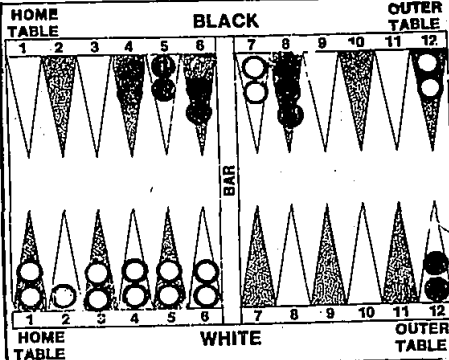


backgammon
Mike Giordano
 of the Cavendish North backgammon club

I know a very competent and experienced backgammon player who was the brunt of an occasional barb for his assertion that, "Every game of backgammon is a race."
 Strictly speaking, the game doesn't become a pure race until one side gets all his men past the opponent's most backward man. If the opponent holds your one point and you are bearing your men off, he might retain the hope of hitting a shot right up to the very end of the game.
 But from your point of view, the game is a race even though you may have opposition every step of the way.

In the position diagrammed above, white has a five-four to play. There are only two viable options: moving both men from the black seven point or moving both men from the black 12 point. The latter play has the advantage of not leaving black a chance to hit on his next roll, plus the dubious advantage of maintaining pressure on black and impeding his forward progress.
 BY BREAKING the black seven point, white is hoping to get away and reduce the game to a race.
 In order to know whether white is better off trying to run or trying to stay

back and fight, the overriding consideration is the state of the race. This is determined by making what is called a "pip count," where each man counts for the minimum number necessary to bear that man off.
 Each man on the white one-point counts one, each man on the white five-point counts five and so on.
 White's home table counts to a total of 40. The men in black's outer table are counted by the same method with the men on black's 12-point counting 12 pips each and the men on the black seven-point valued at 13 pips each.
 White's total pip count is 102. By using the same technique from the other side, we will find that black has a pip count of 113.



WE NOW KNOW that white is up 11 pips in the race before he plays his five-four. After his play he will be up 20. Being so far ahead, white should realize that he will be forced to get his back men moving long before black will. This is especially true when your opponent's back men are more advanced than your own.
 To see why this is so, let's assume that white makes the inferior play of bringing the men from black's 12-point into his outer board. Within two or three rolls white will have brought those men into his home table and be in a position where he will be forced to break the black seven-point with any number including a six.
 Black, on the other hand, will be able to use the builders in his outer table to make a better home board and still retain either his eight- or nine-point as well as the white 12-point. At the critical juncture, when white is compelled to break his back point, black will have

a double shot at white's last man and be a strong favorite to hit and win the game.
 If white breaks his back point now and leaves his opponent the two shot, now he is better than a two to one favorite to escape unscathed. As a general rule, if you have a substantial lead in the race, it is in your best interest to simplify the game and attempt to reduce the game to a straight race where you will enjoy an edge.
 In a certain sense, every game of backgammon is a race. The race is most often a marathon through an obstacle course. But if you were a world-class sprinter with a clear advantage in speed, wouldn't it be wise to reduce that grueling marathon to a 100-yard dash?

Jeff Stary of Southfield, an excellent backgammon player and a true world-class bridge player, has taken over direction of the Cavendish North backgammon club in Southfield, as its new owner-proprietor. He is full of energy, enthusiasm and good ideas.
 I continue as backgammon instructor and tournament director. We plan to expand our tournament schedule in the very near future. We still have our 8 p.m. Wednesday Night Tournament, with one new feature — a half-hour positional analysis (very similar to these columns), with question-and-answer period. This will run from 7:15-7:45 p.m. for those players able to come a few minutes early.
 For further information call the club at 842-9816.



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