details: The Columbus Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status. As of December 31, 2015, they have 12 USBGF members. For more information about the Columbus Backgammon Club, email Jason at jason@columbusbg.org.

DURHAM/CHAPEL HILL BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Ken Larsen **Location:** Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** KLarsen1@nc.rr.com **Website:** Durham/Chapel Hill BG Club
Details: The Durham/Chapel Hill Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status as of December 31, 2015 with 12 USBGF members. For more information about the Durham/Chapel Hill Backgammon Club, please email Ken at KLarsen1@nc.rr.com.

Qualifying Prime Clubs

HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Sean Garber **Location:** Indianapolis, Indiana
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** seagar1824@yahoo.com **Website:** Hoosier Backgammon Club
Details: The Hoosier Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status as of December 31, 2015 with 10 USBGF members. For more information about the Hoosier Backgammon Club, please email Sean Garber at seagar1824@yahoo.com.

KANSAS CITY BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Eric Barr **Location:** Overland Park , Kansas
Phone: (816) 237-8089 **E-Mail:** mister.eb@gmail.com **Website:** Kansas City Backgammon Club
Details: The Kansas City Backgammon Club had 10 USBGF members as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Kansas City Backgammon Club, email Eric Barr at mister.eb@gmail.com.

PLYMOUTH BACKGAMMON CLUB

Director: Dean Adamian **Location:** Canton, Michigan
Phone: N/A **E-Mail:** deanadamian@gmail.com **Website:** N/A
Details: The Plymouth Backgammon Club has achieved Prime Club status with 10 USBGF members, as of December 31, 2015. For more information about the Plymouth Backgammon Club, please visit deanadamian@gmail.com.



HOOSIER BG CLUB

The Columbus and Hoosier Backgammon Clubs achieved Prime Club status this past year. Their annual regional competition, the Ohio Valley Challenge Cup, is a major draw!

LIVE ABT TOURNAMENT RESULTS

From November 18 - January 10

Complete tournament results may be found at chicagopoint.com

November 2015

.....

ABT - LAS VEGAS OPEN BACKGAMMON TOURNAMENT November 18-22, 2015; Las Vegas, Nevada

CHAMPIONSHIP (93+35 rebuys): 1-Akiko Yazawa (Japan), 2-Dorn Bishop (CA), 3/4-Victor Ashkenazi (NJ) / Takayuki Hino (Japan); 1C-Ray Fogerlund (NV), 2C-Ted Chee (CA), 3C/4C-Pedro Carvalho (Brazil) / Stacy Turner (FL); 1LC-Patrick Gibson (CA), 2LC-Michihito Kageyama (Japan).

INTERMEDIATE (73+27 rebuys): 1-Spencer Chen (NV), 2-Ronald Amorim (Brazil), 3/4-Steve Diano (NV) / Larry Liebster (NV); 1C-Treena Bouque (CA), 2C-Salomon Zonana (Mexico), 3C/4C-Lynn Ehrlich (NY) / J.A. Miller (NV); 1LC-Pete Mostoufi (CA), 2LC-Tara Mendicino (TX).

BEGINNER (10): 1-Paulo Torres (Brazil), 2-Craig Deberg (MN).

SUPER JACKPOT (32): 1-Akiko Yazawa (Japan), 2-Falafel Natanzon (Israel/USA), 3/4-Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan) /Ray Fogerlund (NV).

LIMITED JACKPOT (32): 1-Takayuki Hino (Japan), 2-Josh Racko (CA), 3/4-Alfredo Unes (Brazil) / Damon Singer (NV).

BEGINNERS JACKPOT (8): 1-Allan Hernandez (Mexico), 2-Alia Azamat (NJ).

SENIORS (128): 1-Steve Sax (CA), 2-Gus Contos (CA), 3/4-Tristan Bettencourt (CA) / Tom McEvoy (NV).

DOUBLES (28 teams): 1-Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan) & Kazuki Yokota (Japan), 2-Larry Arnold (MN) & Tom Magne (MN).

BLITZ (176): 1-Charlie Pipkin (NV), 2-Kit Woolsey (CA).

MINI-MATCH (64): 1-Herb Roman (IL), 2-Bob Glass (CA).

LADIES JACKPOT (8): 1-Molly Anderson (WA), 2-Peggy Neubig (NJ).

Live ABT Tournament Results

JUNIORS (under 50) TOURNAMENT (8): 1-Damon Singer (NV), 2-Tuvya Felt (TN).

\$100 SATURDAY JACKPOT (32): 1-Pat MacNeil (Canada), 2-Luiz Torres (Brazil).

\$100 SATURDAY JACKPOT II (8): 1-Maies Petrosian (CA), 2-Mike Courtney (CA).

MOCHY/SIMBORG CHALLENGE II: 1-Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan).

AFTER TOURNAMENT TOURNAMENT (32): 1-David Kettler (TX), 2-Stacy Turner (FL).

December 2015

.....

ABT - CALIFORNIA STATE BACKGAMMON CHAMPIONSHIP December 4-6, 2015; Los Angeles, California

OPEN (61): 1-Al Hodis (NV), 2-Joe Russell (CA), 3-Doug Mayfield (CA), 4/5-Michael Showkati (CA) / Yoshiyuki Nakamura (Japan); 1C-Dorn Bishop (CA), 2C-Phil Simborg (IL), 3C/4C-Roberto Litzenberger (VA) / Matt Reklaitis (MA).

ADVANCED (46): 1-David Taniguchi (CA), 2-Steve Diano (NV); 1C-Pete Mostoufi (CA), 2C-Aaron Foust (NV), 3C/4C-Paul Baraz (CA) / Scotty Kelland (CT).

LIMITED (9): 1-Andrew Arthur (CA), 2-Paul Vanselow (CA); 1C-Mercedes Brynton (CA).

SUPER-48 MASTERS (42): 1/6-Shay Asraff (NV) / Roberto Litzenberger (VA) / Yoshiyuki Nakamura (Japan) / Maeis Petrosian (CA) / Joe Russell (CA) / Norm Wiggins (CA).

PAUL DINGWELL AMATEUR JACKPOT (30): 1-John Isaac (CA), 2-Paul Baraz (CA), 3/4-Ergin Bayrak (CA) / Sean Taghani (CA).

BLITZ (36): 1-Ted Chee (CA), 2-Elena Evans (TX).

SENIORS (64): 1-Bob Glass (CA), 2-Pete Mostoufi (CA), 3-Sean Taghani (CA) / Jon Vietor (CA).

DMP-USBGF PRIME TOURNAMENT (160): 1-Bob Glass (CA), 2-Bruce Newberg (CA).

DOUBLES (8 teams): 1/2-Ben Friesen (MI) & Harvey Gillis (AZ) / Clarine (CA) & Steve Sax (CA).

Live ABT Tournament Results

January 2016

ABT - 9th NEW YORK METROPOLITAN BACKGAMMON OPEN
January 6-10, 2016; Jersey City, New Jersey

CHAMPIONSHIP (70+16 rebuys): 1-Mike Senkiewicz (NY), 2-Frank DiMaggio (NY), 3/4-Neil Kazaross (IL) / Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan); 1C-Ben Friesen (MI), 2C-Rory Pascar (IL), 3C/4C-Tobias Hellwag (Germany) / Jeb Horton (NC); 1LC-Frank Talbot (MI), 2LC-Brent Cohen (PA).

INTERMEDIATE (66+18 rebuys): 1-Jordan Schwitzer (NY), 2-Michael Shmuely (NY), 3/4-Bruce Ballance (PA) / Canan Aktas (NY); 1C-Kevin Walsh (NJ), 2C-Chen-Fu Yu (MD), 3C/4C-Marcy Kossar (MD) / Ruben Martirosyan (NY); 1LC-Michael Robinson (NY), 2LC-Cloyd Laporte (NY).

ADVANCED BEGINNER (26): 1-Frank Echols (NJ), 2-Lisa Pelaez (NY); 1C-Jenna Longman (MI), 2C-Alia Azamat (NJ); 1LC-Howard Linnemann-Schmidt (NY).

BEGINNER (18): 1-Troy Longman II (MI), 2-Chris Coppa (NY); 1C-Dan Schechner (NY), 2C-Andrew Lin (WA).

LIBERTY CUP MASTERS (32): 1-John Klein (MD), 2-Mike Senkiewicz (NY), 3/4-Victor Ashkenazi (NJ) / Julian Schulman (NY).

LIMITED JACKPOT (32): 1-Bill Finneran (MD), 2-Jay Karns (CT), 3/4-Leon Marini (NJ) / Eric Stevens (FL).

LIMITED JACKPOT OVERFLOW (18): 1-Antoinette Williams (NY), 2-Michael Valliere (PA).

2-POINT MINI-MATCH (128): 1-Ed O'Laughlin (VA), 2-Albert Steg (MA), 3/4-Larry Shiller (CT) / Tony Wuersch (RI).

BLITZ (160): 1-Albert Steg (MA), 2-Gary Koscielnny (NY).

NEW YORK DOUBLES (32 teams): 1-Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan) & Steve Sax (CA), 2-Petko Kostadinov (SC) & Akiko Yazawa (Japan).

SENIORS TOURNAMENT (64): 1-Bill Finneran (MD), 2-Frank Talbot (MI), 3/4-Fran Goldfarb (NY) / Cloyd Laporte (NY).

SENIORS OVERFLOW TOURNAMENT (16): 1/2-Doug Huch (NJ) / Alan Steffen (NY).

Live ABT Tournament Results

\$500 JACKPOT (4): 1-Ray Fogerlund (NV).

\$100 JACKPOT #1 (8): 1-Carol Joy Cole (MI), 2-Sergiy Rybiy (NY).
\$100 JACKPOT #2 (8): 1-Pete Anderson (WA), 2-Boris Dekhtyar (NY).

USA vs THE WORLD: 1-*World Team:* Tobias Hellwag (Germany) / Michihito Kageyama (Japan) / Thomas Kristensen (Denmark) / Masayuki Mochizuki (Japan) / Akiko Yazawa (Japan), 2-*USA Team:* Victor Ashkenazi (NJ) / Matt Cohn-Geier (CA) / Neil Kazaross (IL) / Petko Kostadinov (SC) / Mike "Falafel" Natanzon (USA) / Steve Sax (CA). *The World Team edged Team USA with points scored in multiple events. Team USA edged the World Team in PR including final consultation match: 3.08 vs 3.33.*

HIGH ROLLER EVENT (20): 1-Mike "Falafel" Natanzon (USA), 2-Matt Cohn-Geier (CA).



TARA MENDICINO



AKIKO TAKES LAS VEGAS

World Champion Akiko Yazawa took Las Vegas by storm, winning the Vegas Open Championships in November in a highly competitive bracket of 128 entries, as well as winning the 32-player Super Jackpot.

USBGF MASTER POINT LEADERS

By Rich Munitz

Updated: 12/31/2015

2015 National Master Points Top 10

#	Name	Master Pts	Match Pts	Rank Pts *	Win - Loss	Win %	Rating	Events	1st Pl.
1.	Ray Fogerlund	109.36	95.29	14.08	86 - 63	57.72%	1670.32	35	1
2.	Frank Raposa	63.25	57.49	5.76	58 - 51	53.21%	1620.09	21	1
3.	Karen Davis	61.51	55.15	6.37	52 - 42	55.32%	1593.98	20	0
4.	Ed O'Laughlin	61.43	56.18	5.25	51 - 41	55.43%	1659.65	19	0
5.	David Rockwell	57.24	48.66	8.58	45 - 30	60.00%	1634.37	15	1
6.	Phil Simborg	55.93	49.98	5.95	48 - 49	49.48%	1584.29	22	0
7.	Victor Ashkenazi	54.05	44.42	9.63	39 - 27	59.09%	1663.76	14	1
8.	Carter Mattig	52.25	45.85	6.40	43 - 42	50.59%	1559.92	18	1
9.	Dennis Culpepper	51.51	44.93	6.58	42 - 30	58.33%	1671.24	16	0
10.	Carol Joy Cole	49.57	47.07	2.49	50 - 41	54.95%	1570.73	17	0

* Master Points are calculated by adding Match Points + (Rank Points * 0.6).

2015 Online Master Points Top 10

#	Name	Master Pts	Match Pts	Rank Pts *	Win - Loss	Win %	Rating	Events	1st Pl.
1.	Jan Černý	46.56	39.20	7.36	52 - 28	65.00%	1872.83	28	2
2.	Karen Davis	45.75	40.23	5.52	53 - 30	63.86%	1838.80	32	0
3.	Zdenek Zizka	43.65	38.76	4.89	48 - 29	62.34%	1860.87	30	2
4.	Eva Zizkova	41.09	37.35	3.74	47 - 33	58.75%	1811.07	33	1
5.	Igor Erovenko	36.30	31.50	4.81	45 - 27	62.50%	1805.12	32	2
6.	Ted Chee	35.44	32.04	3.40	44 - 28	61.11%	1840.31	29	1
7.	John Gamalielson	32.79	27.43	5.36	48 - 14	77.42%	1947.58	18	2
8.	Barry Silliman	32.78	28.78	4.00	40 - 27	59.70%	1840.42	28	1
9.	Joseph Russell	32.42	26.23	6.18	34 - 15	69.39%	1896.57	16	3
10.	Dmitriy Obukhov	30.65	25.46	5.18	39 - 20	66.10%	1894.25	22	1

* Master Points are calculated by adding Match Points + (Rank Points * 0.6).

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USBGF NATIONAL LEADERBOARD

By Barry Silliman - Rankings Editor

Updated: 12/31/2015

Open / Championship

Top-Ranked Players
In USBGF-Rated Events

#	Name	Rating
1.	Joe Russell	1672.58
2.	Akiko Yazawa	1665.55
3.	Tak Morioka	1664.44
4.	Neil Kazaross	1660.39
5.	Masayuki Mochizuki	1650.64
6.	Dorn Bishop	1648.78
7.	Ray Fogerlund	1635.92
8.	Michy Kageyama	1634.93
9.	Dennis Culpepper	1631.32
10.	Victor Ashkenazi	1624.57

Top-Ranked Players In
American Backgammon Tour Events

#	Name	Points
1.	Dorn Bishop	43.08
2.	Ray Fogerlund	41.69
3.	Akiko Yazawa	36.23
4.	Joe Russell	34.98
5.	Phil Simborg	29.64
6.	Tak Morioka	28.00
7.	Marty Storer	27.80
8.	Chuck Bower	25.78
9.	Jason Pack	24.07
10.	Frank Talbot	22.06

Intermediate / Advanced

Top-Ranked Players
In USBGF Rated Events

#	Name	Rating
1.	Pete Mostoufi	1663.40
2.	Josh Racko	1637.09
3.	Chen-Fu Yu	1634.75
4.	Bob Howayeck	1619.04
5.	Artie Sutton	1599.79
6.	David Taniguchi	1593.64
7.	Brandon Macklin	1580.08
8.	Cheryl Andersen	1577.68
9.	Mick Zakrajsek	1571.34
10.	Steve Binenstock	1567.67

Top-Ranked Players In
American Backgammon Tour Events

#	Name	Points
1.	Pete Mostoufi	13.10
2.	Feliks Goykhman	12.25
3.	Steven Sherbel	11.33
4.	Spencer Chen	10.81
5.	Gary Koscielny	9.65
6.	Dennis McFarlin	9.63
7.	David Taniguchi	9.20
7.	John Skratulia	9.20
9.	Kathleen Davis	9.14
10.	Bruce Ballance	9.11

USBGF NATIONAL LEADERBOARD

Novice / Beginners

Top-Ranked Players
In USBGF-Rated Events

#	Name	Rating
1.	Fran Miller	1557.30
2.	C.J. Uttley	1553.73
3.	Timothy Turner	1548.61
4.	Greg Smith	1545.42
5.	Jin Hu	1537.49
6.	Gary Koscielny	1533.51
7.	Rebecca Lively	1530.54
8.	Genna Cowan	1530.24
9.	Charlene Britton	1529.16
10.	Joe Green	1529.09

Top-Ranked Players In
American Backgammon Tour Events

#	Name	Points
1.	C.J. Uttley	2.27
1.	Igor Baburov	2.27
3.	Rebecca Lively	2.14
4.	Alia Azamat	1.71
5.	Paulo Torres	1.67
6.	Ken Torrens	1.50
6.	Timothy Turner	1.50
8.	Adam Tyson	1.44
8.	Fran Miller	1.44
10.	Paulette Duong	1.17

Qualifications for inclusion in USBGF-Rated Events

The numbers following the player names show their Elo ratings, cumulative since 2009. Open and Advanced player listings are restricted to USBGF members. To be listed, a player must have played in the listed division of a live USBGF-rated tournament in the past thirteen months.

Qualifications for inclusion in American Backgammon Tour Events

ABT Points are awarded only in the main events of ABT tournaments; no points are awarded in any side events. The numbers following the player names show the total ABT Points earned in 2015 competing in the specified division.

USBGF ONLINE LEADERBOARD

By Tara Mendicino

Updated: 1/20/2016

Online Circuit Top 10

#	Name	GG ID	Rating	Win - Loss	Win %	Trnys Won	High Rating
1.	David Presser	Gasman	1983.59	77 – 26	75%	8	1983.59
2.	John Gamalielson	TarsTarkus	1952.89	85 – 37	70%	3	1952.89
3.	Adam Versaw	adamV	1947.94	18 – 6	75%	3	1965.32
4.	Jim Stutz	NaturalDog	1943.92	15 – 3	83%	1	1958.73
5.	Chris Yep	cyep	1942.39	13 – 3	81%	1	1952.17
6.	Petko Kostadinov	bulgari	1942.31	14 – 3	82%	1	1953.24
7.	Doug Amenda	thephoenix2	1924.30	52 – 26	67%	5	1936.19
8.	Dorn Bishop	dorn	1923.87	14 – 6	70%	2	1944.76
9.	Bill Phipps	bjp	1919.49	5 – 0	100%	1	1919.49
10.	Arthur Sutton	im4tunet	1914.04	6 – 1	86%	1	1914.04

Up-to-date ratings may be found at: usbgf.org/trny/leaderboard/
Qualifications for inclusion in USBGF Online Circuit Events

The numbers following the player names show their Elo ratings, cumulative since September 2012 in the USBGF Online Tournament Circuit. To be listed, a player must be a current or past member of the USBGF.

Upcoming Online Circuit Tournaments

Circuit Monthly for February

Start Date: February 1, 2016

Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=259

Masters and Advanced Divisional Tournaments

Masters Divisional XXVII Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=263

Advanced Divisional XVIII Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=264

Intermediate Divisional XX Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=265

Membership Blitz Tournaments

Membership Blitz #30 Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=266

USBGF ONLINE CIRCUIT WINNERS

By Tara Mendicino

Updated: 1/20/2016

Recent Online Circuit Tournament Winners

Start Date	Status	Tournament	Winner
Dec 29, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #28	Ken Bame
Dec 06, 2015	Completed	USBGF Advanced Divisional XV	Jason Marshall
Dec 06, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #26	Cynthia Belonogoff
Nov 14, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional XIV	Andrew Hunter
Nov 14, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #25	Nick Blasier
Oct 28, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #24	Ronald Loero
Oct 28, 2015	Completed	USBGF Advanced Divisional XIII	Cynthia Belonogoff
Oct 28, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional XIII	Fabian Melnik
Oct 28, 2015	Completed	USBGF Masters Divisional XXI	John Gamalielson
Oct 17, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #23	William Lonergan
Sep 27, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional XII	Alicia Hendler
Sep 01, 2015	Completed	USBGF Masters Divisional XIX	Barry Silliman
Sep 01, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional XI	Ergin Bayrak
Jul 26, 2015	Completed	USBGF Masters Divisional XVIII	John Gamalielson
Jul 26, 2015	Completed	Circuit Monthly for August	Zdenek Zizka
Jul 21, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional X	Carlos Pulido
Jul 16, 2015	Completed	USBGF Intermediate Divisional IX	Shannon Mckinney
Jul 16, 2015	Completed	USBGF Advanced Divisional X	Ray Cifani
Jul 13, 2015	Completed	Membership Blitz #20	William Lonergan

2015 USBGF Online Circuit Tournament of Champions

All 2015 Online Circuit tournament winners will be invited to participate in the 2015 USBGF Online Circuit Tournament of Champions. This exclusive event will start in mid-April 2016. Don't miss it!

Upcoming Tournaments

UPCOMING TOURNAMENTS

Upcoming ABT Tournaments and
USBGF Sponsored Live & Online Events

Be sure to mark your calendar and attend these exciting ABT tournaments & USBGF events. For complete tournament listings, see chicagopoint.com.

**ABT: 4th TEXAS CHAMPIONSHIPS
& 2016 USBGF AWARDS**
Dates: February 4 - 7, 2016
Place: Menger Hotel, San Antonio, TX
Details: [Website](#)
Phone: 281/703-9304

FEB



ABT: SUNSHINE STATE CLASSIC
Dates: February 19 - 21, 2016
Place: Clarion, Clearwater, FL
Details: [Website](#)
Phone: 727/743-0500

FEB



ABT: OHIO STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS
Dates: March 18 - 20, 2016
Place: Marriott, Cleveland, OH
Details: [Website](#)
Phone: 330/268-4610

MAR



ABT: U.S. OPEN
Dates: April 13 - 17, 2016
Place: Flamingo Hotel, Las Vegas, NV
Details: [Website](#)
Phone: 702/218-8238

APR



ABT: ATLANTA SPRING CLASSIC
Dates: April 28 - May 1, 2016
Place: Sheraton, Atlanta, GA
Details: [Brochure](#)
Phone: 404/403-1957

APR



ABT: CAPITAL CLASSIC
Dates: May 20 - 22, 2016
Place: Holiday Inn Dulles, Sterling, VA
Details: [Email](#)
Phone: 540/222-6431

MAY



ABT: 36th CHICAGO OPEN
Dates: May 26 - 30, 2016
Place: Holiday Inn, Rosemont, IL
Details: [Website](#)
Phone: 617/699-9100

MAY



Upcoming Tournaments

ABT: LOS ANGELES OPEN

Dates: June 10 - 12, 2016

Place: Hilton LAX, Los Angeles, CA

Details: [Website](#)

Phone: 818/901-0464

JUN



ABT: MICHIGAN SUMMER CHAMPIONSHIPS / ABT AWARDS

Dates: July 1 - 4, 2016

Place: Sheraton, Novi, MI

Details: [Website](#)

Phone: 810/232-9731

JUL



ABT: 20th MINNESOTA OPEN

Dates: July 22 - 24, 2016

Place: Comfort Inn, Bloomington, MN

Details: [Website](#)

Phone: 612/718-2613

JUL



ABT: 1st SILICON VALLEY OPEN

Dates: August 5 - 7, 2016

Place: Courtyard, San Jose, CA

Details: [Website](#)

Phone: 510/402-8068

AUG



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