

SHEINWOLD ON BACKGAMMON

BIG BACKGAMMON BOOM LIKE CANASTA CRAZE

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 1

(First in a series of twelve articles.)

Indoor game fanciers are shaking their heads about the Great Backgammon Boom. "Biggest game craze since the early days of Canasta," they say.

The difference is that backgammon, a game that goes back some 4,000 years, is here to stay. You can't walk into a smart resort—from Monte Carlo to Acapulco—without hearing the rattle of dice and the click of "men" being moved. The big names of show biz, famous athletes, celebrities of the arts and sciences, the beautiful people—all seem addicted to the game that Cleopatra played with Mark Antony.

PLAYED ON BOARD

Backgammon is played on a board that usually folds along the center line (marked Bar). The board is put on a table, with the bar running from you to your opponent.

The rest of the equipment consists of 15 white checkers (or "men"), 15 dark checkers, two dice cups, two pairs of dice, one doubling cube and two slightly crazy players (named "you" and "opponent," or White and Black to correspond with the color of the men they play).

Forget about the doubling cube for the moment. A pair of dice goes in each cup, and each player takes turns at rolling. Depending on what you roll at your turn, you will move one or more of your men around the board. The game is a race, and your chief object is to move your men to the goal faster than your opponent can.

That is, of course, a simplification. If victory depended only on rolling higher numbers than your opponent, the game would have died 3,998 years ago. You may overcome bad rolls by capturing a man of the opposite color, sending it back to the starting point; or you may block men so that they can't move. If you make good use of bad rolls you can often beat an opponent who rolls much higher numbers.

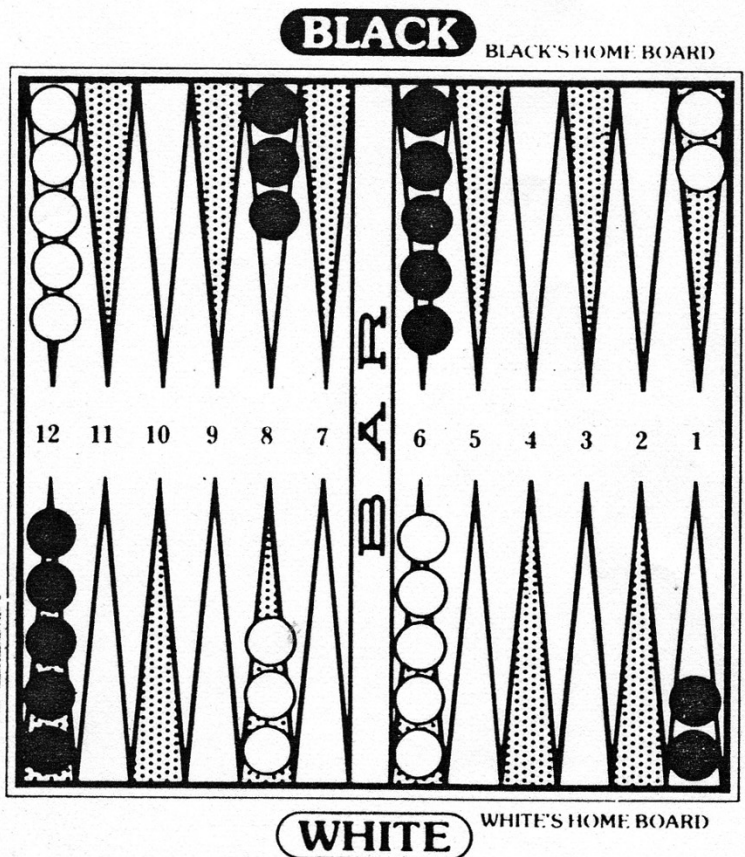
STARTING POSITION

Now let's put the men on the board. Follow the diagram, giving yourself the white men. Every game of backgammon starts from this position; and you will know it by heart after you have played a few times. Don't bother to memorize the starting position; just clip this column out and keep it in your

board until you have become familiar with it by regular play.

In fact, clip out all the columns in this series to make sure that you play backgammon accurately and well. The next column will show you how the men move.

Diagram No. 1



HOW THE MEN MOVE

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 2

(Second in a series of twelve articles.)

In the first article of this series you learned how to set up the men on a backgammon board. Don't be discouraged if you need to consult a diagram to do this for the first few weeks of play. Each of the celebrities who now plays the game well, such as Polly Bergen, Diana Ross, Bill Bradley and Hugh Hefner, started exactly this way.

Now let's see how the men move from the starting position. Assume that you're White and that your opponent is Black—which means that you move the white men and your opponent moves the black men.

The first stage in your race is to get all of your white men into the lower right quarter of the board. Black's object is to get all of his black men into the upper right quarter of the board. In each quarter there are six long triangles ("points") of alternating color; the six points at the upper right are Black's home board, and the six points at the lower right are White's home board.

The men move from point to point, according to the numbers rolled on the dice.

For example, suppose your first roll from the starting position is 5-3. You could move one of the five men in the upper left corner down one point to the point occupied by five black men (without actually stopping there) and then four more points to the right, coming to rest on the point already occupied by three white men.

If you have a backgammon board, set up the men in the starting position and move a man five points in the direction just described. This is just the first part of your move; the other part is the move of three points, since your dice called for a 5-3 move.

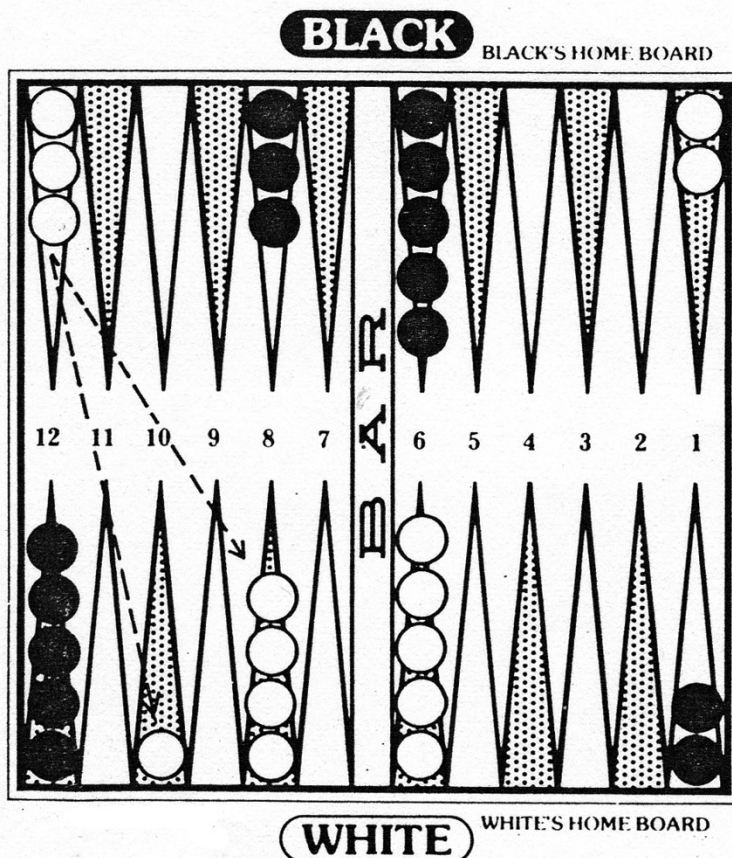
If you like, you may continue to move the same man. Take the man from the lower left point (on which you originally had three white men) and move three more points to the right. This takes you into your home board, just to the right of the point on which you have five men.

This is not the only way you can make your 5-3 move. An expert might start as you did moving down from the upper left corner to add a man to the point with three white men. But then, instead of moving on with the same man, he would bring another white man down from the upper left corner for a move of three. This would leave a single man on the unoccupied dark point at the lower left part of the board.

Notice the direction of your move. You go from left to right in a counterclockwise direction. Black moves in the opposite direction—clockwise.

If Black had the same 5-3 roll, he might move two men up from the lower left corner. One man would go to the light point on which he has three men; and the other would go to the unoccupied light point in the upper left quarter of the board.

Diagram No. 2



HOW TO MOVE DOUBLETS

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 3

(Third in a series of twelve articles.)

You have learned how to set up the board for the beginning of a game and how the men move. Let's continue by discussing how to move if you roll a doublet.

The doublets in backgammon are called double six (6-6 on the two dice), double five (5-5), double four (4-4), double three (3-3), double two (2-2) and double one (1-1). When you roll a doublet at backgammon you take the number *four* times. That is, if you roll a double six you take four moves of 6 points instead of only two moves: for double fives, you take four moves of 5 points, and so on.

Let's study the diagram shown today. Black has happened to move first, and he has moved a 4-2. You will notice that he has moved one man 2 points from his 6-point—the point in the upper right quarter on which he now has four men. And he has moved 4 points from his 8-point—the point in the upper left quarter on which he now has two men. Each of these moves lands a man on his 4-point—the point in the upper right quarter where he now has two men.

Notice that Black moves in a clockwise direction. You, White, move in a counterclockwise direction.

Now suppose you roll double six at this stage. How should you move your men?

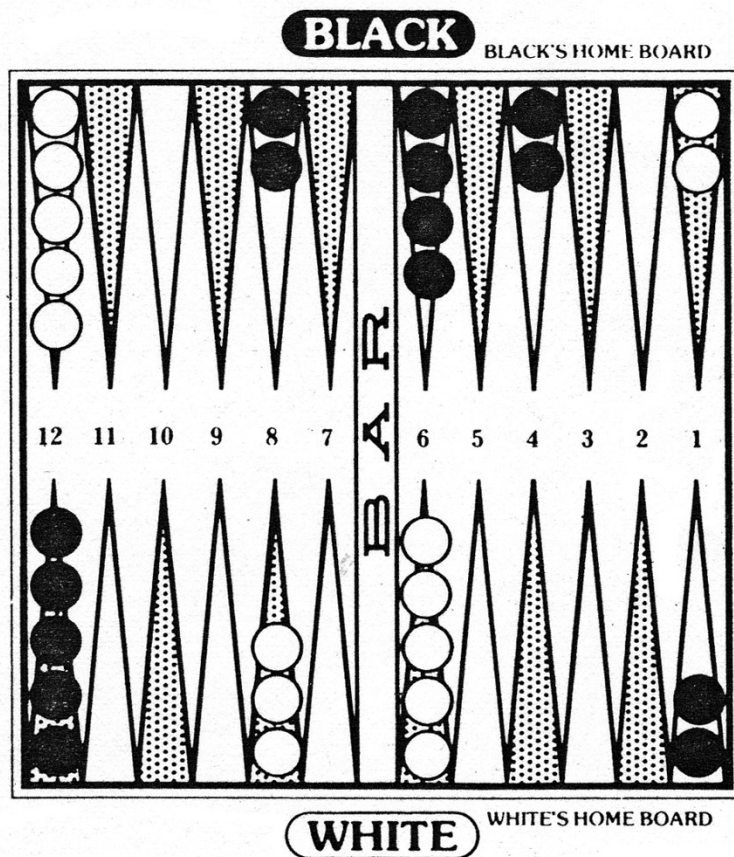
The best move is from the right-hand upper corner (the two "runners" on your opponent's 1-point). Move both men six points to your opponent's bar point. The bar is the ridge that runs down the middle of the board; and the bar point is the first point outside of the bar (numbered "7" in the diagram).

Moving your runners to your opponent's bar point uses up two of your sixes. You make the other half of your move by taking two men to your own bar point from the upper left-hand corner. This point, numbered "12" in the diagram, may be described as your Halfway House.

You would make the same kind of move if you rolled double four. That is, you would move the two runners from the upper right-hand corner to your opponent's 5-point. And you would complete your move by bringing two men down from your Halfway House, in the upper left-hand corner, moving them four points each. They would then land on your 9-point, to

the immediate left of the point on which you start with three men.

Diagram No. 3



CAPTURE AND SAFETY

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 4

(Fourth in a series of twelve articles.)

It is a basic rule of backgammon that you cannot land any of your men on a point if it is already occupied by two or more men of your opponent.

For example, look at today's diagram. Your opponent, Black, has already moved a 6-4 by moving one of his "runners" from the lower right-hand corner to the left, where it now rests on your 11-point.

You, White, now roll double five (5-5).

Your first thought, perhaps, is to move your runners from the upper right-hand corner. But if you count 5 points to the left, you would have to land on your opponent's 6-point, where he already has five men. Two of those black men would be enough to stop you from landing on his 6-point.

There are other moves you can make with your double five, but for the moment concentrate on the fact that you cannot move the runners because you cannot land on a point already occupied by two or more enemy men.

We come now to another basic rule of backgammon: You are allowed to land on a point occupied by only one man of the enemy; and if you do so, that enemy man is captured and must start over again by entering in your home board.

In today's diagram, you can hit the single black man at the lower right-hand corner (on your 1-point) by moving 5 points from your own 6-point (the point in the lower right quarter on which you start with five men).

Before we discuss how you should take the other three fives of your 5-5 roll, let us look ahead and see what happens to the single black man (often called a "blot") that you have just hit. At his next turn Black must re-enter the captured black blot before he can make any other move. If he rolls anything that includes a one (6-1, 5-1, 4-1, 3-1, 2-1 or 1-1) he can enter that blot on your 1-point. This is the very point from which he has just been ousted, and in entering here he hits the white man that hit him on your previous move. If this happens, your captured white blot must be entered in Black's home board (the upper right quarter of the board) before you can make any other move.

It is not necessary for your opponent to re-enter his captured blot on the same point from which it came. If he rolls anything containing a two (6-2, 5-2, 4-2, 3-2, 2-2 or 1-2) he can enter his blot on your 2-point (the second point from the right in the lower right corner). This would use his two, and he would then move one of his men the number of points corresponding to the other number of his roll. (With a 6-2, he would come in with a two and would move some man six points.)

If your opponent rolls 6-6, he cannot come in at all, because your 6-point is occupied by four men (assuming that one of the original five men there has been moved to hit the Black blot on your 1-point).

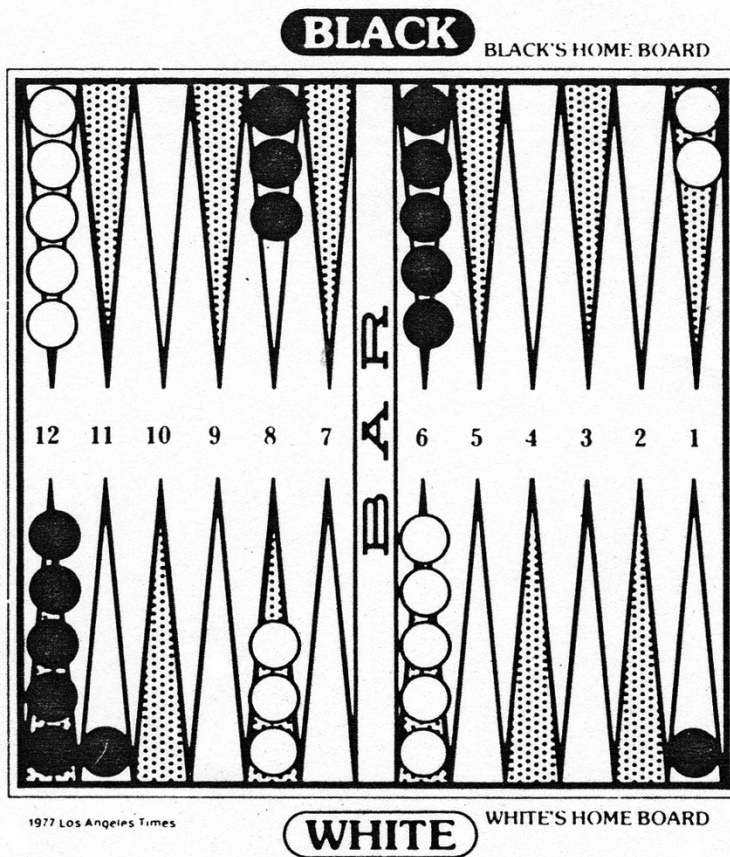
If your opponent cannot come in with his blot, he cannot make any other move. The double-six, usually a very good roll,

is completely wasted.

This fact indicates how you should take your double-five. Instead of moving only one man from your 6-point to hit the blot on your 1-point, you should move *two* men from the 6-point to the 1-point. This not only hits your opponent's blot but also prevents him from coming in if he rolls a one. For the other half of your move, take two of the three men on your 8-point and move them five points to the right, where they land on your 3-point.

After you have made this move, you will have three men on your 6-point, two men on your 3-point and two men on your 1-point. If your opponent rolls ones, threes or sixes on his dice, he will be unable to come in—and he will be unable to make any other move until he has managed to re-enter that blot.

Diagram No. 4



1977 Los Angeles Times

WHITE

WHITE'S HOME BOARD

Copyright LOS ANGELES TIMES

BEARING OFF

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 5

(Fifth in a series of twelve articles.)

When you have all 15 of your men in your home board, you can begin to take them off the board. This process is called "bearing off." The player who first bears off all 15 of his men is the winner.

In the diagram, we see a position that might occur late in a game. You, White, have all 15 of your men in your home board. Black has 14 of his men home, but the 15th man is in Black's outer board (upper left). You are ready to bear off, but Black is not quite ready.

Suppose you roll a 5-3 in this position. You would take one man off your 5-point and one man off your 3-point. You put these men completely off the board.

If you chose, you could take one man off the 5-point and then move a man from the 5-point to the 2-point or from the 4-point to the 1-point. It is always permissible to move a man in the direction of the 1-point instead of bearing a man off; and in some positions (but not this one) it would be good strategy to do so.

You would have to move a man over if your roll included a one or a two. For example, if you rolled 5-1, you would take one man off the 5-point and then move some other man one point. You could, if you chose, move a man from the 5-point to the 4-point; or from the 4-point to the 3-point. The best move, however, would be from the 3-point to the vacant 2-point. If you later rolled a two, you would be able to bear a man off.

If you happen to roll a six, you take a man off the 5-point. The rule is: When the number you roll is higher than any occupied point, take a man off the highest occupied point. If you had no men on either the 6-point or the 5-point, but did have men on the 4-point, you would take a man off the 4-point if you rolled either a six or a five; and if you rolled a 6-5 in this position, you would take two men off the 4-point.

Suppose in today's diagram you had five men on the 6-point and no men on the 5-point. What would you do if you rolled 5-3? The three is easy: You take a man off the 3-point. For the five, you must move a man from the 6-point to the 1-point. You can't bear off with your five because the number is not higher than any occupied point.

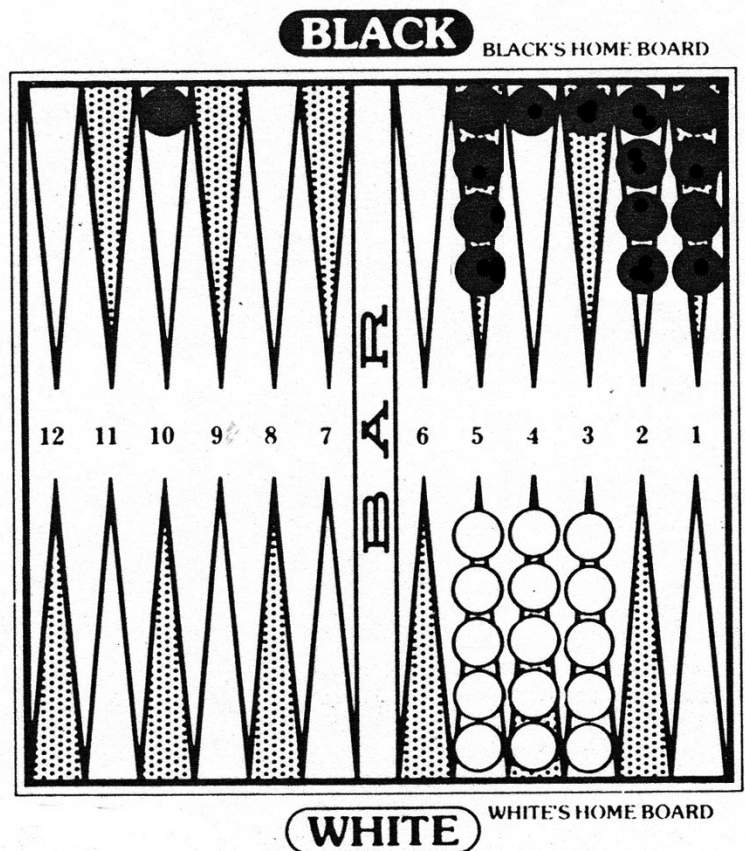
After you have made your move, Black will move. If he rolls a 2-1, he can move the man in his outer board (upper left) to the bar point, but that still doesn't get him into his home board; and until he gets all of his men in, he cannot begin to bear off. If Black rolls 3-1, he gets into his inner board, but he uses his entire roll to do so and still cannot bear a man off. But if Black rolls 4-1 (or anything higher), he can get at least one man off. With 4-1, for example, he moves to his 6-point

with the four and then bears one man off the 1-point with the one.

If you bear off all of your men before your opponent bears off all of his, you win the game. If you bear off all of your men before your opponent has borne off any of his men, you win a double game (called a gammon). And if you bear off all of your men at a time when your opponent not only has all 15 men still on the board but also has one or more men in your inner board, you win a triple game (called a backgammon).

If you were playing for one peanut per game, you would win two peanuts for a gammon and three peanuts for a backgammon.

Diagram No. 5



WHO GOES FIRST?

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 6

(Sixth in a series of twelve articles.)

To begin a game of backgammon, each player rolls just one die. If the players happen to roll the same number, they must roll again. (We'll have another word or two on this subject in a minute.)

Sooner or later, usually at the first attempt, the two players will roll different numbers. Then the player who has rolled the higher number moves first; and his first move is the two numbers that he and his opponent have rolled. For example, if White rolls 6 and Black rolls 1, White moves first; and his first move is 6-1.

After this first move, the other player rolls both of his own dice; and thereafter the two players move in turn, each rolling his own two dice for his move.

Now let's return to the question of rolling the same number. When this happens, most backgammon players turn the doubling cube so that 2 shows at the top, thus indicating that the game is being played for twice the agreed stake (if any). For example, if you are playing a game for one peanut, and you both happen to roll the same number on the opening roll of a game, that game is played for two peanuts.

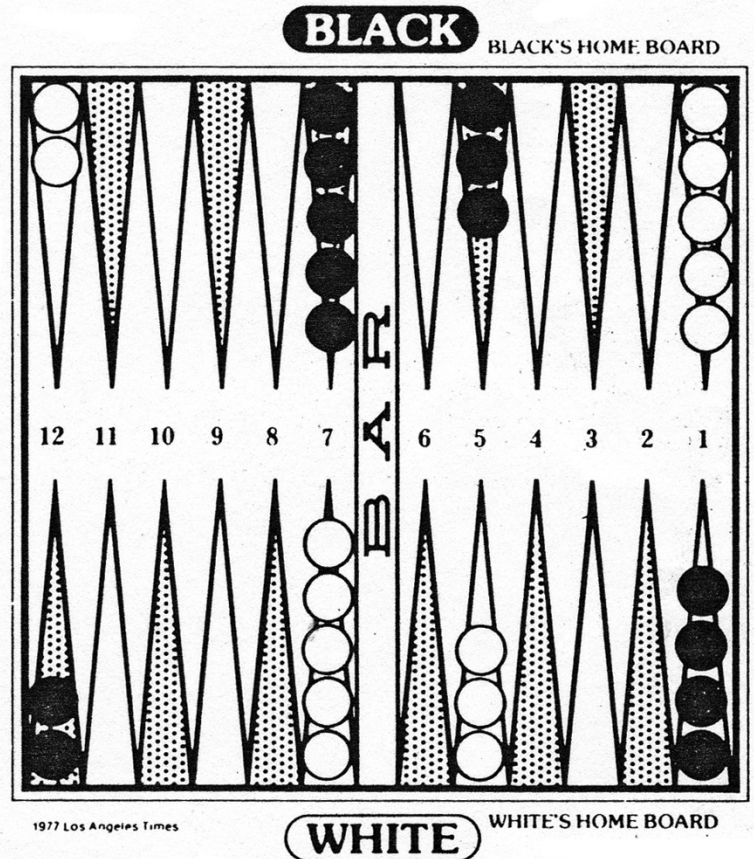
If both players roll the same number again (twice in succession), the doubling cube is turned so that the number 4 shows at the top. This indicates that the game is being played for four times the agreed stake.

This sort of thing could theoretically go on for quite a while, but most backgammon players agree to limit the number of "automatic doubles." For example, you might agree, on sitting down to play, that the stake is to be one peanut per game, with a limit of three automatic doubles. If no such limit is agreed upon, a single game may count for 64 peanuts (or even more), and that might be more peanuts than you wanted to risk on a single game of backgammon.

While we're on the subject of the opening move, we ought to say something about the two legal starting positions. If you have saved the earlier articles of this series you will be familiar with the starting position in which you, White, have your home board at your right. This means that your opponent has his home board at his left. His starting position is just as legal as yours; and every backgammon player should be familiar with both positions and should be comfortable whether he moves his men in a clockwise or counterclockwise rotation.

To help you see the other legal starting position, today's diagram shows the original position with White's home board at the lower left instead of at the lower right. Keep this diagram, and try to play as many games with the home board at your left as at your right.

Diagram No. 6



1977 Los Angeles Times

Copyright LOS ANGELES TIMES

MAKING POINTS

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 7

(Seventh in a series of twelve articles.)

When you begin to play backgammon, your first question is "Why should I move one man rather than another?"

You will usually get good results if at the beginning of a game you try to put two men on an otherwise vacant point. When you have two (or more) white men on a point, no black man can land on that point; and if your opponent puts two black men on a point, you cannot land a white man on that point. The process of putting two of your men on a point is called "making" the point.

The most valuable points are your opponent's 5-point, your own 5-point and your own bar point. A substantial level below the importance of these three points are your own 4-point, your own 3-point, your opponent's 4-point and your opponent's bar point. You attach only minor importance to such points as your own 2-point, your own 1-point, your opponent's 3-point or 2-point and points in your own outer board (such as the 9-point, 10-point and 11-point).

The points in your own inner board are useful for three purposes: to furnish safe landing spots for your men as you bring them into your home board before you begin to bear off; to block your opponent's runners from getting safely out of your home territory, and to make it difficult or impossible for your opponent to re-enter the board after you have been lucky enough to hit him.

In today's diagram, White has moved three times, each time by making a valuable point. Black, far less fortunate, has been unable to make a point and has moved his men unwisely.

White's opening roll was 3-1, which he used to make his 5-point. That is, he moved one man from the 6-point to the 5-point and another man from the 8-point to the 5-point.

Black rolled 3-2, and he took a man from his Halfway House (the point at the lower left corner on which he originally had five men) and moved it safely to his own 8-point. This was safe, but not the best use of the roll. Black should have moved two men from his Halfway House—one three points and the other two points. They wouldn't be safe, but there is such a thing as playing a game so safe that you're an absolutely safe loser.

White, at his second turn, rolled 6-1; and he used this roll to make his bar point. That is, he moved one man one point from the 8-point to the bar point; and another man 6 points from the White Halfway House down to the bar point.

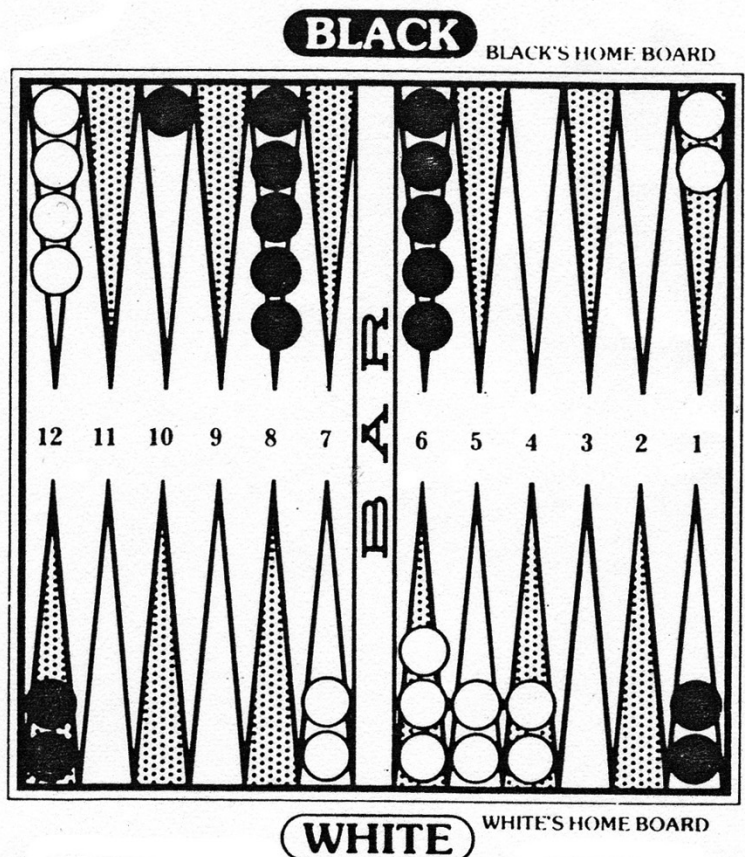
Black, at his second turn, rolled 4-1 and again moved from his Halfway House to the 8-point. If he had made the recommended move at his first turn, he would have been able to make his bar point with this second roll of 4-1.

At this third turn, White rolls 4-2 and makes the 4-point. That is, he takes one man 2 points from the 6-point and another man 4 points from the 8-point. Both land on the 4-point.

Black now rolls 2-1 and moves one man three points from his Halfway House to his own 10-point.

Read the three advantages of making points once again, and see how White's position is far superior to Black's. White should begin to move his runners out of Black's home board; if he gets hit, he will have little trouble re-entering since Black has only one point made (the 6-point). If Black tries to move his runners out, he must be lucky enough to roll specifically 1-6, 2-5 or 2-6. And if he gets hit, he will have trouble re-entering, since White has three points made—so that Black can get back into the game only by rolling a one, two or three.

Diagram No. 7



LONG SHOTS AND SHORT SHOTS

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 8

(Eighth in a series of twelve articles.)

If one of your men gets hit when you're playing backgammon, you must re-enter him in your opponent's home board. This slows you up, but you cannot afford to play backgammon as though getting hit were a fate worse than death.

You can almost never win a game of backgammon if you pile your men up on two or three points. Sooner or later you're almost sure to get a roll that forces you to land on an unoccupied point; and then you're at the mercy of your opponent.

You may think that it's better to put off the evil day, playing safe as long as possible in the hope that you may never need to take a risk. This is a losing philosophy at backgammon; it's usually safe to take risks at the beginning of a game but dangerous to take the very same risk later on.

For example, suppose you are White in today's diagram with an opening roll of 3-2. If you want to play safe, you can drop a man down from your Halfway House until it rests on your 8-point. The expert, however, prefers to drop two men down from the Halfway House, landing one on the 11-point and the other on the 10-point.

Is this risky? Slightly.

Let's see how Black can hit you. The only men he can hit you with are his runners, on your 1-point. To hit the man on your 11-point, he must roll specifically a 6-4. Double five will not do the job because he cannot move five points. To hit your man on the 10-point, Black must roll a 6-3 or a 5-4.

Each of the three rolls just mentioned can be made two ways. You can roll 6-4 by getting a 6 on the first die and a 4 on the second die; or by getting a 4 on the first die and a 6 on the second die. Similarly, 6-3 and 3-6 are the same roll; and 5-4 and 4-5 are the same roll.

For the reason just given, there are six ways that Black can hit your two blots. But there are 36 possible ways of rolling the two dice, and in 30 of these he will not hit you. Thus the odds are 30 to 6 or 5 to 1 that Black will not hit you.

Even if he does hit you, the damage will not be great. He has only one point made in his home board. You will be able to re-enter your man in his board unless you roll double six (and the odds are 35 to 1 against that misfortune).

If you wait until your opponent has made seven or eight moves before you leave a blot, you may discover that by that time he has made two or three additional points in his inner board. It is far more difficult to re-enter his board when he has four points made than when he has only one point made.

Still, there is such a thing as taking a foolish risk. For example, you would not take your opening 3-2 roll by dropping two men from your 6-point onto your home board. Black would be able to hit your two blots with any two, any three and also with double one. His chance would be 21 out of 36, so that the

odds of hitting you would be 7 to 5 in his favor.

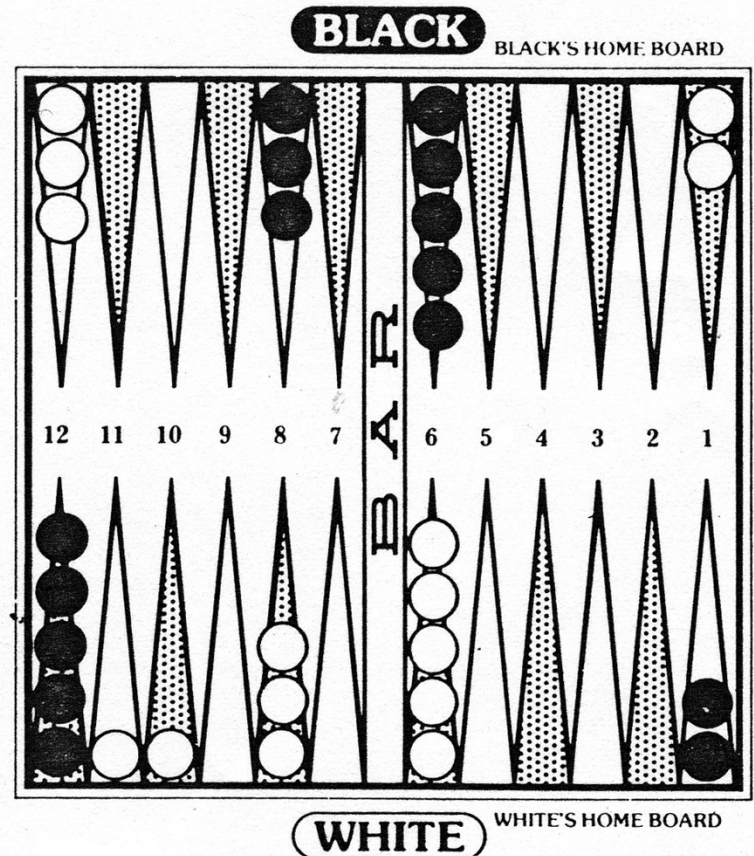
You can count these possibilities by counting any ordinary roll as two possibilities and any doublet as just one possibility. It's a little early in your backgammon career to make such calculations, but it's not too early to distinguish between long shots and short shots.

A long shot is a roll that totals 7 or more, so that it uses both dice.

A short shot is a roll that totals 6 or less, so that it may use only one die (but also may use the total of both dice).

It's much harder for your opponent to hit you with a long shot (7 or more) than with a short shot (6 or less).

Diagram No. 8



THREE TYPES OF GAME

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 9

(Ninth in a series of twelve articles.)

Broadly speaking, there are three main types of game plan: the running game, the blocking game and the back game.

You play a running game when you get big rolls to start with and can see your way clear to bringing your back men around safely. Your object is to land all of your men safely in your home board and then bear them off. If you roll bigger numbers than your opponent, you should win a pure running game.

The trouble with a running game is that you can't always bring your men around safely. If your opponent hits one of your blots, you have to start that man all over; and you may lose enough ground to lose the race. Your opponent must keep at least one man back if he hopes to hit you when you leave a blot. Ideally, he would keep several men back in your inner board. If he does so, he is playing a "back" game. Meanwhile, he makes a few points in his home board so that when he does hit one of your blots, he can make it difficult for you to re-enter the board.

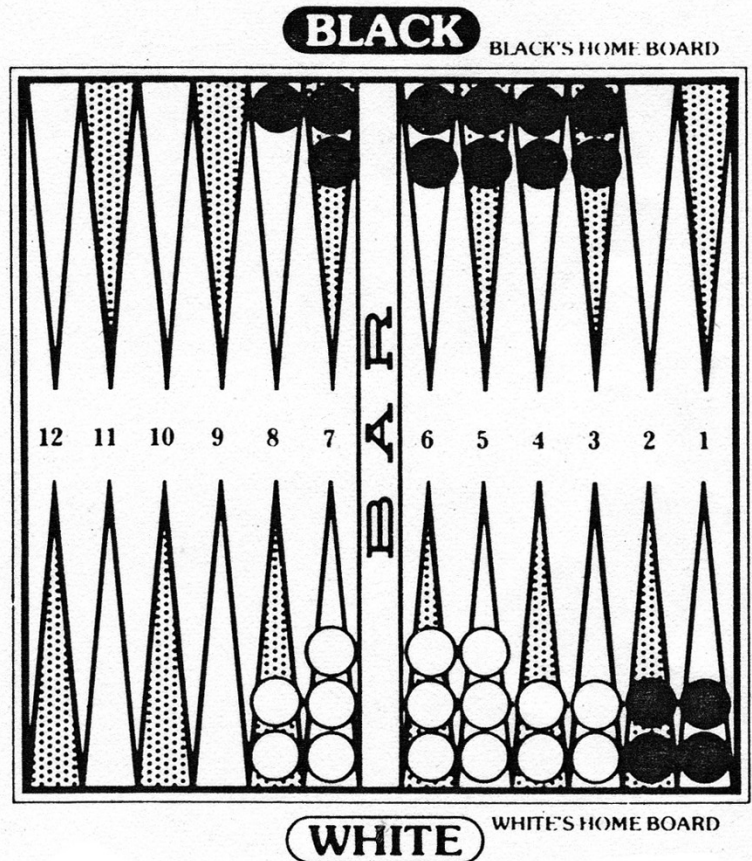
The most successful game plan of all is the blocking game. You make as many points as possible in your home board and just outside of your home board in order to hold back your opponent's back men.

In the diagram, White has made six points in a row (called a six-point "prime"). Black's men in White's inner board cannot get out.

Suppose it is Black's turn, and that he rolls double four. It will be difficult for him to take this move and still preserve a "good" board—one that will be difficult for White to enter if White happens to get hit in the next move or two.

White hopes that Black will get big rolls, which will force Black to move his men over onto his lower numbered points. For himself, White hopes for small rolls, so that he can preserve his own prime for a few moves. Eventually, White will move all of his men into his home board, and Black will eventually get a roll big enough to move one or two men out. If Black leaves a blot in moving out, White should be able to hit the blot and make the point—thus making it more difficult for Black to re-enter the board and also making it easier for White to bear his men off safely without leaving a blot in the process.

Diagram No. 9



Copyright LOS ANGELES TIMES

OPENING MOVES

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 10

(Tenth in a series of twelve articles.)

The best opening moves are 3-1, 6-1 and 4-2, since they allow you to make important points.

With 3-1, make your 5-point. Move 3 points from your 8-point to your 5-point; and one point from your 6-point to your 5-point.

With 6-1, make your bar point. Move 6 points from your Halfway House (the point at upper left where you start with five men) and one point from your 8-point.

With 4-2, make your 4-point. Move 4 points from your 8-point and 2 points from your 6-point.

With 6-5, take one of the runners (your two men in the extreme upper right corner) and move him all the way to your Halfway House.

With 6-4, take one of the runners and move him one point short of your Halfway House. He can be hit only if your opponent rolls a two, and the odds are 25 to 11 against that.

With 6-3, many players take one of the runners and move him out two points short of the Halfway House. Some modern experts prefer to take a runner to the opponent's bar point (a move of 6 points); and then use the three by dropping a man down from Halfway House to the 10-point.

With 6-2, some players move one of the runners to the opponent's bar point and drop one man two points down from the Halfway House. Other experts prefer to move a man all the way from the Halfway House to their own 5-point. If this blot is not hit, you can probably make the 5-point or some other valuable point; if it is hit, the game is still young, and the damage will not be fatal.

With 5-4, 5-3 or 5-2, move two men down from your Halfway House. One of those men lands safely on the 8-point; the other man will be a useful builder if it is not hit.

With 5-1, 4-1 or 2-1, move one man down from the Halfway House and take the one-point move with a runner by moving it from your opponent's 1-point to his 2-point.

With 4-3 or 3-2, bring two builders down from your Halfway House.

Following the usual rule about the first move, you cannot get a doublet; but you may get a doublet as your second move or as the reply to your opponent's first move. The first or early move with doublets is fairly standard:

6-6: Make both bar points. Move the two runners to the enemy's bar point and drop two men down from your Halfway House to your own bar point.

5-5: Take two men from your Halfway House to your 3-point. If your opponent has left a blot on your 1-point, move two men from the 8-point to the 3-point and two men from your 6-point to the 1-point.

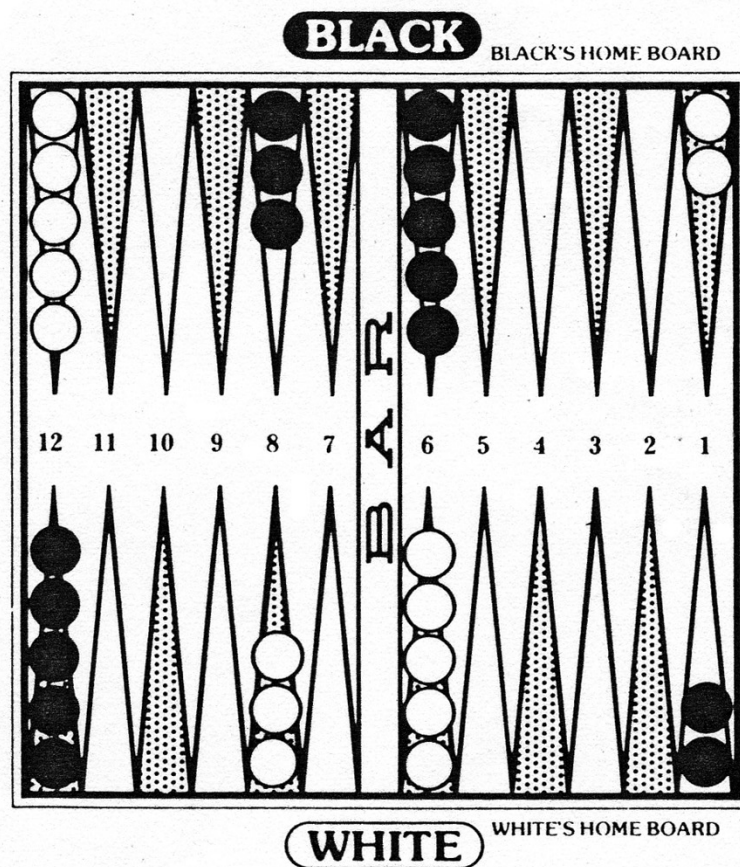
4-4: Move the runners to your opponent's 5-point and bring two men down from your Halfway House to the 9-point.

3-3: Move two men from your 8-point to your 5-point and two men from your 6-point to your 3-point.

2-2: Move two men down from the Halfway House to your 11-point and two men from your 6-point to your 4-point. A strong alternative is to use the entire roll to move your two runners to your enemy's 5-point.

1-1: Move two men from your 6-point to your 5-point and two men from your 8-point to your bar point.

Diagram No. 10



THE DOUBLING CUBE

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 11

(Eleventh in a series of twelve articles.)

Nobody can be a winning backgammon player if he doesn't use the doubling cube well. The shrewd doubler tends to win games that count for at least 2 points; and the non-doubler tends to win only 1-point games.

As you may remember, the doubling cube is used automatically when you and your opponent both roll the same number on the opening roll. When this happens, the cube is turned so that the number 2 is uppermost, alerting both players to the fact that the game counts double. If the same thing happens on the next roll, the cube is turned again, this time so that the number 4 is uppermost. This puts you on notice that the game counts for 4 points instead of only for 1 point. To use my well-worn example, if your agreed stake is one peanut per game, the loser will have to pay 4 peanuts after there have been two automatic doubles. And if the game is a gammon (if you bear off all of your men before your opponent has borne off a single man) 8 peanuts change hands; 12 peanuts in the case of a backgammon (you bear off all of your men when your opponent not only has not borne off a man but also has one or more men in your home board):

So much for automatic doubles. Now we come to the deliberate doubles.

When it is your turn to roll the dice, you may take the doubling cube and double the stake from one point for the game to two points—or twice whatever the stake happened to be at that time. (You can't do this if you were the previous doubler, as we'll see.)

In doubling, move the cube from the middle of the outer rim of the board (where it usually rests in an undoubled game) toward your opponent. If he accepts the double, he keeps the cube on his side of the rim—and the game goes on at twice the previous stake. If he refuses the double, he moves the cube back to the middle of the rim; play ceases in that game, and you immediately score whatever stake the game was being played for before the double.

For example, you and your opponent each roll a 5 to start the game. You turn the cube so that the 2 is uppermost. The cube stays in the middle of the rim. The game continues, and you both know that you are playing for 2 peanuts instead of the usual 1 peanut.

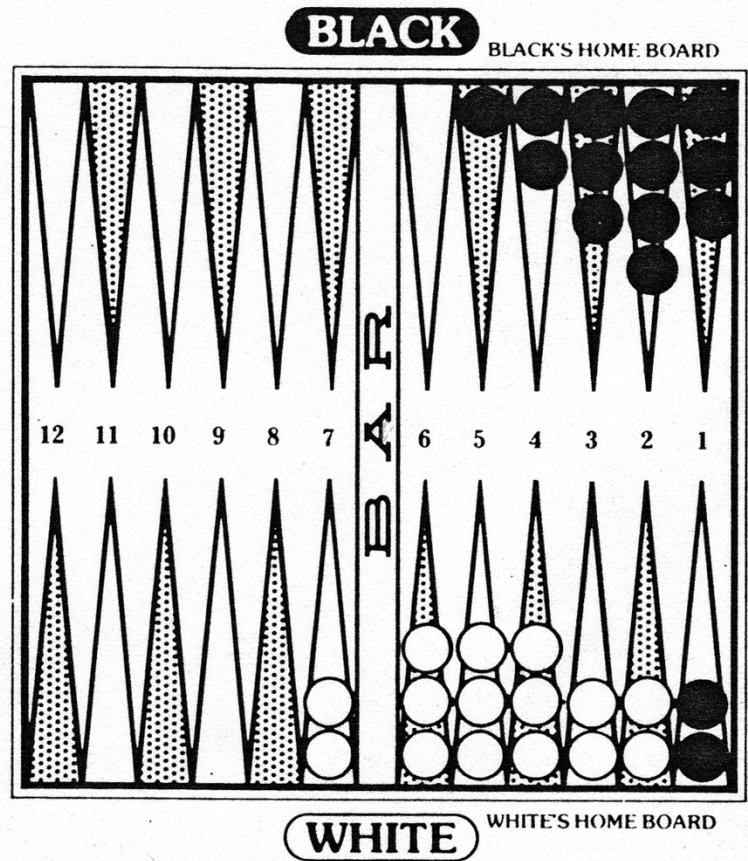
As the game proceeds, you build up a fine position, and you expect to win the game. It is your move in the position shown, and before you roll the dice, you turn the cube from 2 to 4 and push it across the rim of the board toward your opponent.

If he accepts the double, play continues, and the game is now being played for 4 peanuts. If you gammon your opponent, he will have to pay you 8 peanuts. If you backgammon him, he will have to pay you 12 peanuts. But if he refuses the double, he pushes the cube back toward the middle of the rim (with 64 on top, which usually signifies that the game has not yet been doubled) and immediately pays you just 2 peanuts.

Suppose your opponent accepts the double to 4. The cube is on his side of the rim, indicating that he is the player who accepted the last double. Only he has the right to redouble. (Even if your position continues to improve, you cannot double again. The right to redouble belongs to the player who has accepted the previous double.)

If you suddenly get some very bad rolls and your opponent gets some very good rolls, he may wish to redouble. Then he will turn the cube so that 8 is on top and push it back along the rim of the board to your side. If you refuse the redouble, you must pay him 4 peanuts at once. If you accept the redouble, you keep the cube on your side of the board (where you may re-redouble if the position encourages you to do so) and play on for a stake of 8 peanuts.

Diagram No. 11



MORE ABOUT DOUBLES

by Alfred Sheinwold

Part 12

(Last in a series of twelve articles.)

When you start to play backgammon you will probably use the doubling cube only when you are an overwhelming favorite to win the game. Your object in such situations, especially when there is no chance of gammoning your opponent, is to end the game at once rather than run the risk that your opponent will roll several sets of doublets and thus pull the game out of the fire.

In today's position, for example, you are White and it is your turn to roll. You should turn the doubling cube (unless you have made the previous double, in which case only your opponent can turn the cube).

If you fail to double, you might take off only two of your men; and your opponent might roll double six and take off the four men on his 6-point. This would leave you each with six men on the board.

You would then take off two men, and your opponent might roll double four (or higher), bearing off four more men and leaving only two men on his 3-point.

You might still take off only two men, leaving two men still on your board. Now your opponent might roll two numbers as high as three or better (the odds are slightly against this), and he would win the game. The odds are almost a thousand to one against his doing all of this, but it costs him nothing to try if you let him continue the game undoubled.

If you double, he sees that his position is virtually hopeless. He will refuse the double and pay you whatever stake the game is being played for.

You will seldom have a position as overwhelming as this. In the end game, when both sides are bearing off, you should double whenever you have a substantial advantage. For example, you double when you each have the same number of men and it is your turn to move—provided that your men are at least as close to your 1-point as his men are to his 1-point. If you both roll roughly equal dice, you will win the race.

Your opponent should refuse such a double if each side has only a few men. He may take the double if each side has about 10 men (or more), especially if his men are slightly better arranged for bearing off.

Doubling your opponent early is a matter that calls for experience and judgment—or just courage. The same qualities are needed to know when to accept and when to refuse an opponent's double.

Don't double on the strength of a few big doublets unless you also manage to make a few useful points in your home board. Your opponent should take such a double, and a few good rolls may put him in position to redouble.

Double on the strength of a 5-point or 6-point prime with two or more of your opponent's men imprisoned behind the prime.

Double in the running game if the two sides break contact and if you are very substantially ahead of your opponent. Counting to see who is ahead is not an elementary matter; but you don't want to double unless your advantage is so obvious that you don't have to count.

Refuse an early double if your position is substantially inferior and if there is a serious risk of being gammoned.

Accept an early double if you have several points made in your home board and if your opponent still has to bring two men around to safety. If you manage to hit him, you might win the game instead of losing it.

Diagram No. 12

