



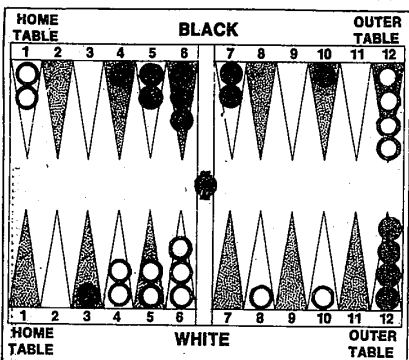
backgammon

Michael Kiolan of the American Backgammon Club

● CALCULATED RISKS
Suppose you were playing in a local tournament. The score is 6-8 in an 11-point match. The doubling cube is neutral. You, playing white, roll a 6-3. What is your move?
It appears that there are several good options: Move from the black 12 and white 10 to the white 7, thus forming a prime; move from black 12 to white 7 with the 6 and hit and slot from white 6 to white 3; run a checker out from black 1, hitting black twice. —
Certainly the last option is the

strongest sounding play. With three checkers "up in the air," white hopes to blitz black and maybe score a gammon. Many beginners would choose this move, since it appeals to the greed of one's gaming nature to obliterate the opponent. You were taught to hit at every opportunity.
Hitting either checker is a mirage. The small prime black has formed, and the loose checkers should not be a concern to white for the moment. White must concentrate on closing black out of his home board, so the first option —

covering the 7 point — also cannot be correct. Making the 7 point at this juncture is useless.
The final option — leaving a blot on white 3 — is the only possible play. Many would faint at the thought of leaving four open blots, but you have to remember that backgammon is a game of continuous calculated risks.
The reasoning behind this move is practical. White must close out black. White must not let black have the 3 point — or any point — without a fight. Once black establishes a point, white will lose sight of the gammon potential and could have trouble moving home. Furthermore, even if black rolls a 3 and hits, white may still continue the attack and hit black on the 4 point from the bar.
Either way, white should be the winner (unless, of course, black rolls double threes to save himself). The odds are that with two checkers on the bar and three points open, black has a 25 percent chance of getting off the bar with both checkers.
Also, the blots on the 7, 8 and 10 points are temporarily safe. With two checkers on the bar, your opponent virtually cannot harm you (except for the right double). With all these outer board blots, there are 13 out of 35 combinations that will cover the blot on 3 if not hit. White could easily hit and run from the back any time, although picking up additional checkers could be hazardous in the bear-off.
Winning a potential two points at this close score in a tournament is critical. The important thing is that, if black suddenly establishes the 1 or 2 point, white may double him out with the cube. Either way, white is in command.



Who will be the winners on Academy Award night?



second runs

Tom Panzenhagen

It's Oscar time — time when your favorite movies don't win Academy Awards and your least-favorite do. It's hard to predict how members of the academy will vote each year. Who would have thought Richard Dreyfuss would win best actor in 1977, or "Rocky" would take best picture of 1976?
The bottom line is that the best performances aren't always rewarded. Oscar winners are usually determined by a combination of past performances and sentimentality, which is why John Wayne won best actor in 1969 for "True Grit."
At any rate, you're about to read it here first. Here's how Hollywood will vote for this year's Oscars:

Best actor: Robert De Niro, Robert Duvall, John Hurt, Jack Lemmon, Peter O'Toole
First of all, no one is sure what John Hurt ("The Elephant Man") looks like, so he's out of the running. No one saw

Robert Duvall's film, "The Great Santini," and Jack Lemmon ("Tribute") was an afterthought (got to have five nominees). Which leaves O'Toole ("The Stunt Man") and De Niro ("Raging Bull"). Hollywood loves reformed alcoholics, but De Niro wins, and here the sweeps begin.

Best song: "Fame," "9 to 5," "On the Road Again," "Out Here On My Own," "People Alone"
Dolly Parton is big — or, popular — right now, and she made a lasting impression in her screen debut, so she'll take home best-song honors for "9 to 5." The theme from "Fame" peaked early (a misadventure that will affect the outcome in another category), which rules out it and "Out Here On My Own Again," also from "Fame."

Best actress: Ellen Burstyn, Goldie Hawn, Mary Tyler Moore, Gene Rowlands, Sissy Spacek
Speaking of surprises, Eileen Brennan's co-star from "Private Benjamin," Goldie Hawn, will win in the biggest upset of the awards. The academy usually votes in clusters (as you'll see later), so the Hawn-Brennan team will walk away victorious. Favorite Sissy Spacek ("Coal Miner's Daughter") is deserving of the prize, but it seems like her film has been out for at least two years, which may explain why its director, Michael Apted, didn't even get a nomination as best director. Mary Tyler Moore ("Ordinary People") — real-life son died, divorced from Grant Tinker — stands a chance, but it's only rarely that the academy rewards screen newcomers. Burstyn ("Resurrection") and Rowlands ("Gloria") are two of the country's best actresses, but their films weren't that well received, and this just isn't their year.

Best picture: "Coal Miner's Daughter," "Elephant Man," "Ordinary People," "Raging Bull," "Tess"
Everyone raves about "Ordinary People," but a family-drama ("Kramer vs. Kramer") won the Oscar last year, and the academy is not likely to repeat itself. Again, "Coal Miner's Daughter" has been around too long, and its director wasn't even nominated for an award. "Tess" is the controversial entry, but its greatest detractor may be that it hasn't been out long enough. "Elephant Man," like its director, is the dark horse. But obviously the winner is "Raging Bull," which, by this point, will be on a winning rampage.

Best supporting actress: Eileen Brennan, Eva Le Gallienne, Cathy Moriarty, Diana Scarwid, Mary Steenbergen
Veteran performer Eileen Brennan ("Private Benjamin") is the best-known among the nominees, and she divides her time between Broadway and Hollywood (that's the movie people like). Besides, she gave the best supporting performance of the bunch, so Brennan is the winner. Mary Steenbergen ("Melvin and Howard") and Cathy Moriarty ("Raging Bull") are both deserving, but they're relative unknowns and sure to repeat as nominees in years ahead.

Best supporting actor: Judd Hirsch, Timothy Hutton, Michael O'Keefe, Jason Robards, Joe Pesci
Timothy Hutton has two things going for him: He gave a great performance in "Ordinary People," and his father, actor Jim Hutton, died a couple of

years ago. Even though Hutton is a screen newcomer, he wins hands down. Judd Hirsch, his co-star, may take a few votes from Hutton, which could open the door Joe Pesci of "Raging Bull," but that's doubtful. Any other year Pesci would have won. Jason Robards ("Melvin and Howard"), one of the world's worst actors, should be satisfied (and surprised) to have been nominated.

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