

Madison Backgammon News



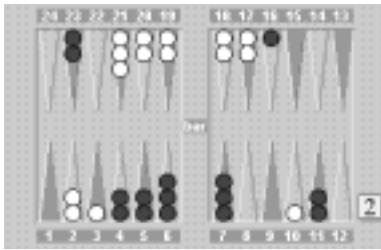
Number 33

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Answers to Quiz Problems

By Sam Pottle

Problem 5



Money game, Black owns the cube.
Black to play 32. (4 points)

Black was hoping to hit White's outfield checker, but must do the best he can with a poor roll. It's tempting to just grab that blot on the 16 point and bring it to safety, but how is Black planning to win after that?

Black has two men trapped behind a 5-prime, away from the edge, so that he has no direct escaping numbers. White is at the edge of a shorter prime, so that both fives and sixes escape. To "win going forward," Black needs to roll two ones and two sixes, while successfully containing at least one of White's rear checkers. This is a tall order.

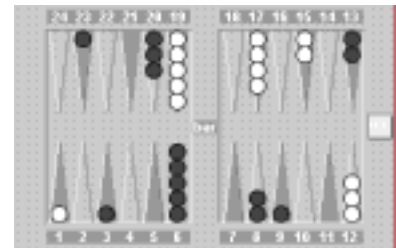
Instead, Black should try to break White's prime. If Black could have hit the outfield

checker this turn, several of White's entering numbers would have forced him to break his prime (e.g. 41, 42, or 43). As it is, White's free outfield man represents crucial *timing*: White can play for two or three turns with that checker, by which time he will probably have rolled a five or a six to escape another back man.

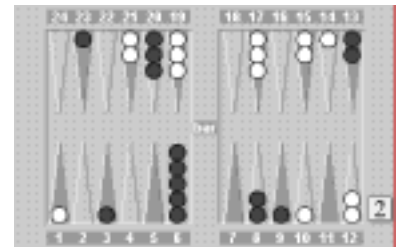
To counter this plan, Black must try to lengthen his prime. Slotting the back of the prime is unpromising, since it leaves multiple direct shots. What about slotting the front? Black can attack with 6/3* 7/5. This does several good things. It gives Black a chance at building a 5-prime; it knocks White away from the edge of the existing prime, so that only sixes escape; and it puts White on the bar, giving Black another chance at that blot in the outfield.

Black won't be happy if he gets hit, of course, but he's an underdog anyway if he plays passively, and the potential gains if the aggressive play works are substantial. Score 4 points for 6/3* 7/5.

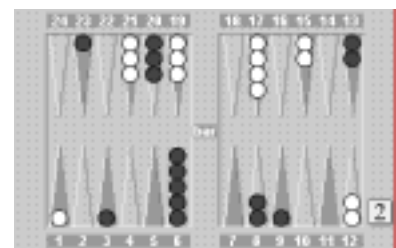
Problem 6



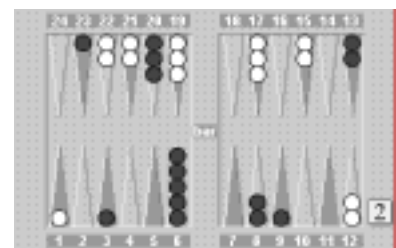
Part A: Money game, center cube.
Black to play 52. (2 points)



Part B: Money game, Black owns the cube.
Black to play 52. (2 points)



Part C: Money game, Black owns the cube.
Black to play 52. (2 points)



Part D: Money game, Black owns the cube.
Black to play 52. (2 points)

(continued on page 2)

Answers

(continued from page 1)

Here again we have the same position four times for Black, with variations for White, mostly involving stronger inner boards in the latter positions. This time, however, Black's best play is the same in all four positions.

What are some reasonable ideas? Black can make the bar point (23/18 20/18), run a back man out (20/13), make the four point (9/4 6/4), attack (6/1* 3/1), cover and split (8/3 with 23/21 or 20/18), or cover and slot (8/3 6/4). I guess a loose hit with 23/18 3/1* is also possible.

The cover and slot play must be worse than simply making the four point because it gives away the eight point, and makes a less desirable point. We can eliminate the running play because it isn't constructive; making a useful point must be better than just shuffling spare men around. We can also discard the loose hit play as being less productive and less safe than making the ace point.

The four point is also a better point to make than the bar point (18 point). Why? Because Black already has a good defensive anchor on the 20 point. His defense is strong and his offense is weak. What Black really needs is to put some teeth in his inner board. So we can eliminate 23/18 20/18.

What about the cover and split play? This is an attempt to avoid leaving a direct shot inside. It's not all that much safer than making the four point, though; there are 9 indirect shots at the blots on the eight and nine points (compared to 12 direct shots at the three point blot the other way). Otherwise, the play has the same drawbacks as the

cover and slot play: it makes an inferior point and gives away the eight point. As a bonus, the cover and split leaves the six point stacked up. This can't be right.

What's left? We've narrowed our options down to the two serious contenders: making the four point, and attacking on the ace point. Looking at the position as a whole, we see that Black has four men back to White's one, and Black has a strong defensive anchor. Both of these circumstances call for bold play. Since Black already has four men back, it won't cost him very much to have a fifth man sent back. Because of his advanced anchor, Black can't be primed or closed out, so he shouldn't have any trouble getting his back men out and around the board. In these circumstances, it is usually right to try and make key points by slotting them and then covering, since the downside of getting hit is small.

In this case, we "slot" the three point by not moving the checker that's already there, and simply make the four point. Black gets the four point, unstacks the heavy six point, and leaves the three point slotted, hoping to cover it next turn. The only drawback of this play is that the slotted man might be hit, and even that is hardly fatal.

By comparison, the attacking play is safer, but doesn't accomplish as much. It makes an inferior point, and doesn't prepare to make more inner board points. The big advantage of the play is that it puts White on the bar. This would be useful if White were threatening to make big gains on his roll, or if Black had good chances to carry out a blitz. Here, though, Black's

strong defense keeps White from making great strides in one roll, and Black has too many men back to hope for a successful attack against a single checker, starting from a two point board.

This analysis applies to all four parts of the problem; making the four point is best in each position. The decision is closest in part B, where attacking is more attractive because of the White blots in the outfield. If Black makes the ace point in part B and White dances, Black will have good attacking chances. The problem is that White only dances 11% of the time (4 rolls). Most of the time, White will enter and safety one or both outfield blots, leaving Black with a made ace point to hamper his flexibility for the rest of the game. If Black had one more point in his board, or were desperate to play safe this turn, the attacking play could be right. Here, though, the attacking plan doesn't work out often enough to make it worthwhile.

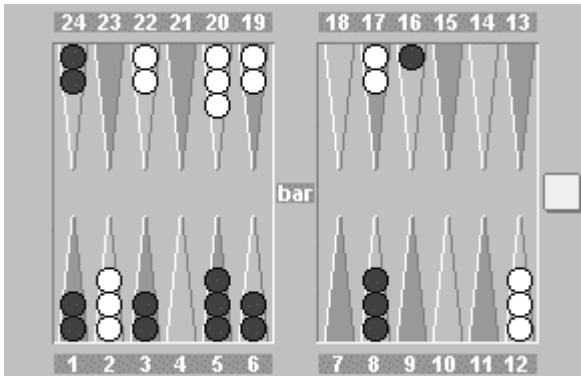
The moral of this problem is: when getting sent back doesn't cost much, put your checkers where you want them and don't worry too much about getting hit. This is sometimes expressed more briefly as *put your checkers where they belong*. It's often good advice even when getting hit is fatal, or nearly so. (See Problem 5.) The types of plays that this kind of thinking leads to are called "pure" plays, and they tend to be right more often than you think. Almost all novice and intermediate strength players tend to play too safe in positions like those in Problem 6, where taking modest risks is called for.

Score 2 points for 9/4 6/4 in each part of the problem.

New Quiz Problems

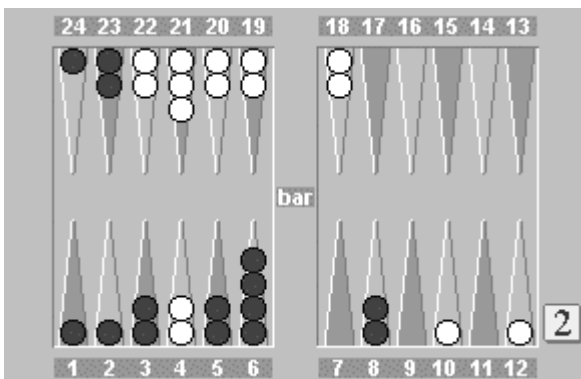
Our thanks to Bill Robertie for our quiz problems, which are all taken from his "Great Texas QuizGammon Contest" at World Cup VI in 1998.

Problem 7



Money game, center cube. Black to play 64.
(4 points)

Problem 8



Money game, Black owns the cube. Black to play 64.
(4 points)

Madison Players Score Big At Nov. 99 Springfield, Illinois Tournament

The 1999 Illinois State Backgammon Championships held November 12-14, 1999 at the Springfield Hilton proved to be one outstanding event this past year for Madison Backgammon Club members. Five individuals from our club made the trek to this tallest building in central Illinois. The tournament drew 22 participants in the Championship bracket and 24 more in the Intermediate division. While the overall strength of the fields was not on par with some of the other major Midwest tournaments held earlier in the year, it did give some intermediate-class players the opportunity to test the open-class waters.

Sam Pottle, our club's esteemed tournament director, was one of those daring souls to take the plunge into the shark-infested waters of the Championship bracket. His efforts were well rewarded with a Last Chance victory in this new realm.

"Uncle" Bruce Russell and Lee "One Out of 973" Pflugrad stunned the Intermediate division players with their 1st and 2nd place finishes, respectively. Not that finishing in the money is something new to these seasoned pros, but the *real* question is, what did Bill Davis know (that the rest of us didn't) when he placed the high bid in the Intermediate Calcutta auction and selected the Russell/Pflugrad team instead of picking any of the other eleven teams?

The venue for this tourney was great. The playing rooms on the 29th floor of the Springfield Hilton offered a spectacular view of the city and its magnificent historical sites in the heart of Lincoln country. The hotel rooms were clean and priced far less than comparable accommodations at other tournament cities (\$55/night). The adult beverages in the hotel bars and restaurants were also very reasonably priced.

The hospitality of Randy Armstrong, the tournament director, and his staff was very cordial. The tournament was very organized and well run. I found the atmosphere at this tournament to be very friendly and relaxing, over the board, and away from it. I would highly recommend attending future tournaments run by these guys!

Congratulations to Sam, Bruce and Lee for their well-deserved victories!

Pottle and Machaj Invade Chicago

Sam Pottle and Tom Machaj journeyed down to the Chicago Bar Point Sunday Bimonthly tournament on November 28, 1999 and both returned with some of the prize money. Sam captured 2nd place in the Open division after slaying some heavyweight contenders. Tom battled back after a loss in the 2nd round to take the Consolation prize in the Intermediate bracket.

Bill Chalks Up 2 Wins; Gary Escapes The Claw and Finishes at The Top

Bill Minser picked up 8.40 points with back-to-back victories on Nov. 16 and Dec. 7. Not a bad way to finish up the year! Congratulations, Bill!

Gary Hines remained on top of the point standing to complete the year, even though he miss the last tournament of 1999. Tom Machaj needed a 1st place victory to wrestle the title from Gary, but was stopped dead in his tracks by Bruce Garner in the finals match of the December 21 tournament. Bruce won 4.80 points since November 2, culminating with a 1st place finish at the end of the year. Nice work, Bruce!

Club Tournament Format For 2000

The current tournament format of 5-point matches for the main flight and consolation bracket will remain unchanged for 2000. Registration will close promptly at 7:00 p.m. followed by the draw. Call ahead if you think you might be late!

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Recent Club Tournament Results

November 16 – (9 players) 1st Bill Minser,
2nd Gary Hines, Cons. Lee Pflugrad.

December 7 – (7 players) 1st Bill Minser,
2nd Tom Machaj, Cons. Lee Pflugrad.

December 21 – (8 players) 1st Bruce Garner,
2nd Tom Machaj, Cons. Sam Pottle.

Final Club Standings For 1999

Gary Hines	46.65
Tom Machaj	46.05
Mark Tremayne	33.35
Sam Pottle	33.10
Bill Minser	29.65
Bruce Russell	24.65
Lee Pflugrad	22.35
Lenn Schneider	20.50
Bruce Garner	15.25
Carl Jespersion	12.70
Rob Keast	9.10
Mark Kremer	6.70
Sonja Peacock	4.15
Jerry Neviaser	3.00
Charlie Walter	1.00
Paul Gibbons	1.00
Marge Kirchoff	1.00
Paul Strasberg	1.00

Upcoming Events

January 4 – Club Tournament. JT Whitney's Pub & Brewery, 674 S Whitney Way, Madison, WI. (608) 274-1776. 6:30 p.m. Registration. 7:00 p.m. Play begins. \$6/entry, \$4/1st side, \$5/2nd side.

January 18 – Club Tournament. JT Whitney's Pub & Brewery, 674 S Whitney Way, Madison, WI. (608) 274-

1776. 6:30 p.m. Registration. 7:00 p.m. Play begins. \$6/entry, \$4/1st side, \$5/2nd side.

January 23 – Milwaukee Bimonthly Tournament. John Hawks Pub, 100 E Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI (414) 272-3199. 12 p.m. Registration. 12:30 p.m. Play begins. \$40/open - \$10/side, \$20/limited.

February 1 – Club Tournament. JT Whitney's Pub & Brewery, 674 S Whitney Way, Madison, WI. (608) 274-1776. 6:30 p.m. Registration. 7:00 p.m. Play begins. \$6/entry, \$4/1st side, \$5/2nd side.

February 6 – Chicago Bar Point Sunday Bimonthly. Anyway's Chicago Grill & Bar, 5 E Roosevelt Rd, Oakbrook Terrace, IL (630) 932-9323. 11:30 a.m. Registration. 12 p.m. Play begins. \$40/open, \$20/intermediate.

February 15 – Club Tournament. JT Whitney's Pub & Brewery, 674 S Whitney Way, Madison, WI. (608) 274-1776. 6:30 p.m. Registration. 7:00 p.m. Play begins. \$6/entry, \$4/1st side, \$5/2nd side.

February 18-20 – 22nd Annual Pittsburgh Backgammon Championships. Greentree Radisson. Pittsburgh, PA. (800) 333-3333. 1:00 p.m. Friday registration opens. 9:00-10:15 a.m. Saturday final registration. 12:30 p.m. Play begins. \$200/championship - \$100/side, \$100/advanced - \$50/side, \$35/novice. Several other events.

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Madison Backgammon News is published every month or so to promote the fine art of backgammon in south central Wisconsin. Madison Backgammon Club meets every Tuesday evening at 6:30 p.m. at J.T. Whitney's Pub & Brewery. Club tournaments are held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of every month. Chouettes and one-on-one play are conducted on all other Tuesdays and after players have completed their tournament matches. For further information, contact Tom Machaj at (608) 276-8144 or by e-mail at machaj@itis.com