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THE YEAR'S BIGGEST TOURNAMENT

by Lewis Deyong and Walter Krader



One cold London day in January 1976, Lewis Deyong was suddenly asked to lunch by 2 executives of the S. B. M. (La Société des Bains de Mer), the massive holding corporation which controls the chief leisure facilities of Monte Carlo, 2 casinos, 4 hotels, 18 restaurants, beaches, night clubs, etc. It was at that lunch the elements of the year's biggest tournament began to emerge.

«We have held backgammon tournaments before, but what we want is something special. The best players, the biggest entry, the highest prizes. When Monte Carlo does something, it's the biggest and the best or else it isn't at Monte Carlo. You are the backgammon consultant to Philip Morris International, are they interested in co-sponsoring such an event with us?»

A quick telephone call to Philip Morris International HQ (Lausanne) brought a quick answer — indeed they were. Philip Morris International had decided for some time that backgammon was a game very much on the upswing, and they had already determined upon a programme to promote the game, and promote it in a big way. Plans were already laid to sponsor the 1976 British Backgammon Club Amateur Championship, (held in con-

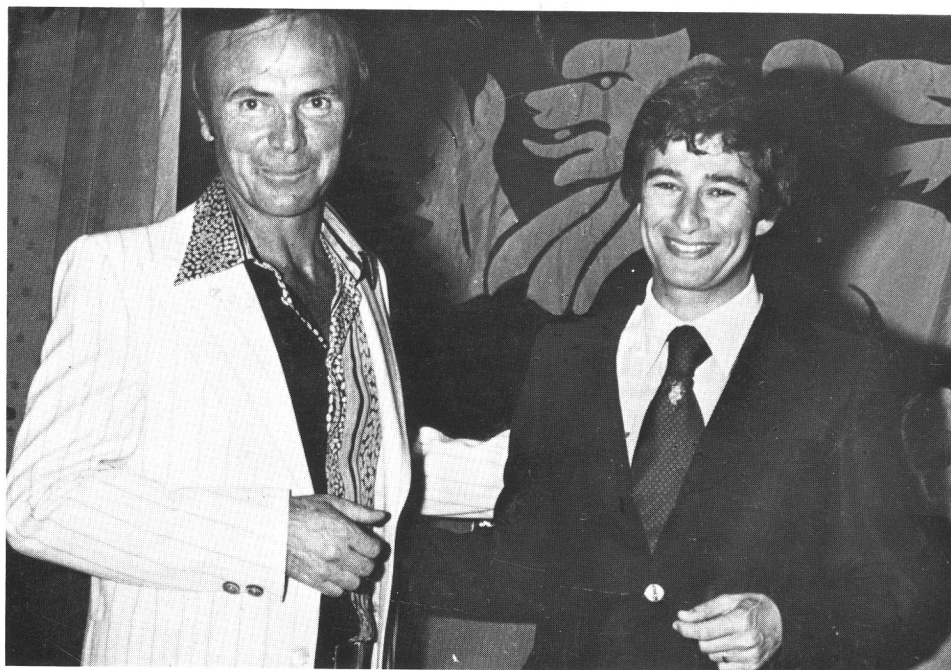
junction with the Daily Mail). This competition eventually drew close to 2000 competitors playing in heats all over Britain. To complement it Philip Morris International needed another event. A high powered Championship for experts at the very top level of the game.

The two sponsors met the following week in Monte Carlo, and the pieces fell neatly into place. The organisation was turned over to Lewis Deyong, and with it a big slice of responsibility for the ultimate success of what was now the Philip Morris International Open Championship of Backgammon to be held in Monte Carlo, July 14th — 18th.

Invitations went out to all the well known players we could locate and the Tourna-

ment was simultaneously announced in the European (now International) Backgammon News, graciously sponsored by Philip Morris International distributing 10,000 copies all over the world. From Helsinki in the north to Capetown in the south, from Teheran in the east to Hawaii in the west, thousands of the best players were invited to the Riviera to test their skills against the other experts who would be attending. Many inducements might bring people to Monte Carlo in July; Mediterranean sunshine, the swimming, the 22 tennis courts of the Monte Carlo Country Club, for some, evenings at Jimmy's, the most glamorous night club in the world, but we have a more than sneaking suspicion that for most, lurking not very deep below the surface, the reason for coming to the backgammon week was the competition, and the lure of prize money — big prize money.

By the time July arrived, over 300 competitors had accepted to enter the two →



Finalist Kiumars Motakhassess, Winner Joe Dwek

THE YEAR'S BIGGEST TOURNAMENT

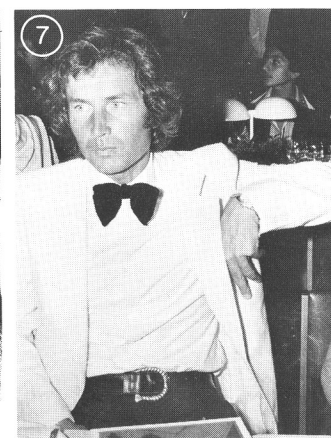
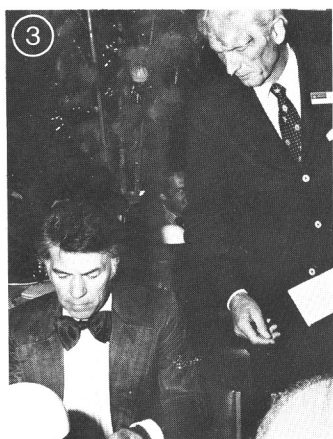
events (Championship: entry fee \$ 250, or Junior entry fee \$ 50). At stake, waiting to be won in the auction and the prize money was close to \$ 100,000. For some this was going to be a very profitable vacation. Philip Morris International had even commissioned a special trophy for the winner, worth over \$ 5000 «The Backgammon Players», sculpted in alabaster and silver, by noted artist Chris Melling. The stage had been carefully set, and at the last moment we realised that the stage would be too small. On the morning of July 14th the auction dinner was switched from the Hotel de Paris to the Salle des Etoiles, a beautiful showroom with a sliding roof, 50 cabaret dancers and the best food this side of Maxim's. The backgammon party, players, guests and spectators combined, numbered almost 500, and before the auction had even begun, the betting was hot and pretty heavy.

For the first time in European backgammon, the giant Joe Coral bookmaking group had installed a fixed odds book 'on the rails', offering prices on individual players, the winning country, (U.S.A. was installed as 6-4 favourite), and even a rather daring 7-1 was offered against any lady winning the Championship. Quickly established as favourite was Joe Dwek of London, the incumbent European Title Holder. Rated at 12-1 in a field of 175 players (the other entrants were in the Junior tournament), Corals took in their first bet, \$ 1000 on Dwek from a Californian textile millionaire. Other bets came pouring in during dinner, and at 10.00 p.m. the auction started. Dwek sold first, bought by a Spanish liqueur magnate for a price of £ 2500.

British international player Phillip Martyn brought £ 2200 from a Greek shipping tycoon and other aces commanded similar sums. Gino Scalamandre of Milan, holder of the 1975 Crockford's World Championship was sold to a group from Playboy for £ 2000. When the last player was sold (Paul Magriel of New York, known as X-22, the Human Computer, to a family of Iranians for £ 2200) the pool topped £ 50,000.

Play started the next day at 2.00 p. m. in the famous gilt and gingerbread casino of Monaco's main square. The building is a salute to La Belle Epoque. Ornate ceilings are covered with gilded frescoes, potted plants infest every corner, gay abandoned nymphs swarm across acres

Monte Carlo Tournament scene



MONTE CARLO,

of wall space. One showcase exhibits 19th century posters. Gambling then was considered a serious affair, and clients of Monte Carlo played roulette only in white tie (albeit without decorations) and full evening dress. One illustration, surely an errant aberration from a later age, depicts a very proper (but apparently unlucky) lady, standing at a roulette table clad only in her underwear and stockings, the rest no doubt having disappeared on number 32. One wonders if this illustration intended to warn other members of the fairer sex not to get themselves over-involved and become a subsequent embarrassment. After all in those days Monte Carlo entertained the most respectable of British Milords, Balkan Princes and Russian Grand Dukes. Society scandals might erupt publicly in Capri, but in Monte Carlo ruined men were expected to shoot themselves discreetly in the casino gardens with a minimum of fuss, although contrary to public opinion pistols for that purpose were not obtainable upon request from the concierge.

As the organiser of the Championship, Lewis Deyong sincerely hoped that none of our players would take defeat as hard as that.

By 2.01 p.m. of the 15th, 150 backgammon boards were in action, and by 7.00 p.m. most of the seeded players, Dwek, Martyn, Kiumars Motakhshes of Iran, etc., were among the total of 12 from the original 16 who survived to the second day. The «Nice Matin» had requested a «play of the day» for a feature column, and in the evening after the action had finished, a few experts clustered around the official's table, each one arguing the merits of some particularly clever coup he had brought off.

The decision required such delicacy that even Henry Kissinger would have been obliged to approve the committee ruling: The Play was to be chosen with a roll of the dice.

By the end of day 2 the decision was a lot easier. Rounds 3 and 4 saw the exit of

Martyn, Claude Beer of Philadelphia (a former world champion), X-22 developed a malfunction and he too disappeared, ex-tennis star Jean Noël Grinda double faulted himself out of the tournament — it was the day of the long knives. «The Casino will suffer for this tonight» warned Kyle Larsen (the winner of the giant Pebble Beach Championship held near San Francisco). When play started next day in the Consolation tournament (open to all 2nd day losers) we asked Kyle how he did, we thought he was looking a bit pale, considering his four days in the Riviera sun. «Oh it was nothing serious. I just lost an arm and leg». We were about to frisk him for pistols when he added: «Fortunately I'm an octopus».

The last eight revealed two clear favourites emerging on a collision course. Dwek, and the Iranian Motakhshes, the betting favourite of his fellow countrymen. The petrodollars poured in on him, especially after he defeated his compatriot, Maurice Elghanyan, the 1975 Monte Carlo winner. Dwek now down to 9-4 had strong London support, and most of the professional players seemed to favour him.

Happily the organisation was running smoothly, our hardworked staff consisted of a former professional soccer player, a retired British car dealer resident in Monte Carlo, the doorman from Annabel's (London's premier night club) and Paolo Negri, the wine steward of the Clermont Club, ably assisted by three girls from London and a Swiss student. Philip Morris had plastered Monaco with posters, Tele Monte Carlo latched on to the tournament and were running a ten minute spot every night in French and later Italian language transmissions. These efforts produced quite a few curious spectators, and the big matches of the final rounds were played out at packed tables.

LEFT TO RIGHT:



- ① Sebastian Taylor, Alice Topping
- ② Nicholas Coral, Betty Coral
- ③ Hervé Odermatt, Dr. Reginald Kernan
- ④ Actress Vivian Ventura
- ⑤ Marianne Portzelt, Maika Perez de Cobas, Gino Scalamandre
- ⑥ Stephen Raphael, Joan Harkness
- ⑦ Jean Sobieski
- ⑧ Livia Weintraub and Friend
- ⑨ Ted Bassett, Paule Cals
- ⑩ Raphael di Osborne, Annelie Grinda
- ⑪ Dr. Reginald Kernan, Claudia di Osborne
- ⑫ Herbert Papock, Geri Sackler
- ⑬ Ringo Starr, Steinar Nyborg, Peter Sellers
- ⑭ Final: Joe Dwek, Kiumars Motakhshes



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(For details see page 9)

THE YEAR'S BIGGEST TOURNAMENT

Dwek defeated the Committee chairman, London stockbroker Stephen Raphael, 25-23, in the quarter-finals. Dark horse Glen Abney of California (100-1 in the opening line) had fought through to the semi-finals. «I've won two gin rummy tournaments, but I don't know anything about this game». He was almost apologising after every upset victory. Only in the quarter final round, finding himself still 50-1 did he put down a token bet of \$ 20. When he finally exited in the semi-finals it was not without honour. 25-21 is a close score, and Kiumars Motakhasses emerged the winner with the look of a man who had been badly scared. At one time he had been trailing 12-3!

So the finals were set for a battle of East versus West. Joe Dwek versus Mothakasses. The odds on the match were even money Iran, 4-5 Dwek. «I do not think there is much difference between them, but Joe Dwek is rather like the Lester Piggott of backgammon, the public want him». This explanation came from Lou Cohen, director of Corals bookmaking

division. Incidentally Corals were to hold their own tournament the following week in London, at Crockfords, which belongs to their casino division.

Sunday, 18th July. At 3.00 p.m. the two contestants squared off in the Salle Blanche. Dwek, 38, Harvard educated, London resident. Motakhasses, 43, born in Russia, Iranian national world traveller and speaker of twelve languages (each of them with an accent).

Much of the money originally at stake siphons off into the consolation tournaments, some goes to the losing semifinalists, but in the championship match between prize money (including a special Philip Morris International prize of \$ 5000 for the winner), and the auction pool, remained \$ 46,000 for the winner and \$ 18,000 for the runner-up. They were playing this match for a difference of \$ 28,000 (about £ 15,500). Among the 100 or so spectators who could crowd around the table, were Nigel Dempster of the Daily Mail Diary and other representatives of the European press. The challenge round was a reporter's dream. The score swung back and forth until it reached 24-24 in a 25 point final.

Backers of Dwek (at 12-1) and Motakhasses (a lot of money had come in on him around the quarter finals at 6-1) were climbing the walls to see the last deciding game.

The critical play of the whole match is well described by Joe Dwek in this newsletter (MOMENT OF TRUTH). His chief backer describes Dwek as «The Ice Man», but on the last roll of the match (a clinching 6-6) both Dwek's arms shot into the air, and for perhaps the first time, the august walls of the Monte Carlo reverberated to a Harvard «Rah».

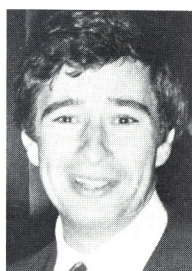
This event was perhaps the most enjoyable Backgammon Tournament ever held. Thanks to the forethought of Philip Morris International and the Société des Bains de Mer the players were accorded outstanding comfort and courtesy — they responded with the best deportment and sporting acceptance of their various fates anyone can remember at a tournament where \$ 200,000.— was involved. Congratulations to all.

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→ (continued on page 7)

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

by Joe Dwek

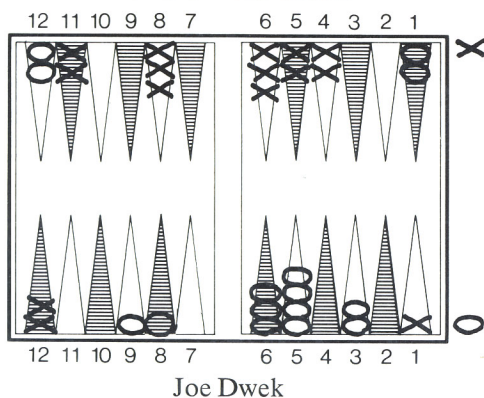


When a Final is contested between two experts and the score is 24 all in a 25 point match, one expects every play in that game to be criticized, dissected, argued, analysed and then reanalysed

— especially by other experts witnessing the game.

DIAGRAM 1

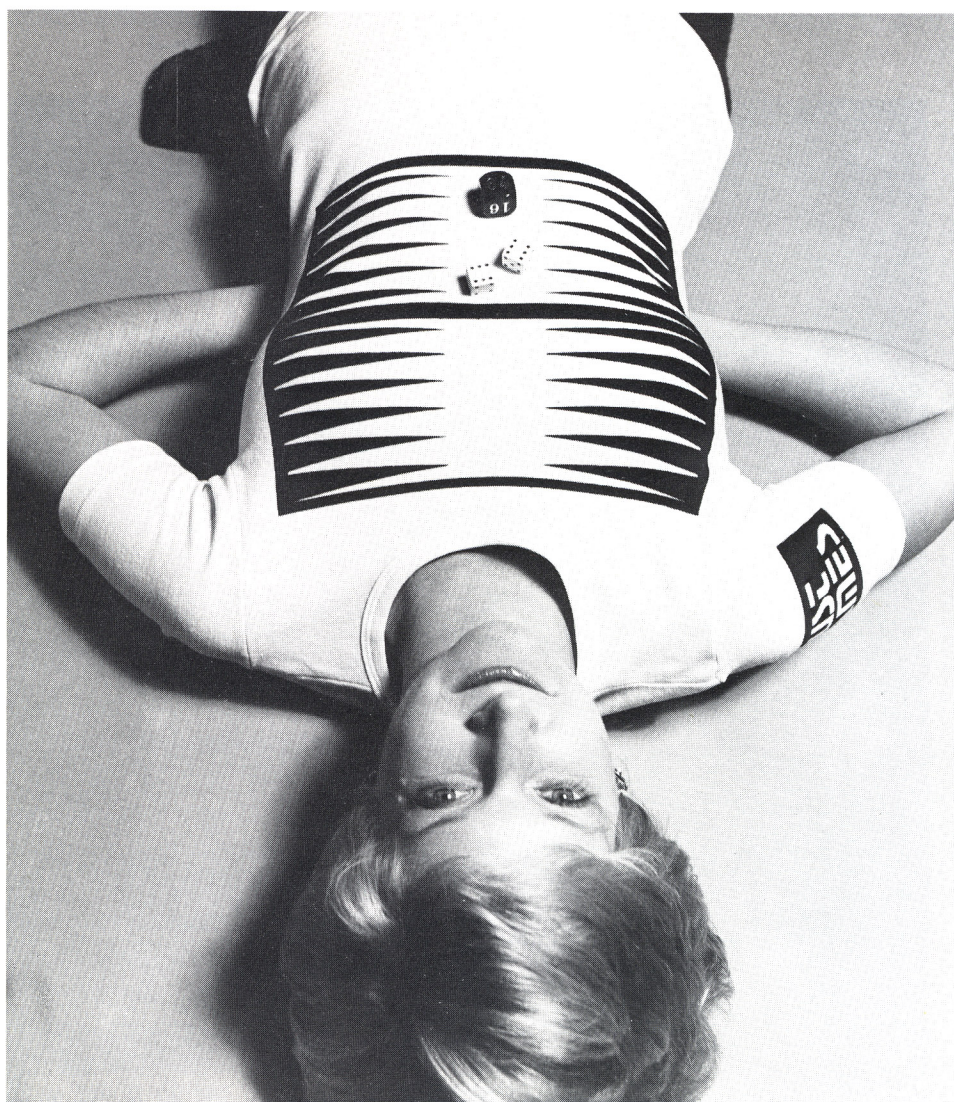
Kiumars Motakhassess



In the case above I was not only playing for the prize money, the added prize money offered by Philip Morris International and the S.B.M., the auction pool (I owned 50% of myself) and the ego trip of winning this monumental contest, I was also playing for all the people who had placed a bet on me with Corals, the bookmakers.

The 4-2 I had to move was the most crucial play of the tournament for me and most likely the most important play I would have to make in 1976!

I am sure that Kiumars will remember it as long as he plays backgammon — which I hope is for a long time to come, he is such a capable and pleasant opponent. Of course I know that I could play a moderate move by making my four point as shown in diagram 2.

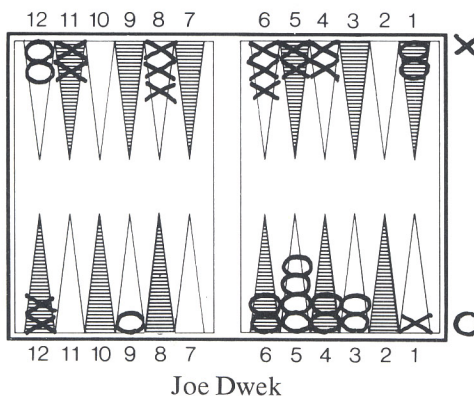


LATEST IN FASHION

This T-Shirt («JUST GAMES») is now on sale in London together with a manual how to play on it. One of the recommendations is to use the half closer to the lady's face as home board and not to pile too many men on the six and five points.

DIAGRAM 2

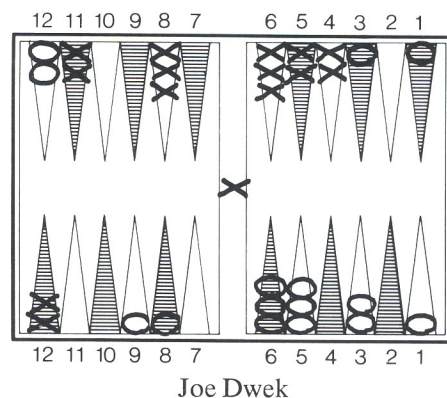
Kiumars Motakhassess



However, I consider this is an inadequate play that puts very little pressure on Kiumars, and remember with the score at 24 all in a 25 point match the double game is of no consequence and the cube has no value. So what should I do instead? If I make my 4 point, I must then pray (hard) that Kiumars does not 1) roll a 6, 2) make his bar point and 3) does not cramp my timing. I elected to make the following play:

DIAGRAM 3

Kiumars Motakhassess



I am still praying against a 1 from X) but now I profit from the disorientation factor of putting my opponent's man on the rail, and 9/36 shots that keep him there. The hit worked and he failed to come in. Next I threw a 5-4 which covered my blot on the one point and came to his bar — the rest is history.