

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK #6 – JANUARY 13, 2021

THE POSITION:

○ is bdarcohen
 score: 3
 pip: 146
 5 point match
 pip: 156
 score: 1
 ● is KellyRae

XGID=---b-BD-BA-AdC----bcbb-AA-:0:0:1:52:1:3:0:5:10

● to play 52

THE TOURNAMENT AND THE PLAYERS:

For this week’s problem, we’ll continue to take positions from games played by members of our regular player pool in the “For The Glory” online tournament circuit. This position comes from Monday’s weekly tournament (January 11, 2021). Bill “KellyRae” Lonergan is playing the Black checkers in a consolation round match against Brian “bdarcohen” Cohen, who is playing the White checkers.

THE GAME SITUATION:

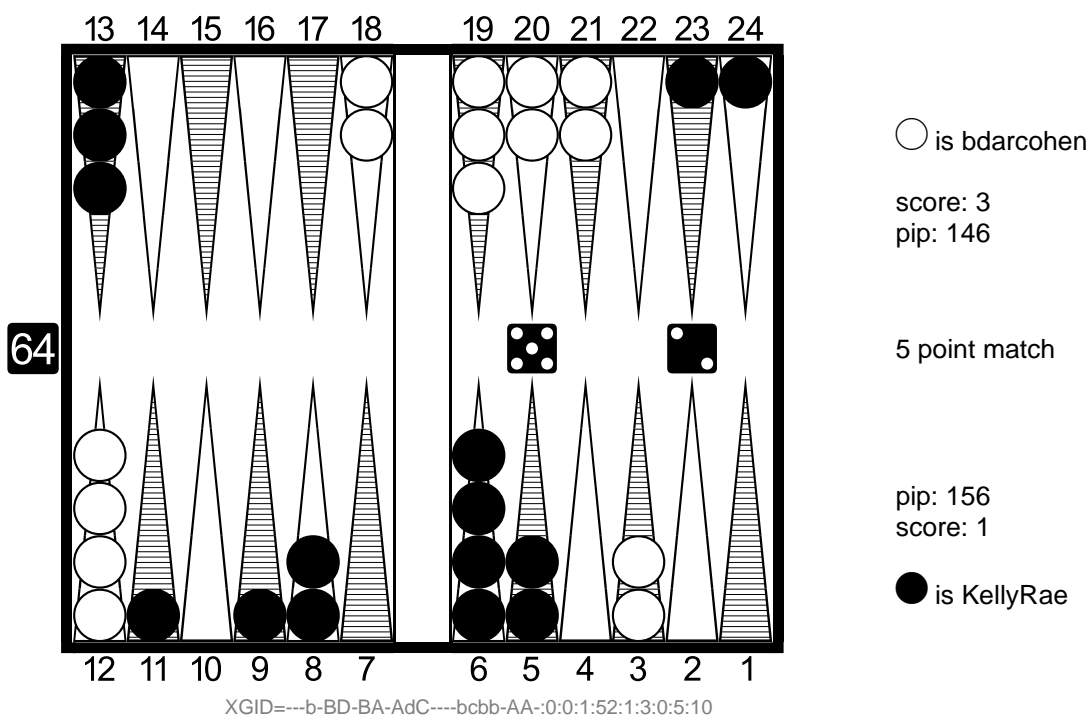
It’s the fifth game of a 5-point match, with Brian leading 3-1. Bill is on roll, trailing in the race by 10 pips, and he has rolled 52, which affords him a number of possible plays. He takes his time and carefully weighs his options, aiming to find the best play.

THE QUESTION:

So, what should he do here?

SOLUTION

Extreme Gammon Rollout Results:



● to play 52

1.	Rollout ¹	13/8 11/9	eq: -0.001
	Player:	44.12% (G:10.93% B:0.98%)	Conf.: ± 0.018 (-0.019...+0.017) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	55.88% (G:21.55% B:2.17%)	Duration: 9 minutes 01 second
2.	Rollout ¹	9/4 6/4	eq: -0.081 (-0.080)
	Player:	41.71% (G:10.45% B:0.64%)	Conf.: ± 0.017 (-0.098...-0.064) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	58.29% (G:21.19% B:2.64%)	Duration: 9 minutes 09 seconds
3.	Rollout ¹	11/9 6/1	eq: -0.182 (-0.180)
	Player:	39.94% (G:10.29% B:0.73%)	Conf.: ± 0.018 (-0.200...-0.163) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	60.06% (G:24.57% B:3.24%)	Duration: 10 minutes 21 seconds
4.	Rollout ¹	24/22 9/4	eq: -0.464 (-0.463)
	Player:	34.56% (G:8.68% B:1.02%)	Conf.: ± 0.019 (-0.483...-0.445) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	65.44% (G:31.65% B:5.51%)	Duration: 13 minutes 12 seconds
¹ 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.			
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller			

www.eXtremeGammon.com Version: 2.19.211.pre-release, MET: Kazaross XG2

Black has two constructive choices in this position. He can make his 9-point with 13/8 11/9, or he can make his 4-point with 9/4 6/4. Ordinarily, preference goes to making an inner-board point, rather than an outer-board point. This is the case because each extra inner-board point that you have makes it harder for your opponent to enter a hit checker from the bar. With the two-point board that Black currently has, White will dance with 4 out of 36 rolls whenever he seeks to reenter from the bar. If Black adds another made point to his inner board, White's dancing numbers from the bar increase from 4 out of 36 rolls (11%) to 9 out of 36 rolls (25%); that's a significant improvement.

So, it would seem that making the 4-point would be the better play. However, for all rules there are exceptions. Before making your play, you need to evaluate the overall position to see if there are any factors that may call for a different approach. The first thing you need to do is evaluate the position to determine what each of

Black's and White's game plans should be. In this position, after Black plays this roll, the race will be about even, with White having a four-point prime and Black having a broken four-prime (whether he makes the 4-point or the 9-point). Each player will have two checkers stuck behind a blocking structure, with White also having an anchor on Black's 3-point. Since White has a solid four-prime, his best game plan is priming/containment – he will aim to use his checkers on his midpoint to extend his four-point prime to a five-point prime. Likewise, Black's game plan will also be priming/containment – this is especially the case with White having an anchor, as an attacking game plan isn't feasible against an anchor (of course, if White breaks his anchor, Black may be able to attack, but at the moment he doesn't have any attacking opportunities – so, for now, Black's game plan is to try to hem White in).

Given the respective game plans of the two players, Black has two primary objectives: (i) escaping his rear checkers; and (ii) preventing White from escaping his own rear checkers. To achieve the second objective, Black will strive to develop a strong blocking structure to contain White's two back checkers. In this regard, while the 4-point is an inner-board point, the 9-point has much more value as a blocking point – whenever your opponent has made the 3-point, your 9-point becomes a particularly strong blocking point, since it prevents your opponent from leaping into the outfield with 6's, sometimes escaping entirely.

Since this game is taking the form of a prime-versus-prime battle, blocking points are more important than inner-board points. In particular, it is especially important that Black seek to block White from escaping with 6's. Timing is critical in prime-versus-prime battles. The player that has more spare pips for movement will generally be able to hold onto his prime longer, forcing his opponent to crunch; and once a player's prime collapses, his winning chances largely evaporate. Here, Black can still escape a rear checker with 6's – if he can get one or both of his back checkers out from behind White's prime, he will gain additional timing that might prove helpful to him in winning the priming battle. By blocking White's 6's, Black makes it harder for White to do the same. If White's 6's are blocked, White will be forced to expend spare pips in his front position whenever he rolls a 6 (the largest number), hurting his timing and diminishing his chances of winning the priming battle.

A few other added benefits of playing 13/8 11/9, rather than 9/4 6/4:

- Black obtains a better distribution of builders that can be used to make points or, if White runs with a back checker, attack a remaining blot. After 13/8 11/9, Black will have a spare checker on his 8-point and two spare checkers on his 6-point. After making the 4-point, Black will not have any spares on his 8-point, and his 6-point will be left with only one spare.
- By making the 9-point, a later roll of 66 by White does not allow for a quick escape of White's two back checkers from Black's inner board. With a close race, if White is allowed to escape with that roll (and he will have several chances to do so), Black will find himself in trouble if White gets lucky.
- If Black makes his 4-point, it will be very difficult for him to subsequently make his 9-point without taking significant risk. On the other hand, after making the 9-point, Black will still have some reasonable chances to subsequently make his 4-point.

Best Play: All things considered, in this position the 9-point is much more valuable to Black than the 4-point. As the Extreme Gammon rollout shows, **13/8 11/9** is clearly Black's best play, while 9/4 6/4 is almost a blunder.

EPILOGUE

As it turns out, Bill actually botched the play and made his 4-point. A complicated game ensued, and Bill was able to find a double before he closed out two of Brian's checkers. Unfortunately for him, his bearoff did not go as smoothly as he would have liked, he was forced to leave a shot, Brian hit the shot, and the rest of the match was history.