

BACKGAMMON INSTRUCTIONS

THE GAME OF BACKGAMMON

Backgammon is a game for two players that can trace its history back thousands of years to games of ancient Persia, Rome, Egypt and Greece. The modern game is played according to the following standard rules (though variations are found around the world).

EQUIPMENT

- A backgammon board, marked with 24 triangles, called points
- 30 checkers (15 per player, distinguished by color)
- 4 six-sided dice (2 per player)
- A doubling cube (optional)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CHECKERS: Game pieces

POINTS: The 24 triangles on the board

HOME BOARD/INNER BOARD: Points 1–6

OUTER BOARD: Points 7–12

BLOT: A single checker occupying a point

BAR: The raised rail across the center of the board

BEAR OFF: To remove a checker from the board

OBJECTIVE

To be the first player to remove all 15 of your checkers from the board.

BOARD SETUP

The 24 points of the backgammon board form a U-shaped track on which players move their checkers in opposite directions (one clockwise and the other counterclockwise), with one player's #24 point being the other player's #1 point, and vice versa. The 1 point is the very last point a checker can be moved to before it is removed from the board, or "borne off." To start, each player places 2 checkers on his 24 point, 5 checkers on his 13 point, 3 checkers on his 8 point, and 5 checkers on his 6 point.

PLAY

To begin, each player rolls a single die, and the player with the higher roll goes first. If both players roll the same number, they must roll again. The first turn is based on the numbers showing on those dice.

For each turn at play, a player rolls his pair of dice and moves his pieces from point to point, as long as a legal move is possible. A legal move is a move to a point not already occupied by two or more of the opposing player's checkers.

Moves are made according to the numbers shown on the dice, with each die dictating a separate move. The player may use both moves for one checker or may move 2 checkers (one for each die). In other words, if the player rolls a 2 and a 5, he may move one checker 2 spaces and then 5 spaces (or 5 spaces, then 2), assuming there are open points to move to. OR, he may move one checker 2 spaces and a second checker 5 spaces.

The player must play both numbers on the dice, as long as legal moves are possible (even if those moves are not desirable strategically). If only one legal move is possible, the player must take that move. If either move would be legal, but not both moves, the player must play the higher number. If no legal move is possible, the player loses a turn.

ROLLING A DOUBLE

If the player rolls a double, he must play each die twice. So, a roll of 4 and 4 means 4 moves of 4 spaces each.

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HITTING THE BLOT & GETTING OFF THE BAR

If a point is occupied by only one of the opposing player's checkers (called a blot), the player can "Hit the Blot," removing the opposing player's checker and setting it on the bar.

If one or more of a player's checkers is on the bar, he must move them back onto the board before moving any others. After rolling the dice, the player must move his checker off the bar and onto an open point (points 1–6) on his opponent's home board, corresponding to a number on one of the dice. In other words, if the player rolls a 3 and a 6, he must move his checker off the bar to either the 3 point or 6 point on the opponent's home board. After that, if the player has no more checkers on the bar, he can use the second number to move any of his checkers (including the one he just moved off the bar). If neither number rolled corresponds to an open point, then the checker cannot be moved off the bar and the player loses his turn. If a player has more than one checker on the bar, and only one checker can be moved off, the player must do so, and forfeit the remaining move for that turn.

BEARING OFF

A player must move all his checkers to his home board before he can bear any of them off.

Once a player has all his checkers on his home board, he can choose to continue to move them, if legal moves are possible and strategically prudent, or bear them off using the numbers on the dice to indicate points. For example, if the player rolls a 3, he can either move a checker 3 spaces (say, to protect against a blot being hit by his opponent) or move a checker from the 3 point off the board. If either of the numbers on the dice corresponds to a point on which the player has no checkers, he must make a legal move from a higher numbered point. In other words, in the example above, if there are no checkers on the 3 point, the player must move a checker 3 spaces from the 4, 5 or 6 point. If he has no checkers on a point higher than the number on the die, then he must move from the highest point available. So, in our example, if he rolls a 3 and has no checkers on points 3–6, he can move a checker from point 2 off the board. If he rolls a 6 and a 5 and has no checkers on the 6 point, he can bear off 2 checkers from the 5 point.

Once a player bears all 15 of his checkers off the board, he wins the game.

MATCH PLAY

Like many games, backgammon can be played as a series, or match, with the winner of the match determined by a tally of total points (based on the number of games won and lost) after the final game in an agreed-upon number of games. Alternatively, a match may be played to a specified number of points, with the first player to accumulate the required points being declared the winner.

In match play, a standard game win is valued at 1 point. If a player fails to bear off even one of his checkers before his opponent removes all 15 of his, then that player has lost a "gammon," and his opponent is awarded 2 points for the game. If the losing player still has checkers on the bar or in the opponent's home board, then the loss is a "backgammon," and the opponent wins 3 points.

The doubling cube may be used to increase the number of points that each game is worth, with the winner of the game receiving the value of the game (1, 2 or 3 points) multiplied by the value on the cube.