

# Tournament Backgammon Rules and Standards Guide

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## Section 1: Responsibility of Participants

### 1.1. Responsibility of Tournament Director

**1.1.1.** The overriding responsibility of the Tournament Director, or "TD", is to provide a venue that is as fair and enjoyable as possible to all. To that end, the TD is responsible to ensure that these Rules and Guidelines will be followed as much as possible unless he determines that an exception should be made in order to maintain the overriding principle of fair play. When there is a doubt or question as to the application of a rule, a general approach is to tend *to rule against the player who has, either intentionally or unintentionally, initiated an action that created the question or conflict in the first place.*

**Example:** Player A rolls, says his dice were cocked, picks them up and rolls again. Player B says he did not believe the dice were cocked. The TD should rule in favor of Player B, as Player A should have waited for acknowledgement from Player B before deciding that the dice were cocked. Or, as the dice were rolling and appeared to be cocked, Player A accidentally hit the table possibly causing the dice to land flat. Player B should be given the choice of allowing the dice to stand or roll over.

**1.1.2.** The TD shall not only do his best to maintain fairness, but will also do his best to assure all of said fairness as much as possible by posting rules and making copies of the rules available to the spectators and participants and by conducting draws in public or with witnesses.

**1.1.3.** Full advance disclosure of all financial matters, points, and awards is required, and affiliation with a recognized Backgammon Federation or Association is strongly encouraged.

**1.1.4.** Tournament Directors will use their best judgment to see that the attached Standards of Ethical Practice are followed by all, as much as possible, and the Tournament Directors will have sole and final determination as to how the standards will be interpreted and any sanctions for violations made at their tournament.

### 1.2. Responsibility of Players

**1.2.1.** As most matches are not officiated, players are expected to self-officiate, *imposing the strictest standards upon themselves.* When in doubt, a player should voluntarily rule against himself or penalize himself in questionable situations. A player who consistently behaves in this manner can then expect the same from his opponents. Players are expected to always try their best to win within the rules and within accepted, normal standards of behavior and good sportsmanship.

**1.2.2.** Players may not *collude* or agree to revise any of the tournament rules without the specific, advance approval of the TD.

**Example:** Players may not agree to play to a different score, different clock settings, or different rules of play.

**1.2.3.** During the match or set of matches, players may not receive help, advice, or refer to any notes or written material of any kind, nor are they allowed to discuss previous plays and cube decisions with spectators, coaches, or others until the match is completed.

**1.2.4.** The only writing that is permissible is to record conditions of play, or to record the current position on the board. "Conditions of play" include the score, the time on the clock when a break takes place, which player initiated a double and the level of the cube, and whether a game resulted in a gammon or backgammon.

**1.2.5.** When keeping the score, players may note either the actual score or the away score (e.g., 2–1 or 5-away/6-away).

### **1.3. Responsibility of Spectators**

**1.3.1.** Spectators are required to remain still and quiet and not say or do anything whatsoever to distract the players. They may not offer opinions, advice, or comments on anything, even after a game has ended, as long as the match or set is still in progress.

**1.3.2.** If a question or dispute arises, spectators are not to offer their comments unless asked to do so by *both* players or by the TD.

**Example:** If the players disagree about what the previous roll was, spectators may*not* state what they saw unless asked by both players.

**1.3.3.** Spectators must wait until the end of the match to cheer, applaud, or offer their comments and should not do so between games or between matches in a set of matches.

**1.3.4.** If a spectator sees a problem or irregularity of any kind, he should immediately notify the Tournament Director or staff. If, for example, a spectator sees that the cube has not been centered or that one or both players have the wrong score, the spectator should inform the Tournament Director and let him handle the situation. The only exception to this is if a spectator sees that the clock is running when it should not or is not running when it should, and then he may say something to the players.

**1.3.5.** When a spectator walks up to a match in progress, he should *not* ask about the score or call attention to the score by overtly looking at the score sheet, as that could alert a player to take cube action. A spectator should also not take pictures of positions on the board unless requested to do so by both players, as taking a picture might alert a player that a position might be a double, or might be a close play, or that he might be making an error.

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## **Section 2: Rules of Tournament Play With Recommended Interpretations and Examples**

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### **2.1. Purpose**

The intention of these rules and the accompanying guide is to provide tournament competitors a clear and consistent path to enjoyment of the game of backgammon free of dispute, misunderstanding, or disagreement regarding the procedures of play.

**2.1.1. Interpretation.** In the event that an issue arises which is not explicitly covered by these rules and guidelines, or for which, in the judgment of the Director, strict compliance violates the principles of fair play, the Director may improvise and/or override these rules.

**2.1.2. Conformity.** Players may not, either unilaterally or by mutual agreement, choose to alter or not to follow any rule. Players may not be allowed to play matches on a computer or tablet instead of a board, unless approved by the TD.

### **2.2. Conditions of Contest**

**2.2.1. Direction.** A single, designated person shall be in charge of the competition and from here forward referred to as "Director" or "TD". At Director's discretion, one or more staff persons will be assigned to assist in direction duties but the final responsibility regarding all matters of the contest lies with the Director. From here forward, "Staff" refers to the Director and his designated assistants.

**2.2.2. Eligibility.** The final determination as to the eligibility of a person to participate in the tournament [and/or in individual events and divisions within the tournament] is at the sole discretion of the Director. The Director may appoint a committee to help or make eligibility determinations. If there is a ruling body that sets standards

for eligibility, the Director should adhere to those standards unless he believes there is good reason to rule otherwise.

**2.2.3. Location.** Matches are to be played in areas designated by the staff. If contestants choose to play in alternate areas they must receive explicit permission from the staff.

**2.2.4. Pairings.** A drawsheet shall be posted in the playing area, accessible to all contestants. At a minimum the drawsheet will show the pairings for the current round of competition and the match length for that round.

**2.2.5. Starting times.** Once a pairing is posted, players are responsible for beginning the match promptly. Exceptions are meal breaks and overnight breaks. In these cases the match shall commence at the posted time for the next session. When multiple events are running concurrently the staff will designate which event's matches take priority. It is very important that penalty points be awarded for late starts, even if the other party in the match is willing to waive it. This is the only way to assure that tournaments will run on time. If the players agree to take a longer break and do not have the approval of the TD, a penalty to both players may be applied to their next match.

**2.2.6. Intramatch breaks.** The Tournament Director shall determine and post rules for breaks. Unless otherwise stated, each player is allowed only one break of up to 5 minutes during a match. Breaks must be between games. Punctual return from breaks is just as important as prompt starts; abuses must be reported and penalty points assigned. During breaks there will be no discussion of backgammon strategy and no access to electronic equipment, written material, or coaching. When a break starts, both players should write down the time the break has begun so there is no question about a player being late. If clocks are in use, the remaining time on each player's clock must be recorded and agreed to prior to the players leaving the table.

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## Section 3: Equipment

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When equipment is not provided by the staff, the choice of equipment is up to the players. Preference shall be given to equipment which is most likely to provide a smoothly flowing contest for those involved.

### 3.1. Appropriateness of Equipment

Backgammon is a mental contest between participants. As such, any use of outside aid is prohibited. Besides the standard game equipment, instruments/devices may be used to keep score and record positions for future reference. Equipment used to record matches must not interfere with play and are subject to the approval of the TD. Matches, positions, and plays that are recorded at tournaments are considered *public domain* and may be used by tournament officials, during the tournament. However, if either player requests that a recorded match be restricted to the two players involved, that request must be honored (e.g. no copies distributed to others).

### **3.2. Equipment Size**

The size of the board, checkers, dice, and doubling cube shall be appropriate [as defined by the TD] for the playing environment.

### **3.3. Choice of Equipment**

In the event that multiple, acceptable equipment options are available and when players disagree on preference, dice shall be cast to determine any unresolved equipment choices and direction of movement. The TD may determine that one player's equipment is clearly inferior in terms of playability and he may make the decision rather than leaving it up to a roll of the dice. For example, if one player has a very small board, or very large or small dice, or unusual or un-lipped dice cups, etc.

### **3.4. Change of Equipment**

The initial resolution of equipment and the direction of play shall remain in effect for the entire match. If playing pieces are broken or lost during the course of a match an appropriate change shall be made under the direction of the TD.

### **3.5. Dice Generation**

Random dice rolls are essential for a fair contest. As such, approved devices for generating random rolls such as precision dice, lipped dice cups, dice tubes, and baffle boxes receive priority. If either player wishes to use a piece of equipment that is not essential to the competition, such as a baffle box or dice tube, strong consideration should be given to that request. If the other player objects, the TD shall determine if there is legitimate reason to object or refuse to use the equipment offered and shall make the final decision.

### 3.6. Dice Selection

**When four dice are used**, one player should shake and roll all four dice onto the playing surface and then the players alternate (non-shaker first) to choose the dice for that game. At the request of either player, the dice shall be remixed and reselected in an identical manner only between games, with the player calling for the change doing the rolling, and subsequently giving his opponent first choice of dice.

**When a clock is used**, two dice are selected and the other set aside if needed. If either player calls for a dice change, all four dice will be used to select the two in play.

### 3.7. Communication

The Director shall decide on the official language of the tournament and communication between the players involved in a match shall be done in that language. Spectators may not communicate with players during a match, in any language. In the event that a player does not speak the official language, a translator may be used upon receiving approval from the Director.

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## Section 4: Monitors

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At the discretion and choice of the staff, a person may be assigned to a particular match to ensure proper procedures and etiquette. It is the responsibility of this monitor to promptly call attention to every irregularity observed and see that it is rectified before the match proceeds. The monitor shall verify the score, the roll, legal moves, and all rulings. The TD may also give the monitor the right to award penalty points or even a forfeit for unsportsmanlike conduct. Players may not refuse the ruling of a monitor who has been appointed by the TD.

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## Section 5: Procedures of Play

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### 5.1. First Roll

Each player throws a single die to begin the game and the player with the larger die plays both dice as his first move. If one player's die is cocked, only his roll goes over. The player with the lower die must not touch the dice until the other player has completed his turn and picked up his dice or hit the clock. The play is not over until the player with the higher die picks up the dice or hits the clock.

## 5.2. Alternating Turns

Only one player may move at a time and that turn alternates between players. Only the player on turn may touch the board, dice, checkers, or cube.

## 5.3. End of Turn

~~If a player has made a full move and subsequently touches or moves either die, that turn is completed, even if he pulls his hand away.~~ If he wishes to move the dice before his turn is complete, ~~he must state~~ it is preferred that he/she state that he/she is adjusting the dice prior to touching them. If four dice are used, a player ends his turn by picking up either die. If two dice are used, a player ends his turn by tapping on the board on either the side or the middle as agreed upon by the players at the start of the match. When a clock is in use, a player's turn ends only when he presses the clock plunger.

## 5.4. Unambiguous Handling of Equipment

The checkers and doubling cube should be moved in a clear manner showing intent. A single hand shall be used for movement of checkers for the entire turn. If the player on turn has a checker on the bar, that checker must be brought legally onto the playing surface before any other checker can be moved. It is highly recommended that players clearly show which checkers are moved **by putting those checkers at the top of the point with a space between the original checkers on the point and the newly moved checkers.** This makes it easier to remember which checkers had been moved. If a player wishes to look at several plays, he should return the checkers to the original position each time before looking at an alternate play. Players should not move checkers very quickly or in any way ambiguously. If there is a dispute, the ruling should go against any player who moves checkers quickly or ambiguously. The same is true for any ambiguous or unclear handling of the doubling cube.

## 5.5. Dice Rolling

Dice handling must be consistent with the generation of random rolls. When cups are in use, both the shake and the toss are important, required randomizing components. **Dice should be shaken vigorously at least three times, up and down, before rolling.** The dice should be released well above the surface of the board (at least 3-4 inches) to allow the dice to clearly fall and then bounce or roll before settling. The dice cup should not hit the surface of the table during the toss, and

fingers should not be in contact with the dice or near the opening of the cup after the dice leave the cup. If a player does not believe his opponent is following this protocol, he should nicely remind his opponent of this rule. If the player does not improve his rolling, the TD should be called. The TD may caution the player, he may require a baffle box or dice tube be used, or he may appoint a monitor and penalize further infractions. The appropriate penalty for continued infractions is to allow the opponent the choice of whether to allow the roll to stand or make the player roll over. Continued infractions may result in penalty points. The TD may go so far as to designate a roller for one or both players.

### 5.6. Valid Roll

Both dice must leave the cup at approximately the same time. If one die hits the table before the second die has left the cup, the roll is invalid. For a roll to be valid, both dice must come to rest flat on the playing surface in the half of the board located on the right hand side of the bar from the viewpoint of the player who rolled. Otherwise both dice must be re-rolled. If a player believes his dice are cocked, he must state so and wait for acknowledgement from his opponent before picking up his dice. If a player fails to get acknowledgement, and the other player believes the dice were not cocked, the ruling should go against the player who picked up his dice without acknowledgement. Players may *not* agree to allow their opponent to roll on the wrong side or to change the rolling rules in any way. For a die to be considered cocked, it must remain motionless in a cocked position for at least 1 second and then declared cocked by either player and subsequently acknowledged by the other player. If either die was cocked for over 1 second and then fell, even if neither party declared it cocked before it fell, it shall be considered cocked. If the players disagree on whether it was a full second, but both agree that it was close to a second, and neither party had called "cocked" before it fell, it shall be considered a valid roll.

### 5.7. Re-positioning the Dice

Once a valid roll is made, the player may re-position his dice but it is preferred that he first verbally call the numbers on the dice and state that he is just moving the dice. The intent is that a player may not give the appearance of ending his turn to induce his opponent to fast-roll. When a clock and one set of dice is used, the turn never ends until the clock is hit, however, it is still preferred that a player still call the numbers on the dice and state that he is moving them so there is no question as to what the roll is.

### 5.8. Fast Rolls

A player may not roll until the other player has completed his turn. See **section 5.3** for **End of Turn** details.

If a player fast rolls, the other player has the option of allowing the roll to stand, but may still revise or complete his move, knowing what the opponent's roll is, or, he may require the roller to roll over once he has completed his move (whether he decides to change the move he has made or not). The fast roll rule applies even if the initial roller's play is forced, if he is on the bar and cannot move, or even if in a non-contact bear-offs.

### 5.9. Cube Placement and Handling

A single doubling cube shall be used for the contest and its location and value shall always be unambiguous. When a game begins the cube must be located near but to the side of the playing surface, equidistant from the two players with either the 64 or 1 facing up. When the cube is centered the player on turn, before rolling, may offer the cube to his opponent by placing it near the center of either right hand or left hand playing surface with the 2 face up. (NOTE: if a player attempts to roll and the dice are cocked or not legal, he cannot then decide to double). If the opponent chooses to accept he places the cube on his side of the board, visible to both players, keeping the 2 face up. For clarity, the player should also verbally declare that *he takes or accepts*. Subsequently the mechanics and requirement of offering and accepting a redouble are identical to the initial double except the cube value is increased by a factor of 2 from its present orientation in the offering process. Only the player in possession of the cube may redouble. If there is any ambiguity in the manner in which a player offers the cube or takes the cube, any ruling or dispute shall tend to go against the player who was ambiguous or misleading. If a player verbally says he doubles, or says he is going to double, *he must double* when it is his turn. If a player clearly reaches for the cube, or picks it up, or gives any indication that he is doubling, he must follow through and double. ~~If the player says he will drop or take if doubled, he cannot change his mind.~~ If a player wishes to move or reposition the cube without the intention of doubling, he must state that he is repositioning prior to handling the cube.

### 5.10. Clock Usage

As a condition of contest or at the requirement of the Director, an approved clock will be used during the match. "Conditions of Contest" should be explicitly stated in the pre-tournament literature. Possible conditions on an event-by-event basis are:

(1) clocks required in all matches; (2) clocks to be used at the request of either player; (3) clocks to be used upon mutual agreement of both players. If an event's written announcement does not include the explicit clock conditions, then number 3 above is the default. Whenever a clock is being used it is the responsibility of both players to follow the Clock Rules, in a separate document. If clocks are not required and both players agree to use them, they may do so, but the attached clock rules must be in play and enforced.

**Example:** If players agree to use the clock and time runs out, the match is lost. If players agree to use the clock for mechanical reasons only and agree not to end the match if time runs out, this must be written on the score sheet or the Director notified of this in advance so there is no question or conflict if a player's time runs out.

### 5.11. Crawford Rule

For the first game that is played with a score that has a player one point from victory, the doubling cube shall be out of play for that game only. If a player forgets the Crawford rule and doubles, and the other player accepts, and the error is discovered before the next match begins, the score shall be corrected as if the cube had not been turned. The Tournament Director will determine if the match will be replayed from the beginning of the game or, if possible, from the position where the double occurred. If the match ends, and the turned cube was directly responsible for the trailer winning the match, and then the error is discovered, the correction shall be made and the match continued. If, however, the error is discovered after the next round of play has begun, the match will not be continued and the result will stand.

### 5.12. Game Completion

A game ends when one player has borne off all 15 checkers or a player has dropped a cube. A player may concede a game, gammon, or backgammon only if there is no possibility of a different outcome if the game were to continue.

### 5.13. Score Keeping

Both players are required to keep a running, written score of the match, updating it after each game, and verbally agreeing upon the score before a new game begins. Scoreboards are allowed, but the written score takes precedence, as written scores provide a history of the scoring and are therefore more complete.

### 5.14. Match Completion

A match ends as soon as one player's score meets or exceeds the agreed upon match-length as written on the draw sheet. Neither player may concede the match

prior to this occurrence. Note that regardless of score, a match may not end on a dropped cube.

**Example:** If a player is leading 2-away/4-away and the leader holds a 2 cube and redoubles, if the other player drops the match does not end. Instead, the player is alerted of his error, accepts the double, and completes the game.

Both players are responsible to see that a tournament official is informed of the outcome and the result is posted. If the match was played to the wrong score, with both players assuming that the match had ended, the result stands regardless of whether the match was played to a longer or shorter score. Players may not intentionally agree to play to a score different from what is posted or announced, and if that is determined, either or both players may be penalized in a future round or in a manner that the TD determines.

### 5.15. Larger Number

If a player can only play one OR the other number rolled on the dice, the larger number must be played.

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## Section 6: Irregularities

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### 6.1. Illegal Moves

Unless the Director states differently and publishes such in advance, Legal Moves shall be enforced. After the conclusion of a turn, and before the dice are next tossed, if either player notices that the just completed move is inconsistent with the dice (an illegal move), the dice shall be replaced on the surface with the actual roll showing, the checkers replaced to their position before the illegal move and the player must replay his turn. If the illegal move isn't noticed until after the subsequent dice roll, the play stands as made. Illegal moves include leaving or placing checkers on the bar or off the board that should not have been left or moved there, not picking up a checker that had to have been hit in order to move legally, or moving checkers to the wrong points. Note that only the players or a tournament official may point out an illegal move — spectators are required to remain silent unless asked by both players to assist.

### 6.2. Disagreement of Previous Dice Roll

In the event that (1) a player has picked up his dice (concluding his turn), (2) his opponent claims the move was illegal, (3) the player in question claims the moves was legal, and (4) the players disagree on what the actual dice roll was, the Director must be summoned and informed of the occurrences. If subsequent discussion does not resolve the dice dispute, the Director shall determine what action is fairest. The Director may choose to consult spectators or he may determine to side with one of the players if he believes there is sufficient reason to do so, or he may require a high roll to decide if the roll goes over or to determine which roll is used.

### 6.3. Illegal Initial Setup

If a game has begun and the checkers did not start out in their proper, initial position, a correction shall be made if the error was discovered before completion of the move corresponding to the fourth roll of the game. If the error is discovered after that, the game shall continue without adjustment.

### 6.4. Checker Discovered Off the Board

If before a player has begun his bearoff, his checker is found off the board and it can't be determined that the removal occurred on the current play or the play previous to the current one, that checker shall stay out-of-play for the remainder of the game. The player with the checker off may still lose a gammon or backgammon.

### 6.5. Appeals

A player may appeal a Director's ruling but only before play resumes. A committee of an even number of neutral, experienced persons not involved in the directing of the present tournament shall be chosen by the Director and presented (by the Director at the player's table) with the evidence. The committee then move away to discuss the situation. A majority must be achieved to overrule the Director.

**Example:** If the committee is two people, they must both rule differently from the Director; if it is four people, three must rule differently from the Director to overturn the Director's ruling.

A prompt ruling is critical for the smooth continuation of the match and flow of the tournament. If an appeals committee is formed, they should not be told what the Director's initial ruling was, and their ruling will be final. Only after the ruling committee's decision is made and enacted may play resume.

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## Standards of Ethical Practice

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In addition to the basic rules of the game, whenever there is a competition where there is generally not an assigned official or referee, we believe the competitors must be required to maintain a high level of sportsmanship and ethics. For the benefit of all concerned, the following Standards are expected of all participants and spectators at backgammon competitions.

1. The Golden Rule is clearly a proper concept. Treat your opponents as you would expect them to treat you: with courtesy and fairness.
2. Since there is no official or referee, you are obligated to strictly enforce the rules and penalties against yourself. You should not ask for, expect, or even accept leniency. If you break a rule, whether intentionally or by accident, you should insist that the appropriate penalty be applied.
3. In keeping with the above two concepts, when your opponent breaks a rule you should also insist that he accepts the appropriate penalty.
4. The concepts of fair play and good sportsmanship shall take precedence, and players should not take advantage of their opponent due to a technicality or accidental occurrence. (e.g. there is an external disturbance and a player neglects to take his turn, hit his clock, or move a checker off the bar).
5. Foul language, threatening language, insulting remarks, deceptive statements or actions, are subject to punitive response by the tournament director. Said response may include a warning, to a point deduction or penalty in the current or future matches, or expulsion from the competition.
6. Spectators have an obligation to help maintain good sportsmanship and fair play and may not cheer for a player during a match nor may they offer any comments or advice relative to the match until the match is completed.
7. All competitors and spectators are expected to maintain a friendly, positive spirit at all times. Complaining, berating staff or opponents, or spreading of bad will at any time during the competition is not acceptable and can result in punitive action by the staff.

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