Error Scale

The "error scale," created by Nack Ballard and Paul Weaver in 2003, is used to convey how much better one backgammon checker play is than another.

If you focus on a mere few thousandths of a point of equity, you are likely to miss the forest for the trees. The idea behind the error scale is to convey *approximate* error sizes. Common words are used to describe whether a play is right or wrong and to what degree.

Example: If Play A is better than Play B by a cubeful equity of .024, Play A is "marginally correct." This term is not as specific as .024, because it refers to a *range* between .02 and .03, but the average reader finds it easier to relate. Besides, there are few if any players in the world who can meaningfully feel the difference between .024 and (say) .029.

Error Scale

Best Play	Difference	Inferior Play
Tied	.00 – .01	Tied
Barely correct	.01 – .02	Barely wrong or Very close
Marginally correct	.02 – .03	Marginally wrong or Close
Correct	.03 or more	Wrong, or Mistake
Blowout	.06 or more	Blunder
Wipeout	.10 or more	Whopper
Double wipeout	.20 or more	Double whopper

The terms in the left column of the table refer to the *best play in relationship to the second best play*. For example, if a rollout indicates the best play is .012 (in cubeful equity) better than the second best play, the best play is "barely correct." If a rollout indicates the best play is .065 better than the second best play, the best play is a "blowout."

The numbers in the center column refer to the difference in cubeful equity.

The terms in the right column refer to *inferior plays in relationship to the best play.* For example, suppose the rollout indicates that play A (the best play) is .012 better than play B, .037 better than play C, and .071 better than play D. In that case, B is barely wrong (or very close), C is wrong (or a mistake) and D is a blunder.

Here is a useful memory aid: The "B" words (blowout and blunder) are opposites, and the "W" words (wipeout and whopper) are opposites.

The terms "whopper" and "double whopper" also happen to refer to hamburgers in a well-known franchise. If the rollout indicates that a play is between .15 and .20 worse than the best play, Paul Magriel whimsically calls it a "whopper with cheese."

The term "best" (having the highest equity) should be used when one wishes to be general rather than specific about which of the seven terms in the left column of our error scale apply.

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Publications that employ the error scale include the excellent *Backgammon Openings* book (read reviews on the nackbg website) and the *Early Doubles* articles (on the GammonLife website).