



One Foot In The Gammon

Monthly Backgammon in Ealing Newsletter

BGIE

Issue 1

Dear Ealing BG player,

Welcome to our new monthly newsletter, keeping you up to date with all that's new in the Ealing Backgammon world and beyond.

My name is Darren Woodcock, a below average BG player, as some of you Ealing players will concur, and in my absence at a recent Backgammon in Ealing (BGIE) committee meeting, I was "volunteered" to produce a monthly newsletter. My experience of putting something like this together is absolutely zilch and I am currently fumbling around on my laptop feeling about as useful as Boris Johnson at a UN meeting, however I shall do my best to keep our "vast" readership informed and amused.

Although "One foot in the Gammon" is for BG players of every level, I ideally want to appeal to those players who are just starting out or who loiter about in the lower half of their club rankings, the kind of players that when you ask them about their ELO ratings, reply with something along the lines of "Well I absolutely loved Mister Blue Sky and would give that 10 out of 10 but I was never too sure about Don't bring me down as I found that slightly depressing". To me, these players are the **most important in the BG world**, as without them BG will cease to exist in the next 20-30 years as you old fogies shuffle of this mortal coil, and yes I can say this as I am one of the Shufflers.

I want to attempt to bring those players on a journey with me, to not only help improve their game but also give them a platform to ask any questions about the BG world that they don't understand without being made to feel stupid. Many a time I have beaten better players than myself (purely by luck I might add) and rather than be congratulated I was told how lucky I was, how many terrible moves I made, or in some cases even had voices raised at me. I am happy to accept criticism even if I don't understand it, but there are better ways and means of delivering this. If we can get this point across to all players of every level I am sure it can only increase our enjoyment of what is after all, the best game in the world.

So let's start this journey and please dear reader feel free to get in touch (contact details on page 4) to offer me your (positive) criticisms and suggestions for future publications or even just send me money for beer, if you feel so inclined!

I look forward to hearing from you in due course but in the meantime, happy rolling!

Darren Woodcock

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CAPTION OF THE MONTH



"Ruffs guide to Backgammon"

It's competition time and a very big thank you to Chris and Enzo for giving us permission to use this fantastic photo taken at Ealing Bowls club during our weekly Thursday BG gatherings.

We are offering a bottle of wine for the best caption so please send your entries to dwoodcock@tallyhoevents.co.uk

Results will be published in next months' newsletter.

Player Profile: BEN "The Bike" OWEN



Ben was a founder member of Backgammon in Ealing and is addicted to the game. Ben got involved playing in live tournaments after listening to Mike Main being interviewed on BBC London prior to the 2014 London Open .

On the spur of the moment Ben secured his BG board (that he had owned since he was 8 years old) to his Bicycle and cycled the 15 miles to Blackfriars to play in his very first tournament. It wasn't a fairytale ending on that day, but he has been hooked on the game ever since.

Where do you live? Hanwell, West London

How would you describe yourself? I am an expert in laughing when I lose or win, a veteran in complaining and an outlaw in Preston!

Greatest achievement in BG? Getting to the semi-final of the 64 player knock-out UK Open 2015 qualifying tournament, in London, with the prize being an all expenses paid trip.

Which phrase do you most overuse in Backgammon? "That's BG!"

Your favourite roll in BG? It has to be my signature 44. It annoys the hell out of Simon Morecroft!

What's your biggest strength? I can pilot bicycles around the ten most dangerous junctions in London without getting scared!

What's your biggest secret? I have been to every tube station!

The biggest laugh in BG? Without a shadow of doubt, it has to be coming back from a Brighton tournament with Darren Woodcock and Steve John. I told them the best way to get back to West Ealing was via Clapham Junction to Brentford and then the E8. Steve thought it was Clapham Junction to Shepherd's Bush and then the 607. Darren thought it was to Victoria and then the District. The deal was the last person to the pub buys the other two the first drink. Darren and Steve end up taking a taxi from Ealing Broadway to West Ealing to try and beat me, but lost! All of us still find it hilarious!

What do you do outside BG? Advocate for better cycling infrastructure, befriend people in prison, work with the homeless, and have a passion for etymology.



Poetry Corner



"Enigma Variations" by Chris Hamilton

1

He plays for pride and not for cash
but still considers every move.
Divinely guided straight from Rome,
believing that he'll never lose.

2

She crafts her game to suit herself
and rolls from high above the board.
Her doubles are the stuff of legends,
with giggles, laughter and applause.

3

He's at his best when centre stage,
but plays as well with right or left.
Enjoys a run while in the box
but can leave quite bereft.

4

"It's a mystery" why he thinks aloud,
while searching for the winning play.
"I want to be free" from five pointers, says he,
As with seven he's more au fait

5

He sees the shaker twist and turn
and suffers cycles of bad luck.
The wheel of fortune rolls along,
as dice bespoken run amuck.

6

Faster than a speeding train, he plays
and seldom will he stop to think.
He minds the gaps while bearing off,
then rolls before you've time to blink.

7

He plays a rather cautious game
and looks for oddities to book.
He CAN sometimes just fall asleep,
forgetting that he ever took.

8

Always is he affable,
with a prescription for success.
Oft thinks he's on the bar when not
but muddles through much like Magoo.

9

The calm man triumphs by the sea
and rides upon the breaking waves.
The crimson board, once dormant,
returns to see the light of day.

10

He talks at length through complex games
but rarely does he use XG.
preferring to rely on self,
the ego left quite unexplained!

11

He has no great desire to win,
instead sees beauty in the game.
He walks with those in lofty realms,
but seeks none of their empty fame.

12

He conducts himself with great restraint,
good natured with an open heart,
Deserving of prolonged applause
as prima donnas turn and part.

13

His words are sparse but chosen well,
to rule the last remaining few.
He paddles with his canine friends,
quite sure that victory would ensue.

14

Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
he thinks too much on all his plays,
But often doth he make the better choice,
then glories in these happy days.

15

She brightens our most dismal days
and warms the frozen southern seas.
She sails past all her waiting peers,
to claim her biggest prize to date.

Position of the Month by Peter Bennet

Problem

Black was trailing in the match 2-3 (to 5) and had doubled earlier. Now Black has a dilemma...he would love to hit the extra blot because a gammon wins the match, but he also needs to advance to the edge of White's five prime, so that he can escape the straggler with his next 6.

So the main question is: which ace should he choose? Is the decision close? Secondary question: pick the best 4 to go with each play of the ace.



Solution on Page 7

BGIE Results

Ealing Cons. Bowls Club

5 January T1: Graham Read
T2: Chris Hamilton\ Mike Ireland

12 January T1: Michael Hewson
T2: Petar Vidovic

19 January T1: Emad Salib\ Joseph Sarkis

26 January T1: Sean Clennell
T2: Graham Smith
T3: Petar Vidovic

2 February T1: Tariq Siddiqi
T2: Paul Mortimer

The Grange

2 January T1: Sean Clennell
T2: Paul Mortimer
T3: Chris Hamilton
T4: Catalin Bucur
T5: Eric Maillebiau

6 February T1: Monica Beckerson
T2: Ray Mills
T3: Jon Barnes
T4: Mike Murton
T5: Tariq Siddiqi

Solution for Position of the Month

To win a gammon you must first win the game. It looks as though having two opposing checkers (and eventually three, when you hit as you leap the prime) on the bar against a strong board will give you lots of time to extricate the back checker, enabling you cruise home comfortably for an easy win with lots of gammons.

These sorts of positions were analysed some years ago by, among others, Ray Kershaw. He calculated, and presented in the form of a table, the probability of escaping a checker which is behind a 5-prime but not at its edge. In this position, with your straggler one pip from the edge, you are only a slight favourite to escape in five rolls. Your other spare checkers represent 36 pips of timing (assuming you can move them all exactly to the acepoint) after which your board will crunch if you haven't escaped by then. The average roll in backgammon is just over 8 pips, so 36 pips equate to fewer than five rolls.

With this knowledge it becomes easier to see that advancing to the edge of the prime is more urgent than hitting again immediately...and it's not close – any hitting play is a big blunder. Once you are at the edge, assuming White hasn't entered in the meantime, your next 6 will hit another checker and you will win lots of gammons anyway when this happens. In fact you win about 5% more gammons by creeping up rather than hitting with the ace now.

As for the 4, if you hit 13/12* the best 4 is clearly 12/8 leaving no outfield shots. If you correctly use the ace to creep up with 24/23 it's quite close, but a small gain in flexibility is not worth the risk of leaving extra shots. Rolls of 4-5 (making the 6-prime), 4-4 and 4-6 are good for White however you play your 4, but 13/9 leaves 4-1 to hit in the outfield as well as double 4, or three extra good rolls. Playing 6/2 leaves White just one extra – double 4. It also gives more hope of life after death if White does manage to enter and hit because you won't have lots more vulnerable blots strewn around.

Psst Editor...we have a spare
page?

Well bloody well improvise
then!!

"That sodding Peter Bennet" by Darren Woodcock

I walked into the venue, the force with me was strong
The boards lined up like soldiers, the draw would not be long,
The welcome speech is over, the games about to start,
My lips go dry my heart in mouth, I think I need to fart.

I miss the first banana skin, the second and the third,
And then my world came crashing down, I thought I had misheard
I felt as nervous as a woman, sitting on Trump's Senate,
I'd only gone and bloody drawn that sodding Peter Bennet.

I found my seat and looked across at England's greatest player
He tried to bet himself to win, of course there were no layers.
Handshakes done the dice were rolled the game was underway
Peter focused like a hawk, my thoughts... a wasted day!

In 15 minutes all was done, hands shook, I hit the beer
And wondering what the bloody hell that I was doing here,
I hate the game and that's me done, so stuff their invitation,
But wait a sec, I can't go yet, I'm in the Consolation!

And lastly.... I need your help!

I have a list of ideas for future publication in One Foot in the Gammon (OFITG) and would love your input. Listed below are a few thoughts.....

Caption of the month. I will periodically include a BG related photo (this month's is on page 2) and the winning caption will win a bottle of plonk.

Joke of the month. Send in your jokes and the best one wins a prize.

Buyers/sellers page. If you have any BG items for sale then just send in a photo with a brief description and your contact details and I will advertise them for you.

Poetry corner. I thought of this one as we have a very talented poet amongst our BG brethren. Can you do better?

Jargon buster. Something that might help the newer players and the not so new! I recently found out what a "Cock Shot" was in BG jargon!? We learn something new every day.

Player Profile. I would really appreciate your help with this one. Let me know if you would be willing to be our "Backgammoner of the month" and I will send you a list of questions. Alternatively you can decide your own questions which will let you choose what you want us to know about you, and not what you don't !

The letters page. I would like you all to use this page as your own. You can even withhold your name if you feel so inclined. Please write in with any help/advice you can offer the budding BG player or maybe tell us how unlucky you were. You know the sort of thing, "Fred Bloggs threw 74 doubles against me in a 5 point match last night and then walked off with the barmaid at the end of the tournament".

Advertising. If you running your own business or just starting up a new one and would like to advertise IN OFITG, just drop me a quick email or call me. Details below.

Thanks in advance to each and every one of you who makes a contribution in the coming months. My contact details are as follows:

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Thank you one and all,

Darren