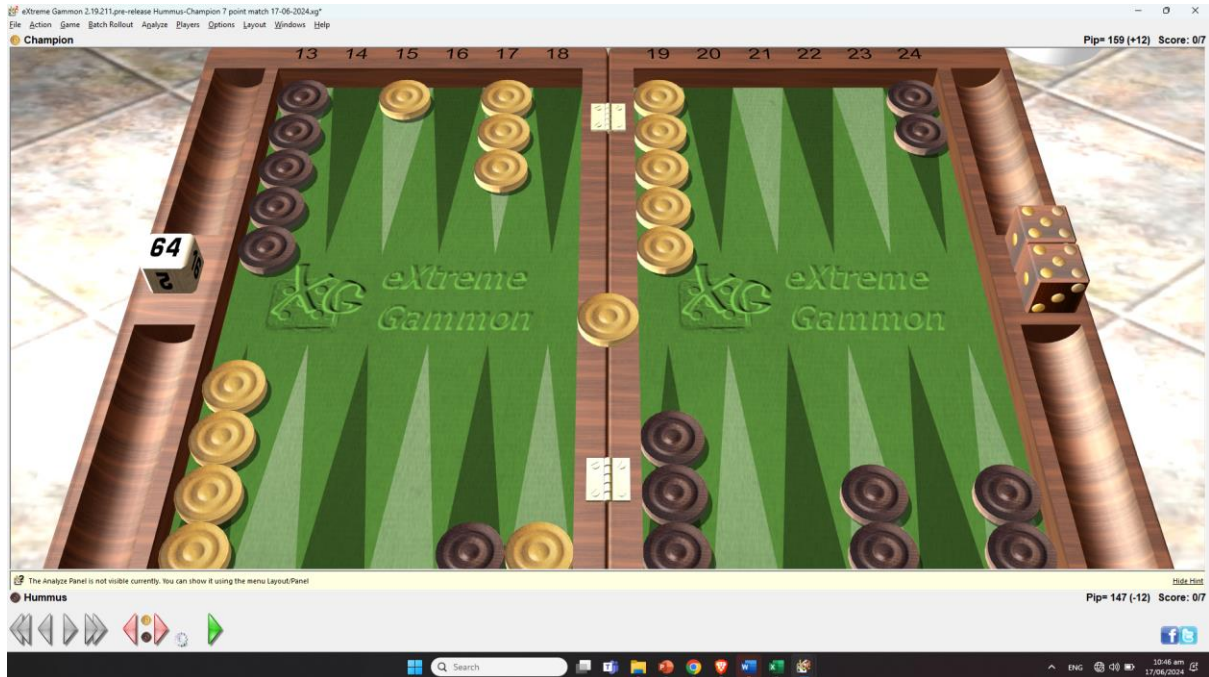


# Too Gammonish to Take

By Itzhak Solsky



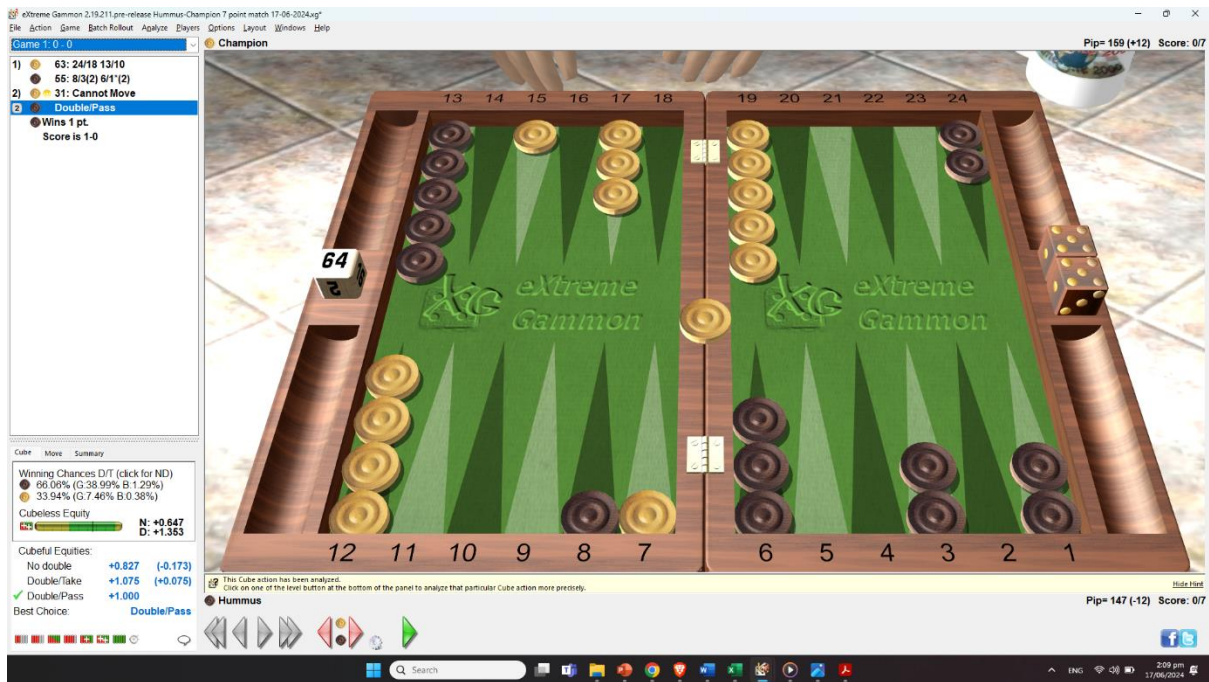
It's 0-0 to 7. It is Black to play. Should black double? If he does, should white take?

Let's fill in a few lines with some random gibberish, so that you'd actually need to scroll down in order to see the answer and the bot's evaluation (the best bot on the market... and who knows? We might have an even better version at some point. It's OK to dream, isn't it?)

So, is this far enough? Or maybe a couple more lines?

Today we'll discuss a bit of "inner game" – what sometimes happens behind the scenes, in a player's mind, as his thinking process slowly crystallizes into a concrete choice, which is then ruthlessly carried out on the well-triangled board...

Fine – enough space wasted. Now let's check the answer:



It's a huge double and a clear pass. We win 66.1% with 39% gammons and 1.3% backgammons, and we lose 7.5% gammons (66.1w, 39g, 1.3bg, 7.5gl).

Equities: 0.827 if we don't double, 1.075 if we double and white takes, and of course 1.000 if we double and white correctly drops (ND 0.827; D/T 1.075; D/P 1.000).

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 It's a standard story, of course... an opening split, followed by double fives, dance, cube, pass...

This has been discussed and presented one million times, by the best writers...

But today we're going to discuss it from a different angle (also literally!), as this position is a great example for a position-type that occurs later in the game, rather often.

The position-type is called a "gammonish cube" – where there's a serious gammon threat, which in a sense compensates us for not winning the game that often.

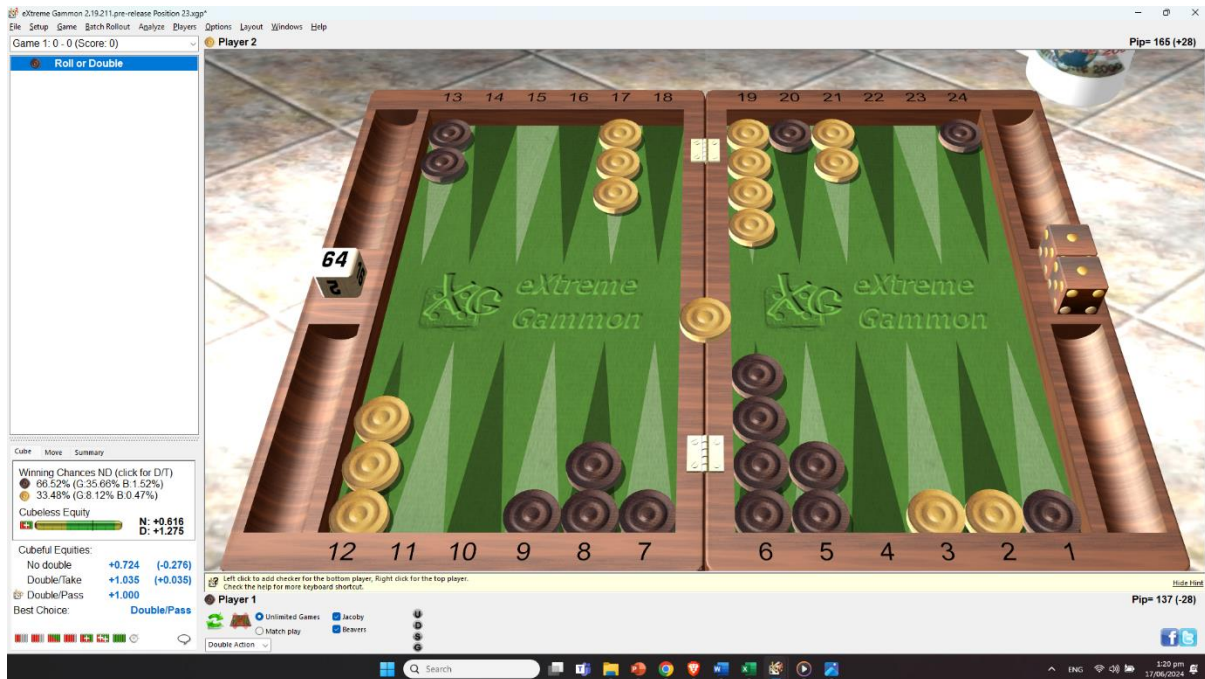
The beauty is that even though we do leave considerable winning chances to the opponent – not all gammonish cubes are takes!

Let us take a better look at this familiar example: black doesn't win this position all that often (only 65.7% of the time), as there's obviously a lot of work to do – you need to bring two back checkers around, your midpoint is awkwardly stacked, your home board is full of gaps and holes, and then there's this blot on the 8 point.

Also the attack needs "proving" with only eight men "in the zone" – it's only a pass because the blot stands on the anvil (which is the bar point), right where we want to hammer down from our overloaded midpoint with any six...

In this position we win a gammon 38.5% of the time, which is simply too much for white to take. Our wise opponent takes the modest route and pays one point, so she doesn't have to face a potentially devastating attack (more fun for us if she does take, of course) – and this is how we crawl a little further up the score board without a shot being fired (the opening 55 excepted).

Take a more complex position, a less familiar one with essentially the same parameters:



Again, a super-huge double and a clear pass (66.7w, 36g, 1.4bg, 8.2gl, ND 0.729, D/T 1.036, D/P 1.000).

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It's one thing to "know a reference position by heart", such as the opening double fives, and it's quite another to be able to recognize an inherently similar situation, in a complex middle-game position that looks quite different.

How often are we so immersed in our own difficulties, that we forget to look beyond our own shoulders and see that the sun is shining, actually quite brightly, on the other side?

Here specifically, the blazing sun is represented by our opponent, who has worries of her own and we can easily miss the happy fact, that on this specific occasion (in both positions) her troubles outweigh ours!

Sometimes we need to pause a little, lift our heavy and weary head from the board, and venture into foreign lands... Just put yourself in your opponent shoes. How much would you enjoy being offered the doubling cube right this minute? Note, if you will, that she's on the bar (this is an important detail!)

20<sup>th</sup>-Century chess grandmaster and theoretician Aaron Nimzowitsch once coined this aphorism: “The threat is stronger than its execution”. How true is it, and how applicable to our theme here!

In a familiar anecdote, Nimzowitsch once complained to the arbiter when his opponent, Alexandre Alekhine (world champion between 1927 and 1946), took a cigar out of his pocket and placed it by his side, at the table.

The arbiter said – “why are you complaining? He was not smoking”.

“Right”, said Nimzowitsch, “but he threatened to smoke...”

And so it is here. We should offer the doubling cube, declaring our threat to attack - and our opponent should be duly scared and drop it.

*Belgian Champion (2024), UBC contender (2023) and BMAB master Itzhak Solsky is a backgammon coach with the Backgammon Learning Center ([www.backgammonlearningcenter.com](http://www.backgammonlearningcenter.com)), where you can learn backgammon through a systematic methodology conceived and arranged over the years by such giants as Paul Magriel, Kit Woolsey, Phil Simborg, Mochy and others.*