

backgammon

Mike Giordano

of the Cavendish North backgammon club

REMEMBER THE GAME PLAN

Blocking is the name of the game for the backgammon player and the offensive lineman alike.

I remember the days when I started learning backgammon. One day, a friend and teacher sat across from me, his patience worn thin by a series of my name plays. Finally, he yelled, "What's your game plan? What are you trying to do?" My admission of ignorance drove him into a rage, similar to the effect of a couple Miller Lites on John Madden in the TV commercial.

He ranted: "You block 'em. You build your 5 point! And your 4 point! And your bar point! And when you get 'em all blocked in, you can do any damn thing you want and even you can't lose."

The advice was basic but sound. The delivery I've remembered all these many years.

In the example, white rolls a 6-4 and is faced with the happy dilemma of making either his 5 point or his 7 point. Both plays are strong, but making the 5 point is the better choice. There are a couple reasons why this is so.

We may hit a shot in the next few rolls in which the additional point on our home table would make it more difficult for the opponent to re-enter from the bar. Also, by making the 7 point, we would strip ourselves down to two men on the black 12 point. This

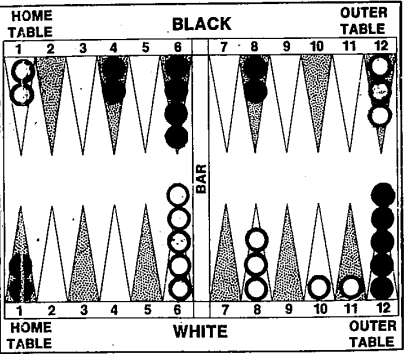
might prove an embarrassment if black runs into our outer table and we are forced to abandon the black 12 point in order to hit him.

There is an even more basic reason for making the 5 point. If you think about your objectives — your game plan, blocking — you will see that the 5 and 4 points both have a high priority since black couldn't be effectively blocked if he were able to make one of these points with his back men.

Because we play backgammon with only 15 men per side and we would like to use 10 of them to occupy the five points from our 4 through our 8, that doesn't leave much room to have men stacked five high on any point. By using one of the five men on our 5 point to achieve a high priority objective, the remainder of our men will be better placed to build additional blocking points.

Sometimes, when faced with a dilemma, your decision becomes easier if you stop to think about what it is that you're trying to accomplish. When you're stuck for a play, I try to consider the game plan — the important things like old friends, linemen and beer commercials.

Questions about backgammon can be sent to Mike Giordano, c/o the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.



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Second runs

Tom Panzenhagen

"It Happened One Night" (1934), 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the *Reford Theatre*, 17390 Lakeshore at *Grand River*, phone 537-1133, \$2. Running time: 105 minutes.

Frank Capra's first screwball comedy is delightful, witty, fast-paced, picturesque, all-American and all-Hollywood. No cultural or artistic bias intended, but early talking films were dominated by foreign stars and Broadway actors. Emil Jannings, Maurice Chevalier, Charles Laughton and Joseph Sternberg represented "American cinema before Capra came along and gave a new spirit and vitality to the young art form. In "It Happened One Night," Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert team as unlikely lovers — he a brusque reporter and she a runaway society miss. Oscars went to picture, director and the two stars; Roscoe Karns, Alan Hale and Ward Bond co-star. Rating: B-3.0.

"The Paper Chase" (1973), 2 tonight on Ch. 4. Originally 111 minutes.

It's little known that John Houseman (the tyrant-professor, Kingsfield) was a big-time Hollywood producer for many years and is now artistic director of a touring troupe of performers called The Acting Company. (For a fascinating and amusing account of his professional relationship with novelist and screenwriter Raymond Chandler, see the book "The World of Raymond Chandler," edited by Miriam Gross.) Houseman will always be remembered as Kingsfield, though, and with good reason. As the Harvard law professor, he permeates every scene of this film written and directed by James Bridges, even those in which he does not appear. Timothy Bottoms stars as first-year law student Hart, with Lindsay "Bionic Woman" Wagner as Kingsfield's daughter and Hart's love interest. Rating: B-3.0.

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