

**PROBLEM OF THE WEEK #15 – MARCH 23, 2021**

**THE POSITION:**

2

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

XGID=-BCDDBA--A---b--Bc--bbb-bb-1:-1:1:62:0:0:0:7:10

○ is JackMac  
score: 0  
pip: 89

7 point match

pip: 71  
score: 0

● is KellyRae

● to play 62

**THE TOURNAMENT AND THE GAME SITUATION:**

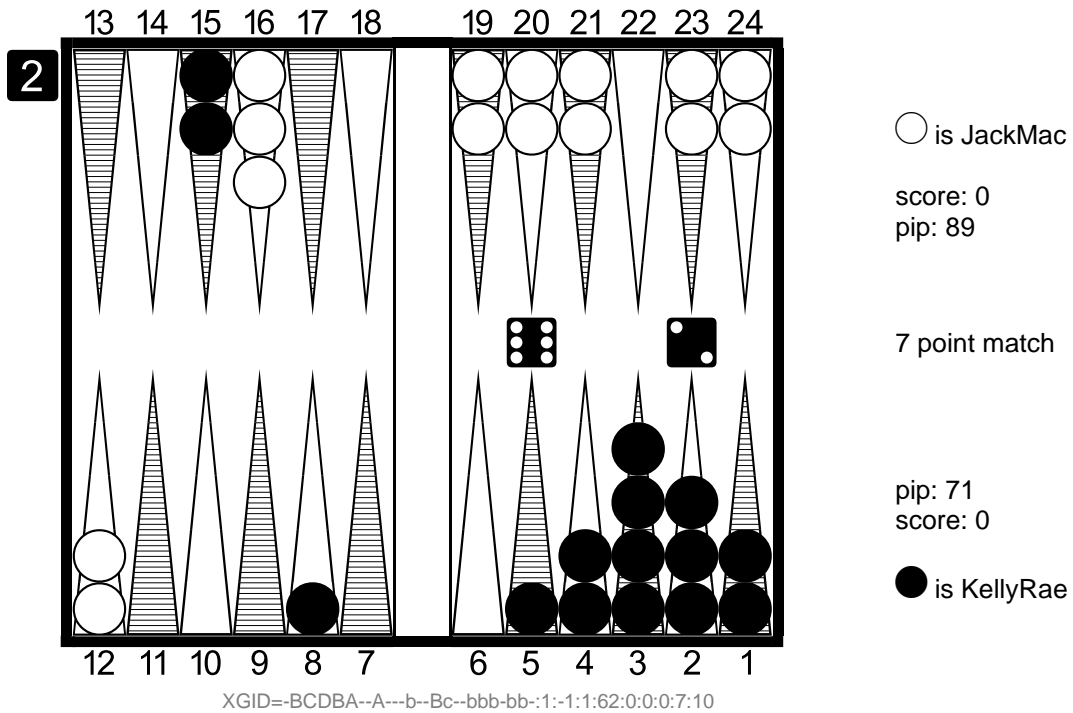
For this week’s problem, I’ve taken another position from one of our weekly “For The Glory” online tournaments. I am playing Jack “JackMac” McCullough in a 7-point match, and this is the first game of the match. Jack is holding the cube on 2, and I’ve just rolled 62 in the above position.

**THE QUESTION:**

So, what’s my best play here?

# SOLUTION

## EXTREME GAMMON ROLLOUT RESULTS:



● to play 62

1. ✓	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	8/2 3/1	eq: +0.272
	Player:	67.83% (G:1.68% B:0.01%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+0.268...+0.276) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	32.17% (G:2.98% B:0.15%)	Duration: 24.7 seconds
2.	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	8/2 5/3	eq: +0.254 (-0.018)
	Player:	67.17% (G:0.29% B:0.00%)	Conf.: ± 0.004 (+0.250...+0.258) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	32.83% (G:1.22% B:0.03%)	Duration: 17.7 seconds
3.	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	8/2 4/2	eq: +0.191 (-0.081)
	Player:	64.32% (G:0.85% B:0.00%)	Conf.: ± 0.005 (+0.186...+0.195) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	35.68% (G:2.37% B:0.05%)	Duration: 26.3 seconds
4.	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	15/13 15/9	eq: +0.168 (-0.104)
	Player:	64.00% (G:0.65% B:0.06%)	Conf.: ± 0.003 (+0.165...+0.171) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	36.00% (G:2.03% B:0.06%)	Duration: 6.9 seconds
<sup>1</sup> 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction. Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller			

## ANALYSIS:

This week, we continue our review of “stay or run” problems. In today’s problem position, Black must first determine whether he should remain on the 15-point (stay) or break that point and seek to race home (run). As we did with last week’s Problem of the Week, we begin by considering the relevant factors that offer guidance as to whether it’s best to “stay” or “run”:

- **The Race.** Here, Black has an 18-pip lead in the race (26-pips after he plays this roll). This is a fairly large lead in the race and suggests that Black should pursue a racing game plan. This factor favors making a run for it. (**Favors “run”**)
- **Flexibility and Timing.** As was noted in last week’s problem solution, if your position is flexible and you figure to be able to make relatively safe moves for several turns, that favors keeping the anchor.

When timing is short, though, you can expect to be forced off the anchor soon anyway, so it might be best to take your chances now if things figure to get worse for you in the near future. Similarly, if things don't figure to get much worse for you in the near future, it is likely best to stay put and hope for a better roll on your next turn.

- Here, White has a great amount of timing and flexibility; he'll be able to hold onto his midpoint for several rolls. By contrast, Black seems to be running short of time and his front board is already starting to crunch. However, if Black runs now, he'll be leaving a direct-shot – his best running play is 15/13 15/9, which leaves White with only direct 1's to hit the remaining Black blot (a total of 11 hitting rolls). On the other hand, if he waits, he'll have a number of rolls next turn that will allow him to clear the 15-point entirely (66, 65, 64, 55, 54, 44 and 22 – a total of 10 rolls); in addition, a roll of double-aces will allow Black to advance his rearmost checkers to the 13-point, where he'll be very well-positioned to clear that point very soon. Also, if he stays put this turn, he'll only have 12 rolls on his next turn that will compel him to break the 15-point and leave a direct-shot (63, 62, 61, 53, 52 and 51). In those cases where he is forced to leave a direct-shot, the danger will be about the same as it is if he runs immediately on this roll. A blot on the 13-point leaves White with 11 hitting numbers; a blot on the 14-point leaves White with 12 hitting numbers; and a blot on the 15-point leaves White with 14 hitting numbers. Given the relatively negligible differences in hitting chances for White if Black keeps the anchor and blots next turn, it is better for Black to wait and ***possibly*** leave a direct-shot on his next turn, rather than run home immediately, essentially leaving a direct-shot ***100% of the time***. Simply put, issues of timing and flexibility offer no compelling reason for Black to immediately ***volunteer*** a direct-shot. (***Favors "stay"***)
- **Opponent's Board Strength.** This factor strongly favors staying put. White has a five-point board which he'll be able to retain for another few rolls. If Black gets hit in this position, it will be quite bad for him. (***Favors "stay"***)
- **Tactical Aspects of the Position – Loose Blots.** White has no loose blots, and if Black finds himself on the bar, he likely won't even get an indirect return shot. Without any short-term tactical weakness being present in White's structure, Black should be more inclined to stay put. (***Favors "stay"***)
- **Safety – Risks Associated with Running for Home.** As noted above, if Black gets hit in this position, it will be quite bad for him. He is already a big favorite to win the race, and he can afford to wait another roll, hoping to be able to clear the 15-point without leaving any shot at all. (***Favors "stay"***)

Having weighed the relevant factors that should be taken into account in evaluating the "stay or run" question posed by this problem position, it is clear that it is best for Black to stay put on the anchor. Of the choices of the plays that "stay," 8/2 is forced and 3/1 is clearly the best play of the deuce because it maintains a smooth bear-off distribution while preserving a checker on the 5-point which will allow Black the option to keep the 15-point anchor for another turn if his next roll is 43, 42 or 41.

### **BEST PLAY:**

Black's best play in this position is to hold onto the 15-point for another turn, and play **8/2 3/1**. To run with 15/13 15/9 would be a fairly significant blunder.

### **EPILOGUE**

As it turns out, I actually made the correct play for a change, 8/2 3/1. 😊 I was able to clear the 15-point on my next turn, and the finish of the game was rather uneventful. I won a single game for two points.

## **REFERENCES (REPEATED FROM PROBLEM OF THE WEEK #14)**

I list below some backgammon books that contain checker play problems. For each, the reference is directed to specific problems contained in the book that involve the question of whether to “break anchor.” In each case, the author includes a discussion of the considerations that are involved in making this decision. Overall, the quality of the analysis and discussion is quite good.

Olson, Marc Brockmann, *Backgammon: Pure Strategy*, 2017, pp. 237-242, 247-250.

Robertie, Bill, *501 Essential Backgammon Problems*, Cardozo Publishing, 3rd Ed., 2017, Chapter 15: Breaking Anchor, pp. 217-220.

Robertie, Bill, *Modern Backgammon*, The Gammon Press, 2001, pp. 96-106.

Woolsey, Kit, and Heinrich, Hal, *New Ideas in Backgammon*, The Gammon Press, 1996, Chapter 2: Anchors Aweigh, pp. 47-82.