

Backgammon is serious

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By GERALDINE CRAWFIS
 Backgammon, the game that used to be known for its location on the flip side of a checker board, has become a fast-moving, crowd-drawing attraction. And a bright orange bungalow on Greenfield, north of Twelve Mile Road, is evidence of the game's burgeoning growth.

The establishment—Cavendish North—is the state's first full-time backgammon club. A combination of skill, luck and the chance to finish in the money brings men, women and children to the public club tables to compete.

The club derives its name from the Cavendish clubs that were popular in England in the late 1800's with Whist players.

Whist is a card game played by partners where people get one point for every trick in excess of six. In time, the name Cavendish became synonymous with card clubs.

In the U.S., bridge, a descendant of Whist, became the club's favorite game. Today, Cavendish clubs can be found in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and Toledo. Each club is an independent establishment. Although bridge is still a popular diversion at the clubs, lately backgammon is the rage.

Southfield's Cavendish North club was founded in the Ace Building on Southfield Road by Howard Perleman in 1973. Two-and-a-half years ago the

club moved to its present location and was sold to Bob Claffone, of Royal Oak, a former state chess champion. "Backgammon is a rapidly rising enjoyable pastime," Claffone said. "It's an easy game to learn; great for family fun and popular with college students. It's hard to tell how many people play but the sale of sets is going strong."

On any Wednesday evening between a half dozen to 30 players of various ages, occupations and capabilities sit elbow-to-elbow at four long tables in the main room, matching their wits and their luck with the dice roll.

One Wednesday night a precocious six-year old grabbed the \$25 first prize. "I was topped by a nine-year-old girl," said an embarrassed policeman who's played the game for two years.

There are no dues to pay for membership at Cavendish North club. The public may play between 1 p.m. and midnight seven days a week during the winter. The club is closed on Sundays in the summer.

For many, the club is a stopping-off point after work to avoid the rush hour. For others it is a way to pass a lazy afternoon or have an active evening out. The strongest drink in the place is coffee. Games cost a dollar an hour.

Tournaments go on practically all the time nationwide and internationally. A popular one is sponsored

by the American Backgammon Players Association and run by Sydney Jackson, a former Detroit, in Marina Del Ray, Calif.

GRANDDADDY of all the tournaments was last year in Las Vegas with 60 participants rolling and moving for the World Amateur Backgammon Championship with a winning purse of \$100,000.

Linda Roach, an aspiring law student from Ann Arbor who directs the Wednesday night activities at Cavendish, says she enjoys tournament play. If she isn't winning, she is at least breaking even. Her theory is to combine a top tournament with a pre-planned vacation.

"If you win, some or all of your vacation is free," she said. "If you lose, well, you were planning to spend a little on fun anyhow. All you lose is the entry fee."

The Playboy Tournament in Chicago was a favorite with Linda. The players were invited to have dinner with Hugh Heiner and his daughter at his palatial digs.

The club does not sponsor anybody in a tournament. Players pay their own fee and participate as individuals. Brass plaques on the wall display names of tournament winners who call Cavendish North "their club."

According to Claffone, some of the top players in the country play at Cavendish, including Perleman, West Bloomfield lawyer Charles Bugar, Southfielder Jeffrey Starr and students Steve Landen and Joe Monro. Current club champ is Bob Silver of Detroit who won the Boyne Mountain tournament this summer.



A pensive Paula Allen decides her next move.



Mickie Ambrose rolls the dice. The game is a combination of skill and luck.

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