



U.S. Backgammon Federation

Tournament Rules (Effective 1/2025)



These [Tournament Rules](#) govern live tournament backgammon play. They are a complete, though concise rendition of the [WBGF Tournament Rules](#), having the identical intent and interpretation.

INTERPRETATION AND SCOPE

In case of a dispute or inquiry, participants must be truthful and forthcoming when questioned by the Tournament Director (TD), who shall determine the most appropriate course of action in circumstances not expressly addressed by the Rules. Every TD must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest. Based on the circumstances of a particular case, the TD may find a solution as dictated by fairness or make narrowly tailored exceptions. The TD may impose penalties for rule violations or for unacceptable behavior.

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. The TD may address any rule violation they observe.

REGISTRATION

The TD may bar a player from entering tournament events, or a lower skill division. By attending, players consent to the streaming, recording and publishing of tournament activities as determined by the TD.

ETIQUETTE AND LANGUAGE

Attendees must engage in good sportsmanship, fair play and handle equipment respectfully. Players should speak and play in a clear and unambiguous manner and avoid the appearance of impropriety or they will be at a disadvantage if a ruling is needed. Players must respect a request to limit conversation or distraction.

Only English or other official tournament language may be spoken near a match in progress, except between teammates in a consulting event.

MONITORS

The TD or agreeing players may appoint a match monitor to point out irregularities and require correction.

SPECTATORS

Spectators must remain silent during a match and must not signal or help players in any way, except when asked by the TD or both players during a dispute.

Between games they may, unprompted, point out an error in score, setup, or a running clock. Other irregularities should promptly and discreetly be conveyed to tournament staff. Spectators must not point out illegal checker moves unless both players and the TD agree to allow it and display a sign so stating near the board. A player may request that the TD bar a spectator from watching their match.

AIDS; OTHER EQUIPMENT

Players must not use any aids or devices during a match, except to keep score and time and as desired to record the match or positions. Headphones are allowed, subject to TD review. Non-passive recording must occur on the player's clock.

START OR RESUME TIMES AND BREAKS

Matches must start, or resume following a scheduled suspension, at the designated time and take place in a designated playing area (non-smoking Preferred).

Between games each player may call 5-minute breaks, limited in number to the match length divided by 6 (rounded down). Players may tend to emergencies if no breaks remain and shall inform the TD; abuse may be penalized. Players are entitled to a 5-minute break between consecutive matches. The TD may modify the standard break schedule.

The TD may assess penalty points or start the clock against any player who fails to start or resume a match on time, or who takes excessive break time. A player may be assessed one penalty point after each 5 minutes of delay that they cause and shall be forfeited when the total penalty points assessed exceeds half the match length. Alternatively, after a player has caused 5 minutes of delay the TD may start their clock.

EQUIPMENT: SELECTION, SETUP AND CHANGE

The TD may set policy regulating equipment and setup. All other preference disputes (seating, direction of play, game equipment, etc.) must be identified by the players before the match starts and shall be resolved in favor of the player rolling the highest dice sum.

Players must share two dice when using a clock; otherwise, they may share two dice or use four dice. Each player may choose to use either a dice cup or a baffle box. A baffle box must be placed on the non-home board side.

To mix dice, the requesting player rolls all four dice. Their opponent selects one die, alternating thereafter. Two more dice must be added if necessary.

Clock reserve time shall be 2 min. times the (average remaining) match length, with 12 sec. Simple Delay per move, unless the TD specifies otherwise. The clock must be placed on the home board side.

At any time: the TD may change/impose equipment if needed, or a clock; if available, a player may require use of lipped dice cups or precision dice. Before games: players may change equipment if agreed or require a mix of the game dice; if available, a player may require use of a board designed with checkers of diameter 37-50mm (1.5-2.0"). Defective equipment must be replaced immediately.

ERRORS IN THE STARTING POSITION

A checker setup error must be corrected if noticed before the third valid roll of the game, or if agreed thereafter; the last valid roll's move may be replayed.

VALID ROLLS

Dice must not be manipulated.

When using a cup, the dice must be vigorously shaken at least twice up and down and rolled in one action on the right-hand side of the bar with enough force and height to tumble freely. With consent, the dice may be rolled on the left. Consent is revoked when stated, a roll on the right occurs or the game ends.

When using a baffle box, the dice are dropped together from a hand or cup into the baffle box and must freely pass through. On the opening roll, one player may drop both dice with each player assigned a color, or players may roll from cups.

A roll is invalid if a die does not come to rest on the playing surface or checkers on the same side of the bar as rolled, is supported by a vertical surface, balanced on edge or corner, descends into the gap between the checkers it is on, or if a player objects before either die begins to settle. Once agreed, both dice must be rerolled; the clock's delay time may be reset.

Rule option: the TD shall set a preference policy for *Dice on Checkers*. When *No Dice on Checkers* is in effect, all dice coming to rest on the checkers are invalid.

CHECKER AND DICE HANDLING

A player must move checkers clearly to a specific location, using one and the same hand throughout their turn (including hitting the clock), keep borne off checkers away from the playing surface, should announce the roll before repositioning dice, and must not touch any checkers during the opponent's turn.

If a play is not final, a moved checker should be offset above its intended destination. The original position should be restored before making another play.

END OF TURN; PREMATURE ACTIONS

In an untimed game using two dice, a player ends their turn by hitting a non-expiring clock, or by tapping the bar if no clock is available.

When using four dice, players end their turn by lifting one or both dice, unless notice of *repositioning* is given.

When using a clock, players must hit the clock to end every turn, even if no play is possible. If the opponent lifts a die before their time is activated (fast grab), the player may pause the clock to complete their move and/or require forfeit of the opponent's delay.

If the opponent rolls before the player ends their turn, the player must point it out and state their choice: the roll stands or must be redone; they may then revise their move. This is in lieu of any delay time forfeit for a fast grab. A player who repeatedly fails to point out a premature roll may lose the option to require a reroll.

ILLEGAL MOVES

Both players must point out all illegal checker moves. Correction requires reverting to the original dice roll and position and resuming play from there.

Rule option: the TD shall set a policy of either *Legal Moves* or *Responsible Moves*.

Legal Moves: All illegal moves must be corrected if noticed before the opponent has made a valid roll.

Responsible Moves: If an illegal checker move occurs, the opponent must either require it to be corrected or to stand. No other type of infraction may be condoned.

CLOCK HANDLING AND EXPIRATION

Clocks must not be stopped except in limited situations, most notably between games, when a die gets away, and during a dispute. Players must immediately announce and rectify any instance where the clock has been set incorrectly, is not paused when required or is running against the wrong player. A player is entitled to restoration of lost time if their clock was not hit or paused when it should have been. A player loses the match when it is noticed that their reserve time has expired, unless they can then validly claim the game and match. The TD may divide the reserve time into two banks and shall reset the clock to the second bank time when called after the first bank has been used.

DOUBLING CUBE ACTIONS

If a player touches the cube or makes any statement or gesture that reasonably implies an intention to double, then they must double at that time, or on their next turn if not yet legal. Merely reaching for the cube does not by itself imply an intention to double. A player wishing to move the cube without doubling must state that intent prior to handling the cube. Absent other evidence of intent, a take or pass occurs when the cube is placed down outside the playing surface.

The doubling cube must always be returned to its proper position and level if an error is agreed.

CRAWFORD GAME; DEAD CUBES

The doubling cube is removed from play for the first game after either player is exactly one point away from winning the match (the Crawford game). The cube is dead for a player who would win the match by winning the game at the current cube level. Any cube action during the Crawford game or with a dead cube is void.

COMPLETION

All games, and matches must be played to completion unless ended by the pass of a valid double, by the expiration of a player's clock reserve time, or in non-contact positions by the resignation or valid claim of a

single game, gammon, or backgammon. Otherwise, only the legal bear-off of a checker saves a gammon.

SCOREKEEPING

Both players should keep their own running, written score. Absent evidence to the contrary in a scoring dispute, if only one player has kept a written score, then it shall prevail; otherwise, the trailer's scorecard shall prevail. All scoring errors must be corrected when noticed, even if previously agreed by both players.

INCORRECT MATCH LENGTH

Both players must verify the posted length of their match and must not knowingly play to another score.

Upon discovery that the match length used is wrong, any game in progress shall be completed. The match length used shall be changed to the posted value if no player has reached either the used or the posted length. The TD may adjust clocks.

REPORTING RESULTS

Both players are responsible for ensuring that their match result is promptly reported to designated staff and verifying that the correct result has been posted on the Tournament draw sheet. The TD must be notified promptly if an incorrect result was posted; it may be corrected even if the next match has started.

DISPUTES; LIMITED RIGHT OF APPEAL

If players cannot quickly resolve a dispute, the clock must be paused, game materials left undisturbed and the TD summoned, who shall make a ruling. An aggrieved player may promptly appeal any TD ruling and intended corrective action. The TD shall convene a Ruling Committee of 3 or 5 qualified and impartial players to independently consider evidence and argument, and by majority vote may reverse, or modify the TD's ruling. All persons involved in the dispute are entitled to make relevant representations to the TD or Ruling Committee.

USBGF Tournament Rules - Supplementary Standards and Allowed Variations

This Supplement establishes standards and states the allowed variations in certain areas left to the discretion of the Tournament Director (TD) by the WBGF Tournament Rules.

The [Tournament Ruling Guide](#) document has been prepared for TDs and players to consult as may be appropriate. It provides greater detail about the intent of the Tournament Rules, offers guidance for rulings and addresses uncommon situations. The Ruling Guide defines the words: *must*, *shall*, *should*, and *may*, as used throughout the Rules and Guide.

Tournament Staff and players must comply with the USBGF [Standards of Ethical Practice](#) and the [WBGF Code of Ethics](#).

ANNOUNCEMENT OF DEVIATIONS FROM STANDARDS

A TD who intends to deviate from any standards defined herein must announce those deviations in advance in both the tournament brochure and on the tournament website, as well as at the tournament prior to the start of play for major events. The brochure may refer players to the website for the list of variations if space is limited.

REGISTRATION

USBGF membership may be a requirement for registration. By attending, players consent to the streaming, recording and publishing of tournament activities as determined by the USBGF and TD.

PREFERENCE POLICY TERMS

Required: use is required, no player choice;
Preferred: either player may insist on use;
By Roll: use is settled by the roll of high dice;
If Agreed: use only if both players agree;
Per Player: each player may make their own choice;
Not Used: use is not allowed, no player choice.

RULE OPTIONS: STANDARDS AND ALLOWED VARIATIONS

Legal Moves shall apply unless the TD announces a *Responsible Moves* policy in advance.

Dice on Checkers is Required unless the TD announces an alternate preference policy in advance.

EQUIPMENT PREFERENCE: STANDARDS AND ALLOWED VARIATIONS

Use of two dice is Preferred over four dice. Allowed variation: Required.

CLOCK POLICY: STANDARDS AND ALLOWED VARIATIONS

Event type	Standard			Allowed Variations		
	Preference	Reserve	Delay	Preference	Reserve	Delay
Top skill	Preferred	2 min/pt.	12 sec.	Required, Preferred	1.5 – 2.5	12
Other skill	If Agreed	2 min/pt.	15 sec.	Required, Preferred, By Roll, If Agreed	2 – 3	12 – 15
Doubles	Required	3 min/pt.	15 sec.	Required	2.5 – 3.5	15 – 18
All other	If Agreed	2 min/pt.	12 sec.	Required, Preferred, By Roll, If Agreed	(any)	(any)

Maximum allowed reserve times may be rounded up to the next whole minute after multiplying by the match length. Minimum allowed reserve times must not be rounded down.