

"Modern" Backgammon

BY GEORGES MABARDI

■ This article is inspired by the varied attacks, under one guise or another, which have been directed at Backgammon ever since its return to well-deserved popularity. It is also a restating of certain fundamental principles which the present-day enthusiasts have overlooked, for one reason or another, in their haste to popularize the game by the use of startling but doubtful theories. To see Backgammon suddenly become popular is a joy to an old player, but to see novices rush in blindly, arouses the experienced player's protest.

Some of the new "authorities" have seen fit to evolve a strange hybrid which they call "modern" Backgammon. There is no such thing—unless modern Backgammon is another name for bad Backgammon. A game which has not changed in centuries cannot be altered overnight simply because more Americans are now playing it than ever before. The principles, the conventional moves, strategy and tactics, are the same today as they were in Chaucer's time, no matter how many fresh enthusiasts rush into print with books heralding "the new game."

Doubtless the Twentieth Century passion for modernizing everything is responsible for this attempt to discredit an ageless game. Backgammon is an elemental game, and because of its very simplicity, it cannot change.

The cause of the present confusion about the so-called "modern" Backgammon is, more specifically, the recent development of two minor conventions—The Double, and Chouette. The former, however, is merely a new way of scoring; and the latter is simply an improvisation which allows interested bystanders to wager on the outcome while retaining an

active interest in the game. True, the Double frequently forces a player to resign a game before its completion; but that has been happening, in the beaten player's own mind, for thousands of years. And certainly the sidebet, the primary idea of Chouette, is nothing new. It is therefore obvious that *neither development in any way affects the fundamental principles of the game.*

Since these two new conventions—and admirable ones they are—represent the only change in Backgammon from the beginnings of its history, and since they do not alter the basic game in any degree, the student will be pardoned a certain confusion when he is bombarded on all sides with books which attempt to propound the theories of a "new" Backgammon, based on the false premise that the game has radically changed. But it follows that, as the game has *not* changed, any *new system of play* presumes to disregard the sound strategies which have endured for centuries.

■ And yet some of the present-day writers on the game insist that Backgammon is a game of Youth. Admitting that such an idea may also be part of the modernizing propaganda, it is still difficult to see how such a statement can be made. What are the common attributes of Youth? Eagerness, irresponsibility, impetuosity. And what are the three cardinal sins the good Backgammon player must avoid as he would the plague? Eagerness, irresponsibility, and impetuosity! Indeed, the game is forever demanding of its adherent, caution, sound judgment, patience, and incredible perseverance. Those, surely, are not attributes of Youth. Nor, on the other hand, is Backgammon an old man's game. It is, primarily, a game for those who are first of all masters of themselves. It offers swift punishment to the reckless, final victory to the patient.

Clearly to understand the fundamental principles of the game, before studying its less important technicalities, let the reader visualize an army in the field, its intrenched line reaching from a strong base to an extended outpost in enemy territory; in a word, a salient. The commander of this army wishes to withdraw his men and move them to the final safety of his base with as few casualties as possible. What is the soundest general strategy?

Obviously, if no units are to be lost, the tip of the salient must be withdrawn first, then the sides, and finally the center. For, if the men nearest the base are withdrawn first, the units at the outpost will be left in danger of capture. Accordingly, the wise commander begins his retreat with his most exposed men, i.e., the outposts. That is the primary principle of his operation—let the furthestmost advanced retreat to prepared positions, consoli-

date, retreat further to other prepared positions, consolidate, again retreat, and so on until the base has been safely occupied.

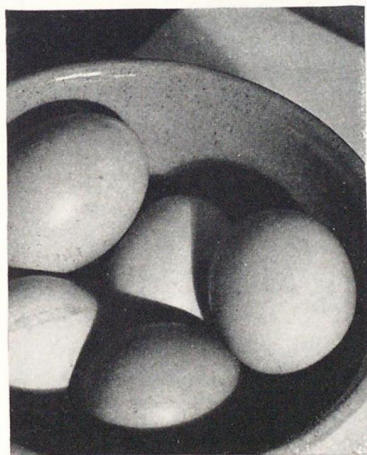
The fundamental strategy of Backgammon is identical with this maneuver. The two men on the opponent's one-point represent the tip of the army commander's salient. *The first and most important principle of Backgammon is to bring these two outmost men safely home.* If the player never learns anything more about tactics, he must learn this. It will save him many a bitter defeat and win him many a victory.

Remember, too, that Backgammon is a game of continual retreat; that there is never an advance. Following the example of the army commander, the Backgammon player must continue the careful *withdrawal* of his outmost men to prepared positions—the opponent's twelve-point, the player's eight-point, and other strongholds incidentally arranged, until his base, the inner table, is safely occupied. While carrying out this concentration of forces, the player will be operating under fire of the enemy. Therefore he should always bear in mind the *second great principle of the game, which is: Never expose a man to capture unless the risk (a) forces opponent to still greater risk when he takes advantage of it, (b) will result in an important gain if successful, or (c) is the lesser of two evils dictated by the dice.*

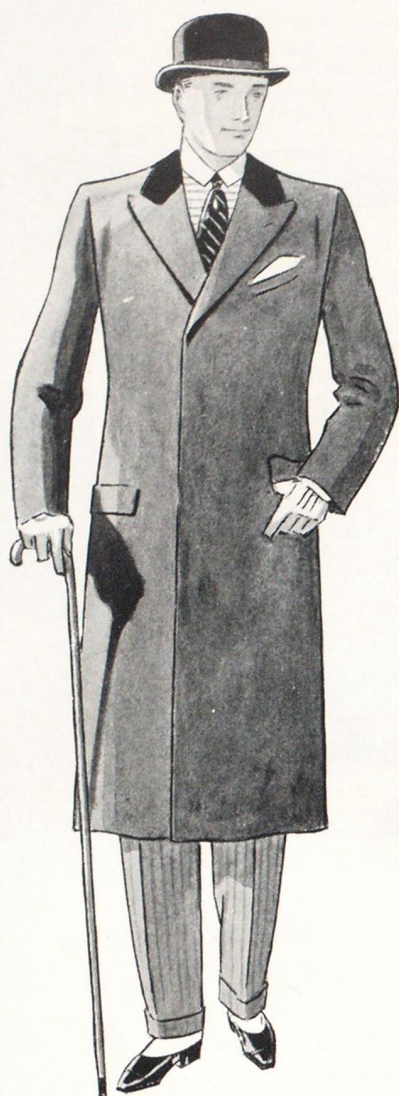
■ If the player will obey these two fundamental principles of Backgammon, he will be securely started on the difficult road to complete mastery of the game. There is no gainsaying that the road to perfection is difficult; success in Backgammon, despite appearances, despite ill-advised assurances of ignorant "experts," depends *fully fifty per cent on skill alone.* It is the mode of play that wins games no matter how the dice fall.

As for the weird play of the "new" Backgammon with its disregard for the fundamental principles of the game, its credence in the fancy that Backgammon is a game of luck, and its false premise that the game has changed, let us examine its two outstanding characteristics. They are: First, reckless play. And, second, undue faith in the Backward Game.

1. *Reckless Play.* The most typical move of the "modern" enthusiast is an unorthodox eight opening (a 6-2, 3-5 throw) thus: one man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's five-point. The defenders of this amazing move declare that in this manner a poor initial throw can be used to pave the way for making the valuable player's five-point; and they add that, even if the blot is taken up, the opponent's inner table is open and re-entry therefore easy. All of which seems, at first glance, to be true. BUT—and this is the vital point—their argu- (Continued on page 84)



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"Modern" Backgammon

(Continued from page 57)

ment completely disregards the two fundamental principles of the game: *retreat the outmost men at every logical opportunity, and, do not take unnecessary risks.* The player's five-point is valuable, but *not valuable enough* to make the extreme risk worthwhile. Re-entry is easy, but after you have re-entered look where you are! The chances are 3-to-4 that the blot, which is already retreated 19 points, will be hit by a man that has not yet *started* to retreat. In other words, the player should be ready to sacrifice or retreat what is equivalent to the entire play of a shake of double-fours in the hope against odds of 6-to-5 that he will cover his five-point next time! This is a typical illustration of the false reasoning of those who rebel against the age-old strategy of Backgammon.

2. *The Backward Game.* This strategy, almost as old as Backgammon itself, has lately been "discovered" amid much excitement by the rebels. It is only natural that they have come to seize upon it so tenaciously, because the reckless openings which are the hallmarks of their game put them so regularly at a disadvantage in the play that they needs must have recourse to this tactic as the only way out. Thus, from being forced continually to play the Backward Game, these new "experts" have found in it hidden charms and potencies which would seem to have escaped the discerning eyes of shrewd players for a thousand years. The Backward Game is, to define it simply, the last recourse of the player who is at a disadvantage: with helpful dice, carefully manipulated against a weaker opponent, this strategy is frequently successful. BUT—the Back-

ward Game is primarily a *defensive* tactic, and cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be made into the brilliant *offensive* operation that the "modernists" would have it. An experienced player, ahead at the time, can almost always defeat a Backward Game with a sound Position Game.

But perhaps the most astounding innovation expounded by the unsound professors of the "new game," is the omission in play of the Backgammon itself! The ultimate purpose of the player has always been to win a triple game, a Backgammon; the name of the game itself coming from this aim. The only possible excuse for the omission lies in the weakness of the "new" game, i.e., risky opening play results in constant use of the Backward Game, constant use of the Backward Game results frequently in the loss of double games or Gammons and, if the game were properly played, Backgammons. Hence the rebels shrewdly omit the Backgammon to spare themselves the losses their system of play deserves.

Backgammon should be played carefully and patiently according to the precepts and principles of a thousand generations of players:

First: *Retreat your outmost men at every logical opportunity.*

And, second: *Never take unnecessary risks.*

Winning Backgammon (D. Appleton and Co.), by Grosvenor Nicholas and C. Weaton Vaughan. Two pioneer players present an original book of Backgammon problems which should provide a source of valuable information and many hours of entertainment to the confirmed Backgammoner.

Muncy Morgan

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mad when he went up on the platform. Under the showman's taunts he was half-crazy. Once he lunged toward the carnival wrestler, but the man jumped nimbly out of the blacksmith's reach.

When the last of the carnival crowd had been drawn to the athletic arena's outside platform, the spieler said to Muncy, "Now, my man, if you'll go inside and get on a pair of tights, we'll start the match."

Muncy said, "No, I'll crawl the sonabitch just like I am."

The spieler said, "No, you'll have to get on a pair of tights, because we don't want nobody saying that this wasn't no fair match."

Muncy followed the showmen inside the tent. The crowd surged forward to buy tickets.

When Muncy crawled through the ropes of the wrestling arena the canvas billowed with the cheers that went up from the crowded plank tiers.

The show wrestler circled. Muncy bellowed and made for him. The two fell to the mat in a tangle. They were both dressed in tights of the same faded red. The light was bad. It was hard telling who was who.

Muncy had his legs locked around the other's body in a scissors hold. The

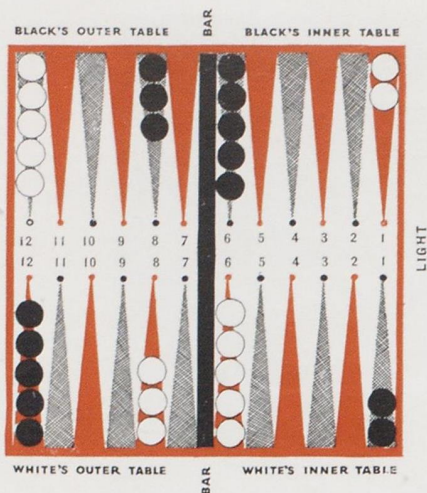
professional had a head hold on Muncy and he bore down viciously. Both men were grunting loudly. Everyone thought that the blacksmith had the show wrestler where he wanted him, though. The crowd quieted down, waiting for someone to give in.

The show wrestler squirmed and slipped free from the terrible grip of Muncy's legs. Muncy made a frantic grab. He snatched a toe-hold, and he yanked savagely. Something cracked. It cracked like a rifle shot. The show wrestler stood up. Muncy Morgan had fainted. He was twisted up there, gray and ghastly in the flickering light of the gasoline torches.

The crowd held its breath while Doc Boatright came up to examine Muncy. The carnival barker talked with the doctor for a few seconds.

Then he stood up in the arena and began explaining it to the crowd. Muncy Morgan's leg was broken. He had caught a toe-hold on his own foot. Muncy had broken his own leg.

No one would believe it. Everyone went wild. There was a big fight that night. Someone set fire to the athletic show's tent, and the carnival company got so wrecked that it couldn't show in the next town.



THE SET-UP AT THE START

■ The following are the explanations of the twenty-one opening moves in Backgammon illustrated in the diagrams on the page opposite, which are in accord with the principles of my book *Backgammon to Win*.

DOUBLE-SIXES—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's bar-point, and two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point.

The value of this opening throw is always overrated. It does afford a fine start for the running game; but, by its very uniqueness, often leads to final disaster. Many players double at once when opening with sixes. Such a double is absolutely unjustified; if made, it should always be accepted with alacrity.

The advantages of the correct play of double-sixes are obvious; both bar-points are secured and the all-important outmost men are well started on the retreat home.

Incorrect Plays—1. Three men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point, and one man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's bar-point.

2. Four men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point.

These two freak openings, the first a "modern" adaptation, the second a novice's dream, can be dismissed with a repetition of the principle expressed in the author's book: *The primary idea of Backgammon is to bring the two Outmost men Home as quickly as possible*. Neither of these openings commences this important maneuver as adequately as the correct play given above. Furthermore, neither secures the important opponent's bar-point.

DOUBLE-FIVES—Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's three-point.

One of the worst opening throws. There is no other way to play it.

DOUBLE-FOURS—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point, and two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's nine-point.

Next to double-ones, this is the best opening throw on the dice. Two of the fours allow the player to retreat his important outmost men a valuable distance and to occupy the opponent's strategic five-point; the other two secure his own nine-point and give him a valuable building position.

Incorrect Plays—1. Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's five-point. This would be a good play if, again, it were not for the *first principle of Backgammon*, i.e., retreat the two outmost men as quickly as possible. The player's five-point is important; but not as important as the fundamental principle of the game.

2. Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's nine-point. While retreating the two outmost men further than the correct play, this opening does not offer as speedy a trip home, because the player's nine-point is not waiting as a stop-over; nor does it secure the opponent's five-point.

3. Any play that includes the making of the player's two-point is fit only for the novice, because it definitely puts two men out of play. In the early game no point lower than the player's four-point should ever be made—save with a five-three opening.

DOUBLE-THREES—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's four-point, and two men from the player's eight-point to the player's five-point.

A good opening, retreating as it does the outmost men to a strategic position in the opponent's inner table, as well as securing the player's important five-point. A blot is left, but the chances against being hit are 5-to-1.

Incorrect plays—1. Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point. This play, by its very simplicity, always attracts the novice; but it fails to retreat the outmost men and fails to make the player's five-point.

2. Two men from the player's eight-point to the player's five-point, and two men from the player's six-point to the player's three-point. While making the valuable player's five-point, this opening again fails to retreat the outmost men and, further, puts two men definitely out of play.

3. Four men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's ten-point. Again the outmost men are not brought up, nor the player's five-point secured. In the early game, builders are not as important as position.

DOUBLE-TWOS—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point.

An excellent opening, securing the opponent's five-point and retreating the outmost men effectively.

Incorrect Plays—1. Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eleven-point, and two men from the player's six-point to the player's four-point. Outmost men not retreated; no important point made.

2. Two men from the player's eight-point to the player's four-point. The same fault as in the first incorrect play.

3. Two men from the player's six-point to the player's four-point, and two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's three-

point. A half-hearted compromise. Ruthlessness and assurance win Backgammon games; temporizing loses them.

DOUBLE-ONES—Two men from the player's eight-point to the player's bar-point, and two men from the player's six-point to the player's five-point.

The best opening throw. So far, not even the most eccentric of Backgammon "authorities" has been able to devise an Incorrect Play for this combination.

SIX-FIVE—One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's twelve-point.

A sturdy throw that brings one of the outmost men within skipping distance of home.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's bar-point, and one man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point, and one man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point.

These two openings, aside from failing to retreat an outmost man as successfully as does the correct play, leave blots valuable to the opponent.

SIX-FOUR—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point and bar-point.

This is the sound play for a poor throw. Of course, the odds are 3-to-1 that one of the blots will be hit. But it is very difficult in this position for the opponent to hit and *also* to cover. Therefore, if one, or even both, the men are put on the bar-point, the re-entry to an open board gives the player an excellent opportunity to take up one or more of the opponent's men. Inasmuch as the opponent's men in this skirmish are already partially retreated and the player's are outmost, it is easy to see with whom the tactical advantage rests. In case the blots are not hit—when the opponent throws five-four, five-two or double-fives—the player has a splendid chance to turn a poor throw into a good one by covering for an important point.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's eleven-point. While this move does retreat an outmost man, it also leaves him open to be hit by a two (a 1-to-2 possibility), and offers no chance for the player in turn to take up the blot that hit him. Risks should never be taken in Backgammon unless, to take advantage of them, the opponent will be forced to risk himself.

2. One man from the player's eight-point to the player's two-point, and one man from the player's six-point to the player's two-point. Two men out of play.

This is called the novice-point.

SIX-THREE—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's bar-point and four-point.

Another poor (Continued on page 90)

Backgammon openings

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shake but soundly played as above. The same reasons for the correct play of six-four apply here.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's ten-point. Valuable blots are always unwise where recovery is hard.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's four-point. This is one of the favorites of the "new" backgammon and is incorrect, inasmuch as it fails to retreat either of the outmost men and makes a 1-to-2 blot out of a well-retreated man.

SIX-TWO—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's three-point and bar-point.

Another poor throw that must be played in the same manner—and for the same reasons—as 6-4 and 6-3.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's nine-point.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's five-point. See comment on 6-4 and 6-3.

SIX-ONE—One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point, and one man from the player's eight-point to the player's bar-point.

Next to three-one, the best throw with uneven dice. There is no other possible way to play it.

FIVE-FOUR—One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point, and one man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point.

This is another poor throw, although it does allow the player to bring one of his outmost men up to the opponent's five-point, and to place a man on his own eight-point for building.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's ten-point. The player is too easily hit when far retreated.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's four-point. Improper as is same play of six-three—too dangerous.

3. Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point and nine-point. A good building play, but, again, the player is neglecting to retreat his outmost men.

FIVE-THREE—One man from the player's eight-point and one man from the player's six-point to the player's three-point.

A poor throw, best played as above. This is the only opening in which the player retreats men as far as the three-point in his inner table. The men are out of play, but there is no better move.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's five-point. Commendable as is its attempt to make the player's important five-point, but wrong in dangerously exposing a valuable man.

2. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's four-point. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point. Useless.

3. One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's nine-point. The odds are 3-to-4 the player will be hit, with small chance for recovery.

FIVE-TWO—Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eleven-point and eight-point.

This is an exceedingly poor throw and must be played, as above, for building purposes only.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point, and one man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's three-point.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's six-point. Never pile up men on single points.

FIVE-ONE—One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's bar-point.

Another bad throw. Must be played similarly to the six-four opening. The odds that player will be taken up are 2½-to-1, but the possibility of revenge makes the risk worth while.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point, and one man from the player's six-point to the player's five-point. The man from the player's six-point is too far retreated to be risked so brazenly.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's bar-point. A fatal error.

3. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point, and one man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's two-point. Futile exposure.

FOUR-THREE—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point and four-point.

Another of the poor throws but soundly played in the opponent's inner board. The odds that the player will be hit are 7-to-3, but again, he has an excellent chance for revenge.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's six-point. Piling them up.

2. Two men from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's nine-point and eight-point. Good builders, but can be hit after a long retreat.

FOUR-TWO—One man from the player's eight-point and one man from four-point.

A nice throw. The only way to play it.

FOUR-ONE—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's five-point and two-point.

A miserable throw. Player makes an attempt at the opponent's five-point and retreats his outmost men a little.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's nine-point, and one man from the player's six-point to the player's five-point. Do not expose blots in your inner table unless it is absolutely necessary.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point. Useless.

THREE-TWO—Two men from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's four-point and three-point.

A weak throw. Outmost men are retreated; opponent's five- and four-points are threatened.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eleven-point, and one man from the player's eight-point to the player's five-point. Dangerous exposure which is not worth while.

2. Two men from the opponent's

twelve-point to the player's eleven- and ten-points. Risky exposure of valuable men. Outmost men forgotten.

3. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eight-point. Useless.

THREE-ONE—One man from the player's eight-point and one man from the player's six-point to the player's five-point.

The best opening throw with uneven dice. Makes the player's immensely

valuable five-point.

TWO-ONE—One man from the opponent's one-point to the opponent's four-point.

The worst shake on the dice.

Incorrect Plays—1. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's eleven-point, and one man from the player's six-point to the player's five-point. Unnecessary risk.

2. One man from the opponent's twelve-point to the player's ten-point.

Mrs. Hopkins

(Continued from page 47)

"That gun was give to me by my father, sir! I was a Grove before my marriage, and the Groves is an old Southern family. My father used to tell me, 'Nora,' Nora Grove was my maiden name, 'Nora,' he said, 'you've always been used to gentlemen, but they's men in the world that's apt to take advantage of females, especially pretty females.' So he give me that gun you hold in your hand."

"I had always hoped that the occasion for using that gun would never come up, but you see, Mr. Hopkins has to be out in the country a good deal, and I am left alone. A pretty woman is apt to arouse a man's brutal instincts. So I thought it would be a good idea to get loads."

"I guess that'll take a .22 short," Floyd Evans said.

A few days later an Armenian rug pedlar came to town. He carried his

pack of rugs, tapestries, scarves and couch throws on his back in a great mass of color. He went from house to house, showing his wares.

Along late in the afternoon he came to the Hopkins home. He knocked on the front door, but he didn't get an answer. He rattled the screen.

About that time Mrs. Hopkins opened fire. The Armenian started running. Mrs. Hopkins came out on the back steps, firing after him.

The next morning Mrs. Hopkins dressed up and came to town. She went in to the Justice of the Peace's office to give herself up.

Mrs. Hopkins leaned her head over on one side. She said: "You know, Judge, after I think about it, maybe I was a little too rash. I thought that man had his animal passions aroused. But I guess all he really intended was just a little romance."

Portrait of a fashionable painter

(Continued from page 55)

was true, they now belonged to the ages.

Gradually the crowd dispersed. Towards six o'clock the gallery was emptied. Arthur Faleck slipped into his fur-collared overcoat, and was about to leave, when he espied a young, rather seedy-looking man standing in the far corner of the gallery and gazing with frowning intensity at the portrait of an oil millionaire's wife. Drawn by the absorbed expression of the young man, whom he had never seen before, he casually sidled over to him.

"Well," he said genially, "what do you think of it?"

The young man barely glanced at him out of the corner of a ferocious brown eye. His pale, thin face contracted in a grimace of disgust.

"Arthur Faleck," he said, "had a genuine talent. But because he found he could paint flesh tints well, he sacrificed his art on the altar of Mammon."

"Ah?" said Arthur Faleck sardonically. "The way of all flesh-tints?"

"I mean," the young man said savagely, "he can paint. He has a genius for lustrous fabrics and flashy surfaces. And for likenesses. But the man has no soul. And he has evidently been too busy making money to learn anatomy, or to learn how to draw."

"You are right," said Arthur Faleck reflectively.

"I ought to be. I am a painter myself."

"Portraits?"

"Yes. In a garret. God! If I only had half Faleck's opportunities, I could show this generation what a portrait painter ought to be!"

"Well," said Faleck to the young man, "I happen to be Arthur Faleck. If you will let me, I will be glad to come to see your work. If it is good, I'll get you a commission."

"Good Lord!" cried the young man, his white face flushing deeply. "After what I said? Why?"

"Because," said Faleck, with a cynical twist of his thin lips, "because you remind me so much of myself when I was your age."

BEAUX ARTS: Arthur Faleck had always been one of the moving spirits in the Beaux Arts Ball. It was largely owing to his untiring efforts on the Executive Committee that on this particular February night the ballroom of the Astor was a splendid and decorative replica of the Court of Henry the Eighth. In the pageant, Faleck himself had been Henry the Eighth, but, quite naturally obeying the instincts of that fickle monarch, towards four o'clock in the morning, he had deserted all of his eight wives (recruited from the pages of the Social Register) and, deep in wine, was sitting in a private bedroom on the ninth floor, caressing the flimsily clad figure of a little model who had come to the ball as "An offering from the court of the Sultan". In the same room, Max Brinden, the

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The four games

BY GEORGES MABARDI

An Egyptian Backgammon expert explains some of the strategies employed in various types of play

■ In Backgammon four types of campaigns are used by the experienced player, the choice depending on his own position and the position of his opponent. In a single game he may use one of these systems of campaign only, or he may use all four as his position changes with the fall of the dice. The four games are the position game, the blocking game, or side-prime, the running game, and the backward game.

The novice cannot be expected to master these styles of play until he is thoroughly familiar with all the fundamentals; in fact he will not even recognize them when they are being used against him. But the experienced player depends on the different virtues of the four campaigns to bring him victories.

The position game is the fundamental strategy of Backgammon. It consists simply of biding one's time and taking advantage of every favourable opportunity. In other words, it is an intelligent retreat. The perfect position game would be the one in which an average sequence of throws allowed the player gradually to withdraw his men into his home table without a casualty. To approximate this perfect game is the aim of the good player.

The science of the position game is caution and conservative play. Let the opponent make the openings, let him take the risks, make the bold plays: the player can pursue his sound policy of watchful waiting, and, profiting by

the opponent's mistakes, seize his opportunity when it presents itself and skip off with the game. The position game in Backgammon is what is called scientific play in all other games. It corresponds closely to what is known in baseball as the batter's "waiting out" the pitcher; it resembles, in boxing, skilled fighters' sparring for points; it approximates, in yacht racing, the boats' jockeying for the start.

The strength of the position game, aside from its virtues *per se*, lies in the ease with which it may be abandoned. If this is a paradox, it is none the less true. For, unusual throws of the dice by either player or opponent may suddenly make the abandonment of the position game expedient, if not absolutely necessary; and the switch to one of the other games is made easy by the very sound nature of the position game itself.

Thus, if the opponent suddenly makes a mad dash for home (the running game), the player can easily change his style of play to any one of the other three games; he can, if he finds himself even with, or ahead of his opponent, also play a running game; or he can, if he is behind, but in an advantageous position, try for a side-prime (the blocking game); or finally, if he is sadly at a disadvantage and likely to be thrashed decisively, he can try to capture the opponent's inner table and extend the game as long as possible (the backward game). The reason why such quick switchings to different games are frequently disastrous in every-day Backgammon is, that the player's position, when the time comes for him to switch, is unsound; he has not learned the inestimable value of an orthodox position game.

Now if the opponent is also playing a sound position game and refuses to make the first break, an interesting situation arises which has two possibilities: either the careful jockeying will continue until the game is almost

over and then, simultaneously on both sides, switch to a running game with the outcome dependent upon the fundamental soundness of the positions and the throws of the dice, or the player himself will make the break, accepting a favourable opportunity and quickly running, or blocking as the case may be. This latter eventuality, not infrequent when the player is playing against an experienced opponent, almost always presents a situation that is Backgammon at its best; it is here that the fine points of the game, the delicate skill, the exacting play, come into their own.

■ It would be impossible—unless one wrote a tortuous ten thousand page text book (and doubtful even then)—to explain just when the player should abandon a position game for another tactic. The possible positions and combinations number into the millions; to illustrate half a dozen would be to confuse the reader on a thousand.

The three other games, however, allow a more matter-of-fact explanation. What to do, *once these tactics have been started*, can be told briefly.

The blocking game may be defined as the series of moves by which the player attempts to impede and finally halt the retreat of the opponent's forces (normally the two outmost men) by erecting a sequence of six or less points. If six successive points are each occupied by two or more of the player's men, the opponent obviously cannot pass. This is a blockade or side-prime.

The usual side-prime is erected with the player's eight-, bar-, six-, and five-points as nuclei, the first and third being in his possession at the set-up and the second and fourth being major objectives of the early game. Once they are secured, the opponent's outmost men cannot escape except with six-three, six-two, five-three, or double-threes and a five

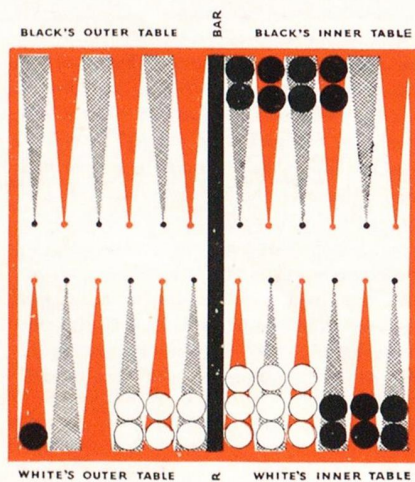


DIAGRAM 1

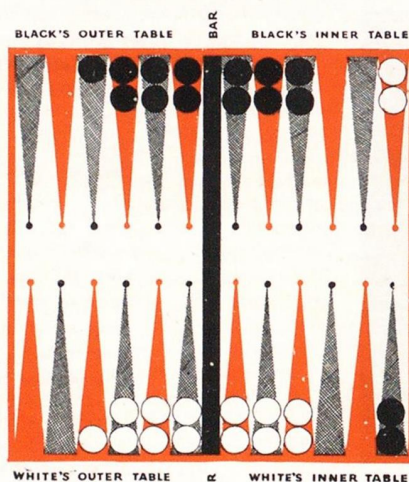


DIAGRAM 2

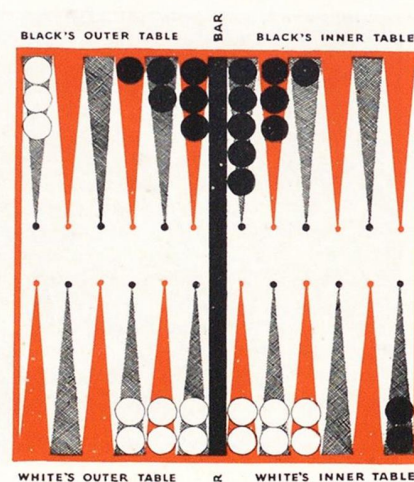


DIAGRAM 3

or a six. Not only are these compound throws hard to get *twice*—as *two* men must be carried out—but even when they are shaken they carry the outmost men only further into exposed positions where it is safe for the player to hit them again. And if the player shakes a four-two and double-fours (provided he has a builder on his eight-point), or any one of the many other combinations, he can secure his four-point and his nine-point, thus completing a perfect side-prime.

With this primary objective of the blocking game accomplished, the player must pause and survey the board. He must judge whether (a) it is to his advantage to revert to a cautious position game, take up as many men as he can, and try for a gammon or backgammon, or (b) play a persistent running game and get his other men around to his side-prime as expeditiously as possible. If he decides on the position game, he must first of all secure the remaining points in his inner table and then commence a general retreat, taking up as many of the opponent's men as he can on the way; but if he decides on the running game he must engineer his retreat first and make up his board only incidentally as he brings in his men.

■ The player's judgment here will be influenced vitally, of course, by the tactics the opponent offers in rebuttal: if the opponent concentrates on building an impregnable inner table with the hope of catching a blot when the side-prime eventually must be broken up, the player should run; if the opponent immediately begins a backward game, the player should attempt nothing more than to extend his side-prime until it completely covers his inner table, *under no circumstances whatsoever taking up a blot*. When his inner table is completed, with the exception of his one-point which the opponent's outmost men hold, the player can and should play as openly as possible, taking up and leaving blots.

First, as to judging which game to play after the side-prime is complete and the blocking game therefore abandoned: if the player's men have retreated considerably farther toward his home than the opponent's men have retreated toward their home, the player must run; it is the simplest thing for him to do, he will almost surely win a single game, conceivably a gammon. But if the player's remaining men are not advantageously placed, he must embrace the position game and bide his time. This he can well do as his side-prime gives him a strategic superiority. Even if he is taken up, the player still retains this advantage, for the opponent cannot pass the side-prime until it is broken, which will never happen with the player on the bar.

Second, as to the play of the running game, should the player decide on it or the opponent force it by closing his (the opponent's) inner table: the retreat must begin



Box cars! From now on Ah plays backgammon!

with the outmost men; if the opponent has a partial blockade, this is particularly important; the outmost men should be moved with the one- and two-throws as well as the doublets—being hit cannot hurt them now. The other men should be retreated first to the player's nine-, eight-, and bar-points and, only after they have all been brought up, into the player's inner table.

■ This is to insure against high throws forcing the player to leave a blot at the very end of the game. Once all the opponent's men have been passed, save the two which are blockaded, the player must enter his inner table cautiously, making additional points wherever possible, and guarding against alignments on his outer side-prime points, which will leave blots if combinations with six are thrown. Many seemingly certain victories have been dissipated on these plays: they can be avoided, obviously, by bringing the men from the bar-point in *before* moving the men from the eight-point. Even so, there is danger—the student will find that he cannot be too careful in the tricky maneuvers attendant upon safely reducing a side-prime.

Third, as to the play of the position game, should the player decide on it, or the opponent force it, by adopting a backward game: the player *must*—and this point cannot be stressed too strongly—secure *all* the remaining points in his inner table before taking up a blot. The opponent must be allowed no

further foothold in the player's board or the side-prime will collapse with a sickening crash. The opponent is trying to get *behind* the player so that he can demoralize his strategy by hitting men which will have to be exposed when the side-prime is broken up and there are not enough points held in the player's inner table to receive entering men.

For instance, if the player has recklessly hit all the blots which the opponent has left for him, the situation shown in Diagram 1 could very well arise. Black (opponent) controls White's (player's) one-, two-, and three-points while the side-prime is still unbroken. It is White's shake. To the casual observer White's position may seem a strong one but in reality it is fatal. White is almost certain to lose a single game, perhaps a gammon. If he escapes being taken up on the first throw he is almost sure to be hit on the second or third, the danger increasing with each shake. It is impossible for him to escape from this predicament except by a sequence of incredible dice throws. (This is an interesting and informative game to play out for practice. Remember, it is White's shake.)

Accordingly, the player must always make every effort to complete his board, when opposing the backward game, before he hits a blot. Once he *has* completed his board, he must hit every blot he can and come home as slowly as possible; because he can thereby cripple the opponent by giving him only one point of reentry, the (Continued on page 86)



The Editor's Uneasy Chair

(Continued from page 31)

his world tour via the Orient, with a splendid portfolio of sketches in colour—some of which appear on Page 52 of this issue. Covarrubias will shortly begin the illustration of some dramatic and colourful Harlem night-life scenes for *Vanity Fair*.

Alajálov, the Russian cartoonist whose *Vanity Fair* and *New Yorker* covers are so popular, did the amusing sketch in red and black on Page 63. *Vanity Fair* is also pleased to announce that in April and May it will introduce to its readers the work of two famous new European caricaturists—Garretto and Toño Salazar. The latter, curiously enough, although a Frenchman by birth, lived for a number of years in Mexico, where he went to school with Covarrubias.

Commander Byrd: no Icarus

SIR: In your December issue was what purported to be a biographical sketch of Admiral Byrd, by Mr. Morris Markey. Because of its air of familiarity and its novel point of view, it appeared to achieve a flavor of authenticity. But the flavor proved to be so misleading . . . that I am moved to protest. . . .

On the fragile presumption that Byrd is the Tex Rickard of exploration Mr. Markey hangs his article. Now that is wrong; no matter what else you may take away from Byrd, there is one quality in him that is impregnable—sincerity. The polar regions do not warmly nourish mere opportunism. Moreover, Byrd has been soundly trained in his vocation.

In paragraph 3 Mr. Markey says that Byrd, after a slight taste of flying, visualized his career in the larger opportunities of promotion. Whether or not he failed to become an expert pilot is debatable. He won his wings in the Navy school at Pensacola, became a member of the Crash Board and was judged competent enough to be assigned to train 100 pilots in night bombing tactics. If he had troubled to ascertain this fact, Mr. Markey must have conceded that this required a fairly high order of skill. . . .

Doubtless it is also true that Byrd has no trace of the "flying fool." But neither is he the self-pampered opportunist that Mr. Markey creates. . . . After all, Byrd holds eight Navy citations for courage. . . .

Contrary to Mr. Markey's statement in paragraph 4, Byrd had nothing to do with "hounding" Congressional Committees into appropriating a million dollars for the flight of the Navy NC boats, nor with inducing the Navy to undertake the flight. Byrd was in Canada at the time, in charge of American naval forces there, and first learned of the project when recalled to take charge of navigational preparations. . . .

What Mr. Markey calls "the first venture in his own behalf," the Greenland flights, was not his own at all, but wholly a Navy and National Geographic Society enterprise. Not a dollar was "wormed from citizens at large," and there was no "bow," however brief, "for Rockefeller or Ford." Contrary to Mr. Markey's statement, they put

up no money. The National Geographic Society provided the funds, the Navy much of the equipment and personnel. Commander MacMillan was senior officer; Byrd was merely in charge of the Navy aviation unit, under orders. Three planes were used, not one.

Here, as before, the Rickard influence was noticeably absent.

I doubt very much whether Byrd had to search for a "key"—which Mr. Markey labels as science—to his future technique. After all, Byrd is, and has been for many years, trained in the technique of exploration and aviation, both of which happen to be, in their larger aspects, scientific. Moreover, he is a well-educated man (University of Virginia, V.M.I., Annapolis and Harvard), is of a philosophical leaning, with an intimate friend in Dr. Hocking of Harvard; and so it is conceivable that the word *science* carries a different meaning to him than to Mr. Markey. . . .

The polar flight did not, as Mr. Markey said, cost a million dollars. It was but one effort of the expedition; there were many others equally important. The faintest pretense at research—the guidance of a good geographer—must have convinced Mr. Markey that Byrd's flight to the eastward, to name a single example, was one of the most important reconnaissances of its kind ever undertaken. Not only was an unbroken coast line discovered, explored and extended; it was also mapped by camera. . . .

No doubt I have become concerned with certain trivial errors; but this I did for a purpose—mainly to show how thin was the research given to this study of Byrd. If he is to be belittled, surely a man of Byrd's standing is entitled to better than that. . . .

CHARLES J. V. MURPHY
Mamaroneck, New York.

Mr. Charles J. V. Murphy, *Vanity Fair* is reliably informed, ghost-wrote Commander Byrd's book. His letter, therefore, was undoubtedly written by one in full possession of the facts.

A grand hotel

Dear Sir: I have long been a subscriber to *Vanity Fair*, and I wish that you would make up your minds just what the editorial policy of your magazine is. In your January issue I notice that, on page 31, under the photograph of Eugénie Leontovich, you speak of her play, *Grand Hotel*, as "that fine piece"; in the article on the opposite page, George Jean Nathan dismisses the same play as "an occasionally amusing but negligible cinematic account of thirty-odd hours' happenings in a Berlin Gasthaus."

I am at a loss to know which of your two comments I should accept.

(MRS.) E. L. PRINGLE

In the opinion of the editors, *Grand Hotel* is an exciting and interesting play which should not bore anyone. However, the columns of *Vanity Fair* are reserved for the comments of its contributors, of whom Mr. George Jean Nathan is one of the most popular; and it is one of *Vanity Fair*'s most rigid editorial policies not to restrict the free expression of their opinions.

The four games

(Continued from page 63)

one-point, and, by hitting more blots, pile up the opponent's men on the one-point where they can do the opponent little good, and the player little harm and win a gammon or backgammon.

In brief, the offensive action which has culminated in the erection of a side-prime changes abruptly with its successful completion to a *defensive* operation which involves either a swift retreat to the side-prime (the running game), or a consolidation of defense in the inner table and then a further offensive to capture enough men to assure a gammon or backgammon (the position game).

As for the counter-blocking game, the reader, from noting what *not* to do in the foregoing, can get a good idea of its principles. It consists, simply, once the side-prime has been successfully erected, of adopting one of the following three tactics: (a) erecting a counter-side-prime, (b) building a closed board and awaiting possible captures, and (c) playing the backward game.

The first is a very unusual procedure occasioned by both players throwing the same high dice all through the early game. Carried to a perfect extreme, it would result in the position illustrated in Diagram 2. This is an interesting game to play out; the student will find it worth while to play it through several times.

Attempting to counter the blocking game by building a solid board, when the two outmost men remain on the opponent's one-point, is the most sensible procedure of the three listed above. When it fails, as it does more often than not, this play rarely results in a loss of more than a single game. Diagram 3 illustrates the position. All Black can do is make points in his inner table and trust in his dice. It must be remembered that a side-prime, once established, usually wins a game.

The backward game as a counter to the side-prime has many disadvantages, the worst of which is that, if unsuccessful, it nearly always ends in the loss of a gammon or backgammon, while if it succeeds, a single game only may be won. The tactics of the backward game, the most overvalued, and overplayed tactic in Backgammon, too long to be gone into in the brief space of this article, will be considered in the next issue of *Vanity Fair*.

All in all, the blocking game is a powerful weapon in the hands of a player throwing high dice and should be developed carefully as directed above: to oppose it, run for home as fast as you can, especially with the two outmost men; but if the outmost men are caught, strengthen your inner table, wait for a break—and be prepared to lose a single game.

The running game is the simplest, the least demanding, but frequently the most exciting tactic in Backgammon. It is occasioned by a series of high throws in the early game on the part of one or both players and consists mainly in getting the men home and off the board in the quickest possible time.

There are a few rules to remember in playing the running game: the most important are these. 1. Always extricate and retreat the outmost men first. 2. Avoid hitting blots unless your inner table is closed or nearly closed. 3. Once past your opponent, try to play your shakes so that each number will take a man into your inner table. 4. If your opponent is also running, avoid being the first to expose blots when the last men are passing each other.

The counter-running-game is either another running game, an attempt at blockade somewhere along the path of retreat, or the backward game, depending, as always, upon the relative positions. Generally speaking it can be said that, if the opponent is running but not far ahead, the player should run also; if the opponent is considerably ahead, a blockade should first be attempted and, failing that, the backward game.

In countering with another running game, the player must hit more blots, take more chances, than he would if he were ahead, and depend to a certain extent on getting more favorable dice than his opponent. If he counters with a blockade, he must do so early in the game and direct every effort, regardless of risk, towards erecting a partial, or complete side-prime. Lastly, if the player counters with a backward game, he must do so *even earlier* in the game and must be willing to lose a gammon or backgammon—always possibilities when this tactic is adopted—if he fails.

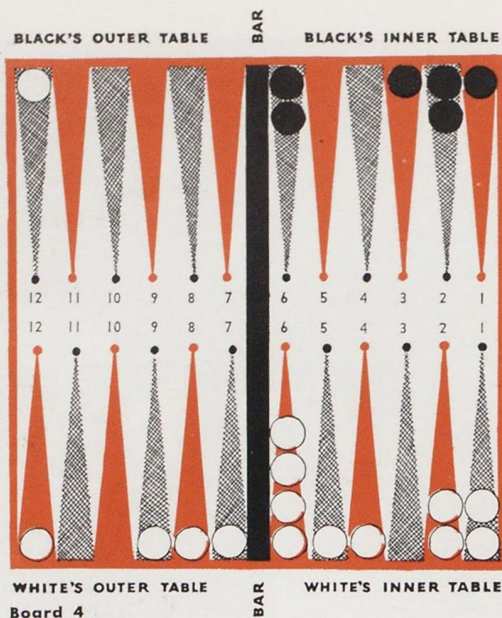
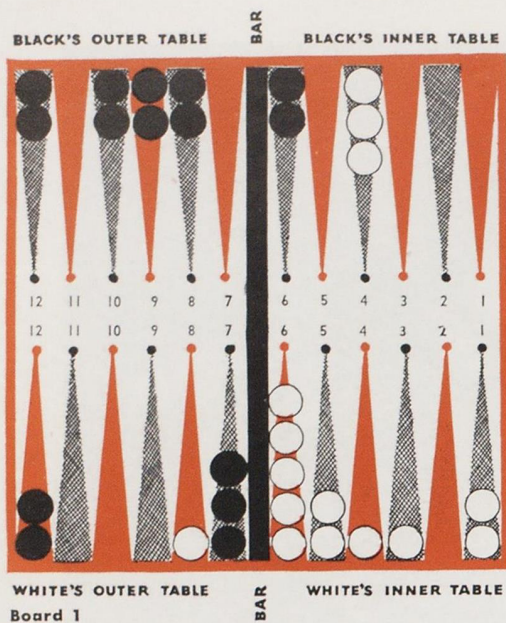
The usual end of a running game, when one player forges ahead, is a double and resignation.

Miss Diana Fishwick

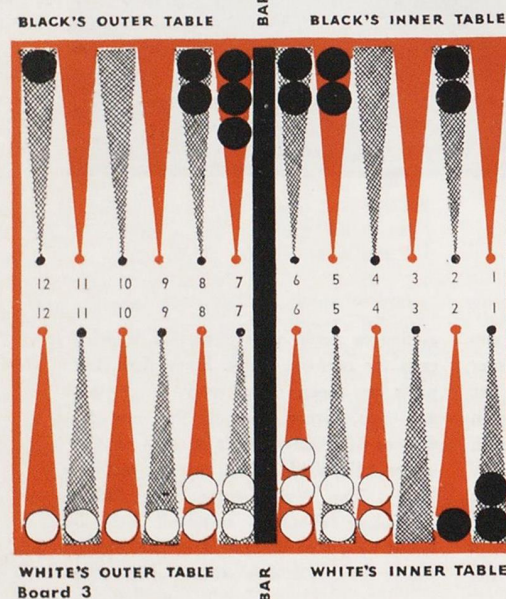
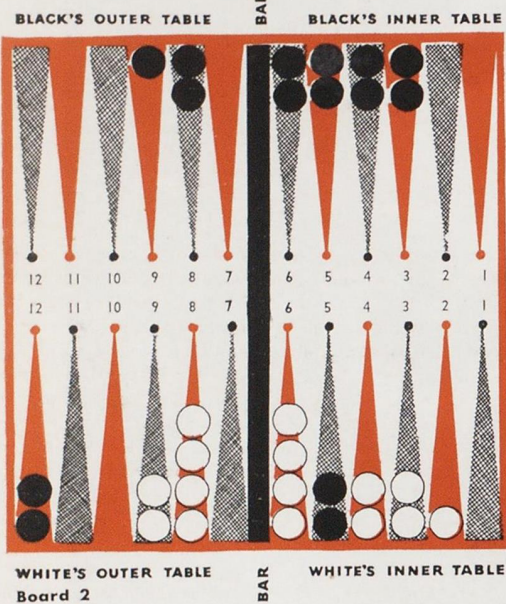
(Continued from page 72)

Miss Fishwick possesses is that she lives in a country of great seaside links—that richly dowered corner of Kent where Sandwich and Prince's and Deal all cluster together. No one of them is, however, her home course—though no doubt she plays on them sometimes. Her home course is North Foreland, an entirely inland course (though it is set on a cliff looking out to sea) and not—to my mind—an inspiring one. The club, however, is one of the few that play tournaments in which both men and women play, and these, no doubt, have been good train-

ing for her. I do not know if she has had much teaching, but she impresses me as a player to whom the course she plays on and the teacher at whose feet she sits would not make a great deal of difference. She has a natural gift of hitting, a tireless energy and a fine fighting temperament, and these things would make a golfer of her wherever she was. She is not a Miss Wethered (who is, for that matter?) and I don't think she ever will be, but I shall be surprised if she is not a considerably stronger player than she now is—and that is saying a good deal.



Some typical situations



BOARD 1

B.'s Throw. So far it is anybody's game. Although W. has a good inner table, his three men in B.I.T. will meet with casualties before they get home. B. must build B.I.T. quickly, at the same time leaving two men in W.O.T. in order to hit W. on the way home. However, if his dice permit, B. should try to establish a sideprime and if he succeeds he will probably win the game. W.'s tactic is to escape with the third man on B.I.T. 4 as quickly as possible, leaving two men back to menace B.'s incoming men and make up his own I.T.

BOARD 3

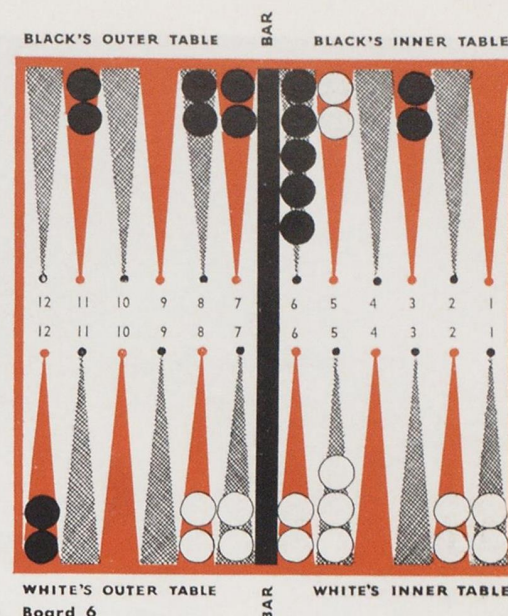
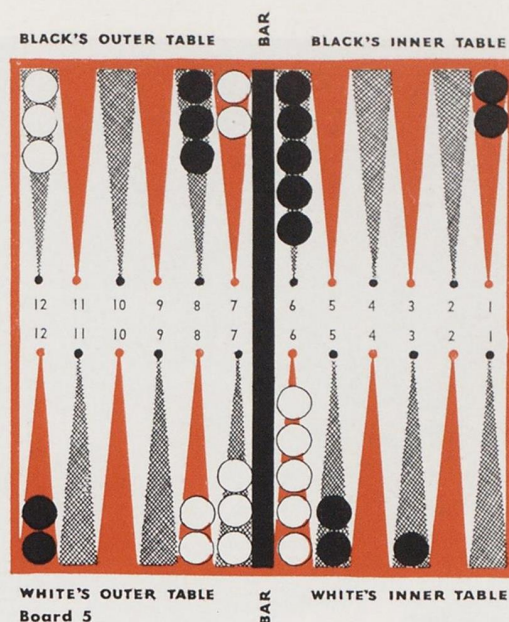
W. has doubled last and is almost sure to establish a side prime. B.'s best chance is to build up as slowly as possible B.I.T. and hope for low dice and that his opponent will break. W.'s policy in the meantime is to make his points on W.I.T. 3 and W.I.T. 2 as soon as he can. If W., in order to erect a perfect sideprime, has to leave a blot on W.I.T. 2 or 3 and is hit, the damage is nevertheless slight. Re-entry is a matter of one or more shakes, while B. is still unable to retreat. B. must not move from W. 1 even if he throws double ones or twos

BOARD 2

W.'s Throw. W. has doubled and B. has committed the all too common error of accepting. W. has only six men to bring into W.I.T. B., however, has three men in B.O.T. (which are counted as 3), two men in W.O.T. (counted as 4), and two men in W.I.T. (counted as 6); or an equivalent of 13 men to enter. B.'s only chance is to remain as long as possible in W.I.T. hoping that W. will break. Even if B. should throw a pair of high doubles, he must still lie back in W.I.T. moving his men in the outer tables

BOARD 4

W.'s Throw. W. has, of course, lost the game. W. has equivalent of six men to bring into W. I. T. and in order not to lose a gammon or double game, W. must not lose one single pip while entering. Example: W. throws 6-1 and moves one man from W.O.T. 12 and one man from W.O.T. 7 into W.I.T. 1. If W. throws a 3-2 he moves one man from W.O.T. 9 and one man from W.O.T. 8 into W.I.T. 1. If W. fails to bring all men in on every three cast of the dice, the penalty is almost sure to be a double game for B.



in Backgammon by Georges Mabardi

BOARD 5

W.'s Throw. W. has doubled last, although he has only a very slight advantage. Should W. throw any combination with a 5, he should move one man to safety from B.'s bar-point in the hope that he will get the other man safely by, for a running game on the next throw. But if B. picks up his blot, re-entry is quite easy and W. should still play a running game. In the meantime B.'s best hope of equalizing positions is to build B.I.T. and stay on W.I.T. 5 to pick up his homecoming opponent, if possible, running only with the man on W.I.T. 3

BOARD 6

B.'s Throw. The game is almost even, B. having a slight advantage of position. Each player has the equivalent of ten men to bring into his respective inner tables. B. should take no chances of losing his advantage by leaving a blot. Example: B. has 6-1. He enters two men from his own bar-point into B.I.T. Should W. throw double fives, or fours, then in this case only, should he retreat from B.I.T. 5. Otherwise he must remain to threaten B.'s homecoming. Either side is justified in doubling, and in accepting a proffered double

■ In these six boards, illustrated from situations that have actually developed in the course of games, there is no attempt to explain any particular subsequent throws of the dice. In other words these are not, in a limited sense, problems. The boards which show typical situations—frequently encountered in play, are merely presented to the player for study and it will profit him greatly if he will play each one out several times with different throws of the dice, in order to establish in his own mind what is likely to be the wisest course in strategy to pursue in similar circumstances in other games.

B.I.T. Black's Inner Table
B.O.T. Black's Outer Table
W.I.T. White's Inner Table
W.O.T. White's Outer Table

■ In the March issue of *Vanity Fair*, the strategies of the four games of Backgammon—the position game, the running game, the blocking or sideprime game and the backward game—were considered. It was stated that the backward game was the most over-emphasized, overvalued and overplayed tactic in Backgammon. But as space did not permit full discussion of its disadvantages at that time, the backward game is given further consideration here. In at least three cases out of five, it ends in a gammon or a backgammon for the player who uses it without restriction; in the fourth case it ends in the loss of a single game; in the fifth a doubtful victory. In fact, this strategy, which is the one artificial element in the game, ends so frequently in disaster that the inexperienced player should never employ it, and the expert only on those rare occasions when his position is hopeless.

The principle of the backward game is this:

when high throws of the dice have advanced the opponent past most of the player's men, or when the player has had one or more blots hit other than his outmost men, the player *may begin the game again* by getting *behind* the opponent and forcing him to pass by once more. During the second passing, the player hopes to be able to hit the opponent's blots one after another until he has returned enough of them to his (the player's) own board to equalize the positions again, and begin the running game once more, with the same opportunities he had when the game began.

■ In theory this is an excellent tactic, but in reality it is faulty—because it depends on the opponent's cooperation for success. In other words, unless the opponent takes up the backward game player's blots, no backward game is possible because the player cannot get *behind* the opponent except by being taken up. An attempt to get around this is made by the player of the backward game taking up all the opponent's blots he can while at the same time leaving as many of his own blots as possible in his inner table, so that the opponent cannot enter his men without taking up the player's blots. Experienced players, however, are rarely led into this predicament.

The only occasion when the backward game should be adopted without question is when the opponent opens with double-ones and the player's first throw is not a good one. The double-ones give the opponent his eight-, bar-, six-, and five-points, a position the strength of which cannot be overestimated; if in conjunction with this beginning, the player's own first throw is weak, he has only one alternative—the backward game.

In developing the (Continued on page 100)

