

BIBAFAX

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Dedicated To Backgammon



Have you heard the one about the Scotsman, the Irishman and the Brit?

See page 25 to find out how they all got on

Biba Backgammon Tour - 2010

Following on from an earlier attempt to organise a backgammon tour based upon regional tournaments, Biba has set up the Biba Backgammon Tour (BBT). It is a non-contributory, non-fee event that takes its final 8 players from the entrants of the following UK events:

Scottish Open. Manchester One-Day. English Open. Barcelo Cup
Sandy Osborne Trophy. Coventry Open. Irish Open.

The organisers of the above events are not directly involved with the UK Tour, but if they want to assist they are welcome to do so. All that is required of them is to make available the names of the Last 8/16 players in the Main. This is purely a Biba project and any funding is via Biba and an event sponsor - the search for which is now on - events pay nothing towards it.

For the Last 8/16 of the Main in each of the tour events, points will be awarded thus: 1st = 20, 2nd = 16, 3rd & 4th = 12, 5th/8th = 9, 9th to 16th = 5. A running points total and leader board will be published on the Biba web site following each event, and in the Bibafax upon publication. After the final event, the Irish Open, the top 8 scorers will become the qualifiers. These 8 qualifiers will be invited to take part in the Grand Final to be held on the Saturday evening at the 2011 Bright & Breezy tournament, 8 January. The Finals will be a 15-point Knockout with a winner-takes-all prize of at least £250. If you are interested in being the sponsor (or can suggest someone who might be), please contact BBT on info@backgammon-biba.co.uk.

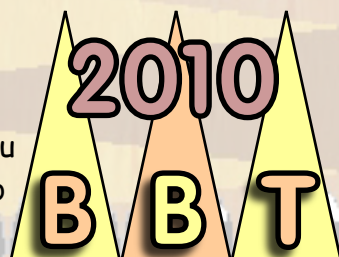
Qualifiers must confirm their attendance for the Final by 7 November. If any of the qualifiers cannot attend the Final then the 9th scorer will be invited, and thereafter, 10th, 11th etc. until such time as we have an 8 draw. Any vacant places that occur on the day of the Final will be decided in the same way.

Remember. There are no fees to pay to enter the BBT - the only fees you incur are those to enter each event. The BBT is not an official part of the above events (excepting those organised and run by Biba) but it is hoped that its involvement will result in more entrants for each event.

Because the BBT is being introduced retrospectively we already have 8 potential qualifiers from the Scottish Open and Manchester One-Day events, and others will soon be added upon their conclusion. Below is the calendar of all events including those already completed.

19-21 March:	Scottish Open - (Biba event)
25 April:	Manchester One-Day - www.lighton.btinternet.co.uk/backg.htm
5-6 June:	English Open - (Biba event)
3-5 September:	The Barceló Cup (Biba event)
1-3 October:	Sandy Osborne Trophy - (Biba event)
17 October:	Coventry Open - http://covbackgammon.co.uk
28-31: October:	Irish Open - eperry@iol.ie

If your club is staging a local tournament that is open to all and you would like to be part of the BBT, please email and let us know. It is also very likely that Biba Grand Prix Points can also be applied to your event.



To see the leader board and latest updates go to www.backgammon-biba.co.uk/bbt2010

Questions & Answers about the Biba Backgammon Tour

Q: Do the 8 qualifiers have to be Biba members?

A: No. The Tour is open to any backgammon player. It is designed to promote regional backgammon and (hopefully) increase entry levels for them. Of course, if any of the finalists in January are not members of Biba they could join if they wanted to. To get the Tour going this year Biba has added a few 'extra' events which will be replaced next year with more local ones.

Q: Are you restricting it to the last 8 or 16 of each Main event?

A: Not all events have a last 16; however, it will be extended to include 9-16 (where appropriate) and the points allocated will be 5 for 9th to 16th. The leader board reflects this with the Scottish Open and Manchester results, and the information sheet already shows this.

Q: It is possible that two or more of those topping the chart at year end could share the same number of points thus giving a greater field of 8 qualifiers. How do decide who is in the Final?

A: I have decided to add 'attendance points' (AP) as a tie-breaker. All event entrants will get 1 AP for each event they enter. Those that support the tour the most will have more AP than those that enter only one or two events. Of course, if any entrants are not in the top 16 (or top 8) of any event then I might not have a record of their attendance, therefore it is incumbent upon such entrants to ensure the event TD informs Biba of their attendance or to notify me themselves. There will be a full list of BBT points and AP posted on the Biba web site following each event, check to see if you are mentioned - if you aren't, contact Biba.

Q: It looks as if the event calendar is filled up with Biba events, why is this?

A: I had considered launching the BBT next year but instead decided to start it now so that by this time next year it will have established itself within the backgammon calendar. This year, to kick-start it, I have added extra Biba events. Next year I expect more local events to be added to give it the local relevance the BBT is hoping to promote.

Q: How does an event become part of the BBT?

A: Quite easily - simply by holding a local tournament which is open to everyone and not just its club members and offering it to Biba as part of the BBT. This year Manchester and Coventry have 'signed-up' and next year Liverpool will be joining in. Also, it is very likely that Biba Grand Prix points will also be awarded at all BBT events to add that little extra incentive for those chasing the Grand Prix championship.

Q: For the January finals in Brighton, do all the entrants have to stay in the hotel?

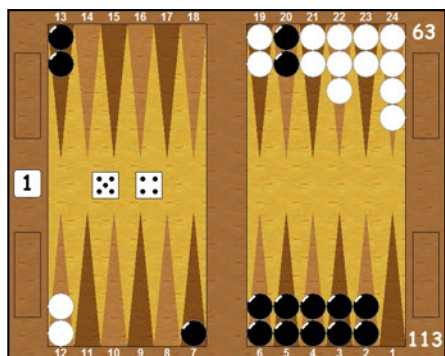
A: No, they do not if they are only entering the BBT Final. However, should they also be entering the Bright 'n' Breezy, then normal Biba rules of entry apply.

Q: Playing to 15 points seems a bit high. Is this likely to change?

A: Yes, there is flexibility. On the night the number of points played per round can be decided by consensus.

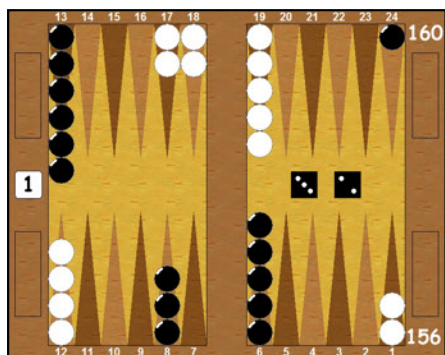
Leader Board May, 2010

20	Stewart Pemberton	9	Ash Dalvi	5	Dave Motley
20	Adrian Jones	9	Marcus Wrinch	5	Fak Laight
18	Carl Dell	9	Paul Barwick	5	Ian Shimwell
16	Matthew Fisher	9	Paul Gillam	5	Martin Bakwill
16	Vaidas Novicenko	9	Uldis Lapikens	5	Martin Birkhahn
14	Mark Calderbank	5	David Phillips	5	Richard Biddle
12	Ian Hesketh	5	John Wright	5	Simon K Jones
12	Brian Lever	5	Kevin Jones	5	Stewart Wilson
12	Lawrence Powell	5	Phil Tutchings	5	Susan Bourne
12	Paul Harper	5	Rachel Rhodes	5	Vicki Pemberton



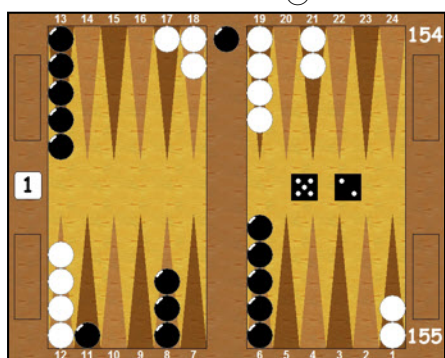
Black 0 White 2
White to play 54

I always never volunteer a direct shot if being hit means I lose the game but here the safe 6/1, 6/2 will leave me in trouble on all 4s, 5s and 6s except doubles leaving multiple shots and indirect shots. I moved 13/4. Any other play is a mistake.



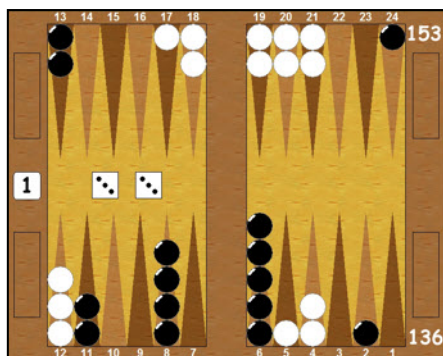
Black 0 White 3
Black to play 32

This is probably the first score-based decision of the match. John is behind in the match so he should bring down two builders 13/11, 13/10 to go for a priming game, which is more gammonish, and unstacking the heavy mid-point, as opposed to John's actual play of 24/21, 13/11 which was an error @ -0.043.



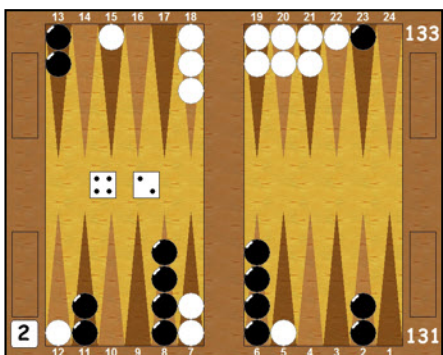
Black 0 White 3
Black to play 52

John played 25/23, 13/8; he should have played 25/20, 13/11, making the 11-point and just playing with the one blot. An error @ -0.067 but not a blunder. If I make the 5-point it is strong anyway whether or not I point on John's head.



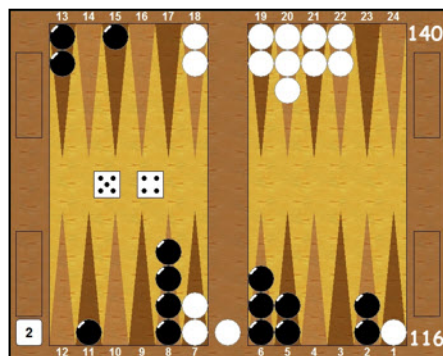
Black 0 White 3
White to play 33

After the obvious 21/18(2) I should have played 13/10(2) as opposed to the safer 13/7. With the stronger board and an anchor, and with a black blot in John's home board I should play all out to make the 8-point. A large error @ -0.091 and almost a blunder.



Black 0 White 3
White to play 42

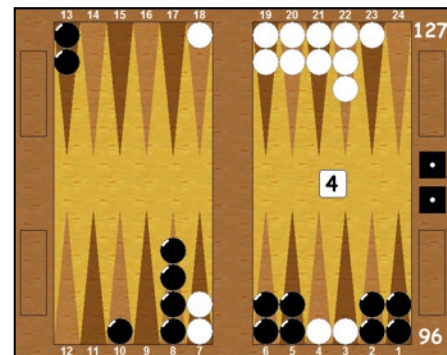
After the obvious 7/3 I should play 20/18 and only play with two blots as opposed to my actual play of 13/11 leaving four blots. Now John has no double hitting number and no 33 or 11 jokers. An error @ -0.045, but not a blunder.



Black 0 White 3
White to play 54

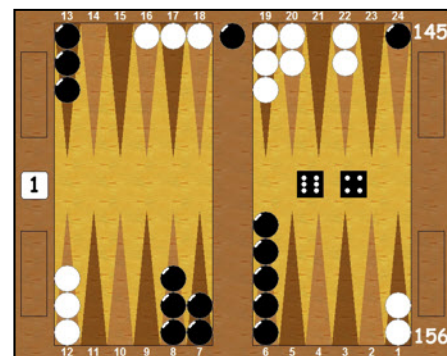
As I am behind 15 pips in the race after this roll, I have to get a shot to win with my stronger board. Playing 25/16 covers the outfield better and challenges John to get his checkers on the 15- and 11-point safe while keeping my strong board. I played 25/21, 7/2 as I was scared of run-

ning out into a treble shot. This is the wrong idea as it is John who should be scared of being hit. My play was, unfortunately, a blunder @ -0.124.



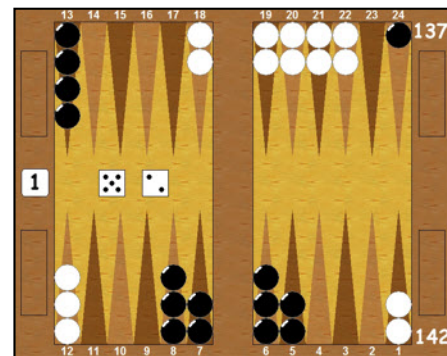
Black 4 White 3
Black cube action

John's double is clear. This is a small pass for money but at this score it is a monster pass. I thought about it for a long time and thought that as I needed four points and the recube to 8 was perfectly efficient, it was a take. However it is a monster blunder as Snowie tells me, Redouble/take @ -0.450!



Black 4 White 3
Black to play 64

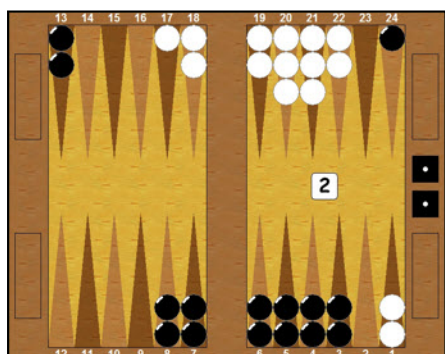
John's biggest error of the match, a blunder @ -0.365. After coming in with the 4 John should have played 24/18* hitting, as opposed to his running play of 21/15. Hitting sends me back 19 pips and takes away half my roll next go.



Black 4 White 3
White to play 52

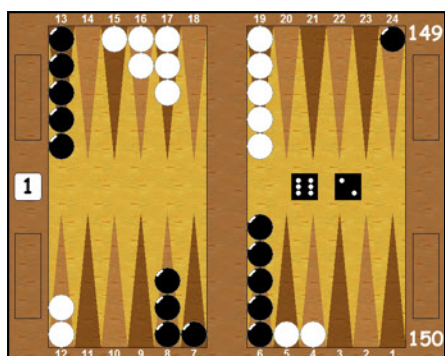
Again, another big blunder on my part @ -0.369. After playing 13/8 I should

have played 24/22, preparing to escape my back man or getting a more advanced anchor as opposed to 13/11 and leaving direct 1s but getting more covers for the 8-point to complete the 6-prime.



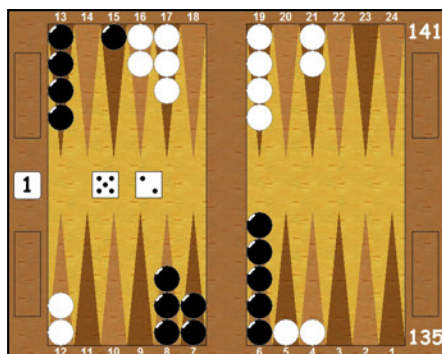
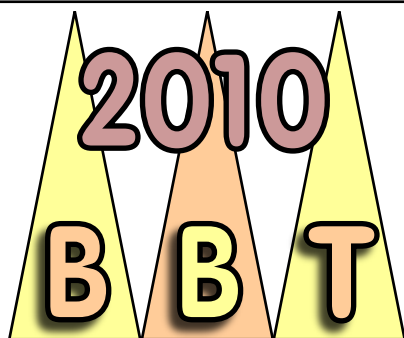
Black 4 White 3
White cube action

Maybe John thought I would take this but it is far too good to double. However if I took this incorrectly 1 time in 5 then it would be a good double. John has simply too much timing with his two spares on the 13-point representing 22 pips in the race. I would have crunched my board in the meantime.



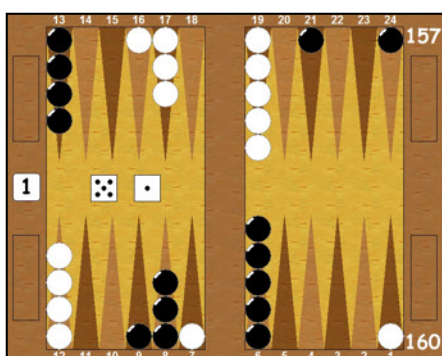
Black 5 White 3
Black to play 62

After covering the bar-point with 13/7, a better 2 is hitting on the 4-point, unstacking the heavy 6-point and fighting for a key point as opposed to playing the passive 24/22 John played, trying to escape his back man. Also hitting gains a tempo where I lose half my roll and cannot use all my builders on my side of the board unless I roll doubles. A blunder on John's part of -0.123.



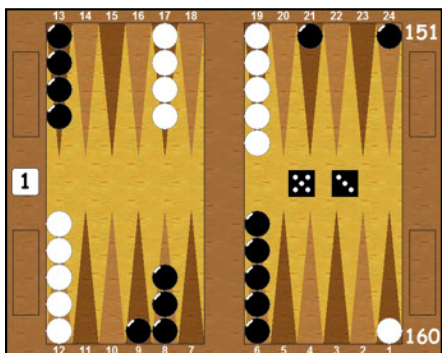
Black 5 White 3
White to play 52

I should have run with 20/13 challenging John to find a safe place for his blot on the 15-point to go onto, especially as I have the stronger board. My play of 9/4, 9/7 was an blunder @ -0.149



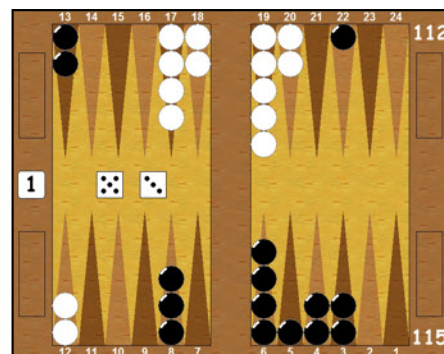
Black 5 White 4
White to play 51

I should have made the anchor playing 24/18. With my builder on the 9-point most of my numbers play well next roll if not hit. If it is hit I just start again. I played 18/13, 9/8 which is too stacked and inflexible in the opening. An error on my part @ -0.086.



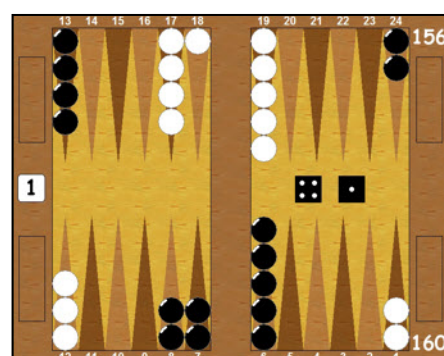
Black 5 White 4
Black to play 53

John should have played 24/21, 13/8 making an advanced anchor and freezing my builders on the 8-point and 6-point while putting a valuable spare on the 8-point. Instead, John played 21/13 making a back man safe and stacking another checker on his mid-point which was a blunder @ -0.122.



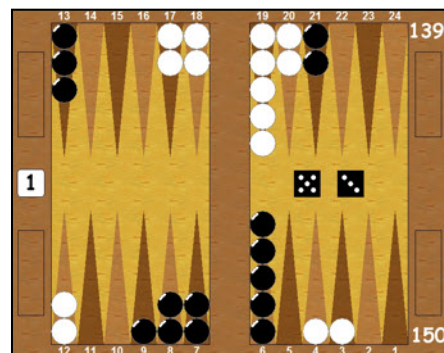
Black 5 White 4
White cube action?

A small error on my part @ -0.039 by not doubling prior to rolling. I am ahead in the race, escaped my back men, have the stronger board and priming/blitzing threats. Also I am behind in the match which makes the double even stronger.



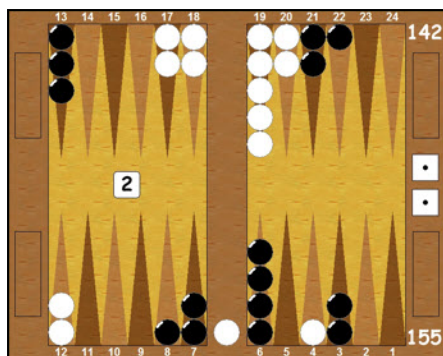
Black 6 White 4
Black to play 41

John should have played 13/9, 6/5, unstacking the heavy 6-point and slotting the key 5-point. By playing 24/23, 13/9, he is allowing me to unstack my heavy points by pointing on his head and making a point. This was an error @ -0.059.



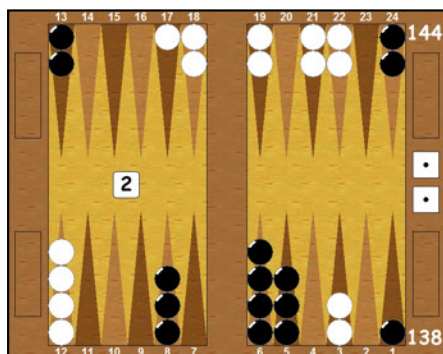
Black 6 White 4
Black to play 53

Obviously John points on my head but with which - 9/4*, 7/4 or 8/3*, 6/3? The former hits on a better point and only leaves one blot while the latter, 8/3*, 6/3, makes an inferior point and leaves two blots and more return shots. John's 3-point play was a marginal blunder @ -0.111.



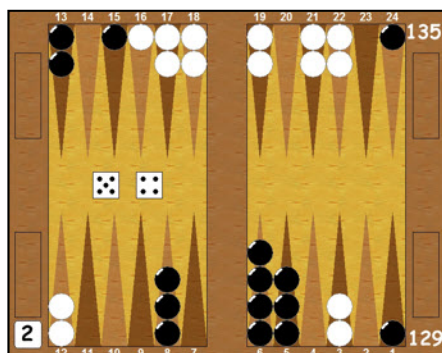
Black 6 White 4
White cube action

I doubled too early here making an error @ -0.035, even though I am behind in the match. I am on the bar which cuts down on my good numbers and John has an advanced anchor which cuts down on his gammon losses. John's take is too easy and even if I roll my best sequence pointing on his head and he dances, John still has a take.



Black 8 White 4
White cube action

I doubled and John incorrectly took. At 3-away, 7-away in the match, it is an error of -0.081 in taking. I have an advanced anchor and am threatening to make the 5th point of my prime.



Black 8 White 4
White to play 54

Now's a good time to run off my anchor with 22/13 as I am ahead in the race, have the stronger board and John has a blot in his home board. My play of 13/8, 13/9 is almost a blunder @ -0.097 for it leaves my two back men isolated.

Match detailed statistics for UK Finals		
Player	John Hurst	Nicky Check
Rating	intermediate	intermediate
Overall	8.924/14.807	9.437/16.149
Errors(blunders)	17(7)	16(7)
Checker play errors		
Checker play	6.733/10.459	6.111/9.727
Errors(blunders)	11(5)	10(5)
Double errors		
Overall	1.105/2.954	1.541/2.128
Missed double	0.419/1.115	1.401/1.907
Wrong double	0.686/1.839	0.140/0.221
Errors(blunders)	4(1)	5(1)
Take errors		
Overall	1.086/1.394	1.785/4.293
Wrong take	0.303/0.478	1.785/4.293
Wrong pass	0.783/0.917	0.000/0.000
Errors(blunders)	2(1)	1(1)
John Hurst was 51.34% favourite.		

John eventually gets two of my checkers on the bar, and he bears off to win a gammon and the match.

This match is on the CD-ROM version of Bibafax or is available via email from Biba HQ. It is also available as a html file for those that do not have Snowie. Please note that in order to see the boards, Snowie image files are required. Please ask for details.

The XI Scottish Open

Well, the Scottish Open returned to Scotland and it was a partial success. The entry of the Main was lower than I'd hoped for and the turn out of Scottish players was also lower than I'd hoped for. The 'south of the border' entries were down due to the hotel not releasing any extra rooms, and to BA's striking cabin crew. The 'north of the border' entries were down because some players found the cost of entering too expensive. For an event that cost around £2300 to stage, I thought the cost of entering reasonable and it didn't cost any more than many other Biba events. Mind you, what excuse did the Beginners (4) have? Theirs' was a free entry event and I added fifty quid as prize money! They're hard bugers to please, these Scots!

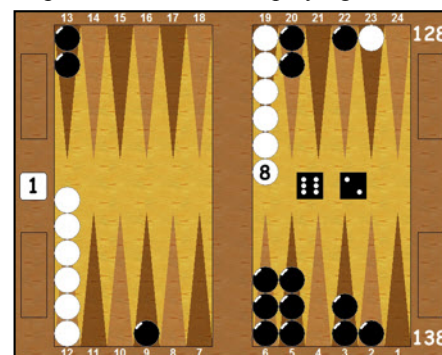
The weekend began with the **Friday 500 (22)** which was a decent turnout, (unfortunately, not all the Scottish en-

trants returned to play in the Main, which would have made a difference), and it was decided between Martin Barkwill and Andy Darby. Andy had already been 1st and 2nd this year, and Martin proved no match for him as he notched up a second 1st place.

The **Main (33)** got underway on time and by the Sunday morning we had our four semi-finalists: Lawrence Powell vs Vaidas Novicenko (Lithuania via Dublin), and Ian Hesketh (local, Edinburgh BG Club member) vs Stewart Pemberton. Vaidas and Stewart emerged the winners and it was they that sat down to contest the Scottish Open Championship.

Stewart took the lead 2-0, and then Vaidas levelled off at 2-2; he then increased it to 2-4 and Stewart pulled one back to make it 3-4. The lead then went 3-5, 4-5, and it is at this score that we see Stewart

make a big blunder. The match is to 11 points and Stewart is playing as black.



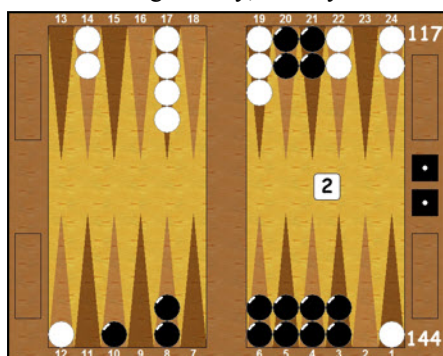
Black 4 White 5
Black to play 62

Stewart played 22/16, 9/7. Apart from duplicating 4s, this is a non-move; it doesn't do anything and it should. His position throughout is far superior to his opponent's, but unless he gets a white checker back in the race he's per- ➡

haps going to lose. He needs to be provocative here and build his home table quickly to take advantage of his spare checkers. This is best achieved by playing 13/7, 6/4. He won't mind being hit and he now has great chances to make a good home prime ready to contain any blots that he might Hoover up later.

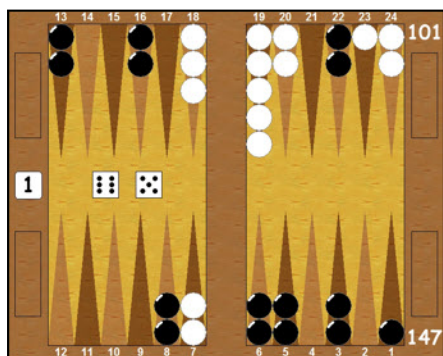
By moving from the white 22-point he also allows Vaidas to play safely past his advanced anchor. Vaidas rolled 64: 13/3, a roll that would (if played), have left two blots on and Stewart rolled 21 and could have picked up both of them! A few rolls later and Stewart is cubed out as the score moves to 4-6 to Vaidas.

The score continues, 4-8, 5-8, 6-8, 6-9; and it is here that Stewart ships across a 2-cube trailing 5-away, 2-away!



Black cubes

This is a good cube from Stewart and Vaidas correctly takes. Vaidas is unable to get his lone runner to safety and it is later joined by another white checker resulting in a 2-cube gammon for Stewart as he goes into the lead 10-9 Crawford. About halfway through this game Vaidas makes a blunder when playing a 65.



White to play 65

He deliberates between 7/1, 6/1 and 18/7 for almost two minutes! He is clearly struggling with which move to go with and eventually blunders with the former. His play merely postpones the time when his back two checkers will have to move, and at the moment the 65 is ideal for moving one to safety. Black's home

board isn't that hot and he has a blot on the 1-point that only a roll of 66 or 61 will hit and cover. Later he is unable to get one of his runners safe and it is this one that leads to his eventual downfall and Stewart's victory.

It wasn't a classic final, and both players made their fair share of mistakes: Both made 11 blunders (Stewart 7 checkerplay, 4 cube; Vaidas 9 checkerplay, 2 cube). Snowie rated them both Intermediates and had Stewart as the slight favourite - perhaps due to his high luck rate of 17.806!

In the **Consolation (29)** Neil Webb (honorary Scot and the first winner of the Scottish Open in 1998) fought his way from Round 1 to meet Phil Tutchings (who entered from the Progressive side) in the final. Unfortunately for Neil - but fortunately for Phil - Neil was unable to add another Scottish 1st place to his trophy cabinet as Phil rolled out the winner.

The **Last Chance (32)** was an open draw and finalist, Mark Calderbank didn't waste time (or money) on reentering, he got to the final on his first attempt. His opponent, John Wright, made it on his third! Possibly fired by his extra costs, John went on to win, leaving Mark in second place. During this match Mark made a silly mistake that had the on-lookers astounded at what they saw. It's not for me to relate what happened, but if you see Carl Dell or John Wright . . .

Arthur Wright had a decent weekend; he didn't win the Main or the Consolation or the Last Chance, but he did win the **Haggis (16)** and the **1-Point Knockout (33)** which ran in tandem with the Main. This is Arthur's second 1-pointer final and this time he prevailed by beating Vaidas. In the Haggis he got the better of Nicky Check. Nicky, being the sporting player that he is refused to smile for the photo, hence the sullen look! Arthur, a



Main: Stewart - Viadas
Consolation: Neil & Phil
Last Chance: Mark & John

brand new granddad dedicated his two victories to his new grandson, Harry Arthur Piran Ford. It's only a matter of time before we see young Harry at a tournament, eh Arthur?

As mentioned above the **Beginner's (4)** was a very poor turnout, especially when you consider the number of eligible entrants that could have entered. However, undeterred we played a Round Robin, then played off for positions and Hazel Brown came 1st with Derek Wilson 2nd and Angie 3rd. In the **Poker (14)** Mark Calderbank came 1st with organiser (in Tony Fawcett's absence) Vicki Pemberton coming 2nd and Jonathan Frame 3rd. And in the **Team (13)**, Richard Biddle beat everyone else to be the sole victor - back on form, eh Richard? Richard's route to the tournament was a long and circuitous one, he travelled on his Harley went from west to east on his adventure. Perhaps, when his cold frozen hands are warmed up he might regale us with his exploits . . . frogs included?

Finally. I'd like to thank all those that travelled from the south to enter, and all those that lived on the doorstep and entered! Thanks also to sponsors, CasinoRip and their representative, Gilberto, for the trophies; and finally to Gareth Timms and Hazel Brown from the Edinburgh BG Club for their help and the wine prizes. If you're ever in Edinburgh (or close by) nip in and have a game with them - they've some decent players who'll give you a good game. Find them at <http://www.meetup.com/Edinburgh-Backgammon/>.



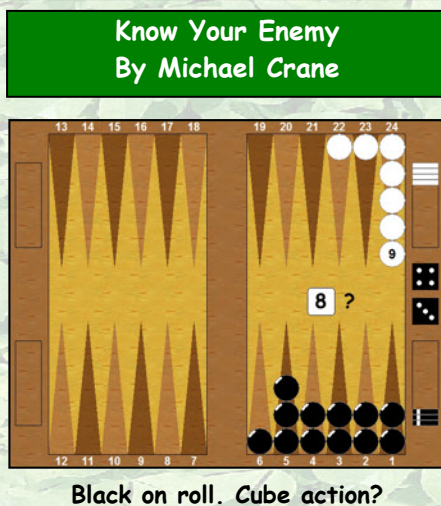
Match detailed statistics for Scottish Open		
Player	Stewart	Vaidas
Rating	intermediate	intermediate
Overall	11.847/35.609	11.013/42.817
Errors(blunders)	22(11)	25(11)
Checker play errors		
Checker play	7.913/25.184	9.353/37.076
Errors(blunders)	18(7)	22(9)
Double errors		
Overall	1.459/2.261	1.489/5.426
Missed double	0.158/0.278	0.000/0.000
Wrong double	1.301/1.983	1.489/5.426
Errors(blunders)	2(2)	2(2)
Take errors		
Overall	2.474/8.164	0.172/0.314
Wrong take	0.000/0.000	0.000/0.000
Wrong pass	2.474/8.164	0.172/0.314
Errors(blunders)	2(2)	1(0)
Stewart Pemberton was 57.21% favourite		



Haggis (& 1-pointer): Arthur & Nicky
Beginners: Angie, Derek & Hazel
The Trophies

When I first learned to play backgammon I enlisted the aid of my friend, Jim Moore. I taught him how to play over twenty years ago. I have played against Jim on a regular basis ever since. I know him well, very well. I know how he plays and how he thinks. That's why, in this position in an 11 point match with me trailing 8-away, 7-away, I offered over a very dodgy 8-cube. I knew it wasn't a good recube, but I knew my enemy!

Was I taking an huge risk? It is so clearly not a recube and an easy take for the match, and yet Jim thought about it for a minute or more . . . and then dropped!

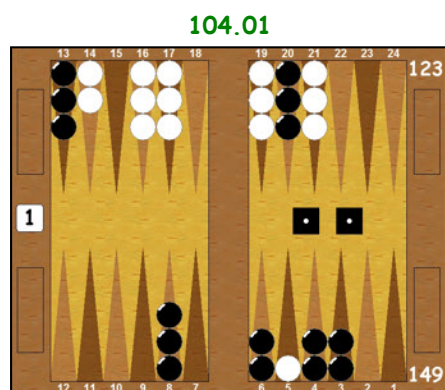


He did lots of counting and touching of checkers and looking at the score; and I knew I'd get the four points! If Jim was going to take (and it clearly is one) he'd have snatched it up immediately. I knew after a second he was going to drop. I even said to him, "What are you thinking about? It's an easy take." He still dropped.

Not for one second did I doubt he'd drop it. If I did I would have hung onto the cube and prayed for doubles! Mind you, Jim had the last laugh, I took the match to 9-7 to me and was gammoned on a 2-cube (correct double/take) and lost the match!

Competition 2010 No.1 - Solutions 104.01 to 104.06

Well, it's a new Competition and each of the entrants start off on a level footing - until the last page of this article, that is!



11 point match

Black 10 White 1 Crawford
Black to play 11

MC: Let's start this off with a 'virgin', Nicky Check, entering his first ever competition.

Nicky Check: 13/12, 8/5*

Black is behind 26 pips so he must hit white and contain him to win. I would play 13/2, 8/5* hitting and diversifying with 3s, 8s and 7s to cover the blot on the 5-point. I believe it is wrong to play 8/7 with the last 1 as the 8-point is part of the prime from the 3-point to the 8-point and it keeps the blot count down. Black would be very unlucky to be gammoned at this score with the 5-point anchor already made.

MC: What Nicky and the next two entrants do is take an unnecessary risk leaving a direct 4-shot off the bar. Hitting is correct, but not like this.

Bob Young: 13/12, 8/5*

Unlikely to win the game and match unless black hits some back, so why not now? 6/5*(2) leaves all safe but poor home board, i.e. open high point, so hit 8/5*. Pick-and-pass or leave it? Will need to make a good blockade to try and force white to enter and start dismantling on other side of board, so leave slotted, planning to close it next roll. 8/7 seems too loose, breaks part of a good blockade to try for good cover numbers, far more productive is 13/12, giving 7s and 8s to make the point, as well as rolls for the bar-point, and see what white rolls. If hit, black won't mind re-entering low down and giving more problems for white's awkward rolls.

Paul Plumptre: 13/12, 8/5*

We have to hit 8/5* - I refuse to entertain any non-hit. 8/7, 8/5* gives white four extra hits and four very damaging double hits, so is too big. So it is a choice between (a) 8/5*, 5/4 hitting and lifting, and (b) 13/12, 8/5* slotting. Being hit after (b) only costs me maybe a +5% chance of not managing to re-hit the last man during white's escape, plus maybe a +5% extra gammon chance, four men back rather than three (which I care about fully at this match score). Whereas if I am missed after (b), I have a half chance of immediately covering my 5-point, which must increase my winning chances by maybe 20% compared to (a). So I rate that (b) compared to (a) has a one third chance of costing me 10%, of a two third chance of gaining 20%. I play (b) by some margin.

Phil Tutchings: 13/12, 8/5*

This is the Crawford game with black leading - so two main aims:

- 1) Win one point and the match
- 2) Avoid being gammoned - (gammon would put white eight points away - an even number so a game closer to winning the match)

As black is 26 pips behind in this game it is necessary to maintain contact to have a decent chance of winning. Although we don't want to risk having more checkers sent back (increasing white's gammon winning potential) we do have the anchor on white's 5-point which should minimise the risk of gammons against us.

As we need to keep contact the priority should be not to let white's blot on our home 5-point escape - so we should hit with 8/5*.

Bringing a checker down from the mid-point (13/12) gives us 8s, 7s and 3s to make our 5-point next time with no immediate risk of a double hit against us (which would carry gammon risks). This play seems to balance our two main aims at this match score.

MC: None of the above consider shifting points; in fact many players often overlook this strategy, especially if the shift is off the 6-point. The rest of the field see it as a viable option. However, the first of the bunch likes to flirt a little with danger.

Peter Christmas: 13/12, 8/7, 6/5*(2)

We only need a point for the match and assuming white is put on the bar we will

only be 17 pips behind after this roll so if we can keep the straggler occupied for a couple of rolls the race will be close. The pick-and-pass is a totally safe option (8/5*, 5/4) but we do have some work to clear our 13- and 20-points and pushing white back to our 1- or 2-point is going to greatly increase our game winning chances. We can take some risks with our anchor and even having a man sent back if he comes in on the low points it would make it harder for white to bear in safely, but going forward is our best route to win.

So although a case can be made for 8/5* and 13/12 for some extra cover numbers, it's maybe too loose. The alternative 6/5*(2) needs some quick back-up too with 8/7 and 13/12 bringing three spares to bear on remaking the 6-point asap. It also leaves some indirect shots but with our stronger board we are better placed to do battle in our outer board for as long as we can and if the worse happens we can fight the rearguard action; so I would give it to 13/12, 8/7, 6/5*(2).

MC: It might only be a few return hits off the bar, but they really aren't necessary. It's better to play it completely safe.

Cedric Lytton: 13/12(2), 6/5*(2)

Black's game plan is to keep white's runner back, and this play leaves no shots and gives good outer-board coverage if white should re-enter with a 6. 13/12, 8/5* would be dangerous with three men back behind white's (albeit broken) 4-prime, and 8/5*, 5/4 would lose a builder for the bar-point or 5-point.

MC: Cedric sees the danger that the other four entrants were happy to put themselves into.

Richard Biddle: 13/12(2), 6/5*(2)

I think it is important to be aware of the score here. We only need to win one point, we don't want to lose a gammon, we don't need a sledgehammer to crack a nut. For that reason by hitting with or without the slot could be wrong. Hitting without the slot (8/5*, 5/4) just wastes a builder. Hitting with the slot (8/5*, 13/12) sends one of our checkers back 15 times out of 35 boosting our gammon-losing chances.

However the latter feels the most natural play as we are behind in the race so leaving a blot after hitting isn't so bad. We have all been trained never to do the ►

unthinkable and lose our 6-point but is it so wrong now if we also make our 12-point? Any 6 that white re-enters with is likely to get hit again. And we can just keep on attacking, blitzing, trying to re-make the 6-point until we catch up again in the race. Simple.

MC: Simple? Well, you certainly are, Richard. Sending your answers to all the other entrants really was a simple thing to do! Our final entrant was pleased to know your answers.

Brian Lever: 13/12(2), 6/5*(2)

My original notes on this position simply said "hit but how?" Doh! Well the hit must be obvious; the trick is to contain the hit blot. Richard Biddle very kindly sent his answers to all the usual suspects, and I agree with a lot of what he says – eg pick and pass wastes a builder; I'm not so sure about hitting and slotting though – Richard says that we get hit back 15 times, which must mean that we're missed 21 times. And we do need the 5-point to win the game.

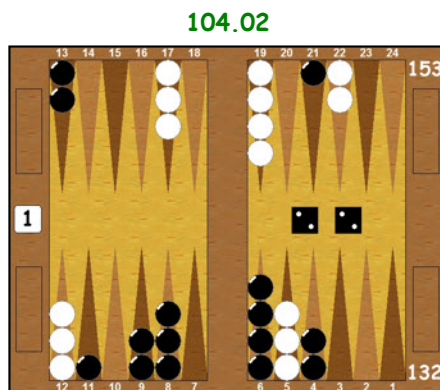
But I agreed with his overall conclusion: the idea that the initial play – the hit – should be 6/5(2)*; the situation does call for some caution because black doesn't want to be hit back, and in truth he doesn't really need to take chances (unlike white who is chasing the game) then the blocking of 66 and builders for the 6-point, which we also need to win the game. I did toy with the idea of making or slotting the bar, but it does leave a dangling blot or two whereas 13/12(2) leaves nothing hittable and a double shot at any white entering 6.

Snowie: 13/12(2), 6/5*(2)

And off we go for another fun packed year of problem solving – you humans are gluttons for punishment! In this position white's last checker is threatening to escape so hitting is mandatory. The loose hit should be considered and rejected – no need for black to panic yet as he has plenty of checkers in the attack zone and so he should play 6/5(2)* with two of the 1's.

The choice is then between the completely safe 13/12(2) or 13/12, 8/7 which creates an extra builder at the cost of leaving five shots. Again there is no need to panic and blocking double-sixes is a huge plus so the vote goes to the safe play.

MC: So, the safe option is the best option? If only it was always this simple!



11 point match
Black 1 White 10 Crawford
Black to play 22

MC: We'll let Nicky lead seeing that he is the only one to pick this particular move.

Nicky Check: 13/11(2), 8/4

The first 2 are easy – 13/11(2) as the point 6 pips away is the best point to have against an anchor on the 5-point. Then I would play 8/4 leaving no blots in my home board in case white hits loose on my blot on my 4-point and I hit back.

MC: Well, he got the easy ones correct, but the 8/4 takes away a spare 6 and doesn't even rate a mention from Snowie. Nicky isn't alone in picking a unique move, the next two entrants do so, too.

Phil Tutchings: 11/7, 6/2

Here the situation is reversed. We are now trailing 10-away, 1-away so we want to avoid the loss but a gammon would put us a game closer to winning post-Crawford. After this roll we have a significant racing lead (29 pips) but white's anchor on our 5-point makes the prospect of a gammon unlikely.

We cannot escape the back checker yet so we can't just play a straight racing game. Our mid-point is still a valuable asset and hopefully a safe landing place when we get the opportunity to progress the lone back checker.

Despite our racing lead there is a lot of contact left in this game and we should be thinking of balancing and developing our own home board with protecting our blots. The play of 11/7, 6/2 does this (and duplicates white's good 2s).

MC: Mmm, not sure where Phil is going with this. He mentions "protecting our blots" and then proceeds to leave one exposed with 11/7! He also says, "there is a lot of contact left in this game", which this play certainly shows! Our final 'sole-mover' is Bob Young.

Bob Young: 11/9, 9/7(3)

With a big racing lead, play as safe as can with flexibility in mind, and try to escape rear checker when the opportunity arises. This suggests not leaving the blot in the outfield. However, to cover it, leaving the mid-point means a more perilous journey for the rear checker to reach safety, so lift the outfield checker instead. As the best plans are usually to keep all the checkers in play in front of white's rear anchor, then 9/7(3) is preferred to the alternative of 6/4 and variations of that play.

MC: Not wanting to isolate his runner, Bob keeps his mid-point intact and keeps all his checkers active; a close second best. The next three entrants opt to lose active checkers and a few points in the competition to boot, which is not a good start for them.

Peter Christmas: 13/11(2), 11/9, 6/4

Now needing a win to stay in the match and a gammon would be a benefit but unlikely with white in a strong holding game, but unfortunately we can't move our back man with this. Next best is to ensure we don't have another sent back and avoid putting a loose man on the 2-point.

So two main candidate moves should be 11/9, 9/7(3) or 13/11(2), 11/9, 6/4: the first gives us a usual mid-point, Golden Point holding game which we may have to clear later when white is much stronger in his home board. While clearing it now means our runner has only three safe rolls instead of four if it is left alone where it is now, but if hit will mean at best jumping into the out-field and hoping to avoid being hit again. Swings and roundabout on this one; I have a slight preference for clearing the mid-point now and blocking the three white men on the 5-point with a good solid position and hope to get the straggler out asap.

MC: The key to the correct play here is to keep your checkers active. Snowie eschews any move that includes this 6/4 play for that reason.

Cedric Lytton: 13/11(2), 11/9, 6/4

Loss of the mid-point is more than compensated by the broken 4-prime which leaves white with only 5s and 62 to escape. Black still has excellent chances to escape his own back man, white having his sentinels stacked on three non-consecutive points. Other moves would allow white 6s as well to escape one man and then black's own escape would be more difficult.

Paul Plumptre: 13/11(2), 11/9, 6/4

My game plan is to escape my back man as safely and as soon as possible. Our home boards are equal, and white has an anchor, so I am foolish even at this match score to try something fancy for complications and gammons. Meanwhile, I might as well block escaping 6s, so 13/11(2) are the most important two 2s. Thereafter, I mildly prefer 11/9, 6/4, distributing spares for flexible building, rather than slotting 6/2, a little deep.

MC: It's the 6/4, or the discounted, 6/2, that let's this play down. Let's see what the experts have to say. We'll start with Richard 'Nothing up my sleeve' Biddle.

Richard Biddle: 13/11(2), 9/7(2)

There are a great many choices here, between putting three checkers on the bar-point and spreading the builders. If we are not going to use the checker on the 11-point to make the bar-point (11/7, 9/7(2)) then we will need to cover it. I think the 11-point will hold more value for us than the bar-point in the short-term so I would choose to bring both checkers down from the mid-point. This does lose our connectivity with our lone back checker but we are in full racing mode. We block white 6s from the back forcing unfavourable 6s elsewhere.

Now spreading builders, we would play 11/9, 6/4 with the remaining 2s, but we can still make our bar-point by playing 9/7(2). In the long run, owning the bar-point will help us bring all our checkers home safely. So this move helps address our short-term and long-term strategy, now to try and get that back man home.

Brian Lever: 13/11(2), 9/7(2)

As I play around with the rolls it's clear that this is the previous position a couple of turns earlier, with scores and players reversed. Here it's black chasing and needing a gammon, and like white in the previous position unlikely to get one. But he's sufficiently ahead in the race and should simply play to his strength by trying to bring the position home. He's rolled a number which clears the mid-point safely so that's what he should do to start with – 13/11(2).

Ok it abandons the baby on the 21-point but it's less of a problem than it might be if white had more builders trained on it. White in the previous position then went on to play 11/9, 6/4, whereas I would have played 9/7(2), trying not to play behind white's anchor unless I'm slotting or making new points, and not leaving a

gap in front of the anchor. Can't be much in it though. So 13/11(2), 9/7(2) – bloody hell, agreeing with Richard again. And I didn't look at his answer first!

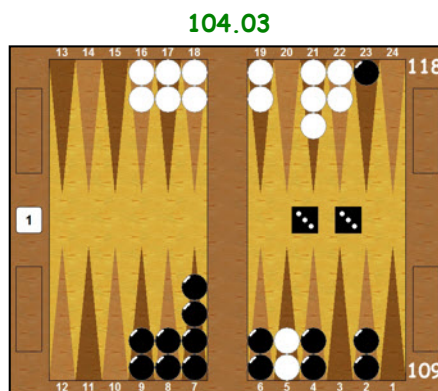
MC: A good blocking play and all checkers active, just as Snowie prefers. If you think Brian is copying Richard's plays, wait until you see what happens in the next position!

Snowie: 13/11(2), 9/7(2)

Black would love to win a gammon because of the score but obviously his major priority is to win the game to stay in the match. He is ahead in the race so he should race but unfortunately his back checker is stuck so he needs to position his other checkers on the assumption that the rear checker will escape next turn. His other priority is to safety the blot on his 11-point.

Ideally he should keep all his checkers in play acting on the white anchor on his 5-point so moves which involve 6/4 or 6/2 won't be as strong as those that keep all the checkers active.

Given this plan there are two main contenders: 13/11(2), 9/7(2) and 11/7, 9/7(2). Assuming the back checker escapes which structure will be easier to clear later on? It is very close and in a chouette either move would be acceptable because there is only a very small equity difference but after long analysis my neural nets tell me that the vote goes to 13/11(2), 9/7(2).



11 point match
Black 1 White 10 Crawford
Black to play 33

MC: This splits the team into a few different opinions. Let's start with the loners.

Peter Christmas: 23/20, 9/6(2), 6/3

First we have to move 23/20, it is under the hammer a little but we have to put pressure on the outside points and it gives us a good chance to jump if we are not

hit. Unfortunately we are going to have to play over the white anchor either with 7/4(2), 4/1 or breaking the back point with 9/6(2), 6/3, slotting the better open point to make next time if we can. Or 9/6(2), 7/4 does not leave a slot but maybe over cautious worrying if we are hit, and we hit back and can't cover our slot and it is hit, even so we don't fear a gammon, it is all about winning this game.

Breaking our 9-point makes it a little easier for white to escape but he will be more concerned with hitting the black runner then escaping our small prime. Having the slot on the 3-point looks a little stronger then on the 1-point and gives more spares to cover next go if we don't have other things to do like reenter or jumping. Close call but 23/20, 9/6(2), 6/3 looks the most solid to me.

MC: This is close, but no cigar. It is the 6/3 that lets it down; it leaves a blot that could prove hard to cover if black gets a shot. Our next entrant goes it alone, too.

Richard Biddle: 7/1(2)

Three main candidate moves, in reverse order of preference:

23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1 – I am not convinced that stepping up to white's 5-point to escape is ideal, because white needs 6s and 5s to escape and can hit loose with 4s, 3s and 2s, plus many 1s can be used to pick and pass or kill off with double-one. There are too many good rolls for white. However, this move does have the benefit of maintaining black's four-point prime.

23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4 – So this time, we are still stepping up but we are now inviting white to try and escape with one checker with the Heimlich manoeuvre. The Heimlich involves white escaping with one checker and us having sufficient builders to attack the remaining checker. So if white doesn't fall for the Heimlich, he will then be forced to break his prime that we have stepped up to the edge of. Cute.

7/1(2) – Or we could just wait and see, keep our prime and not step up to come under the gun. We now have a four-point board, a four-point prime and white must now fear leaving a direct shot. This will cause white to awkwardly reduce his prime, unless he throws the match-winning 65, 56, 66 or 55s. Still not favourite to win but if we can escape or hit a blot next time, we become favourites.

MC: Black's runner needs a 3 to facilitate its escape, and this is the time to do ►

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it. Any 5 or 6 after 7/1(2) will see black's points opening up and white's easier escape. Everyone else moves up, 23/20.

Bob Young: 23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1

Hasn't gone too well since position #2 then!, but still a race lead and open 5-point in white's prime, which black can occupy if he wishes, ... and why not? Looking at black's home board and options, he doesn't really want to reduce his prime, with 9/3(2), despite making a home board point, as it gives a quarter of white's rolls the opportunity to step both checkers over the 3-prime, so really for me it's a choice of 7/1(2), staying back, hoping white will collapse his prime next roll, or step into the battle zone 23/20, and 7/1, 7/4.

If black doesn't move up, white will probably play from his 9-point, but by stepping up, the down side would be rolls like 43, pointing on the 5-point blot, but that is a risk worth taking for me, it gives black an escape route that he needs.

Phil Tutchings: 23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1

We are at Crawford again with our opponent being an even number of points away so it is important to avoid being gammoned. We don't want our back checker stranded so our first move is 23/20 giving us a good chance of escaping next roll.

We need to maintain our four-prime behind white's back checkers to contain them whilst attempting to bring our back checker home safely. After this roll we have a significant racing lead and there is no point in making unnecessary risks as we aim to win the single point to win. If we maintain this prime even white's joker roll of 44 would leave us with some chances of escape and minimal gammon risks against us.

Paul Plumptre: 23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1

I do not think I can afford 9/3(2), building a good home board, because this lets white additionally escape with 64, 54 and 44. Likewise, I do not think I can hang back, and hope that white crashes before me – this is simply not going to happen. So I have to start with 23/20 to try to win by straightforward running; I am not much scared of white slotting on me with a loose 2, 3 or 4 – I will gain nicely on my half chance of a re-hit. (In fact, I am not sure if white should slot on me thus.)

Thereafter, I maintain my block with 7/1, 7/4; the slot on my 1-point will be unfortunate in an exchange of blots, but it has

to be played to improve for the turn after next. Of course, I will not enjoy white pointing on me with 43, 42 or 32; but if I hang back, I won't enjoy the same with 65, 62 or 52 either.

Cedric Lytton: 23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1

Black must take this opportunity to escape his runner and must also keep his prime as long as possible. If black does not play 23/20, white can escape one of his own runners with a 5 or 6 and then black will not be favourite to escape at all. If black plays 7/1, 7/4, he will have no spare man to attack with should white run out, or to play in to keep his prime should white roll very small numbers and keep her own prime.

MC: Bob, Phil, Paul and Cedric all come a very close second. Snowie found it hard to decide a winner, but eventually chose that picked by the final two entrants.

Nicky Check: 23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4

Black is ahead 21 pips after the roll. Black should play 23/20 to prepare to escape and then 9/6(2), 7/4, leaving no additional blots and duplicating white's 4s and 5s to hit the blot on the 5-point, and escape from black's 3-point prime.

Brian Lever: 23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4

And again this is a variant on the previous positions a few moves on. Black simply has to move 23/20 to start with – not many pointing numbers and he's otherwise at risk of losing his front blockade. And then he should break his blockade anyway – slightly, to give himself some flexibility and some builders, both for points and pointing if white runs. Best way to do this involves 9/6(2) and then 7/4.

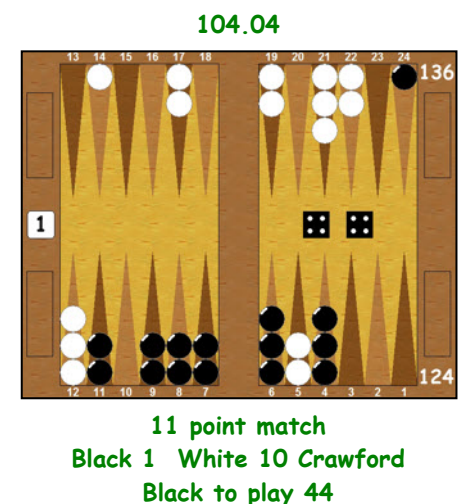
Snowie: 23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4

This is obviously later the same game. Now black has a difficult choice. He can step up with 23/20 but then he has to weaken his defensive prime or he can wait by making his ace-point with 7/1(2) and hope that white's very stripped home board structure begins to collapse enabling the rear checker to escape.

The normal approach is to step when you can and this position is no exception but because of white's structure the decision is remarkably close and 7/1(2) is actually the third best play and there is only a very small equity difference between it and the best play.

So having decided to step up with 23/20 how about the rest of the roll? Two main

choices: 23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4 and 23/20, 7/4(2), 4/1. The first play gives a flexible position with no home board blots, the second keeps a four-point block but creates a slightly awkward looking home board with an exposed blot that may be hard to cover. There is virtually no difference between the plays even after an extended rollout as the pros and cons of the two plays cancel each other out. However, there has to be a winner and my neural nets give a tiny edge to 23/20, 9/6(2), 7/4.



Nicky Check: 24/16, 8/4(2)

Black is ahead in the race by 28 pips after this roll. The first two 4s are easy 24/16 preparing to escape and then 8/4(2) keeping the best possible outside prime against white's two men on his 5-point.

MC: This is Nicky's first competition, and up until now he was doing OK, however, he now slips down the field with his play. Nicky has at least grasped the fact that he is leading the race and therefore 24/16 is essential, but stacking the 4-point is wrong. Our next two run, but run out of steam.

Cedric Lytton: 24/20, 11/7, 11/3

When ahead in the race ... We start the back man on its way and usefully clear the 11-point; we have to give up one point of our prime, and clearing any other point (with 7/3(2) or 6/2(3)) could make the 11-point difficult to clear later. If white rolls 65 and escapes 20/14, 20/15, black has 6s for 20/14*. This looks like a position leading to 104.03, where black has mistakenly played 24/16 or stayed back, allowing white to build a 5-prime.

Paul Plumptre: 24/20, 11/7(2), 7/3

This must be the same game as 104.2 and 104.3. We are still 28 pips ahead after this roll, and want to race; we still are foolish to hang back in a vain hope of extra

gammons. My options with the back man are to run 24/16, or less far with 24/20. With the front men, I can clear 11/7(2), or I can build 7/3(2); I prefer the former, since else I only have 32, 52, 53 and doublets to clear the 11-point safely. So the options come down to: (a) 24/16, 11/7(2), and (b) 24/20, 11/3, 11/7.

After (a), I am challenging white to roll a 2, 4 or 11 – 25 shots; I get very few return shots after this hit. (I believe Magriel remarks that, in these positions, while white is hitting you, he cannot improve his home board by building.) After (b), the only damaging hits are the point 63: 11/5*, 8/5, and the tip&run 61, 62, 31, 32.

Other hits after (b) will leave me return shots, to my possible advantage. On the other hand, after (b) and a miss by white, I only get my back man to full safety with a 9 or an 11. Whereas after (a) and a miss by white, I get my back man safe with all but nine rolls. I think it is the number of immediate damaging white hits that is most important, so I play (b), not putting myself open to 25 good hits.

MC: *Cedric quotes an oft used sentence from Snowie, "When ahead in the race . " and then doesn't race far enough! Nor does Paul and it is this failure to run as far as you can that lets them both down. We now come to the 'Run, Forest. Run!' entrants.*

Richard Biddle: 24/16, 11/7(2)

Four main candidate moves, in reverse order of preference (...sort of): 11/3(2) – this approach gives us another home board point and is waiting for a good running play roll that leaves us vulnerable to just one direct shot but I fear this roll many never come before we are blocked in. It also reduces our broken five-point prime to a four-point prime.

24/16, 7/3(2) – a running play leaves us open to 25 hitting rolls. If we don't get hit then we are looking good as we should be able to play safely in from there. What I don't like about this is that many of the hits will come from the mid-point or 10-point and does no damage to white's board. It is a cheap hit.

24/16, 11/7(2) – another running play, but rather than making another home board point, this time we set up for another Heimlich manoeuvre.

24/20, 11/7(2), 7/3 – a half running play, a Heimlich set-up and another home point half-made. Now we don't want white to hit and start to make the 5-point but in order to hit, white will either need to throw a 6, 8 or break his valuable 8-point. Mmm that's still 29 hits (counting double-1s). Not so attractive and still a long way home if we don't get hit. So I think I go back to the previous move.

Brian Lever: 24/16, 11/7(2)

Boring! Same tweaked position (that reminds me, I can do a short article on a tweaked position). Run rabbit! Ahead in the race and time to move. Shuffling the front blockade with something like 11/3(2) will simply weaken it and further isolate the back checker. So play 24/16 then 11/7(2) – or possibly 7/3(2) adding an extra tooth to the board just in case white hits – which of course he's favourite to do – and there's a later exchange of hits. But I think 11/7(2) for compactness' sake and to give playable spares. Not much more I want to say – except point out that RB agrees!

Bob Young: 24/16, 11/7(2)

Michael likes this 10:1 match, is he trying to goad us into suicidal gammon making, high risk, low reward (still be a long way to the winning post) moves that might appear more likely to be selected at this match score?

Choices.... (a): 11/3(2), (b): 24/16, 7/3(2) (minor duplication of 2s), trying to escape with the racing lead, or (c): 24/16, 11/7(2) keeping checkers still in front of white's rear anchor. 24/20 and staying there is better for white, enabling a slot after hitting at least, so move on is better. I think keeping the 7-point will be more useful for black when bearing in, so break the 11-point, albeit losing a closer safe point for the rear checker to land on, but still giving him almost half his rolls to land somewhere safely.

MC: *Well the first batch of runners were very close and they differ ever so slightly from the Roger Bannisters (showing my age, now) who came home in 1st place.*

Phil Tutchings: 24/16, 7/3(2)

Again we are at Crawford with a racing lead and want to keep the game as straightforward as possible to avoid gammon threats against us and to get home for the winning point. Our priority is to safety the back checker as soon as possible. By playing 24/16 we put it in a position to join the main body of our checkers if not hit next roll. Even if our back checker is hit off the 16 point only a 44 roll for white would make a new home board point – but this would be the case whether we moved out or not! Given that we would like to maximise safe landing points for our back checker next roll (if not hit) – and that we should contain white's back checkers until we have safetied it – the move of 7/3(2) seems best in keeping our checkers well connected to complete the race in relative safety.

MC: *Phil mentions connecting, and this is a good enough reason for this play over the one above.*

Peter Christmas: 24/16, 7/3(2)

Same match situation as last two with white on the 5-point, little chance of gammons, we need to get our back man out either to the 9- or 5-point. Sitting on the 5-point may give us some return shots if hit open, but don't really want to encourage this with 30 shots hitting so moving on to the 9-point leaves white 2, 4 or 11 (16 shots) to hit us but a good chance to escape if missed. With two left to move it should be between 11/7(2) or 7/3(2), and although it leaves a gap making the 3-point equalizes the home board points and leaves a direct number for the runner to land on if not hit, so I just prefer it.

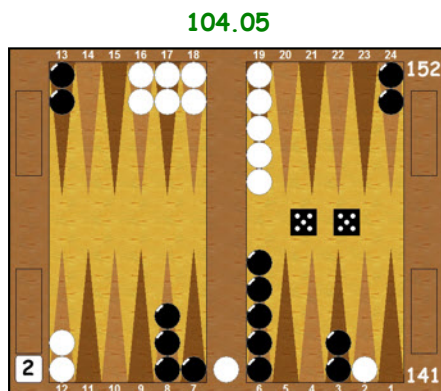
Snowie: 24/16, 7/3(2)

Yet another position or variation from this game! Again black must try to escape his rear checker. If you selected something like 11/3(2) hoping for an escaping roll next turn then you still have much to learn! You have been given the chance to escape so do so. To repeat a well- ▶



worn phrase – when ahead in the race, race.

All moves involving 24/20 are weaker than those involving 24/16 – the idea is to escape as far as you can. After playing 24/16 you then have the choice of 11/7(2) – making the bear-in easier or 7/3(2). This latter move is correct for two reasons: it strengthens the home board in the event of a blot-hitting contest and by keeping the 11-point there is better connectivity between black's checkers. Having said this, the equity difference is tiny, so don't worry if you chose 11/7(2). The key is the first two 4s must be played 24/16.



11 point match
Black 6 White 1
Black to play 55

MC: Occasionally I really cock it up and pick a position that everyone gets correct. Thankfully, Phil has helped me out of an embarrassing situation and gone out on his own.

Phil Tutchings: 13/8, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

White has an underdeveloped home board so at this score the aggressive play could put us in a very strong position. With this play we put two on the bar and establish a new home board point. Although we are giving up the mid-point this is a constructive move which could give us a re-cube if white rolls badly. Any other moves seem to overstack points which could make subsequent rolls awkward to play.

As we still have the 24-point we shouldn't have to fear too many gammon threats against us even if our blot gets hit and white enters both checkers from the bar (as we would have a decent chance of establishing an anchor in white's undeveloped home board).

MC: Well, he might be on his own but the score point difference is just a gnat's. Everyone else gets it correct..

Nicky Check: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

Black should play 7/2* hit, and then 6/1(2) unstacking the heavy 5-point and making the best possible board. The last 5 black should play 8/3. Black is in full blitz mood as 4 points would get him to Crawford – odd which is advantageous. Black can then escape from white's immobile 4-prime at his leisure. If black is hit back he will probably make an advanced anchor in white's home board.

Paul Plumptre: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

Any non-hitting move such as 13/3(2) is grotesque. So we must slot 7/2*. Given that, it will be best to blitz with 6/1(2), making a 3-point board. The last 3 may as well play 8/3, to put added pressure on the blot on our 2-point. Yes this whole move is unbalanced towards the low end of my home board; but provided white stays on the bar for two moves, I should be able to restore the balance.

Brian Lever: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

I always associate 55 with making the 1-point and that's what the first two 5s should do – not that there's a lot else available anyway. Might as well pick up the 2nd checker with 7/2*, good for the gammon which would take black to Crawford, and that leaves a very limited choice for the final 5 – realistically 13-/or 8/3. I can see an arguments for both moves: 13/8, because it puts more checkers "in the zone", 8/3 because it provides more covering numbers for the blot, increases the chance of a gammon and keeps the mid-point ... what is it they say about choosing a play which does several good things? So 6/1(2), 7/2*, and 8/3 is my choice – and besides, Richard chose it as well. I mean, he won the whole thing last year so it must be right? OK?

Peter Christmas: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

Can't see too much choice here, as the back men can't move and losing the mid-point to stack up the 8-point seems pointless; so I would have to go with 6/1(2), 7/2* and 8/3 as a spare to make the 2-point if not hit back. Looked for an alternative but everything else looks too weak to contemplate for long.

Richard Biddle: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

At last, a position with some simpler choices. My thoughts: Can't move from the back, need to hit coz two on the bar better by far, unstack the six-point by making the ace-point. Right so we are blitzing. We have one more 5 to play. Which of 13/8 and 8/3 best suits our blitzing strategy? If we want to cover the slot next time, best to play 8/3. This also

avoids breaking the mid-point which may be required if the blitz fails. If we can escape one of our back checkers soon, then we could be looking at the doubling cube or a gammon.

Bob Young: 8/3, 7/2(*), 6/1(2)

Oh oh, not 10:1 in the match, must mean something sinister, (but it could be after this game!!). Blitz time, stronger home board, useful four points available if lucky, go for the jugular (circus expression ... something to do with throwing your balls in the air), hit, and making two on the bar, make an extra home board point and put more builders into the action. Only debate might be 13/8 or 8/3, but 8/3 puts more men fighting to prevent white anchoring on the 2-point.

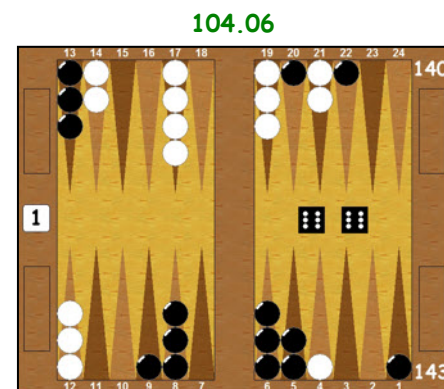
Cedric Lytton: 8/3, 7/2*, 6/1(2)

Black can try a blitz without giving up his mid-point at once; he can cover his 2-point blot with a 1 if allowed, and can attack on his 4- or 5-points with the rest of his ammunition. Indeed, if white fans black has a double which I would pass at the score facing a gammon and 10-1 Crawford threat.

Snowie: 8/3, 7/2* 6/1(2)

This is a very simple problem as three of the fives are virtually forced and it is only a matter of how to play the last one. 6/1(2), 7/2* are common to both options and then it is a question of playing 13/8, 8/3 with the final five.

So should you keep the mid-point and put a checker slightly out of play with 8/3 or play very purely with 13/8? The answer lies in the rear checkers – while they are still stuck on white's ace-point it is rarely right to give up the mid-point and that is the case here. Score one for practicality over purity – the last 5 should be played 8/3.



11 point match
Black 4 White 3
Black to play 66

MC: Well, for the first time in this competition, Brian is on his own . . . not a good sign!

Brian Lever: 13/1, 9/3, 8/2

Now this is a bit tricky, but a couple of the plays seem clear. First cover the 1-point with 13/1. Having started that point it's often best to make it and add a third point in board. Then pick up the blot on the 9-point – play 9/3. Black is ahead in the race and should play to stay ahead. And that leaves just the one 6 to play – either 8/2 or 22/16. I prefer the former, if only because white's hits are in his own board, raising the possibility of return hits from the bar. True, many of the returns will allow white a crack at a loose blot in black's own board – but probably only at one blot as many of black's entry numbers will cover one or both blots and create a 4-point board. OK it does leave targets, but not as many as RB's multi-blot choice. I've set it up and had a look at it – very pretty, but is it what the position demands? Sadly (for me) it probably is! But I've made my choice and have to stick with it. Bang goes this month's £30!!

MC: Well, Brian has stuck to it, and here's what Snowie has to say about it, "This is not the way to play winning backgammon." Bye, bye, thirty quid! Mind you, Brian, you got more points than the next lot did - they have stumbled in Snowie blunder country!

Phil Tutchings: 22/16, 13/1, 9/3

The match score is close and we now have a racing lead in the game. We should aim to minimise contact with white and leave our back checkers with the best chance of reaching safety quickly. We do not want to lose our mid-point as this is the natural target for our back checkers to land on. Moving one checker from the mid-point to the one home board 1-point whilst minimizing immediate threats. The last 6 should be used to start bringing the backmost checker to safety - at least if it is hit from this position white's home board is still underdeveloped and we would have the chance of making an advanced anchor on white's 5-point.

MC: No mention of hitting here so that at least some of the many, many white hitting numbers might be reduced. What about Nicky?

Nicky Check: 22/16, 13/1, 9/3

Black cannot prime white's last man so a priming game is out of the question. This

leaves a blitzing/racing game. Hence the first two 6s should be played 13/1. Black should then play 9/3, 22/16 so all black's men are communicating with each other which will help black to bring his men round together or maximize black's return hits if white hits.

MC: Nope, no hitting mentioned here. Perhaps Peter might think about it.

Peter Christmas: 22/16, 13/1, 9/3

By far the hardest one as it seems hard to do much constructive. 22/4* may be ok but the last 6 of maybe 13/7 leaves five blots on and 9/3 leaves three blots in the home board: both seem too loose. As white only has one blot he is well placed to start a blot-hitting contest so I think the safest thing is to tidy up the position as we are going to have at least two blots under attack.

13/1 covers one and at least strengthens our board, and 9/3 takes another blot out of the firing line. 8/2 looks too loose, it will tempt white to open hit and the spare is better on the 8-point as it can be used to hit or cover next time. So the only other 6 is 22/16 which is ok as we have a race lead now and can try to get the men round and we can anchor up if not hit or fall back to the 5-point if we are hit. Moving 13/7(3) leaves the back men a bit cut off so will stick with the best running moves and try to play it safe as possible as white could have some good threats against the blots if we are not careful; so 22/16, 13/1, 9/3 should be enough to prevent white from doing any cube action for now at least.

MC: Well, Peter mentioned it but was worried about a blot-hitting contest. Peter, with all those blots on anyway, you're heading for one regardless! Richard talks himself around to the hit, and gets it right.

Richard Biddle: 22/4*, 13/7

We have to leave so many blots here, we have to wonder whether we want at least to do it by taking half a white roll away next time by hitting (22/4*, 13/7) and leaving two home board blots. Not hitting (22/10, 13/1) leaves all 36 hitting rolls next time of which 12 are double hits. Hitting leaves 30 hitting rolls (12 double hits), but there are two rolls that don't hit and four dancing numbers. So that pretty much decides it.

The only question I have in my mind is around the shape of my board after the roll. Not hitting, gives me a three-point board, albeit one of them the ace-point.

Hitting gives me a great spread of builders and many return shots if I can avoid the double hit. I'll go with hitting.

MC: No pussy move for Richard.

Bob Young: 22/4*, 13/7

Save the mega blunders til last eh!!! Can't see this game ending up 10:1, so Michael obviously feels this is the biggest banana skin of them all (and I think he could be right about that). If black puts all effort into safety play, he might play something like 13/1, 9/3, 8/2. This is ok, but white is just screaming "attack", with 1s, 3s, 5s, and 6s, some of which put two in the air. If black moves 22/16, no duplication is achieved, so just as likely to get clobbered. 22/10, 9/3 at least duplicates 6s, but again shifts the momentum to white, giving him his entire roll to attack. As dangerous as it is, hit white, taking away at least half of white's re-entry roll, and if hit back, black has a good chance of re-entering and anchoring on one of the two half made points in white's home board.

As a final option, 13/1, 8/2(2), making a strong home board, would be a good play on the Planet Zig, which orbits the star Zog, where if an opponent has four blots somewhere, no hits are allowed, but until we get there to play them using their rules, stick with the more sane planet Earth rules. (They also have zero gravity, and no magnets, so are heavily into Velcro. Plays havoc with the dice throw though, the last time I saw a throw from one of their beings, the dice missed the board, and went thirty light years away before coming to rest on a neighbouring satellite, with low gravity forces, it made for a long game I remember). Still, enough of my last holiday.

MC: What Bob failed to mention about the Zig roll that missed the board was that they were cocked anyway and would have had to be rerolled!

Paul Plumptre: 22/4*, 13/7

The aggressive option is 22/4* slotting, with which I go the whole hog, a finish with 13/7. Yes this is five blots, two direct from the bar, but it does proffer some diversion for my vulnerable man on white's 5-point. Any alternative has to start with 13/7(2); then one has to play a third 13/7, to lift the blot and bring down a third builder. And the fourth 6 must be safest 9/3, rather than 22/16 leaving me exposed to hits on any white 5-, 4- or 2-point. I also prefer 9/3 for this fourth 6 rather than 7/1, which covers my ►

1-point, but leaves me exposed to a damaging 5 with no re-hits. So, do I prefer (a) 22/4*, 13/7; or (b) 13/7(3), 9/3? (b) leaves my forces well split apart, and my two back men will have much trouble escaping. Particularly if white rolls any 5 or 6 to escape his back man. So I play (a) 22/4*, 13/7, escaping one back man, and setting up an exciting melee on the likely exchange of hits.

MC: Good to see Paul getting excited.

Cedric Lytton: 22/4*, 13/7

The most difficult this time; black can either hit 22/4* or cover with 13/1, but not both. But what happens if he doesn't hit?

(1) 22/16, 13/1, 9/3 leaves white with 1s, 3s and 6s to hit one and 2s, 4s to hit another – diversification galore!

(2) 22/10, 9/3, 8/2 at least duplicates 6s, but with three blots in his home board black will not relish the likely blot-fight when white hits on her 5-point.

(3) 13/7(3), 9/3 makes a 4-prime and safeties the 9-point blot, but white is favourite to escape with 5s and 6s, and then has complete control of the outer boards a great, long-term advantage; black can expect to escape one runner but not both, or he might anchor but then have a very badly-timed holding game with only three or four rolls before his board collapses. white, with a badly-structured outer board may have trouble clearing mid-point, but might conveniently slot a point on attack while black still has two home-board blots.

(4) 13/7(3), 7/1 makes a 4-prime, covers the 1-point and prepares to attack if white doesn't get out with a 5 or 6. But white hits with 1s, 3s, 5s and 6s and black, with

three men back, could well lose a gammon.

(5) 22/4*, 13/7. This leaves white with 1s and 4s but black has much better chances of tidying up and keeping white's runner back. white might even dance.

In the cold light of day, the choice is between (3) and (5), black being a slight underdog either way. No doubt Snowie will scold me for leaving 4 blots, but I decide on (5) for three reasons:

- (i) This obeys the principle of keeping the mid-point while I still have men back;
- (ii) And another principle, attack opponent's last runner;
- (iii) I'd rather go down fighting than just lie down meekly and await my fate.

By the way, Paul Lamford and I share the same girlfriend as opponent (see Improve Your Backgammon). A good chouette, yes?

MC: Cedric gets there (via Planet Zig?) but he could have saved a lot of time and typewriter ink if he'd used the oldest backgammon adage of all . . .

Snowie: 22/4*, 13/7

An example of when double-six is not a great roll. However black plays it he will be the underdog. First let's dismiss 13/1, 9/3, 8/2, minimising blots but doing nothing to improve the position. This is not the way to play winning backgammon. Once you dismiss that and also 22/4*, 9/3 leaving three home board blots we are left with two plays: 22/4*, 13/7 leaving five blots(!), and 22/10, 13/1 leaving only three blots and some duplication but giving white his full roll next turn.

The two plays are quite different in nature but the equity difference between them is

tiny. The hitting play could be fantastically successful when it works but a nightmare when it fails while the quiet play could still see black unable to take a double in two turns time.

Back to the oldest backgammon adage of all - 'when in doubt, hit'. The hit is correct here but only by the thinnest of margins. I must go and ask my new cousin Extreme Gammon what he thinks about this one.

Well, that's the first one over, and the usual suspect is first again, Richard Biddle. Richard wins the £30 towards his accommodation (he's costing me a fortune!) Cedric came a credible 2nd with Brian in 3rd place.

	Action	Score
104.01	13/12(2) 6/5*(2)	10.00
	13/12 8/7 6/5(2)	9.77
	13/12 8/5*	9.16
104.02	13/11(2) 9/7(2)	10.00
	11/9 9/7(3)	9.84
	13/11(2) 11/9 6/4	9.65
	13/11(2) 8/4	9.26
104.03	11/7 6/2	8.89
	23/20 9/6(2) 7/4	10.00
	23/20 7/4(2) 4/1	9.94
	7/1(2)	9.88
	23/20 9/6(2) 6/3	9.61
104.04	24/16 7/3(2)	10.00
	24/16 11/7(2)	9.93
	24/20 11/7(2) 7/3	9.71
	24/16 8/4(2)	9.22
104.05	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	10.00
	13/8 7/2* 6/1(2)	9.99
104.06	22/4* 13/7	10.00
	13/1 9/3 8/2	9.25
	22/16 13/1 9/3	8.88

Name	104.01	104.02	104.03	104.04	104.05	104.06	Score
Richard Biddle	13/12(2) 6/5*(2)	13/11(2) 9/7(2)	7/1(2)	24/16 11/7(2)	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/4* 13/7	59.81
Cedric Lytton	13/12(2) 6/5*(2)	13/11(2) 11/9 6/4	23/20 7/4(2) 4/1	24/20 11/7(2) 7/3	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/4* 13/7	59.30
Brian Lever	13/12(2) 6/5*(2)	13/11(2) 9/7(2)	23/20 9/6(2) 7/4	24/16 11/7(2)	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	13/1 9/3 8/2	59.18
Bob Young	13/12 8/5*	11/9 9/7(3)	23/20 7/4(2) 4/1	24/16 11/7(2)	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/4* 13/7	58.87
Paul Plumptre	13/12 8/5*	13/11(2) 11/9 6/4	23/20 7/4(2) 4/1	24/20 11/7(2) 7/3	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/4* 13/7	58.46
Peter Christmas	13/12 8/7 6/5(2)	13/11(2) 11/9 6/4	23/20 9/6(2) 6/3	24/16 7/3(2)	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/16 13/1 9/3	57.91
Phil Tutchings	13/12 8/5*	11/7 6/2	23/20 7/4(2) 4/1	24/16 7/3(2)	13/8 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/16 13/1 9/3	56.86
Nicky Check	13/12 8/5*	13/11(2) 8/4	23/20 9/6(2) 7/4	24/16 8/4(2)	8/3 7/2* 6/1(2)	22/16 13/1 9/3	56.52

See page 24 for the next set of competition positions



Biba International, March 2010 - Paul Plumptre reports:

I had had an easy run to the final of this tournament. I had a bye in round 1, and the dice had been

markedly kind to me in the three previous matches. So I was well relaxed for this Final. However, it was only my second time playing with a clock, and I will attempt the self-excuse that one or two of the large number of playing errors I make are induced by the implicit time pressure. Now for the embarrassing part.

Neither I nor Nicky rates well, according to Snowie and GNU, and my dice plays are awful. I make 7 blunders of >0.16 cubeful error. Nicky has given me quite an easy ride on the cube; given how badly I am playing, maybe I can't blame him for dropping some marginal cubes.

GNU reports the following statistics:

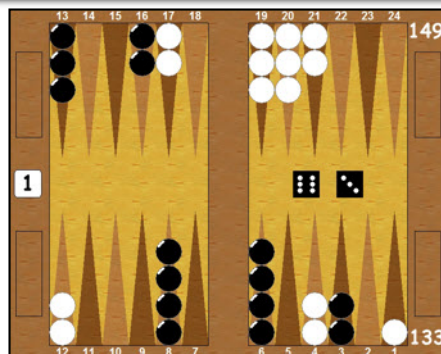
I make a total of -3.4 of cubeful errors, -2.9 on dice and -0.5 on cube. Thus GNU rates me at Snowie -12.0 and at FIBS 1780.

Nicky makes a total of -4.0 of cubeful errors, -1.9 on dice and -2.1 on cube. Thus GNU rates Nicky at Snowie -13.9 and at FIBS 1833. (The Snowie overall evaluator must be much harsher on Nicky's cube errors, than is the GNU FIBS evaluator).

GNU reports me as significantly lucky, and Nicky as significantly unlucky. I have 17 lucky rolls of cubeful gain $> +0.3$, and only 8 unlucky rolls of cubeful loss < -0.3 ; whereas Nicky has only 9 such lucky rolls and 13 unlucky rolls. This is of course entirely why I won the match.

I have not played as poorly as FIBS 1780 for many years. I can manage FIBS 1850 (which approximates to Snowie -9) or better in any normal human-vs-human session, and I average FIBS 1900 (which approximates to Snowie -6) versus the computer (average over 1000 games 2008-2009).

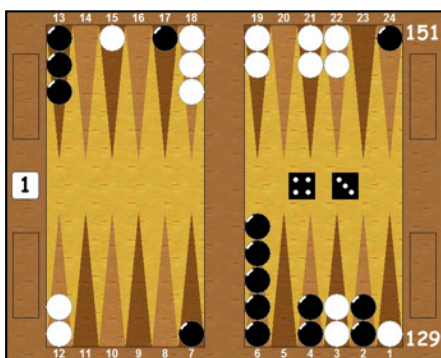
Anyway, I comment in some detail on my larger dice errors. Experts will not need to read my excuses; but I hope some middle-ranked Biba players will find some crumbs of useful advice within my chatter. I play as black and Nicky is white and the match is to 11 points.



Black 0 White 0
Black to play 63

I play 16/10, 16/13, clearing my back point. I thought the bots had taught me to leave a blot in front of the last point, to permit re-hits if the opponent hits. Also, I am not sure if my 10-point, if I build it with 16/10, 13/10, is much of an asset; I am going to have to dismantle it, maybe at risk, in a few moves time.

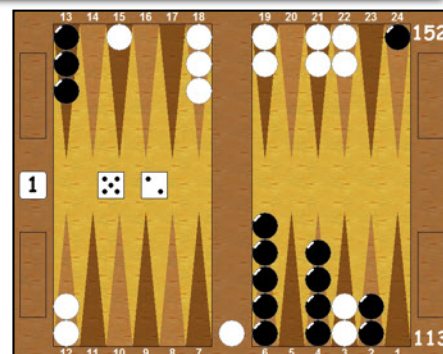
However, GNU prefers its move of 16/10, 13/10 by 0.17 cubeful. GNU assesses that both moves are near-equal, if white misses; but it is worse for black to be hit with a 6 after my move, than to be hit with a 4 after its move. (Is this because the former is getting its back men moving – I can't tell?)



Black 1 White 0
Black to play 43

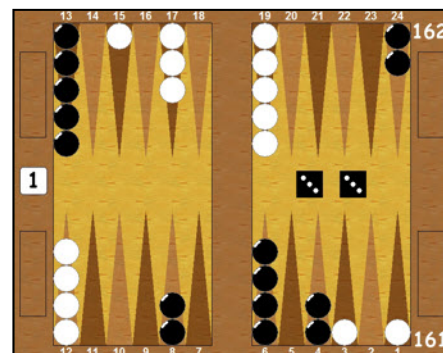
I see 17/13, 7/4, which safeties two loose blots, and I look no further. Even if I try to evaluate GNU's preferred move of 24/17, I see 21 hits on my 7-point, and I am likely to reject it. In fact, GNU assesses that I am no worse off after its move and being hit with a 4 or a 6, than after many of the sequences after my move.

My move is a large error of 0.21 cubeful. I suspect that I will repeat such a move in a similar position.



Black 1 White 0
White to play 52

In passing, Nicky's play here of 25/20, 22/20, shifting to a good anchor on the 5-point, looks very natural to me. I wonder how many human players opt for the bot's preferences of 25/20, 7/5 slotting, or 25/18 running?



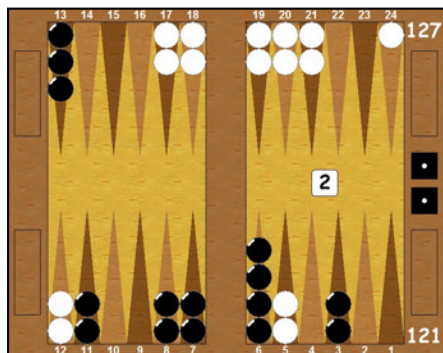
Black 1 White 1
Black to play 33

My play of 24/15*, 6/3* is horrible, and my largest error of the match. GNU rates it an error of 0.38, so I am throwing away nearly half a point. It is very obvious that the blitz 8/5(2), 6/3*(2) leads to a very powerful double, if not better, next roll. Whereas after my play, white has a third chance to get some counter-play by hitting me with a 3 from the bar. I can only plead some falling under the pressure of the clock.

Of the early doublets, I find 33 the trickiest to play correctly. Against a neutral opening move, 33 is just best played defensive 24/21(2), 13/10(2). But one should seize almost any excuse to attack with 8/5(2), 6/3(2). I find it is terrifyingly easy to make 0.1 or even 0.2 playing errors with 33 in the opening. Match position can also affect these decisions by a fair bit. In this particular position, I was hallucinating back to some error I made once, when 24/15* was correct. One example of this, is the play of 33 in reply to the opening 'two down' of 43: 13/9, ►

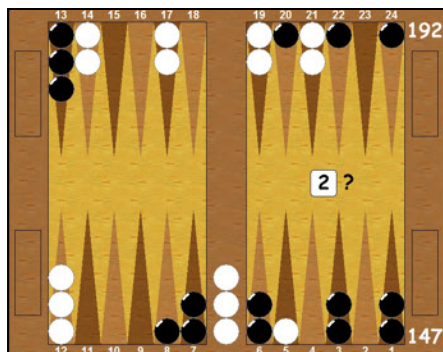
13/10; there, 8/5(2), 6/3(2) is an error of some 0.05 compared to the hits 24/15*.

I think I need to settle for a simple rule: "if your opponent has a blot on your 3-point, it is never wrong to play an opening 33: 8/5(2), 6/3*(2)". (Does any expert disagree, that there are any more than 1-in-100 exceptions to this rule?)



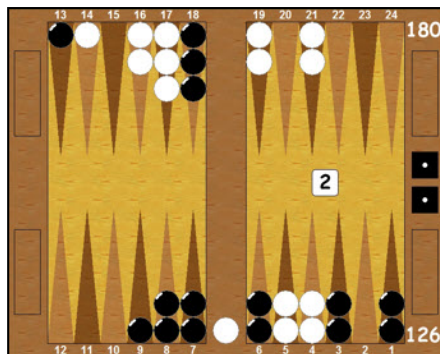
Black 2 White 1
Black cube action

I double prematurely, against the 5-point Hold. I normally get these decisions near correct, and I know this standard 5-point Hold is no double if I am only +6 pips. I wonder if, under the pressure of the clock, I failed to count the pips properly. In the game, I got my deserved comeup-pance a few moves later, when Nicky rolled 66 to walk the race.



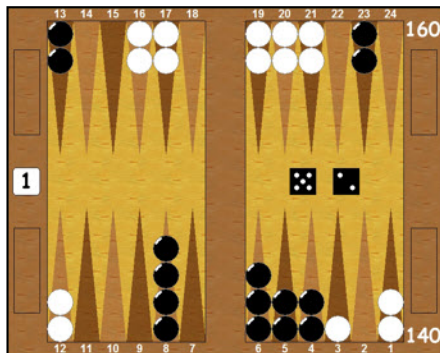
Black 2 White 3
Black cube action?

With three White men on the bar, I play on Too Good To Double. This is too optimistic. There are too many ways white can reach near-equality by anchoring, or I encounter difficulty in extricating all my back men. Put simply, I have too much to do. GNU says my failure to cash is a 0.17 error.



Black 2 White 3
Black cube action

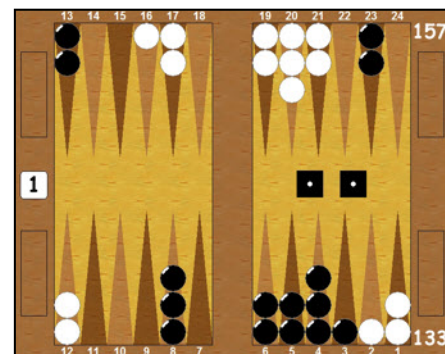
Nicky rightly picked me up on my decision to double, against his 4-5 back game. If I go through the labour of all the play against a back game, I hate to end up with only +1 point, and so I like to get the cube across sometime early. In this case, I had some hopes that white's timing would go awry, but I am well wrong. The GNU roll-out says I am not even 60% to win this position, and it is a 0.1 error to double.



Black 4 White 3
Black to play 52

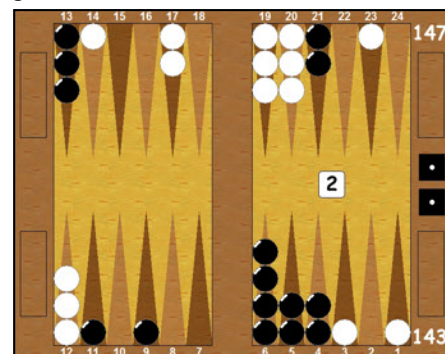
I think this is a difficult decision. My move of 8/3* 6/4 over-attacks. GNU prefers to try to escape a back man with 23/18, 8/6. Interestingly, whereas the GNU neural net at ply2 and at ply3 put my move as an error of 0.20, GNU's roll-out puts it at an error of only 0.12. (Is there some hope for us humans, that the bot is showing a touch of difficulty in evaluating these choices?) Snowie's roll-out agrees with GNU that my move is an error of 0.14. What I need to appreciate in this position is that the running 23/18 is not much dangerous; white has no rolls that gain much by hitting me. Whereas, after my attack, white gains considerably if he hits me from the bar; moreover, in

this near prime-vs-prime position, white barely minds if he stays on the bar.



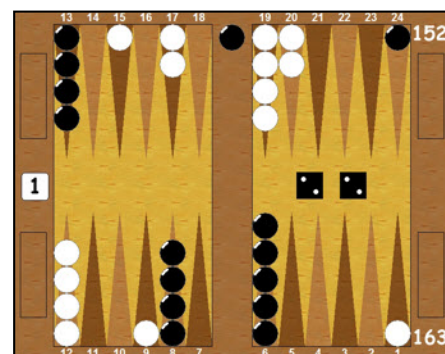
Black 4 White 3
Black to play 11

GNU only puts my move of 23/22, 4/2*, 3/2 as an error of some 0.05. Snowie rates it a 'blunder' of 0.12 – I have not investigated this.



Black 5 White 3
Black cube action

Nicky misses another good take of my cube. If you too are tempted to drop a position like this, I find it helpful to reflect that, if black fails to attack the 3-point, you have a 1/3rd chance of a 2 next turn to anchor to near-equality; and if black slots onto the 3-point, you also have a 1/3rd chance of hitting from the bar, again to near-equality.

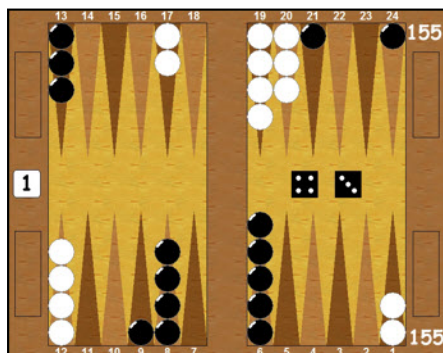


Black 6 White 3
Black to play 22

The bots say that the structure 23-point, 22-point by playing 25/23, 24/22, 13/9* for my two back men is some 0.05 better than the structure 24-point, 21-point with the play 25/21, 13/9*. However, ▶

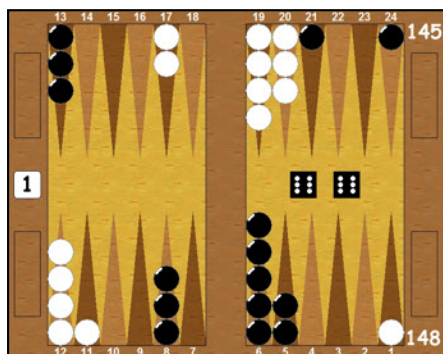
**£810 Winner-Takes-All Rollover up
for grabs at the June, English Open.
Be in it to win it!**

this is mere subtlety compared to my playing errors coming up.



Black 6 White 3
Black to play 43

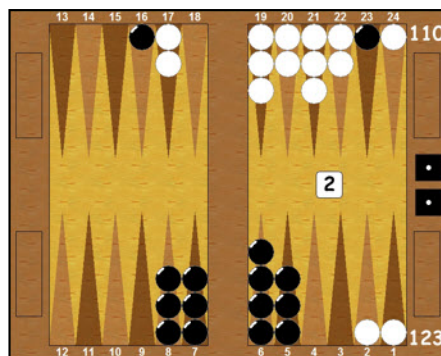
I have to choose between 24/21, 13/9, which both anchors and shores up, and 9/5, 8/5 building my 5-point. I err by 0.27 in choosing the latter. Analysis of some sensitivities to this position shows that the defensive anchor is more valuable than the attacking 5-point by at least 0.1, regardless of the rest of the position.



Black 6 White 3
Black to play 66

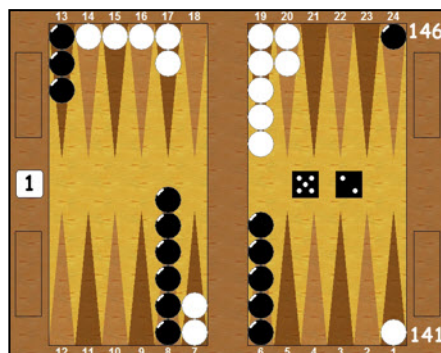
And I follow with a different large error on this 66. My play of 24/18, 13/7(3) is very wrong, at a number of levels. First, I am wrong to under-value the blitz 13/1*(2), which is correct by 0.26 over my move, and by 0.06 over anything else. The blitz opens up possibilities of an immediate win after poor returns by white, which are not available anywhere else. (Michael Crane explored this theme, in his questions in Bibafax competition 103 last year; I evidently have not learnt the messages.)

Second, even if I refuse to see the value of 13/1*(2), I should appreciate the value of the simple run 21/9, 8/2(2), which leaves me in a fair position, provided white does not hit with a 7 or an 8. Third, even if I opt for 13/7(3), I should realise that 24/18 leaves my two last men vulnerable, exactly where white wants to attack them; my thinking that 24/18 leaves fewer white hits than 21/15 is spurious.



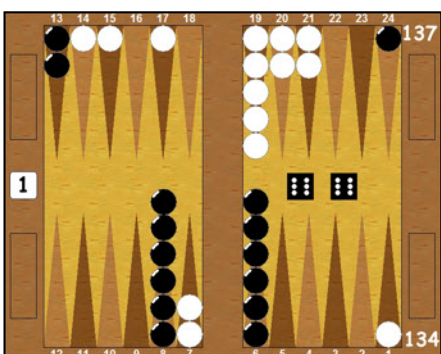
Black 6 White 3
Black cube action

I was well pleased when Nicky dropped this cube. The bots say I am not even correct to double at this match score – I am unapologetic.



Black 7 White 3
Black to play 52

This 52 poses me a typical such problem for this position. I continue to play safe with 13/6, in line with the bots general advice. However, by now, I ought to take some risk by slotting 8/1*; if White misses from the bar, I gain a bit. GNU rates my move an error of 0.13; Snowie puts it an error of 0.17.



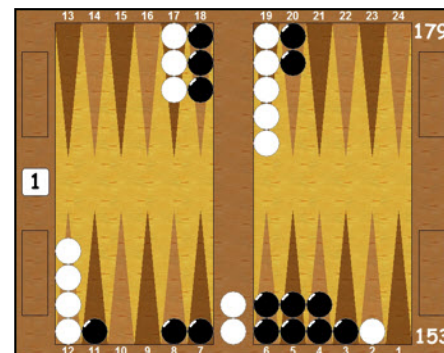
Black 7 White 3
Black to play 66

Something like 1 in 200 games open up like this. One player does not get hit much, but cannot make any home points at all, and piles up ridiculous candlesticks.

I find these positions hard to play; some years back, I used to play adventurous,

slotting on the grounds that I had to risk something to get an improvement towards a more sensible position. But, in general the bots have told me to play safe in many such positions.

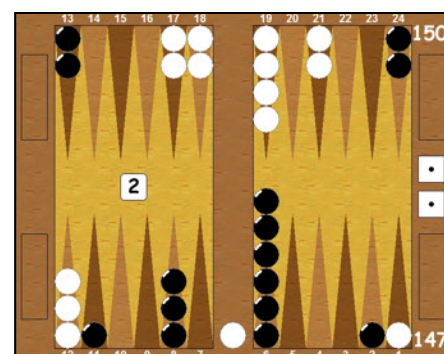
I also play this lucky 66 slightly too safe. I leave only 11 shots with 24/6, 8/2, but GNU says it is correct by some 0.05 to leave 15 shots from white's anchor on my 7-point with 24/12, 8/2(2). Anyway, Nicky misses, and I coast to an easy cash three moves later.



Black 8 White 3
Black on roll

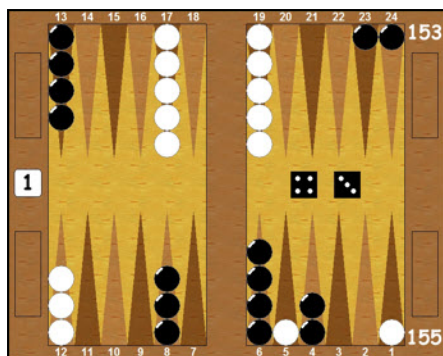
Here I am actually playing Too Good To Double, hoping to cover the slot on my 3-point and move towards an undoubled gammon while white has two men on the bar. In fact, it is correct to double by 0.05. Next turn, once white has brought both men on, I cash.

Well, Nicky agrees with me that this is a cash (ie a drop); unfortunately for Nicky, the bots disagree, and say that there is enough play left in this position for Nicky to take by 0.2. I doubt there are many human players who can identify this as a correct take at this match score.



Black 7 White 3
White cube action

The dice give me a very obvious decision to drop, particularly at the match score. It would have been a pretty risky decision for Nicky to double me the turn before – I would have taken easily.



Black 9 White 4
Black to play 43

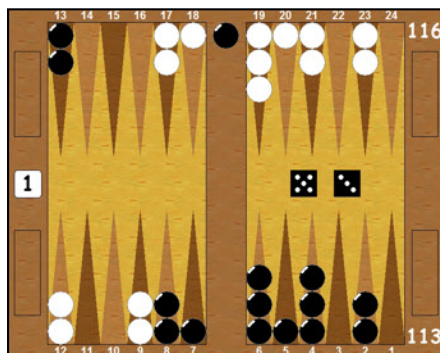
I have a 43, which can obviously either anchor 24/20, 23/20, or attack with 8/5* plus something. I judge that these decisions are close at evens, which they are. I don't like anchoring early against an open home board, so I choose 13/9, 8/5*. However, I overlook that: (a) the double hit 8/5*, 5/1* is better by 0.05 cubeful at either evens or the actual match score; and (b) also that at this match score of 2-away, 7-away, it is 0.12 better to safety up with the anchor.

I know that at this match score of 2-away, N-away, an opening 22 should much

more often be played 24/20(2) than at evens; just so, here the anchor becomes markedly favoured.

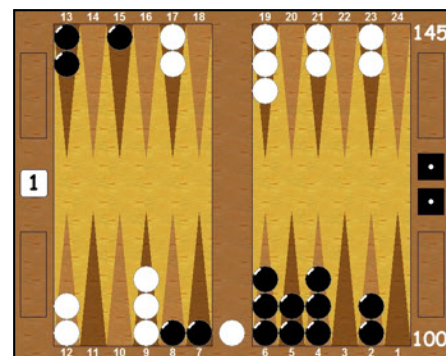
Between moves 10 to 15 of this game I knew I had some good doubling positions if the match score were even. Although I do look out for doubling windows at 2-away, 7-away, I was very minded not to double during these moves.

In fact, I was correct. This game, like many of its sort, goes straight from No Double by 0.5 at move 15 after my 53: 25/20*, 8/5 joker . . .



Black 9 White 4
Black to play 53

. . . to Too Good To Double by 0.3 here:



Black on roll

The dice continue kindly and give me a further 66 joker, so that I win an undoubled gammon and match.

Well, this ends commentary on an undistinguished performance by me. If I continue to play this badly, it will be a number of years before I get to the Biba top table again.



2009 was a fairly unusual year for backgammon in that there were no new books on the game published. While there was plenty of good on-line material available the lack of new books is worrying because normally the number of books published mirrors the popularity of the game. Let us hope this is only a short-term hiccup and that authors soon return to writing about the game. I was going to wait until 2011 to publish my next 'Wind' book but because of the lack of other new books I decided, with a little prompting from Carol Joy Cole, to bring the new book forward a year.

One of the problems is that you will never get rich as a backgammon author as it is a very niche market. If you sell a thousand copies then you are doing very well indeed. The exception is probably my own "Backgammon for Dummies" which is approaching about 6,000 in sales but that reflects the power of the Dummies brand as much as anything. So backgammon writing remains as much a labour of love as anything else!

So where is backgammon now? Throughout what I call the 'Internet Years' backgammon has maintained a core following without ever quite taking off in the way that poker has done. The media coverage of poker has transformed the game ever since the producers worked out how to give viewers access to the players' hole cards. That development, coupled with the fact that poker is relatively simple to understand (if not to play) has meant that it has been a huge success.

Backgammon has yet to make that leap. It has appeared on TV much more in the last decade thanks to the hard work of independent producers such as Andy Bell who has made a success of the World Series of Backgammon, despite a number of problems along the way. The PartyGammon sponsored million dollar tournament in the Bahamas was great fun but I doubt the promoters made much money.

The fundamental problem is that backgammon is too difficult! While apparently a simple game it is actually extremely complex. The further you delve into the intricacies of the game using the bots the more sophisticated it becomes and you realise just how many mistakes even the top players make.

Watching live backgammon at somewhere like Monte Carlo is great fun but

the audience there is made up of experienced players, some of them the best in the world. Taking a match and making it exciting for the average games player or even the man in the street is where poker succeeds and backgammon, as yet, fails.

The doubling cube baffles the average spectator yet it is at the very heart of the game. This means that for now the audience for backgammon programmes remains limited to the relatively small number of people who understand the game at intermediate level (try defining that!). The man in the street can get a sense of the excitement of the game but, until we find a way to easily explain some of the more complex elements such as doubling, the intricacies of the game will remain a closed book to the vast majority of potential viewers.

The other area that has developed hugely since "Second Wind" was published is on-line play. Playing on-line requires a whole new set of skills because of the limits in use in on-line play. When, for example, you are playing for £10 a point with a maximum win/loss of £40 per game that setting of an upper limit should substantially change your cube action, particularly in the area of redoubling – something that many on-line players don't understand. Of course, this is 

all the better for those who have taken the time to study this. As ever in life, those that do the work get the reward.

As to the book itself the structure remains the same as the other two 'Wind' books with material presented in chronological order and it covers the years 2007-2009. In addition there are two quizzes and an index. The main new addition is full rollout information for all the positions as this had been a request from readers for some time.

Can rollouts be taken as gospel truth? Of course not, because they take no account of human emotions and the fact that humans make errors, but at least the rollouts give a solid base to work from. Even the bots make mistakes and they also evolve

with time. All the rollouts in the book are done using Snowie 4.7 but it is becoming clear that eXtreme Gammon (XG) is stronger than Snowie so once or twice I have asked XG to give its opinion.

For now eXtreme Gammon may be the strongest player in the world but no doubt there will be further developments as computers get ever more powerful and neural net techniques evolve. It is to be hoped that the long-awaited next version of Snowie will finally arrive in 2010. Competition drives innovation so it would be good to see further developments in all three bots as that can only benefit all of us.

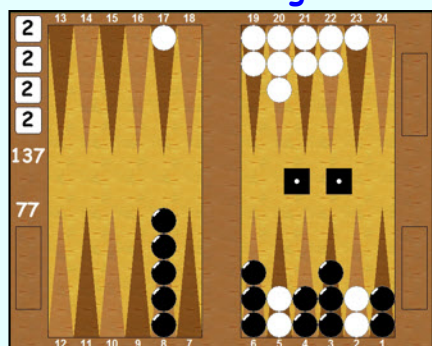
While the game of draughts (checkers) has been 'solved' by computers and for £50 you can buy a chess program that can

crush most grandmasters, the same is not true of backgammon. The pace of change in theory has slowed over the last few years after the huge advances of the preceding decade, but I believe there is still a long way to go in the evolution of the game, particularly in the area of doubling, by far the most difficult aspect of the game.

"Wind Assisted" can be obtained from www.lulu.com where you can also preview the first dozen pages. It can also be obtained directly from myself or Chris Ternel's Backgammon Shop - www.bgshop.com.

Chris Bray
chris.bray@btconnect.com

Easter at Harbinger Hall



The Dowager Duchess's spectacular Easter egg hunt had concluded successfully and the party had repaired to the long drawing room for an afternoon's backgammon.

In the box sat the Enigmatic Englishman. Cautious Cuthbert was captaining the team and he was delighted with his roll of double ones. He quickly played 8/7(2), 8/6 but paused before picking up

his dice. "Anybody want to play anything else?" he enquired.

Nigel Natural was first to speak. "I don't know why but that just doesn't look right to me. I wonder if we should just play 8/6(2)?"

"Don't be silly, NN. A point is a point and CC's play is obviously correct," said the Prophylactic Pole.

"I'm not sure which play is right," said DD, "so I will go with the majority."

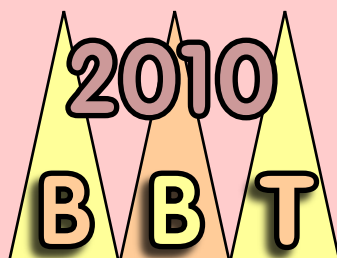
"In that case I am going to make my original play," said CC and picked up his dice.

"And I thought the day couldn't get any better after my success in the egg hunt," said EE. "It should be clear to all of you that making a new point that you will shortly have to dismantle is not the right idea. Your plan is not to try to contain my

checkers behind a prime but to clear your own points.

"One of the huge benefits of 8/6(2) is that other than 61 you won't have to play any sixes next roll and that in turn might lead to my having to give up one of my anchors before I want to."

EE rolled 51 (8/2), the team rolled 62 (7/1, 8/6) and then EE rolled 25 hitting the blot and allowed himself the smallest of smiles.



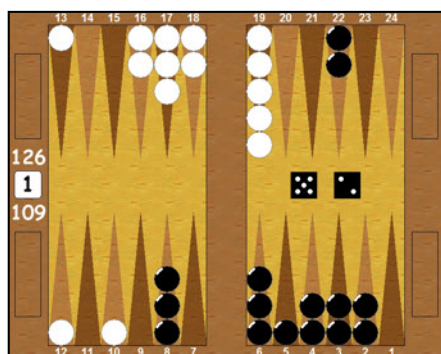
The Coventry Open Backgammon Tournament Sunday, 17 October, 2010

Competition 2010, #2 106.01-06 Positions By Michael Crane

Welcome to the second of the three 2010 season Competitions

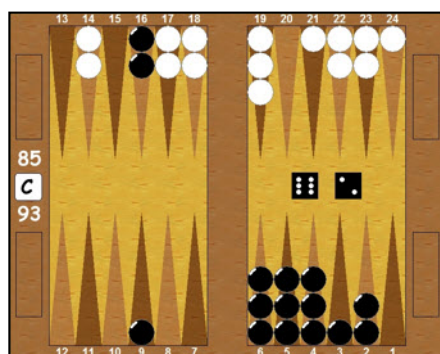
The winner will win £30 off their accommodation at any Biba tournament of their choice.
The member with the highest points total at the end of the year will win a cheque for £75.
Entries in by 1 July at the very latest - Answers in Bibafax 108, August 2010
Email: info@backgammon-biba.co.uk and all 'hard copy' to Biba HQ

106.01



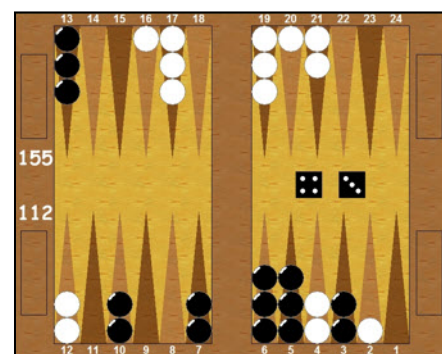
11 point match
Black 8 White 8
Black to play 52

106.02



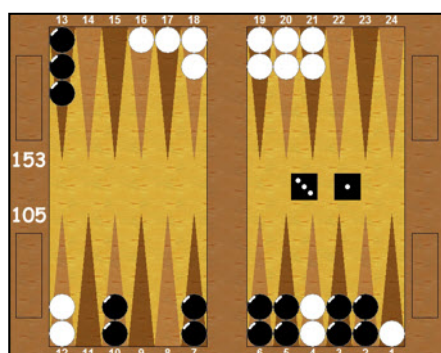
11 point match
Black 10 White 9 Crawford
Black to play 62

106.03



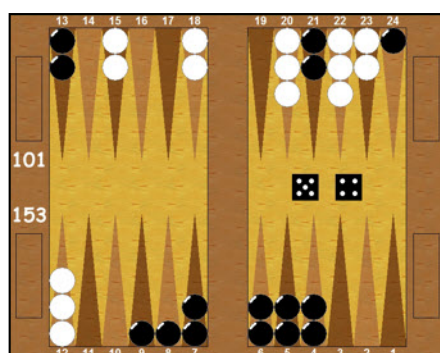
11 point match
DMP
Black to play 43

106.04



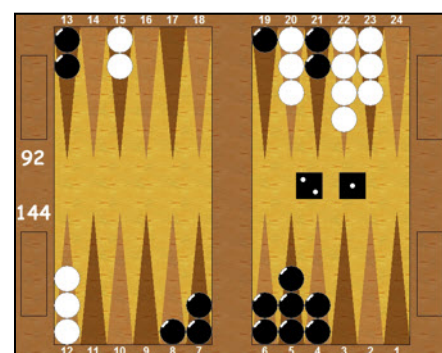
11 point match
DMP
Black to play 31

106.05



11 point match
DMP
Black to play 54

106.06

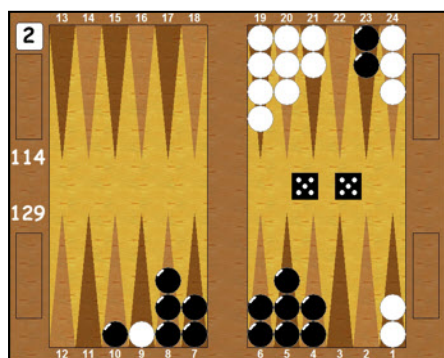


11 point match
DMP
Black to play 21

	The 18th Irish Open Championship	
	Wynn's Hotel, Dublin 29-31 October 2010	BIBA 2010 UK FINALS QUALIFIER

Have you heard the one about the Irishman, the Scotsman, and the Brit? Well, the joke is, they are all the same person! Prior to the weekend's final, two entrants had won the Irish and the Scottish Opens, Adrian Jones and Sean Casey; and one of them went on to win the triple and present me with this neat little opener!

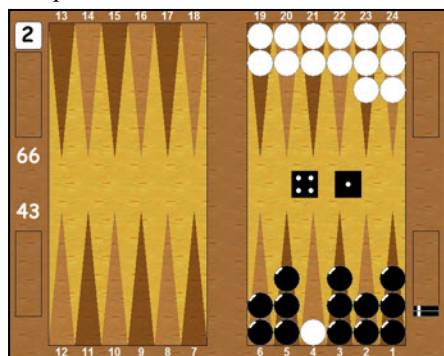
Main (57). Well, I won't keep you in suspense any longer; the final of the British Open was between Sean Casey and Paul Gilbertson, and it was a good match to watch, both players being equally strong with the dice rolls often deciding the outcome rather than expert play. One benefit of using a video camera to record matches is that you are able to see just how long some of the moves take to play. For example, how long would it take you to play in the this position? Sean is on roll and he is playing as black.



11 point match
Black 1 White 0
Black to play 55

He was a full 59 seconds before he even touched a checker. He then went through a choice of plays: 23/13(2); 23/18(2), 8/3(2); 23/18, 8/3(3). He then went back to his first choice, 23/13(2), thought for 10 seconds and then hit the clock. It took him 2m 7s to play this 55 - a play that Snowie rated a large error, preferring 23/18(2) 8/3(2).

A little later, during the bearoff he was in this position:



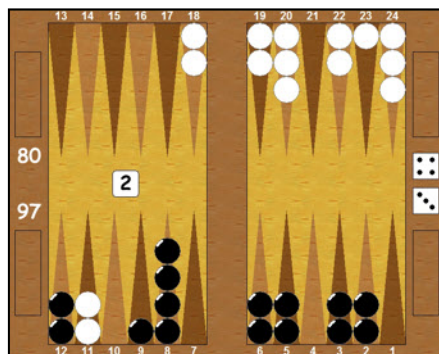
Black to play 41

CasinoRip British Open

Report by Michael Crane

Here his choice was: to hit, or not to hit, that is the question! He looked and looked and looked and, after 1m 48s he decided that the hitting play, 5/4*, 4/0 was the best - and Snowie concurred.

Much later in the match Paul shipped across a 2-cube hoping to cash in this position:



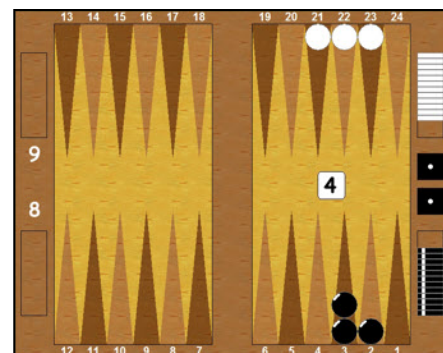
Black 8 White 6
White cube action

Paul thought quite a while before shipping across this cube, counting before doing so. Sean paid it equal attention, also counting, before taking. This is a blunder according to Snowie; Paul was a little surprised at the take but was happy to see it accepted (later Sean admitted that he'd miscounted), after all, he was over 80% at the time. But - and I know you're expecting a 'but' - Paul didn't figure on Sean's two double-sixes during the bearoff that allowed him to recube to 4, a cube that Paul just couldn't take. The score moved to 10-6 Crawford to Sean, and he went on to win the match at 11-6.

Snowie rated them both 'advanced' and made Sean the slight favourite @ 50.46%; however, Sean's luck rate was quite large @ 16.474, and when a player of Sean's skill level gets 'lucky dice' he's almost impossible to beat. The losing Semi-finalists were Julian Minwalla & Paul Barwick.

So, who was laughing at the joke about the Irishman, the Scotsman and the Brit? The Irishman, Sean Casey! Well, that's not strictly true - Sean wasn't in the Winner-Takes-All prize fund so we have a rollover of £420 for the County Cups Swiss format in May . . . so we had the last laugh.

Consolation (53). Adrian Jones didn't become a joke after all, but he did the next best thing if you can't win the Main, he won the Consolation. Knocked out of the Main 1st Round by Dorothy Lee (a good scalp for Dorothy), Adrian went into the 1st Round of the non-progressive side and fought his way through six opponents to face Peter Bennet who came from the Progressive side. Peter had three tough draws on the way, Brendan Burgess (winner of four Biba Mains), Brian Lever (also winner of four Biba Mains, two of which were British Opens!), and then Stewart Pemberton (2010 Scottish Open winner). He looked good for the Consolation too. Here is Peter, playing as black:



7 point match
Black 3 White 0
Black cube action

Peter recubes to 4 looking for a couple of points . . . and Adrian takes! Adrian is now relying on rolling any double greater than 22 or on Peter not bearing off first. This is what Peter has to say about it:

I can roll 33 or better on my first roll, winning immediately which happens 4/36 of the time = 11.1%. If I fail Adrian needs 33 or better giving him 88.9% x 11.1% = 9.9% winning chances from this sequence.

But, the other way for Adrian to win is not for me to roll any consecutive 1s. It is, specifically, for me to roll 21 followed by any 1, OR any 1 (except 21 which has already been counted) followed by 21, which is considerably less than ANY consecutive aces. This is:

$$(1/18 \times 8/9 \times 11/36) + (9/36 \times 8/9 \times 1/18) = 1.5\% + 1.2\% = 2.7\% \text{ approximately.}$$

This does not take account of the fact that Adrian can fail to bear off in two rolls, but that only reduces it to about 2.6%. This gives Adrian a total of about 12.5% (9.9+2.6) match winning chances if he takes. If he passes he has about a 15% or 16% chance (depending which ▷

match equity table you use) of winning from 0-5 down to 7, so he should have passed. At the table Adrian said he made the mistake of thinking I could fail with any consecutive aces (about 9%). If that had been the case it would have been a comfortable take - the double would have been questionable.

All I did at the table was see that his 33 or better gave Adrian about 11% as a first approximation, adjusted slightly downwards for me rolling 33 or better first, and slightly upwards for me failing in 2 rolls. I knew this had to be well under 15% in total and therefore a pass, so I doubled. Unfortunately for me, after I bore two men off, Adrian remembered to recube to 8 (the sort of thing I have forgotten to do in the past in the heat of the moment!), and rolled a very economical 33 for the match!!

Meanwhile, the **Last Chance (32)** saw Irving Czechowicz beat Vicki Pemberton and Stuart Mann beat Billy Sharp in the semis, each victor hoping to win the trophy. Stuart couldn't stop Irving as he reached ahead to take home his first ever Biba trophy. Well done, Irv. Over in the **RIP (32)** Mardi Ohannessian beat Peter Finnimore and Liz Perry beat Marcus Wrinch in the semis, and in the final Liz was pipped to the post by Mardi. She was delighted to win a trophy, and very pleased to take 2nd prize in the pool!

The **Team (13)** saw George Miltiadou beat me in the final (he was lucky!). Cecilia Sparke beat Vaidas Novicenko in the final of the **Crackshot (57)**; and in the **Poker (23)** Andy Darby came out on top with Rosey Bensley 2nd and Simon K Jones 3rd. Overall, Vicki Pemberton retains her #1 spot while Mark Calderbank drops to #3 as Lawrence Powell replaces him at #2. Tony Fawcett stays at #4, and Phil Tutchings is knocked out of the Top Five by Andy. Andy is our first qualifier, and a quick glance at his scores will reveal he's got some very low scores to replace - this puts him in a good position to improve. In the **Friday 500 (31)** Peter Bennet beat Andreas Sophocleous in the Final. Overall, Andy Darby (yep, him again!) keeps his #1 slot and Nicky Check and Myke Wignall swap places. Brian Lever and Rosey Bensley come in and we lose Ed Turner and Ann Pocknell. With the bottom five each on 16 points there's a good chance that next month some of them will be out of the Top 16.

We also had a sweepstake on the Grand National and Irving and I backed the winner. I didn't even know my horse was leading until the last few yards when I saw No.6 flash by on the screen! Result!

Finally. I am grateful for the Irish contingent turning out, they are a strong team and they were delighted to see Sean become the 2010 British Open champion. I was also pleased to see Billy Sharp and John Frame; unable to attend the Scottish Open on their own doorstep due to a Stag Party (no contest, really!) they drove hundreds of miles south to enter the British Open - thanks, guys, good to see you both again. Also, thanks to the event sponsor, Casinorip for the great trophies. Unfortunately they were not present at this event but they hope to be at the Biba World Championships in July, and I will be there with the guaranteed £1000 first prize!.

And I can't go without saying goodbye to John Hedge. John and wife, Svetlana, are returning to Australia at the end of April. A regular attendee of Biba tournaments, John has become a friend and Sharen and I have enjoyed their company during many dinners together. He'll be missed by all of us, but, he did take a load of email address and he intends to keep in touch from down-under via the web. Take care, John, and keep in touch.





2010 Details, Deals and Dates

Registration: Saturday 1030 to 1230

Play Starts (prompt): Friday 2100, Saturday 1300, Sunday 1030

Auctions: Group, Saturday 1245. Individual, Sunday 1015

Pools: Private, members only, prize pools available at £tba

All tournaments feature a free entry Friday 500 **

Formats: Knockouts - 11, 7, 5, & 3 point matches, Swiss - 6 x 11 point matches

Saturday night backgammon, Poker Grand Prix and Jackpots subject to demand

Registration Fees: Members only: £20 - you can join on the day.
Entrants not residing at the hotel, £15 extra to cover facilities
(all fees and surcharges to be paid on the day - prepayment not required)

FRIDAY

2100: Friday 500 **
+ Jackpots (on demand)

SATURDAY

Registration 1030 / 1230
Play starts 1300 prompt

SUNDAY

Registration 1030
(penalty points apply @ 1035)

Accommodation at Biba backgammon tournament weekends cannot be booked through any other special offer or promotional rate. Players not on the Biba special rate or not staying in the hotel shall pay a surcharge of £15 per night to cover facilities provided. ** Friday 500 entrants who are not on the Biba rate or are not staying in the hotel will have to pay a £20 entry fee.

Dinner, bed and breakfast @ Barceló Hotels for 2010

The Barceló Hinckley Island or Barceló Daventry

Reservations: 0870 168 88 33 and quote 'backgammon'

Single room: One night £66, two nights £115.50

Double or twin room: One night £108.00, two nights £203

There are a limited number of rooms made available to Biba at these rates for each of the hotels above and they will be allocated on a first come - first served basis. You are strongly advised to book your accommodation requirements as instructed on page ?? to avoid disappointment.

Registration £20, Entry Fee £15
Guaranteed 1st prize of £500

The English Open. 4,5,6, June 2010

Barceló Hinckley Island Hotel

The usual four elements plus extras on demand

This is a Biba Grand Prix & Tour Tournament and is seeking a sponsor



Advice on Booking Accommodation for all 2010 events

The Biba calendar on this page lists all the Biba events (plus a few non-Biba events) for the year. The wise member books every tournament they want to enter in one block booking. If, nearer the date they are unable to attend, they simply cancel the room (at least one week's notice is required) and they are not charged a penny. This guarantees that you'll never have to worry about accommodation ever again and you can relax in the full knowledge that no matter what, you'll always have a room. Book it now - you know you want to!

What does sponsoring an event entail?

At the very least you are required to supply the trophies for the event - the costs vary, but are usually in the region of £100 to £150. If you wish to attract a good turnout then extras should be considered to boost attendance. You can rename some of the above events to suit your sponsorship - details upon request. Once sponsorship has been agreed you are obliged to supply/fund the trophies in order to exclusively reserve your event.

If you would like to sponsor a tournament, those marked X are unavailable.

2010 Backgammon Calendar

Jun 4,5,6	The English Open	GP	-	BBT	Hinckley	Knockout
X Jul 2,3,4	Biba World Championship casinorip.com	GP	UK	-	Hinckley	Knockout
Jul 24,25	15th Liverpool Open (non-Biba event)	GP	-	-	Liverpool	Combination
Aug 6,7,8	SAC Trophy	GP	UK	-	Hinckley	Swiss
Aug ??	14th Mind Sports Olympiad (non Biba event)	-	-	-	tba	Swiss
Aug 28,29	The Bristol Open (non-Biba event)	-	-	-	Bristol	Knockout
Sep 3,4,5	The Barcelo Cup	GP	-	BBT	Hinckley	Knockout
Sep 24,25,26	The London Open (non-Biba event)	-	-	-	London	Knockout
Oct 1,2,3	Sandy Osborne Memorial	GP	-	BBT	Hinckley	Knockout
Oct 17	The Coventry Open (non-Biba event)	GP	-	BBT	Coventry	Knockout
Oct 29,30,31	18th Irish Open (non-Biba event)	GP	UK	BBT	Dublin	Knockout
Nov 5,6,7	Townharbour Trophy	GP	UK		Hinckley	Swiss
X Dec 3,4,5	The UK Finals Christmas Party * Sponsored by Peter & Paul Christmas *	GP	-		Hinckley	Double KO

For full details of the Biba Backgammon Tour events, go to www.backgammon-biba.co.uk

6, 7, 8 August, 2010 - S.A.C. Trophy @ Barceló Hinckley Island Hotel

The third of the year's four Swiss Format events. Not only do entrants get to play 6 x 11 point matches, but the winner qualifies for the Christmas UK Finals in December with entry into the Last 16 plus one night's free accommodation. Also, this is a great opportunity to rack up a good few Grand Prix points. In addition to the Main & Consolation there will also be a 31 Point Knockout between rounds for those that fancy something extra! Not forgetting the Poker Grand Prix and backgammon Saturday night.

casinorip**.com**

THE SMARTER WAY TO PLAY

Sponsors of the Biba website and Biba tournaments



Biba is proud to present its second World Championship Knockout & Progressive Consolation, Last Chance and 3-pointer event that is open to all players (**see below**) who cannot afford the high Registration and Entry Fees that world events normally charge.

2,3,4, July 2010

Barceló Hinckley Island

Registration Fee: £20. Entry: £20

Guaranteed 1st Prize: £1000

*** Entrants must be subscribers to Bibafax and members of Biba. You can join on the day.**

Sponsored by *casino*rip.com

THE SMARTER WAY TO PLAY

This is a UK Finals Qualifier and Grand Prix Tournament



LIVERPOOL BACKGAMMON CLUB

presents

The 15th Liverpool Open - Saturday 24, Sunday 25 July 2010

Venue: Liverpool Bridge Club, 7 Croxteth Road, Liverpool L8 5SE



Fee: £35.00 (under 18 - £20) includes Saturday Buffet
Entries after the deadline will incur an extra £10 additional fee



Reg: Saturday: 10.00-10.45am for a 11 am start. (NB: Limited to 64 players)

* Main * Consolation * Last Chance * One Point Shoot-Out *
* Sweeps * Cash Prizes! * Poker * Bar *

Details from: John Wright. 07931 553829 jpwright@blueyonder.co.uk

Peter Chan: 07879 837288 peedur8@hotmail.com

For catering purposes, pre-entry is required. Cheques payable to Simon Jones.

3 The Vineries, Liverpool, L25 6EU and forward prior to 17 July 2010

Please include your name, email address & telephone number

NB: Entries after 17 July will incur an additional £10 fee



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MANCHESTER ONE-DAY TOURNAMENT

Rodney Lighton reports:

Despite Manchester's best attempts we couldn't win all the events. As (too) often seems to happen a Liverpool player won the main final.

Congratulations to Adrian Jones who beat Birmingham's Matthew Fisher in the final, with Manchester's Brian Lever and Paul Harper losing semi-finalists.

The remainder of the trophies, however, went to Manchester players. Peter Snape beat Michael Horne in a very close con-

solation final and Rodney Lighton won the Last Chance against Dorothy Lee. The one pointer went to Irving Czechowicz who beat Neil Everitt.

The event followed its usual format. An initial entry of 42 players competed (slightly down on previous years). Five rounds of five point matches were played in a Swiss format. Those with four or five wins qualified for the main final together with 8 of 13 who scored three points. The remaining 26 players went

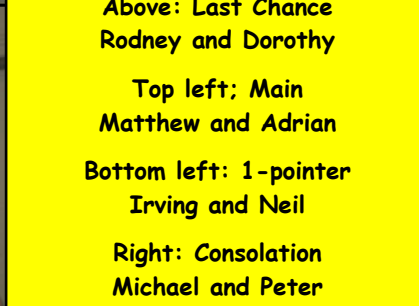
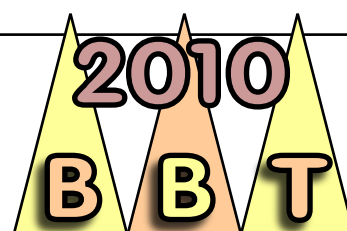
into a consolation final. Those who lost early in the main or consolation got entries to the Last Chance.

Everyone enjoyed the day. Lots of backgammon and copious amounts of food. As usual thanks to all who helped to make the event run smoothly. Susan Bourne for taking entries and running the finances, Irving for directing. Annette Jones for scoring. Lorraine Lighton for the buffet tea and scoring. Various Manchester club members for helping to set up the tables. Manchester Bridge Club and Jeff Morris for hosting the event.

Main		Consolation		Last Chance		1-Pointer	
1	Adrian Jones	1	Peter Snape	1	Rodney Lighton	1	Irving Czechowicz
2	Matthew Fisher	2	Michael Horne	2	Dorothy Lee	2	Neil Everitt
3&4	Brian Lever	3&4	George Hall	3&4	Ralph Eskinazi	3&4	David Phillips
3&4	Paul Harper	3&4	Vicky Chandler	3&4	Ian Shimwell	3&4	Brian Lever
5to8	Paul Barwick	5to8	Peter Bibby	5to8	Neil Everitt	5to8	Kevin Jones
5to8	Marcus Wrinch	5to8	Angie Dell	5to8	Rachel Rhodes	5to8	Kevin Stebbing
5to8	Carl Dell	5to8	Ian Hesketh	5to8	David Phillips	5to8	Matthew Fisher
5to8	Mark Calderbank	5to8	Steve Fowles	5to8	Susan Bourne	5to8	Vicky Chandler

GP & BBT @ Manchester

17.53	Adrian Jones	20	5.68	Fak Laight	5	2.06	Andrew Smith
14.96	Matthew Fisher	20	5.68	Ian Shimwell	5	2.06	Jon Williams
10.83	Brian Lever	20	5.68	John Wright	5	2.06	Peter Bibby
10.83	Paul Harper	20	5.68	Kevin Jones	5	2.06	Peter Chan
9.27	Peter Snape		5.68	Rachel Rhodes	5	2.06	Rich Ward
7.73	Carl Dell	9	5.68	Simon K Jones	5	2.06	Ian Hesketh
7.73	Marcus Wrinch	9	5.68	Susan Bourne	5	2.05	Neil Everitt
7.73	Mark Calderbank	9	4.11	George Hall		2.05	David Phillips
7.73	Paul Barwick	9	4.11	Vicky Chandler		1.55	Maurice Ekpenyong
6.17	Michael Horne		4.10	Dorothy Lee		1.55	Mick Vacarey
6.16	Rodney Lighton		2.57	Angie Dell		1.55	Paul Garlick
5.68	David Motley	5	2.57	Steven Fowles		1.55	Alan Greenwood
			2.56	Ralph Eskinazi			



Above: Last Chance
Rodney and Dorothy

Top left; Main
Matthew and Adrian

Bottom left: 1-pointer
Irving and Neil

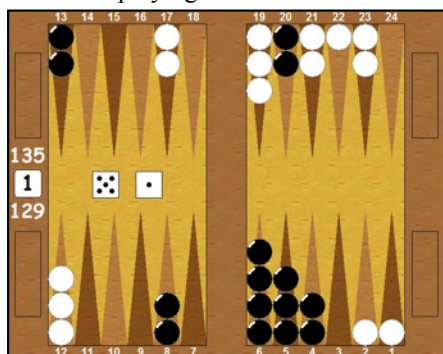
Right: Consolation
Michael and Peter

By 12:15 on the Saturday I did a head count of entrants and discovered I had 32, a perfect draw for any tournament, but for a Swiss, it was perfect! I was sorely tempted to close the doors, put the lights out and metaphorically, hide behind the sofa in case anyone else showed up! But, I couldn't do that so I sat there until 12:30, and then I shut the doors!

An entry of 32 was to give me (eventually) 16 in the Main and 16 in the Consolation. By Sunday morning we had four in the Main on 3-3, Peter Bennet vs Gerry Enslin and Julian Fetterlein vs Vicki Pemberton, encounters from which Gerry and Julian emerged on 4-4. On paper, the match between Gerry and Julian should have gone to Julian, he's higher ranked (1940 to 1540) and is recognised as one of the top players in the country, let alone Biba. Julian's problem was, Gerry didn't recognise this fact and it was he that went to the 6th Round on 5-5! Of the 4-5s that had not already played Gerry, Marcus Wrinch was drawn at random to see if he could put a stop to Gerry's run of beating top players (Rachel Rhodes - defending champion and former two-times British Champion, and Peter Bennet - 2008 English Open Champion and currently the highest ranked active player!). He did!

In what was an one-sided match Marcus led from the off and Gerry only managed to get three points the entire match. The eventual score of 11-3 didn't fully reflect the match, each of them played some very good backgammon (and some quite bad too) but overall it was closer than the score would have you believe. Marcus was favourite (58.24%) and Snowie rated them as Expert for Marcus and Advanced for Gerry.

There were just five checker-play blunders throughout (Gerry 4, Marcus 1), but one of Gerry's was a tad large as you can see here. The match is to 11 points and Marcus is playing as black:



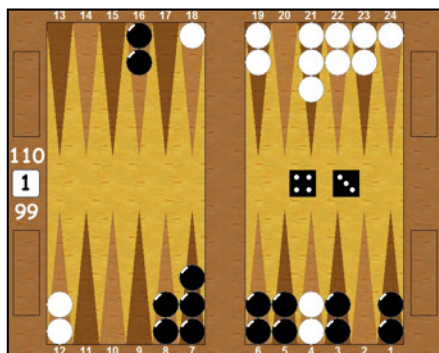
Black 0 White 0
White to play 51

County Cups Trophy

Michael Crane reports

With Marcus holding an advanced anchor he's likely to hit loose in his home board if he doesn't get a better move elsewhere. For this reason it is essential to play 24/23 and anchor. The 5 then is between 8/3 and 13/8 - and Snowie gives it to 8/3 by a small margin. However, as you will have gathered Gerry didn't make this move, instead he pokes his head over the barricade with 23/18, 4/3! Big mistake, Marcus then rolled The Girls (55), 8/3*(2), 6/1(2), and Gerry never got both checkers back into play until Marcus bore off and let him in to take the gammon.

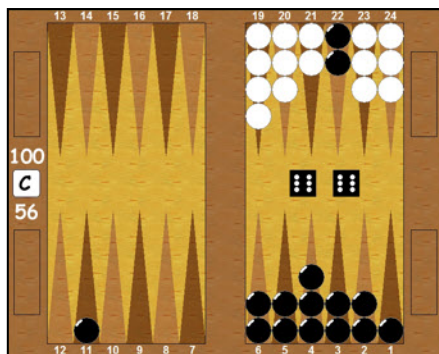
Marcus's blunder wasn't so dramatic, it being a borderline blunder:



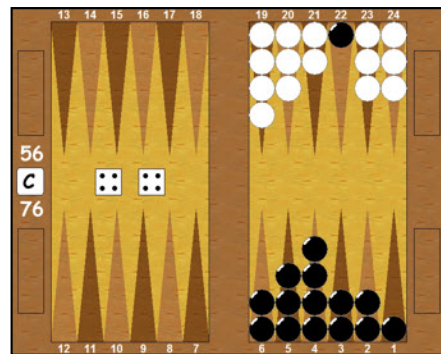
Black 2 White 1
Black to play 43

Gerry has a fairly impressive home board and unless he hits a black checker he isn't going to win the race from here, although he is 11 pips ahead, positionally he's at a slight disadvantage. So, Marcus should avoid leaving a blot, and Snowie opts for the simple move of 6/2, 6/3. Marcus chooses 8/5, 7/3 and leaves the shot that Gerry needs! Gerry does in fact roll a 4, but sadly for him it is Snake Eyes (11).

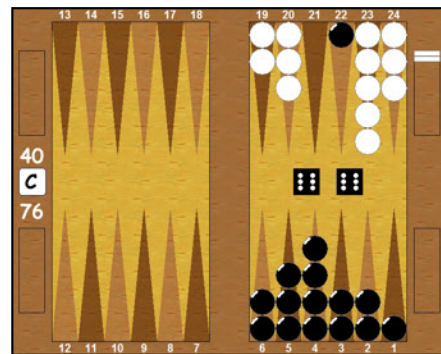
The most exciting part of the match was the Crawford game, a game in which the onlookers couldn't believe their eyes. Marcus leads 10-2:



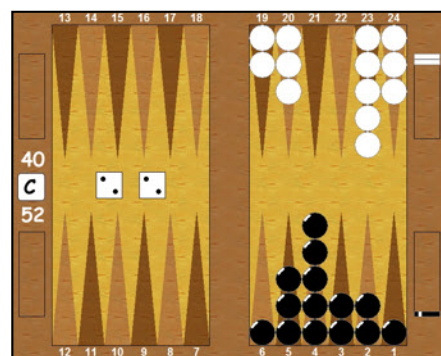
22/4, 11/5



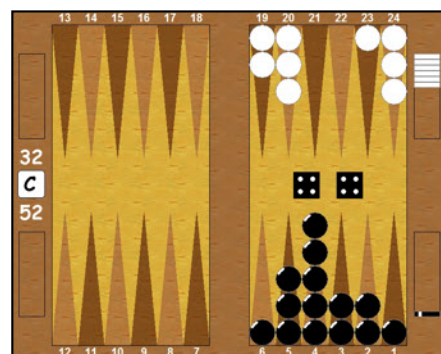
6/2(2), 4/0(2)



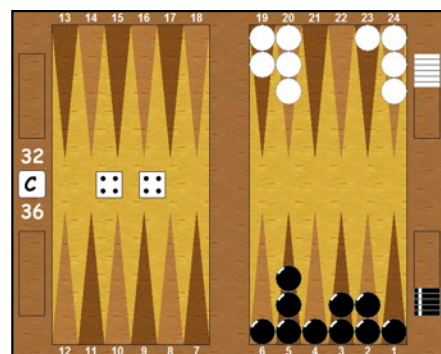
22/4, 6/0



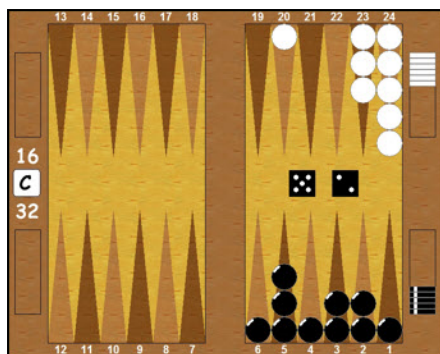
2/0(4)



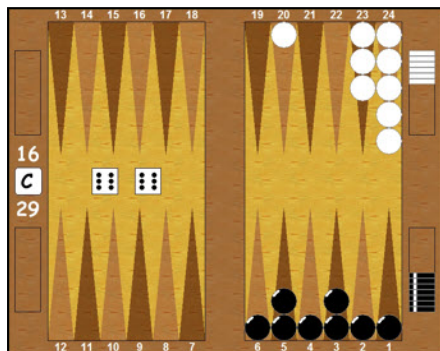
4/0(4)



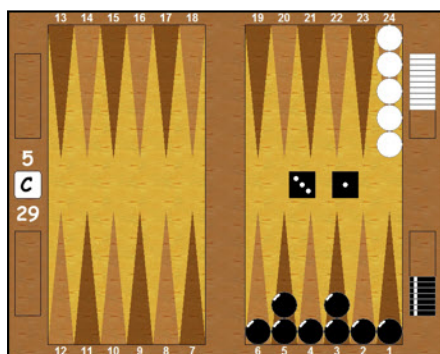
6/2(2), 5/1(2)



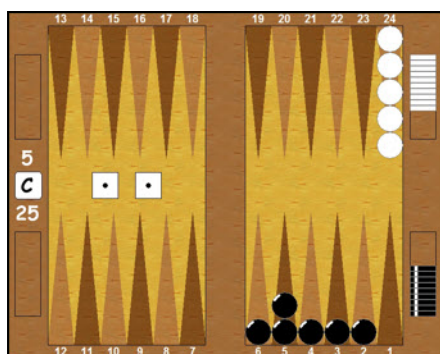
5/0, 2/0



5/0, 2/0(3)



3/0, 1/0



1/0(4)

If this sequence of doubles were to come out whilst playing online or against a bot there'd be shouts of dice-rigging and cheating; but this was head-to-head and those that keep moaning about the dice online and against bots should realise, shit happens!

So, Gerry remained on 5-5 and it was left to the tie-breaker to establish that Rachel Rhodes came in as Runner-up. Biba members might be interested in learning

that the £410 W.T.A rollover from the British Open is now a double rollover of **£810** (thanks to the fact that no one won 6-6), a sum which might (or might not) go at the June English Open! If you haven't yet decided to come to the English Open, perhaps this snippet might entice you.

In the **Consolation** element we had two players on 3-3, Chris Ternel and Dan Tutchings. The head-to-head tie-break was used and it was Chris who came out 1st after it was acknowledged that he won their Round 3 match. As things worked out, this was Dan's second 'win' of the weekend, for it was he that won the **Poker (10)** on the Saturday evening. Andy Darby came 2nd, with Mark Calderbank 3rd and Phil Tutchings (daddy!) 4th. In the poker we now have our first qualifiers (5 or more entries) and Vicki Pemberton remains at #1 and Mark Calderbank has moved up to #2 as Lawrence Powell (absent this weekend) drops to #5. Andy Darby moves up to #3 and Myke Wignall replaces an absent Tony Fawcett at #4.

In the **Team (6)** event it went down to two players going at it head-to-head, Michelle Ford (new member playing in her first ever Biba tournament) vs Brian Metcalf. Michelle's inexperience was to Brian's benefit and he came out the winner; mind you, Michelle is determined to return at a later date to gain that experience - good for you, Michelle. In the 1-point Knockout, Adrian Jones beat Rachel Rhodes.

In the **Friday 500 (11)**, Mardi Ohannessian beat Nicky Check in the Final, with Mark Calderbank and Mick Harris in joint 3/4th. The effect of this on the listing is that Andy Darby keeps his #1 slot leading Nicky Check by 10 points, who leads Myke Wignall by 10 points, who leads Mardi Ohannessian by 10 points!

Finally. I'd like to thank our anonymous sponsor who provided the trophies and 1-Pointer added prize money in celebration of his birthday. I'd also like to thank my wife, Sharen, for her help in standing in for my usual assistant, Deana Fawcett who was holidaying in Lanzarote - I must



Rachel & Gerry

Chris & Dan

Adrian

be paying her too much . . . Oh, I've just remembered, I don't pay her at all! Also, thanks to Vicki Pemberton and Mark Calderbank for stepping in to run the poker . . . Tony Fawcett was with Deana in Lanzarote . . . and I don't pay him either!

Match detailed statistics for County Cups		
Player	Marcus	Gerry
Rating	expert	advanced
Overall	4.626/12.527	6.716/20.765
Errors(blunders)	16(6)	21(7)
Checker play errors		
Checker play	2.029/5.690	3.776/10.539
Errors(blunders)	9(1)	17(4)
Double errors		
Overall	2.330/6.282	1.166/2.299
Missed double	1.668/3.320	0.828/1.570
Wrong double	0.663/2.962	0.338/0.730
Errors(blunders)	6(4)	3(2)
Take errors		
Overall	0.267/0.555	1.773/7.927
Wrong take	0.000/0.000	0.000/0.000
Wrong pass	0.267/0.555	1.773/7.927
Errors(blunders)	1(1)	1(1)
Marcus Wrinch was 58.24% favourite		

The Scottish Open, 19,20,21 March, 2010

Main (33)

1	Stewart Pemberton
2	Vaidas Novicenko
3&4	Lawrence Powell
3&4	Ian Hesketh
5to8	Paul Gillam
5to8	Uldis Lapikens
5to8	Ash Dalvi
5to8	Carl Dell

Consolation (29)

1	Phil Tutchings
2	Neil Webb
3&4	Rachel Rhodes
3&4	Martin Barkwill
5to8	Paul Gillam
5to8	Uldis Lapikens
5to8	Ash Dalvi
5to8	Carl Dell

Last Chance (32)

1	John Wright
2	Mark Calderbank
3&4	George Hall
3&4	Mick Vacarey
5to8	Andy Darby
5to8	William Spiers
5to8	Stewart Wilson
5to8	Martin Birkhahn

Friday 500 (22)

1	Andy Darby
2	Martin Birkhahn
3&4	Richard Biddle
3&4	Lawrence Powell
5to8	Vicki Pemberton
5to8	Jonathan Frame
5to8	Vaidas Movicenko
5to8	James

Poker (14)

1	Martin Barkwill
2	Vicki Pemberton
3	Jonathan Frame
4	Lawrence Powell
5	Phil Tutchings
6	John Wright
7	Paul Gillam
8	Carl Dell

The Haggis (16)

1	Arthur Wright
2	Nicky Check
3&4	David Phillips
3&4	Ann Pocknell

Team (13)

1	Richard Biddle
---	----------------

Beginners (4)

1	Hazel Brown
2	Derek Wilson
3	Angie

GP & BBT @ Scottish Open

18.58	Stewart Pemberton	20
13.42	Vaidas Novicenko	16
13.41	Neil Webb	
13.41	Phil Tutchings	5
9.29	Ian Hesketh	12
9.29	Lawrence Powell	12
9.28	Rachel Rhodes	
9.27	John Wright	
6.19	Ash Dalvi	9
6.19	Carl Dell	9
6.19	David Phillips	5
6.19	Paul Gillam	9
6.19	Uldis Lapikens	9
6.18	Martin Barkwill	5
6.17	Mark Calderbank	5
4.13	Martin Birkhahn	5
4.13	Richard Biddle	5
4.13	Stewart Wilson	5
4.13	Vicki Pemberton	5
4.12	Arthur Wright	
4.11	George Hall	
4.11	Mick Vacarey	
2.58	Andrew Darby	
2.58	Bill Spiers	
2.58	Jonathan Frame	
2.58	Kevin Jones	
2.58	Peter Bennet	
2.56	Nicky Check	
2.06	Ann Pocknell	
2.06	Gareth Timms	
2.06	Jeff Barber	
2.06	Vicky Chandler	

Ranking changes @ Scottish (new/old)

1929	1948	Peter Bennet	1569	1552	Paul Gillam
1878	1865	Lawrence Powell	1544	1544	Phil Tutchings
1832	1852	Nicky Check	1532	1547	Vicky Chandler
1812	1813	Martin Barkwill	1531	1546	Jonathan Frame
1791	1806	Rachel Rhodes	1525	1538	Gareth Timms
1774	1715	Stewart Pemberton	1524	1539	John Wright
1752	1768	Ann Pocknell	1521	1514	Richard Biddle
1742	1727	Uldis Lapikens	1517	1532	Stuart Murdoch
1681	1660	David Phillips	1502	1485	Ashutosh Dalvi
1631	1582	Vaidas Novicenko	1482	1497	Kevin Jones
1628	1643	Jeff Barber	1479	1479	Stewart Wilson
1608	1627	Andrew Darby	1380	1390	Arthur Wright
1607	1606	Mark Calderbank	1378	1391	George Hall
1586	1597	Neil Webb	1370	1346	Carl Dell
1585	1600	Bill Spiers	1359	1374	Mick Vacarey
1583	1558	Ian Hesketh	1357	1355	Vicki Pemberton
1573	1576	Martin Birkhahn			

The British Open, 9,10,11 April, 2010

Main (57)

1	Sean Casey
2	Paul Gilbertson
3&4	Julian Minwalla
3&4	Paul Barwick
5to8	Peter Bennet
5to8	Brendan Burgess
5to8	Rachel Rhodes
5to8	Brian Lever

Consolation (53)

1	Adrian Jones
2	Peter Bennet
3&4	Chris Ternel
3&4	Stewart Pemberton
5to8	George Miltiadou
5to8	Vaidas Novicenko
5to8	John Batty
5to8	Brian Lever

Last Chance (32)

1	Irving Czechowicz
2	Stuart Mann
3&4	Billy Sharp
3&4	Vicky Pemberton
5to8	Peter Christmas
5to8	Martin Barkwill
5to8	Andy Darby
5to8	Lawrence Powell

The RIP (32)

1	Mardi Ohannessian
2	Liz Perry
3&4	Peter Finnimore
3&4	Marcus Wrinch
5to8	Mark Calderbank
5to8	George Hall
5to8	Jon Barnes
5to8	Nicky Check

Friday 500 (31)

1	Peter Bennet
2	Andreas Sophocleous
3&4	Brian Lever
3&4	John Hedge
5to8	Cecilia Sparke
5to8	Mardi Ohannessian
5to8	Mark Calderbank
5to8	Sean Casey

Poker (23)

1	Andy Darby
2	Rosey Bensley
3	Simon K Jones
4	Tony Fawcett
5	Dave McNamara
6	Vaidas Novicenko
7	Lawrence Powell
8	Paul Gilbertson

Team (13)

1	George Miltiadou
2	Michael Crane

Crackshot (57)

1	Cecilia Sparke
2	Vaidas Novicenko

GP @ British

24.77	Sean Casey
24.76	Adrian Jones
13.42	Paul Barwick
13.42	Julian Minwalla
13.42	Paul Gilbertson
9.29	Brendan Burgess
9.29	Rachel Rhodes
9.29	Peter Bennet
9.28	Chris Ternel
9.28	Vaidas Novicenko

Grand Prix Championship May 2010 (10.29 and above)									
54.13	Mark Calderbank	29.41	Myke Wignall	21.15	Brian Lever	14.94	Martin Barkwill		
53.64	Nicky Check	28.87	Mardi Ohannessian	20.13	Kevin Jones	14.94	Peter Christmas		
53.15	Peter Bennet	26.84	Paul Gilbertson	20.11	George Hall	14.44	Eric Westbrook		
53.13	Adrian Jones	26.83	Lawrence Powell	19.61	Julian Fetterlein	13.92	Carl Dell		
50.54	Marcus Wrinch	25.29	Simon K Jones	19.08	Tony Fawcett	13.42	Julian Minwalla		
49.53	Phil Tutchings	25.27	John Wright	18.58	Gerry Enslin	13.41	Neil Webb		
47.45	Rachel Rhodes	24.77	John Hurst	18.57	Andreas Sophocleous	11.87	Ray Kershaw		
45.93	Stewart Pemberton	24.77	Sean Casey	18.07	Mick Harris	11.86	Angie Dell		
45.89	Andy Darby	22.70	Vaidas Novicenko	18.03	Mick Vacarey	11.83	Peter Finnimore		
43.34	Paul Barwick	21.66	Ann Pocknell	17.51	Jon Barnes	11.35	Ian Hesketh		
38.69	Vicki Pemberton	21.65	Uldis Lapikens	15.99	Neil Everitt	10.83	Peter Chan		
38.18	Jeff Barber	21.16	Paul Plumptre	15.45	Irving Czechowicz	10.30	Stuart Mann		
31.45	Chris Ternel					10.29	Dorothy Lee		

Ranking Championship May 2010									
Q	2079.14	Marcus Wrinch	Q	1540.64	Chris Ternel	10	2142.80	Uldis Lapikens	
Q	2048.71	Nicky Check	Q	1513.29	George Hall	10	1490.30	Andreas Sophocleous	
Q	2035.93	Paul Barwick	Q	1384.50	Neil Everitt	10	1470.30	Kevin Jones	
Q	2030.71	Stewart Pemberton	Q	1725.15	Lawrence Powell	8	1560.50	Ray Kershaw	
Q	2025.57	Phil Tutchings	13	1825.75	Peter Bennet	8	1509.00	Mick Vacarey	
Q	1981.50	Jeff Barber	12	1825.72	Peter Bennet	8	1465.63	Peter Christmas	
Q	1877.36	Andy Darby	11	1777.82	Paul Plumptre	8	1279.63	Ed Turner	
Q	1875.86	Vicky Pemberton	11	1443.18	Tony Fawcett	7	1703.00	Adrian Jones	
Q	1865.36	Mark Calderbank	10	1626.00	Ann Pocknell	7	1588.86	Eric Westbrook	
Q	1811.79	Myke Wignall	10	1926.00	Paul Gilbertson	7	1547.86	Robert Tutchings	
Q	1777.71	Rachel Rhodes	10	1800.70	Julian Fetterlein	7	1326.14	Arthur Wright	
Q	1743.43	Mardi Ohannessian	10	1785.20	Simon K Jones	7	936.43	Anne Ryder	
Q	1597.93	Mick Harris	10	1754.50	Sean Williams				

List only shows 7 entries and above

Friday 500 May 2010									
77	Andy Darby	16	Richard Biddle	9	Ray Kershaw				
67	Nicky Check	16	Rosey Bensley	9	Rob Tutchings				
57	Myke Wignall	15	Martin Barkwill	9	Sean Casey				
47	Mardi Ohannessian	14	Ed Turner	9	Tony Walters				
44	Peter Bennet	13	Rachel Rhodes	9	Vicki Pemberton				
37	Andreas Sophocleous	13	Vaidas Movicenko	7	Carl Dell				
30	Mick Harris	12	Ann Pocknell	7	Chris Ternel				
29	Tony Fawcett	12	John Hedge	7	Dave McNamara				
27	Simon K Jones	11	Anne Ryder	7	Eddie Barker				
25	Mark Calderbank	11	Arthur Wright	7	Gareth Timms				
23	Phil Tutchings	11	Paul Gilbertson	7	Ian Tarr				
22	Jeff Barber	9	Michael Crane	7	Jon Barnes				
19	Brian Lever	9	Mick Vacarey	7	Julian Fetterlein				
16	John Wright	9	Cecilia Sparke	7	Stewart Wilson				
16	Marcus Wrinch	9	George Hall	7	Stuart Pemberton				
16	Martin Birkhahn	9	Jonathan Frame						
		9	Lawrence Powell						

List only shows 7 points and above

Poker Grand Prix May 2010			Pts	Player	Entries	Pts	Player	Entries
97	Vicki Pemberton	Q	37	John Wright	3	20	Jonathan Frame	1
85	Mark Calderbank	Q	26	Marcus Wrinch	3	14	Billy Sharp	1
80	Andy Darby	Q	26	Mick Harris	3	12	Paul Gillam	1
50	Myke Wignall	Q	7	Mick Vacarey	3	11	Cecilia Sparke	1
81	Lawrence Powell	4	52	Rosey Bensley	2	10	Chris Evans	1
67	Tony Fawcett	4	29	Carl Dell	2	10	Eddie Barker	1
51	Phil Tutchings	4	25	Paul Gilbertson	2	10	John Frame	1
30	George Hall	4	15	John Batty	2	8	Julian Fetterlein	1
25	Ann Pocknell	4	13	Robert Tutchings	2	7	Angie Dell	1
64	Simon K Jones	3	13	John Hedge	2	6	Stewart Pemberton	1
39	Martin Barkwill	3	25	Dave McNamara	1	3	Carol	1
			23	Vaidas Novicenko	1	3	Roy Hollands	1
			20	Daniel Tutchings	1	1	Kevin Stebbing	1

23 – 27 JUNE 2010



5th Portuguese Backgammon Open & Davis Doubles

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Grand Finale
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Qualify for the
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Grand Finale prize-pool

20,000 €

