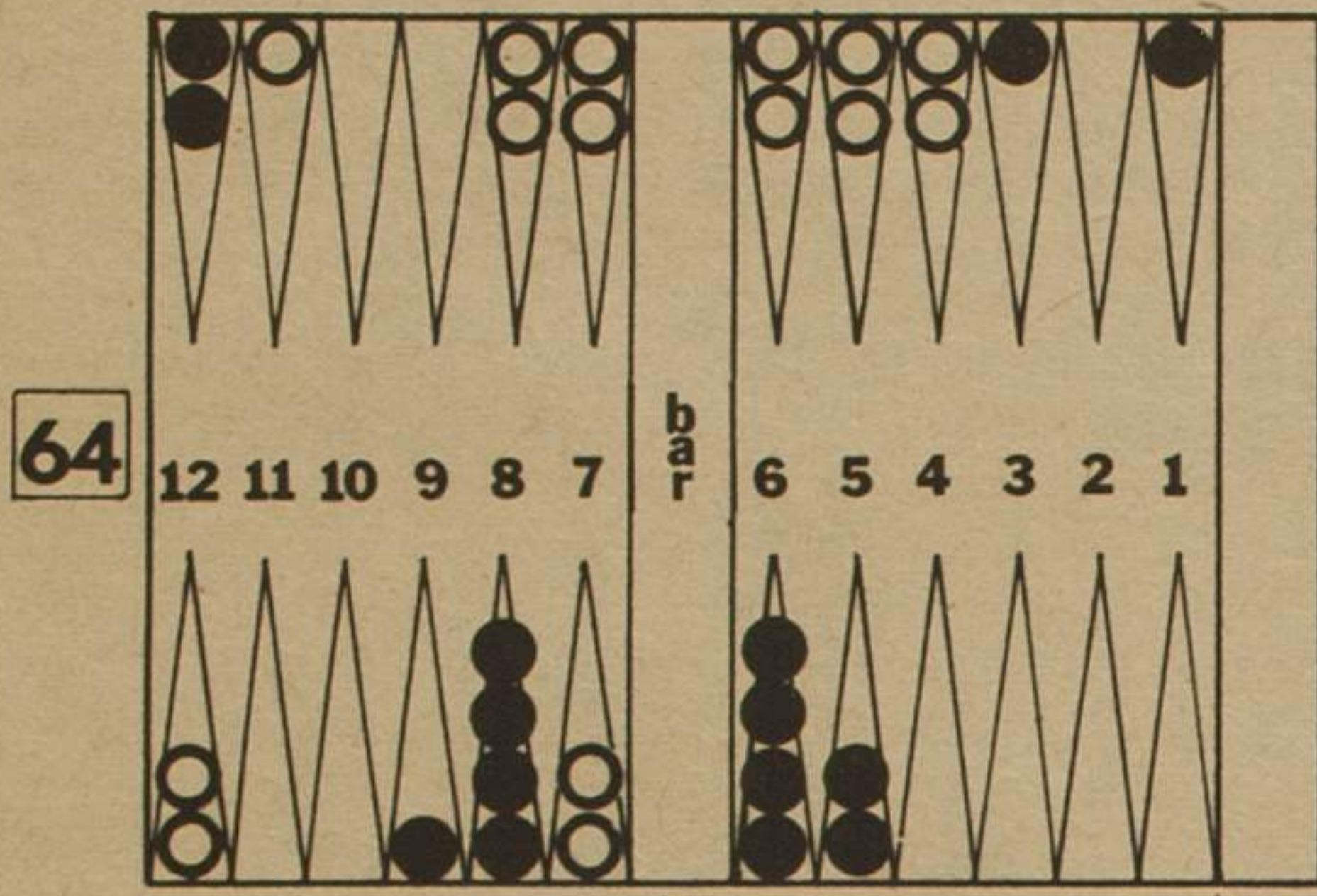


Boardtalk

by Dr. Rohlenstoen



**Black to play 6-2,
first game of a nine-point match.**

No player can expect to hold his own outside the novice division these days until he is comfortable with his judgment in making the two basic doubling decisions: when to offer a double and when to accept one. More money changes hands as the result of bad doubling decisions than bad play decisions.

To rise above the pack, a backgammon player must learn not only how to make the right doubling decision, but also how to incorporate those decisions — past and future — into his tactical decisions. We approach the above problem primarily at this second level.

On the preceding roll, White uncorked a 6-6, and should have been contemplating turning the cube even before Black started to shake his dice. Realizing that he possibly will be facing a double after he plays this 6-2, Black needs to turn the board (figuratively) to anticipate White's decision. Both players recognize that Black has only two rational choices: hitting from W3, or making W3 and starting a point in his inner board.

The two plays have about equal chances of pulling the game out for Black, whom we make about a 2:1 underdog. So which play Black should make — and which one he did make — comes later.

Whichever play Black makes, White should double. This would apply in any match situation save one: if White were leading 7 to 5, turning the cube would be giving Black a free redouble to 4. If the situation in Diagram No. 1 were to arise in a straight money game, I would double every time. Doubling here meets the prime criterion for a good pressure double: White will be happy, take or drop.

A brief aside while we consider White's decision if he were the owner of the cube at 2, thinking about redoubling to 4. In all money games, yes. Redoubling from the box, I would expect half a chouette to drop. In match play, yes; but I would expand the exceptions to include any situation where I was leading an opponent of equal or lesser ability with fewer than eight points to go in the match. Think it through, it's good exercise.

So, expecting White to double, Black must decide whether he wants to take. He may conclude, as we have, that he is but a 2:1 underdog and take the cube; or he may believe that White's 6-6 was an omen and drop.

Should Black decide to refuse the expected double, then he needs to look for the move that might earn him a reprieve for at least the next roll. Against an opponent of average ability, hitting on W11 could do the trick. Many players have an inordinate sense of insecurity when on the bar and wouldn't think of touching the cube.

This is a weakness every backgammon player should be alert for in his opponent's game and in his own. Players with this phobia often will drop from a game in which they have adequate equity for a take; and, on the other side of the coin, they will take an unreasonable double just because their opponent is on the bar.

Against an experienced opponent, Black's best bet to run a bluff is to make W3 and play B8/B2, confidently. As this is the play Black should make if he intended to take the anticipated double, White may think twice before turning the cube — giving him an extra chance to make the wrong decision.

Although sending the man on W11 to the bar would equalize the pip count, this is far from being a running game yet. Black's chance for winning with this move would be predicated on his ability to harass White until his other back man was able to escape. This plan has three flaws:

First, Black will have to use one full turn just to escape from W1. Second, White has full control of three quadrants and partial control of the fourth from the bar. Although it has potential, Black's home board is too weak. It's this third flaw that points up the main hazard of this play.

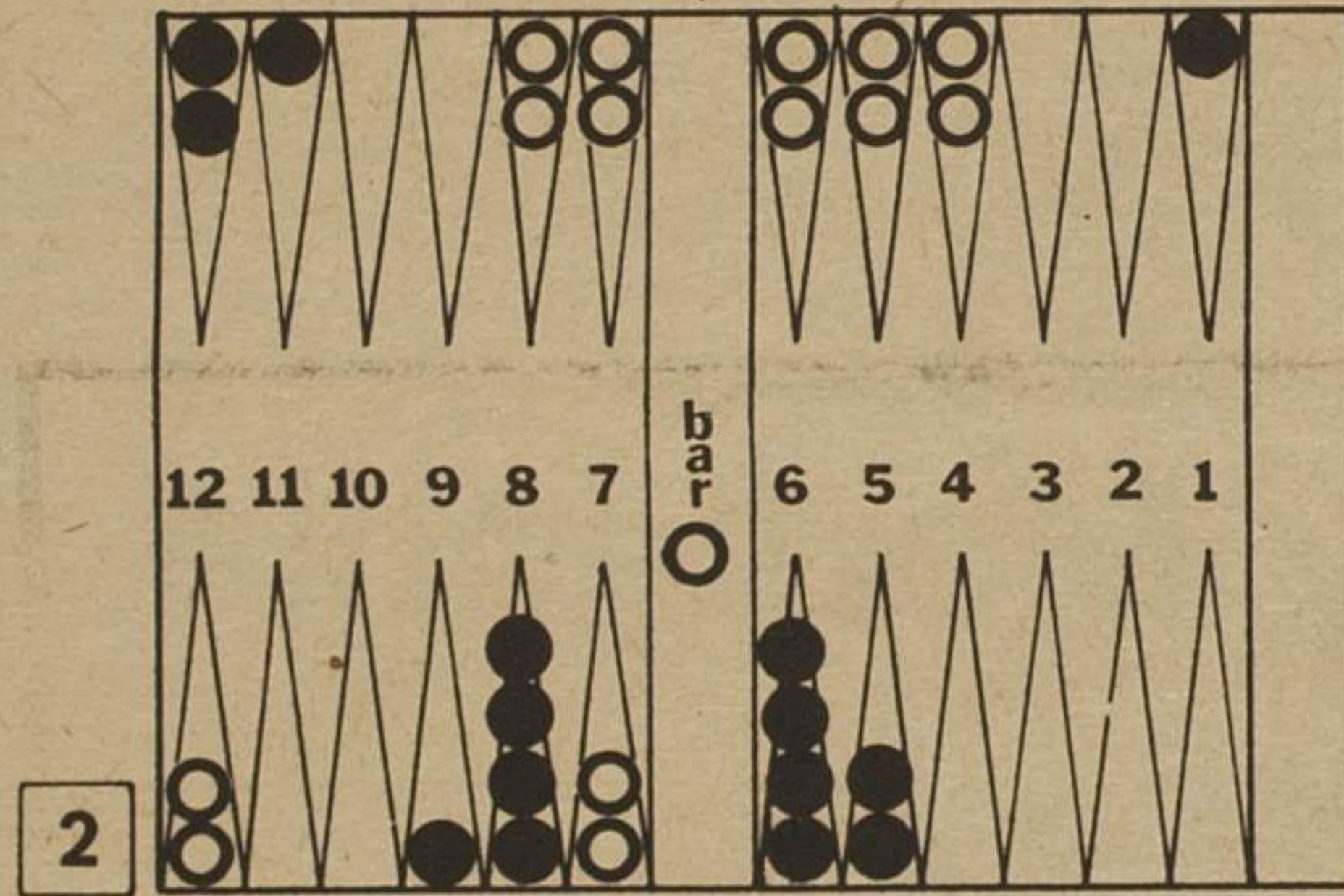
There are only four rolls that keep White on the bar: 6-6, 6-5 and 5-5. Eight others are bad for him because they force him to expose a second blot: 6-2, 5-3, 5-1 and 4-1 (4-1 can be mitigated somewhat by starting W9).

Five rolls are indifferent: 6-4, 3-1 and 1-1 (play 1-1 W8/W6, W8/W7). And six combinations play safe: 6-1, 5-2, and 4-3. Double 4 scatters blots about, but completes the prime to all but lock up a single win.

This leaves 12 rolls that bring White off the bar and put Black on it. With three blots and no defense, Black is flirting with a four-point loss. This is doubly dangerous here because of the shortness of the match.

If Black accepts the double and loses the minimum two points, his odds of winning the match against an equal opponent slip to 44 percent. But if he accepts and loses a gammon, he goes down to 36 percent — nearly a 2:1 underdog.

By making W3, Black accomplishes two things right away: he puts White on the defensive and he greatly reduces the odds of being gammoned. This also gives him some hope of winning in a race. If Black can find a 6-6 of his own before the prime is completed (everybody's entitled), the game is a toss-up.



White to play 3-3 from the bar.

I'm not sure I would have recognized 3-3 as a legitimate comeback shot if it hadn't been for the developments in the actual game, in which Black took the hit and the double.

After entering on B3, White played a wash, 2W4/W1; then boldly followed up his decision with W8/W5. It was a risky play, in that it all but destroyed his blockade of his home board, but it's hard to argue with the result.

Black burned* with a 6-1, and White followed with a 6-2, picking up the blot on W11 and adding a builder to W7. The blitz was on. A touch of irony was added a few rolls later and Black posed a brief threat. Just as White was poised to close his board, Black entered two men from the bar on the last empty point with a 3-3. He ended the game with a gammon-saving 6-6.

*Burned. A fairly descriptive term I use in place of some longer ones or their acronyms, such as "failed in entry" (FIE) or "stayed on bar" (SOB).

I notice that Diagram No. 1 is an excellent setup to illustrate another sort of backgammon strategy, so let's not waste it. In the same situation, give the cube to Black at 2 and give White a deadly 5-5 to play.

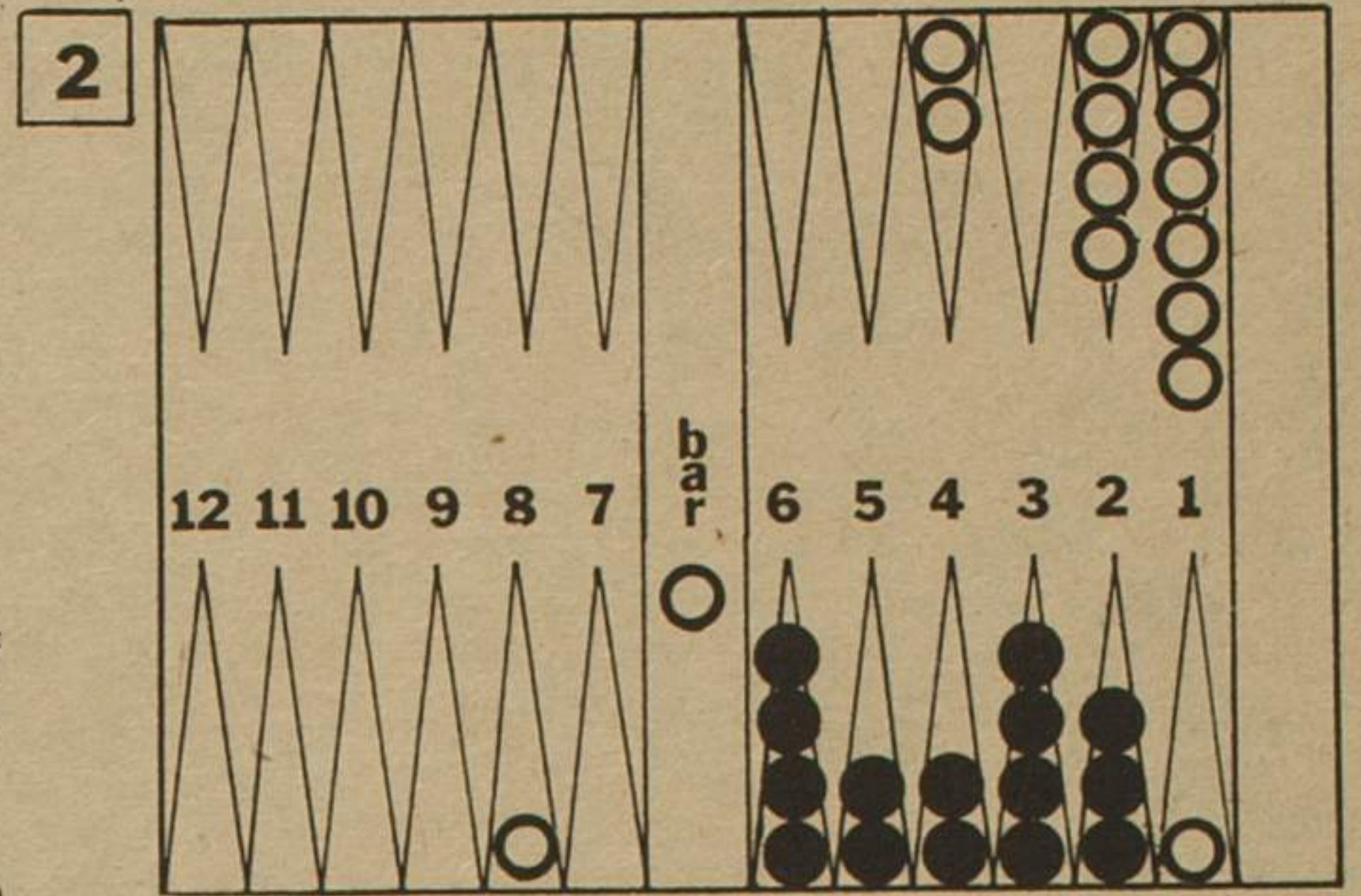
White could play this as a straight running move and be 90 percent sure of winning the game: B7/B12, B7/W8, W11/W6. But this would be passing an opportunity to deal — as they say in the lists — a telling blow by going for a gammon and a 4-0 lead in the match.

The obvious play is 2B12/W3, completing the prime and putting one man on the bar. Almost as good is 2W8/W3, 2W7/W2, putting one man on the bar and making a five-point board. But both these plays are wrong for the same reason: they give Black 11 rolls that establish an anchor in White's inner board. The idea is to keep Black out altogether. Tip: Having just seen an intermediate wash successfully played, a major wash might come to mind: 2W8/W3, 2W6/W1. Don't.

The gammon play is 2W8/W3, W11/W1, putting two men on the bar while maintaining the five-point block, which was the muscle behind White's double. Black now has only two rolls that establish a defensive hole — a 5.5 percent chance instead of a 30.5 percent chance. White doesn't want his blot on W1 to be hit, of course; but it doesn't worry him a whole lot either.

Lagniappe: Don't let taunts of "lucky dice" goad you into giving a handicap or playing under special rules to prove your skill. If your opponent thinks you are trouncing him only because you are getting the better rolls, let him continue to think so and put the proof in your wallet. Never overlook the possibility he might be right.

Reprint from April



Black to play 5-4

How should Black play this 5-4 in a 23-point match:
a. leading 22-19?
b. leading 22-21?
c. trailing 19-22, owns cube?

- ANSWERS
a. B5/B1, B5/off
b. B6/B1, B5/B1
c. B6/B2, B6/B1

J. HOOD BOOKS

PROVIDING SCHOLARLY BOOKS

FOR THE STUDENT RESEARCHER & LIBRARIAN

Tues.-Sat. 11am-6pm
Sunday 1pm-6pm
Closed Monday

1401 MASSACHUSETTS
Lawrence, Ks. 66044
1-913-841-4644

ELLER

FIGHT MS MAY 4-9

Emerald City Antiques & Restoration

Fran Beier Fair
Bill Fair
Dick Dunhaupt

415 N. 2nd
Lawrence, Kansas
913-842-1808

Open Monday — Saturday 9-5

The Land of Ahs

BAHNMAIER RETAIL LIQUOR

Formerly BANNING LIQUOR STORE

Large Selection Of Imported Beer • German Wine

Complete Line Of Wines • Beer • Liquor

841-3288
900 NEW HAMPSHIRE



coming up at...

Off the Wall

May

- 6 — PUBLIC NOTICE NIGHT
- 7 — Night Shift
- 8-9 — Excessives (rockabilly from Lincoln, Neb.)
- 13 — Street Talk
- 15 — Abuse
- 16 — Teardrop Explodes with Get Smart and Abuse
- 22 — Gear and Go Cats
- 23 — No Exit
- 27 — Flatland String Band
- 28 — Dancing Cigarettes
- 29-30 — Dallol (Ethiopian reggae band)

737 N.H.

841-2266

El Matador Cafe

The finest Mexican food

in Lawrence

— the Reyes Family



El Matador

446 Locust

Sun. 4-8

Mon. 5:30-8:30

Tues.-Sat. 5:30-10:15