

## n e w s l e t t e r

**Australia's newest backgammon tournament honours one of our greats****Eva Bitel Tournament**

When the Australian Backgammon Federation board of directors met to discuss ways of paying tribute to the late Eva Bitel for her enormous contribution to the game in Australia, it seemed a logical solution that a tournament should be named in her honour.

The result was the creation of Australia's newest major backgammon tournament. After further discussion, the ABF is proud to announce the Eva Bitel Tournament will be a backgammon event like no other in keeping with what we believe Eva would have wanted... a multi-entry event that encourages people of all standards to play without penalising or deterring anyone regardless of their standard.

Eva and husband Ivor were stalwarts of Sydney backgammon, and indeed the Australian backgammon scene for well over 40 years. They operated Castle Cove Backgammon, one of the major Australian clubs, for more than 40 years, and Eva also organised the Operation Wheelchairs fundraiser in the venue.

After years of striving to achieve a unifying body for the game, Eva was a major force in the creation of the Australian Backgammon Federation. She remained president until shortly before her death in 2019.

While the general entry fee for the tournament, to be held online from early September, will be an affordable \$50, players can also enter for a nominal \$5 and "high rollers" will have the ability to buy in for a further \$100 side pool. Regardless of entry fee, the winner, runner up and semi-finalists will receive well-earned trophies. The point of difference is that those who enter for \$50 will share the general prize pool (expected to be around \$2000) and the high rollers will play for their own higher prize.

Ultimately, as we're sure Eva would agree, everyone has a chance to win - the prizemoney simply varies according to the entry fee paid.

The Eva Bitel Tournament will be an on-line competition and remain that way. It will be a round robin event, with all entrants playing six 9-point matches. The top two players in each group will then play a knockout. All matches will be played online.

The default platform will be Backgammon Galaxy. Matches can be played on a different platform if both players agree but if there is any dispute, matches are to be played on Galaxy.

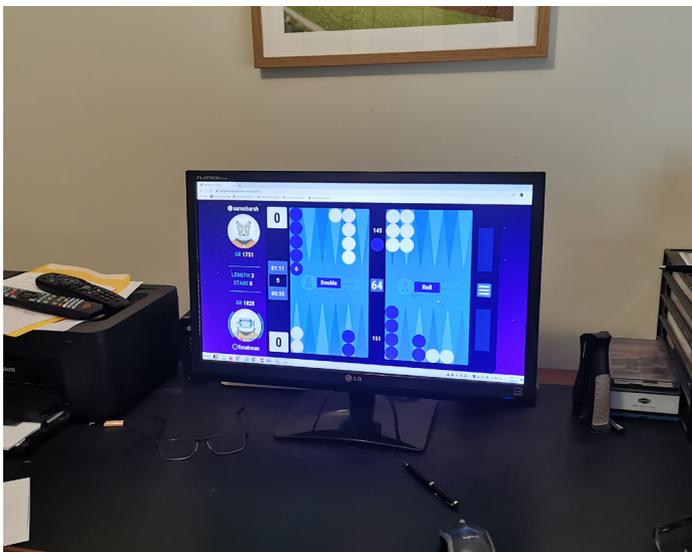


# Playing it safe

If backgammon players have learned anything from the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic and the massive impact it's had on our daily lives, it's that we've had to find a different way to play our great game. Most players around the world had barely played an online match before the first lockdown in March; now online play is a regular way of playing for many Australian players. League matches are being played online, the ABF had great success with the Australia–New Zealand Challenge and we've just announced the first major Australian online tournament.

While it's very difficult to find too many positives to come out of major changes to our lives, backgammon players have realised they can actually improve their game playing online. The various platforms offer a range of analysis options after a match is completed, giving players the chance to review their mistakes – and their good moves – and take notes.

The greater backgammon community has also been highly responsible throughout the Corona restrictions. Unable to meet to play, we've encouraged our fellow players to join us online for a quick game, a chat and even the odd lesson. The ABF Board of Directors has already held two Zoom meetings with great success – and very few disconnections – and made us wonder why we weren't meeting this way previously. We'll all be very eager to get back to playing our opponent across a table on a real board but, in the mean time, online play is proving to be a very appealing alternative. When we are back playing live, the general consensus is that online play will remain an important part of our play and a great way to improve our individual games.





A happy Cindy Belogonoff with her Monte Carlo trophy, flanked by Elsa and Shane McNally

## BACKGAMMON STORIES

### *Cindy sees the world - and does Australia proud*

The wonderful thing about backgammon, as we've all found out the fun way and the hard way, is that any solid player can beat a world champion on the right day.

With that belief, Cynthia (Cindy) Belogonoff included Monte Carlo in her 2014 trip to Europe to play in the World Backgammon Championship, with the hope of just collecting a win or two against quality opposition. That mindset allowed Cindy, a championship Bridge player, to put a few early losses behind her and finish with a major profit when she finished runner up in the World Seniors Championship.

Western Australian Cindy, who plays online under the nickname Cindybel, played hard but fair all week in her first venture into serious live play and took home more than two thousand Euros. Cindy went to Monte Carlo to play in the main flight but didn't realise the tournament required cash-only entry and couldn't find a bank to give her the thousand Euros required. That setback was a blessing in disguise, with Cindy forced to pay the 200 Euro for the seniors entry.

Compatriots Shane and Elsa McNally who were cheering her home towards the end of the week, didn't have the same luck. Shane was knocked out in the third round of the main flight and Elsa made it through a couple of rounds of the Novice Championship.

While Cindy was the only Australian that year to turn a profit, they all swear it was an invaluable experience and recommend it to anyone who wants to combine travelling with backgammon. In this case, all three got to watch Japanese great Akiko win the first of her World Champion titles from the luxury of special viewing rooms within the famous Fairmont Hotel.

# Oz/NZ Challenge set to become regular event

The Australia/NZ Online Backgammon Challenge is set to become a regular, perhaps even a bi-annual tournament, after huge interest brought 64 players together for the inaugural event in May. Each country was represented by 32 players, split into round robins leading to a knockout stage. Australia “won” the first event clearly, with 12 of our players making it through to the playoffs, compared to four NZers.

Unbeaten players from the first phase were Steve Clarry, Antony Sacker, Shane McNally, Ian Dunstan, Hossein Haydari and Nick Begakis from Australia and Pip Biss, Grant Hoffman and Murray Richards from NZ. By the time the semi-finals were reached, there were three Aussies and one Kiwi left. Robert Disney (Newcastle) defeated NZ’s Grant Hoffman 11-2 in one semi-final, with Hossein Haydari (Adelaide) knocking out Steve Clarry (Sydney) 11-8 in the other.

Hossein went into the Final as favourite after a big year that has cemented his place as a top 5 Australian player but highly-experienced Rob Disney had other ideas, taking the final 13-4. Steve completed a clean sweep for the Aussies, defeating Grant 13-10 in the Consolation.

The Challenge was the brainchild of NZ’s Tony (AJ) Marquette and ABF President Dr Greg Ash. The two men first sat down by video link in late April to discuss possibilities, agreed on the basic concept in early May and had the whole tournament organised days later. The Aus/NZ Challenge was played between May 15-31.

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## NATIONAL RANKINGS

The latest national rankings show ABF members (bold) holding 14 of the top 20 placings.

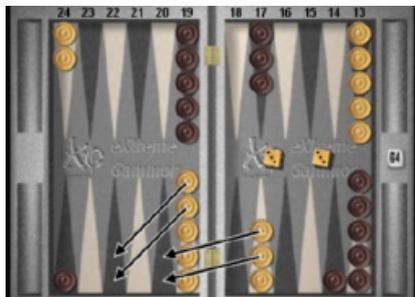
1	<b>Saeed Nourmohammadi</b>	1813	11	Terry Efthimiou	1706
2	<b>Simon Ustick</b>	1807	12	<b>Kevin Jessup</b>	1700
3	<b>Vince Turner</b>	1758	13	Peter Brown	1697
4	Chris Benham	1740	14	<b>Martin Pikler</b>	1697
5	<b>Hossein Haydari</b>	1738	15	<b>Ian Dunstan</b>	1697
6	<b>David Reitzen</b>	1731	16	<b>Habib Shalala</b>	1694
7	<b>Steve Quinn</b>	1729	17	<b>Pat Halpin</b>	1687
8	<b>Mick Dyett</b>	1722	18	Shaun Harding	1681
9	<b>Arthur Ramer</b>	1714	19	<b>Gene McIntyre</b>	1673

For the complete National Rankings list, go to <https://results.ausbgf.org.au/ratings>

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## HOW DO YOU PLAY THAT ROLL?

Some rolls play themselves; others are so bad, you’re left trying to minimise the damage. But what about “that” really good opening roll. Some moves vary, depending on your match position and how aggressive you need to be. Double 6 plays itself, as does double 1 and 3-1, but what do you do when you have too many good choices - as the double 3 presents?



All things being equal, the experts suggest you make your 5-point and 3-point. This varies, depending on whether your opponent has split the back men, made a point on your inner point, has strength in their outer board. In many of these cases, you’d be wise to move your back chequers forward to own the opponent’s 4-point.