

CHAPTER XIII

PROBLEMS OF THE ENDGAME

The word endgame, as used here, has been borrowed from the vocabulary of the chess players, but any game that has special problems in the last few plays has an endgame and requires special consideration.

In shuffleboard, the endgame is the hardest part of the game to play. It is also the headiest part of the game. Many times a game has been brought successfully to within one shot of the winning score, then lost because the player failed to see the opportunities or the dangers in what should have been the final half round of play. More complications can develop at the end of a game than at any other time. This means that a player has more chances to make a blunder in this part of the game. And if the players' scores are about even, there is little time left in the endgame for either player to recover from a blunder.

The scoreboard assumes its greatest importance in the endgame. Not only does the player consider the number of points that he and his opponent must have to achieve the winning score; he will also carefully compare the two scores. The difference between the scores is important because the final half round can end with both players exceeding the game point, the higher score being the winner.

The solution of an endgame problem may depend on whether the game is singles or doubles, a point game or a frame game, or whether the play is at the head or the foot of the court in a doubles game. Games that are a combination of the frame game and the point game create further complications in the endgame. For instance, a game that has a limit of 14 frames and a game point of 75 points, whichever comes first, keeps the players mentally alert toward the end of the game.

For the point game, critical numbers to keep in mind are those scores that require just two discs to win. The expression **magic circle** is used sometimes to designate this scoring level. The magic-circle level for a 100-point game would be, of course, different from that of a

75-point game. Since the objective of most games is 75 points, one should keep in mind the significance of the following scores:

57 requires a 10 and an 8 to win;

59 requires two 8's to win;

60 requires an 8 and a 7 to win;

65 requires a 10 to win.

Although the score of 60 is usually considered the lower limit of the magic circle, there is still a considerable amount of "magic" in the score of 57. (See analysis problem No. 2, page 69).

The importance of these scores derives from the fact that in a doubles game each team has two successive hammers, and then they must play two half rounds without a hammer shot. If a player and his partner are so fortunate as to arrive at the score of 60 in the same round as they have their two hammers, and their opponents are not yet in the magic circle, they have a real advantage over their opponents. If each player can successfully clear the board and score his hammer, they will win the game.

On the other hand, if the players arrive at the score of 60 in the same round in which their opponents have the hammer shots, and their opponents are not yet in the magic circle, it is better that the players (without the hammers) simply bide their time, playing cautiously to keep their opponents' score down, and wait until their own hammer round comes up before attempting to win the game. At this point in the game, conservative playing has special rewards. The conservative player does not rush the game.

In a singles game the hammer goes back and forth between the players every half round. Consequently, the magic circle concept does not apply in exactly the same way to a singles game.

The strategy at the end of a frame game is only a trifle simpler than the strategy in a point game. Toward the end of a frame game, the players must keep in mind the exact number of hammers left in the game; whereas in a point game, the players must estimate the number of hammers each will need to attain game point.

And one remembers all the way along in a frame game that, though the scores are even, if the opponent has one more hammer shot remaining than the player has, the opponent is really ahead in score.

A game is not won until the last disc has been shot. A player's luck can change as late as the last shot in either kind of game. So the player must always maintain a winning attitude, even when the odds seem to be overwhelmingly against him. As long as there is any possibility whatever of keeping the game alive, the player will continue to choose the best shots he can find and to shoot the best he can. That is the spirit of the game.

The tabulated analysis of the following game situations shows the importance of the scoreboard in the selection of the correct shot. The analysis shows, too, why so many incorrect shots are chosen during a game. No player has the computer-like mind that is sometimes needed to choose, in a few seconds, the best shot from all of those available.

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 1 (FIGURE 69)

Let us assume that Yellow, playing in a singles game, is confronted with two of his opponent's discs, one in the 7-area, the other in the deep 10-area. Yellow is about to shoot his hammer. What is his best shot?

To emphasize the importance of the scoreboard, we shall assume four different game situations and shall analyze each one. The

scores at the beginning of the half round in which Yellow is making his shot are: (a) 68-62; (b) 67-62; (c) 65-68; (d) 62-68.

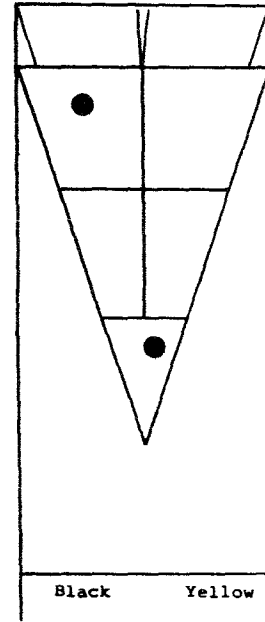


Figure 69

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 1: TABULATION

Scores At the Beginning Of the Half Round	(a) 68-62	(b) 67-62	(c) 65-68	(d) 62-68
If Yellow:				
Then the Score Will be:				
1. Spoils the 10,	68-69	67-69	65-75	62-75
2. Spoils the 7,	68-72	67-72	65-78	62-78
3. Spoils the 7 and scores,	75-72	74-72	72-78	69-78
4. Spoils the 1 and scores,	78-69	77-69	75-75	72-75
5. Kitchens the 7 and scores,	75-62	74-62	72-68	69-68
6. Kitchens the 10,	68-59	67-59	65-65	62-65
7. Kitchens the 10 and scores,	78-59	77-59	75-65	72-65
8. Makes a combination shot,	68-62	67-62	65-68	62-68

Analysis. Yellow's first concern is whether to make a combination shot or to take a shot that will affect only one disc. He realizes that the scoring discs are too far apart for him to risk a combination shot unless the immediate outcome of the game depends on that shot, and he sees that if he chooses a combination shot, he will not be able to score his cue disc. He observes, too, that he cannot line up his cue disc with the two targets, which would improve his chance of success with a combination shot. And, finally, there is the added risk that the target disc in the 10-area may stick when it knocks out the score in the 7-area. If that should happen, the result of the combination shot would be equivalent to shot number 1. So Yellow concentrates on the other shots in the tabulation.

A further consideration is that in the next half round Black will have the hammer. Yellow would like, if he cannot make a winning shot, at least to make a shot that would leave him ahead in score as he starts the next half round. That would give him more options in his strategy for the next half round of play. Consider now the different parts of the problem.

(a) Shots number 3, 4, 5, and 7 are all winners. The safest shot should be chosen. That is number 3.

(b) Shots number 4 and 7 are the winners, and number 4 should be chosen because it has a greater chance of success. If Yellow should try shot number 7, he would be assuming the added risk of the disc in the 10-area stopping short of the kitchen and scoring a 7 for his opponent.

(c) Shot number 7 is the only winner, and the shot must be made so as to avoid, as far as possible, the many risks. The first consideration is to score the cue disc in the 10-area; the second is to get the opponent's disc entirely through the 7-area. So the shot will be made with kitchen-speed-plus. If the up-and-down shot results from this, the game is won; if the disc overshoots the kitchen, the result is equivalent to shot number 4, and the game is a tie. If the score becomes a tie, then Yellow will have another hammer shot.

(d) There is no winning shot in this situation, but numbers 5 and 7 both will leave Yellow leading in score. This is about all the advantage Yellow can expect to get out of this half round; but if he can prevent his opponent from scoring in the next half round, or if he can sneak in a score of his own equal to his opponent's, Yellow will win. Since Yellow will lose the game immediately if he does not successfully make a

kitchen shot, he should choose shot number 5, the one which is more likely to succeed.

MORE PROBLEMS FOR ANALYSIS

The reader may compare his analyses of the next five problems with the discussions at the end of this set, which are offered as suggestions rather than as answers. Often there is no perfect answer to these problems. Expert shufflers may talk about the correct play for a given situation, but since their choice of shot must necessarily be based on experiential knowledge, there is not complete agreement in all instances. Anyway, part of the fun in shuffling is the arguing about the merits of the shot that failed.

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 2 (NO DRAWING)

The game is doubles and the score is Yellow 57, Black 62. Game point is 75. The play is at the head of the court, and the board is clear. Yellow is about to shoot his hammer. How should he shoot?

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 3 (FIGURE 70)

Yellow is ready to shoot a disc. Should he guard his 7 or spoil Black's potential double?

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 4 (FIGURE 71)

The score is Yellow 67, Black 62. Black is about to shoot his hammer. What shot should he take?

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 5 (FIGURE 72)

It is the last frame of a singles game. The score is Yellow 40, Black 38. Yellow has the hammer. How should Black shoot disc No. 7?

ANALYSIS PROBLEM NO. 6 (NO DRAWING)

Beginning the last frame of a singles game, Black leads by 7 points and Yellow has the hammer. Discuss: (a) Yellow's strategy; (b) Black's strategy.

ANSWERS TO THE ANALYSIS PROBLEMS

2. The yellow team needs 18 points to win; the black team needs 13. Either team can win with two discs on the board, and neither can win with one. Since the yellow team has two hammers coming up, they should try to win the

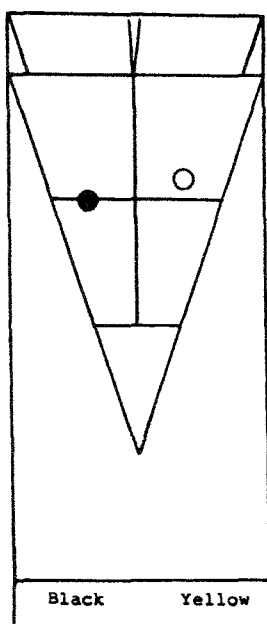


Figure 70

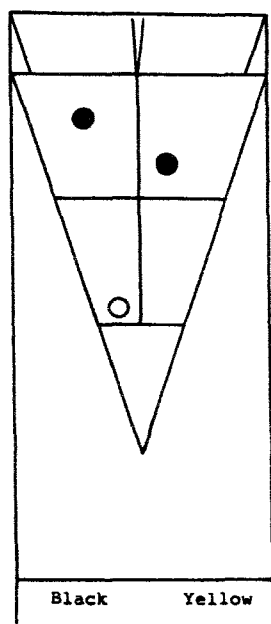


Figure 71

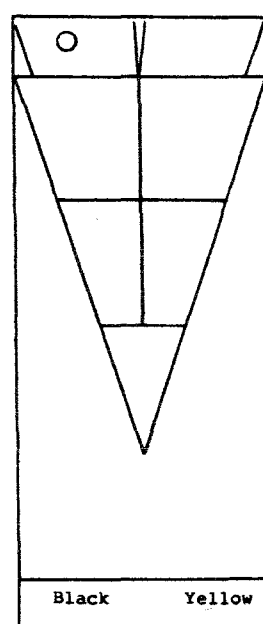


Figure 72

game before the hammers go to their opponents. But if Yellow should shoot an 8 and leave the 10 for his partner, the opponent would surely block the 10-area in the next half round. So Yellow should shoot the 10 at the head of the court, and let his partner go for the 8.

3. What is the score? That makes a difference in Yellow's choice of shot, because his choice will depend on which player is in a greater need of the score. If this is near the end of the game with Black ahead, Yellow must keep Black from scoring, and he will have to deal with the potential double. But if Yellow is far ahead, needing only a score or two to win, Yellow must protect his own score. Possibly Yellow can frustrate Black in regards to both shots by shooting a 10.

4. Black should waste his hammer shot if this is a 75-point game or the last frame of a game. Otherwise, he will try to knock Yellow's 8 off the board and glance his cue disc to the opposite 8-area for a score.

5. Black should shoot a 7 on the side of the board opposite the disc in the kitchen. Yellow must then kitchen the 7 to win. Black would lose the game quickly by covering Yellow's disc in the kitchen.

6. If Yellow clears the board and shoots an 8, he will win. If Black shoots a high 8 with

disc No. 7, Yellow has two choices, neither one an easy shot, to produce a win: He must kitchen Black's high 8 or glance his cue disc into the opposite 8-area to score while at the same time spoiling Black's score. If Black puts disc No. 7 any place in the 7-area, Yellow must kitchen it to win, or the result will be at best a tie. Yellow's strategy will be to clear the board and try to score his hammer for an 8.

Probably, Black would prefer to shoot a score of 7 with disc No. 7 and to take a chance on Yellow's kitchen shot or a tie, than to take a chance on his high 8 going several inches too far, which would give his opponent a backstop for the winning score. Then, if Yellow fails to score when spoiling Black's 7, Black would win. If Black decides to go on the board with disc No. 7, he may prefer to start playing kitchen bait at the beginning of the frame, which will set the mode of play for the entire frame and will give him an opportunity to exploit a weak play if it is made by his opponent.

But Black may use another strategy. He may shoot his first three discs as St. Petes, being careful to allow Yellow no chance to hide a score by the use of the alley shot. If Yellow succeeds in clearing each of these guards off the board, Black will shoot disc No. 7 as suggested above.