TRIBUTE TO FALAFEL

We mourn the loss of one of the game’s greatest ambassadors & most charismatic players.

U.S. BACKGAMMON FEDERATION

2020 NEW YORK METRO FINAL

World class analysis of the exciting matchup between Saba Bejanishvili & Ron Rubin

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The Spring issue is our first after the untimely death in February of the great Falafel. He is memorialized with a cover photo, as well as reminiscences from friends and over-the-board rivals: Jake Jacobs, Michihito Kageyama, Arkadiy Tsinis, and Bob Wachtel. His warm heart and friendship, not to mention his first-rate play and commentary, will be sorely missed.

The Texas Championships, held on Super Bowl Weekend, featured play and awards: notably the ABT trophies, the USBGF’s Lifetime Achievement Award for Phil Simborg, and the induction of Ed O’Laughlin into the American Backgammon Hall of Fame. The ceremonies are recapped with the help of photos, and topped off by USBGF Historian Bob Stoller’s interview of Ed which takes us through a long and ongoing career that has so far spanned more than four decades.

Other events reported in this issue: the NY Metro, with a fine pictorial by L.A. organizer Candace Mayeron, and the World Backgammon Internet Federation team championship in which Team USA triumphed.

Jake Jacobs provides a wonderful and erudite review of Bob Wachtel’s recent two-volume book, The Backgammon Chronicles. This fascinating and colorful work, by a long-standing and well-traveled Giant of Backgammon, explores everything you can think of about our game; buy it if you haven’t done so already!

Though backgammon remains a great pastime, it has, like every other part of life, been gravely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Some of this year’s ABT events have been canceled, some postponed, and a cloud of uncertainty lies over the game. But the show must go on. President Karen Davis’s column talks about the Federation’s efforts to change and adapt, including the expansion of online tournaments and support of online club events. And Jeff Spencer, of Minnesota’s Twin Cities Backgammon Club, describes in detail the successful inauguration of innovative online play using a combination of Internet platforms. Other clubs are already starting to follow the Twin Cities lead.

As always, we have recent tournament results, ABT and Master Points standings, and information on upcoming events. We list our sponsors, both individual and corporate, whose indispensable generosity is especially appreciated in these tough times.

Marty Storer puts the spotlight on a pair of matches from New York: the Open final between veterans Saba Bejanishvili and Ron Rubin, and the USBGF Championship between newcomer Eli Karp (top gun in the West) and old hand Jack Edelson (champion of the East). Enjoy the world-class play and the analysis of many intriguing decisions.

We have a pair of interesting pieces from columnists Rich Munitz (What’s the Rule?) and Art Benjamin (Math Overboard), who at long last gives us a great way to memorize match equity tables.

Other clubs are already starting to follow the Twin Cities lead.

As always, we have recent tournament results, ABT and Master Points standings, and information on upcoming events. We list our sponsors, both individual and corporate, whose indispensable generosity is especially appreciated in these tough times.

“Get Into the Game—Become a Member”

Marty Storer

Marty Storer is a member of the USBGF Board of Directors and Executive Editor of PrimeTime Backgammon magazine.
A vibrant club has quickly instituted successful online tournaments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The match between Rubin and Bejanishvili did not disappoint the eager audience.

NEW YORK METRO OPEN FINAL
The match between Rubin and Bejanishvili did not disappoint the eager audience.

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Write for PrimeTime Backgammon!
We are always looking for great content and photos. If you are interested, we would love to hear from you! Contact us via email at info@usbgf.org.
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Tara Mendicino, Production Editor, Vice President and member of the USBGF Board of Directors, and co-director of the Texas Backgammon Championships.

RAY BILLS
Ray Bills, Membership Director, was on the winning USA Team at the Chicago Open’s USA vs. Japan event in 2018. He won the Wisconsin Amateur Jackpot in 2017.

JEFF PROCTOR
Jeff Proctor is co-director of the USBGF Online Circuit tournaments. He also directs the Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club and the Atlanta Spring Classic ABT tournament.

APRIL KENNEDY
April Kennedy, Social Media Director, is co-director of the Viking Classic Championships and co-director of the Twin Cities Backgammon Club.

FROM TOP: APRIL KENNEDY; TARA MENDICINO; ROBERT AMADOR

TARA MENDICINO
Tara Mendicino, Production Editor, Vice President and member of the USBGF Board of Directors, and co-director of the Texas Backgammon Championships.
Backgammon players constantly weigh risks and rewards. Today’s public health challenges pose serious risks, and each player will have to decide how to weigh those against continuing to play the game we love. The U.S. Backgammon Federation has issued a statement supporting national and local tournament directors in their decisions to cancel, postpone, or continue tournaments with risk-mitigation strategies depending on local conditions and public health official policies. We will share information on director practices and experiences and be flexible in modifying policies and procedures in response to emerging information.

For now, policies prohibiting public gatherings of any size, including closing restaurants and entertainment events, make it likely that there will be no live backgammon tournaments for some time to come. Most local clubs are suspending tournaments. ABT tournament directors with tournaments in April and May have canceled or postponed events. The U.S. Open in Las Vegas is canceled. Ohio is rescheduled to July 16-19, and Atlanta to August 28-30, while the 2020 Cherry Blossom has been canceled and the 2021 Cherry Blossom scheduled for April 21-25, 2021. As of this writing, the Falafel Memorial in Niagara and Michigan Summer Championship are continuing as planned, taking steps to implement risk-mitigation strategies. But the near-term future seems very uncertain. Your support of tournament directors’ decisions, as well as imposing self-isolation in the event of symptoms or exposure to coronavirus, is deeply appreciated. Be safe, and keep healthy.

Expansion of online playing opportunities

The USBGF has developed a highly acclaimed Online Tournament Circuit, with 100 online tournaments registering 3,000 entrants in 2019. The USBGF is planning a major expansion of its online tournament offerings in 2020. In addition it is prepared to assist local clubs in converting to online. An article on the Twin Cities (MN) online local club tournaments is included in this issue.

The USBGF Local Club Initiative

Online Championship

On March 5, twenty-three players who won their annual Local Club Initiative event began a single-elimination online tournament to determine the best of the best local club players. The players will play 13-point matches in the early rounds culminating in a 15-point semi-final and 17-point final match. The winner receives a free entry into a future ABT live event as well as being featured in PrimeTime Backgammon Magazine complete with an analysis of his final match. Participants and the clubs they represent are:

- Ted Chee, Backgammon by the Bay.
- Bill Finneran, Northern Virginia Backgammon Club.
- Bill Lonergan, Long Island Backgammon Club.
- Bob Urquhart, Austin Backgammon Club.
- Carl Sorg, Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club.
- Charlie Raichle, Denver Backgammon Club.
- Daniel Bluestone, DC Metro.
- Dave Staggs, Hoosier Backgammon Club.
- David Kornwitz, New England Backgammon Club.
- Ed O’Laughlin, Beltway Backgammon Club.
- Gus Contos, Gammon Associates.
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- Joe Calvarsuo, Columbus Backgammon Club.
- Michael Vitale, Ohio State Backgammon Club.
- Vlad Ovseypan, Orange County Backgammon Club.
- Phil Martorelli, Chicago Bar Point.
- Richard Ruggirello, NYC Backgammon.
- Yury Millman, Twin Cities Backgammon Club.

USBGF Online Championship

The USBGF is offering members an opportunity to compete in a USBGF Online Championship open to all members with prizes for entry to ABT tournament Jackpots or Main division events or a major international tournament. Details on entry fees and prizes will be announced soon.

USBGF Club Team Championship

The USBGF is also planning to resume the popular USBGF Club Team Championship. Five-player teams from USBGF Prime Clubs will be invited to compete in the USBGF Club Team Championship. Players are designated by their captain as A, B, C, D, E seeded players with players playing their counterpart on the opposing team. Teams with three wins advance to the next round.

Club Initiative

Having options to play without requiring long-distance travel is taking on heightened importance. The U.S. Backgammon Federation Committee, chaired by New England Backgammon Club organizer Albert Steg, is considering strategies to move local club play online. In addition to Albert, members of the Committee include Ted Chee, director of the San Francisco Backgammon by the Bay Club, Ben Friesen, USBGF Chief of Tournament Support, Ross Gordon, director of the Connecticut Backgammon Club, Joe Miller, director of the Ohio State Backgammon Club, Jeff Proctor, director of the Atlanta Northside Club, and ex officio, John Pirner, USBGF COO and Treasurer, and Karen Davis, USBGF President and Executive Director.

USBGF as a Federation of Prime Clubs

Albert has asked the Committee to brainstorm ideas for reshaping USBGF Prime Clubs to create a greater sense of shared purpose, identity, activity, and rivalry. In particular, he asks what could be done to improve our local club experience, and drive participation and membership in both local clubs and the USBGF? What new
President’s Column

kinds of fun could we provide our players? And how can local clubs in turn promote the USBGF! What if Prime Clubs made some commitment to the USBGF such as annual dues, or some other defining behavior or structure?

One approach is to ask what services / support / collaboration might the USBGF provide to their “Prime” Clubs—perhaps in exchange for an annual “Prime Club” Membership fee on the order of, say, $200 per year? Or phrased another way: what kinds of benefits would make such an annual club fee worthwhile? Some possibilities include:

» Holding online local club tournaments on the USBGF Online Circuit or other tournament management system.

» USBGF Club Team Championship—an online inter-club team competition among Prime Clubs

» USBGF Prime Clubs online “Tournament of Champions” among club “Players of the Year”;

Please share any ideas or thoughts with Albert Steg and contact him at asteg@mindspring.com.

USBGF National Social Club Tour

The USBGF is currently pursuing engagement with private “Social Club Backgammon Interest Groups.” Private clubs in many cities—such as New York, Washington, D.C., Palm Beach, Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco, among others—have backgammon interest groups, numbering dozens to hundreds of players, that compete against each other. These clubs are the locus of considerable backgammon activity among players who have not yet ventured into the world of tournament backgammon outside their walls. However, there is no national tour where teams from these clubs compete for prestigious prizes (and bragging rights!).

The USBGF would like to engage these players in the wider community, perhaps by sponsoring a National Social Club Tour, either separate from or in conjunction with American Backgammon Community. The first Social Club tournament will be held in October 2020 in conjunction with the Sunny Florida ABT tournament. The first Social Club tournament will be held in October 2020 in conjunction with the Sunny Florida ABT tour-

mament. Private clubs will be invited to send 3-5 player teams to a separate Social Club Tournament. In addition, a Doubles ProAm event will be offered, pairing Sunny Florida Classic entrants with Social Club players. Ben Friesen will direct the event, organized by Jason Briggs, director of the Palm Beach Bath and Tennis Club backgammon group. Participating players will become members of the U.S. Backgammon Federation, and PrimeTime Backgammon magazine will provide coverage and statistics on their events.

Growing the Backgammon Community

In an electronic age, strategies that make use of social media, websites, and apps show promise for growing the backgammon community. The USBGF has revamped its Facebook pages over the last year, with modest success growing the number of fans and visitors, while also stimulating membership in the USBGF. A revamped website is also underway to make resources more readily available to those seeking information on where and how to play, educational materials, ratings and statistics, and news.

Helping Beginners and Intermediate Players Learn the Game

A library of educational resources on the USBGF website will be key to helping beginners and intermediate players acquire skills and enjoy competitive play. Excellent educational material is being generated including Chris Bray’s weekly Learning Curve columns on the USBGF website, Art Benjamin’s lectures and articles, and short state-of-the-art videos being developed by Backgammon Galaxy. Expanding and organizing these resources to make them more readily accessible would help engage a growing backgammon community.

Secure the resources required to carry out our mission and realize our potential

The USBGF Board of Directors has approved launch of a Capital Campaign to raise required funds to pursue these initiatives. Priorities include website enhancements; expanding and enhancing videos on the USBGF’s YouTube channel; developing modern tournament management services and support; partnering with one or more backgammon servers to ensure first-quality access to all USBGF members for online tournaments; developing new teaching videos for novices and intermediates; and sponsoring USBGF signature events. To date, over $30,000 has been raised. Your support is especially needed at this critical time.

We’re pleased to announce two new levels of Founding Sponsor: Beaver Founding Sponsors who have contributed $12,800 or more and Raccoon Founding Sponsors who have contributed $25,600 or more. These Founding Sponsors will receive specially designed doubling cubes and an invitation to the annual USBGF Tournament of Stars. They will join over 185 Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze Founding Sponsors who have contributed a total of $325,000 to the USBGF.

President’s Column

KAREN DAVIS
Karen Davis brings her expertise as a former nonprofit CEO, economist, and noted health policy expert to her role as President and Executive Director of the USBGF.

The financial health of the organization is strong with over a $10,000 surplus in 2019. As always, our financial statements are posted on our website at usbgf.org/about-us/usbgf-organization-reports.

We’re especially gratified by the support of our members. The new option of autorecurring membership with quarterly pay-ments through member PayPal accounts has been well received.

Membership dues on a quarterly autorecurring basis are $15 for Premium members, $10 for Basic members, and $5 for Novice members. We’ve also seen a major uptick in subscription to the print edition of the PrimeTime Backgammon magazine, again with automatic quarterly payments of $18 per issue plus shipping.

Challenges Ahead

Progress over the last decade would not have been possible without the volunteers, Board members, and staff who give so generously of their time and effort, and for this we are truly grateful.

Key to success in the next ten years will be transitioning to an employed staff with talented individuals responsible for key functions—foremost among them being education, membership, marketing, support for local clubs and tournaments, and technol-

ogy. The Capital Campaign and new dues structure will bring an infusion of operating revenue as well as up-front capital funds for development. Your support of these investments in the future of backgammon in the U.S. is much appreciated.

“Get Into the Game — Become a Member”

Karen Davis

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“Get Into the Game — Become a Member”

Karen Davis

Karen Davis brings her expertise as a former nonprofit CEO, economist, and noted health policy expert to her role as President and Executive Director of the USBGF.
USBGF Streaming Sponsorship

The U.S. Backgammon Federation has acquired an amazing state-of-the-art laptop to bring the highest quality streaming possible to be enjoyed by the global backgammon community.

American Backgammon Tour Live Streaming Sponsor

We are excited to announce that live match streaming for the 2021 American Backgammon Tour is sponsored by the U.S. Backgammon Federation. Streaming for the Atlanta Spring Classic and 40th Chicago Open may be viewed on Twitch. Streaming for the Cherry Blossom Championship may be viewed on YouTube.

Make a Donation to the Streaming Fund and Show Your Support!

Show your appreciation of our live broadcast by donating to the U.S. Backgammon Foundation Streaming Fund PayPal account at donations@usbgf.org and/or by joining or renewing your U.S. Backgammon Federation membership.

Streaming at Select USBGF Prime Tournaments & International Events

The enhanced streaming capability is also being made available to select USBGF Prime Tournaments and major international events on an on-going basis.
The USBGF salutes the individuals and organizations who have generously supported our Federation by becoming Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors. These 188 Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors have contributed $325,000, providing the seed capital needed for the launch of the U.S. Backgammon Federation, and/or have contributed to the Prime Tournament Initiative. The support of our Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors will be appreciated for years to come, and includes perpetual recognition of our Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors. These 188 Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors have contributed seriously supported our Federation.

In appreciation of this generous support, a doubles event pairing Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors with Giants of Backgammon—the Tournament of Stars—is held annually at the Cherry Blossom Backgammon Championship, honoring the Founding Sponsors and Prime Benefactors who have been instrumental in the success of the organization. Founding Sponsors receive an attractive personalized doubling cube noting their level of giving. Prime Benefactors receive a doubling cube designed by Geoffrey Parker Games. We designed by Geoffrey Parker Games. We

Thanks to our newest Gold Founding Sponsor, Jason Loveleld; Silver Founding Sponsors Julia T. Cooley, and Stuart Doneshbek; and Bronze Founding Sponsors Curtis Wilhemlsen and Matt Reklaitis.

More information on the benefits of becoming a Founding Sponsor may be found at USBGF PrimeTime Backgammon Magazine USBGF PrimeTime Backgammon Magazine

The USBGF Board of Directors has approved the launch of a Capital Campaign in 2020 to raise funds needed for website enhancement, educational material, modern tournament equipment, and tournament sponsorship.

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Ed O’Laughlin – Oakton, Virginia

Ed O’Laughlin is a Hall-of-Famer in every way. He has been playing backgammon for 38 years, with his game stronger than ever at age 81. He is an avid student of the game, and has never lost his curiosity and enthusiasm. He has supported the growth of the Beltway Backgammon, Northern Virginia, and D.C. Metro clubs. He is generous with his time and patience, both as a competitor and a mentor, earning the affection and support of his D.C.-area backgammon family.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

- He won the $50,000 first-place prize in 1998 at the Tahoe Caesar’s Colossus.
- He is #3 on the all-time ABT list with 347 points, after Neil Kazaross and Ray Fogerlund. He was 1st in 2016, and 2nd in 2017, 2013, and 2002.
- He is an eight-time Giant of Backgammon, most recently ranked #21 in 2017.

American Backgammon Hall of Fame Members

2019 Induction
Steve Sax

2018 Induction
Alexis Obolensky, Joe Sylvester

2017 Induction
Ray Fogerlund, Joseph Russell, Mike Svobodny

2016 Induction
Patrick Gibson, Tim Holland, Danny Kleinman, Howard Markowitz

2015 Induction

The American Backgammon Hall of Fame recognizes and honors those players, directors, and other individuals who have made significant contributions to the game over a substantial period of time. Nominations solicited from U.S. Backgammon Federation members note awards and accomplishments and reasons for consideration. The 2019 Hall of Fame Committee consisting of Joe Russell, chairman, Art Benjamin, Patrick Gibson, Neil Kazaross, Bill Riles, and Bill Robertie, reviewed all nominations and compiled a ballot. Electors voting on the ballot included all living inductees in the Hall of Fame, members of the USBGF Board of Directors, and others of long and extensive participation and expertise in the backgammon community, possessing the knowledge and perspective of individual contributions.
Ed O’Laughlin

2020 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION

Surrounded by family, friends, and admirers, the 2020 American Backgammon Hall of Fame inductee enjoys himself at the Awards Dinner, a traditional part of the Texas Backgammon Championships in San Antonio.

Ed made a gracious acceptance speech and was presented with his Hall of Fame plaque by USBGF President Karen Davis. He is shown at the table with daughter Erin, Karen Davis, wife Evelyn O’Laughlin, and son Austin (who played with Ed to win the Doubles at the 2010 Chicago Open).

Robert Stoller: It is Friday afternoon, January 31st, 2020, and we are in the Presidential Suite of the historic Gunter Hotel in downtown San Antonio, Texas at the annual Texas Backgammon Championships. One tradition that has evolved at this tournament is the inductions into the American Backgammon Hall of Fame, whose first “class” was in 2015. I am sitting here with the gentleman who is going to be inducted this year—by my count the 24th Hall-of-Famer, Ed O’Laughlin. Thank you very much for joining us.

Ed O’Laughlin: I’m glad to be here.

Robert Stoller: By way of acknowledgment and credit, the videographer who is taping all of this is Robert Amador. He is a videographic professional here in San Antonio and he has been with us for every one of the videoographies of the American Backgammon Hall of Fame inductions going back to the original one in 2015.

At the moment we’re getting close to when we will have to break for the Awards Dinner, so I’m going to do something a little uncharacteristic; I am going to put on the record one of Mr. O’Laughlin’s impressive recent achievements.

He is in third place on the list of all-time points winners on the American Backgammon Tour, or ABT. His lifetime total is 347.01 as of the end of 2019, but he has recently added to that by cashing in the New York Metropolitan ABT event earlier in January. All-time #1 is Neil Kazaross with 598.61 points, followed by Ray Fogerlund with 569.60. Ed is ahead of Steve Sax, who is all-time #4 with 316.05, and Rich Munitz, all-time #5, with 300.46. Those five players are the only ones who have broken the 300-point lifetime mark on the American Backgammon Tour. Next in line is Malcolm Davis, one of our original 2015 inductees, and his lifetime total is 264.76. John O’Hagan is in seventh place with 261.86.

Ed O’Laughlin: I’m glad to be here.
In 2010 Mr. O’Laughlin was interviewed by Phil Simborg. I have the transcript of that interview and I want to use it as a place to start. Phil asked Ed how he was introduced to backgammon, and Ed replied that in 1979 he was running a chess club when a fellow from Syria asked why he didn’t play a really good game of backgammon. So, let’s fill this out a little bit. Ed, how did you happen to be running a chess club in 1979?

Ed O’Laughlin: I volunteered to do it when some other people didn’t want to. It was sort of a fun thing. I was trying to improve at chess and so I was playing ten hours a day. But I was never a really great chess player.

After the guy made the remark about backgammon, I got into it right away and we started playing. I realized that backgammon was more suited to my math background than chess. I got every book and read them all. I played for low stakes like a quarter a time with the picture of Alan Steffen; I know him but I forgot his name. Sometimes you forget names when you’re getting older.

Robert Stoller: What did you do after you graduated?

Ed O’Laughlin: I worked for the Veterans Administration and it didn’t work out too well. Eventually I started playing backgammon.

Robert Stoller: Now the earliest event at which I could document your appearance was Las Vegas—the second Masters Invitational. The picture I have here is archived on the Chicago Point website; it’s #91 in the Michael “Max” Maxakuli collection. Let me ask you if you can identify this young man over here in the lower right of the photograph.

Ed O’Laughlin: That’s me. People told me I looked like a movie star, which I can’t believe because I was striking out with the girls all the time. At Monte Carlo they showed me the picture and said I looked good, but I sort of disbelieved it.

Robert Stoller: Do you recognize any other people?

Ed O’Laughlin: I recognize almost everyone. At first I had a hard time with the picture of Alan Steffen; I know him but I forgot his name. Sometimes you forget names when you’re getting older.

Robert Stoller: For a bit more history, I have here the Fall 2017 issue of PrimeTime Backgammon, which includes my interview with Joe Russell who had been inducted into the Hall of Fame earlier that year. There are a number of Hall-of-Famers in this photograph, which was taken in the period June 3-7, 1987. Malcolm Davis, Kit Woolsey, Kent Goulding, and Nick Ballard are all shown, and all are members of the inaugural Class of 2015. Here’s Joe Russell wearing a full beard and a high head of hair.

Ed O’Laughlin: He doesn’t look like the Joe Russell I know now.

Robert Stoller: Here’s Howard Markowitz, inductee in 2010, and here you are too. By my count that’s eight Hall of Fame inductees, and Hal Heinrich who was World Champion in 1990. So this interesting photograph is an amazing precursor of great things to come.

Ed O’Laughlin: Everybody in that picture was a very strong player and got invited—it was a good tournament.

Robert Stoller: Now, Bill Davis, a member of the inaugural Class of 2015, was the founder of the American Backgammon Tour. Before that he published a newsletter called Chicagoland Backgammon. That was succeeded by his Chicago Point newsletter. I have here the first issue of Chicago Point: Volume 1, Number 1, June 1988. On page 1 we have you finishing in second place in the doubles with your partner J. Baroff, this was at the ’88 Chicago Open. Do you remember something about that?

Ed O’Laughlin: I don’t really remember it. Jim Baroff was a very good player. I see that we lost to Ed Maslansky, he is a local DC player.

Robert Stoller: In the November 1988 issue, on page 4, we have you playing in the Caribbean at St. Maarten and you finish second in the Championship.

Ed O’Laughlin: I remember that. I don’t think I ever saw George Brandt again. These guys show up and then disappear.

Robert Stoller: You mentioned playing in Monte Carlo, and we’re going to talk more about that. You’ve played in Las Vegas, the Caribbean — you have played around the world.

Ed O’Laughlin: That’s right. I went to Brazil for a tournament. I’ve played in Japan, Dubrovnik in Croatia; and Tbilisi, Georgia. Then there was Cyprus. I’ve played in France, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark … Robert Stoller: Literally, all around the world.

Ed O’Laughlin: Anywhere there’s a tournament, I usually try to make it.

Robert Stoller: We still have you finishing decently in the late 80s, but not at the tip-top level. This is April 1989, and at the 37th Indiana Open we have you cashing.

Robert Stoller: So, you can be an enormously successful player, winning big jackpots but not gaining status in terms of the American Backgammon Tour.

Robert Stoller: To Sandy Labetkin, yeah. He’s a very good player. I played him again last year. He disappeared for twenty-five years and he played very well against me. You don’t seem to lose much if you’re a good player. You can just drop out and come back and play.

Robert Stoller: Later on, you win the U. S. Open back-to-back during the era when it was held jointly with Kent Goulding and Bill Robertie’s World Cup.

But the first time I find you in the winner’s circle is the September 1989 National Labor Day tournament. That is not to say you had not won before.

Ed O’Laughlin: During the 1980s I won a lot of tournaments. I just can’t remember them all.
2020 American Backgammon Hall of Fame Induction

Robert Stoller: My records are not as complete as I would like them to be. 1989, however, is a good year for you because the next thing I see in my collection of Chicago Points, this is November 1989 and the front-page headline says “O’Laughlin Strikes in Tahoe.” The Caesar’s Colossus, and here you are in first place. Do you remember anything about that?

Ed O’Laughlin: I played Mike Carson who was a very good player from Philadelphia. He was moving out and down with a 62 even though I had the better board, and that was the right play. I didn’t think so at the time, but the neural networks eventually eventually proved he was right. I congratulate him for being ahead of his time.

Robert Stoller: In 2016, one of our inductees was the deceased Tim Holland who had won the World Championship three times when it was held in the early 1970s in Las Vegas. His obituary appeared in the New York Times—I made the presentation on Tim’s behalf and I read that obituary, which said that the antecedents of backgammon date back to the pharaohs in Egypt. The reason I bring that up is that in this issue of Chicago Point is a picture of you posing with Cleopatra at Caesar’s Colossus. Here she is. Do you remember anything about that?

Ed O’Laughlin: I don’t remember that at all. I was smiling because I won some money. I was nerdy there.

Robert Stoller: Kent Goulding, of the Hall of Fame’s 2015 class, had come to backgammon from chess and thought there should be a backgammon rating system like the one developed by the Wisconsin math professor Arpad Elo for chess—known as the Elo system. Kent created a rating system to emulate that. On the back cover we have Kent Goulding’s Top 50 compiled through December 1989. And who’s in second place?

Ed O’Laughlin: I’m second, right behind Mika Lidov who was a little ahead of me. At the time she was probably the world’s best female player, and certainly one of the world’s best players, period. But she really didn’t play that much from then on.

Robert Stoller: As I mentioned, this was the era of the World Cup, held every two years jointly with U.S. Open, and directed by Kent Goulding and Bill Robertie. In 1992 we are at Harvey’s Bristol Suites Hotel here in Texas. Who won the U.S. Open that year?

Ed O’Laughlin: I won. I beat Rafael Lopez de Lara from Mexico who didn’t show up very much, usually only in Las Vegas and maybe big events in Texas. He’s a very good player, and I guess I got lucky and won. You have to be lucky to win any given tournament.


Ed O’Laughlin: I remember that tournament. I beat the most famous player that ever lived, Paul Magriel. He really revolutionized the game by writing a fantastic book, which is mostly spot-on with the neural networks. That proves the great worth of his book, which is really the Bible of backgammon. He was a phenomenal player. Unfortunately, he has passed, but he will always be immortalized by his writings and his play.

Robert Stoller: Paul Magriel was one of our original inductees in 2015, and I got to do an interview with him on Skype. I believe that was the last interview he gave about backgammon before he passed away. He was just a few months shy of turning 72.

We are getting close to when I have to get you downstairs for the Awards Dinner.

Ed O’Laughlin: We can go a little longer. I don’t have to be there exactly at 5:00.

Robert Stoller: We’ve done a lot of ancient history, and now I want to get to more recent history.

One of the best backgammon books that has been published in the 21st century is Backgammon Praxis by Marty Storer, who currently serves as Executive Editor of our publication PrimeTime Backgammon. This is a two-volume collection of three matches by Malcolm Davis. Volume One consists entirely of one match: the match that Malcolm played against you in Monte Carlo in 2000.

That was an 11-point match. What do you remember about it?

Ed O’Laughlin: Maybe it was the Super Jackpot, maybe it was the Consolation. It was over four years later when Marty interviewed us. So, I think we were sort of guessing in the commentary we provided.

Robert Stoller: By way of background, this was published by the Fortunate Press, which is an enterprise by Jeremy Bagai, one of our great players. The book is published in 2005, the match took place in 2000. As it turns out you win this match, and one of the great things about this book is that every position is analyzed extensively, and many of the positions you each comment on.

Robert Stoller: How did Marty contact you to get your comments?

Ed O’Laughlin: He asked us and we agreed to do it. That match was during my comeback to backgammon; I had been away for about five years, but I was doing well. I had come in second in the Las Vegas Super Jackpot, so I thought I’d go to Monte Carlo on a roll. The match against Malcolm was the only match I won in Monte Carlo out of about ten — after doing so well in Las Vegas.

Robert Stoller: Monte Carlo is the home of the World Championship. The Monte Carlo tournament has been both good to you and not so good to you. And now I have to go back to my Chicago Points because I want to find the story of what I think was the worst bad beat anyone has ever suffered. I wanted to ask you about that.

Chicago Point #195, September 2007, covers the 32nd Monte Carlo World Championship. Your Super Jackpot is at the top of the front page here. You are playing against Sven Rumcker of Germany at double match point. You are playing the black checkers and have two checkers to bear off. You win the first prize, on the order of $50,000, if you get past one checker. The only way to lose is to roll a 1, other than double 1 which will bear off both checkers, followed by getting hit and losing the game having fourteen checkers off. According to Bill Davis, who is an engineer by profession and knowledgeable about backgammon mathematics, before your roll you are 99.7% certain to win this position. What happened?

Ed O’Laughlin: I left the blot and he hit it. He had a relatively bad position to win, with a couple of dead checkers and an open point. And he did it, he beat me.

Robert Stoller: And the swing on that was something in excess of $20,000.

Ed O’Laughlin: Yeah. It hurts to this day.

Robert Stoller: I asked you about that because losing is an important aspect of backgammon. Every player will inevitably lose a considerable amount of the time. When I had the privilege of interviewing Steve Sax last year, he talked at some length about that, and suggested that the most successful backgammon players have a winning percentage approximating the most successful baseball teams—in the low sixties. How do you come back from a turnaround like this, where you are 99.7% to win and yet you lose?
2020 American Backgammon Hall of Fame Induction

Ed O’Laughlin: I know I’ve been working hard and studying the game, and I’m in very good physical condition. I’m going to play again and I’m going to do well. So, I lost that time but next time I might win. I go through that every year that I’ve played. I play in tournaments mainly—I’m not a big money player—so I know I’m going to win. I show up. What does Woody Allen say? Eighty percent of life is showing up. And I show up.

Robert Stoller: Apropos of showing up and doing well, I tried to compile statistics for the five of you who are at the tip-top of the American Backgammon Tour lifetime. Neil Kazaros is #1, with Ray Fogerlund #2, Ed O’Laughlin #3, Steve Sax #4, and Richard Munitz #5. Now, how have you all done over the last five years? Neil has accumulated 82.4 points. Ray has accumulated 77.92. Let’s skip over you for a minute. Steve Sax has 94.14. Richard Munitz has 97.53. Over the last five years you alone have broken 100, and it is 136.66. That’s your last five years cumulative on the ABT. And remember that ABT points are not awarded for jackpot money wins but only for cashing in main event itself. So, you have eclipsed all of those four contemporaries.

Ed O’Laughlin: But I was showing up all the time. Often Neil wouldn’t show up. Ray showed up a lot, probably about as much as I did. And the other two, Steve Sax and Richard Munitz, didn’t show up as much. So, I’m showing up!

Robert Stoller: That’s Woody Allen’s point!

Ed O’Laughlin: If you show up at a tournament you have a chance to win. The other player’s not there to get any points. That’s the reason.

Robert Stoller: One of the great things about your career has been your longevity. You are now 81 years old. You will be the oldest living inductee into the Hall of Fame. I believe Oswald Jacoby was #2 when he passed away and he was inducted posthumously in our inaugural Class of 2015. But you will be the oldest living inductee, and I think that is a great inspiration and a tribute to the idea that life doesn’t end at any arbitrary age. And if you keep yourself healthy and mentally alert, there is no limit to how long you can go on functioning at the highest level.

Ed O’Laughlin: Yeah, I agree. I’m a vegetarian and a fitness buff. I try to sleep well, and then I try to play backgammon roughly ten hours a day. Also I’m reading as much as possible on every subject I can. I’m playing backgammon and I’m reading about politics, health, and science on the Internet. Watching MSNBC too—so sometimes I’m doing three things at once. I’m trying to use my mind and learn as much as possible, including more about backgammon—a game that is great for your mind, with the mathematics, and learning to overcome adversity. Once in a while things go badly in backgammon, and you have to learn that. I think it’s the greatest game in the world. Hopefully it will be on television soon, and maybe it will take off like poker.

Robert Stoller: Well, that would be fantastic. Anyway, I was going through my research to see if I could find a single word or phrase that would encapsulate your career. And we’re coming to the end of this interview as I have to get you down to the Awards Dinner. The first word that came to my mind was longevity but it struck me that that wasn’t enough. Quest and spirit are what it is really all about. So, I finally thought of the last three lines of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s famous poem Ulysses. I’m going to read them to you and let you respond.

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

And I would say that is the epigraph of your life story.

Ed O’Laughlin: Well, I’d like to live up that passage. I don’t know if I can do so, at least not completely. But I’ll keep trying and, as I say, showing up.

Robert Stoller: Well, Ed O’Laughlin, thank you for showing up for this interview. ◆

Ed O’Laughlin in Backgammon Praxis
By Marty Storer

In 2002, I was engaged by GammonVillage to write an analysis of a match between Mike Senkiewicz and François Tardieu, a project that motivated me to analyze three matches that had been played by Malcolm Davis: one against me, one against Frank Talbot, and the other against Ed O’Laughlin. That in turn led me to a followup project: writing Backgammon Praxis, a two-volume book that was published in 2005 by Jeremy Raga’s Fortunatus Press, with the large benefit of Jeremy’s production and editorial help. The book consists of analysis of those three matches.

Malcolm Davis was (and is) a phenomenal player with a long and successful career that has spanned both the days before bots, and the period thereafter, termed the Bot Era in the book. Ed O’Laughlin is another such player. Being familiar with Ed’s career, indeed having first played him in 1983, I was happy to analyze a match between two true Giants of Backgammon. Sometime in the several months before Backgammon Praxis went to print early in 2005, Jeremy and I contacted Malcolm, Ed, and Frank to solicit their commentary. All kindly consented to provide their observations, which added great color and insight to the book. Fittingly, Ed has now joined Malcolm in the American Backgammon Hall of Fame. ◆

- MARTY STORER
The USBGF is honoring Phil Simborg with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution as a backgammon educator. Along with Perry Gartner, he established the Backgammon Learning Center that has 25 prominent faculty from countries around the world. He serves as Teaching Pro for the USBGF, and has prepared over 250 teaching videos posted on the USBGF website as a member benefit. He is a frequent lecturer at ABT tournaments.

Notable Awards and Accomplishments

- #15 in ABT all-time Points List with 168.85. In top 20 in 2019 (#19); 2015 (#5); 2014 (#14); 2012 (#6); 2005 (#2).
What’s the Ruling? Responsible Moves

By Richard Munitz, Chair, USBGF Rules and Ethics Committee
Submit questions to: rules@usbgf.org

My opponent accepted my double but didn’t hit the clock. After reconsidering, they passed and paused the clock. I wanted them to pass so I was happy that they changed their mind. I didn’t know the rule, but since this was a Responsible Moves tournament, I figured it didn’t matter, so we started the next game. But what if I wanted them to take? Or what if we were playing Legal Moves? What is the rule on this?

The Ruling

As we learned in the previous column, all cube actions are final. So, when the player attempted to retract their cube decision and change it, they violated the Rules. What you may not realize is that although it was a Responsible Moves tournament, by condoning this infraction the opponent also violated the Rules! The condoned infraction is void and the original cube decision stands!

Rationale for Ruling

The person who asked the question had a misconception about the intent behind Responsible Moves. It turns out that many other experienced players have the same misconception. Let’s clear that up!

Responsible Moves only permits you to condone illegal checker plays.
Responsible Moves does not give you license to condone any other rule violation.

You can of course trust me that this is the intent of Responsible Moves. But you might be wondering: “If I read the USBGF Rules, what specific rules and logic would lead me to this same conclusion?”

Let’s start with the official text that every tournament director using the USBGF Rules must use in their tournament brochure or web site to announce that they are running a Responsible Moves tournament:

» Rule 1 [Rules Options]: Responsible moves: The non-offending player may choose to condone an illegal move or require its correction.

You’ll find the mention of Responsible Moves, and that required text, in the Tournament Rules Options document. How would you have known about that document? The introductory paragraph of the USBGF Rules refers to it, describes it, and provides the website link:

» Rule 2 [Introduction]: These Tournament Rules govern live backgammon tournament play. The Tournament Ruling Guide and the Tournament Rules Options documents have been prepared for directors and players to consult as may be appropriate. The Ruling Guide provides greater detail and guidance for these rules (section numbers cited) and addresses other uncommon situations. Rules Options govern the variations to these standard rules that directors may employ.

» Rule 3 [ILLEGAL MOVES]: Both players must promptly point out and correct all illegal plays noticed before the opponent has made a valid roll. Any illegality that is unrelated to the dice roll or the number of pips moved (for example, a player places their own checker on the bar, or invalidly passes their turn), must be corrected if noticed before the offending player has made their next valid roll. Correction requires reverting to the original dice roll and position and resuming play from there.

The first thing you’ll notice about Rule 3 is that when we all think about “Legal Moves,” this is the specific rule we think of. If you look closer, you’ll notice that all discussion relates to illegal checker plays. The key point is that the way to correct an illegal move is to restore the original dice roll and position and resume play from there. Those instructions do not make sense for correcting any other kind of rule violation. In the context of the USBGF Rules, an “illegal move” clearly refers to an illegal movement of the checkers. That being the case, the only rule violation that you can condone under Responsible Moves is an illegal move of the checkers. Some directors who use Responsible Moves limit the scope further and do not permit "impossible moves" to be condoned. That is typically the special class of illegal moves for which Rule 3 defines a longer mandatory correction period—most commonly, putting your own checker on the bar.

Do the Rules discuss the handling of rule violations aside from illegal checker moves?

» Rule 4 [INTERPRETATION AND SCOPE]: Both players must promptly point out any violation of a mandatory rule and must correct it unless the Rules explicitly allow the opponent to condone the infraction.

Rule 4 makes crystal clear that players must not condone rule violations in general; they may only condone violations of specific rules only when that is explicitly authorized. Rule 1 (Responsible Moves), when in effect, explicitly authorizes violations of Rule 3 (Illegal Moves) to be condoned. Only one other rule currently exists that authorizes a rule violation to be condoned. That is the "Premature Roll" rule. If a player rolls before it is their turn, their opponent may condone that violation and require the "fast roll" to stand rather than correcting it by requiring a reroll at the proper time.

Rule 4 is a meta-rule. It is a rule about the Rules and is therefore supreme to all other rules. Essentially, if a player condones a rule violation that they are not authorized to condone, they are violating Rule 4. Since there is no rule allowing a violation of Rule 4 to be condoned, the players are obligated to retract the illegal condoning.

Bottom line—if a player breaks a mandatory rule, both players have an obligation to point out that violation whenever it is noticed. This promotes transparency and consistency. Even if the rules explicitly allow a violation of that rule to be condoned, Rule 4 still requires that the violation be pointed out. It is not permitted to silently condone an infraction. Aside from the two exceptions noted above, both players must ensure that the rule violation is corrected. It doesn’t matter if both players prefer the violation to stand. A rule violation must not be allowed to stand—even in a Responsible Moves tournament. If it is not clear how to correct the rule violation, or if correction is still possible, the director should be called to make a ruling.

What is a mandatory rule? It is a rule that uses the words "must" or "shall"—that is, a rule that simply states something as fact. It also includes the generally accepted rules for the game of backgammon itself. What is a non-mandatory rule? It is a rule that uses the words "should" or "may." These words have specific meaning and are used consistently throughout the Rules and the Ruling Guide.

» Rule 5 [INTERPRETATION AND SCOPE]: The Ruling Guide defines: must, shall, should, and may.
What’s the Ruling? Responsible Moves

Here are some examples of things that must not be condoned because they violate mandatory rules:

» You must not allow a double in the Crawford Game or in a Dead Cube situation to stand.

» You must not allow your opponent’s clock to run continuously after they close you out.

» If your opponent gives you 4 points after you win an undoubled gammon, you must require correction of the score.

» You must not permit your opponent to retract an already offered double, or to drop a double after they’ve taken it—even if you prefer the second action to the first.

» You must not permit your opponent to resign in a contact position.

» You must not permit your opponent to be 30 minutes late for the match because you’d rather get lunch than start play.

Summary

The only difference between a Responsible Moves tournament and a Legal Moves tournament is that you are permitted to condone an illegal checker play at a Responsible Moves tournament. Even if you choose to condone the illegal move, you must still point it out. If any other mandatory rule is violated, both players must always point it out and insist upon its correction—even at a Responsible Moves tournament.◆

- RICHARD MUNITZ

To review the complete USBGF Tournament Rules, Ruling Guide, and Tournament Options, please visit usbgf.org/docs/rules.pdf.

About Rich

Richard Munitz is one of the original founders of the USBGF, has served on the Board of Directors since 2009, and serves as Chairman of the Rules Committee and the Ratings and Stats Committee.

He is a winner of the American Backgammon Tour and has ranked as high as 4th in lifetime ABT points. He has been voted Giant of Backgammon multiple times, ranking as high as #21.

Richard runs the NYC Backgammon Meetup. He is a professional software developer and lives in Suffern, NY.
Matvey Natanzon, also known as Falafel, and backgammon go hand in hand. In fact, some years ago, when somebody asked him if he was thinking of getting married, Mike Svobodny answered for him: He is already married to backgammon. They ended up making some bets on Falafel getting married. I don’t recall the exact details, but the bets involved which of several backgammon players would get married first, who would have children first, and the like. Unfortunately Falafel lost those bets.

His love affair with backgammon began in 1994, when he left Buffalo without a dollar in his pocket and ended up in New York’s Washington Square Park, armed only with his expert skill at chess. I used to hustle chess there between college classes, and one day I met this chubby, happy-go-lucky guy, who spoke only a few words of Russian. We formed an instant bond that proved to be lifelong, but was cut far too short. It was there, in “Jurassic Park” as I liked to call that sometimes dangerous place, that he picked up the game of backgammon: playing for 25 cents a point, sleeping on the benches, losing whatever he would make at chess and what I would lend him, in order to pay for his backgammon education. He would eat a $2 falafel every day, and that’s how he got his nickname.

After a couple of years of playing backgammon, he proclaimed that one day he would become really, really good at this game. From Washington Square Park the action moved to Liberty Park, where he continued to hone his skills by playing countless hours, and also paying James Colen, one of the top players in the world at the time, $2 per question answered. But his real backgammon growth began when he got to the Ace Point Club and was able to use the club’s computer to run the neural network program JellyFish, and later Snowie. It is said to take about 10,000 hours to become an expert in any given field, a mark which Falafel easily passed. He probably spent 100,000 hours at the Ace Point working with Snowie, and later playing countless hours of online backgammon from his apartment in Tel Aviv. The result of all that play and study was his long-standing #1 world ranking, during a time when nobody came close to matching his performance.

During all those years he made a decent living, but struggled because of his “lock” sports bets. It wasn’t until 2012 that a lucky encounter led him to Hollywood, where some high rollers wanted lessons from the best—and as they say, the rest is history. After his newfound fame and riches he pretty much quit playing in tournaments, except for the Monte Carlo World Championship. He wanted to win that prestigious event, and in Monte Carlo he could reconnect with all his backgammon friends.

His commentary on the Monte Carlo finals is legendary. Here are two links: 2016—Granstedt vs. Russell and 2017—Assaraf vs. Kostadinov.

He always loved the game deeply and was hoping to put together, with the help of his Hollywood friends, an unprecedented tournament featuring a million-dollar prize pool. He thought that would help put backgammon back on the map, as it had taken a back seat after the poker boom of the early 2000s. But he never got the chance to do so; his life was cut short by his cruel disease, which robbed the backgammon world of one of its best ambassadors, and me of one of my closest friends: one of the kindest, most big-hearted, and compassionate people I was lucky to know.

ARKADIY TSINIS
A Tribute to Falafel

A Gambler’s Honor
by Bob Wachtel

Our best friend Falafel was one hell of a backgammon player. Sadly, he was knocked out of the game this year by a genetic anti-joker.

Falafel is a central character of the memoir I published a few months ago, The Backgammon Chronicles. Chronicles is so titled not only because it is a history of modern backgammon, but also because that was what Falafel called one of our favorite recreations. Back in the day, I used to organize impromptu quizzes (usually based upon my own blunders) at major tournaments, rounding up as many world-class players as I could to weigh in on them.

Falafel loved these sessions. “Ohhh, the Chronicles,” he’d murmur happily as I’d begin setting up positions. And immediately the fun would begin. No matter how difficult the problem, within a minute or so he’d state his opinion—categorically and emphatically—and offer to bet all of the assorted “geniuses” present that he was right. Moves other than the one he’d chosen, he declared, were “impossible.”

Naturally bets and propositions flurried, as did negotiations over new bets and offers. The amounts at stake were not trivial; but did negotiations over new bets and offers. The amounts at stake were not trivial; but I must confess that I barely noticed those traits. To me he was a brilliant rival—but also because that was Falafel, a New York hustler with a colorful personality. He already had the nickname Falafel when I met him, given him in his youth when he hustled low-stakes chess in the park in New York City, and, lacking funds, subsisted on beggary.

As his friends have recalled in the last days, Falafel was kind, generous and caring—but I must confess that I barely noticed those traits. To me he was a brilliant rival—but even more interestingly, a true gambler. Not the most verbal of persons, he found in betting a means of expressing not only his beliefs—on backgammon positions, sporting events, or political outcomes—but his integrity as well.

We have all heard the expression “Put your money where your mouth is,” but to Falafel that challenge (which most people completely ignore) was a moral imperative. “I guess,” I remember him announcing on a hundred occasions, “If I say it I have to bet on it.” And so he would. No hypocrisy or weaseling here: to require oneself to live by a strict creed like this requires no small amount of courage (called “heart” in the gambling world) as well as a deep sense of honor.

I am glad that I was able to send Falafel a copy of the book in which he starred while he was still able to read and appreciate it.

• BOB WACHTEL

Memories of Falafel
by Jake Jacobs

Early in the fifth season of Justified the hero, Raylan Givens, is being punished by handling walk-ins. In walks an obnoxious fellow who says the Marshals have seized a backgammon website which owes him $250,000.

“Heaven’s got a new backgammon player.”

Futilely he said, “That’s Falafel.”

Cue the predictable food joke.

The man explains that “Mister Falafel” is the world’s greatest backgammon player, and has “even had magazine articles written about him.” The magazine was the New Yorker, and I should know, because I was among the backgammon experts quoted in its profile.

If memory serves, I met Matvey (aka Mike, aka Falafel) Natanzon at the World Cup in Dallas in 1996. He seemed to be a protégé of Abe Mossiari at the time. Through relentless study (in a documentary for Israeli television he claimed to study backgammon fifteen hours a day) Falafel moved up the ranks to become the world’s top-ranked player.

Recently Falafel made another big bet, the biggest. He had cancer. I am not certain of the specifics, but it was serious, deadly serious, attacking the best part of him, his brain. He bet he could beat it.

Runyon had a character named Sky Mastro, “because he bet as high as the sky.”

Falafel and I knew the current incarnation of Sky, which led to Falafel being part of the legendary Million Dollar Weight Loss Bet. On the night we dined at Sushi Saito, Falafel and his then-roommate, MCG, had a weight gap of 170 pounds (77.27 kg). Could they cross weights in one year, Falafel losing, Matt gaining? A million dollars rode on the answer. Ten and a half months later, at the Russian baths, Matt was up to 178.5 pounds, a gain of 40.5, and Falafel! 178!

He lost the bet yesterday. R.I.P. Falafel.

• JAKE JACOBS

Runyon had a character named Sky Mastro, “because he bet as high as the sky.” Falafel and I knew the current incarnation of Sky, which led to Falafel being part of the legendary Million Dollar Weight Loss Bet. On the night we dined at Sushi Saito, Falafel and his then-roommate, MCG, had a weight gap of 170 pounds (77.27 kg). Could they cross weights in one year, Falafel losing, Matt gaining? A million dollars rode on the answer. Ten and a half months later, at the Russian baths, Matt was up to 178.5 pounds, a gain of 40.5, and Falafel! 178!

He lost the bet yesterday. R.I.P. Falafel.

• JAKE JACOBS
I Mourn for Falafel by Michihito Kageyama  
(Edited by Candace Mayeron and Marty Storer)

by Michihito Kageyama

I got notice of his death through Sandra Dunworth (formerly Brady), one of his caretakers in an assisted living center in Buffalo, New York. I tried to write something on Facebook immediately but I couldn’t. I kept silent; I don’t know why. Eventually, however, about two weeks from his loss, I started writing about him.

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He had an uncanny ability to instantly recognize a backgammon position, simultaneously coming up with the correct analysis. He could do this faster than anyone else. This ability combined with his rich humor made him not just the best player in the world but also the best commentator in all of backgammon.

He was pretty simple: If people are suffering, we must help them. This backgammon genius passed away on 14 February 2020 aged 51. The backgammon world was in deep sorrow, and hundreds of people posted photos on social media, expressing their heartfelt condolences.

A Tribute to Falafel

Purity And Ethics Of The Game
Falafel’s ethics of the game were impeccable. Falafel hated illegal plays long before “legal moves” rule became popular. (In backgammon, accidentally misplaying the checkers – usually from misreading the dice roll – is called an illegal play. Modern rules require the opponent to point out any misplay.) Falafel always wanted the game to be formal and pure and never hesitated to advocate for the ethical stance. This thinking process is so natural for him that it’s like breathing, not even an option. After listening to Falafel’s philosophy, I began pointing out illegal plays even to my own detriment. In the 2009 Menton Open (France), my opponent made an illegal play, which reduced his equity by a lot. I have a devil at the bottom of my mind that might make me pretend not to see his illegal play. However, as I had fully adopted Falafel’s ethics, and even though my opponent’s misplay was much in my favor, I asked him to correct it. Finally, I won that tournament.

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Though I was supposed to go back to Japan the next day, I accepted his offer and canceled my ticket for Japan. For the next two months Falafel and I were together 24/7. I learned that he was a terrible snorer (!), but I got used to it quickly.

It is important to know that in 2013 my good friend Masayuki Mochizuki (“Mochy”) was the #1 Giant of Backgammon, I was #2 and Falafel was #3. (Falafel was #1 in 2011.)

I thought the biggest benefit of that American journey would be that I could discuss backgammon positions at any time. The world’s GOAT (Greatest of All Time) would always be next to me! Well, it didn’t exactly work out that way. The truth is that Falafel often acts alone, and I needed to find the proper time to ask him. Even so, it was a dream situation for a backgammon player like me, so hungry to pick his brain.

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A Tribute to Falafel

During this time, Falafel had a special student, a very wealthy man. When Falafel gave lessons, I was always with him as his assistant. My title, “World #2,” worked well. The student was a busy and important man, so we would get notice of the date of the lessons only one day before or the same day. Of course, he paid handsomely, and I very much needed this additional income at the time. I am forever indebted to Falafel for his generosity in sharing his student with me.

Lifetime Achievement Award
By 2018, cancer had thoroughly invaded his brain and it was hard for him to walk. But he came to the 2018 World Championship in Monte Carlo with Tobias Hellweg pushing his wheelchair. Though Falafel did not play in the tournament, he gave commentary on the World Championship final with just as much insight and humor as usual.

Then, on the last night of the tournament, during the presentation of winners’ trophies, Falafel was called to the stage. Everyone wondered why, since he had not played in the tournament. The USA’s Joe Russell, himself a world champion (1989) and now Chairman of the Board of the United States Backgammon Federation, presented Matvey “Falafel” Natanzon with the USBGF’s Lifetime Achievement Award. You could tell how Falafel was so moved by this recognition. People were cheering and crying—thrilled by Joe’s speech and Falafel’s award but sad to see this giant of a man in his greatly weakened condition. His great friend Sander Lylloff was next to him, supporting him the entire time. I was also on the stage since they gave me the Gentleman Prize. When Falafel received the trophy, I felt an overwhelming mixture of pleasure and sadness for my dear friend.

Last Visit
In early January 2020, I was wondering whether I should fly to New York and see Falafel in Buffalo. My schedule was so tight that I was about to give up on visiting the USA. However, Daphne Downs, a very close friend of Falafel’s, gave me sensible advice: If you don’t visit now, the next time might not come. She understood Falafel’s situation very well, as she had studied medicine for seven years in addition to being a fine backgammon player. Her words motivated me to buy an airplane ticket to New York. First, I played in the New York Metropolitan Open but did not cash. Patti Rubin asked me to deliver a gift to Falafel, a handy set of chouette markers to show who is in the box and who is the captain. The next day I flew to Buffalo with Mochy. We were the Giants #1 and #2 going to see the GOAT for what we hoped would not be the last time.

He was a patient at Brothers of Mercy Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Clarence, NY, just outside Buffalo, but no medical treatment was working for him. When Mochy and I talked to Falafel, he replied with a clear voice, correctly addressing us by name. He also could eat by himself. As he had asked me in advance to bring some backgammon positions, I printed out many positions and brought a pile of paper. Falafel saw the first position and started thinking but did not venture a single opinion. That was when I sadly realized this would be the last time I would ever again see my dear friend, and my heart was utterly broken.

Amazing Women
I must state explicitly that Falafel was blessed at the nursing home. His mother, Larissa Rein, visited him daily with food and helped take care of all medical needs. His sister Elaine Lewis came from England to help her mother and provide Falafel with a sister’s loving care. Also, Falafel had three extraordinary caretakers at the Center. These three women could not have given him better care. Mochy highly praised all of them, as they always did their best for their patient. You could tell they passionately cared about his well-being. Here are the names of those who belonged to that worthy home health-care organization, Jaimie’s Helping Hands:

Jaimie A. Heckt
Sandra M. Dunworth
D’Lora Eckelberry

Goodbye Matvey “Falafel” Natanzon—We Will Never Forget You
Falafel’s spirit and intense love of all aspects of the game affected all backgammon players who were lucky enough to be in his presence. We enjoyed watching his game, talking to him, listening to his entertaining commentary, and even just seeing him walk (this is not a joke—watching him walk made me happy).
A Tribute to Falafel

Thank you very much, Falafel. Thank you for being a backgammon player. Thank you for being my friend. I am proud of all the time I spent with you. You left a great legacy to us. We appreciate it and we promise to use it to make a better backgammon world.

One Falafel Legacy—The “Island” Concept

Around 2013 in Las Vegas, Falafel mentioned the term “Island” which is the situation where each point in the outer field has only two checkers. You want to avoid an Island. Here is an example.

Position 1

![Position 1](image1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Pips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-Away White</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Away Black</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black to play 64

17/13 17/11 +0.036
13/3 -0.066 (-0.102)

13/3 is the obvious choice, but the resulting position is an Island because the the 8, 13, and 17 points now have two checkers each. We would like to avoid an Island.

Position 1-A after 13/3

![Position 1-A](image2)

Position 2

![Position 2](image3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Pips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-Away White</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Away Black</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black to play 42

13/11 5/1 +0.173
13/11 13/9 +0.049 (-0.124)
6/2 3/1 +0.039 (-0.134)

The Island concept is so beneficial that I often use it over the board. I’ll bet Falafel never expected his casual comment to affect me so much!

Black chose 6/2 3/1 over the board, which does not leave a shot. However, as you already know, the resulting position is an Island.

Fortunately, the opponent has an inner blot. Thus, according to an eXtreme Gammon (XG) rollout, 17/11 17/13 is superior by 0.102 money-equivalent points per game (PPG).
A Tribute to Falafel

Position 2-A after 6/2 3/1

Black must take a risk with 13/11 5/1 to avoid an Island. This play creates spare checkers on the 13 point and 11 point. Black will be flexible to play his next turn. XG tells us it is better than 6/2 3/1 by 0.134 PPG, even though it leaves two blots.

Position 2-B after 13/11 5/1

I am pleased to announce that I am collecting many Island positions to improve my skill and write a new book! I will dedicate my Island book to the memory of my dear, dear friend Matvey Natanzon, who has inspired me in so many ways. RIP.

- Michihito Kageyama

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Exquisite Craftsmanship

Our boards are made by Fazil Terlemez, a German craftsman.

Disabled from polio when he was 3 years old, and limited to working from a sitting position in a wheelchair, Fazil has earned his livelihood for the past 20 years by making superb backgammon boards, dice cups and doubling cubes. For Fazil, no detail is too small to be overlooked. Everything about his designs speak of strength, durability, and beauty. His boards are a joy to play on.

Fazil’s playing surface of choice is a felt made from dense Merino sheep wool. Merino wool is a quiet yet lively playing surface. Dice tumble easily across the soft board surface. Checkers will never lose their smooth glide action.

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Imported from Finland

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This is the finest and highest quality backgammon scoreboard available for purchase. Imported from Finland.

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The 13th annual, ever popular New York Metro tournament, directed by Lynn Ehrlich and Jeb Horton, was held January 9-12, 2020, at the Hyatt Regency on the Hudson, Jersey City, NJ. Saba Bejanishvili (GA) prevailed against Ron Rubin (NV) in the final of the Championship division. You can see the full results elsewhere in this issue.

Both contestants are strong and experienced competitors. I remember Ron Rubin as a tough player in the 1980s. Saba Bejanishvili is a newer addition to the circuit, but has done well. He was featured on the cover of PrimeTime’s May-June 2015 issue, which contains analysis of the epic Mochy-Saba Dual Duel final match (in the performance rating, or PR, category) from San Antonio, 2014.

Here is a list of their recent successes, besides this year’s New York Metro. Most are taken from the Chicago Point website.

Saba:
» Cashed in Michigan Summer Championships, 2016;
» Won Atlanta Masters, 2016;
» Won Atlanta Championship, 2015;
» Won World Backgammon Tournament of Champions, Chicago, 2014;
» Won Tournament of Stars Doubles, San Antonio, 2014 (with Petko Kostadinov);
» Finished second in the PR section of the prestigious Dual Duel event, San Antonio, 2014.

Ron:
» Cashed in both the U.S. Open and Las Vegas Open, 2018;
» Won Sochi (Russia) Doubles, 2018 (with world-class organizer Patti Rubin);
» Cashed in Monte Carlo Open, 2018;
» Cashed in both the Las Vegas Open and Monte Carlo Open, 2016;

In this article I will analyze some of the more interesting positions from their exciting 11-point final. There were many to choose from. As usual, eXtreme Gammon (XG) has consented to help. That friendly bot cautions us that all humans make mistakes, even top players and even authors of articles like this one (the bot admonishes me that for every mistake made in the current match, I have likely made worse in a similar position). In return I have reminded XG that it is not perfect itself, knowing little about such matters as table presence and opponents’ quirks, and it has graciously registered agreement. I am always willing to reach out across the carbon-silicon gap to work together. Now that a measure of bipartisan human-bot accord has been achieved, let’s see what happened in the match.
2020 New York Metro Final

The first game was quick: Ron built a solid five-point prime and Saba was forced to overrun his forward position. Ron doubled him out, and led 1–0.

The second game was critical. It developed into a mutual holding-racing game with each player owning the opposing 4 point. Ron built a broken five-prime with his 7 point open, and Saba’s double 6 left him no choice but to put three checkers deep into his board. Ron had 61 to play in the following position.

Score Pips
11-Away White (Saba B.) 110
10-Away Black (Ron Rubin) 131

Black to play 61

21/15 2/1 +0.366
21/15 6/5 +0.330 (-0.036)
\checkmark 9/8 9/3 +0.259 (-0.107)

Ron broke his 9 point, 9/3 9/8, leaving no shots. But this was a big error; he is behind in the race, so priming is a fine game plan, even against an advanced anchor. Ron’s roll, combined with Saba’s weakened inner board, gives him a good opportunity to break his anchor instead of his prime. Despite leaving two blots for Saba to hit, the best play is 21/15 2/1. Fewer than half of Saba’s replies both hit and cover something—note the duplication of aces—and even then Ron will be favored to enter, perhaps hitting a direct shot in the process. Even if Ron is hit and then fans on Saba’s four-point board, it will not be easy for Saba to escape both back checkers. Ron’s broken five-prime is quite valuable and must not be given up lightly.

Saba replied with 62, and 11/3 was virtually forced. Ron rolled 63 to cover his 2 and 3 points, and Saba rolled a welcome double 3.

Score Pips
11-Away White (Saba B.) 102
10-Away Black (Ron Rubin) 116

White to play 33

21/18(2) 6/3(2) +0.031
21/18(2) 6/3 5/2 -0.021 (-0.052)
\checkmark 21/18(2) 11/5 -0.047 (-0.077)

Of course Saba brought his back checkers out to the 18 point. For the final two 3s, he had to decide whether to make his 3 point and leave Ron six 7s to hit, or to play safe with 11/5. He picked the safe play, which turns out to be a substantial error.

Making the 3 point strengthens the inner board, and is best for other reasons as well. It saves a playable 6, and the blot on the 11 point provides outfield control which is especially helpful in conjunction with a four-and-a-half-point board. After Saba hides his 11-point blot instead, Ron can jump to Saba’s outfield with one or both back checkers, and Saba’s hitting opportunities will be limited. Not only that, a 6 will compel him to break the 18 point and perhaps leave many shots. After the correct play of making the 3 point, Ron will have a much harder time breaking the anchor to fight for outside control.

The game sequence showcased those considerations. Ron rolled 32, slotting his 4 point with the deuce, and breaking his anchor with the 3 in order to control much outfield territory. Saba’s feared variation came to pass: he rolled 64, with which he minimized shots, 18/12 18/14. Suddenly Ron had a cube decision.

Score Pips
11-Away White (Saba B.) 80
10-Away Black (Ron Rubin) 111

Black on roll. Cube action?

| No double | +0.402 (-0.147) |
| Double/Pass | +1.000 (+0.451) |
| Double/Take | +0.549 |

THRILL IN PROGRESS

The final match had a rapt audience for the live stream and expert commentary. What better way to top off a wonderful tournament like the NY Metro?
Ron has 24 shots: 5s plus combinations (15 numbers); three additional 7s (61 and 43, since 52 has already been counted); three additional 8s (44 and 62; 53 has been counted and double 2 is blocked), and finally two shots represented by 64: 21/11*. All of those shots, including five hit-cover numbers and three that hit twice, are juicy because of Saba’s two inner-board blots and a strong possibility of a gammon if he stays on the bar. The position is volatile; Ron may lose his market by a mile if he refrains from turning the cube. Accordingly, he doubled.

Should Saba take? It’s true that Ron is a 2-to-1 favorite to hit, and has decent gammon chances. But he may be in trouble if he misses. Saba is 31 pips ahead before the roll, and he will be happy to own the cube after a miss. And even if Ron hits, Saba has a chance to hit and cover with any 4 but 46—as long as only one of his checkers is on the bar and Ron has not hit and covered—or he may enter on the ace point and eventually escape and win the race. So Saba has plenty of winning chances, as well as good redoubling opportunities if Ron fails to hit. Saba took, and XG’s rollout confirms a clear double and a very easy take.

The excitement continued as Ron rolled a 31 to miss!

Ron made the 18 point and looked around for the ace, eventually selecting 10/9 instead of 8/7. Both aces are about the same, but Ron’s mistake was to assume that the best 3 was to safety the back checkers. Better by far is 8/4, achieving maximum outfield control by keeping the rear checkers separated, and creating the strongest possible five-point board in the bargain. Again Saba’s inner-board blots make the difference. After Ron makes his 4 point, only five of Saba’s hitting numbers (52, 22, and 11) avoid a direct and gammonish return shot!

Now it was Saba who had the cube decision. Did his chances to safety his outside blots warrant a redouble to 4?

Saba did redouble, a decision XG rates as very strong. Ron is far behind in the race and an underdog to hit; only Saba’s 55 and 41 leave a direct shot, and with the 4 point unmade, a hit may not be enough to win. But although Saba may lose his market immediately, he will often have to leave multiple indirect shots or even a later direct shot, and Ron still has some small chance to win the race without hitting. Ron assessed his overall chances as enough for a take, and according to XG he was right.

Saba cleared his 12-point blot with 63: 12/3; Ron rolled 21, missing and also failing to cover the 4 point; Saba replied with 41, which left a 7-shot; Ron missed, Saba rolled 65 to safety the last straggler, and won the race from there. He led 4–1.

Early in the next game, the players rolled three successive jokers. But Ron rolled two of them, and doubled Saba out in a borderline too-good position. When in doubt about whether you’re too good to double, turn the cube and give your opponent a chance to blunder by taking! The score was now 4–2, Saba’s favor.

Saba had 65 to play at his seventh move of the fourth game, in another mutual holding-racing position.
Instead of playing 9/3* 23/18, Saba pointed on his 3 point, cutting return shots from 14 to 11, and leaving no hit-cover numbers instead of three. But this play was safer only for the moment; he should have hit loose and moved his back checker to safety on the 18 point. The 8 point is a key asset because Saba is ahead in the race and it often help him clear his midpoint later. At the same time 23/18 works on racing. By comparison, the 3 point is not especially important.

The lack of an 8 point gave Saba trouble, as he ended up in a blot-hitting contest with an inflexible position and an inner board inferior to Ron’s. At the same time 23/18 works on racing. By comparison, the 3 point is not especially important.

The next game saw some more critical cube actions. In the early middle game, both sides had one back checker, but Ron had the stronger board and led in the race. Was his edge enough for a double? Ron definitely has the advantage, ahead 15 pips in the race with some threats to boot. He has a three-point board to Saba’s “pointless” or one-point board, possibly enabling a successful attack in the near future. He may win after hitting in Saba’s outfield, or he may simply escape and win the race. But if hit, Saba may hit back, or else fall into a good holding game by anchoring in Ron’s board. Also, Saba has a better blockade: three points in a row with no checkers out of play for priming. Doubling therefore looks risky, and Ron left the cube alone.

However, XG says the position is a double by 0.039 points per game (PPG)! That level of mistake is not a blunder, but it’s not the kind you want to make regularly.

The score makes the difference here. A four-point gammon would get Ron to the milestone 4-away score, where a doubled gammon efficiently wins the match, and a two-point win gets to another milestone score: 2-away, where a two-point win or an undoubled gammon also wins the match with no points wasted. At a score of 11-away to 11-away, the position is a clear no-double!
Now Ron doubled to 2. Had he lost his market? No — Saba took, a large blunder. He must have given too much weight to his own nicely placed builders and Ron’s positionally ugly forward position, likely underestimating Ron’s gammon chances (given by XG’s rollout at about 36%) and overestimating his own wins (about 30%). Saba does indeed have plenty of winning opportunities, but Ron’s gammon chances are overwhelming.

If Ron thought he had a double on either of the previous two turns, but delayed in order to give Saba a more difficult taking decision later, kudos to him. But although such ploys can work from time to time, they have a big downside: you may lose your market for the cube. As Mary Hickey has preached for a long time: When in doubt, make the best decision. That means that you should usually just try to do what you believe is technically correct. On another day Saba might have passed Ron’s double with a sigh of relief. In the 45 years I’ve played, I have found that doubling too late, hoping for a bad take by an overly aggressive player, is a common and costly type of error.

After Saba took, Ron rolled a bad 21 in reply: one of nine numbers that didn’t cover. Instead of trying to play safe with a move like 6/3 or 24/22 2/1, he made the strongest and most aggressive play, 24/21. Saba fanned and Ron hit the second blot, going on to win a four-point gammon. The score stood at 7–4 in favor of Ron.

In the next game, Ron opened with 41, bringing a builder to the 9 point and splitting his back checkers with the ace. Ahead in the match, he refused to try the volatile and complex 5-point slot, instead playing to simplify into a race or holding game. He was rewarded when Saba replied with a terrible 43, hitting loose on his 2 point and splitting to Ron’s 4 — an opening response favored by XG and its more avid followers as the best of a bad lot, but nowhere near universally adopted. Ron rolled 43, missing the return shot but having his choice of two useful new points.

Ron made Saba’s 4 point in preference to his own 9. In the face of Saba’s weak board, with a deeply placed blot and only eight checkers in the Zone, the normal money or early-match move would be to make the 9 point, a choice I believe Ron would have made in either situation. At this score he knew Saba would be making aggressive decisions with the cube and checkers, and steered toward a simple and non-gammonish position, just as he did on the game’s first move. Now well ahead in the match, Ron knew the advanced anchor would be a lasting asset that would vastly reduce Saba’s gammon chances.

Even at the score, XG favors the 9 point by a huge margin. This position shows how difficult the leader’s play can be when the score difference is large. Clearly the leader should give more weight to safety, but the question is always how much. In this position, Ron has little to fear from an attack and should make the valuable 9 point, preventing Saba from hitting on that point and handing him a 16-pip setback. Ron will often end up with an advanced anchor anyway.

A complicated struggle ensued, Ron getting the best of the luck. He locked Saba into a 2-5 (or 23-20) backgame. He had some good doubling opportunities, but late in the game the cube was still in the middle.
Ron doubled. It is quite possible he had been hoping for a take in a position like this; but whatever the case, Saba did not take the bait. Again, cube play is difficult for the player with a big lead in the match; it is tempting to adopt either the fearful stance (“When in doubt as the leader, do not double”) or the greedy one (“I can play for gammon or hope for a bad take by the desperate trailer”), and even the strongest players will sometimes go astray.

The score was 8–4.

In the following game, Saba escaped both backcheckers and doubled Ron in a menacing position. Ron wisely passed, remaining with an 8–5 lead.

The next game was another mutual holding game where Ron had the best of it. Ahead in the race, he doubled after Saba’s holding chances deteriorated, and Saba correctly gave up a point. Now Ron led 9–5: 2-away to 6-away. Things looked dim for Saba!

The next game was the ninth of the match, and Saba quickly built an advantage.

Saba doubled here, just the right time to do so. Though the race is close, his board is far better than Ron’s and he can expect to win many more gammons. Rather than risk being gammoned, Ron passed and led 9–6.

But the pass was a blunder? That may seem surprising, especially since Ron has only two active sets of builders on his side of the board. But his bar point, though not called the Golden Point, really adds luster to his position: it blocks Saba’s back checker and also provides a good measure of safety. Ron’s spare checker is an intriguing example of the interplay between checker moves and cube action.

Ron made the 16 point, and eventually Saba hit one checker in a holding game. Ron fanned, and Saba doubled to 2. Holding a broken four-prime against two checkers on his 5 point, facing a four-point board with Saba’s 4 and 5 points open and two of Saba’s spare checkers buried deep, Ron scooped up the cube.

Saba exited a back checker at once, but Ron came in and a tense outfield battle began. He hit on Saba’s bar point, but had to expose a second blot. Saba hit, Ron fanned, and Saba immediately hit the second checker. Ron eventually entered one checker and Saba hit it loose, but Ron replied by entering both checkers with a hit! Saba rolled a fine double deuce in reply.
A nice-looking play is to make the 21 anchor and hit loose on the 5 point, and that is not bad at all. But Saba did better, disdaining the anchor and venturing a double tiger play: Michy Kageyama’s term for a double hit in the inner board that leaves a double direct return shot. Saba played the correct and gutsy bar/23 9/5* 6/4*, hoping to win a gammon should Ron stay on the roof. Four points would get Saba to the Crawford Game.

Stay on the roof Ron did, and Saba covered his 5 point with 64! Again Ron fanned, but Saba was unable to escape a checker. However, his roll was 42 — far better than 44 or 33! — and he switched from his 6 point to his 4 point with 6/4 6/2, maintaining a five-point board. Ron entered one checker and Saba hopped his rearmost straggler to the outfield with 43: 23/16. The excitement continued as Ron came in with 63: bar/19 6/3! He hit next turn, only to see Saba escape and then make his own 10 point! Ron remained with a blot on Saba’s 6 point, holding against two checkers on Saba’s 10.

Saba left a direct shot and Ron hit! Saba hit right back, but Ron entered and had two assassins lurking in the outfield, while Saba’s spare checkers, still on top of a five-point board, had been pushed down to his 1 and 2 points. Saba advanced to Ron’s 5 point, trying to escape in the following position. Ron rolled 41 and had to decide whether to hit loose against Saba’s five-point board, thereby taking a very real risk of being gammoned.

Ron played safe and made his 2 point. But it’s quite risky to let Saba try to run from Ron’s 5 point! Ron should hit, after which all 21 of Saba’s non-hitting replies are very bad for him. Besides, four of Saba’s return shots, 52 and 53, break the five-point board and leave a direct shot. The large upside of hitting, combined with Saba’s chance to break his board, makes the loose hit vastly preferable to Ron’s conservative play. After 6/5*, 16/12 is the best 4, edging out 17/13 because it maximizes cover numbers after a miss.

Saba rolled a 65, hitting and then winning a 4-point gammon. Given the same sequence of rolls, Ron would also have been gammoned after hitting on his 5 point. Still, this was a big decision underscoring the difficulty of playing with a big lead in the match.

Saba led at Crawford, 1-away to 2-away. A mutual holding game turned into a straight race that Ron won in a breathtaking bearoff, during which he was a 78-22 underdog at one stage. The intrepid finalists were at DMP: double match point! Saba had over two minutes left on the clock, but Ron was down to 17 seconds.

Saba made his 4 point with opening 42, and Ron replied with 43, splitting to the 20 point and bringing a builder to the 10. Saba hit twice with 43, Ron entered both checkers with 52, and Saba had 32 to play.

EXPERTS AT WORK

Left to right: Rory Pascar, Michy Kageyama, John O’Hagan, and Voice of Backgammon Larry Shiller who always supplies color. It’s a great experience to listen to real-time analysis of a cliff-hanger final match by such a fine team.
Position 16

Score | Pips
1-Away White (Saba B.) | 154
1-Away Black (Ron Rubin) | 159

White to play 32

| 13/11 8/5* | -0.038 |
| 24/22 8/5* | -0.048 (-0.010) |
| 13/8 | -0.053 (-0.014) |
| 8/5* 6/4 | -0.074 (-0.036) |
| 8/5* 5/3 | -0.077 (-0.039) |

Saba hit with the 3, a principled decision that XG likes. Though 13/8 is a good practical choice for players who dislike the chances of a complicated battle, the best play is very likely 8/5* 13/11 as XG prefers. Without fear of losing a double or triple game, Saba can play both positionally and tactically, going for the 5 point while unstacking his heavy midpoint and placing a builder on the 11. The deuce he chose, 6/4, is antipositional because it creates a “dilly builder” or spare inner-board checker that has moved past the most desirable open point, in this case the 5. XG says the second-best deuce is 24/22, which mobilizes the back checkers and increases control of Ron’s outfield. Ron missed the return shot and Saba immediately made the 5 point. Ron made his own bar, but Saba attacked and Ron could only make the 23 anchor as Saba’s back checkers hopped over Ron’s three-prime consisting of the 8, 7, and 6 points. Ron was locked into the low-anchor game and Saba never even gave him a shot! That was the DMP anticlimax—Saba had won the close and action-packed match, and was the 2020 New York Metro champion. Yet another prestigious title went to Saba, and Ron can be proud of his second-place finish, as well as his under-4 XG performance rating for the match. Of course we’ll be hearing plenty more from these two great players.

- MARTY STORER
USBGF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2019
Eli Karp (West) vs. Jack Edelson (East)

By Marty Storer

YOUTHFUL CHAMPIONS

Eli Karp came from nowhere to win the USBGF National Championship West at the age of 18. His opponent in the East-West playoff, Jack Edelson, is remarkably wrinkle-free for an experienced player.

The USBGF National Championship is an annual event, a match between the East and West regional champions. For 2019, the Wickedly Good Champion of the West was 18-year-old Eli Karp from New Orleans, who won his title at the L.A. Open—his very first tournament! He was profiled by L.A.'s impresario, Candace Mayeron, in the Fall 2019 issue of *PrimeTime*.

His opponent, known in certain New England quarters as the Wicked Wicked Good Champion of the East, was the redoubtable Jack Edelson, who lived for a long time in Madison, WI, and now resides in Minnesota. Jack has been around for quite a few years and has racked up many impressive results, finishing fifth in the 2016 ABT, and winning the big Gibraltar tournament of 2018, to name only a couple of triumphs from a very long list. He took his USBGF East title at the 2019 Cherry Blossom in D.C. The final was only 7 points, as befits a playoff between winners of events made up of many players and consisting of shorter matches. In a way this contest was similar to the Sunny Florida final matches between 20-year-old Cary Hoarty and 80-year-old Ed O’Laughlin: youth versus experience. (See the Winter 2020 *PrimeTime* issue for coverage.) In Florida the wise owl O’Laughlin edged out the youngster; would the same happen in New York? The age difference between Eli and Jack is closer to 20 years than 60, but experience will tell — sometimes! Both Eli and Jack are seasoned chess players, and were quite aware that backgammon is not chess and anything could happen. And of course Eli is no slouch at his newfound pastime, having already won one title and bested some big names. I am picking him as an up-and-comer for sure.

With the help of eXtreme Gammon (fondly known as XG), I will now present analysis of 12 interesting decisions from the Karp vs. Edelson USBGF National Championship match. (See a version of my standard disclaimer in this issue’s article on the NY Metro Open final between Saba Bejanishvili and Ron Rubin.) At this point I will say only that the house fell on one of the wicked wizards. I am not sure whether Jake Jacobs’s brother, Munchkin, was there, but his presence would have been fitting.

The first game reached the bearoff with the cube still in the middle. Eli was on roll, clearly the favorite, and thought about doubling.

Eli chose to leave the cube alone. Though he is ahead by two pips, a significant margin when the counts are in the 20s, he also has two extra checkers. It is possible he made this decision by instinct, for if he employed one of the standard racing formulas (Keith, Trice, Thorp, or one of the Effective Pip Count variations), he got the wrong result — for all of them recommend a double. Though these formulas are meant for money games, initial doubles and takes should be much the same at a score of 0-0 to 7 as they are for money.

Should Jack have taken if doubled? Strangely, the Keith Count, usually quite accurate, recommends a pass because in this case it underestimates Jack’s edge in having fewer checkers on the board; both the Trice and Thorp formulas explicitly adjust for that factor. But the position is a solid take according to XG’s rollout.

Eli rolled 64 to bear two checkers off, and Jack could only find 42 in reply. Now Eli doubled, Jack passed, and Eli led 1 – 0. He could have wished he’d doubled on the prior turn: he had lost his
market for the cube. This bearoff emphasizes the need to use one or more racing formulas as a matter of course. For a statement and explanation of different racing formulas, see XG’s Analysis tab, as well as articles available at bkgm.com among many other places.

The second game turned into a holding game for Jack. He was behind in the race by 38 pips, but had a solid anchor and a trailing checker to provide extra coverage. However, his board was undeveloped. He had a 21 to play in the following position.

Eli has two distant outside points to clear, and may leave a direct shot immediately or later on. Jack urgently needs a stronger board, and to that end he made the best play: 6/4 6/5, slotting both of the key interior points. The alternatives are 8/5, slotting one inside point, breaking the useful 8 point, but only leaving one inner-board blot; and 8/7 6/4, again leaving one blot in the board and breaking the 8 point, but giving more ways to cover and gain a three-point board. Both alternatives are inferior to the double slot, which keeps the 8 point and figures to build a strong board sooner.

Eli, knowing that the state of the opponent's inner board is often a critical factor, considered what he could do to take advantage of Jack’s momentary tactical weakness of two inner-board blots.

But even if Eli’s plan succeeds and he does make a new point in his outfield, Jack’s holding game is likely to remain viable for quite a while. Usually he will improve his inner board quickly, after which Eli will still have a lot of work to do in order to get home safely. Eli can afford to delay doubling until he has a bigger threat.

Jack accepted the double, and Eli had 53 to play.

The only safe play was the ugly 13/8 6/3, which Eli disdained. Instead he played according to plan, trying to exploit Jack’s shaky inner board before it could be improved. He chose 13/10 6/1*, aiming to force Jack’s trailer off its annoying post on the 1 point, and also to make the potentially valuable 10 point.

The USBGF Championship final is about to begin. Eli acknowledges the camera with a poised look as Jack muses over a familiar position. Stephen Collins (C) prepares to stream the match. The NY Metro was his first experience streaming a major national tournament.
Eli’s play was well motivated and perfectly consistent with his double. But the best choice is to slot without hitting: either with 13/10 13/8, creating two new builders while starting the 10, or with the best and most dazzling move, 14/11 14/9, clearing the 14 point and starting the 11 point as well as the extremely desirable 9. The double-blot play would give Jack 12 ways to hit and cover an inside point (64 63 61 44 43 41 22), but of those numbers, only 44 is a joker. After any of the others, Eli will have many return shots at several blots.

Eli’s primary game plan is to clear his outfield points, avoid Jack’s obstacles, and win the race. Either of the two top plays does more to accomplish that plan than Eli’s overly ambitious hit. After the move played, Jack has only seven hit-covers, but all of them maintain his 20 anchor.

Jack hit and covered with 31: bar/24* 8/5. Eli missed the return shot with 32, which at least covered the 10 point. In the ensuing exchange, Jack attacked but Eli escaped, and Jack was forced to leave an outfield shot in order to keep his midpoint without weakening his inner board. Eli correctly hit despite some danger, and kept Jack’s back checkers restrained long enough to win a four-point gammon! Suddenly he was the big favorite with a 5 – 0 lead. His aggressive cube and checker play had paid a big dividend.

Eli built an advantage in the next game, and Jack had 21 to play. The choice was between offense and defense.

The score mandates aggression by the trailer, a fact that suggests making the 4 point. But 24/21 grabs a strong defensive anchor and maintains good chances to improve the inner board soon. That would be the choice of many players. However, Jack knew not only that defense was not his top priority, but also that Eli’s third checker on the 3 point represented quite a handicap in terms of flexibility. Eli’s broken five-point prime is imposing, but his midpoint is stripped and he has few good attacking numbers, thus he may have trouble coming home safely. Accordingly, Jack made a three-point inner board and broken four-prime, doing his best both to restrain Eli’s back checker and to profit from an immediate hit if a second blot should appear.

The defensive play is quite a large error at the score, and is also very bad at 7-away to 7-away. At that variant score Jack has more to lose by being gammoned, but the best way to win is still to improve the inner board and blockade. That’s consistent with the good advice to play for a win instead of trying to avoid being gammoned.

Jack has a chance for an immediate hit, followed by fantastic priming and attacking chances. He has 26 shots at the blot on his 7 point, and two more to hit on Eli’s 8. Besides that, double 5 and 53 miss but make the 3 point. And even if Jack cannot move his back checkers soon, the cube will be dead for Eli, he will be forced to play the game to the end, and gammons will not count double in his favor. Jack doubled and Eli gave up, making the score 5 – 1 in his favor.

At a score of 0 – 0 to 7, Jack would still have a strong double, but Eli’s blockade would be sufficient for an easy take. Kudos to Eli for recognizing the influence of the score.

In the next game, the fourth of the match, Jack opened with 21 and slotted his 5 point, clearly best at the score and also the most popular choice in most match situations. Eli replied with double 5, moving 20 pips forward but hurting his priming chances. Jack had 42 to play in reply.

MORE VICTOR’S SPOILS

The USBGF National Champion won a specially designed FTH board, donated by Gammon Stuff and complete with Federation logos.
Position 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Pips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Away White (Eli Karp)</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Away Black (Jack Edelson)</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black to play 42

8/4 6/4 $+0.415$

$\checkmark$ 11/5 $+0.380$ (-0.036)

At the score, Eli must be wary of giving Jack an automatic redouble, so he will hardly ever be able to turn the cube. Thus Jack can play aggressively, hoping for a quick double if things go his way. He made his 5 point, but making the 4 point would have been better. That move gives a fine chance for an instant and very strong three-point board, while Eli’s forward position is a bit overrun and many of his rolls are awkward. After making the 4 point, Jack would be able to double after most of Eli’s missing numbers.

Position 8

Eli replied with a welcome set of boxcars, and Jack came back with double 3 to make the 21 anchor and the 3 point. Eventually, Jack played his 4 point at the price of leaving an outside direct shot, a prospect he did not particularly fear because Eli had only a three-point board with a blot, and hitting would force him to abandon his 18 anchor. But Eli rolled a hit-cover number, after which Jack fanned and Eli made his 5 point. Jack entered on the five-point board, Eli safetied an outside blot, and Jack missed a direct shot at the remaining straggler. His roll was 44 in this position.

Position 9

This was a big decision. Should Jack play safe, making the 4 point and moving his spare back checker all the way around to his 9 point? Or should he put a blot on the 17 point, leaving a six-number shot but increasing containment chances? Besides the six shots, another drawback of that play is to leave a blot on the 2 point, the remaining 3s would have to be 8/4 7/3 6/2.

Eli rolled 54 to clear his blot safely, and doubled Jack out next turn. He led 6–1 at Crawford. That score was Gammon Go for Jack, because a two-point win would get him to an even-away score where he would need just two doubled wins or one doubled gammon to win the match. If Jack were to win a single point, he would be much worse off: from the resulting 6–2 deficit, he would have to win either three games, or else one two-point win and a doubled gammon.

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Eli played safe, and XG tells us that is a big mistake. A one-point win would get Eli to the Crawford game, leading by five points, so a gammon loss would not be too much worse for Jack. By far Jack’s top priority is to hit and win, and a checker on the 17 point would advance that goal.

Now Eli was on roll. Every move a cube decision!
Eli played 10/5 13/11, refusing to play completely safe with the ugly 10/5 6/4, and opting to leave eight indirect shots — a significant number, but far fewer than Jack would have after the more aggressive 10/5 6/4. Though the loose hit would be normal for money or at an early match score, Eli was wary of being hit and gammoned.

But as is so often the case, it’s best to play for the win rather than try to avoid a gammon. Eli must hit loose. His safer play gives Jack a free hand to anchor, escape, make his 5 point, or hit in the outer board. If he is hit back after 10/5 6/4, it is not the end of the world; he has an anchor and a good two-point board, and Jack will not be favored to make his 5 or bar point next turn. The sound advice of Jacob “Stick” Rice comes to mind: When in doubt, make the move that would be best at double match point (DMP). That is, go for the win! With no gammons in play, surely the loose hit would be correct, and it is best at the current score as well.

Eli clearly must switch from the 3 point to the 2, putting a second checker on the bar and preventing Jack from anchoring except with doubles. Of course he did so. Then it is tempting to create another builder for the 3 point, which has become the most valuable point on the board: the MVP, to use Julius High’s term. But instead of playing the blitz-oriented 8/6 or 8/7 24/23, Eli made his bar point to create a broken five-prime. This is a fine move that hedges his bets. The blockade is useful, and allows the back checkers some time to get moving. If Eli breaks his 8 point he may have to attack soon, and an attack can backfire, especially since Eli’s four back checkers are far from the scene of a blitz. His actual play is much

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Position 10</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Pips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Away C</td>
<td>White (Eli Karp)</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Away C</td>
<td>Black (Jack Edelson)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White to play 52

| 10/5 6/4*  | -0.314 |
| 13/8 6/4*  | -0.324 (-0.009) |
| 10/5 8/6   | -0.386 (-0.071) |
| 13/11 10/5 | -0.390 (-0.075) |
| 13/8 10/8  | -0.414 (-0.099) |

Jack rolled 52, a number that would have missed if Eli had hit, but which hit on the 11 point in the game continuation. Jack had the best of the resulting exchange until Eli rolled a double-ace joker to hit two checkers and make the 4 point! Eli later rolled another great double 1, and Jack was just about down for the count.

Jack fanned with double 6, but came back to hit multiple times and escape a back checker! However, he could not advance his remaining laggard to Eli’s 3 point — that is, not until Eli had five builders aiming at what was still the MVP. Eli made the 3 point on Jack’s head, and things looked good for him. All he had to do was roll his prime in safely.

Jack had a closed board and Eli had good builder position. His roll of 53 gave him a technical decision.

Standard prime-rolling technique, first treated systematically by the late Paul Magriel in his landmark book *Backgammon* (1976), is to hit loose at the forward edge of the prime while still maintaining six points in a row. If the opponent hits, you can recirculate the hit checker and try again. If not, you hope to cover the slotted point and extend the prime forward. Repeat the process until you have a closed board.

Accordingly, Eli hit loose with the 5 and looked for the best 3. He played 5/2, disliking to stack two spare checkers on the 5 point. But this was the wrong idea. If Jack misses after Eli’s actual play, Eli has 27 ways to close his board, one number to leave a direct shot (double 6), and several to switch to the 1 point, breaking the prime and leaving an indirect shot while also delaying his bearin.

The correct 6/1 6/5 leaves Eli better off, both when Jack hits and when he doesn’t. If Jack hits, Eli’s two forward spare checkers are in good position on his 5 point, rather than badly placed on the 8 and 2. If Jack does not hit, Eli has no numbers that force him to leave a direct or indirect shot; he can clear his 6 point if he rolls 55, 53, or 52, or maintain the prime with 32 or 21, while all other numbers make the 1 point from the 7 or the 5.

The moral of the story: If you’re trying to roll your prime home against one checker on the bar, don’t just count immediate ways to make the next point in line (here, the 1 point). Try also to see
what happens after you make that point. In this position, Eli’s play gave him 28 ways to make his 1 point from the 8, 7, or 2 (24 numbers for the 6,1 double shot, plus 43 and 52), but one of those numbers would have left a direct shot. A secondary moral is that it’s unlikely to be correct to place spare checkers deep within your prime-field.

Jack rolled 51 to hit back, then volunteered a direct shot on the 6 point, hoping to be hit and gain a chance to anchor on the 24 point. Two checkers closed out might be preferable to one; at least Jack’s board would not break further and he would have a tiny point. Two checkers closed out might be preferable to one; at least Eli never rolled a hitting number, simply coming around and closing his board, then hearing off safely to win game and match. Eli Karp had come from nowhere, triumphing over a tough veteran to become the 2019 USBGF National Champion!

Though the luck went Eli’s way (a nearly unbeatable 5.5 as measured by XG), the performance ratings (PRs) were quite good: a near-perfect 2.19 for Jack, and a creditable 4.20 for Eli. Eli can justifiably be proud of his PR and his result. One of these years he will be in a final match on the world stage, and may that time not be long delayed. ◆

- MARTY STORER

Team USA Wins!
WBIF Online World Team Championship 2019

The U.S. demonstrated its backgammon prowess this year, as Team USA won the World Backgammon Internet Federation (WBIF) Online World Team Championship 2019, a competition among 31 countries. Switzerland and Romania finished second and third, respectively. The WBIF, originally the European Backgammon Internet Federation, is an Internet-based organization which sponsors the annual World Team Championship (WTC) as well as a World Individual Online Championship and national championships. Since 2018 WTC membership has been open to non-European countries, including the U.S. and Japan. Team USA placed second last year in an exciting finish against Norway.

The WTC 2019 took place from September 16, 2019 to February 4, 2020, and consisted of 10 rounds. The U.S. fielded a strong team of six players, five of whom competed in each round: Neil Kazaross, Steve Sax, Joe Russell (Captain), Art Benjamin, Alfred Mamlet, and Frank Talbot. Giants of Backgammon, grandmasters, and other leading players were invited to participate in a best 2-of-3 11-point match qualifier to determine seats on the team. Kazarross, Sax, Russell, and Mamlet also played on the 2018 Team USA, along with Roberto Litzenberger. Mamlet was the 2018 individual winner with a 10-0 undefeated record.

Everyone on Team USA compiled an impressive record and came through at a critical point to help the team advance to the next round. The overall team PR was a World Class level 4.6. Special thanks to Neil Kazaross for taking the team across the finish line in the final round. Neil, after being a 90% favorite in the match against his Romanian opponent, became a huge underdog, needing to roll a double on his last shake of the next to last game and then win the DMP game in order to win. HE DID IT!!!! Neil played amazingly well in that match, with a World Champion level 1.84 PR. The WTC was an exciting come-from-behind victory. After seven rounds, Team USA was tied for third place. Romania and Switzerland led with 6 out of 7 team wins. The USA was tied with Japan, Iran, and Sweden with 5 out of 7 team wins. The USA won against the U.K., Greece, Iceland, Croatia, and Mexico, and lost to Switzerland and Israel in the first seven rounds.

In Round 8, Team USA defeated Romania, making their team record 6-2 along with Romania and Switzerland. Japan, Denmark, and Iran were clustered just behind them.

In Round 9 Team USA faced the formidable Japanese team and pulled out a heart-pounding win. Steve Sax had a 2.73 PR and a dazzling win over his Japanese opponent. Steve ranks #6 out of over 500 WBIF players (former Backgammon World Champion Lars Trabolt leads the list) with an average PR of 3.16 in his play in the WTC 2019.

Art Benjamin won his Round 9 match against his Japanese opponent, and the USA needed one more win to move forward. Joe came down with a respiratory infection and had to postpone his match, but Frank “The Closer” Talbot won his match giving the USA a victory over Japan. Frank was undefeated with a 5-0 record, giving him the individual player lead. A trip to Uganda, his wife Monica’s homeland, kept him out of several rounds.

The tenth and last round was a round-robin played among the three remaining teams: USA, Switzerland, and Romania. Team USA came through with flying colors, racking up wins against both strong teams to finish in first place. Art Benjamin came through winning his match against Romania with a stunning 3.1 PR. And Neil Kazaross finished it off! ◆

- JOE RUSSELL AND KAREN DAVIS

THE WINNERS
Jack and Eli pose after their action-packed final match. Eli proudly holds his winner’s trophy, one of many he’s on track to accumulate.
The 13th annual New York Metropolitan Championship, held at the luxurious Hyatt Hotel in Jersey City, broke attendance records and also nearly broke the backs of tournament co-directors Lynn Ehrlich and Jeb Horton.

The New York Metro is usually the highest-attended ABT tournament, aided by an influx of Europeans and a massive beginner/advanced beginner contingent. This year Ehrlich shattered her own records. She had a total of 257 players: 100 in the Open (a separate ABT record), 77 Intermediates (Advanced), and 80 Advanced Beginners and Beginners.

Ever the innovator, Ehrlich tried to institute a completely digital registration process and tournament notification system. Called DeepGammon, it’s a smartphone app that replaces all paperwork including bracket charts. Unfortunately, server issues and poor WiFi connections in the ballroom prevented even the most technologically astute from using it properly. Undeterred, Ehrlich and her staff stayed up all night Friday to get everything back on paper by start of play on Saturday. Notwithstanding the problems, all the tournament directors in attendance agreed that it is the future of events, once the kinks are worked out.

From that point the tournament ran smoothly. Of a large contingent in the Championship division, Peter Naguib of Germany was the only European who cashed. The other nine places went to Americans: Saba Bejanishvili, Ron Rubin, Matt Reklaitis, Arkady Tsinis, Alan Grunwald, John Klein, Ed O’Laughlin (this guy always cashes!), Roberto Litzenberger, and Gary Bauer. Intermediates were a little more diverse: seven Americans, two Canadians, and one Frenchman. Robert Loveless of Canada took the title.

Arkady Tsinis won the Super Jackpot, Ioannis Rizos won the Masters, and Rory Pascar triumphed in the Limited Jackpot. Young Eli Karp, who had won the USBGF’s Western title in June at the Los Angeles Open—his very first tournament (see Prime Time, Fall 2019)—beat Eastern winner Jack Edelson for the title of USBGF National Champion.

Outstanding Tournament

01 He’s back. The entire backgammon community was thrilled to see Voice of Backgammon’s Larry Shiller after a year’s hiatus. His energy and enthusiasm have been missed.

02 Stroll the lobby and you are likely to run into World #2 Michy and 2012 World Champ Nevzat Dogan pondering a position.

03 For many of us, this upward-looking photo captures part of the experience of playing the tall Saba.

04 Laura Hoarty has a lot to smile about these days. Plus, she’s wearing a shirt from new vendor Backgammon Baby. It matches her board!

05 Popular Cary Hoarty’s girlfriend Clare is starting to be a welcome fixture on the BG circuit. Cary finished 2019 as ABT #3!
2020 New York Metropolitan Open

DEEPGAMMON
DeeGammon is intended to replace paper. The brackets were shown on large screens and updated in real time as players reported scores on their smartphones.

BEST FRIENDS
BFFs Candace Mayeron and Antoinette Williams. Antoinette won the Ladies Prize in Monte Carlo 2019.

EXCELLENT READ
Larsen-Silliman #86 John Klein is engrossed in Bob Wachtel’s new book. You can purchase it at most tournaments or on Amazon.

DOUBLES WINNERS
Ghazi Al-Kinani (VA, playing the checkers) and John Klein (MD) won the Doubles.
Filmmaker Alia Azamat stays connected while supporting hubby Victor Ashkenazi at the New York Metro.

01

David Stein of Chicago sold his company and plans on attending many more tournaments in 2020.

02

Ray Pasternak, from Philadelphia, is often seen on the Advanced circuit.

03

Eric Petersen of Beverly Hills, CA.

04

Retractable promotional banners adorned the room.

07

Marcy Wertheimer (NY) plays Advanced Beginner division. In all, there were 80 players in Advanced Beginner and Novice divisions.

05

Stunning in green sequins. How will Leyla Zaloufksaya ever top this? (She will find a way.)

06

Peggy Neubig and Martha Ghio.

09

Two-time winner Kimon Papachristopoulos did not have the kind of results he expected this year.

08

Albert Steg and Frank Talbot.

10

Jay Robinson.

11

Carter Mattig has an even bigger smile, trailing 0-7 to Chris Trencher!

13

Backgammon legend Kent Goulding always comes out for the NY Metro.

14

Chris Trencher is smiling. He's leading Carter Mattig 7-0.

12

Marcy Kossar loves the NY tournament and says she wouldn't miss it for anything!

15

World Championship organizer Patti Rubin helped out, while the NY tournament directors were converting from electronic to paper brackets.

16

John Savio photobombs Lynn Ehrlich (center) and her sister, Bonnie Bayuk. Bonnie tirelessly works on Lynn's tournament staff.

17

Steve Nelson of Hong Kong.

18
Virtual Twin Cities Backgammon

By Jeff Spencer

Our club is more than just a place to play a game. Twin Cities Backgammon is a vibrant community. We’re actually more of a family. In the new world of COVID-19 and social distancing, our members have felt a real hole in their lives. We have missed each other terribly. So, our team of local directors, Yury Millman, Jeff Spencer, and April and Michael Mesich (yeah, they got married if you hadn’t heard) stepped up to meet the needs of the members of the Twin Cities Backgammon Club. We weren’t going to just hunker down and lose track of each other, sheltering in place without having a backgammon outlet! We’ve had a weekly tournament for 50 years and we’ve had two weekly tournaments for three years. We weren’t going to let that solid growth wither in the face of a microscopic virus.

Meeting Together Online

We wanted to keep the experience of meeting and socializing. And we wanted the tournament to begin and end in one night. Chat rooms are fine for text, but voice is so much better. Discord is an app that really fit the bill. It allows for chat rooms, Voice Over IP group calls (up to 50), and so much more. It’s used by online gamers all the time, so it’s an incredibly stable platform. And best of all, it’s free. (Our club sprang for the $100/year upgrade to boost audio quality, etc.)

Entry Fees

Making online payments is pretty much a no-brainer. There are a lot of choices there. We settled on one method, in order to keep the accounting as clean and transparent as possible. When you have multiple payment methods it gets really confusing really fast.

Brackets

The next problem was setting up tournament brackets and communicating them in real time. Challonge handles that nicely. We were able to create the brackets in a matter of minutes and embed them into our website so that participants can see who they are playing and who their next opponent will be. Nice.

Playing Online

This is another no-brainer. The players in each match can choose any platform they want Backgammon Galaxy, Grid Gammon, Backgammon Studio, Safe Harbor Games, or any other platform. In the Discord app, the players can do a private voice call, so they can talk to each other during the match if they want to, almost as if they were playing live.

Chouettes

After players get knocked out, they can create a pick-up chouette from within Discord. We even have a shareable Google Spreadsheet that manages multiple cubes.

The Take-Away

Backgammon goes on. And we love our club. Check out twincitiesbackgammon.com for more information about how it works. We’re keeping our local online tournaments small and local. We’re planning on having larger weekend events, but more will be revealed. We’ll post information on our website as soon as it is available. Maybe you could start an online tournament for your local club. Spread the fun, not the virus.

– JEFF SPENCER
A Pro’s Prose

Book Review

THE BACKGAMMON CHRONICLES

A Pro’s Prose

By Jake Jacobs

The Backgammon Chronicles: A Pro’s Prose

about you, if you relieved yourself next to where he was eating his
breakfast. For his part, Bob would air the place out by throwing
open the windows, the front door, and the sliding glass doors to
the patio. I would stumble out in late afternoon, reacting about
the way Dracula would if he found sunlight and fresh air in his
crypt. I pointed out that in all the years Munchkin owned the place
it never needed airing, so why start now? With the windows and
doors open Noodge and Toto might run away. Was that a glimmer
in Bob’s eye, and the trace of a smile when I said that?

Ours was an ill-fated domestic arrangement, which was a shame,
because it was only later, long after he moved out, that I discovered
my mysterious roommate with respiratory issues was the bright,
funny, and talented Mr. Wachtel. Just as it took time to recognize
all of that, it took time for me to discover the treasure trove of
articles in his new, two-volume compendium.

During last year’s voting for the Backgammon Hall of Fame (a
day season known in my house as Passover, and that is the only time
you will catch me stealing a joke from Bob Hope), I noted that
Steve Sax is credited with one hundred and twenty-five articles
written for GammonVillage. Knowing what it takes to produce
one hundred and twenty-five articles, I was impressed, and aston-
ished. I have read quite a few articles by Steve, but would never
have guessed his output had reached such a number. As I am on
a quest to become backgammon’s “most prolific author,” if I haven’t
already achieved that rank, I am aware that the competition –
Danny, Bill, Kit, and Chris, the other members of the “over two
thousand pages club” – have output more obvious to the public
because of a secret: they put their stuff in books! I have two books
in my credit, but have enough published material to fill another
two dozen. If I were smart, I would edit it and begin issuing
articles in his new, two-volume compendium.

Once upon a time, backgammon was glamorous! The first great
tournament director of the modern era was a Russian prince, and
the players he gathered to compete were members of the jet set.
Even as the game spread to coach class, there was the possibility
of an upgrade: tonight, the Tuesday tournament at Beef ‘N Barrel,
tomorrow Faces discotheque! People played for money in those
days. Backgammon was a battle for supremacy, and a player’s
做到, quiz sets, and textbooks. “Which is a shame, since the game
almost devoid of storytelling.” In book form, I’d agree. There is
Lewis Deyong’s proto-canonical Playboy’s Book of Backgammon,
and my own A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Four-
Point!” There is a recent memoir by Gnarly Prime. It’s not much
gold after sifting through what Bob calls “a spartan diet of manu-
als, quiz sets, and textbooks.” This is a shame, since the game
love is filled with fascinating people, doing unusual things in
exotic settings. Sure, it has its share of badly dressed nerds, and
chain hotels in characterless suburbs, serving eggs scrambled from
rubber chickens and odd g EZY potato cubies in their breakfast
buffets. Yet among all that are a constant stream of mini-dramas
and Shakespearean tragedies unfolding (“Then I danced for
the fourth time on his two-point board!”), if you care to look.
Bob skips the badly dressed nerds (not always: see page 60 of Vol-
ume One!), and the greasy potatoes, to take us to Asgardstrand,
Enghiennes-Bains, or Montreux. While doing so he provides
vivid descriptions of his travels, gives insights into the thinking
of the players he encounters, and imparts his personal philosophy
of backgammon.

A

crally, the proper subtitle is not “A Pro’s Prose,” it’s “A
Pro’s Adventures on Tour,” but parroting the original
would be a dull way of reviewing an exhilarating book.
The pro is Robert Wachtel. I got to know Bob the usual way one
gets to know backgammon pros: he moved into a bedroom down
the hall. The year was 1984, the city was Las Vegas, the rooms
were in a condo belonging to my brother, Richard Munchkin,
and bringing us together was a project launched by a mutual friend,
Craig Chellistorp, one of the unsung titans of backgammon in that
era. Craig had decided that I needed a roommate. I had a pair of
roommates just then, Noodge and Toto, cats my brother had left as
a legacy when he moved to L.A. They were spooky and shy, given
to hiding behind the sofa whenever they sensed human presence.
Bob was bemused, sardonic, and never hid behind the sofa (or at
least if he did, I never caught him), so he was easy to distinguish
from the cats. Craig decided Bob had to learn to play blackjack,
so that he could make Craig rich. Making that decision was the
tough, executive part; providing a room for Bob and teaching him
how to play a winning game, those easy tasks Craig delegated to
me. I had a couple of spare rooms, could use the spare cash, and
when it came to teaching, Bob had already learned how to count
cards. He’s quick that way. I believe I showed him how to shuffle
track, but that would have been all the training he needed.

We were not ideal roommates, sort of Oscar and Felix from The
Odd Couple, one neat, one a slob. Despite being the Oscar, I was
the one who cleaned. Every month or two I would run an aged
vacuum over the carpets, and use wet paper towels to wipe sur-
faces in the kitchen and bathrooms, and so keep the place fresh
and festive. It was the other differences that mattered. I slept until
late afternoon, when it was time for the first cigarette of the day.
Twenty years of smoking had dulled my sense of smell, so I was
not always alert to the need to change the kitty litter box, a box
placed strategically between the kitchen and dining room (which
were a combined fifty square feet, so it was hard to miss). Bob
was a non-smoker, a fresh-air fiend, an exercise buff, an early
riser, and most importantly, not a cat lover. The cats he didn’t love
were Noodge and Toto, though he might have felt the same way

Even as the game spread to coach class, there was the possibility
of an upgrade: tonight, the Tuesday tournament at Beef ‘N Barrel,
tomorrow Faces discotheque! People played for money in those
days. Backgammon was a battle for supremacy, and a player’s
The Backgammon Chronicles: A Pro’s Prose
This example comes from page 66 of Volume One. It occurred in a $50-a-point game at the Cavendish West, an L.A. club, in 1980. Bob was Black, and White was an Australian bookie who redoubled in this two-checker versus two-checker position. Bob took, and lost. His opponent couldn’t believe Bob took the cube, and offered the following proposition: “I’ll give you 3 to 1 money odds, your $100 to my $300.” Backgammon players learn with their mother’s milk that a cube should be taken with a 25% chance of winning, or in 1 of 4; the explanation running something like this: If you pass four times, you are minus four, but if you take four times you lose three times two points, minus six, and win two points one time, for net loss of four points. No doubt the bookie reasoned that if Bob lost more than 75% of the time, he would lose more than $300 in slightly more than three losing games, while collecting less than $300 on the less than one game in four he won back.

There were a couple of problems with his reasoning. The first is: it’s a take. Bob will win more than one game in four. Two shakes (three misses) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths. That parlay alone gets Bob up to 328.333/1296, making it a take. There are additional chances after White throws any other ace, and after 32 and 42. Bob has over 30% winning chances.

The second problem with his logic is that offering odds does not work if there is a live cube, the first thing that occurred to me when I read it, and something that occurred to Bob much later, which he discusses. Suppose White throws one of his thirty misses. Black should redouble! That seems crazy as a 10-to-26 underdog, but it isn’t. If Bob holds the cube (I assume at 2 since the Australian bookie was not always gin. For instance, if he threw a 21, he’d be left with a 5,2 bearoff, that’s two (the 21 roll) times thirty (Black’s misses) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths. If Bob chooses gin (the 21 roll) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths. If Bob chooses gin (Black’s misses) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths.

It is worse than that for White if he plays correctly. Peter, my roommate, said: “Gee, I thought it was better to leave a 5,2?” “That’s because you’re a beginner!” his opponent snorted. They got into the habit of drawing upon the assembled wisdom of the expert players, showing them positions, and soliciting their thinking. One of them, Falafel, dubbed these sessions Bob’s “chronicles,” essays form the body of the two volumes. During these events he discusses. Suppose White throws one of his thirty misses. Black should redouble! That seems crazy as a 10-to-26 underdog, but it isn’t. If Bob holds the cube (I assume at 2 since the Australian bookie was not always gin. For instance, if he threw a 21, he’d be left with a 5,2 bearoff, that’s two (the 21 roll) times thirty (Black’s misses) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths. If Bob chooses gin (the 21 roll) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths. If Bob chooses gin (Black’s misses) times 17/36, or twenty-eight and one-third more 1296ths.

Misplaying a 21 to leave 4,3 instead of 5,2; no one would do that! Would they? Oddly enough, in that same era at the Cavendish Club, another of my former roommates was playing for dimes, when his opponent on roll with 6,5,3 rolled a 61 and played 6/off, 5/4 instead of 3/2. Then rolled 43 on his next shake to win, with a number that would have failed had he played correctly. Peter, my roommate, said: “Gee, I thought it was better to leave a 5,2?” “That’s because you’re a beginner!” his opponent snorted. They propped play versus play, rolling out each side over and over, discussing in the essay: “How Computers Changed Backgammon.” Fortunately, he was and is an adaptable fellow, and as the clubs and discos faded, new doors opened online, as he recounts in “The Online Survival Guide.” Online play was, especially for Americans, brief, at least play of the remunerative sort, and for a pro, what other sort is worth discussing? But these changes brought about another adaptation, leading to the best part of the books.

The backgammon scene that flourished in the aftermath of the computer revolution was a vibrant tournament culture. The largest and best tournaments were in Europe, and Bob was impelled to travel, to observe, and to recount what he experienced. These essays form the body of the two volumes. During these events he got into the habit of drawing upon the assembled wisdom of the expert players, showing them positions, and soliciting their thinking. One of them, Falafel, dubbed these sessions Bob’s “chronicles,” providing the title for his books. Strictly speaking, at least if we go strictly by Merriam-Webster, a chronicle is: “a historical account of events arranged in order of time usually without analysis or interpretation.” Fear not! There is plenty of analysis and interpretation. And there is quite a bit more. Without the changing backgammon world, Bob might never have traveled to the far corners of the world, Bob might never have traveled to the far corners of the world, Bob might never have traveled to the far corners of the world, Bob might never have traveled to the far corners of the world.
The Backgammon Chronicles: A Pro’s Prose

Earth, and we might never have enjoyed passages such as this, in an introduction to a tournament in Gibraltar.

To give the story a little context, let’s back up 10 million years or so. The continents, floating around on their tectonic plates, were, as usual, butting into one another. This time it was Africa’s turn. It collided with Europe in the region of what is now Spain, creating a land bridge that closed off the Mediterranean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean. The Mediterranean dried up, but only for about 5 million years. Then somehow a little channel, or strait, developed in the land bridge. The Atlantic flowed back in. The Mediterranean was back in business, leaving Europe nicely poised for the development of civilization and backgammon.

I don’t know about you, but after reading that I am dying to know what happens next!

Some of the tournaments he visited every year, and reading about them is like viewing instalments in a serial. The Nordic Open in particular, unfolds as an ongoing story, because it features an especially dramatic and interesting event, Denmark versus the World. These matchups between the best of the best include individual matches, speedgammon matches, 1-point matches, and consulting doubles matches. Then the cumulative points for each team are the starting point for a final team-versus-team match, all players consulting and thus offering insight into the thinking of the best minds in backgammon. The battle in 2014 is described on pages 119 to 142 of Volume Two. The teams were: Mochy, Michy, Falafel, MCG, David Wells, Victor Ashkenazi, Perko Kostadinov, Bill Phipps, and Bob; for the Danes Thomas Kristensen, Marc Olsen, Freddie Noer, Thomas Myhr, Lars Trabolt, Mik Larsen, and Sander Lylløff. Gus Hansen missing in action.

World entered the final round with a 12 – 0 lead in a match to 17. The first game was filled with fascinating and difficult decisions. The following was my favorite.

The World is Black, leading 12 – 0 to 17, and owns a 4-cube. I am not sure how much time the teams were allotted, but by the time this beauty came up, World was under time pressure. They have a 51 to play, and must decide, after playing 11/6*, whether to hit a third checker 6/5*, or bear off from the 1pt.

Staying on the 6pt leaves 13 shots, all 6s plus 44 and 22. Going to the 5pt leaves only 11. But there are 13 repeaters from the 5pt, versus 8 from the 6pt. Bob adds that there are also repeaters if White throws a 5 without a 6, and then Black rolls 44 or 41. He misses the rare variation where White rolls 44 after Black hits the third checker, and then Black rolls 31 or 11.

I suspect that rattling around in their noggins, like a BB trying to find its way into the clown’s mouth, was a bit of received wisdom from positions like the following, where the choice of how to play an ace is similar to the World’s choice in Position 3: to bear an extra checker off, or hit.
Position 4

Score | Pips
Money White | 76
Money Black | 13

Hit for the gammon, or bear off two checkers for more post-hit wins?

In a money game, how should Black play his ace? Baring off two checkers is very slightly better than hitting, it is almost pick-’em. But the extra checker, going from 7 to 8 off, adds 3% winning chances, so at DMP it is clear. At a gammon-go score hitting would be correct. (Gammon-go scores are those such as 2-away, Crawford, where the opponent gets nothing extra for winning a gammon, but the trailer’s gammon is worth the equivalent of an extra game, since he wins the match instead of getting to DMP.)

At any rate the extra secondary shots left by the other play, and the extra checker off, led them to hit on the 6pt and bear off from the 1pt.

Meanwhile, one of the Danes had gone to the bar to buy a beer, not his first, and when he returned he offered to bet that hitting the third checker was correct. Sander, for he was the beer-loving Dane, wound up with 7000 euros worth of action. (As an aside, I have had players leave the room, and return suspiciously eager to bet against me, but I would trust any of the players named on either team to have not consulted a bot during their absence.)

When Black plays to the 5pt and White misses 25 times, Black leaves 13 repeaters. That’s 325/1296. There is also White’s 44 followed by 31 or 11, so 328/1296. When Black stops on the 6pt and White misses 23 times, Black leaves 8 repeaters, plus there are the times White rolls a 5 without a 6, so 9 numbers times Black’s 41 or 11. That’s 211/1296. Black leaves an extra 117/1296 secondary shots on the 5pt. However, White will hit when left shots more often when Black stops on the 6pt and leaves a repeater. Those calculations are tedious, so I relied on rounding and estimation. I believe White will hit a Black repeater when Black goes to the 5pt about 13 times on average, and 13/36 x 328 is about 118/1296. If Black stops on the 6pt, when he leaves a repeater White will hit on average more than 16/36. Using 16/36 x 211 we have about 94/1296, so Black is leaving roughly a net 2/3 of a shot more repeaters. However, I was conservative with White’s hits on Black’s 6pt repeaters; I believe it is more like 16.5 shots. Also, there are variations where when Black repeats after hitting on the 5pt, he has more checkers off. Compare the sequence 5pt*, miss, 33, with 6pt*, miss, 44 or 22. So in all Black leaves the equivalent, between primary and secondary shots, of more than 1.5 total hits if he stops on the 6pt.

There are two other factors regarding primary hits. If Black is hit immediately, White might pick up a second checker, and there are slightly more secondary variations where this could happen when Black stops on the 6pt. And if Black hits three, White may hit, but remain on the bar longer, limiting his ability to exploit his capture.

The essays in these volumes were written between 2009 and the present, some never appearing elsewhere. Most, though, appeared either online at LogicEmpire, or in the USBGF’s magazine Prime-Time Backgammon. The last of his tournament chronicles is from 2017, and currently Bob is unaffiliated with any journal. Once again, he is transitioning and adapting. For our sakes I hope that he will continue to travel, and to write, so that in the near future I can review Volumes Three and Four of his ongoing adventures.

- JAKE JACOBS


ABOUT JAKE JACOBS

Jake Jacobs is a prolific writer well known to those in the backgammon community for his wit and insight. He also manages interconnected companies in Singapore and Japan. Mr. Jacobs spends a lot of time in Tokyo but lives in Singapore with his wife Khampha and daughter Sasithon.
In this article, I will share with you my method for memorizing any Match Equity Table (MET). The beauty of this system is that it is based on words instead of numbers so no mental math is required. This is especially useful since you often have to do other mental calculation over the board (pip counts, counting shots, estimating win probabilities) so it is nice to be able to access these numbers without doing any explicit calculations. Also, the system will work with any table of numbers, so even if some numbers in the given MET are tweaked (by you or by popular consensus), you don't have to throw away a formula.

Although this table has 81 entries, more than half of the entries are superfluous. All the numbers on the diagonal are 50, since you have a 50% chance of winning (against an equal opponent) when the score is tied. Also, the winning chances for the leader and trailer must add to 100%, so all the entries below the diagonal can be ignored. For example, if you know that at 2-away, 4-away, the leader wins 67% of the time, then the trailer will win 33% of the time.

The entries in the first row and column refer to the Crawford scores, since the numbers that arise in the post-Crawford scores are almost never needed when it comes to cube decisions. Indeed I cannot recall a single situation where I have ever needed those numbers over the board.

The most important numbers to learn are the 10 red numbers that arise within a 5-point match since these are the scores that you will encounter most often. I recommend learning these numbers first before taking on the new scores that arise in longer matches. If you haven't memorized those numbers yet, then I recommend using the method in this article.

Before we get into the details of the system, I want you to go over the list of word pairs.

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<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please read through the above list several times so that when you hear the first word, you instantly think of the second word in the pair. So if the first word is MORE, you are reminded of the word LUCK. Go ahead and quiz yourself right now. Cover the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Pair</th>
<th>Word Pair</th>
<th>Word Pair</th>
<th>Word Pair</th>
<th>Word Pair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINY SHOVE</td>
<td>TINY SHOVE</td>
<td>TINY SHOVE</td>
<td>TINY SHOVE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAR CHEEK</td>
<td>NEAR CHEEK</td>
<td>NEAR CHEEK</td>
<td>NEAR CHEEK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME KILL</td>
<td>TIME KILL</td>
<td>TIME KILL</td>
<td>TIME KILL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAIL CAR</td>
<td>NAIL CAR</td>
<td>NAIL CAR</td>
<td>NAIL CAR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIRE FOOT</td>
<td>TIRE FOOT</td>
<td>TIRE FOOT</td>
<td>TIRE FOOT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td>MORE LUCK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TALL FIRE</td>
<td>TALL FIRE</td>
<td>TALL FIRE</td>
<td>TALL FIRE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLLY JOLLY</td>
<td>MOLLY JOLLY</td>
<td>MOLLY JOLLY</td>
<td>MOLLY JOLLY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME CHEESE</td>
<td>NAME CHEESE</td>
<td>NAME CHEESE</td>
<td>NAME CHEESE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REAL LIFE</td>
<td>REAL LIFE</td>
<td>REAL LIFE</td>
<td>REAL LIFE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
second word in each pair with your hand. Then look at the first word and try to remember the second word. Got it? Okay, now for the fun stuff.

The system I use for memorizing METs is through a phonetic code that turns numbers into words. Memory experts call it the major system and it has been in the English language since the early 19th Century. In the major system, every digit from 0 to 9 is assigned one or more consonant sounds.

1 t or d
2 n
3 m
4 r
5 L
6 j, ch, sh
7 k or hard g
8 f or v
9 p or b
0 s or z

There are even mnemonics (memory aids) for learning this list. For example, a typewritten t has 1 downstroke (and the t sound is phonetically similar to the d sound), the letter n has 2 downstrokes, the letter m has 3 downstrokes, the word “four” ends in r, raising 5 fingers creates an L between your index finger and your thumb; a backwards 6 resembles the letter j; 7 rhymes with Kevin; 8 looks like a cursive f; you can flip a 9 to get the letter p or b; 0 begins with the letter z. If you study this list with these mnemonics for just a few minutes, you will know the code backwards and forwards and have a very powerful memory tool, which we shall soon explore.

By the way, I sometimes tell people that this code was taught to me by Tony Marloshkovips, but that’s just a name I created from the consonant sounds listed in order. Now before you read any more of this article, please memorize the above list. Now.

Once you have memorized the phonetic code, you can convert numbers into words by simply inserting vowel sounds wherever you like. For instance, the number 12, using the t (or d) sound and the n sound can be turned into literally dozens of words like: TINY, TIN, TAN, TUNE, TUNA, TEEN, DEN, DIN, DON, DUNE, DEENA, DINE, DONE, DANNY, DONNA, EDEN, and more. The number 68 which uses the sh sound and the f sound can be turned into words like: SHOVE, SHAVE, SHIV, CHEF, CHIEF, JEFF, JAVA, JIVE, and more. Notice that although a number can be represented by several words, a word can only be converted back to a single number. For instance, the word SHOVE can only be represented by the number 68.

Now let’s apply the phonetic code to memorizing the MET. How do we memorize that at the Crawford score of 1-Away/2-Away, the leader’s winning chances are 68%? First, convert the score 12 into the word TINY. From the word pairs that we memorized earlier, TINY reminds you of SHOVE, which has number 68. The table below contains all the scores that can occur in a 5-point match. What are the chances at 2-away/3-away? 23 becomes the word NAME which reminds us of CHEESE which translates into 60. So the leader has a 60% chance and therefore the trailer has a 40% chance.

If you haven’t done so already, study these 10 word pairs so that when you hear the first word, you think of the second word. Naturally you are welcome to change the words as long as they are consistent with the phonetic code. For instance, for the 3-away/5-away score, you can replace MOLLY with anything that uses M and L sound, like MAIL, MALL, MEAL, MELLOW, MILE, MOLE, or MULE. And JOLLY can be a word like JAIL, GEL, SHELL, or JELLO. So if you find it easier to remember MAIL JELLO, or MULE JAIL, feel free to do so. Once you know these 10 word pairs, you know all the match equities that can occur in a 5-point match. What are the chances at 2-away/3-away? 23 becomes the word NAME which reminds us of CHEESE which translates into 60. So the leader has a 60% chance and therefore the trailer has a 40% chance.

Once you have mastered this list, it’s time to learn the new scores that can occur in a 7-point match (shown in blue in the original table). See the following table and the associated mnemonics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Away</th>
<th>Trailer Away</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Assoc Word</th>
<th>Leader's Chances</th>
<th>Trailer's Chances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>TINY</td>
<td>SHOVE</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>KILL</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>TIRE</td>
<td>FOOT</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>TALL</td>
<td>FIRE</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>CHEESE</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NEAR</td>
<td>CHEEK</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NAIL</td>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MORE</td>
<td>LUCK</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MOLLY</td>
<td>JOLLY</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>REAL</td>
<td>LIFE</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DORIS AUER
Remember that the code is based on pronunciation, not on spelling, so a word like MAGI, though spelled with a G, uses the J sound. If that’s too confusing, then you could remember the 36 score with a mnemonic like MASH CAT. By the way, it’s also perfectly acceptable to add consonant sounds to the end of your word if it makes the word more memorable. For example, with the 46 score, I actually use the mnemonic RICH JERK. Even though the word JERK would translate back into 647, I simply ignore the 7 at the end. Likewise, for the 47 score you could use a pair like ROCK CASINO and for 67, I use CHECK LOTION.

Once you have mastered the pairs above, you can learn the new scores that appear in a 9-point match. Since most of the matches that I play online or at my local club are 7 points or below, these scores do not get reinforced as much so I will sometimes review these mnemonics before playing a longer match.

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Hopefully now the opening paragraph of this article makes more sense. If your opponent drops your 8-cube, they will be trailing 5-0, putting them 4-away/9-away. Should they take your cube and play for the match? At the 49 score, you remember ROBO, which reminds you of COP, which is 79%. This means that your opponent should take the cube if their winning chances are 21% or better. Since the position is a clear pass for money, then their winning chances are below 21%, so they should pass at this score as well. Consequently, you should double at this score and hope that they take.

Suppose we faced the same situation but the score was 2-0, how would that change our decisions? Now, if you double and they drop, the score would be 6-0 (3-Away/9-Away). From the 39 score, we create the word MAP and the MAP-FIRE pair tells us that your winning chances would be 84%. Thus, they would need 16% to take and play for the match. How big a race lead would you need to double in that sort of situation? We’ll save that topic for a future article.

- ART BENJAMIN
About Art

Art Benjamin, math professor at Harvey Mudd College, is one of backgammon’s foremost contributors as well as a fine player. He has been a member of the USBGF Board of Directors since 2011. He currently chairs its Governance and Nominating Committee, and is a Diamond Founding Sponsor.

He has supported intercollegiate play and propelled successful outreach efforts to professional mathematicians. He won the 1997 ABT championship, placing second in 1993 and third in 1996, and has had many good results since then. He loves to invent quick and easy counting and memorization methods for backgammon.

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LIVE ABT TOURNAMENT RESULTS

January 2020

ABT - 13th NEW YORK METROPOLITAN BACKGAMMON OPEN
January 9-12, 2020; Jersey City, New Jersey

CHAMPIONSHIP (100+40 rebuys): 1-Saba Bejanishvili (GA), 2-Ron Rubin (NV), 3/Matt Reklaitis (MA) / Arkadiy Tsinis (FL); 1C-Peter Naguib (Germany), 2C-Alan Grunwald (NJ), 3C/4C-John Klein (MD) / Ed O’Laughlin (VA); 1LC-Roberto Litzenberger (VA), 2LC-Gary Bauer (NY).

INTERMEDIATE (77+31 rebuys): 1-Robert Loveless (Canada), 2-Shahrooz Moreh (NY), 3/P.J. Macali (OH) / Tara Mendicino (TX); 1C-Daniel Adler (NY), 2C-Murat Kemalhodoglu (NY), 3C/4C-Scott Douglas (Canada) / Tom Rebelo (Douglas); 1LC-Rick Wolf (FL), 2LC-Aurelien Cardoso (France).

ADVANCED BEGINNER (54): 1-Kai Demler (NY), 2-Lisa Pelaiz (NY), 3-Makoto Nozaki (NY); 1C-Ralph D’Onofrio (NY), 2C-Jonathan Berkowitz (NY); 1LC-Nick Paleos (NY).

BEGINNER (26): 1-Jordan McCollom (CT), 2-José Ward (NJ); 1C-Jamie Rosen (NJ), 2C-Makoto Nozaki (NY); 1LC-Jayne Herrick (NY), 2LC-Sheryl Glenn.

SUPER JACKPOT (24): 1-Arkadiy Tsinis (FL), 2/3-Blake Fleetwood (NY) / Atakhan Ismailov (NY).


LIMITED JACKPOT (48): 1-Rory Pascar (IL), 2/3-Igor Baburov (NY) / Joe Freedman (NM), 4/6-Felix Goykhman (NJ) / Irina Litzenberger (VA) / Howard Markowitz (NV).


USBGF 2-POINT MINI-MATCH: Final Four split: Garry Kallos (Canada) / Ed O’Laughlin (VA) / Phil Simborg (FL) / Nick Paleos (NY) or Andrew Swanson (NJ).

Live ABT Tournament Results

NEW YORK DOUBLES OVERFLOW (16 teams): 1-George Garami (FL) & Rick Wolf (FL), 2-Kent Goulding (MD) & Mike Senkiewicz (NY).


SENIORS TOURNAMENT (64): 1-Robert Loveless (Canada), 2-Paul Polatov (NY), 3/4-Farah forudi (OH) / P.J. Macali (OH).

USBGF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFIER PLAYOFF: 1-Howard Linnemann (NY), 2-Robert Loveless (Canada).

SUPER SENIORS TOURNAMENT I (8): 1-Phil Simborg (FL).

SUPER SENIORS TOURNAMENT II (4): 1/2-Carol Joy Cole (MI) / Howard Markowitz (NV).

FTH BOARD TOURNAMENT (16): 1-David Shadi (NJ), 2-Jordan Cohn (NJ).

$200 JACKPOT (8): 1-Jim Stutz (CT).

$100 JACKPOT (8): 1-Herb Roman (IL).

$100 JACKPOT (8): 1/2-Steve Nelson (Hong Kong) / Philippe Salnave (FL).

$50 JACKPOT (8): 1-Alexandra Knupfer (Switzerland).

$50 JACKPOT (8): 1-Mark Megalli (NY).

$50 JACKPOT (8): 1-David Tuminaro (DE).


$50 JACKPOT (8): 1-Cornel Paltinisanu (Romania).

$50 JACKPOT (8): 1/2-Roberto Litzenberger (VA) / Rodney Workman (IL).

NOVICE (12): 1-Jeremy Krieger (OR), 2-Mary Kay Lively (TX), 3-Michelle Hearn (TX), 4-Robert Gonzalez (TX).

MALCOLM DAVIS LONGHORN MASTERS JACKPOT (32): 1-Victor Ashkenazi (NJ), 2-Boris Dekhtyar (NY), 3/4-Christopher Trencher (NY) / Kit Woolsey (CA).

ALAMO CLASSIC LIMITED JACKPOT (32): 1-Gary Oleson (TX), 2-John Bird (TX), 3/4-Cem Aslan (TX) / Ami Ben-Ari (CO).

TEXAS CLASSIC ADVANCED JACKPOT (29): 1-Mike Snow (TX), 2-Kevin McDonough (AZ), 3/4-Scott Neal (TX) / Joe Potts (TX).

SAN ANTONIO CINCO DOUBLES (32 teams): 1-Cary Hoarty (OH) & Laura Hoarty (FL), 2-Marc Emrich (CO) & Dan Minardi (CO), 3/4-Irina & Roberto Litzenberger (VA) / Paul Mangone (CA) & Kara Schultz (CA).


SPEEDGAMMON (64): 1-Rory Pascar (IL), 2-Mark Ferrin (TX), 3/4-Rudy Langenbach (TX) / Jonah Seewald (CO).

FIESTA MIXED BLITZ (64): 1-Doug Mayfield (CA), 2-Ray Fogerlund (NV).

USBGF DMP PRIME TOURNAMENT (96): 1-Aaron Foust (NV), 2-Ed O’Laughlin (VA), 3-Don Marek (IL).

AWARDS NIGHT FREEROLL TOURNAMENT (48): 1-Cary Hoarty (OH).


TEXAS SHOWDOWN POINTS POOL (11): 1-Jonah Seewald (CO).

$100 JACKPOT #1 (4): 1-Dana Nazarian (CA).

$100 JACKPOT #2 (4): 1-Carol Joy Cole (MI).

$100 JACKPOT #3 (4): 1-Jose Farca (Mexico).


USBGF LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: Phil Simborg (FL).
February 2020

**ABT - 4th BOSTON OPEN - MASSACHUSETTS STATE BACKGAMMON CHAMPIONSHIPS**
February 13-16, 2020; Boston, Massachusetts

**OPEN (40):**
1-Doug Roberts (MA), 2-Stephen Hassman (MA), 3/4-Frank DiMaggio (NY) / Ray Fogerlund (NV); 1C-Boris Dekhtyar (NY), 2C-Allen Tish (CA); 1LC-Clement McNally (FL), 2LC-Leyla Zaloutskaya (NY).

**ADVANCED (32):**
1-Alia Azamat (NJ), 2-Tom Rebelo (Canada); 1C-Marcy Kossar (MD), 2C-Bill Barrows (MA); 1LC-Stephen Douglas (MA).

**NOVICE (6):**
1-Dan Whitney (CT), 2-Scout Jones (CT), 3-Mykuhl Henderson (MA).

**ACE OF HEARTS SUPER JACKPOT (4):**
1-Bill Robertie (MA).

**HERB GURLAND MEMORIAL MASTERS (16):**
1-Michael Neagu (Canada), 2-Marty Storer (NH).

**SWEETHEART DOUBLES (16 teams):**
1-Garry Kallos (Canada) & Allen Tish (CA), 2-Ryan Rebelo (Canada) & Tom Rebelo (Canada).

**QUIET QUICKY (8):**
1-Albert Steg (MA).

**SASSY SPEEDGAMMON (8):**
1-Allen Tish (CA).

**SEDUCTIVE SENIORS (16):**
1-Marcy Kossar (MD), 2-John Pirner (MN).

**JEALOUS JUNIORS (16):**
1-Vinson Blanton (VA), 2-Carl Blumenstein (CA).

**OPTIMISTIC OPEN JACKPOT (8):**
1-Roberto Litzenberger (VA), 2-Leyla Zaloutskaya (NY).

**LOVEABLE LIMITED JACKPOT (8):**
1-Ryan Rebelo (Canada).

**NUTTY NOVICE JACKPOT (4):**
1-Dan Whitney (CT).

**KING OF HEARTS (4):**
1-Patrick Enright (WA).

**QUEEN OF HEARTS (4):**
1-Irina Litzenberger (VA). Patrick Enright won the Playoff Trophy.

**USBGF FREE ROLL (32):**
1-Roberto Litzenberger (VA), 2-Tom Rebelo (Canada).

**PASSION PRE-TOURNEY (16):**
1-Donny Lomuto (NY); 1C-Frank DiMaggio (NY).

March 2020

**ABT - 2nd SACRAMENTO BACKGAMMON CHAMPIONSHIP**
March 6-8, 2020; Sacramento, California

**OPEN (17):**
1-Ted Chee (CA), 2-Terry Stigall (CA); 1C-Allen Tish (CA); 1LC-Ray Fogerlund (NV).

**ADVANCED (16):**
1-Tom Tseng (CA), 2-Richard Loomer (CA); 1C-David Parks (CA); 1LC-Ely Johnson (CA).

**NOVICE (3):**
1-Robert Alvord (CA), 2-Trevor Dahl (CA).

**MASTERS (18):**
1-Ted Chee (CA), 2-Ken Bame (CA).

**BMAB (USA) #13 (10):**
1-Ray Fogerlund (NV), 2/4-Art Benjamin (CA) / Carl Blumenstein (CA) / David Parks (CA). PR winners: Kit Woolsey at 3.83; Art Benjamin at 4.78; Ray Fogerlund at 5.07.

**DMP QUICKIES (8):**
1-Ted Hwa (CA).

**SPEEDGAMMON I (16):**
1-Gary Koscielny (FL).

**SPEEDGAMMON II (8):**
1-Ted Chee (CA).

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**JOINT MATH IN DENVER**

Art Benjamin, a member of the USBGF Board of Directors, organizes a backgammon social event at the annual Joint Math Meetings. Colorado Backgammon Club director Dan Minardi, and fellow Denver club members, brought boards and helped teach backgammon to math professors and graduate students at this year’s event in Denver.
The U.S. Backgammon Federation provides added money of $5 per USBGF member for an annual tournament held by local affiliated clubs with ten or more USBGF members designated as Qualifying Prime Clubs, to help promote the growth of backgammon in their communities. For more information, contact Ray Bills at raybills1959@gmail.com.

SOUTH FLORIDA BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Karen Davis
Location: Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Phone: (954) 488-5364
E-Mail: karen@usbgf.org
Website: Sun Florida BG
Details: The South Florida Backgammon Club has 63 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the South Florida Backgammon Club, email Karen at karen@usbgf.org.

CHICAGO BAR POINT CLUB
Director: Amy Trudeau
Location: Niles, Illinois
Phone: (773) 583-6464
E-Mail: online@chicagopoint.com
Website: chicagopoint.com
Details: The Chicago Bar Point Club has 41 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Chicago Bar Point Club, please visit chicagopoint.com/bpc.html.

BACKGAMMON BY THE BAY
Director: Ted Chee
Location: San Francisco Bay Area, California
Phone: (831) 261-4583
E-Mail: ted@bgbythebay.com
Website: bgbythebay.com
Details: Backgammon By the Bay has 40 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about Backgammon By the Bay, email Ted at ted@bgbythebay.com.

BELTWAY BACKGAMMON
Director: Larry Brown
Location: Arlington, Virginia
Phone: (703) 214-8298
E-Mail: luckyluk@lsbrown.com
Website: beltwaybg.org
Details: Beltway Backgammon has 40 USBGF members as of December 1, 2018. For more information about the Beltway Backgammon Club, please visit beltwaybg.org.

NEW ENGLAND BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Albert Steg and Alex Zamanian
Location: Cambridge, Massachusetts
Phone: (617) 417-6743
E-Mail: asteg@mindspring.com
Website: nbackgammon.org
Details: The New England Backgammon Club has 39 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the New England Backgammon Club, please email Albert at asteg@mindspring.com.

NYC BACKGAMMON MEETUP
Director: Richard Munitz
Location: New York, New York
Phone: N/A
E-Mail: rich@usbgf.org
Website: nycbg.com
Details: The New York Backgammon Meetup has 39 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information on NYC Backgammon, please visit nycbg.com.

ORANGE COUNTY BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Mario Savan/Paul Mangone
Location: Santa Diego, California
Phone: (949) 433-20146
E-Mail: mariosavan@gmail.com
Website: Orange County BG Club
Details: The Orange County Backgammon Club has 35 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information, visit their website or email Mario at mariosavan@gmail.com.

GAMMON ASSOCIATES
Director: Patrick Gibson
Location: Los Angeles, California
Phone: (818) 901-0464
E-Mail: pgibsonmfic@gmail.com
Website: GammonAssociates.com
Details: The first club to reach the goal of USBGF Local Club status is Gammon Associates. As of October 1, 2019, it has 33 USBGF members. For more information about Gammon Associates, please visit gammonassociates.com.

TWIN CITIES BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: David Minikus/April Kennedy
Location: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Phone: (612) 703-3211
E-Mail: tgammon@comcast.net
Website: Twin Cities BG Club
Details: The Twin Cities Backgammon Club has 33 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information, email David Minikus (Thursday Director) at tgammon@comcast.net or April Kennedy (Monday Director) at spyglassweb@gmail.com.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Frank Raposa
Location: Arlington, Virginia
Phone: (703) 406-6385
E-Mail: frankraposa@yahoo.com
Website: NOVA BG Club
Details: The Northern Virginia Backgammon Club has 26 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Northern Virginia Backgammon Club, email Frank Raposa at frankraposa@yahoo.com.
Qualifying Prime Clubs

LAS VEGAS BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Tony Anton
Location: Las Vegas, Nevada
Phone: (702) 438-0926
E-Mail: tonyanton@earthlink.net
Website: vegasbg.com
Details: The Las Vegas Backgammon Club has 25 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Las Vegas Backgammon Club, email Tony at tonyanton@earthlink.net.

CONNECTICUT BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Ross Gordon
Location: Milford, Connecticut
Phone: (203) 521-7866
E-Mail: Ross Gordon
Website: Connecticut BG Club
Details: The Connecticut Backgammon Club has 24 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Connecticut Backgammon Club, email Ross at ross@connecticutbackgammon.com.

FLINT AREA BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Carol Joy Cole
Location: Flint, Michigan
Phone: (810) 232-9731
E-Mail: cjc@flintbg.com
Website: flintbg.com
Details: The Flint Area Backgammon Club has 23 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Flint Area Backgammon Club, email Carol Joy Cole at cjc@flintbg.com.

DC-METRO BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Vinson Blanton
Location: Washington, D.C.
Phone: (571) 766-8395
E-Mail: dcmetrobg@gmail.com
Website: DC-Metro BG Club
Details: The DC-Metro Backgammon Club has 23 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the DC-Metro Backgammon Club, email Vinson at dcmetrobg@gmail.com.

COLORADO BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Dan Minardi
Location: Denver, Colorado
Phone: (303) 356-9731
E-Mail: cdxminardi@gmail.com
Website: coloradobackgammon.com
Details: The Colorado Backgammon Club has 19 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Colorado Backgammon Club, email Dan at cdxminardi@gmail.com.

PUB CLUB
Director: Tim Mabee
Location: Chicago, Illinois
Phone: (630) 606-2388
E-Mail: timmabee1@gmail.com
Website: pubclubchicago.com
Details: The Pub Club Backgammon Club has 18 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Pub Club, email Tim at timmabee1@gmail.com.

ATLANTA NORTHSIDE BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Jeff Proctor
Location: Atlanta, Georgia
Phone: N/A
E-Mail: jeffproctor@gmail.com
Website: Atlanta Northside BG Club
Details: The Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club has 17 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Atlanta Northside Backgammon Club, email Jeff at jeffproctor@gmail.com.

AUSTIN BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Scott Butki
Location: Austin, Texas
Phone: (512) 675-7142
E-Mail: sbutki@gmail.com
Website: Austin Backgammon Club
Details: The Austin Backgammon Club has 15 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Austin Backgammon Club, please email Scott at sbutki@gmail.com.

LONG ISLAND BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: John Barnett
Location: Mineola, New York
Phone: (516) 741-1428
E-Mail: BGplusUSA@gmail.com
Website: Long Island Backgammon Club
Details: The Long Island Backgammon Club has 15 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Long Island Backgammon Club, email John at BGplusUSA@gmail.com.

CHARLOTTE BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Jeb Horton
Location: Charlotte, North Carolina
Phone: (704) 651-2949
E-Mail: jeb@carolina.rr.com
Website: Charlotte Backgammon Club
Details: The Charlotte Backgammon Club has 13 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Charlotte Backgammon Club, please email Jeb at jeb@carolina.rr.com.

HOUSTON BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Bill Riles
Location: Houston, Texas
Phone: (281) 703-9304
E-Mail: btriles@sbcglobal.net
Website: N/A
Details: The Houston Backgammon Club has 13 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Houston Backgammon Club, email Bill Riles at btriles@sbcglobal.net.

OHIO STATE BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Joe Miller
Location: Akron, Ohio
Phone: (330) 268-4610
E-Mail: ohio.state.backgammon@gmail.com
Website: Ohio State Backgammon
Details: The Ohio State Backgammon Club has 13 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Ohio State Backgammon Club, email Joe Miller at ohio.state.backgammon@gmail.com, or visit Ohio State Backgammon.
Qualifying Prime Clubs

COLUMBUS BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Chris Yip
Location: Columbus, Ohio
Phone: (614) 208-3816
E-Mail: chris@columbusbg.org
Website: columbusbg.org
Details: The Columbus Backgammon Club has 12 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Columbus Backgammon Club, email Chris at chris@columbusbg.org.

DALLAS BACKGAMMON LEAGUE
Director: Tom Wheeler
Location: Dallas, Texas
Phone: (972) 484-3038
E-Mail: pwheeler@bigglobal.net
Website: Dallas Backgammon League
Details: The Dallas Backgammon League has 12 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Dallas Backgammon League, email Tom Wheeler at pwheeler@bigglobal.net or see their website Dallas Backgammon League.

KANSAS CITY BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Eric Barr
Location: Kansas City, Kansas
Phone: (816) 237-8089
E-Mail: mister.eb@gmail.com
Website: kcbackgammon.com
Details: The Kansas City Backgammon Club has 12 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Kansas City Backgammon Club, email Eric at mister.eb@gmail.com or see their website kcbackgammon.com.

PALM BEACH CHAPTER
Director: Jason Briggs
Location: Palm Beach, Florida
Phone: (917) 834-7637
E-Mail: seasmoke13@yahoo.com
Website: N/A
Details: The Palm Beach Chapter has 11 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Palm Beach Chapter, call Jason Briggs (917) 834-7637.

BRASS CITY BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Jim Sisti or Al Cantito
Location: Waterbury, Connecticut
Phone: (203) 592-6125
E-Mail: jim@brasscitybackgammon.com
Website: Brass City Backgammon
Details: The Brass City Backgammon Club has 11 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Brass City Backgammon Club, email Jim Sisti at jim@brasscitybackgammon.com or see their website Brass City Backgammon.

HOOSIER BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Sean Garber
Location: Indianapolis, Indiana
Phone: (317) 241-0605
E-Mail: seagar1824@yahoo.com
Website: Hoosier Backgammon Club
Details: The Hoosier Backgammon Club has 10 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Hoosier Backgammon Club, please email Sean Garber at seagar1824@yahoo.com.

Baltimore Backgammon Club
Director: Paul Laubner
Location: Baltimore, Maryland
Phone: (410) 530-2237
E-Mail: CoachLaubner@live.com
Website: Baltimore Backgammon Club
Details: The Baltimore Backgammon Club has 10 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Baltimore Backgammon Club, email Jeff at CoachLaubner@live.com.

ST. LOUIS GATEWAY BACKGAMMON CLUB
Director: Jim Feher or Gerry Tansey
Location: St. Louis, Missouri
Phone: (636) 686-0338 Jim Feher
E-Mail: g_tansey@hotmail.com
Website: N/A
Details: The Baltimore Backgammon Club has 8 USBGF members as of October 1, 2019. For more information about the Baltimore Backgammon Club, please email Gerry at g_tansey@hotmail.com.

South Florida Backgammon Club
The South Florida Backgammon Club has climbed to the largest Prime Club in the USBGF with 63 members. Director Karen Davis awards the 2019 Regional South Florida Championship trophy to Efim Liberman.
## AMERICAN BACKGAMMON TOUR

**By Bill Riles - ABT Standings Editor**

**Updated: 04/04/2020**

### 2020 ABT Standings Top 60

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<td>William Lonergan</td>
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<td>Matt Reklaitis</td>
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<td>Roberto Litzenberger</td>
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<td>Richard Munitz</td>
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<td>Shahrooz Moreh</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Tom Rebelo</td>
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<td>Tony Elliot</td>
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<td>Terry Stigall</td>
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<td>Gary Bauer</td>
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<td>John Klein</td>
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<td>Tom Tseng</td>
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<td>Clement McNally</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Frank DiMaggio</td>
<td>3.20</td>
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<td>Marcy Kossar</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Frankie Farjood</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>John Shakory</td>
<td>2.85</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Mark Ferrin</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Murat Kemalhoigu</td>
<td>2.85</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>P. J. Macali</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Nick Wolf</td>
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<td>Tara Mendicino</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Jordan McCollum</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>Lisa Pelaye</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>Ralph D’Onofrio</td>
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<td>Kara Schultz</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Ross Gordon</td>
<td>1.91</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>David Parks</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>Richard Loomer</td>
<td>1.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Leyla Zaloutskaya</td>
<td>1.60</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>Stephen Douglas</td>
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<td>William Barrows</td>
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<td>Aurelian Cardoso</td>
<td>1.43</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Scott Douglas</td>
<td>1.43</td>
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<td>Jeremy Krieger</td>
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<td>Jamie Rosen</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Jose Ward</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>Andrew Swanson</td>
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1st through 20th receive trophies.

## USBGF MASTER POINT LEADERS

**By Rich Munitz**

**Updated: 04/04/2020**

### 2020 National Master Points Top 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Master Pts</th>
<th>Match Pts</th>
<th>Rank Pts</th>
<th>Win - Loss</th>
<th>Win %</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>1st Pl.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michael Neagu</td>
<td>32.66</td>
<td>27.40</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>25–11</td>
<td>69.44%</td>
<td>1693.81</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Victor Ashkenazi</td>
<td>26.97</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>21–16</td>
<td>56.76%</td>
<td>1620.45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Boris Dekhtyar</td>
<td>23.35</td>
<td>18.98</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>18–13</td>
<td>58.06%</td>
<td>1621.64</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ray Foglerlund</td>
<td>21.64</td>
<td>20.06</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>18–14</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
<td>1644.40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leyla Zaloutskaya</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>18.63</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>20–14</td>
<td>58.82%</td>
<td>1609.22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kit Woolsey</td>
<td>19.89</td>
<td>17.54</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>17–7</td>
<td>70.83%</td>
<td>1697.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rory Pascar</td>
<td>19.36</td>
<td>14.37</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>15–6</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>1618.91</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Allen Tish</td>
<td>17.55</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>15–18</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>1610.32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Arkadiy Tsinis</td>
<td>16.99</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>10–1</td>
<td>90.91%</td>
<td>1723.66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>R. Litzenberger</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>13–13</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>1600.98</td>
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### 2020 Online Master Points Top 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Master Pts</th>
<th>Match Pts</th>
<th>Rank Pts</th>
<th>Win - Loss</th>
<th>Win %</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>1st Pl.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ted Chee</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>12.86</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>20–10</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>1847.12</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Scott Ward</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>16–10</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>1816.54</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Martin Stemberka</td>
<td>11.84</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>15–9</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>1745.76</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Steve Hills</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>16–8</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>1870.04</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Leyla Zaloutskaya</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>8.42</td>
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<td>62.50%</td>
<td>1787.97</td>
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<td>Michael Klein</td>
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<td>1759.95</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>William Lonergan</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>8.91</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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<td>62.50%</td>
<td>1817.98</td>
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<td>Peter Wisniewski</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>13–9</td>
<td>59.09%</td>
<td>1774.07</td>
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<td>1793.54</td>
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<td>David Parks</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>15–8</td>
<td>65.22%</td>
<td>1687.41</td>
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**Online Circuit Top 10**

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<td>amamlet</td>
<td>1922.95</td>
<td>199–94</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>1959.64</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Brian Lonergan</td>
<td>Vengeance526</td>
<td>1909.58</td>
<td>52–24</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Chris Trencher</td>
<td>einsteinny</td>
<td>1903.27</td>
<td>61–35</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1924.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Wolfgang Herfet</td>
<td>linecindy123</td>
<td>1899.12</td>
<td>71–33</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Bill Finneran</td>
<td>Finnerab</td>
<td>1886.14</td>
<td>14–8</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1918.88</td>
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<td>Hillsalive</td>
<td>1870.04</td>
<td>57–32</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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<td>FoolishBear</td>
<td>1850.21</td>
<td>129–74</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1875.83</td>
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<td>Ted Chee</td>
<td>tdc</td>
<td>1847.12</td>
<td>331–202</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1900.58</td>
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<td>9.</td>
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<td>EasyEd</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Art Benjamin</td>
<td>mathemagics</td>
<td>1826.90</td>
<td>109–65</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1923.18</td>
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</table>

**Up-to-date ratings may be found at:** usbgf.org/trny/leaderboard/

Qualifications for inclusion in USBGF Online Circuit Events

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

**Upcoming Online Circuit Tournaments**

Circuit Monthly for May
Start Date: May 1, 2020
Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=737

Divisional Tournaments
Masters Divisional CVIII Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=731
Advanced Divisional LXXVI Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=732
Intermediate Divisional LXXIX Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=733

Membership Blitz Tournaments
Membership Blitz #113 Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=734

Womens Monthly Tournaments
Womens Monthly for April Registration Link: usbgf.org/trny/registration/?trny=728

2020 USBGF Online Circuit Tournament of Champions

All 2019 Online Circuit tournament winners will be invited to participate in the 2020 USBGF Online Circuit Tournament of Champions. This exclusive event will start in mid-April 2020. Don’t miss it!

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**Recent Online Circuit Tournament Winners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Tournament</th>
<th>Winner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 15, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #109</td>
<td>Curt Wilhelmsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 15, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for January Playoff</td>
<td>Martin Stemberka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 28, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #108</td>
<td>Ronald Loero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 28, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Advanced Divisional LXXXIII</td>
<td>Barry Gittleman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #107</td>
<td>William Lonergan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Intermediate Divisional LXXV</td>
<td>Shahroz Moreh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Advanced Divisional LXXII</td>
<td>Kara Schultz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Womens Monthly for February</td>
<td>Cynthia Belonogoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Masters Divisional CIII</td>
<td>Steve Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 05, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for February Qualifier 5</td>
<td>Jerry Ungar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 05, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for February Qualifier 4</td>
<td>Richard Casten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 05, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for February Qualifier 3</td>
<td>Tom Courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 05, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for February Qualifier 2</td>
<td>William Lonergan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 05, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for February Qualifier 1</td>
<td>Juan Jose Aguzzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 26, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #106</td>
<td>William Lonergan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 24, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #105</td>
<td>Andrew Selby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 23, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Intermediate Divisional LXXIV</td>
<td>Ali Shamsian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 23, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Advanced Divisional LXXI</td>
<td>Stefan Andreev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 22, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Masters Divisional CII</td>
<td>Peter Wissniewski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 22, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Membership Blitz #104</td>
<td>Andrew Selby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 22, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Advanced Divisional LXXX</td>
<td>David Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 22, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>USBGF Womens Monthly for January</td>
<td>Leyla Zaloutska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 06, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for November Playoff</td>
<td>PJ Macali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 02, 2020</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Circuit Monthly for January Qualifier 5</td>
<td>Ted Chee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Be sure to mark your calendar and attend these exciting ABT tournaments & USBGF events. For complete tournament listings, see usbgf.org/calendar.
### Upcoming Tournaments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tournament</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABT: WISCONSIN STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS</strong></td>
<td>August 6 - 9, 2020</td>
<td>Marriott, Middleton, WI</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>516/650-4329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABT: ATLANTA SPRING CLASSIC</strong></td>
<td>August 20 - 23, 2020</td>
<td>Crowne Plaza, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>404/590-2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABT: 4th VIKING CLASSIC</strong></td>
<td>September 2 - 7, 2020</td>
<td>Embassy Suites, Bloomington, MN</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>612/703-3211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABT: 2nd WILD WEST SHOOTOUT</strong></td>
<td>September 24 - 27, 2020</td>
<td>Embassy Suites, Denver, CO</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>303/356-3679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Boards**
- **Checkers**
- **Doubling Cubes**
- **Precision Dice**

What's your point?
Watch championship backgammon & learn from the Giants! View over 1000 recorded matches of the world’s leading backgammon players filmed at American Backgammon Tour events across the nation.

youtube.com/user/USBGFbroadcast