

# Madison Backgammon News



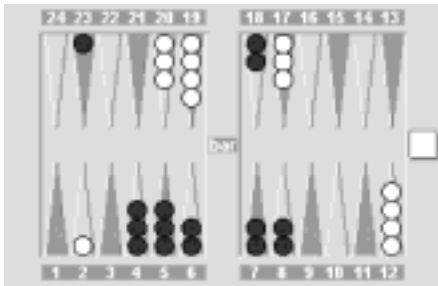
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## Answers to Quiz Problems

By Sam Pottle

### Problem 9



Money game, center cube.  
Black to play 42. (4 points)

Black has a nice position, and was getting close to a double when she rolled this piece of junk. She was hoping to point on White's head this turn, or failing that, to just run the back checker around. Black can't do either of those things with a 42. How should she play it?

Black's biggest asset is her 5-prime, and she should leave it alone. It would be worth giving up in return for a really forceful attack, but Black doesn't have one this turn. That leaves only two possibilities for playing the four: 5/1 and 18/14.

When playing a priming game, it's usually right to play purely, trying to keep all your checkers in front of the opponent's back man (or men). Each buried checker is one fewer builder for the next point in the prime, and one fewer attacker

against the other guy's checkers. In this case, though, the pure play has a price: Black's bar point anchor.

White has only two ways to win this game: he can roll a 1 and a 6 in succession, then win the resulting position, in which he is likely to still be down 15-20 pips in the race; or he can counterprime Black and outtime her, forcing her to break her prime. The second of these options is currently not available to White, because Black owns an anchor right in the middle of White's would-be prime.

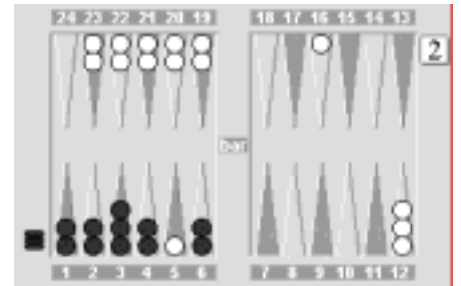
If Black breaks that anchor, then White will attack freely on the bar point, trying to make four in a row. If he succeeds, he may turn the game around. What if Black temporizes with 23/21 5/1? Now it's difficult for White to make great strides. He has some rolls that make the four point on Black's head, but that doesn't hurt Black all that much; she still has a big advantage because of her prime. Even if White rolls 61, escaping the back man, Black still has a very useful holding game. There's even some duplication: the 1's needed to come up to the edge of the prime duplicate the 1's that attack on the four point.

Every roll that White can't attack Black, or escape the back man, Black has a big gammonish attacking threat. Black should try

to minimize White's counterplay, despite the loss of purity involved.

Score 4 points for 23/21 5/1.

### Problem 10



Money game, White owns the cube.  
Black to play 43. (4 points)

This is a type of problem that comes up all the time: when is it right to risk losing the game in order to try to win a gammon? Black can play safe (6/3 6/2), locking up the win with some gammon chances, or he can take two men off, winning more gammons but running the risk of leaving a shot while clearing the 6 point later on.

Since this is a money game, the usual gammon price of 0.5 applies: the aggressive play is justified as long as the increase in gammon chances is at least twice as big as the chance of losing the game. How can we weigh these probabilities?

The basic idea in these positions is this: if you're very likely, or very

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## Answers

(continued from page 1)

unlikely, to win a gammon with the safe play, then getting off one roll sooner won't increase your gammon chances very much. If the gammon race is close, then saving a roll is likely to make a big difference.

One way to judge how likely a gammon is, is to use the **gammon count**, developed by Paul Magriel. White needs a total of 38 pips to bring all his outfield men to his six point, plus at least 2 pips to bear a man off. He therefore needs at least 40 pips to get off the gammon. The average roll (not including doubles) has 7 pips, so White will need about  $40/7$ , or about 6 rolls to get off the gammon. If Black makes the safe play, he will have eleven men left to bear off, and will be unlikely to miss, so he will be off in 6 rolls, not counting doubles.

So the gammon race is close. Black's gammon chances will go up quite a bit if he can get off in just 5 rolls after this turn, so the aggressive play is justified.

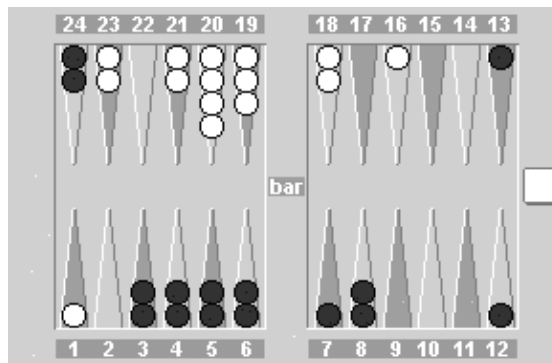
It's possible to estimate Black's losing chances after taking two off. Black must roll 61 or 51 next turn (4 rolls, a  $1/9$  chances), White must hit the shot (about  $1/3$ ), and White must then win the resulting position, in which Black will have 7 or 8 men off. Since White owns the cube, let's say he wins  $2/3$  of those games. (This is probably a bit generous, since White may fail to close out the hit checker.) The overall losing chance is thus about 2 out of 81, or about 2.5%. There are some additional losing chances when Black fails to clear the six point next turn and leaves a shot later, but this is fairly unlikely, and Black will have 9 or 10 (or more) men off by that time, making him a favorite even after he is hit. Let's give White another half a percent in winning chances, for a total of 3%.

Since White wins 3% of the time after the aggressive play, Black should play safe unless his gammon chances go up by at least 6%. Since the gammon race is close, Black's chance to save a roll in the bearoff is easily worth an extra 6% gammons.

Score 4 points for 4/off 3/off.

## New Quiz Problems

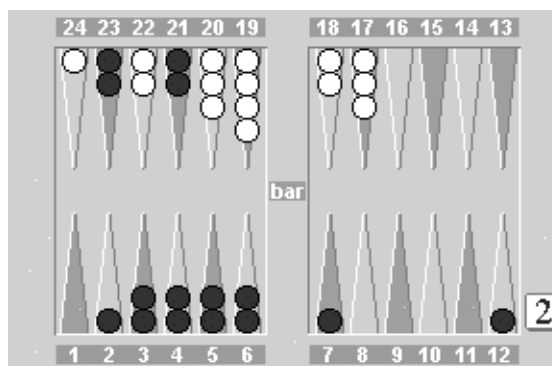
### Problem 11



Money game, center cube, Black on roll.

- (a) Should Black double? (2 points)  
(b) If doubled, should White take? (2 points)

### Problem 12



Money game, Black owns the cube.  
Black to play 65. (4 points)

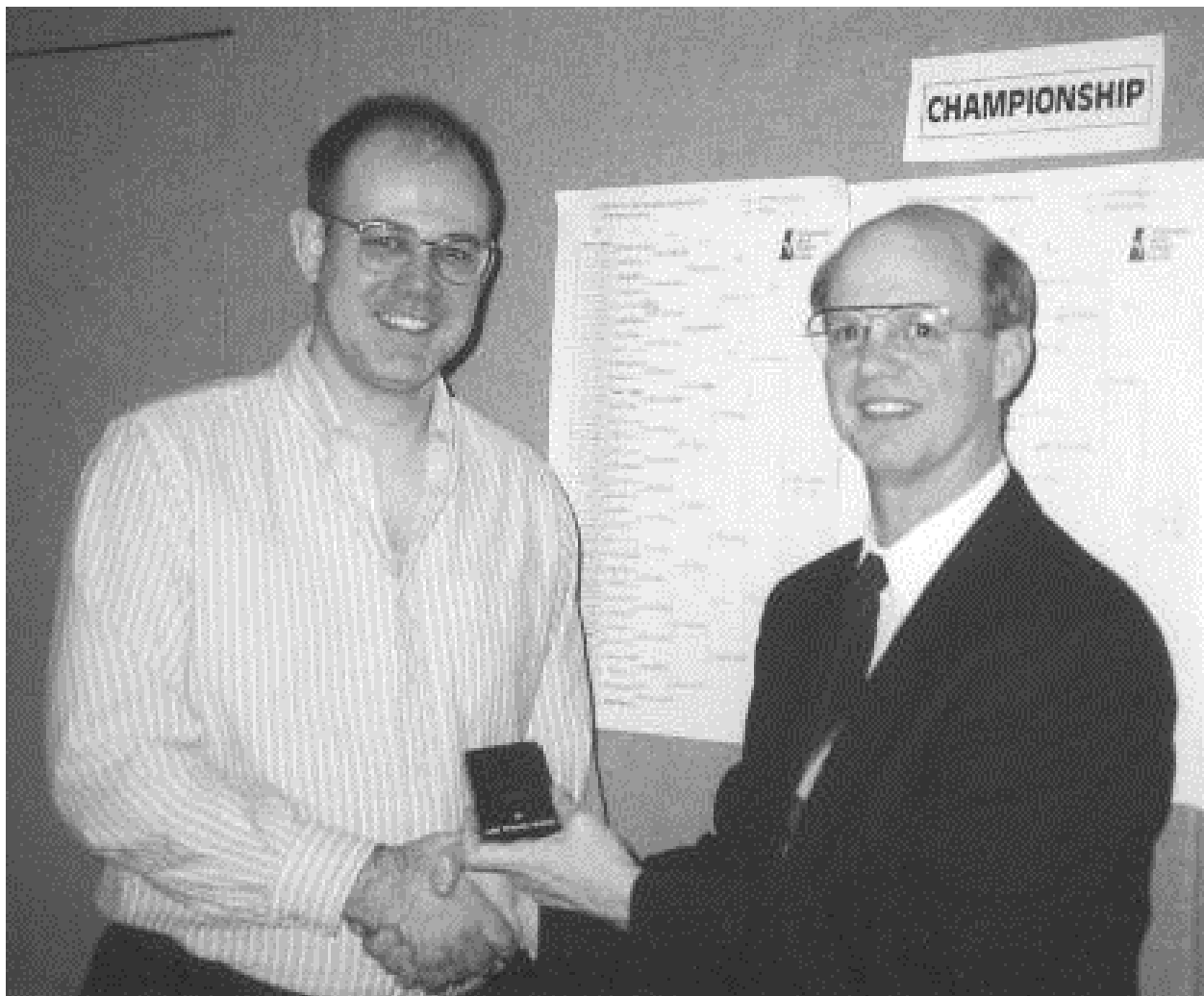
## Steele Springs To The Top

George Steele catapulted his way to the top of the club standings by winning two tournaments and placing 2<sup>nd</sup> in another one over the last two months of play. He has picked up 9.95 points, playing in the last three of four outings, moving from 6<sup>th</sup> place to 1<sup>st</sup> place. Nice work, George!

Bill Minser climbed into 2<sup>nd</sup> place from 4<sup>th</sup> place by winning one tournament and placing 2<sup>nd</sup> in another. Bill gained 7.25 points over the period.

Mark Tremayne chalked up 6.75 points to move from 7<sup>th</sup> place to 5<sup>th</sup> place, bypassing a couple of heavy hitters, namely Gary and Sam.

We have completed a little more than a quarter of the year, so there is still plenty of time to move up, and even take 1<sup>st</sup> place from a zero start!



# Pottle Kicks Butt in Chicago!

Sam Pottle (previously referred to as a “large sack of sand” while he played in the Advanced division up until last fall) massacred numerous open class players at the 2000 Midwest Backgammon Championships at the suburban Chicago Radisson Hotel Lisle-Naperville over the weekend of March 17-19, 2000. Sam amassed an impressive 10-2 record in the Main Event to capture the Last Chance trophy and prize money. Way to go, Sam!

## ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

### Recent Club Tournament Results

**February 15** – (9 players) 1<sup>st</sup> Bill Minser,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tom Machaj, Cons. Carl Jespersen.

**March 7** – (8 players) 1<sup>st</sup> Mark Tremayne,  
2<sup>nd</sup> George Steele, Cons. Sam Pottle.

**March 21** – (7 players) 1<sup>st</sup> George Steele,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Bill Minser, Cons. Mark Tremayne.

**April 4** – (8 players) 1<sup>st</sup> George Steele,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tom Machaj, Cons. Stan Livingston.

### Club Standings As Of 4/04/00

George Steele	12.35
Bill Minser	11.60
Charlie Walter	10.25
Carl Jespersen	8.85
Mark Tremayne	8.55
Sam Pottle	6.05
Tom Machaj	5.65
Gary Hines	4.55
Stan Livingston	2.80
Lee Pflugrad	2.80
Mark Kremer	1.65
Jerry Neviasser	1.00
Sonja Peacock	0.80

### Upcoming Events

**April 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, \$4/1<sup>st</sup>  
side, \$5/2<sup>nd</sup> side.

**May 2** – 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, \$4/1<sup>st</sup>  
side, \$5/2<sup>nd</sup> side.

**May 7** – 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.

**May 16** – 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, \$4/1<sup>st</sup>  
side, \$5/2<sup>nd</sup> side.

**May 26-29** – The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Chicago Open. Wyndham  
Hamilton Northwest Chicago, 400 Park Blvd., Itasca, IL.  
(630) 773-4000. 4 p.m. Friday registration opens. 10:00-  
11:00 a.m. Saturday final registration. 11:00 a.m. Calcutta  
auction. 12:45 p.m. Play begins. \$300/Championship,  
\$150/Intermediate, \$50/Beginner. Several other events.

**June 6** – 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, \$4/1<sup>st</sup>  
side, \$5/2<sup>nd</sup> side.

**June 11** – Chicago Bar Point Sunday Tournament.  
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.

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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 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>  
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  
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