Match Score Explanations
by
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An expert on backgammon match theory could write a thousand pages on the nuances of various scores that can arise. For simplicity's sake, however, there are four match scores that are commonly recognized benchmarks from which checker play strategies for all other scores can be roughly interpolated or extrapolated:

The Four Main Match Scores

Money	Money game	Match: many points left to go	$$
DMP	Double Match Point	1 away, 1 away	−1 −1
GS	Gammon Save	1 away, 2 away, Crawford game	−1 −2 C
GG	Gammon Go	2 away, 1 away, Crawford game	−2 −1 C

Money

In the pure sense, "money" refers to money games; i.e., backgammon games (usually played for stakes) that are not part of a match. All points are of equal value; for example, winning a gammon has exactly twice the value of a winning a single game. A symbol that is sometimes substituted and one that is easy to associate with money is "$$" (or "$").

The broader definition of **money**, however, is any match score at which the best checker plays are essentially the same as in non-match backgammon (see previous paragraph). There is no clear line to draw, but it is safe to say that a money situation exists when neither side has a big lead, and (a) the cube is on 1 and both sides need more than 5 points to win the match, or (b) the cube is on 2 and both sides need more than 10 points. If the position is one of medium to low volatility, less stringent conditions apply. Even for matches nearing the end, though, the best money play is, more often than not, the best play at all scores.

The Jacoby Rule, which states that the cube must be turned before either player can win a gammon, creates a difference between pure money play and match situations that fall under the broader definition of money. This difference will occasionally manifest when a cube turn is pending, though it rarely swings a checker play decision during the first few moves of the game.

On the next page, the table of the four main match scores is repeated for convenience, and the three non-money scores (DMP, GS and GG) are each discussed in detail.

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Standard abbreviations for the four main match score terms appear in the first column, while the actual terms can be found in the second column. A point-related description of each score appears in the third column and a shortened form of each description in the fourth column.

DMP

In the fourth column, the popular jargon "away" refers to the number of points that a player must add to his current score to win the match. At "1 away, 1 away" (−1 −1), for example, the players both need only 1 point; therefore, only one game remains and whoever wins that game wins the match. This score, which is the easy to understand, is known as **DMP** (double match point).

Practically speaking, DMP also occurs when the cube is equal to or greater than the number of points remaining for both players. For example, if (a) the score is −2 −2 (i.e., 2 away, 2 away) and the cube is on 2, or (b) the score is −4 −3 with the cube on 4, or (b) the score is −5 −7 with the cube on 8, whichever player wins the game wins the match: the score has become DMP.

Under the DMP umbrella, it is also reasonable to include the scores in the Crawford game where the leader needs 1 point to win the match and the trailer needs an odd number (3, 5, 7…).

The Crawford Rule states that when the leader first reaches a score of 1 away (e.g., in an 7-point match, he gets to 6 and the opponent has 5 or fewer points), the cube cannot be turned in the next game, which is called the "Crawford game. (After that game, the cube is back in play.)

The score, whether quoted as "10–9, Crawford, in an 11-point match," or "1 away, 2 away, Crawford," or "−1 −2 C," or "GS" (gammon save, see below), is generally quoted from the point of view of the player who is on roll or has a checker play decision to make.

GS

At **GS** (gammon save), winning a gammon gains no more than winning a single game, whereas losing a gammon is very costly. A player at GS should try extra hard to *save* a gammon. The formal definition of GS confines it to −1 −2 C (1 away, 2 away, Crawford), but from a practical perspective it includes other scores, such as: (a) the leader is −1 −3 or −2 −4 and owns a 2-cube, and (b) the leader is −2 −6 or −3 −7 or −4 −8 and owns a 4-cube.

GG

When a player is at GS, the opponent is automatically at GG, and vice versa. The practical definition of **GG** (gammon go), therefore, includes not only –2 –1 C, but also situations in which the trailer (a) is –3 –1 or –2 –4 and has doubled; and (b) is –6 –2 or –7 –3 or –8 –4 and has redoubled. At GG, losing a gammon costs no more than losing a single game, whereas winning a gammon is unusually beneficial. A player at GG should try extra hard to *go* for a gammon.

UBK, the unflappable Bob Koca, was evidently the first to use the terms "gammon safe" and "gammon go." The former term has evolved to "gammon save."

Problem Position

#1   32S-33B-11
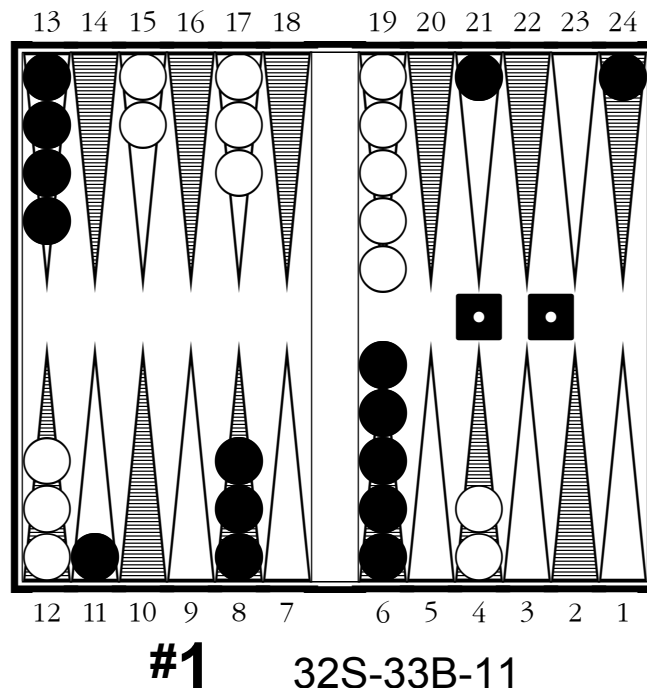
Position #1 will appear in the upcoming book, *Backgammon, Early Doubles*. (It also happens to appear in *Backgammon Openings, Book A*, but with 31 to play instead of double 1s.) This example helps to illustrate the differences in checker play according to match score.

Before reading on, ask yourself how you would play double 1s at each of the four scores.

A few candidate plays are shown below. For money, the best play is 1a (the upper left of the four diagrams), and the second best play, which is tied or very close, is shown in 1b. The third best play (not diagrammed) is 21/20 6/5(3).
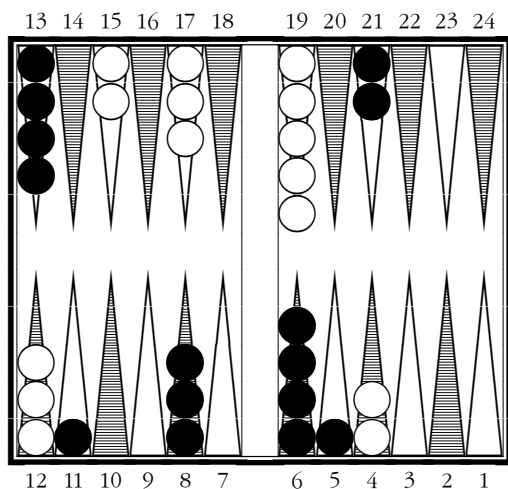
The 1c play is too passive and the 1d play is too aggressive -- they are significantly weaker alternatives for money. However, read the analysis below the diagrams.
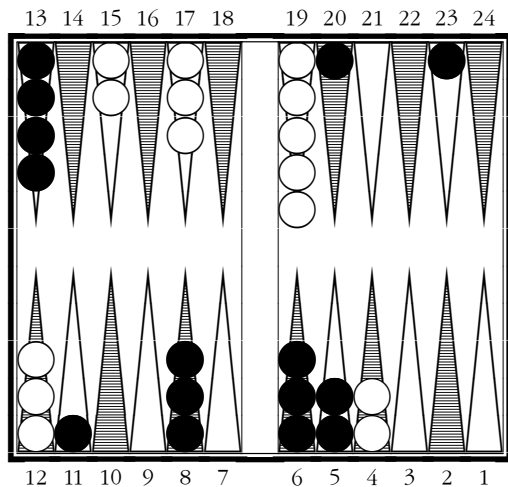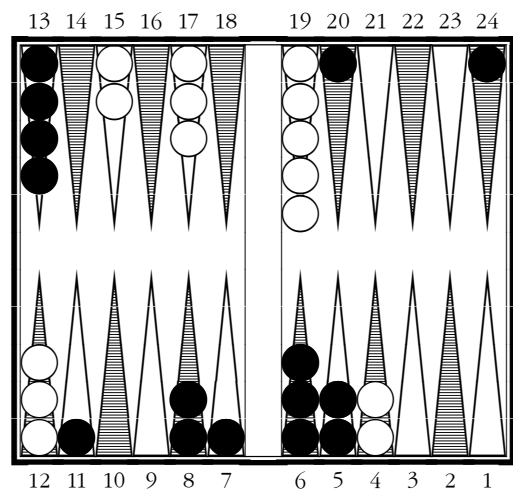
1a Best for Money
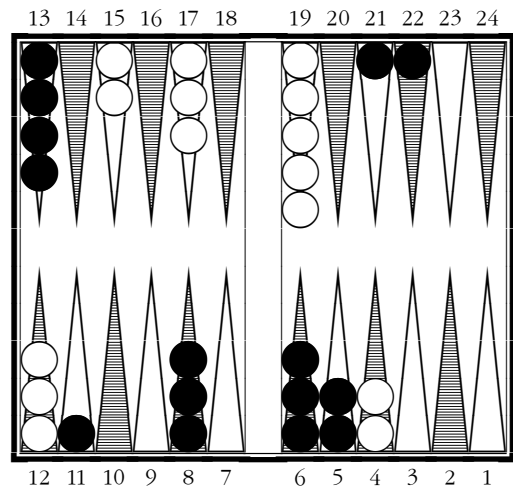
1b Second best for Money

1c Best at GS

1d Best at GG and DMP

Black's best play at GS (gammon save) is to cover the 21pt as in 1c. (With the ace, Black must leave a direct shot, and slotting the 5pt is more productive than sliding to the 10pt or slotting the 7pt.) As is often the case, making an advanced anchor is the standout play at the GS score.

Black's best play at GG (gammon go) is shown in 1d. Three of the aces are the same as in 1a, but with the fourth ace Black should slot his 7pt, maximizing his chance to construct a four-point prime. Black hopes to hit and send back a third White checker (and maybe a fourth), keep them contained and parlay that into a gammon, thereby winning the match.

In 1d, the value of duplicating White's 3s is largely nullified by the duplication of Black's own 4s. In any case, duplication is mostly incidental to Black's quick-building theme at the GG score.

When the best checker play is not the same at all scores, DMP sometimes aligns itself with money, sometimes with GS, and sometimes with GG. In the case of our #1 problem position (32S-33B-11), DMP aligns itself with GG (though just barely) — Black should play as in 1d.

Positions in which one should clearly make a different play (i.e., by .01 or more) at all four scores are extremely rare. To discover one on your own, it would be easier to look for a needle in a field of haystacks. However, such a position can be found in the Match Play section of *Backgammon Openings, Book A*, along with a detailed discussion of the four match scores.

If you would like to improve your checker play in tournaments, pay attention to the score when you are or your opponent is within a few points of winning the match. Ask yourself if the score has become — or a likely cube turn will transform it to — DMP, GS or GG. The score will dictate how important (or unimportant) it is to win a gammon and/or avoid losing a gammon, and this information will help you to decide between two seemingly close checker plays.

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