

# PROBLEM OF THE WEEK #16 – MARCH 30, 2021

## THE POSITION:

○ is Double A Red  
score: 2  
pip: 125

7 point match

pip: 74  
score: 5

● is Bdarcohen

64

XGID=-aECCbC-----a-----acabbb-A:0:0:1:31:5:2:0:7:10

● to play 31

## THE TOURNAMENT AND THE GAME SITUATION:

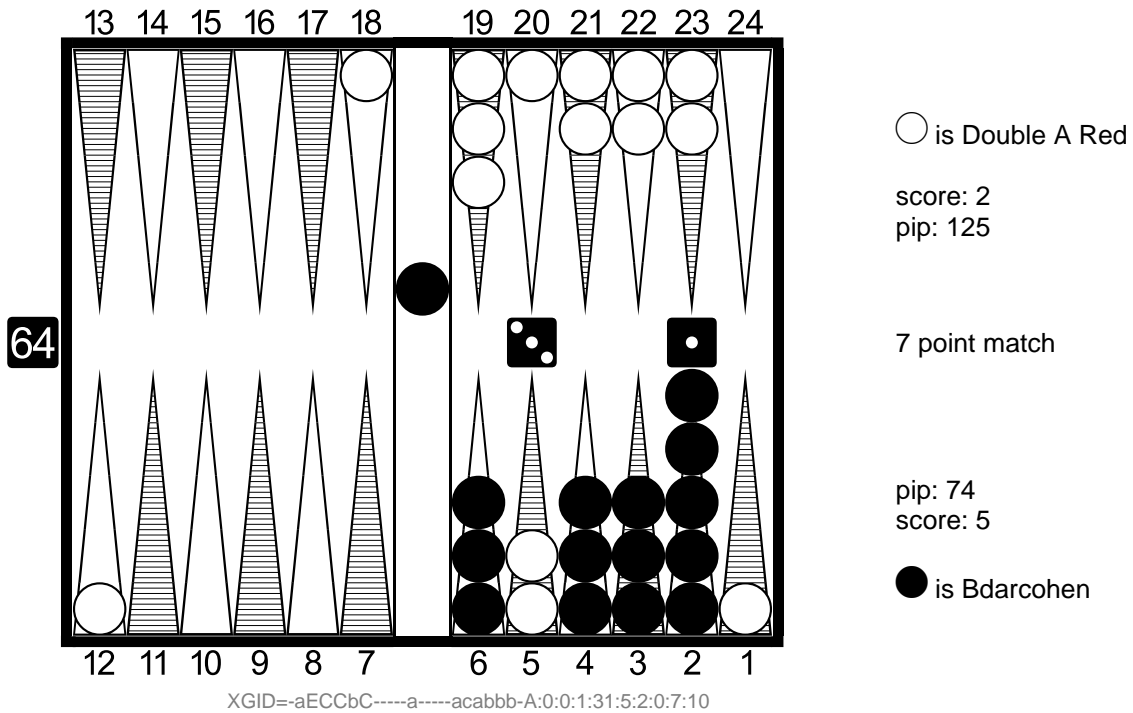
For this week's problem, I've taken another position from one of our weekly "For The Glory" online tournaments. This one was submitted to me by Brian "Bdarcohen" Cohen. Here, Brian is playing local hero and true gentleman, Ralph "Double A Red" D'Onofrio in a 7-point match, and Brian is leading in the match 5-2. The cube remains centered and Brian has just rolled a 31. Of course, the ace is "forced," and then Brian must choose a play for the three.

## THE QUESTION:

So, what's Brian's best play here?

# SOLUTION

## EXTREME GAMMON ROLLOUT RESULTS:



● to play 31

1.	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	Bar/24 4/1*	eq: +0.267
	Player:	52.73% (G:42.54% B:2.11%)	Conf.: ± 0.011 (+0.256...+0.278) - [100.0%]
	Opponent:	47.27% (G:11.25% B:0.37%)	Duration: 46.5 seconds
2.	Rollout <sup>1</sup>	Bar/24 6/3	eq: -0.464 (-0.731)
	Player:	35.19% (G:21.44% B:1.15%)	Conf.: ± 0.011 (-0.476...-0.453) - [0.0%]
	Opponent:	64.81% (G:8.79% B:0.32%)	Duration: 43.7 seconds
<sup>1</sup> 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.			
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller			

[www.eXtremeGammon.com](http://www.eXtremeGammon.com) Version: 2.19.211.pre-release, MET: Kazaross XG2

## ANALYSIS:

This week's problem involves a fairly common position type – a mutual attacking game. Both players have strong four-point home boards and are vulnerable to being attacked. Black will have a blot on White's ace-point following the forced play of his ace on this roll; White currently has four blots strewn around the board, including a blot on Black's ace-point. Black has spares on each of his deuce-point, 3-point, 4-point and 6-point, which can be used to attack White's blot on the ace-point or possibly even make a five-point board; White also has available checkers on his bar-point, 6-point and 5-point which can also be used to attack Black's blot on White's ace-point or, with a roll of an ace, deuce, 8 or double-fives, he can complete a five-point board of his own.

After entering on White's ace-point from the bar, Black has only two possible plays of the three: he can hit loose on his own ace-point, putting White on the bar; or he can play safely by moving 6/3.

This week's helpful tip involves the recognition of the one **key** idea that governs proper play in mutual attacking positions. To quote Walter Trice:

“In mutual attacking positions, *initiative* typically becomes paramount, and both sides will attempt to hit something, somewhere, at almost any cost. Often there is a series of rolls with back-and-forth hits, and then finally someone dances to give his opponent a big edge.”<sup>1</sup>

Application of this tip leads Black to play 4/1\* with the three, and this play is correct by a significant amount.

A few other significant facets of the position that also lead to the conclusion that the hitting play is best here:

- Black has a four-point board – if he hits here, White will dance with almost half of his rolls.
  - Also, if White dances, Black’s numbers are extremely well diversified – 1’s, 2’s and 5’s will cover the blot on the ace-point, giving Black a five-point board; and 4’s and 6’s will hit one of White’s blots on his 5-point or bar-point.
- White has four blots strewn around the board – if White gets stuck on the bar and Black can pick up some of White’s other loose blots, his winning chances and gammon chances will increase substantially. As the rollout results above show, Black’s gammon chances go from just over 20% after playing 6/3 to just over 40% after he makes the aggressive hitting play, 4/1\*.
- This position, like most mutual attacking positions, screams out for a tempo hit. If left to his own devices and with an ability to play his entire roll next turn, White has many strong numbers. From the bar, White would be forced to play half of his roll re-entering his checker (and he won’t be able to play at all if he dances). To summarize White’s possible response rolls after Black plays B/24 6/3:
  - 61 (two numbers) completes a six-prime;
  - 11 (one number) makes the 5-point and shifts from the deuce-point to the ace-point;
  - 65 and 54 (four numbers) point on the ace-point;
  - 55 and 52 (three numbers) make the 5-point and hit loose on the ace-point;
  - 62, 53, 51, 44, 42, 41, 32, 31, 22 and 21 (eighteen numbers) make the 5-point;
  - 63 (two numbers) makes the bar-point and lifts the blot on the 5-point;
  - 66, 64 and 33 (four numbers) make the bar-point, although leaving the blot on the 5-point; and
  - 43 (two numbers) is the only roll that does nothing at all constructive.

As you can see, it’s really not a good idea to let White play his full roll next turn if it can be avoided.

- White has better control of the outfield – Black will have much greater difficulty navigating his back checker through the outfield and into his home board. This means his most viable game plan is to enter into a slug-fest here, where keeping White on the bar will have the added benefit of giving cover to his stranded back checker, thus enhancing his escaping chances.
- Playing 6/3 with the three seems safe, but it is actually potentially very destructive. Until Black is able to escape his checker on White’s ace-point, he will be forced to play his 5’s from the 6-point, often exposing a blot. Similarly, if White is able to make his 5-point on his next roll (and, as shown above, he has many rolls that do so), Black’s non-escaping 4’s will be similarly destructive, forcing Black to play 6/2.
  - Removing the spare from the 6-point also limits Black’s ability to attack White’s blot on his ace-point going forward and to subsequently make his ace-point.

### **BEST PLAY:**

Black’s best play in this position is **B/24 4/1\***. To play B/24 6/3 would be a monster blunder.

### **EPILOGUE**

Brian found the correct play here, although sadly for him 😞 (but good for Ralph 😊), he went on to lose that game, and then the match.

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<sup>1</sup> Trice, Walter, *Backgammon Boot Camp*, The Fortuitous Press, 2004, pp. 289-290.