



RULING GUIDE

For the USBGF Tournament Rules - 2025

Purpose

The Ruling Guide provides detail and guidance on the intent and interpretation of the USBGF/WBGF Tournament Rules and addresses various uncommon situations.

Last Updated: 2024-12-07

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1	GENERAL	5
1.1	Interpretation and Scope	5
1.1.1	Terminology	6
1.1.2	Regulation of TD Discretionary Areas by the Federation	7
1.1.3	When Unsure or Uncomfortable, Speak with the Tournament Director	8
1.1.4	Disputes, Inquiries and Rulings	8
1.1.4.1	Establishing the Facts	8
1.1.4.2	Tournament Director Impartiality	8
1.1.4.3	Circumstances not Covered by the Rules	9
1.1.4.4	Narrowly Tailored Exceptions	9
1.1.5	Penalties	10
1.1.6	Player Obligation to Point Out Rule Violations	10
1.1.7	Intervention by the Tournament Director	10
1.2	Etiquette	11
1.2.1	General – Respect for People, Things, and the Game	11
1.2.2	Avoid Questionable Actions and Statements	11
1.2.3	Don't be a Distraction	11
1.2.4	Penalties	12
1.3	Staff	12
1.3.1	Tournament Directors	12
1.3.2	Ruling Committee	12
1.3.3	Monitors	12
1.4	Registration	13
1.4.1	Approval	13
1.4.2	Assignment to Higher Skill Divisions	14
1.4.3	Implied Consent	14
1.5	Official Language	14
1.6	Spectators, Signaling, and Other Forms of Unauthorized Assistance	14
1.6.1	Spectators	14
1.6.2	Signaling and Other Forms of Outside Help	15
1.6.3	Calling Attention to Illegal Checker Moves	15
1.6.4	Penalties	16
1.6.5	Requests	16
1.7	Definitions	16
1.7.1	Preferences for Equipment and Play	16
1.7.1.1	Required	17
1.7.1.2	Preferred	17

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.7.1.3	By Roll.....	17
1.7.1.4	If Agreed	17
1.7.1.5	Per Player	17
1.7.1.6	Not Used	17
1.7.1.7	Imposed	18
1.8	Aids and use of Other equipment or devices	18
1.8.1	General	18
1.8.2	Position or Match Recording.....	18
1.8.2.1	Passive Recording	18
1.8.2.2	Non-passive Recording.....	19
1.8.3	Headphones, Earbuds, Etc.....	19
1.8.4	Mobile Devices.....	20
2	REGULATIONS.....	20
2.1	Place.....	20
2.1.1	Smoking.....	20
2.2	Starting Times and Breaks	20
2.2.1	Starting Times and Breaks Between Matches	20
2.2.2	Prioritizing Matches	21
2.2.3	Breaks.....	21
2.2.4	Exceptions.....	22
2.2.5	Penalties	23
2.2.6	Leaving the Playing Area Between Matches.....	23
2.3	Equipment: TD Imposition and PreferEnce Policy	24
2.3.1	General	24
2.3.2	Imposition of Clocks	25
2.3.3	Requests.....	25
3	PREPARATION.....	25
3.1	Playing Board.....	25
3.2	Dice.....	26
3.2.1	In General	26
3.2.2	Selection and Use	27
3.2.2.1	Number of Dice Used During Play.....	27
3.2.2.2	Mixing the Dice.....	27
3.2.3	Dice randomization devices.....	27
3.2.3.1	General	28
3.2.3.2	Cups.....	28
3.2.3.3	Baffle Boxes.....	28
3.2.3.4	Other Dice Randomization Devices.....	29

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

3.3	Preferences.....	29
3.3.1	Preference Policies	29
3.3.2	Preference Disputes.....	29
3.4	Game Clocks.....	29
3.4.1	Purpose.....	29
3.4.2	Construction and Approval	30
3.4.3	Placement	30
3.4.4	Preferences and Time Control Settings	30
3.4.4.1	Preferences.....	31
3.4.4.2	Time Control.....	31
3.4.4.3	Setting the Game Clock at the Beginning of a Match.....	31
3.4.4.4	Setting the Game Clock When Introduced During a Match.....	33
3.4.4.5	Loss of Game Clock During a Match	33
3.5	Change of Equipment during a match	33
3.5.1	TD Imposition	33
3.5.2	At Any Time, Including While a Game is in Progress.....	34
3.5.3	Before / Between Games	34
3.5.4	Defective Equipment	34
4	THE GAME.....	35
4.1	Dice and Rolls	35
4.1.1	Random Dice	35
4.1.2	Handling of Dice.....	35
4.1.3	Valid Rolls	35
4.1.3.1	Producing Rolls Using a Dice Cup (No Baffle Box).....	35
4.1.3.2	Producing Rolls Using a Baffle Box	37
4.1.3.3	Invalid Dice Rolls.....	38
4.1.3.4	Rule Option: Dice on Checkers vs. No Dice on Checkers.....	41
4.1.4	Equipment changes.....	42
4.1.5	Requests.....	42
4.1.6	End of Turn	42
4.1.6.1	When Using a Game Clock	42
4.1.6.2	Playing with Two Dice (Untimed).....	43
4.1.6.3	Playing with Four Dice.....	44
4.1.7	Premature Actions.....	45
4.1.7.1	Premature Lifting of the Dice (Fast Grab)	45
4.1.7.2	Premature Rolling of the Dice (Fast Roll)	46
4.1.7.3	Premature Roll That Preempts a Double During a Close-out.....	47
4.2	Checkers and Moves.....	48

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.2.1	Errors in the Starting Position	48
4.2.2	Move and Checker Handling Requirements and Best Practices	49
4.2.2.1	Moves	49
4.2.2.2	Handling of Checkers	50
4.2.2.3	Checker Shuffling; Testing of Alternative Plays	50
4.2.3	Illegal Moves	52
4.2.3.1	Obligation to Point Out Illegal Checker Moves.....	52
4.2.3.2	Rule Option: Legal Moves vs. Responsible Moves	53
4.2.3.3	Correcting an Illegal Move Prior to the Next Valid Roll	54
4.2.3.4	Correcting an Illegal Move After the Next Valid Roll	55
4.2.3.5	Illegally Passing a Turn	55
4.2.3.6	Correcting Invalid Backgammon Positions.....	56
4.2.3.7	Checker Illegally Removed from Play	56
4.2.3.8	Penalties	56
4.2.4	Settlement Agreements or Use of Future Knowledge Are Prohibited	57
4.3	Game Clocks.....	57
4.3.1	Handling of the Game Clock.....	57
4.3.2	Stopping the Game Clock.....	57
4.3.3	Errors in Clock Management	58
4.3.4	Consequences of Reserve Time Expiration.....	59
4.4	Doubling Cube.....	60
4.4.1	Initial Position of the Doubling Cube	60
4.4.2	Current Cube Value.....	60
4.4.3	Current Cube Position	60
4.4.4	Proper Time for Doubling and Redoubling.....	61
4.4.5	Actions that Constitute Doubling and Redoubling.....	61
4.4.5.1	Best Practice	61
4.4.5.2	Binding Actions, Gestures and Statements.....	61
4.4.5.3	Premature Actions and Statements	62
4.4.6	Actions that Constitute Accepting or Rejecting the Cube	63
4.4.6.1	Best Practice	63
4.4.6.2	Binding Actions, Gestures and Statements.....	63
4.4.6.3	Premature Actions and Statements	64
4.4.7	Ambiguous and Inappropriate Cube Handling	64
4.4.8	Crawford Rule	64
4.4.8.1	Erroneous Acceptance of Crawford Game Double	65
4.4.8.2	Erroneous Pass of Crawford Game Double.....	65
4.4.9	Dead Cubes	65

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.4.10	Cube Displayed or Turned to Incorrect Level	66
4.4.11	Automatic Doubles, Beavers, and the Jacoby Rule.....	66
4.5	Completion	67
4.5.1	Conceding the Game.....	67
4.5.2	Claiming the Game.....	67
4.5.3	Saving Gammon.....	68
4.6	Scorekeeping	68
4.6.1	Recording the Match Score	68
4.6.2	Updating the Score After the Completion of a Game	68
4.6.3	Errors in Scorekeeping	69
4.7	Reporting Results.....	70
4.8	Match Length	70
4.8.1	Designated Match Length.....	70
4.8.1.1	Obligation to Verify Match Length.....	71
4.8.1.2	Player Agreements Prohibited	71
4.8.2	Matches Played to the Incorrect Length	71
4.8.2.1	If Noticed When a Game Is in Progress.....	72
4.8.2.2	If Noticed When a Game Is Not in Progress	72
4.8.3	Adjusted Game Clock Settings	72
5	DUE PROCESS: COMPLAINTS, RULINGS, APPEALS	73
5.1	Complaints	73
5.2	Right to Appeal Tournament Director Ruling	74
5.3	Ruling Committee.....	75
5.4	Evidence Collection and Argument.....	75

1 GENERAL

USBGF Supplement: *The Tournament Ruling Guide* document has been prepared for TDs and players to consult as may be appropriate. It provides greater detail about the intent of the Tournament Rules, offers guidance for rulings and addresses uncommon situations.

1.1 INTERPRETATION AND SCOPE

These Tournament Rules govern live tournament backgammon play. They are a complete, though concise rendition of the **WBGF Tournament Rules**, having the identical intent and interpretation.

The official text of the **USBGF Tournament Rules** (the “Rules”) (see: <https://usbgf.org/tournament-rules/>) appears in fragmented form throughout this document, within boxes at the beginning of the relevant sections. The remaining text of this Ruling Guide provides guidance related to these Rules, as well as to the general rules

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

of the game of backgammon, provides additional detail and clarifies intent for the Rules and advises how the Rules should be applied in various situations.

Tournament players are presumed to be familiar with the generally accepted rules of play for the game of backgammon, including use of the doubling cube, as described in several print and online publications including, for example, the webpage: [Backgammon Basics: How To Play – U.S. Backgammon Federation \(usbfgf.org\)](https://usbfgf.org). The stating of those basic rules of the game of backgammon are beyond the scope of the Tournament Rules, but adherence to them is mandatory for all games played in a backgammon tournament unless specifically superseded by the Tournament Rules.

The Rules refer to the Tournament Director throughout. The Tournament Director (abbreviated to TD) is most commonly the person who runs the tournament and is responsible for its smooth operation. That responsibility encompasses determining the general format and conditions of competition, applying and enforcing the rules, setting policy in areas where the Rules allow discretion, ensuring that play occurs and is completed on time and generally working to ensure that players, spectators and in some cases interested members of the public have an enjoyable experience and think positively about the game of backgammon. That responsibility includes interacting as needed with the venue hosting the tournament and working to ensure the proper conduct, health and safety of all present. A tournament may have multiple Tournament Directors on staff sharing these responsibilities as well as a Tournament Organizer who sees to the logistics of arranging for and promoting the tournament. All of these individuals are collectively covered by the phrase “Tournament Director”. However, each tournament must have a single “executive TD” individual who is the supreme decision maker regarding tournament policy. That individual may then delegate responsibility to others, including various TD responsibilities identified by the Rules.

The USBGF Tournament Rules are fully aligned with the WBGF (World Backgammon Federation) Tournament Rules. Both documents have the identical intent, interpretation and meaning and should be considered interchangeable. Even though the USBGF Rules are concise, being only three pages in length, they are a complete statement of the rules and are fully equivalent in intent and meaning to the WBGF Rules. Any perceived difference in intent arising from an interpretation of the respective texts should be understood to indicate that an incorrect interpretation of one or both texts has occurred. Nevertheless, if such an example is discovered, or if some aspect of the text is confusing, please bring it to our attention by email to rules@usbfgf.org so that we may consider a clarification.

Tournament Directors may run special events for variants of the game of backgammon and may establish any rules they wish for such events – because the game being played in such events is not backgammon and is therefore not governed by the Rules.

1.1.1 Terminology

Throughout the Rules, as well as throughout this Ruling Guide, the acronym “TD” is used for brevity in place of the longer “Tournament Director”.

Any references to players or opponents shall be deemed to include references to teams, where applicable.

[USBGF Supplement] *The Ruling Guide defines the words: must, shall, should, and may, as used throughout the Rules and Guide.*

The Rules cover a wide spectrum of statements of varying force from absolute requirements to advised best practices to things that are simply permitted. Without carefully chosen well defined terminology that is applied consistently, it can be difficult for the reader to be sure what level of force applies to a particular rule, what their obligations are, and what consequences may be faced, if any, for violation. The following terms are used by the Rules, and throughout the Ruling Guide:

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

- **Must (must not):** Indicates that an action is explicitly required (or prohibited). This is a mandatory rule, and intentional or repeated violation is a serious matter that may be penalized.
- **Shall (shall not):**
 1. Indicates the expected manner or flow of events or processes. Often used to make a statement of general fact but that can on occasion have exceptions, particularly when referring to actions by the TD. This is a mandatory rule and violation may be penalized.
 2. Used in cases where an action is required (or prohibited) for the protection or benefit of the potentially offending player. In these cases, it is a mandatory rule in the same sense as “must”, however a violation is generally not penalized because a violation is a mistake that is clearly not to the advantage of the offending player.
- **Should (should not):** Indicates a best practice – something recommended to be done (not done). Following such a rule will minimize the possibility for dispute, confusion, and ambiguous situations. This is not a mandatory rule; failure to comply is not by itself an infraction that will be penalized, but a player who does not comply is at risk of an unfavorable ruling by creating the confusion that led to the dispute. A player may ask their opponent to follow such a best practice, and a player who fails to comply with such an explicit request should expect to be at a disadvantage in any related ruling. A player who repeatedly creates confusion and thereby disrupts play may be penalized. The TD may issue a warning and require subsequent conformance with the best practice as a means of avoiding such sanctions.
- **May –** Indicates something that is allowed or is a matter of choice, but generally carries no connotation of being either recommended, or discouraged by the Rules. This is not a mandatory rule. The word “may” is not used to indicate the simple possibility that something can happen; generally, “might” or “can” is used in such a context.

1.1.2 Regulation of TD Discretionary Areas by the Federation

[USBGF Supplement] *This Supplement establishes standards and states the allowed variations in certain areas left to the discretion of the Tournament Director (TD) by the WBGF Tournament Rules. A TD who intends to deviate from any standards defined herein must announce those deviations in advance in both the tournament brochure and on the tournament website, as well as at the tournament prior to the start of play for major events. The brochure may refer players to the website for the list of variations if space is limited.*

Under the WBGF Rules, areas that are explicitly left to the discretion of the Tournament Director by the Rules may be regulated, standardized or otherwise limited by the local Federation, in this case the USBGF. Please refer to the **USBGF Tournament Rules - Supplementary Standards and Allowed Variations** (the “**Supplement**”) document which may be found on page 4, immediately following the core rules within the **USBGF Tournament Rules** document.

The USBGF defines several policy standards in the Supplement, which shall be the official policy at all USBGF sanctioned tournaments in all cases where the TD does not explicitly define an alternative policy. The Supplement also defines the permitted deviations from standard policy at USBGF sanctioned tournaments. If a TD wishes to define a policy that deviates from any of the standards, they may do so, provided that any such deviation complies with any defined limitations and that the non-standard policy is announced to potential attendees in advance via official tournament promotional material such as the tournament brochure and the tournament website. Rule options and other deviations should also be announced to attendees at the tournament before the start of the main event and any major side event that might precede the main event. Since space may be limited in any physical pre-published brochure, the TD may not have sufficient space available to list all such deviations in the brochure. In that case, the brochure may state that non-standard rule variations are in effect for the tournament and refer readers to the tournament website for the full list.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.1.3 When Unsure or Uncomfortable, Speak with the Tournament Director

All players are strongly encouraged to speak with the TD or tournament staff when any situation arises in which they are unsure, uncomfortable, or if something simply doesn't feel right or fair. The TD would much rather be given the opportunity to understand a player's concern, to educate them, to make them feel comfortable, and on occasion, to fix an actual problem, instead of having a player go home with a bad tournament experience. A player must never make their opponent feel intimidated or discouraged about making such an inquiry. TDs should welcome inquiries about any reasonable player concern.

1.1.4 Disputes, Inquiries and Rulings

1.1.4.1 Establishing the Facts

In case of a dispute or inquiry, participants must be truthful and forthcoming when questioned by the Tournament Director (TD)

When a ruling is required, everyone's overriding goal should be to get the ruling right. A correct ruling requires the complete set of relevant facts to be accurately established. Revealing the facts is everyone's responsibility; it is not just the burden of the aggrieved player. Any player (or spectator) questioned by the TD must always truthfully and completely state what they know and disclose any other information that might be relevant to the decision. A player does not have the right to remain silent, nor to withhold essential information simply because the TD didn't think to ask the right question. A player having access to any recordings that might help establish the facts must note their existence and provide such access upon request by the TD. A spectator who saw the events in question should inform the TD that they were a witness but should not speak further until asked to do so by the TD.

1.1.4.2 Tournament Director Impartiality

Every TD must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.

A TD's most important duty is to act as a judge when called upon to make a ruling. The TD, commonly being a tournament organizer, a club director or a player within the community will have many friends and acquaintances playing at tournaments that they direct. When called upon to make a ruling, they must put their personal relationships, biases and self-interests aside and be fair and impartial. Rulings should be made based solely upon the rules and the facts, with consideration of relevant circumstances. When the facts are unclear or in dispute, the trustworthiness of testimony may also be considered.

A TD must avoid conflicts of interest and should avoid even the appearance of such conflicts. Specifically, a TD must never make a ruling in any situation where they are one of the players involved in the dispute. If the need for such a ruling arises, the ruling must be made by another TD assigned to the tournament. If the tournament does not have another TD, then a Ruling Committee must be convened to make the ruling in accordance with section 5.3. A TD should avoid taking a financial interest in any player at the tournament who they may be called upon to rule. If so called, they must either recuse themselves and defer to another TD or disclose their personal interest to the parties in the dispute and inform them of their right to appeal to a Ruling Committee. Being a friend or family of one of the players involved does not represent a conflict of interest, unless it is a spouse with whom there may be a financial interest.

Generally, a TD who makes a ruling should dispel any hint of bias by being transparent about the rationale behind their ruling. They should state the rules involved in the decision and how that decision follows from those rules when combined with the known facts. The TD should have a printed copy of the Rules available for consultation and should not hesitate to show the relevant rule text to the players involved. Every TD should read the Rules periodically, particularly before major tournaments to ensure that their knowledge is refreshed and current. Ignorance about the Rules may be indistinguishable from bias.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.1.4.3 Circumstances not Covered by the Rules

[The TD] shall determine the most appropriate course of action in circumstances not expressly addressed by the Rules.

Based on the circumstances of a particular case, the Director may find the solution as dictated by fairness, ...

The Rules are a statement of generally accepted principles of requirements and best practice for the enjoyment of tournament backgammon by all participants. However, the Rules are not intended to cover every possible situation that might arise during a Tournament and, in any event, should not be considered a substitute for the TD's judgment and discretion to determine the fair and most appropriate course of action in any particular set of circumstances that are not expressly addressed by these Rules. In these kinds of situations, the judgment of the TD shall prevail.

A TD may be called upon to rule in situations where confusing or ambiguous actions or statements made by a player render the facts or intent unclear, leaving the proper ruling in doubt. In such cases, the TD should tend to rule against the player whose actions or statements created the uncertainty. Players should take care to avoid such confusing or ambiguous actions or statements to avoid dispute and any unfavorable rulings that can result. See section [1.2.2](#).

Notwithstanding any of the above, all rulings and corrective actions may be appealed (see section [5.2](#)), including a determination by the TD that a circumstance is not addressed by the Rules

1.1.4.4 Narrowly Tailored Exceptions

Based on the circumstances of a particular case, the Director may ... make narrowly tailored exceptions.

It is said that every rule has an exception. There will be times where blind application of a rule as written is the wrong thing to do when considering the special circumstances of a particular case. A fair and just resolution might be possible only by making an exception to the rule in that special case. This rule is intended to explicitly give the TD some leeway to bend the Rules in circumstances that are expressly addressed by the Rules.

The TD is authorized to make narrowly tailored exceptions regarding the enforcement or application of the Rules, meaning that the exception must be limited in scope based on the special circumstances of the situation and as tightly constrained as possible so that the problem at hand is addressed without broadly undermining the rule at large. Any exception made should therefore apply to the fewest number of people possible and leave as much of the intent of the underlying rule intact as possible.

This rule is broadly applicable, in that the power to make a narrowly tailored exception potentially applies to every rule. However, this must not be construed as giving the TD license to modify or ignore a rule in general. Not liking a rule, or the simple fact that a player complained or requested an exemption is not a valid reason to make an exception. For an exception to be made, the TD must be capable of articulating what facts about the circumstance justify making an exception in that special case, without which an exception would not be justified in the general case. For example, the TD may make an exception to accommodate a player with a disability that they would not make for the typical player.

Under this rule, a TD should make their best effort to reasonably accommodate any player who has clear special needs, a disability or other medical condition such that they will obviously be disadvantaged without such an accommodation. A TD must always comply with the law that is in effect at the location of the tournament regarding such situations.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.1.5 Penalties

The TD may impose penalties for rule violations or for unacceptable behavior.

The TD must, as a means for enforcing the Rules and to discourage abuse, have the authority to impose penalties on players that violate the Rules. In certain cases, the Rules may specify penalties for certain infractions. However, the absence of a prescribed penalty does not imply that no penalty may be assessed. In general, the TD is authorized to impose any penalty believed to be fair and appropriate, given the nature of the infraction(s). In general, a severe violation of the Rules, or egregious behavior may warrant an immediate penalty, whereas less serious violations of the Rules or unacceptable behavior may warrant a penalty if those actions are repeated. The TD may issue a warning to the offending player that repeated violations will result in a penalty but is under no obligation to do so. A director issuing a warning or penalty should explain the nature of the violation to the offending player, along with an explanation of the rule and the best practices they are expected to follow to avoid further dispute or additional penalties. The assessment of a penalty may be appealed by the sanctioned player in accordance with section [5.2](#), both regarding its applicability or severity.

1.1.6 Player Obligation to Point Out Rule Violations

Both players must promptly point out any violation of a mandatory rule and must correct it unless the Rules explicitly allow the opponent to condone the infraction.

While it should be clear that a player who knowingly violates a rule is cheating, it might not be clear that a player is doing something wrong if they notice a rule violation made by their opponent but say nothing. This rule clarifies that both players have an obligation to immediately point out to their opponent (or possibly an offending spectator) all mandatory rule violations that they notice. Furthermore, any such violation must be corrected, if possible. The requirement for correction shall not apply if the Rules specify a time limit for correction and that time has passed, specifically allow this kind of infraction to be condoned by the opponent of the offending player or is simply a case of a prohibited action that is irreversible. However, the passage of the time limit or the right to condone an infraction does not relieve the opponent of the obligation to point out the infraction. In some cases, the repeated failure to point out a type of infraction and then later insisting upon correction only when it is advantageous to do so may be considered entrapment by the TD, who may rule against such a player in that and future situations as a penalty for their repeated failure to satisfy their obligation to point out all violations under this rule.

The phrase “mandatory rule” is intended to distinguish rules that establish an obligation to comply on players, as contrasting with rules that are more advisory in nature - best practices that should be followed to avoid dispute and unfavorable rulings. In general, words like “shall” and “must” convey mandatory rules, while the words “should” or “may” convey a non-mandatory rule. See section [1.1.1- Terminology](#) for more complete details on the differentiating terms regarding the force of rules. Any violation of the rules of the game of backgammon (as distinct from these Tournament Rules) is a violation of a mandatory rule.

1.1.7 Intervention by the Tournament Director

The TD may address any rule violation they observe.

The TD has the discretion but not the obligation to act as a match monitor at any time for any match, without prior notice (see section [1.3.3](#)). The TD might observe a rule violation while watching a match or simply while walking past a table in the playing area. In such a case, the TD is permitted to intervene in the match, point out the violation, and enforce correction if the violation has not been legally condoned by the opponent. However, the TD is under no obligation to intervene. While the TD has the discretion to act as an official monitor for all matches at the tournament, they also have other responsibilities and should not be burdened with having to address every minor rule violation that they might randomly witness. For this reason, the TD is given the discretion but not the obligation to intervene. The TD’s discretion not to act upon what they’ve seen does not apply if one of the players requests their involvement.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.2 ETIQUETTE

1.2.1 General – Respect for People, Things, and the Game

Attendees must engage in good sportsmanship, fair play and handle equipment respectfully.

[USBGF Supplement] *Tournament Staff and players must comply with the USBGF Standards of Ethical Practice and the WBGf Code of Ethics.*

The TD as defined in section [1.3.1](#), Tournament staff, players, and spectators are expected at all times to behave in the spirit of the game, to show generous sportsmanship and considerate behavior, and otherwise to comport with the USBGF Standards of Ethical Practice (see: <http://usbgf.org/standards-of-ethical-practice/>) and the WBGf Code of Ethics (see: <https://wbgf.info/code/>). Attendees must also be respectful to other persons at the venue, since bad behavior from tournament attendees not only reflects badly on the game but may make backgammon tournaments less attractive for venues to host in the future.

Game equipment must not be abused and must be handled with respect, regardless of the owner. Disrespect for the game equipment is disrespect for the game. All property, whether that of another attendee or that of the venue must also be treated respectfully. Attendees must not use or take any game equipment or other property that does not belong to them without the permission of the owner. Lacking a reasonable alternative, unattended game equipment or other belongings that are occupying table space or seats required to play a match may be carefully moved to an obvious location near where it had been left.

1.2.2 Avoid Questionable Actions and Statements

Players should speak and play in a clear and unambiguous manner and avoid the appearance of impropriety or they will be at a disadvantage if a ruling is needed.

It should be a guiding principle of making rulings that if a ruling cannot be made based upon established facts, then the ruling should generally be made against the player that created the confusion or suspicion that led to the dispute for which a ruling has been requested. A player who fails to follow requirements or best practices explicitly stated by the Rules should typically be held responsible for creating such confusion. Thus, it is in the interest of all players to avoid being the creator of confusion or suspicion.

During play, players should make every effort to speak and act in a clear, unambiguous manner, and to avoid doing anything that is potentially confusing. Players must be careful when speaking; they may be bound in the future to any statement they make, even if it is not their turn, even if the statement was made in jest. Furthermore, players are advised that any statements or actions that present the mere appearance of impropriety should be avoided, even if done in jest or in the absence of any such intent. A player who fails to conduct themselves in the manner advised are on notice that any such statements or actions may be used as grounds for a ruling against them in the absence of other evidence to the contrary.

1.2.3 Don't be a Distraction

Players must respect a request to limit conversation or distraction.

Backgammon is a social game, and banter between opponents can add to the enjoyment of the game, both for the players and the spectators. However, conversation that is not necessary for the smooth conduct of the match might be an unwelcome distraction to the other player, particularly when it is during their turn, and they have not initiated the conversation. Similarly, some non-verbal acts can also be an unwelcome distraction. The key word is “unwelcome”. A player has the right to ask their opponent or nearby spectators to limit or stop unnecessary conversation or other distractions. Any reasonable request to cease distracting behavior must be respected. If there is a dispute over the reasonability of any request to cease alleged distracting behavior, or if a player or

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

spectator fails to respect such a request, the TD should be summoned. No player should feel intimidated about asking someone to limit distracting behavior or feel that they are causing trouble by making such a request or by summoning the TD. Any situation that causes a player's tournament experience to be negatively impacted is a situation that should be resolved, and every TD will want the opportunity to address the matter when it arises.

1.2.4 Penalties

A player in breach of the above standards of behavior may be sanctioned in any manner considered just and appropriate by the TD including, but not limited to, disqualification and exclusion from the Tournament playing area.

1.3 STAFF

1.3.1 Tournament Directors

Every TD must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.

Tournaments must be supervised by one or more skilled, knowledgeable and impartial tournament directors (each a "Tournament Director"). A Tournament Director is referred to as 'TD' throughout this document. For purposes of these Rules, the TD is the person or persons responsible for managing play, conduct, enforcing the Rules and making rulings at the tournament. It is a distinct role from the Tournament Organizer who plans and markets the event and coordinates with the venue, though a TD may serve in both roles. When a tournament has multiple TDs, one TD must be designated as the Executive TD who is the supreme authority for the tournament and who then delegates authority to perform the role of TD to other individuals, with any restrictions that they may wish to impose. For example, the Executive TD may delegate to an individual the responsibility to act as TD for one specific event at the tournament, while that individual is not empowered to act as TD for other events. The Executive TD may revoke such a delegation of authority as they deem necessary and may step in to take the place of another TD who has been asked to make a ruling in a particular situation.

1.3.2 Ruling Committee

The TD shall convene a Ruling Committee of 3 or 5 qualified and impartial players...

A ruling committee (the "Ruling Committee") shall be formed as necessary, pursuant to section 5. The Ruling Committee must consist of willing, knowledgeable and impartial persons who are readily available and physically present at the Tournament and shall be selected at the sole discretion of the TD. No person who has a conflict of interest pertaining to the specific case for which the Ruling Committee is being formed shall serve as judge on that case. In general, the same requirements that must be met in order for TD to rule on a particular case also apply to the members of a Ruling Committee (see section 1.1.4.2), but with the further restriction that the TD must not appoint any person who is serving as either a TD or staff member for that tournament.. The number of persons comprising the Ruling Committee must be either 3 or 5, at the TD's discretion, and may vary each time that the Ruling Committee is formed. In the interest of transparency, it is recommended that TDs identify the members of their Ruling Committee in advance via their tournament brochure or website or by announcement at the beginning of the Tournament. If circumstances do not permit one of these individuals to serve, the TD may freely substitute another qualified individual at any time, without prior notice. For the avoidance of doubt, the word "players" in the rule shall be interpreted to mean any otherwise qualified person who plays backgammon; it does not imply a requirement for being a participant in any event at the tournament.

1.3.3 Monitors

The TD or agreeing players may appoint a match monitor to point out irregularities and require correction.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

At the request of a player, or unsolicited, the TD may appoint, replace or remove a monitor for any match. Absent appointment by the TD, both players may, by mutual agreement, appoint a single individual as a monitor for their match. A match monitor may be appointed after the match has started. If the monitor has been appointed by agreement of the players, the monitor may subsequently be dismissed or replaced by agreement of the players.

A monitor has the responsibility and authority to draw attention to and enforce correction of illegal or invalid actions, including but not limited to illegal moves, invalid dice rolls, errors in scoring, etc. A monitor shall ensure that play proceeds in an orderly, fair and respectful manner. A monitor shall point out any rule violation that a player is themselves required to point out. A monitor shall enforce correction of a rule violation if and only if a player is themselves required to correct it. If the Rules permit a player to condone an illegal action, such as for an illegal checker move in a 4.2.3.2.2 tournament, a monitor shall point out the illegal action but shall only enforce correction if the player does not choose to condone the infraction. A monitor may require and enforce strict adherence to best practices recommended by the Rules, typically in cases where failure to follow proper practices causes disruption, confusion or dispute. A monitor may track player break time and may suspend play to summon the TD. The appointment of a match monitor, and the failure of the monitor to observe an irregularity does not relieve the players of their obligation to point out and correct infractions of the rules as required by section 1.1.6.

A match monitor may make a ruling in any situation that arises. However, players may appeal any such ruling to the TD, whose judgment shall supersede that of the monitor. Any such appeal to the TD is still eligible for appeal to a Ruling Committee.

Because it is a matter of the TD's sole discretion whether to appoint a match monitor upon the request of a player and because even when the TD judges that appointing a match monitor is appropriate, a volunteer or staff member may not be available, the TD may charge a fee from the player requesting the monitor, or otherwise from all involved players, when such monitor is appointed.

Uncorrected irregularities are bad for the public perception of the game. The TD should make a reasonable attempt to find a volunteer to monitor the matches of greatest significance in the Tournament, such as the finals of the main event, especially when those matches are being streamed or otherwise recorded for viewing by the public.

1.4 REGISTRATION

The Director may bar a player from entering tournament events, or a lower skill division. By attending, players consent to the streaming, recording and publishing of tournament activities as determined by the TD

[USBGF Supplement] and by the USBGF.

[USBGF Supplement] USBGF membership may be a requirement for registration.

1.4.1 Approval

All players who enter a Tournament must be approved by the TD. A player may be excluded at the TD's sole discretion with or without explanation.

Because many individuals may be involved with the registration and entry process of a tournament, it is possible that an entry might be accepted against the TD's wishes. Similarly, the TD may not have been aware of certain information at the time that the entry was accepted, but only becomes aware of that information later. In such situations, the TD may withdraw a player from an event. The player may be offered entry into a different event or may be denied the opportunity to play entirely. That player is entitled to a refund of any fees associated with that entry that they may have paid – as if they had never entered that event in the first place.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

A currently active USBGF membership may be required for registration and entry into some USBGF sanctioned events. Players who do not meet such a membership requirement shall be denied entry by the TD. While membership may be necessary for entry, it is never sufficient; approval of the TD is always required.

1.4.2 Assignment to Higher Skill Divisions

In Tournaments with more than one skill division, a player may be barred from a lower skill division and be placed in a higher skill division at the sole discretion of the TD, and without any right of the player to appeal. Such a ban from a lower skill level is generally due to a difference between a player's perceived skill level and the skill level that they are attempting to register for. However, any player who is required to play in a higher skill division than they had registered for may withdraw from the event in question without obligation.

1.4.3 Implied Consent

The promotion and public awareness of backgammon tournament activities are in the public interest and is good for the game. For the integrity of the game, gathering data from the live tournament play of a player may be helpful for determining their level of play, whether for purposes of eligibility or to verify performance levels observed in online matches. For these reasons, and potentially others, this rule places all persons who attend a backgammon tournament on notice that the TD or the USBGF may freely stream, record, photograph, document or otherwise capture, analyze, report and publish all activities taking place at the tournament. Furthermore, by attending, a person implicitly consents to the TD and USBGF freely capturing and publishing their likeness, activities and results at that tournament. Penalties may be assessed against any player who enters a tournament event but then refuses to allow such recording by the TD or USBGF.

1.5 OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Only English or other official tournament language may be spoken near a match in progress, except between teammates in a consulting event.

While a match is in progress, players and spectators may speak in an Official Language, but they must not speak in any other language. English shall be an official language at all Tournaments. Other languages may additionally be designated an official language if required by law or if they are the predominant languages used in the location where the Tournament is held.

Notwithstanding the above, teammates participating in a consulting event (typically consulting doubles) are explicitly permitted to speak with one another in a language other than an Official Language. In team events that do not permit consultation amongst teammates about plays during a game, teammates are deemed to be spectators and must comply with all restrictions placed upon spectators regardless of their team affiliation.

1.6 SPECTATORS, SIGNALING, AND OTHER FORMS OF UNAUTHORIZED ASSISTANCE

1.6.1 Spectators

Spectators must remain silent during a match ..., except when asked by the TD or both players during a dispute. Between games they may, unprompted, point out an error in score, setup, or a running clock. Other irregularities should promptly and discreetly be conveyed to tournament staff.

Spectators must generally observe tournament backgammon as quietly and unobtrusively as reasonably possible. Between games, the requirements for spectator silence are relaxed – for example, spectators may applaud after an exciting game. However, in no case should spectators make comments related to the past or future play of the match itself; they should walk away from the area to have any such conversation.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Spectators must not call attention to mistakes or illegal actions, nor ask questions or make comments related to play during a match except in the following cases:

- If a dispute arises and the spectators are asked either by the director or by both players to assist in establishing the facts of the situation. If a spectator is asked to comment by one player only, they must not provide any information. However, they may ask the opponent if it is OK to comment.
- Between games, or prior to the start of the first game, without first being asked by the players, a spectator may state their belief that there is an error in score. A spectator may state the fact that there is a discrepancy between scorecards, or that they believe that the scores are incorrect. However, a spectator must not otherwise give any specifics about the error or how it should be remedied unless both players ask for such information. A match that is being played to the wrong match length is considered to always have an error in score, even before the first game has started.
- Between games, or prior to the start of the first game, without first being asked by the players, a spectator may state their belief that the initial setup of the game equipment is incorrect. A spectator may point out that the checkers have not been set up in the correct starting position or that the doubling cube is not in its proper centered position, or that the game clock appears to be set inconsistent with the match length. A spectator is not in violation of this rule if they point out that the clock or baffle box is not placed on the required side of the board, however such a comment should generally be limited to the start of the match to avoid disrupting the flow of play.
- Between games, without first being asked by the players, a spectator may point out that the game clock is still running.

This rule is generally intended to prevent influences by spectators that relate to and could conceivably affect the match or distract the players. As a social game, friendly banter involving spectators that cannot conceivably affect play may be tolerated, if it is welcomed by both players. A spectator must immediately comply with a request by either player to cease conversation or other acts that might be distracting.

In cases of perceived improprieties or other errors in game clock handling, spectators should immediately and privately alert the TD or another Tournament staff member. However, spectators will not be subject to sanctions under section 1.6.4, simply for failing to report suspected improprieties or errors in game clock handling. Even when not watching a match, persons in the tournament playing area should conduct conversations as quietly and unobtrusively as reasonably possible and should take care to have such conversations away from any matches in progress.

Spectators who are watching the match via live streaming or similar, may communicate any irregularities that they observe to the TD, the streaming technician, etc. They must not attempt to communicate directly with the players, since that lacks transparency and there might be a delay in the stream.

1.6.2 Signaling and Other Forms of Outside Help

Spectators ... must not signal or help players in any way.

While a match is in progress, spectators must not signal or otherwise assist the players in any way. Spectators should avoid any statement, sound or other action that might convey even the appearance of violating this rule. Even if not directed toward any individual player, a spectator's perceptible reaction to an event occurring in the match, such as a gasp in reaction to a dice roll or missing of an obvious play can impart information to a player that they did not otherwise realize. The intention is to prevent spectators from impacting the outcome of the backgammon game. A spectator who provides help in the form of picking up a die that has fallen on the floor, fetching a glass of water for a player or similar is not deemed to be in violation of this rule.

1.6.3 Calling Attention to Illegal Checker Moves

Spectators must not point out illegal checker moves unless both players and the TD agree to allow it and display a sign so stating near the board.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Normally, spectators are prohibited from calling attention to any illegal plays or other irregularities that may occur during a game. Players who wish to take extra measures to ensure legal play in their match are encouraged to appoint a match monitor. However, if both players agree, and provided that the TD allows it, the players may authorize all spectators for their match to call immediate attention to any illegal checker moves that might occur during a game. Any such authorization must be visually and persistently conveyed to the crowd in the form of a sign that is prominently displayed near the board that states: “Spectators may point out illegal moves for this match only” or words to that effect. The intention of the sign requirement is to ensure that there is no confusion amongst spectators about the rules or what policy is in place for any given match in the playing area. No spectator who walks over has missed any announcement made at the beginning of the match and left wondering why other spectators are commenting, or even worse, left believing that commenting is permitted in general. If there is no sign visible near the board, there is no spectator commenting allowed on illegal plays, period.

1.6.4 Penalties

Violation of sections [1.6.1](#) or [1.6.2](#) may result in any sanctions that the TD considers just and appropriate including, but not limited to, disqualification of the spectator(s) involved as well as the player (if the player knowingly sought or received outside assistance to gain an advantage) and expulsion from the Tournament playing area.

1.6.5 Requests

A player may request that the TD bar a spectator from watching their match.

A player may at any time during a match ask one or more spectators to stop watching the match. If any spectator refuses, the player may ask the TD to bar that spectator. The TD may consent to the player’s request, and such consent should not be unreasonably withheld. As examples, it is reasonable for the TD to withhold such consent if the player is unable to articulate a rational basis for why the spectator should be barred, or if the TD will assign a match monitor to mitigate concerns.

1.7 DEFINITIONS

1.7.1 Preferences for Equipment and Play

[USBGF Supplement]

Required: *use is required, no player choice;*
Preferred: *either player may insist on use;*
By Roll: *use is settled by the roll of high dice;*
If Agreed: *use only if both players agree;*
Per Player: *each player may make their own choice;*
Not Used: *use is not allowed, no player choice.*

When playing a match, there are various choices to be made regarding the usage of equipment and the manner of conducting play. Sometimes players will have different preferences regarding those choices. In many such cases, the rules, the TD or the Federation will establish a preference policy between such choices to avoid dispute, and to inform players in advance how the tournament will operate.

In accordance with section [2.3](#), the TD has essentially unlimited power to unilaterally impose equipment as needed at their tournament. A preference policy may therefore be thought of as how the TD explicitly conveys in advance how equipment shall be imposed if the players are unable to handle any preference difference on their own.

The following terms are used where applicable throughout the Rules to identify the standard precedence for deciding between valid competing preference resolution methods regarding equipment and play, and by

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Directors when deviating from those standards. In general, these terms only govern the resolution of preference disputes at the beginning of the match. Absent any other statement to the contrary within the Rules, once that initial choice has been made, it may only be changed thereafter by mutual agreement at the start of a new game, typically in accordance with section [3.5](#).

The “By Roll” preference policy is in effect for all preference disputes that are not otherwise governed by an explicit preference policy targeted to that case.

1.7.1.1 Required

Indicates that use of a particular type of equipment or manner of play is required and that players do not have a choice in the matter. Players must not agree to use any alternative at any time during the match unless specifically authorized by the TD.

1.7.1.2 Preferred

Indicates that a particular type of equipment or manner of play shall be used if either player insists upon it. *Preferred* often indicates that this choice is encouraged; therefore, players should not hesitate to so insist, even if their opponent objects. Similarly, no player should be argumentative with an opponent who exercises an option to which they are entitled; these rules exist to avoid disputes, not to create them. A player who at the beginning of the match accedes to their opponent’s request not to impose their preference may do so under the condition that either player may unilaterally impose that preference later. If the opponent agrees to this condition, they are bound to honor it. Players should note any agreement on the score sheet to avoid a dispute.

1.7.1.3 By Roll

Indicates that two (or more) choices regarding equipment or manner of play have equal precedence. If one player prefers one of these choices and the other player prefers the other choice, then the preference dispute will be resolved by rolling the dice in accordance with section [3.3.2](#). Absent any other statement to the contrary within the Rules, once that initial choice has been made, it may only be changed thereafter by mutual agreement at the start of a new game.

1.7.1.4 If Agreed

Indicates that a particular type of equipment or manner of play will be used only if both players agree to such use. A player may propose conditions to their opponent on such use, including manner of use or variation of settings, which if not agreed by their opponent, the player may decline to agree to use the option. If the opponent agrees to those conditions, they are bound to adhere to that agreement unless the players mutually agree to modify the agreement. Players should note the terms of any agreement on the score sheet to avoid a dispute.

1.7.1.5 Per Player

Indicates that each player will choose the relevant equipment or manner of play of their preference for their own personal use. This means that there is no need to resolve any preference conflict because the usual expectation that both players will use the same kind of equipment or manner of play is not applicable in this case; the players are authorized to make different choices for themselves.

1.7.1.6 Not Used

Indicates that a particular type of equipment or manner of play is prohibited. Players may not choose this, even if they both agree.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.7.1.7 Imposed

Regardless of any Preference or Option status in effect, the TD may impose equipment or a manner of play on a match at any time, including during a game in progress. Once imposed, players must not agree to use any alternative at any time during the match unless specifically authorized by the TD.

1.8 AIDS AND USE OF OTHER EQUIPMENT OR DEVICES

Players must not use any aids or devices during a match, except to keep score and time and as desired to record the match or positions.

1.8.1 General

Except as noted in this section, while a match is in progress, players must not use or consult other players, books, articles, computer software programs, mobile phone applications, or any other electronic, mechanical, or written aid relating to backgammon, other than those necessary to keep score and time, or as a dice randomization device if imposed by the Director. For purposes of this rule, a match is not considered to be in progress during a scheduled break in play, or when a player has called an allowed break. This exception recognizes the reality that such a prohibition is impossible to enforce and eliminates the potential for dispute or suspicion over whether any harmless act or conversation during a break in play might be a rule violation.

Playing a live tournament match directly on a computing device or on an online backgammon playing site instead of on a physical backgammon board with physical dice is generally prohibited unless the TD imposes the use of that equipment for that purpose.

A player objecting to the use of any aid or device, should first raise that objection with their opponent, and then if a dispute remains, to the TD, who shall adjudicate. If the TD determines that use of the disputed aid or device is normally authorized, they may make an exception to prohibit the use of such aid or device based on the circumstance of the particular case in accordance with the “narrowly tailored exception” clause of section 1.1.4.4. The director may similarly make an exception to permit the use of any device that is normally not permitted, but determined to be necessary for medical, legal, or other similarly essential reasons.

The mere possession of equipment that in the judgment of the TD has the apparent purpose of imparting an unfair advantage (for example: loaded dice) is sufficient grounds for the TD to severely penalize the player who possesses it, regardless of whether that equipment was observed to be used for such a purpose.

1.8.2 Position or Match Recording

1.8.2.1 Passive Recording

Passive recording of a match is a method of recording in which equipment setup is done before the match begins such that the player doing the recording does not typically interact with the equipment during play. Most commonly, this is accomplished using a video camera. Passive recording is generally permitted without restriction, provided that only recording within the camera is taking place (no automated analysis), and that the setup of equipment is not unreasonably time consuming. Equipment must be positioned reasonably so that it is outside of the players’ field of view of the playing surface so as not to be a distraction to play, and so that it is not blocking the view of other passive recording devices.

The TD may regulate, limit or prohibit live streaming of the match or use of an external computing device if they have reasonable concern that such use might directly or indirectly aid one or both players. To the extent that normally passive recording requires manual intervention, such as to change a battery or to address other technical issues with the recording device, those actions are considered to be non-passive recording and are subject to section 1.8.2.2.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.8.2.2 Non-passive Recording

Non-passive recording must occur on the player's clock.

While a match is in progress and to record individual positions or an entire match, a player may use position cards, a camera (in any form), a video camera, or any similar recording aids. Non-passive recording means any method of recording that requires active involvement from a player during play. For example, taking out a camera and snapping a picture is non-passive recording. Setting up a camera over the board before the match starts and allowing it to continuously record without any interaction with the equipment during play is passive recording.

Non-passive recording slows the pace of play and delays completion of the match. Non-passive recording activities should therefore be kept within reason when a game clock is not in use. The TD may set hard limits, ban future recording or impose a game clock if this privilege is abused. In matches played with a game clock, a position should be recorded only while the recording player's own time is activated or during a break in between games. The players must not stop the clock for purposes of recording a position. A game ending position may be recorded between games with the clock paused.

Transcribing a match by oneself (a third party is not doing the transcribing) using non-passive means for recording, such as with pen and paper, is a time intensive exercise which can potentially result in substantial delays to play. Therefore, any player wishing to self-transcribe their match should use a timed game clock with the normally applicable settings. If the opponent is permitted to decline using a timed game clock in that event, then if the player still wishes to self-transcribe, it is permitted to use the game clock for the match such that the non-transcribing player is untimed but the transcribing player is timed in accordance with section [3.4.4.3](#); players should note "timed" and "untimed" on the scoresheet for the respective player. While non-passive self-transcription is not strictly prohibited by the rules, passive match recording with a camera has become nearly universal and widely accessible. Therefore, a TD should typically impose a clock on any player who wishes to non-passively transcribe their match; their opponent should not hesitate to request such imposition from the TD if their opponent is unwilling to do so voluntarily.

1.8.3 Headphones, Earbuds, Etc.

Headphones are allowed, subject to TD review.

While a match is in progress, a player may use listening devices such as headphones, earbuds, or similar for noise cancellation, music listening or similar purposes if no information is conveyed through such a device that could aid backgammon play. However, as with all rules, the TD has the power under section [1.1.4.1](#) to inspect any listening device and under section [1.1.4.4](#) to make a narrowly tailored exception and limit or disallow the use of such a device based on the circumstances of the particular case; any limitation imposed on listening device use must be in accordance with that section. A player who objects to headphone use by their opponent, and who believes that special circumstances exist in their case to justify constraining their use, may request relief from the TD who shall review and issue a ruling. Such a request may occur before or after the match has started. Examples of some circumstances that would justify making such an exception include: when sound from the device is audible to the opponent or to nearby players; when a player actively engages with the device to an extent that it becomes a distraction to the match; and when the TD believes that the chance that particular device might be used as an instrument of foul play in that particular match greatly exceeds the chance of foul play in a typical situation. The TD may initiate such a review regarding the use of any listening device in any match, without requiring an appeal from a player.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

1.8.4 Mobile Devices

While a match is in progress, a player must not use a mobile phone or other mobile device except for purposes explicitly authorized by the Rules unless the opponent consents in each instance to the player using the mobile device for another purpose. Notwithstanding such consent, with the same reasons and conditions stated in section [1.8.3](#), the TD may inspect, restrict or prohibit any player from using a mobile device at any time. Mobile devices should always be turned off or set to a silent or vibrate mode while in the Tournament playing area, and players should leave the playing area when speaking on a mobile device. If a player examines a message on a mobile device during play, their opponent may ask to view that message, and the player should honor such a request. A refusal to permit this should be considered by the TD if asked to make a ruling.

2 REGULATIONS

2.1 PLACE

Matches must ... take place in the tournament playing area (non-smoking Preferred).

All matches must be played in a tournament area designated by the TD unless the TD consents in advance.

2.1.1 Smoking

Either player may insist upon playing the match in a non-smoking playing area; a match may be played in a designated smoking playing area only if both players agree to do so. The TD need not designate any smoking playing area; if none has been designated, then a player may only smoke in a non-playing area where smoking is permitted during an authorized break in play.

2.2 STARTING TIMES AND BREAKS

2.2.1 Starting Times and Breaks Between Matches

Matches must start, or resume following a scheduled suspension, at the designated time. Players are entitled to a 5-minute break between consecutive matches.

All matches must begin at the scheduled times or as otherwise specified by the TD. The TD should explicitly note any authorized deviation from the standard schedule on the drawsheet – typically by writing the non-standard time next to the individual match or round for which it is applicable. The TD may similarly note which matches must be played during the current playing session, and which matches may be played after play resumes in the next scheduled playing session.

In some cases, no starting time for a match has been explicitly scheduled or specified. Most commonly, this will be the case when the tournament format predetermines match pairings and players are expected to play matches consecutively, once their next opponent has been determined. Players must also play consecutive matches when a contest between two players is a best-of-3 or longer series of matches. When consecutive matches must be played, a player is entitled to a break of 5 minutes between the completion of their previous match and the start of their next match. Despite the specified 5-minute break time, the intent is actually to allow a player up to 10 minutes between the completion of their previous contest and the start of their next contest. This effect is achieved in combination with section [2.2.5](#), which states that no penalty may be assessed until a player has caused a delay of 5 minutes. Between the 5 minutes of allowed break and the 5 minutes grace time for lateness beyond that, a player effectively has 10 minutes. Had a 10-minute break been specified by this rule, players would effectively have 15 minutes, which is not the intended outcome.

A player whose next match is consecutive with their previous match but who is waiting for their opponent to be determined must ensure that they are available to play once their opponent has been determined and after any allowed break time has been taken. The allowed break time and any grace time for lateness applies to each player individually, so the waiting player must not presume that their new opponent will take all of the time to

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

which they are entitled. A player who has a protracted wait for an opponent who wishes to leave the playing area, must do so in accordance with section 2.2.6. Two players who must play a match may not agree to delay the start of their match beyond any permitted break time without permission from the TD; both players may be assessed a penalty for delay and ultimately be forfeited if they do so.

A TD who believes that allowing more time between certain matches is warranted, can override the standard break time between matches at will simply by writing a specific starting time for that match on the draw sheet, or by including those times in the tournament schedule. A match that is scheduled for a specific time is no longer considered to be consecutive with the previous match.

Some in-progress matches may be suspended due to a scheduled recess in the tournament playing schedule, such as for meals or overnight. Those matches must resume at the next scheduled time for resumption of play, unless a different resume time for the match is posted.

In general, the tournament schedule should be prepared by the TD and disseminated in advance via the tournament brochure and/or website, as well as being posted prominently in the playing area. Starting times for individual rounds or matches may also be specified on or near the draw sheet for the applicable event. Special side events may be created and started at will, without an explicit start time being specified, however players registered for such events may be denied entry or subject to penalties if they are unavailable to start play when needed.

If after an event has started it becomes necessary for the TD to reschedule a match to play earlier than the previously scheduled start or resume time, the TD must contact all affected players individually to ensure that they are aware of the revised schedule and their obligations.

2.2.2 Prioritizing Matches

The TD has the sole discretion to prioritize matches from different events when there is a scheduling conflict. Players having multiple matches that are ready to start should generally presume that matches from the main event take priority over all others but are responsible for confirming priority with the TD, and for proactively finding opponents and starting lower priority matches after higher priority matches are completed. A player whose next opponent has started a match in another event is responsible for verifying with the TD whether that match indeed takes priority over their own; that player does not have the discretion to decide whether they are OK with waiting for the other match to finish, as many other players are potentially impacted by that delay. If a lower priority match is being played, the TD may suspend play in that match and require that a higher priority match be started.

2.2.3 Breaks

Between games each player may call 5-minute breaks, limited in number to the match length divided by 6 (rounded down). Players may tend to emergencies if no breaks remain and shall inform the TD; abuse may be penalized.

Each player is allocated a fixed number of 5-minute breaks that they may call at their discretion between games during the match. The number of breaks allocated is dependent upon the match length in points. In general, the fixed number of breaks that may be called during the match by each player is computed by dividing the match length by 6 and discarding any remainder. Thus, the number of 5-minute breaks allocated to each player based upon typical odd match lengths are:

1-5 points, no breaks;
7-11 points, 1 break;
13-17 points, 2 breaks;
19-23 points, 3 breaks;
etc.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

A break is not divisible; it is consumed in full when called. During a break, both players may leave the playing area, but must return and be ready to resume play within 5 minutes or they shall be deemed to be causing delay to the match. To be clear, the player who did not call the break is not causing delay prior to the end of the 5 minutes even if the player who did call the break has returned early and is ready to resume. A player who wishes to take a 10-minute break may do so by combining two breaks. Both players may agree to combine their breaks together so that they may jointly take a 10-minute break. Players may achieve longer break times by combining more than two breaks.

Any situation in which a player leaves the game table may be construed as a called break. Similarly, a situation in which a player remains at the table but engages in an activity that diverts them from promptly starting the next game may be construed as a called break. Minor diversions of 30-60 seconds within eyesight of the table, such as to fetch a cup of water or to change a camera battery should generally be tolerated without a break being charged, provided that the player first informs their opponent of their intent, the privilege is not abused, and that match is not holding up the tournament.

Breaks should generally only be taken between games but, in circumstances involving exceptional urgency, may be taken during a game.

If a player has used all their allowed breaks and finds themselves in an emergency where they must take a break, they are permitted to take a break for the sole purpose of tending to that emergency. If possible, the player requiring the unauthorized break should inform the TD of this need at the start of the break. Otherwise, the player must inform the TD immediately upon their return. The player should return from this non-standard break and resume play as soon as the emergency has been dealt with; this accommodation does not give a player license to take a full 5 minutes if less time will suffice. Notwithstanding this accommodation allowed by this rule, a player who takes a non-standard break and is unable to resume play in a reasonable amount of time as shall be determined by the TD may be subject to penalties for causing delay under section [2.2.5](#).

A player who has a medical condition or other special circumstance that may necessitate more frequent breaks than is permitted by the standard break schedule may seek a special accommodation from the TD, who may authorize a modified break schedule by making a narrowly tailored exception under section [1.1.4.4](#). Such a player should anticipate such a need and speak with the TD about such an accommodation prior to play in the tournament. The TD should make best effort to reasonably accommodate players who have clear special needs or disability such that they will obviously be disadvantaged without such an accommodation. TDs must comply with the law in effect at the tournament venue. No player should expect to be granted an accommodation simply because they ask for one.

See section [2.2.1](#) regarding allowed breaks between consecutive matches.

2.2.4 Exceptions

The TD may modify the standard break schedule.

The TD may make an exception to the previous sub-sections: [2.2.1](#) and [2.2.3](#), if particular concerns to one or both players warrant doing so or if the match is of special significance. The Director should directly inform both players in advance of any such change. Such an exception is narrowly tailored to the circumstance and is therefore authorized by section [1.1.4.4](#).

Because the TD is ultimately responsible for and in the best position to know the time constraints of their tournament, or the lack thereof, they are given the discretion by this rule to modify the standard break schedule. Any general deviation from the standard break schedule must be publicized in advance so that players know what to expect.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

2.2.5 Penalties

The TD may assess penalty points or start the clock against any player who fails to start or resume a match on time, or who takes excessive break time. A player may be assessed one penalty point after each 5 minutes of delay that they cause and shall be forfeited when the total penalty points assessed exceeds half the match length. Alternatively, after a player has caused 5 minutes of delay the TD may start their clock.

Any breach of the rules for starting times and breaks may result in a penalty assessed by the TD. A penalty is assessed to a player based upon the cumulative delay to the match caused by that player, either because they are not present and have not started the match at the starting time or resumed the match at the resume time after a recess in the playing schedule, or because they have exceeded their permitted break time. Once a player has caused five (5) minutes of cumulative delay to their match (the grace period), then the TD may begin assessing a penalty.

The TD may assess one penalty point after the 5 minutes grace period has lapsed, after which an additional penalty point may be assessed for each subsequent five-minute delay until the player arrives and is ready to start play. When a player has been assessed penalty points equal to more than half of the entire match length, automatic match forfeiture shall result. Alternatively, after the 5 minutes grace period has lapsed, the TD may start the late player's game clock. The game clock shall continue to consume the late player's reserve time until they arrive and are ready to start play. The game clock shall then be paused while the players prepare to begin the match. If the late player's reserve time is exhausted before they arrive, then match forfeiture shall result. It is possible for joint lateness to result in the forfeiture of both players for the same match.

While the TD may choose to assess either type of penalty or may vary their choice of penalty for different matches, for any single instance of delay they may assess one penalty or the other; they must not assess both. Players are only entitled to be forgiven for the first 5-minutes of delay that they cause during any given match; they are not entitled to additional grace time after they have been forgiven for having caused 5 minutes of delay to that match. In such cases of repeated lateness during the same match, the TD may begin assessing penalties the moment that a player is late. The 5 minutes of grace time following the allowed break between consecutive matches under section 2.2.1 should not count against the 5 minutes grace time allowed for the upcoming match.

A player who foresees a late arrival to the tournament for a scheduled start or resumption of play should contact the TD in advance to explain the situation and provide an estimated arrival time. Based on the explanation and the needs and schedule of the tournament, the TD might have some leeway and may choose to post a later start/resume time for the match; they may also choose to start another match for which the opponent is needed. No such accommodation for lateness should be expected, however failure to communicate with the TD will tend to ensure that no such accommodation is granted.

Players who fail to promptly report their match result are on notice that their allowed break between consecutive matches begins when their prior match was completed - not the time at which they finally get around to reporting the result. A player who presumes to take a 20-minute break before reporting their result might discover upon returning that they have already been assessed a penalty, no differently than if they had taken that same 20-minute break after reporting their result. Furthermore, a player who fails to report their result promptly is in violation of section 4.7 and may be subject to additional penalties.

2.2.6 Leaving the Playing Area Between Matches

Players not involved in a match who leave the tournament area for more than 10 minutes must first post their name and contact information on a sign-out sheet or, if a sign-out sheet is not in use, obtain the permission of the TD. Players are ultimately responsible for being reachable when the TD attempts to contact them at the phone number or room provided. Alternatively, for events that generate automated match notifications, players

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

should ensure that they are able to receive those notifications and must proactively monitor their mobile device for such notifications when leaving the playing area. Unreachable players, or players who do not return to the playing area promptly upon being notified of a match are still at risk of being assessed penalty points for causing delay to that match.

Players who are entered in side-events are responsible for proactively completing their matches in those events. A player who is either eliminated from the main event, or who has a substantial wait before their next match, should proactively check the readiness of any side-event matches and opponents that are dependent on them before leaving the playing area for an extended period. Players do not relieve themselves from this responsibility to proactively monitor the status of their dependent matches by using the sign-out sheet. Players who sign out should return to the playing area to check status at least once an hour and should obtain direct permission from the TD if they have a need for a more extended absence. Similarly, a player who is ready for a match but observes that their opponent has signed out or has otherwise left the playing area should not take this as license to sign out and take an extended break themselves; they should inform tournament staff that they are ready to play and ask that their opponent be summoned to the playing area. Players judged to have abused the sign-out privilege may lose that privilege and/or be penalized accordingly.

2.3 EQUIPMENT: TD IMPOSITION AND PREFERENCE POLICY

The TD may set policy regulating equipment and setup.

At any time: the TD may change or impose equipment as needed, or a clock.

2.3.1 General

The TD is given substantial discretion and control over the equipment used at their tournament. The TD may impose their choice of equipment on any match at any time, even after a match has started, if they have identified a need for such imposition on that specific match or player. Examples of such a need include but are not limited to resolving disputes, slowness of play, livestreaming of a featured match, suspicion about cheating by a particular player, improper shaking of the dice, table assignments, etc. Because of this power, a player may appeal the use of any unsuitable equipment to the TD, who shall rule and may impose more suitable equipment. In this rule, the word “equipment” is not limited to backgammon game equipment; it includes all physical items related to operating the tournament such as, but not limited to tables and chairs (which implies TD choice of playing location), as well as cameras for recording or streaming, lighting, use of mobile devices for certain specific tournament functions, etc. By entering an event, a player agrees to play under these conditions. While all rulings made by the TD are subject to appeal, players should know that a Ruling Committee will be extremely reluctant to overturn the TD’s broad discretion on matters of equipment, provided that the TD can articulate a rational need justifying the imposition on that match. The Ruling Committee may penalize a player who in their judgment has made a frivolous appeal that has caused a delay to the tournament.

The reason for the requirement that the TD have a need that justifies an imposition is to emphasize that the TD may not use imposition as a means for broadly rewriting other rules governing equipment use at tournaments. For example, there is a rule that gives each player the choice of whether to roll their dice using a dice cup or a baffle box during their match. The TD may not make a blanket imposition of a dice cup on every player in every match at the tournament, thereby denying players the choice of using a baffle box given to them by the Rules. However, the TD may impose a dice cup on a particular player if the need exists because they deem that player’s baffle box to be unsuitable for use and another baffle box is not available. As an exception regarding blanket impositions, although the Rules generally permit players to use equipment on which they both agree, some TDs may supply boards for all tournament matches and place them on tables throughout the playing area. In general, it may be disruptive to the tournament and may risk damage to equipment if players were to remove the tournament’s boards from their assigned tables to substitute their own equipment. The TD need for a blanket imposition of this equipment on many or all tournament matches is therefore the avoidance of such disruption to the tournament and potential damage to the equipment. In such cases, players should first obtain permission from the TD before removing tournament supplied equipment from its designated location.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

The TD may set preference policies that govern the selection and setup of equipment in cases not specifically addressed by the Rules. Any such policies should be set and announced in advance. When announcing preference policies, the TD should use the terms in section [1.7.1](#), so that there is consistency between tournaments and so that confusion is avoided. In most cases, setting a preference policy may be thought of as being equivalent to the imposition of equipment by the TD if called upon to resolve a dispute over the equipment. The TD is simply informing players in advance of how equipment will be imposed at the tournament in response to a dispute so that they can come prepared and self-apply the policy without the need for the TD's involvement.

As an area of TD discretion, matters of selection and setup of equipment are subject to regulation by any sanctioning federation such as the USBGF.

2.3.2 Imposition of Clocks

The imposition of equipment rule deliberately places clocks outside of the scope of the “if needed” clause. Therefore, the TD may impose clocks on some or all matches at the tournament at their discretion without the requirement for a need that is specific to each match. The intent is to empower the TD with the discretion to employ clocks as a tool to mitigate any risk that they perceive to exist to the tournament schedule. The general goal to keep the tournament on schedule supersedes any prior announcement of a clock policy. Exempting clock imposition from the need requirement is also intended to eliminate arguments with players over whether a need for a clock does or does not exist due to the pace of their play or their current location in the bracket.

At any time, if a match that is not using a timed game clock is being played at an unreasonably slow pace, the TD may order that the remainder of the match be played using a timed game clock, in which case delay time and each player's respective reserve time will be set based on the current match score in accordance with the provisions of section [3.4.4.4](#). Similarly, a clock may be imposed on any match, at any time due to slow play in previous matches, or simply because the event has fallen behind schedule. Clocks may be imposed by the TD on matches in any event, regardless of that event's stated clock policy. Standard clock settings for the particular type of event should normally apply when imposing clocks (see section [3.4.4](#)), however the TD may tighten the standard time controls if the tournament schedule will otherwise be placed at risk, provided that such time control is not tighter than any minimum setting established by the sanctioning federation.

While all rulings by the TD are subject to appeal, a player appealing imposition of a game clock should understand that the TD has the authority to do so. The Ruling Committee may penalize a player who in their judgment has made a frivolous appeal that has caused delay to the tournament.

2.3.3 Requests

In the event of an opponent's slow play, either player may request that the TD order that the remainder of the match be played using a game clock under section [Error! Reference source not found.](#). The TD should generally grant all such requests that are made within a Clocks Preferred event.

3 PREPARATION

3.1 PLAYING BOARD

Before games: if available, a player may require use of a board designed with checkers of diameter 37-50mm (1.5-2.0”).

Regulation sized boards are Preferred. Subject to availability, a player may insist that a regulation sized board be used for their match. The player so insisting is responsible for obtaining the regulation sized board. A regulation sized board is defined as one that is designed with checkers having a diameter of 37-50 mm, or equivalently, 1.5-2.0 inches. Backgammon boards are generally designed around the size of the checkers

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

provided rather than the reverse. However, even with a fixed checker size, there can still be significant variation in overall board dimensions from one design to the next. It is for this reason that this rule defines regulation sized boards in terms of the diameter of its checkers rather than the two dimensions of board length and width. A properly designed board will fit six checkers across each of its four tables with a minimal amount of extra space. A board that is not sized for its checkers in that manner is improperly designed and is not considered to be regulation.

If a regulation-sized board first becomes available after the match has started, a player may insist that the non-regulation sized board in use be replaced after completion of any game in progress, and before the start of the next game.

A particular regulation sized board may be objectionable to the other player. For example, they may find the colors or the playing surface design to be hard on their eyes or distracting and believe that it will be an impediment to their play. The objecting player may ask the TD for a ruling. The TD may sustain the objection and impose a different board – potentially a non-regulation sized board, including the original board. However, even if the TD is sympathetic to the objection, if the objecting player is unable to provide a reasonable alternative regulation sized board, the TD may require use of the objectionable board. Players who attend a tournament without bringing a board are generally at the mercy of whatever equipment is available for use.

All dice and doubling cubes not in use should be removed from the board area before the start of the match.

3.2 DICE

3.2.1 In General

At any time: if available, a player may require use of precision dice.

Precision dice are Preferred over non-precision dice. Subject to availability, a player may insist that precision dice be used for their match. The player so insisting is responsible for obtaining the precision dice. For purposes of these Rules, “precision dice” are defined as dice that are manufactured as precise cubes with rounded corners, and equally weighted on all sides so that they tumble freely and evenly and thus maximize the randomness of rolls. Equally weighted means that the die is solid and composed of the same material throughout, and that pips are filled flush to the surface with a material having the same density as the rest of the die.

If precision dice are not available at the start of a match, a player may insist that the dice in use be replaced as soon as precision dice become available, even if that occurs during a game.

A particular die may be objectionable to the other player. For example, they may find the colors, contrast or glare to be hard on their eyes or distracting and believe that it will be an impediment to their play; or they may have reason to believe that the die may produce non-random results. The objecting player may ask the TD for a ruling. The TD may sustain the objection and impose a different die – potentially a non-precision die. However, even if the TD is sympathetic to the objection, if the objecting player is unable to provide a reasonable alternative die, the TD may require use of the objectionable die. Players who attend a tournament without bringing dice are generally at the mercy of whatever equipment is available for use.

All dice used for a match at a given time should be of the same size. Dice should be large enough for all players to see clearly, but small enough to ensure that they roll freely. Dice sized 13-20 mm, or 0.5-0.75 inches have these properties; larger or smaller sizes should be avoided.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

3.2.2 Selection and Use

3.2.2.1 Number of Dice Used During Play

Players must share two dice when using a clock; otherwise, they may share two dice or use four dice.

[USBGF Supplement] *Use of two dice is Preferred over four dice. Allowed variation: Required.*

Matches played with a game clock must always be played with both players sharing the same two dice. A match played without a game clock may either be played with two dice or four dice. If a match is played with two dice, then the same two dice are shared by both players. If a match is played with four dice, then each player uses their own pair of dice. The standard USBGF preference policy is that the use of two dice is Preferred over the use of four dice – meaning that two dice are to be used unless both players agree to use four dice. The TD may alternatively establish a preference policy that makes the use of two dice Required for all matches.

There are many advantages for both players to share the same set of dice, most notably the avoidance of dispute about the numbers on the dice roll that can occur when using four dice; the dispute only becoming apparent after the turn has ended and the dice have been lifted, thus destroying the evidence. When sharing two dice, the dice are not lifted when the turn is ended; they remain undisturbed on the playing surface, available for inspection. Even when no game clock is available, the use of two dice rather than four is encouraged.

At the start of every match, the players shall select the two or four dice for use during the match by mutual agreement from among the available dice. When two shared dice are to be used, the equipment owner should present at least four dice to their opponent, who may then select any two of their choice. Those dice shall be used for the entire match, except for situations described in section [3.2.1](#), and section [3.5](#). Even if only two dice are being shared, four dice should be present at the board in case a mixing of dice is demanded during the match. Any dispute regarding the initial selection of dice shall be handled in accordance with section [3.3](#).

3.2.2.2 Mixing the Dice

Before games: players may require a mix of the game dice.

To mix dice, the requesting player rolls all four dice. Their opponent selects one die, alternating thereafter. Two more dice must be added if necessary.

Before the first game of the match, or between any two games during the match, either player may require that the match dice be mixed. Dice may only be mixed once before the start of any game.

For mixing to be done, four dice must have been selected by the players for use in the match. However, in matches where the players are sharing two dice, it is acceptable for players to initially select only two dice for use in the match and to select two more match dice if mixing is later required.

To mix the dice, the four dice selected for use in the match shall all be rolled together by the player who requested that the dice be mixed. The opponent of the requesting player shall first select a die from amongst the four dice rolled. The requesting player shall then select a die from the remaining three. If the players are sharing two dice, then the player shall continue the match sharing two dice they selected, with the two unselected match dice set aside in case mixing is required later in the match. Alternatively, if the players are using four dice, then the opponent of the requesting player shall select their second die from the remaining two and the requesting player shall take the last remaining die. The players shall then continue the match using the two dice that they each selected.

3.2.3 Dice randomization devices

Each player may choose to use either a dice cup or a baffle box.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

3.2.3.1 General

A dice randomization device must always be used; a die must not be cast directly from a hand to the playing surface. The device must be used as designed and intended, exclusively for the purpose of ensuring the production of random rolls of the dice. There are several kinds of dice randomization devices. Dice cups and baffle boxes are expressly allowed by the Rules. The use of other types of dice randomization devices may be imposed by the TD as per section 2.3. Unless the TD has imposed or established an equipment preference policy for dice randomization devices, the standard preference policy shall be Per Player. Before the match begins, each player may independently choose whether to roll their dice using a dice cup or a baffle box and may not impose their preference on their opponent.

3.2.3.2 Cups

At any time: if available, a player may require use of lipped dice cups.

Subject to availability, a player may insist that cups with an interior lip be used in preference to those without an interior lip. If cups with an interior lip are not available at the start of a match, a player may insist that the non-lipped cups in use be replaced with lipped cups if they become available, even if that occurs during a game. If no lipped cups are available but a baffle box is available, a player may request that the baffle box be used by both players instead of the unlined cups. If the opponent objects, the TD should impose use of the baffle box under section 3.5 until lipped cups become available. Players who attend a tournament without bringing lipped dice cups are generally at the mercy of whatever preferred equipment is available for use.

3.2.3.3 Baffle Boxes

***When using a baffle box, the dice are dropped together from a hand or cup.
A baffle box must be placed on the non-home board side.***

3.2.3.3.1 General

A baffle box, also known as a “dice tower”, is a device through which dice are dropped from a player’s hand or from a cup in order to randomize a roll. As the dice descend through the internal structure of the box, they are deflected repeatedly and thereby randomized until they emerge onto the playing surface. Whether to drop the dice into the baffle box directly from a hand or from a cup, and whether to shake the dice before doing so is Per Player; each player using the baffle box shall make their own choice on these matters and may not impose their preference on their opponent. A baffle box is considered by design to fully randomize the dice between the time that they enter the box and the time that they exit the box. It is for this reason that the additional use of a dice cup or additional shaking is deemed superfluous and thus not subject to imposition.

3.2.3.3.2 Construction and Approval

The baffle box must be properly constructed so that it produces random dice and is immune to manipulation. A player having concern about the suitability for use of a particular baffle box may appeal to the TD, who shall rule on the question and may impose other equipment. A baffle box should be transparent so that its inner structure can be inspected. While the use of a non-transparent baffle boxes is permitted, the TD may reject the use of a particular non-transparent baffle box if they cannot inspect it to their satisfaction.

3.2.3.3.3 Placement

When a baffle box is in use, it must be positioned off the playing surface on the opposite side of the home boards. The intent of this rule is that home boards tend to be more crowded with checkers, so the opposite side should be used for rolling from the baffle box. Furthermore, any game clock must be placed on the home board side, and both pieces of equipment cannot be placed on the same side of the board. If in accordance with section 3.2.3.1, only one player will use a baffle box while the other player will use a dice cup, then the player using the baffle box must place the baffle box on their right-hand side. In this situation, and provided that a game clock is not also in use, since dice rolling will occur on both sides of the board, the baffle box need not be located on the

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

non-home board side. If it is noticed during the match that the baffle box has been placed on the incorrect side of the board, a player may require that it be moved to the other side.

3.2.3.4 Other Dice Randomization Devices

The provisions of section [3.2.3.3](#) shall likewise apply to the extent practicable, to the use of other reliable forms of dice randomizing devices, including devices that randomize electronic dice, as may be imposed for use in a match by the TD. Any such approval or imposition should be for the purpose of addressing a specific need that the TD has identified for a particular match or player, or a specific need due to the unique nature of the tournament or event. Non-standard dice randomization equipment should not be approved or imposed if the TD has not identified such a specific need.

3.3 PREFERENCES

3.3.1 Preference Policies

The TD may set policy regulating equipment and setup.

[USBGF Supplement] *This Supplement establishes standards and states the allowed variations in certain areas left to the discretion of the Tournament Director (TD) by the WBGf Tournament Rules.*

As discussed in more detail in sections [1.7.1](#) and [2.3](#) the TD may establish a preference policy that governs how certain differences in preference for equipment or manner of play are to be resolved between the players. The USBGF Supplement defines some standard preference policies and regulates the options available to the TD for amending those standards. Those standards, regulations and options include various equipment options, clock settings and even the use of rule variations. Please refer to the USBGF Supplement for the latest standards and regulations regarding preferences.

3.3.2 Preference Disputes

All other preference disputes (seating, direction of play, game equipment, etc.) must be identified by the players before the match starts and shall be resolved in favor of the player rolling the highest dice sum.

Players shall roll high dice to settle all preference disputes before the match starts. There is no specific requirement for how they must do this, provided that both players agree on what disputes any given dice roll is deciding. The player who validly rolls the highest total dice roll (doublets not counting extra) shall be given their choice as to all such identified disputes; any invalid roll as defined in section [4.1.3](#) must be redone. If the players are unable to resolve a preference dispute, they should call upon the TD who may mediate or make a ruling, which may result in the imposition of equipment not necessarily preferential to either player.

3.4 GAME CLOCKS

3.4.1 Purpose

A “game clock” consists of a single device containing two adjacent clocks with buttons to stop one clock while starting the other, so that the two clocks never run simultaneously. The game clock’s purpose is two-fold: providing a means for players to signify the end of turns and tracking the amount of time that remains available for each player.

Game clocks serve as a means for players to signify the end of their turn by pressing the button nearest to them. The player whose turn it is to think or to act is always the player whose time should be activated and decrementing. On some clocks, the physical position of the buttons – whether in an up, down, or neutral state, provides similar visual feedback indicating whose turn it is, even if the clock is turned off. Even though a player who has just been doubled is not technically “on turn” in the sense of the alternating turns described by the rules

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

of the game of backgammon, it is still their turn to think and to take the action of accepting or passing the double. Therefore, after a player has been offered a double, their clock must be activated until they have so acted.

Game clocks display the remaining Reserve Time – the discretionary thinking time that a player has available to use for the remainder of the match. This ensures that play occurs at a reasonable pace that is not frustrating to opponents and spectators, maintains a level playing field between opponents, and ensures that neither player overly delays the tournament.

The game clock’s Delay Time provides each player with a fixed amount of free time to use for each of their moves during the match. No reserve time is consumed until the player has consumed their entire Delay Time. Under the Simple Delay system, the per-move delay time is not added to the Reserve Time; it decrements separately and any of the Delay Time that is not used during that turn is lost.

For more information on the proper use of a game clock, and regarding penalties assessed when a player’s time expires, see section [4.3](#).

3.4.2 Construction and Approval

The game clock must be properly constructed and must be properly functioning throughout the match. A player having concern about the suitability for use of a particular game clock may appeal to the TD, who shall rule on the question and may impose other equipment. Otherwise, play of the match will continue using the game clock in question subject only to a possible change of equipment pursuant to section [3.5](#).

3.4.3 Placement

The clock must be placed on the home board side.

When a game clock is in use, it must be positioned on the same side as the players’ home boards. The intent of this rule is that since most moves of a typical game take place within the home boards, placement of the clock in that area will facilitate its use. Furthermore, any baffle box must be placed on the side opposite of the home board, and both pieces of equipment cannot be placed on the same side of the board. If it is noticed during the match that the game clock has been placed on the incorrect side of the board, a player may require that it be moved to the other side.

3.4.4 Preferences and Time Control Settings

Clock reserve time shall be 2 min. times the (average remaining) match length, with 12 sec. Simple Delay per move, unless the TD specifies otherwise.
The TD may divide the reserve time into two banks and shall reset the clock to the second bank time when called after the first bank has been used.

[USBGF Supplement]

Event type	Standard			Allowed Variations		
	Preference	Reserve	Delay	Preference	Reserve	Delay
Top skill	Preferred	2 min/pt.	12 sec.	Required, Preferred	1.5 – 2.5	12
Other skill	If Agreed	2 min/pt.	15 sec.	Required, Preferred, By Roll, If Agreed	2 – 3	12 – 15
Doubles	Required	3 min/pt.	15 sec.	Required	2.5 – 3.5	15 – 18
All other	If Agreed	2 min/pt.	12 sec.	Required, Preferred, By Roll, If Agreed	(any)	(any)

Maximum allowed reserve times may be rounded up to the next whole minute after multiplying by the match length.
Minimum allowed reserve times must not be rounded down.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

3.4.4.1 Preferences

The core Rules do not explicitly establish any standards to govern when clocks are to be used in tournament play. Therefore, in the absence of any clock preference policy being set by the TD, the implicit policy under the core rules is Clocks If Agreed, meaning that a game clock shall be used if both players agree to do so. However, the TD has the discretion to set a clock preference policy.

As a matter left to TD discretion by the Rules, the USBGF Supplement does set standard clock preference policy and regulates the allowed deviations from those standards as listed in the table above. The USBGF's standard preference policy for use of a timed game clock varies with the type of event. In the tournament's main event and major skill divisional side events, the highest skill division (Open, Championship, Masters, etc.) is Clocks Preferred, meaning that either player may insist that a game clock be used for their match. Doubles events are Clocks Required, meaning that game clocks must always be used, regardless of player preference. All other events are Clocks If Agreed, meaning that a game clock is used only if both players agree to do so. The Allowed Variations columns enumerate the permitted ways in which a TD may set their own clocks preference policy that varies from the USBGF standards. If a particular variation is not listed, then the TD may not set such a preference policy.

When players agree to use a game clock in a Clocks If Agreed event, they may agree to use the standard clock settings, or any looser setting (more time); they may also agree to use an untimed game clock solely for the purpose of designating end of turn. Players using an untimed game clock should note that on their score sheet (for example "Untimed" or "UT") to avoid a dispute in the event of a time expiration.

Players are generally responsible for bringing a game clock to any tournament in which they will enter an event requiring game clock use or wish to exercise a preference to use one. Game clock apps can be obtained inexpensively for mobile devices and a mobile device may be used during matches for the purpose of serving as a game clock. Players are responsible for arranging to borrow a game clock if they do not have one when required, no differently from players who attend a tournament without bringing a backgammon board and face an opponent who doesn't have one either. If a TD imposes a clock on a match in an event that does not require clocks, then the TD is responsible for providing the clock.

3.4.4.2 Time Control

All matches played using game clocks must use the time delay method known as 'Simple Delay' which operates as follows: each player is initially allotted a certain amount of discretionary thinking time ("reserve time") for use during the match – typically specified as the fixed number of minutes to be multiplied by the match length to obtain total reserve time; however, the reserve time may also be specified by giving the total number of minutes allotted for the entire match, or as a combination of the two representations (for example 2 minutes per point plus 1 additional minute). Each player is additionally permitted a certain amount of time per move before the player's reserve time will start to decrease ("delay time"). The delay time cannot be accumulated; any delay time that is not used for that move is lost. A player who moves within the delay time therefore consumes no reserve time, and can play indefinitely, without the clock expiring, for as long as they continue to do so.

3.4.4.3 Setting the Game Clock at the Beginning of a Match

The core rules specify a standard clock time control to be used when no other time control policy has been set for that event by the TD. Each player's starting reserve time will be equal to two (2) minutes per point of match length (for example, each player will receive eighteen (18) minutes of reserve time at the start of a 9-point match). Each player's delay time per move shall be twelve (12) seconds. The TD may set an alternative time control for the tournament or may set an alternative time control for any specific event. In certain cases, the TD may even specify conditions under which looser time controls may be used.

The major consideration when selecting the delay time to be used for an event is the amount of time within which the players in the given event can comfortably complete the tasks of making a play without deep thinking – they

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

must pick up the dice; shake and roll the dice; scan the board for candidate plays; choose a reasonable play (not necessarily the best play that they might make with unlimited time); physically move their checkers; place any hit checkers on the bar and finally hit the clock. Players of lower skill levels will on average scan and filter candidate plays slower than those of higher skill levels, and so it is reasonable to allow them a longer delay time. That players in lower skill divisions are commonly expected to play slower is evidenced by the fact that match lengths in lower skill-level events are almost always shorter than in top skill-level events. In doubles matches, a longer delay time should be selected, since the player moving the checkers has the task of confirming the selected play with their partner, in addition to the normal tasks of making a move.

As a means of protecting against unnoticed clock expirations, particularly for players who are inexperienced with clock play, the TD may choose to partition the allowed match reserve time into two separate time banks – a primary time bank and secondary time bank. In that case, the clock is initially set to the primary time bank. The secondary time bank is held in trust in case it is needed. Then upon any expiration of the primary time bank, the affected player shall summon the TD, who shall then reset the game clock to the secondary time bank and warn that player that another expiration will result in the loss of the match. Players are not permitted to divide reserve time in this manner; only the TD may direct that two reserve time banks be implemented. When the TD chooses to utilize the option to partition reserve time into two banks of time, it is recommended that the secondary time bank be 1 minute, with the remainder allocated to the primary bank.

When players agree to use an untimed game clock solely for the purpose of designating the end of turns, the clock's sole purpose is to visually indicate whose turn it is. The untimed game clock may be used in a non-running state if the buttons physically toggle between an up and down state when pressed. Alternatively, the untimed game clock may be used in a running state, set with an arbitrarily large time control. Any expiration of an untimed game clock is without effect or penalty; the proper response to an expiration is either to add more time, or to reset the game clock, as if to start a new match.

As a matter left to TD discretion by the Rules, the USBGF Supplement sets standard clock time controls and regulates the allowed deviations from those standards as listed in the table above. The USBGF's standard time controls vary with the type of event:

In the tournament's main event and major skill divisional side events, for the highest skill division (Open, Championship, Masters, etc.), each player's delay time per move shall be twelve (12) seconds; in other skill divisional events below the highest skill division (Advanced, Intermediate, Limited, Novice, Beginner, etc.), each player's delay time per move shall be fifteen (15) seconds. The delay time for all other events shall be set at the TD's discretion, with twelve (12) seconds being the standard delay time if not otherwise specified.

In consulting doubles matches, each player's starting reserve time will be equal to three (3) minutes per point, and each player's delay time per move shall be fifteen (15) seconds.

In all other side events, including so-called "speed gammon" events, the TD has discretion to determine the appropriate amount of reserve time and delay time consistent with the best interests of the event and the Tournament as a whole.

The Allowed Variations columns in the above table enumerate the permitted ways in which a TD may set their own time control policy that varies from the USBGF standards. If a particular variation is not listed, or falls outside of the allowed range, then the TD may not set such a preference policy. However, in cases where the computed maximum allowed reserve time contains a fraction of a minute, the TD is permitted to set a reserve time equal to the computed maximum rounded up to the next whole minute. It is not permitted to round down the minimum allowed reserve time. If the TD chooses to partition the reserve time into two banks of time, the total reserve time must still fall within the allowed reserve time limits.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

3.4.4.4 Setting the Game Clock When Introduced During a Match

If a game clock is introduced in the middle of a match already in progress, whether by mutual agreement, or if imposed by the TD pursuant to section [3.5](#), the game clock shall be set in the same manner as at the beginning of the match as per section [3.4.4.3](#), except based on the Partial Match Length remaining rather than the posted match length. The Partial Match Length is equal to the average number of points remaining for the two players. Specifically, the match reserve time to be allocated for the remainder of the match shall be the same number of minutes for each player and is computed as the product of the Partial Match Length that remains to be completed, and the number of Minutes Per Point of match length applicable for clocked matches in this event. No time adjustment shall be made to account for any game currently in progress. To avoid programming of any fractional number of minutes, the TD may round the calculated reserve time up to a whole number of minutes.

Partial Match Length = $(RA+RB) / 2$,

where RA is the number of points remaining for player A to win the match and RB is the number of points remaining for player B to win the match. Note that at the beginning of the match, Partial Match Length equals the match length. For example, at a 2-away, 7-away score, Partial Match Length = $(2+7) / 2 = 4.5$.

Reserve Time = Partial Match Length * Minutes Per Point

3.4.4.5 Loss of Game Clock During a Match

If during a match it is noticed that the game clock has turned off or has otherwise ceased to function properly, play must immediately be interrupted to remedy the problem, even if a game is in progress. If the game clock is defective, it must be replaced. If the game clock's battery is dead, either the battery must be replaced, or the game clock must be replaced. If the game clock was accidentally turned off or reset, but is otherwise functioning properly, it may continue to be used. While the first occurrence of a game clock loss during a match might not be attributed to a defective clock, if there is a subsequent loss where the cause is not certain, the clock shall be presumed defective and must be replaced.

The players shall make their best effort to determine or estimate the amount of reserve time that remained prior to the outage and may set the game clock according to any such agreement as they may reach. Either player may summon the TD to assist or rule in this effort. If it is not possible to approximate the clock setting for one or both players from the information available, then as a last resort, the game clock may be set in accordance with section [3.4.4.4](#). Once the game clock has been set, the match shall resume.

3.5 CHANGE OF EQUIPMENT DURING A MATCH

3.5.1 TD Imposition

At any time: the TD may change or impose equipment, including a clock.

If a need arises, the TD may require that the equipment used for any match be changed or that new equipment be introduced at any time and for any reason, including during a game that is in progress. This includes the imposition of a game clock on a match even if both players prefer not to use one. The scope of this rule is for a particular match. The TD should have a reason for imposing equipment on a match; they may share that reason with the players but are not obligated to do so. That reason should not be that the TD wishes to rewrite the rules in general. Imposition of equipment should be limited to cases when the TD sees a need to do so for the current match that does not exist for all other matches at the tournament. Any such ruling is subject to appeal. The TD's powers over equipment are described in more detail in section [2.3](#).

The players are only permitted to change equipment while a match is in progress (a) if the equipment is defective; (b) between games, if the players are in mutual agreement; or (c) pursuant to the provisions of sections [2.3](#), [3.1](#), [3.2.1](#), or [3.2.3.2](#). If the equipment is defective, or either player has a concern regarding its continued use and the opponent does not agree to its replacement, the TD should impose new equipment if its continued use might

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

compromise the integrity of the match or be a source of distraction for a reasonable player. A TD should tend to give the benefit of doubt to a concerned player who has not otherwise established a pattern of paranoia regarding equipment.

3.5.2 At Any Time, Including While a Game is in Progress

At any time: if available, a player may require use of lipped dice cups or precision dice.

While a game is in progress, changes of equipment are prohibited, with the following exceptions:

- a) to replace an unlipped dice cup with a lipped dice cup;
- b) to replace non-precision dice with precision dice; and
- c) to replace essential equipment that is defective as detailed in section [3.5.4](#).

Any change of equipment that may be made while a game is in progress may also be made between games. If an unlipped dice cup is being used, either player may insist that it be immediately replaced by a lipped dice cup if one is known to be available for immediate use.

If a non-precision die is being used, either player may insist that the die be immediately replaced by a precision die if one is known to be available for immediate use. If any of the dice in use are replaced, then either player may require that all four of the game dice be mixed as described by section [3.2.2.2](#), except that the player who demanded the dice replacement shall always be considered to be the player who required the dice mixing.

Any concern about new equipment being introduced may be raised with the TD, who shall make a ruling.

3.5.3 Before / Between Games

Before games: players may change equipment if agreed or require a mix of the game dice; if available, a player may require use of a board designed with checkers of diameter 37-50mm (1.5-2.0”).

Between games, if both players agree to do so, the previously agreed equipment may be changed, provided that such a change does not conflict with any previous imposition of equipment or preference policy set by the TD. Either player may require that the game dice be mixed as described by section [3.2.2.2](#). The four dice to be mixed shall be those previously selected by the players for use in the match. If only two dice had previously been selected, then two new dice must be added at this time. If the match is being played on a non-regulation sized board, then either player may require that the board in use be replaced by a regulation sized board if one is available for use. See section [3.1](#) for more details about regulation sized boards. Any concern about new equipment being introduced may be raised with the TD, who shall make a ruling.

3.5.4 Defective Equipment

Defective equipment must be replaced immediately.

Equipment that is essential to playing the match must be replaced immediately, even if a game is in progress, if it is discovered to be defective. Non-essential equipment may be replaced between games. The word “defective” should be understood to mean equipment that is no longer functioning as intended. Cosmetic damage does not qualify as defective. Essential equipment includes but is not limited to a game clock or dice randomization device that is not operating properly, a damaged die, a checker that has broken in two, a board that has fallen apart and is no longer playable, loss of proper lighting, and a broken table or chair that could compromise safety or the proper completion of the match.

When replacing a defective game clock, the reserve time that was remaining for both players on the defective clock must be replicated as close as is reasonably possible to determine and program on the new clock prior to the resumption of play. If the remaining time cannot be approximated, then the replacement clocks should be set in accordance with section [3.4.4.4](#).

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

The intent of this rule is that non-essential and non-defective equipment should not be replaced while a game is in progress to minimize disruption and delay. However, if both players agree that equipment is defective and should be immediately replaced under this rule, then the equipment should be replaced.

In cases where equipment imposed by the TD has become defective, that equipment must be replaced with equivalent equipment that meets the spirit of the TD's imposition. If it is unclear how to do that, or if alternative equipment is not available to the players, then the TD must be asked to address the situation.

4 THE GAME

4.1 DICE AND ROLLS

4.1.1 Random Dice

Dice must not be manipulated.

Dice must be used solely for purposes of generating uniform random numbers ranging from 1 to 6. Any other use of the dice is a most serious violation of these Rules and the spirit of the game. A player who is determined to have manipulated the dice has cheated and may be subject to severe penalties including expulsion from the tournament and a ban from future tournament participation. The word "manipulated" in this context means exerting some level of skillful influence over the dice roll outcome with the intent to benefit. Such influence is not limited to affecting the numbers on the dice; it can also include influencing whether a rolled die is valid. Simple incidental contact or reaction to a flying die that results in contact and alteration of the die's path, but without accompanying intent to benefit from the outcome is not manipulation.

4.1.2 Handling of Dice

A player should announce the roll before repositioning dice.

Touching the dice while they are live is discouraged. For purposes of these Rules, the dice are considered "live" while the turn in progress has yet to be completed. When necessary, however, the player on turn may move one or both dice to another location on the surface of the board if movement of the checkers is impeded or if a die is on a checker to be moved. The player on turn should notify the opponent of the intent to reposition the dice before doing so. To avoid confusion and dispute, the player repositioning the dice, should announce the dice roll before touching them, and then hold the dice by their side faces while moving them, taking care that the top die face always remains in plain view. Failure to follow this protocol might end the offending player's turn; see section [4.1.6.3](#).

4.1.3 Valid Rolls

4.1.3.1 Producing Rolls Using a Dice Cup (No Baffle Box)

4.1.3.1.1 Proper Dice Rolling Technique

When using a cup, the dice must be vigorously shaken at least twice up and down and rolled in one action on the right-hand side of the bar with enough force and height to tumble freely.

This rule applies in situations where the player has chosen to play the match using a dice cup to produce their rolls. If the player has chosen to play the match using a baffle box (or another approved device) and inadvertently rolls their dice directly onto the playing surface using a dice cup, then the roll is invalid and must be redone.

The dice must be shaken vigorously in a cup in an up and down motion. To shake the dice, the top of the cup shall be covered by the player's hand and the player must shake the cup up and down at least two times. The dice should not be shaken excessively to the point that the dice shaking materially delays the match – particularly when a game clock is not in use. The intent is that the dice be shaken with sufficient frequency, force and in

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

such a direction to ensure that they are bouncing freely and unpredictably within the cup so that the orientation of dice faces are randomized and that the dice are not simply sliding in place from side to side. While shaking, the top of the dice cup must be covered with the hand to prevent the dice from flying out of the cup. If the dice cup is not so covered while shaking, the dice are not being shaken properly. If the dice fly out of the cup while they are being shaken, the dice are not considered to have been rolled – even if they otherwise land legally on the board.

After shaking, the dice must then be rolled in a single action out of the cup onto the playing surface of the board, on the roller's right-hand side of the bar. The phrase "a single action" means that the act of rolling the dice after shaking should be a continuous motion intended to eject both dice out of the cup at approximately the same time. The dice cup should not simply be inverted to dump the dice onto the board solely due to the force of gravity. Instead, the cup should be turned at a downward angle while the cup is pushed with some force in the direction of its opening to impart horizontal velocity on the dice, propelling them across the cup's internal trip lips, out of the cup and across the board surface. Although both dice might not emerge together, the separation in time must not be such that information about the possible outcome of the first die becomes available before the second die leaves the cup. While rolling, the dice should not touch the roller's hand, though such contact does not automatically invalidate the roll – particularly incidental contact with one of the fingers that had been covering the top of the dice cup while shaking.

The dice must exit the cup having been propelled with sufficient force and from a sufficient height so that the dice tumble freely before coming to rest. While the rule does not specify a minimum height or velocity for the dice, it is reasonable to expect that the dice will exit the cup at a height of at least 13 mm or 0.5 inches above the playing surface. The dice cup should not contact the playing surface before the dice emerge as that indicates insufficient height. Typically, the dice are rolled in a horizontal direction either toward the center bar or toward the opponent. A roll is not automatically invalidated simply because a die contacted objects other than game equipment along its path (even if outside of the board), or if the dice cup was accidentally dropped onto the playing surface as part of the natural motion of rolling the dice. If the dice cup (or any other foreign object) is dropped later, after a die has come to rest, and interferes with the resting die, the number on the die prior to this interference shall prevail. A roll is not automatically invalidated if a die contacts a person, however, if there is uncertainty about whether the random outcome was affected by such contact, the ruling should tend to be against the player who created the uncertainty.

Recurring non-compliant dice rolling should not be tolerated. A player who is repeatedly unable or unwilling to comply with the above requirements for the proper rolling of dice from a dice cup may be subject to sanctions by the TD. These sanctions may include but is not limited to the imposition of a baffle box. Non-compliant dice rolling is often the result of ignorance regarding the requirements and the proper dice rolling methodology. Notwithstanding any of the above, both players have the discretion to void any dice roll that they believe to be improper by making a timely objection under section [4.1.3.3.1](#). The objecting player should explain to their opponent what they believed was improper and if applicable, the proper rolling technique for avoiding future objections. If a player is unable or unwilling to correct a recurring problem with their rolling technique, their opponent should inform the TD of the infractions and may request that a baffle box be imposed.

4.1.3.1.2 Rolling the Dice on the Left

With consent, the dice may be rolled on the left. Consent is revoked when stated, a roll on the right occurs or the game ends.

A dice roll is generally invalid and must be redone if they are not rolled on the right-hand side of the bar. However, the rolling player may ask their opponent for permission to roll the dice on the left-hand side of the bar. If the opponent gives consent, then the player may roll their dice on the left-hand side, with the same requirements for proper rolling otherwise applying. The player may continue to roll on the left-hand side on future turns until such time as consent is withdrawn. The opponent may withdraw consent to roll on the left by explicitly stating that the player may no longer roll on the left, must roll on the right, or words to that effect.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Consent is automatically withdrawn if the player rolls their dice on the right-hand side; such a roll shall stand if it is otherwise valid. Consent is also automatically withdrawn if the game ends; the opening roll of the next game must be done on the right-hand side.

The intention behind permitting rolling on the left is that no player is harmed by allowing it if both players agree and communicate their intentions. However, no player is obligated to give consent to rolling on the left, and no player should have an expectation to receive consent when asking. Rolling on the left can cause confusion and disruption, particularly if the player doing so frequently switches sides and keeps asking for permission. Any player who is disturbed by such occurrences or who objects in principle to rolling on the left should simply not grant consent. A player may state that they will never grant consent to roll on the left and if they have done so, their opponent must accept their wish and not continue to ask for permission to do so. When Dice on Checkers is in effect, there is reduced benefit to rolling on the left since the available space for the dice to land is the same regardless of the number of checkers present on the right side of the bar.

4.1.3.2 Producing Rolls Using a Baffle Box

4.1.3.2.1 Generally

When using a baffle box, the dice are dropped together from a hand or cup into the baffle box and must freely pass through.

This rule applies in situations where the player has chosen to play the match using a baffle box to produce their rolls. If the player has chosen to play the match by rolling from a dice cup (or using another approved device) and inadvertently drops their dice into the baffle box, whether from a dice cup or not, then the roll is invalid and must be redone.

In matches played using a baffle box, the dice must be dropped together, either from a dice cup, or directly from one of the player's hands into the baffle box. Shaking the dice is allowed, but it is not required. The dice must be dropped at or about the same time so that no information about the likely outcome of the first die is available before the second die has been dropped. A long as both dice have entered the baffle box before either die has exited from the baffle box, this condition has certainly been met. Both dice must pass completely and freely through the baffle box and come to rest within the playing area of the board, on that side of the bar adjacent to the baffle box. If a die does not pass entirely through the baffle box or becomes stuck in the baffle box and must be dislodged, the roll is invalid and must be redone. Notwithstanding any of the above, both players have the discretion to void any dice roll that they believe to be improper by making a timely objection under section [4.1.3.3.1](#).

4.1.3.2.2 The Opening Roll

On the opening roll, one player may drop both dice with each player assigned a color, or players may roll from cups.

The opening roll must be handled specially when a baffle box is in use because the rules of backgammon require that both players contribute one die to a combined roll, but a single baffle box is shared by both players. The requirements for producing the opening roll are to be able to unambiguously identify which die belongs to which player and what the value of each player's die is. The players may generally agree on any method for producing the opening roll that satisfies these requirements.

This rule authorizes two specific practices for producing the opening roll that could otherwise be construed to be against the rules.

1. Either or both players may roll using a dice cup (without using the baffle box), with each player rolling on opposite sides of the bar. The rules do not otherwise permit dice rolling equipment to be changed during a game. This rule creates an exception that explicitly allows this. If a player is rolling using a baffle box, they may roll using a dice cup on the opening roll and then roll using a baffle box for the remainder of the game.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

2. The players may each preselect a die of a different color that shall be identified as being their die during all future opening rolls. Then, for the opening roll of each game, one and only one of the two players shall drop both dice together through the baffle box. The opening roll is awarded to the player who had preselected the color of the higher numbered die. It is recommended that as a mnemonic, a player chooses a die color to match the color of their checkers to the extent possible. At the beginning of the match, the players should agree upon a method for determining which player will roll the dice for each opening roll. It is recommended that the loser of the prior game rolls in the next game rather than alternating since that avoids the need to remember who rolled in the prior game. The rules of backgammon require each player to roll one die for the opening roll; Having only one player roll both dice could be construed as being illegal. This rule creates an exception that explicitly allows this.

Some players may wish to produce the opening roll by having each player drop their own die through the baffle box one after the other. While this method is permitted, it is discouraged. Doing so creates the possibility that the second die may interact with the first die that is already on the playing surface, creating uncertainty and possibly dispute over what the roll was. If both dice are of the same color, the possibility for confusion is further increased. If this method is used, the player who rolls first should announce their number and then move the die to the side to minimize the possibility of interaction with the second die. The value of the first die is always the value on which it settled prior to the second die being rolled; any subsequent change resulting from contact with the second die is void.

4.1.3.3 Invalid Dice Rolls

4.1.3.3.1 Before the Dice Have Begun to Settle

A roll is invalid if a player objects before either die begins to settle.

Either player may preemptively invalidate the roll of the dice that is currently in progress simply by objecting to the roll before either die has begun to settle. If the objection is timely, meaning that both players agree that the objection was made before either die had begun to settle, the roll is invalid and must be redone. The merits of the objection are irrelevant to the invalidity of the roll; the roll is always invalid if the objection was timely. However, a player who repeatedly makes frivolous objections is delaying the match and should be reported to the TD.

A player may object to a dice roll verbally and/or physically. To verbally object, a player may state “no roll”, “no dice”, “no good”, “invalid”, “stop” or other words to that effect. To physically object to a dice roll, a player may reach and wave their hand over the board near where the dice are being rolled. While physical contact by a player with dice that are in motion is not specifically forbidden as a means of objection, the practice should be avoided in case there is a dispute over the timeliness of the objection. Any such dispute over timeliness should be resolved against the player who deliberately interfered with the dice roll in the absence of any evidence to the contrary.

Before any die has begun to settle, there is no information available about the potential outcome of the roll and therefore no advantage can be gained by a player who objects. The intent behind this rule is three-fold:

1. To short-circuit any dispute arising from a difference in observation or uncertainty of the rules impacting the validity of the roll.

There are many situations where one player may believe that they observed a problem with the dice roll currently in progress whereas the other player did not observe that problem. For example, a die may fail to pass through the baffle box and instead drop directly to the playing surface. If that occurs, the roll is invalid. However, if one player thought the die went through the baffle box while the other player thought it did not, there is generally no way to determine which player is correct after the fact and therefore there is no way for such a dispute to be resolved based upon the available facts. With this

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

rule in place, the player who believes that they may have observed a problem can immediately object and it becomes an invalid roll. It doesn't matter if they were correct or incorrect about the observation or whether they were certain or uncertain. If their objection was timely, the roll is invalid, and any potential dispute is avoided; neither player is harmed by this outcome. Another example is if the player rolling the dice accidentally drops their dice cup onto the board while rolling. A player may be uncertain if the dropped cup causes the roll to be invalid (it doesn't). Regardless, if they make a timely objection, that question of rule is moot; the roll is invalidated by the objection itself and the roll is simply redone.

2. To empower a player to compel their opponent to observe proper dice rolling technique.

As described in section [4.1.3.1](#), there are several requirements that comprise proper technique when rolling from a dice cup. Whether due to bad habit or lack of knowledge, some players do not reliably use proper technique when rolling. A player should inform their opponent if they are not using proper technique and explain what they must do to correct their technique. However, it is best if improper rolling is stopped in its tracks rather than permitting an improper roll to occur and attempting to correct improper behavior after the fact. This rule empowers a player to do exactly that. For example, a player may not shake their dice before rolling them. While the dice roll is likely to be random, there is no reason why a player should have to worry about that question. Shaking is required for a reason. The moment that a player is observed to start rolling their dice without having shaken them, their opponent should object to the roll. The roll is immediately invalidated and must be redone. In this way, the offending player is compelled to correct their rolling technique to enable the game to continue. It is unnecessary to call the TD to enforce proper technique, which can otherwise be a barrier for correcting bad rolling habits. However, there can be a fine line between enforcing the requirements for proper rolling and nitpicking. Players must be reasonable when raising an objection about rolling technique. If a player repeatedly disrupts and delays play with nitpicking, their opponent may ask the TD to assess the situation and make a ruling. The TD has discretion to make an exception and deny an abusive player the right to make future objections on the grounds of improper rolling technique.

3. To create the presumption of validity if a timely objection to a roll is not made.

The provision that a timely objection invalidates a dice roll should be interpreted as creating the presumption that a roll is valid if a timely objection is not made. If a player only objects after they have had the benefit of seeing the dice roll, the TD should rule that the roll was valid absent any evidence to the contrary. A player who has failed to make a timely objection should consider that the burden of proof is on them when deciding whether to call the TD for a ruling.

While a dispute may arise over the question of whether an objection was timely, we are no worse off in that case than we would be without this rule in place. However, when the timeliness of an objection is agreed or established as fact, the advantages of this rule are realized.

4.1.3.3.2 Once the Dice Have Come to Rest

A roll is invalid if a die does not come to rest on the playing surface or checkers on the same side of the bar as rolled, is supported by a vertical surface, balanced on edge or corner, or descends into the gap between the checkers it is on.

The dice must come to rest within the playing area of the board, on the same side of the bar as rolled. In cases of uncertainty, a die has "come to rest" once it has stopped moving for at least two (2) seconds. Each individual die must come to rest either on the playing surface, or on top of one or more checkers, but must not straddle both the playing surface and the checkers. Note that a die on the checkers might be invalid as per section [4.1.3.4 – No Dice on Checkers](#). If one die comes to rest on top of the other, it does not meet the requirement of being on the playing surface or checkers. This test applies only to the final resting place of the dice; it does not matter where a die had travelled, or what it had contacted along its path, provided that there was no attempt made to

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

manipulate the dice as defined in section 4.1.1. If any of the foregoing does not occur, the roll shall be deemed invalid and retaken.

Flatness of a die is not a requirement for validity. Note that the word “flat” does not appear anywhere in this rule, or in fact anywhere within the entire set of USBGF Rules because that word is inherently confusing in the context of horizontal surfaces that are not perfect planes. Instead, there are three specific tests for invalidity.

Given that both dice have validly come to rest as required above, then the roll shall nevertheless be deemed invalid and retaken if any of the following conditions apply to either die:

- The die is **supported by a vertical surface**.

The side rails of the board or bear-off tray, the bar, a side face of the other die, and the side face of any checker are vertical surfaces. A die is supported by a vertical surface if the die would drop by even the slightest amount if that vertical surface were suddenly erased from existence. Imperfections and contours of the playing surface or the tops of checkers, or anything else that cause those horizontal surfaces to deviate from a true plane are not considered vertical surfaces. Examples of such imperfections and contours to horizontal surfaces include stitched on points, points that are peeling up, finger dips in checkers, and raised edges of checkers. Mere contact of a die with a vertical surface does not necessarily mean that the die is being supported by that vertical surface. In cases where a die is in contact with a vertical surface, support is most often indicated visually by one side of the die rising or falling from the horizontal surface. It is almost always possible to discern this by eye. For cases where it is not possible to tell by eye whether vertical support exists, a destructive physical test may be applied as the last resort by the TD. To test if a die on the playing surface is vertically supported, the die is pushed downward on its top face, near the vertical surface in question. If the die is clearly seen or felt to move downward to a new resting position, then it was vertically supported. To test if a die on top of a checker or checkers is vertically supported, the checker or checkers on which it rests are carefully slid on the playing surface ever so slightly away from the vertical surface in question. If the die is visually observed to drop by any amount, then it was vertically supported. Both players may agree that one of them will perform this same destructive test for vertical support without calling the TD; the die shall be deemed to have no vertical support unless both players agree that the die had vertical support. Without convincing evidence of vertical support, the ruling should be that no vertical support exists. A die that is determined to be vertically supported is invalid.

- The die is **balanced on edge or corner**.

This refers to a die that is perfectly balanced, with a single edge or corner being its only contact with the playing surface or the top of a checker. Normally, such a die quickly tips over and lands on a face, but it might balance for long enough to be considered at-rest. A die so balanced is invalid. Because of the precarious balance of such a die and the possibility that the slightest disturbance such as gently bumping the table could cause the die to topple, a player believing that the die is balanced and invalid should state that fact.

- The die **descends into the gap between the checkers it is on**.

This typically refers to a die that is supported by the tops, or more precisely the outer edge of the top surface of two or more checkers but is falling from the checkers into the gap between them. A die might straddle or be supported by the tops of multiple checkers, but if any part of the die has descended below the tops of ALL supporting checkers, then it satisfies this condition and is invalid. A die which straddles two or more checkers of varying heights, while remaining fully above the top surface of the lowest checker does not satisfy this condition; such a die is bridging the gap rather than descending into the gap. A height variation between checkers is deemed to be an imperfection in the plane of the horizontal surface of the checker tops and a die straddling two such checkers without falling below the tops of all of them is simply “on the checkers”. For the avoidance of doubt, a die that has fallen into the gap between checkers but is not supported by the top edges of those checkers and is instead supported by the playing surface is not invalidated by this condition.

The following test for validity under this clause may be applied. A die that is supported by the checkers via contact with a single face of the die is valid. A die that is supported by the checkers via contact with

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

multiple faces is invalid. If an edge of a die is supported by a checker, then that edge shall be deemed to be a part of whichever adjacent face would result in the fewest faces being supported by the checkers. If any significant uncertainty remains, the die should be ruled as valid because this condition to invalidate the die has not been conclusively judged to be applicable.

4.1.3.3.3 Handling an Invalid Dice Roll

Once agreed, both dice must be rerolled; the clock's delay time may be reset.

If both players are in agreement that the current dice roll is invalid pursuant to sections [4.1.3.3.1](#) or [4.1.3.3.2](#), then the entire dice roll is void; the player who had rolled the dice shall pick up both dice and shall then reroll them. This process shall be repeated until a valid roll is produced. If a game clock is in use, then either player may reset the roller's delay time on the game clock by activating the non-roller's time and then immediately reactivating the roller's time. A player is entitled to the full delay time prior to each attempt at rolling the dice.

Neither player is authorized to unilaterally determine that a dice roll is invalid and act upon that decision. Such a determination requires agreement by both players. Although it may be obvious in most cases that a die is invalid, in other cases it may not be obvious. A player who fails to obtain agreement about invalidity from their opponent prior to disturbing the previously rolled dice will be at a disadvantage if a dispute arises. However, because this rule lacks the word "must", obtaining explicit agreement is not considered to be mandatory and therefore a player is not obligated to point out occurrences where their opponent fails to confirm invalidity. From a practical standpoint, it is recommended that a player who believes that a roll is invalid say "invalid", "cocked" or words to that effect and briefly pause to allow any reaction from their opponent before disturbing the dice prior to reroll. Although the non-roller should avoid disturbing the dice, in any unclear situation they should still communicate their belief that the roll is valid, invalid or still in question before the roller causes any disturbance that may alter the facts.

The opening roll is handled as a special case because producing the opening roll may involve two independent acts of rolling where each player rolls one die. In that case, if a player has rolled only one die and that die is invalid, then only that one die shall be rerolled. Even though the rule states "both dice", the intent is to require a reroll of all dice cast as part of that individual act of rolling.

4.1.3.4 Rule Option: Dice on Checkers vs. No Dice on Checkers

Rule option: the TD shall set a preference policy for Dice on Checkers. When No Dice on Checkers is in effect, all dice coming to rest on the checkers are invalid.

[USBGF Supplement] Dice on Checkers is Required unless the TD announces an alternate preference policy in advance.

Section [4.1.3.3.2](#) states: "A roll is invalid if a die does not come to rest on the playing surface or checkers." However, this rule option gives the TD the discretion to create a preference policy that governs whether a die landing on the checkers is valid in matches played at their tournament.

If a match is played with "Dice on Checkers", then during that match any die that comes to rest on the checkers is valid in the absence of other invalidating conditions outlined in section [4.1.3.3](#).

If a match is played with "No Dice on Checkers", then during that match any die that comes to rest on the checkers is invalid, effectively as if the rule text in section [4.1.3.3.2](#) and shown above is amended to remove the word "checkers" as follows: "A roll is invalid if a die does not come to rest on the playing surface."

If the TD states a policy of "Dice on Checkers" for the tournament or equivalently "Dice on Checkers Required", then every match must be played with "Dice on Checkers". If the TD states a policy of "No Dice on Checkers" for

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

the tournament, or equivalently “Dice on Checkers Not Used” then every match must be played with “No Dice on Checkers”. However, the TD may choose to establish another preference policy that allows the players by mutual agreement to determine whether a die that comes to rest on the checkers will be valid or invalid during their match. A “Dice on Checkers Preferred” policy means that a match will be played with “Dice on Checkers” unless both players agree to play their match with “No Dice on Checkers”. A “Dice on Checkers If Agreed” policy means that a match will be played with “No Dice on Checkers” unless both players agree to play their match with “Dice on Checkers”. When two players agree to the non-default variation allowed by the policy, they should make a note to that effect on their scorecard to avoid any later dispute about the rule in effect.

If the TD does not announce a preference policy for Dice on Checkers, then the USBGF’s standard preference policy of “Dice on Checkers Required” shall apply.

4.1.4 Equipment changes

As per section [3.5.1](#), the TD has virtually unlimited discretion over matters of equipment and may at any time order that the remainder of a match and/or subsequent matches involving any player(s) be completed using different dice, a baffle box, or other alternative dice randomizing device. No inference of player misconduct should be drawn from the TD ordering the player(s) to do so.

4.1.5 Requests

If a player observes a pattern of improper dice rolling or has concern about dice rolls not being entirely random, the player may request that the TD (a) order that the remainder of the match be played using a baffle box or other alternative dice randomizing device provided that one is available, or (b) appoint a match monitor, or (c) order that the dice used for the match be replaced. Subject to the TD’s duty to investigate and impose sanctions if appropriate, the TD should undertake to accommodate the player’s request for a remedy regardless of whether the TD believes or suspects that a violation of these Rules has occurred. No inference of player misconduct should be drawn under such circumstances. However, a player who establishes a pattern of raising such concern about multiple players without substantiating evidence and without similar concerns having been raised by other players might find those concerns to be given diminished credence by the TD and could themselves be subject to sanctions for delaying the tournament or engaging in unsportsmanlike behavior.

4.1.6 End of Turn

Once a player has made a legal move of their checkers and has decided that their current move is final, they must definitively signal that their move is final so that their opponent may begin their turn. The method for signaling that one’s turn has ended varies depending upon the equipment being used in the match.

Once a player has signaled the end of their turn, their move is final and is irrevocable if the move was legal. The opponent of a player who wishes to or attempts to retract a legal move that they have made must require that the move stand, even if it would be to their benefit to permit the retraction. An illegal move must be handled in accordance with section [4.2.3](#).

The rules of the game of backgammon do not permit any player to pass their turn. If a player signals the end of their turn without having rolled the dice and there exists any dice roll that would permit them to move a checker, then they have illegally passed their turn and both players are obligated to require that the offending player take their turn as required. Illegally passing one’s turn is not considered to be an illegal checker move; it is a different type of rule violation and therefore cannot be condoned under a Responsible Moves policy.

4.1.6.1 When Using a Game Clock

When using a clock, players must hit the clock to end every turn, even if no play is possible.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

In backgammon, a player's turn is comprised of three phases:

1. Doubling cube actions. The player on turn may double. If they choose to double, then their opponent must either accept the double and continue the game or reject the double and the game is over.
2. Roll the dice. The player on turn must produce a valid roll of two dice.
3. Move the checkers. The player on turn must make a legal move of their checkers.

End of Turn refers only to signaling completion of the third and final phase of a player's turn – the move of the checkers. Although players are also required to hit the clock after they have made a doubling action, doubling actions are not considered to be distinct turns in backgammon. Therefore, hitting the clock plays no part in signaling that a doubling action is final; this rule does not apply to doubling actions.

When a game clock is in use, even if solely to identify the end of each player's turn, a player signifies the end of their turn by pressing the clock button nearest them. This stops the player's time and activates the opponent's time.

Even if the player observes that it will be impossible for their opponent to move their checkers on their turn, they must still hit the clock to signify the end of their turn. Aside from clearly delineating the turns, this ensures that the player receives a full delay time for each move and that their opponent has an opportunity to point out an illegal move or consider whether to double.

If a player begins their turn and has no legal way to move any checker for any possible dice roll, such as when closed out on the bar, then after considering any possible double, they should skip rolling the dice and simply hit their clock to end their turn.

If a player hits their clock to end their turn and picks up the dice before their opponent can do so, the dice shall be handed to the opponent who is on roll, and the delay time shall be reset to the full amount. This is not a Fast Grab as described in section [4.1.7.1](#).

If a player fails to hit their clock to end one or more turns and their clock runs continuously while play continues, then that player is entitled to a restoration of lost time in accordance with section [4.3.3](#).

4.1.6.2 Playing with Two Dice (Untimed)

In an untimed game using two dice, a player ends their turn by hitting a non-expiring clock, or by tapping the bar if no clock is available.

When playing with two dice in an untimed match, the preferred means to signal the end of turns is by using an untimed game clock in accordance with sections [3.4](#) and [4.1.6.1](#). Subject to availability, an untimed game clock shall be used to signal the end of turns unless both players agree not to do so. An untimed game clock is a game clock solely used for the purpose of signaling the end of turns and indicating which player is currently on turn and not for the purpose of measuring time remaining.

An untimed game clock is the preferred method for ending turns in untimed matches using two dice because by design a game clock indicates which player is currently on turn. With some game clocks, the player on turn is physically indicated by the position of its buttons being in an up or down state; when using such a clock, it need not be turned on and counting down to serve its sole purpose of signaling end of turn. Otherwise, the game clock should be running during play. A running game clock always indicates the player on turn by virtue of which of the two clocks are currently counting down; some game clocks have an additional explicit visual indicator of the player on turn such as a light or an arrow on the display. A running but untimed game clock may be set to an arbitrarily long time to avoid timeouts or shall be reset without penalty if time expires. Any toggle device that enables players to manually signal the end of their turns and that clearly indicates which player is currently on turn shall be deemed to be an untimed game clock under this rule and shall therefore be preferred over tapping the bar as a means to signal end of turn.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

In case of dispute over which untimed game clock will be used, a game clock that visually indicates which player is on turn should be preferred over a game clock that does not indicate which player is on turn (including a game clock that is capable of such indication but does not do so because it is either turned off or not otherwise operational). If a player refuses to accept this, the TD should impose use of the untimed game clock that indicates which player is on turn.

When an untimed game clock is used, turns must be ended as described in section 4.1.6.1. Players are always deemed to have an unlimited amount of reserve time remaining when using an untimed game clock, regardless of any remaining time that the clock might display. If the time expires on an untimed game clock it should simply be reset so that it will count down again, thereby properly indicating which player is on turn.

When a game clock is not in use, a player taps the bar to signify the end of their turn. Aside from the mechanical difference of tapping the bar instead of hitting the game clock, the same protocol shall be followed as if a game clock were being used to end turns. Without the benefit of an untimed game clock to visually indicate which player is currently on turn, it is possible that the opponent may not notice that the tap had occurred and may believe that the player's turn remains in progress. If the opponent does not react, the player should simply tap again or may state "your turn" or words to that effect to gain their attention and keep the game moving.

The bar should be tapped with the fingers of an open hand, away from the edge of the board to convey the clearest signal of intent to end the turn. The rule specifies tapping the bar instead of the playing surface to end the turn because the hand moving the checkers is normally near the playing surface. Additionally, a player may commonly touch the playing surface as an aid to visualization. Thus, there is a greater chance of a dispute occurring due to a touch of the playing field that is not intended to end the turn. There is also a greater chance that an intentional tap of the playing surface might not be seen and thus cause delay. Although tapping the playing surface is common and shall be interpreted equivalently to tapping the bar as a means of signaling the end of the turn, tapping the bar is the best practice that should be followed, and players are encouraged to ask their opponents to do so. Absent evidence to the contrary, any dispute that arises because a player tapped the playing surface after having made a legal move should tend to be ruled as having signaled the end of turn if they have often been tapping the playing surface to end turns, and as having not signaled the end of turn if they have been consistently tapping the bar to end turns. Regardless, if the opponent believes that the turn has been ended and lifts the dice and the moving player fails to object to the fast grab of the dice before the dice are rolled and have begun to settle, the ruling should be that the turn had been ended.

Lifting the dice does not generally cause the turn to be ended when two dice are in use. If a player lifts the dice after making their move, they must return the dice to the board and end their turn as required, or they may continue their turn and revise their move. However, if a dispute arises over the dice roll, the player on turn who improperly lifted them will be at a disadvantage if a ruling is required. Unless either player objects, a player may end their turn by lifting the dice if and only if their opponent is closed out and has no access to the doubling cube. If the closed-out player has cube access, they may grant permission to skip the exchange of taps for the duration of the close-out. Neither player should be penalized simply for failing to follow the proper turn-ending protocol; this is commonly accepted practice. But players should consider that this increases the likelihood of a dispute due to an illegal move and creates bad habits for when a timed game clock is in use. If a dispute occurs, a player who failed to follow proper turn-ending protocol will be at a disadvantage.

4.1.6.3 Playing with Four Dice

When using four dice, players end their turn by lifting one or both dice, unless notice of repositioning is given.

When playing with four dice, a player signals the end of their turn by picking up their dice. The turn is deemed to be ended at the instant that the first die is lifted. To be lifted, the die must break contact with the surface it is on;

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

merely touching the die is not lifting it. Nevertheless, capricious handling or covering of a die may lead to dispute and should be avoided.

A player who wishes to reposition the dice without ending their turn should provide notice that they are repositioning the dice before touching them, as per section 4.1.2. If such notice has been provided, then a subsequent lifting and repositioning of the dice shall not be interpreted as signaling the end of turn. However, lifting a die with the intent to reposition after having failed to first provide notice of repositioning, may be construed as having ended the turn, particularly if this is done after having made a full move. A player who fails to give notice of repositioning will be at a disadvantage if a ruling is required.

4.1.7 Premature Actions

A premature action is a situation where the rules require that a set of actions take place in a particular order, but a player commits one of those actions too early and out of order from what is required. Often, this will occur due to impatience or bad habits. Premature actions can at a minimum be distracting and at worst can cause dispute or even represent an attempt to gain an unfair advantage. To deter such behavior, and correct bad habits, the rules in this section specify some penalties that may be applied when a premature action is committed. A player who seeks to gain an unfair advantage by attempting to trick their opponent into committing a premature action so that they may benefit from the penalty may be warned or subject to sanctions by the TD for unsportsmanlike conduct.

4.1.7.1 Premature Lifting of the Dice (Fast Grab)

If the opponent lifts a die before their time is activated (fast grab), the player may pause the clock to complete their move and/or require forfeit of the opponent's delay.

In matches using two dice instead of four, lifting the dice occurs at the beginning of the turn, prior to rolling the dice instead of at the end of the turn after moving the checkers. Therefore, because it is not yet their turn, the opponent of the player currently on turn must wait until that player's turn has been signaled as completed before they may pick up the dice. If the opponent lifts the dice prematurely (Fast Grab), the player on turn must immediately point out the premature lifting of the dice to the opponent; silently condoning the infraction is not permitted. Despite the Fast Grab, it remains the turn of the current player who has not yet ended their turn. Unless the player on turn promptly ends their turn after the Fast Grab, the dice should be returned to the board displaying their original numbers so that the current turn may be completed.

If a timed game clock is in use, two measures of relief are provided to deter a player from committing a Fast Grab. This presumes that there is no dispute over the fact of whether a Fast Grab had occurred. Firstly, after a Fast Grab has occurred, if the player who is on turn does not yet wish to end their turn, then they may pause the game clock and complete their turn while the clock is paused. A player is not required to pause the game clock after a Fast Grab, but they are entitled to do so. Secondly, the player who is on turn may require that their opponent forfeit their per-move delay time for their next move, or they may choose not to impose that penalty. If the delay time penalty is to be required, then the player on turn shall so inform their opponent prior to restarting the game clock and ending their current turn. The opponent must then wait until their delay time has counted down to zero before they are permitted to roll their dice and make their move. The delay time penalty is only satisfied if the penalized player rolls their dice after the delay has counted down to zero. If instead they offer a double or restart the other player's clock due to an illegal move, the delay time penalty remains in force and must still be assessed prior to rolling the dice. However, if a double is offered and passed, then the delay time penalty is not assessed; it does not carry over to the next game. The intent is that the penalized player rolls their dice while their reserve time is counting down rather than during their delay time. Therefore, if that roll is invalid, they must reroll without resetting their delay time. If after an invalid roll the delay time is reset, then it must again be allowed to count down to zero before rolling.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

See section 4.1.7.2, as these two Premature Actions sections are intertwined; the Fast Grab delay time penalty is not assessed whenever the Fast Roll penalty is assessed. Once low on time, the loss of delay time can be a very severe penalty, potentially causing loss of the match. Such a severe punishment is not the intent of the Fast Grab penalty. To mitigate such an impact, the player who committed the Fast Grab may choose to preempt imposition of the delay time penalty simply by rolling their dice prematurely and accepting the penalty imposed by the Fast Roll rule; that penalty is intended to be more severe than for a Fast Grab, but that is not the case when time is very low. The opponent or the TD should point out this option to an offending player who is low on time prior to imposing the delay time penalty. While players must not knowingly violate any rule, or condone a rule violation, a Fast Grab and Fast Roll are deemed to be two symptoms of the same rule violation – an act to commence ones turn prematurely. Once a Fast Grab violation has occurred, proceeding to roll is not considered to create a second rule violation; it only changes the applicable penalty.

A player is cheating if they knowingly attempt to induce a Fast Grab so that they may claim a penalty – for example, by making the motion of hitting the clock without having physically hit the clock. While intent is difficult to prove, the opponent should first explain to the player that they caused the fast grab by appearing to hit the clock and should not claim the penalty. If the player insists upon claiming the penalty, the opponent may call the TD, explain the details and ask for a ruling. There is a difference between a hand that moves toward the clock and a hand that moves in very close proximity to or even touches the clock's button. In the latter case, the TD should tend to deny the penalty and warn the player who caused the confusion.

In matches played with two dice that either use an untimed game clock, or no game clock, a time penalty cannot be imposed. The TD should use their judgment regarding issuing further warnings, but in general has the authority to impose penalties on any player who repeatedly violates the rules. Compelling the offending player to complete the premature action infraction by rolling their dice prematurely, and thus be subject to the penalty of the Fast Roll rule is a suitable course of action if the problem recurs after warnings have been issued.

4.1.7.2 Premature Rolling of the Dice (Fast Roll)

If the opponent rolls before the player ends their turn, the player must point it out and state their choice: the roll stands or must be redone; they may then revise their move. This is in lieu of any delay time forfeit for a fast grab. A player who repeatedly fails to point out a premature roll may lose the option to require a reroll.

The opponent of the player currently on turn must wait until that player's turn has been signaled as completed before they may roll the dice. If the opponent rolls prematurely, the player on turn must immediately point out the premature roll to the opponent; silently condoning the infraction is not permitted. The player on turn has the option of allowing the opponent's roll to stand and may revise or complete the move based on the foreknowledge of the opponent's premature roll. Alternatively, the player on turn may refuse to accept the player's premature roll and instead require the player to roll again once the current turn has been signaled as completed. This prohibition and handling of premature rolls applies in all circumstances including, for example, if the initial roller's play is forced, if the initial roller rolls a number that prevents a checker on the bar from re-entering the opponent's home board, or if both players are bearing off checkers with no possibility of contact. The intention of this rule is to encourage players to be patient and wait until the opponent has signaled end of turn before beginning their own turn because players who roll prematurely will wind up with worse rolls than players who don't.

If one player repeatedly allows the other to roll prematurely and move without fulfilling their obligation under this rule to comment, warn, or object about the infraction, then absent reasonable justification for the prior failures to object, that player should be penalized by the TD with the loss of the right to require a re-roll with respect to the current premature roll, and should be warned that their failure to object to each and every premature roll is itself a rule violation. Of course, the player rolling prematurely should similarly be warned regarding their infractions. Continued failure to consistently object to future premature rolls may result in the permanent loss of the option to require a re-roll for any later challenged premature roll; that player may still revise their move with the foreknowledge of the premature roll, as a continued disincentive for future premature rolling.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

A Fast Roll most commonly occurs when four dice are being used since the opponent of the player on turn already has their dice in their cup ready to be shaken and rolled the moment that their opponent has made their play. If the player who is on turn reaches for their dice as if to end their turn but then doesn't physically pick up the dice, this might induce their opponent to roll prematurely and be subject to the Fast Roll penalty. Of course, the opponent should be patient and be certain that the dice have been lifted before they roll. However, the TD may take the aborted lift into account during any dispute, particularly if the player on turn has established a pattern of aborted lifts that induce premature actions. It is unsportsmanlike behavior to abort a dice lift in the hopes of gaining an advantage by inducing a Fast Roll.

Though far less common, a Fast Roll may also occur when two dice are being used. Because the dice are not already in the cup, any premature action to begin the next turn tends to be stopped at the Fast Grab phase, as described in section [4.1.7.1](#), including potential penalties. Nevertheless, a Fast Roll may still occur after the Fast Grab. If a Fast Roll occurs when two dice are in use, then the typically more severe Fast Roll penalty described above is assessed for the premature action instead of the less severe loss of delay time penalty that may be required when a Fast Grab occurs without an accompanying Fast Roll. As noted in the Fast Grab section, a player who is very low on time and prefers not to accept the loss of delay time penalty may intentionally Fast Roll and accept the penalty for that action instead. Once a Fast Grab violation has occurred, proceeding to roll, even intentionally is not considered to create a second rule violation; it only changes the applicable penalty.

4.1.7.3 Premature Roll That Preempts a Double During a Close-out

When a player has completed a close-out, their opponent can no longer move, and therefore should no longer roll the dice. However, if their opponent has cube access, they may still double on their turn. In such a situation, the rolling player might complete their turn, lift their dice, and then roll for their next turn before their opponent has had the opportunity to double.

When a timed game clock is in use, even during a close-out, the players must each continue to end their turns normally by hitting the clock or tapping the bar. However, if the player who is not closed out breaks from this protocol and lifts their dice instead of hitting their clock, or hits both clocks to preempt their opponent's turn, they have committed an infraction; the closed-out player must stop play to point out this infraction. If the offending player has proceeded to roll the dice, the closed-out player may still consider doubling. If they wish to consider doubling, they must advise their opponent of this fact and their clock shall be activated while they think, however the potentially premature roll shall remain on the board and shall stand if no double is offered because the roll did not preempt a double. If a double is offered and accepted, then the roll has preempted the double, is deemed premature and must be redone. If a double is offered and passed, then the game ends and the premature roll is moot. It should be apparent that the player who is considering doubling after a potentially premature roll can make that decision with the foreknowledge of the roll that will be in effect if they choose not to double.

When a timed game clock is not in use, it is commonly accepted practice for the normal protocol for taking turns to be relaxed and for the player who is not closed out to keep rolling and moving until they no longer have a close-out, and their opponent can move again. Given this, there is in practice no breach of protocol that we can enforce if a roll preempts a double. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the players to proactively follow best practices to avoid such problems. If the closed-out player wishes to consider doubling at any time during the close-out, they should ask their opponent in advance to hold their next roll or similarly signal intent non-verbally such as by holding their hand out over the board where the opponent would normally roll the dice. Such a request or signal should typically be made as the opponent nears completion of the turn in progress but prior to any attempt to begin their next turn. Any roll that was made after the opponent has conveyed such notice should be deemed to be void.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.2 CHECKERS AND MOVES

4.2.1 Errors in the Starting Position

A checker setup error must be corrected if noticed before the third valid roll of the game, or if agreed thereafter; the last valid roll's move may be replayed.

This rule applies only to errors in the initial placement of the checkers. Errors in initial doubling cube position are addressed in section [4.4.1](#). Errors in scorekeeping are addressed in section [4.6.3](#).

An error in the starting position must be corrected immediately if the error is noticed before the third valid roll of the game. That means once both players have completed one full turn and the next player rolls the dice validly on their second turn, correction is no longer mandatory. If the opponent doubles or makes an invalid roll, that does not end the mandatory correction period. Even if a double has been accepted or rejected, possibly accompanied by a resetting of the board and scoring the game, the mandatory correction period remains in effect until a valid opening roll of the next game.

If the error in setup involves a player starting the game with fewer than 15 checkers and no correction is subsequently made, then those missing checkers shall remain out of play for the remainder of the game. In such a situation, the missing checkers have not been borne off; therefore, the player with missing checkers can still potentially lose a gammon or a backgammon as per section [4.5.3](#).

Later corrections may still be made if both players agree to do so and are able to agree upon the method of correction. If the error is detected later and the players do not agree to correct it, then the erroneous starting position and all subsequent play shall stand, and the game will continue to completion from the existing position. An uncorrected error in the starting position does not render any subsequent checker moves to be illegal if they would otherwise be legal. Thus, playing under the Legal Moves rule does not create a legal or moral obligation to correct an error in the starting position after the mandatory correction period has passed.

When an error in the starting position is to be corrected, the following sequence of steps shall be followed: the clock shall be stopped; the checkers, dice and doubling cube shall be reverted back to the state that existed after the last valid dice roll but before any checkers were moved (even if that player has already ended their turn or a cube action has occurred); the error in the starting position is corrected; the clock's delay time is reset and the clock is restarted; the player on turn completes their play; thereafter, play shall continue normally. It is the intent that if the last player has completed their move, but the next player has not yet validly rolled, that the entire play just completed, along with any intervening cube action is undone. If the player who made the last move does not wish to modify their move due to the correction, it is acceptable to forego undoing of the last move and correct the setup error directly upon the existing position. The intent is that a player who had already finalized their move for the last valid roll is entitled to fully replay their move after the correction but is not obligated to do so. Their opponent should not benefit from waiting until they have ended their turn before pointing out the setup error.

To correct the error in the starting position, all checkers that were misplaced when the game started must first be identified. All checkers that should have started the game on the board but that started the game off the board are misplaced. If a point started the game with too many checkers, then the surplus represents misplaced checkers. If any checkers from such a heavy point had been moved, then the misplaced checkers are deemed to be among those checkers that remain on that point. Once those checkers have been identified, they shall be moved to the point or points from which those checkers were missing when the game started. In no case shall such a correction involve rolling back the game state to any point prior to the last valid roll.

Because the mandatory correction period ends when the third valid roll occurs, each player will have completed at most one move of the checkers and the player who moved second may redo their play after the correction is made, as if only the very first move of the game had been made. The standard method for correction should therefore be obvious and straightforward in all cases under this rule. However, if a dispute arises over the fairness of applying this standard method of correction in a particular situation, then TD may be called to make a ruling.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Making a correction later than the third valid roll is allowed in accordance with the above method, provided that both players agree to do so and agree upon how to make the correction. Lacking full agreement, a late correction shall not be made and the error in the starting position shall stand for the remainder of the game. An error in setup does not in and of itself render any subsequent move to be illegal. Therefore, playing the match using the Legal Moves rule does not oblige any player to agree to make a late correction due to an error in setup.

An error in the initial setup in which the board is set up validly, but where the home boards are on the opposite side or the checker colors are reversed from the original board setup agreed at the beginning of the match shall not be considered to be an error in the starting position under this rule because the initial position was a valid initial backgammon position. Such a setup error shall be corrected by flipping the current position symmetrically so that the home board and checker colors are on the proper side; players may agree to leave such an error in setup uncorrected and continue the game as is, with the setup used for the next game reverting to the configuration agreed at the beginning of the match unless both players agree otherwise.

4.2.2 Move and Checker Handling Requirements and Best Practices

Every move must be played legally, in accordance with the rules of the game of backgammon. The Rules state some requirements and best practices for move and checker handling. Players must follow these requirements and should follow the best practices when moving and handling their checkers. In general, even if not explicitly stated, any action that increases the likelihood that an illegal move or a dispute will occur should be avoided. to minimize any possibility of a dispute over where the checkers originated (the original position) and what move was made. This section enumerates these requirements and best practices.

Repeated violations of this section that cause confusion or dispute should result first in a warning from the TD, and subsequently in any sanctions that the TD deems just and appropriate.

When a rule uses the word “must”, it is stating a requirement. That means if a player’s movement or handling of the checkers fails to adhere to such a requirement, their opponent is obligated to point out their infraction and require that they correct it, which usually means refraining from future infractions of that nature. If the opponent points out such failures, they are not being nitpicky, they are doing what they are obligated to do. When a rule uses the word “should”, it is stating a best practice. A player is not obligated to point out such a failure, but may do so, and should do so if it is creating confusion.

4.2.2.1 Moves

A player must move checkers clearly to a specific location, using one and the same hand throughout their turn (including hitting the clock).

The goal when moving is to avoid causing confusion and for both players to be able to follow the move being made with minimal effort. Some players might believe that if the final position at the end of their turn is legal, they have done nothing wrong; they are mistaken. While the result must be valid, that result must be achieved solely by making a series of discrete, unambiguous checker movements in a specific order, each of which is a legally valid act according to the rules of the game. The ends do not justify the means.

A player must move checkers clearly to a specific location. This means that each checker movement made must be from its current position directly to its destination position, meaning that the destination of any full or partial move must correspond exactly to one or more of the dice to be played. To avoid ambiguity regarding position, checkers should be placed and maintained so that they are centered on their points rather than drifting toward one of the adjacent points. A player should not hold any checker in their hand for an extended period while making a move. A checker should be moved directly to its destination or returned to its origin.

Checkers on the bar must be re-entered into play before any other checker may be moved. Conversely, checkers that have been hit must remain on the bar until they are able to be re-entered into the game in a legal manner.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

A checker that falls off the bar must promptly be returned to the bar. A checker that has been borne off must be moved outside the perimeter of the playing surface. These are rules of the game of backgammon and therefore doing otherwise automatically creates confusion.

Players must take care not to disturb any other checkers that are not involved in the move being made, and if a disturbance occurs, it must be promptly rectified.

A player must use only one and the same hand to move all checkers until the turn is completed and must use that same hand to hit the clock when applicable. The other hand should be kept away from the playing surface. Using two hands gives the players more simultaneous actions to follow, thus creating more opportunity for error or foul play, while also clouding intent and creating more ambiguity. A player may change the hand that they use from one turn to the next but must then use that same hand for the entire duration of that turn.

In a match that permits consulting between team members such as consulting doubles, only one and the same team member must ever touch the game equipment for the duration of each game. The team member responsible for handling the game equipment on behalf of a team may be changed between games. Between games, any team member may touch the game equipment.

4.2.2.2 Handling of Checkers

A player must keep borne off checkers away from the playing surface and must not touch any checkers during the opponent's turn.

There is enough room for error, accidents, mix-ups, and disputes purely through the complex process of a player making their move in backgammon. So, it is important that effort be taken to avoid any other means of erroneously altering the game's position.

Checkers borne off, omitted or erroneously removed from play must be kept away from the playing surface of the board until the end of the game. Such checkers must be placed outside of the perimeter of the playing surface and not on the bar, either into the bear-off tray or other storage area of the board or onto the game table. Such checkers must never be left anywhere on the playing surface, even if clearly separated from those checkers still in play. A player must not hold borne off checkers in their hand for any significant length of time. This helps avoid the accidental reintroduction of checkers into the game. Building high vertical stacks of borne off checkers near the board must be avoided because a checker might fall onto the playing surface. A stack two checkers high should typically be the limit.

The only player who is permitted to touch the checkers while a game is in progress is the player who is currently on turn. The player who is not on turn must not touch any of the checkers and must not assist their opponent by placing their own hit checker onto the bar. If the player who is not on turn believes that there might be a problem with the position or the move being made, they should inform their opponent, stopping the clock, if necessary, until the problem is resolved. If there is any dispute remaining as to a checker's position either before or after a move, or regarding the legality of a move itself, the TD should be called. The intent of this rule is to prevent confusion and dispute due to potential alteration of the position by the player not on turn. Therefore, while not explicitly stated by the rule, the player not on turn must also not touch the dice or doubling cube without prior discussion with the player on turn.

4.2.2.3 Checker Shuffling; Testing of Alternative Plays

These Rules do not employ touch-move, or any variation of that. The reason for that is that backgammon is a highly visual game, and it is commonly accepted practice that the player on turn may temporarily move the checkers to examine one or more candidate plays before making a final move and signaling the end of their turn. It is believed that introduction of a touch-move rule would pose a barrier for entry of many social players into organized competition. This permitted shuffling of the checkers, if unregulated, introduces many opportunities

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

for the position to be erroneously altered, and for an illegal move to be made. Many of those errors can result from the players losing track of what the original position was, not noticing that a moved checker was returned to the wrong location, or that a moved checker was not returned to the original location before another play is made. To minimize the likelihood that any error of position or move is introduced into the game, players should follow the best practices stated in this rule when making their moves, particularly, when a play is not yet final or if they wish to test alternative plays.

While these rules state best practices (“should”) rather than requirements (“must”), players who cause confusion by failing to follow these best practices should have their bad habits called out by their opponents, who should instruct them on proper checker handling practice. Undisciplined checker shuffling is the single biggest source of confusion and dispute in competitive backgammon and so guiding players to improve their habits by conforming to best practices stated by the rules provides a benefit to the players, the tournament and the game. If a player is unable or unwilling to make their moves in a less confusing manner, the TD may be called to provide instruction, issue a warning, assign a match monitor or impose any additional regulations or penalties that they believe is necessary to address the problem.

4.2.2.3.1 Offset Moved Checkers

If a play is not final, a moved checker should be offset above its intended destination.

When making a move that is still under consideration rather than being final, the player should place the checkers being moved at least 1 centimeter (1/2 inch) above any checkers that are already on the destination point or an equal distance from the base of the destination point if that point is empty. Offsetting all moved checkers in this manner clearly differentiates the moved checkers from the unmoved checkers, and therefore leaves no question about which checkers must be moved back to restore the original position, if another play is to be tested. Only when the player is ready to signal the end of their turn should the offset checkers be shifted to their final position against the rail or the other checkers on the same point. Any such shifting to remove the offset must be done before the turn is ended rather than after because a player is not permitted to touch the checkers once it is their opponent’s turn.

The key to understanding the intent of this rule is the word “final”. If a player is not certain that they will end their turn with the moved checker on that point, then the move is not final in their mind and the checker should be offset until they become certain. Really, it is not even that one checker move that should be certain to forego offsetting, but that the entire move being made should be certain in case the original position must be restored. It is possible that under a future rule, offsetting might become a requirement rather than just a best practice; such that any checker move that is completed without an offset will be deemed to be final and irrevocable, so players should now condition themselves to make their moves with that mindset, even though the current rule is more forgiving. While such a rule change has been proposed, as have many other touch-move variations, nobody should infer from this that any such rule change is planned or likely.

4.2.2.3.2 Restore the Original Position Between Alternative Plays

The original position should be restored before making another play.

The player should make moves for candidate plays slowly and otherwise in a manner that minimizes difficulty for the opponent to understand what is taking place. If a player wishes to look at a different play, then all checkers should first be returned to their original location, then the checkers may be moved for the alternative play. Even if the player is certain about the move for one die and all alternatives being considered are variations of moves for the other die, all checkers should still be restored to their original position for the sake of clarity and consistency. Every move under consideration should therefore come about legally – in full, directly from the original position. When reverting a candidate move back to the original position, each checker that had been moved should be played in reverse according to the dice roll to bring it back to its origin. No checkers should be removed from their destination point until the origin of all moved checkers has been identified based upon the

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

dice roll. If players lose track of the post-move position due to uncontrolled shuffling, they may be unable to restore the original position.

4.2.2.3.3 Hitting a checker

After a checker is hit, it must be placed on the bar prior to ending the turn. If the hit checker remains on its original point after the turn has been ended, then the checker shall not be considered to have been hit. If a non-hitting play resulting in the same position is not otherwise legal, then the move shall be deemed to be an illegal move and shall be handled accordingly. While the players shall not be deemed to have violated the rules if a hit checker accidentally left on its original point is placed on the bar after the turn has been ended, the opponent has no legal or moral obligation to permit this.

Placing a hit checker on the bar destroys all information about which point the hit checker originated on, which could make it difficult to restore the original position. The following best practices retain information about the origin of a hit checker while a play being made is not yet final.

- The hitting checker may temporarily be placed on top of the hit checker.
- The hit checker may be temporarily moved into the center of the board, aligned with but completely removed from the point it was originally on.

Either of these alternatives allow the resulting position to be visualized without the loss of information about where the hit checker originated. Only when the player is ready to signal the end of their turn is the hit checker moved to the bar. Both methods temporarily create an invalid backgammon position, either because there are two opposing checkers on the same point, or because a checker is on the board but is not on any point. Thus, if the turn is accidentally ended in such a state, the position must be rendered valid before play may continue by placing the hit checker on the bar where a hit checker belongs. Although these practices create invalid backgammon positions, they are not considered to violate the rule that cautions players not to create ambiguity because they preserve more facts than the alternative of immediately placing the hit checker on the bar.

4.2.2.3.4 Disputes

If a dispute arises as to the original checker location due to checker handling inconsistent with the above best practices, then absent other evidence to the contrary, the TD should resolve any uncertainty against the player who moved the checkers.

4.2.3 Illegal Moves

Only the players, the TD, or a designated match monitor or transcriber may point out an illegal move. A third-party match monitor or transcriber may be designated if both players agree, or if imposed by the TD. Spectators are required to remain silent unless asked to assist on a specific move by both players or by the TD, as discussed in section [1.6.1](#) which identifies one exception. Ethical play should be presumed, but players and spectators can and should privately bring suspected irregularities and other concerns to the attention of the TD or, if the TD is unavailable, a Tournament staff member.

4.2.3.1 Obligation to Point Out Illegal Checker Moves

Both players must point out all illegal checker moves.

Players are obligated to immediately point out any checker move made by themselves or by their opponent that does not conform to the rules of backgammon. This means that if a player notices an illegal move, they must immediately call attention to it; they must not remain silent. This requirement takes effect after the player who made the illegal move has ended their turn. However, it is permitted to draw attention to any potential illegality in moving the checkers prior to the turn being ended. For example, if a player rolls a 35 and proceeds to move one of their checkers 2 pips, then that partial move is clearly illegal because they did not roll a 2. Similarly, if a player has a checker on the bar and begins to move a checker on the board without entering the checker from the bar, that is clearly illegal. Pointing out an illegal move in the making is not only permitted, but encouraged

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

because it saves time and can avoid dispute – for example, if the fact of whether an illegal move was made is not agreed after the entire move has been completed.

Pointing out an illegal move does not in and of itself constitute a request to correct the illegal move. It is merely a player's statement of what they believe to be the fact. The subsequent sub-sections discuss the details regarding any correction of illegal moves.

There is no time limit placed upon the requirement to point out an illegal checker move. Even if several turns have passed, if a player notices that a previous illegal move has been made, they must still point it out.

4.2.3.2 Rule Option: Legal Moves vs. Responsible Moves

Rule option: the TD shall set a policy of either Legal Moves or Responsible Moves.

[USBGF Supplement] Legal Moves shall apply unless the TD announces a Responsible Moves policy in advance.

Although any illegal move must always be pointed out in accordance with section [4.2.3.1](#), this rule permits the TD to set a policy for their tournament that defines which of two mutually exclusive rule options shall be in effect. The first option, the so called “Legal Moves” rule, requires that all illegal moves be corrected. The second option, the so called “Responsible Moves” rule, permits the opponent to condone an illegal move.

The USBGF has established a standard policy of Legal Moves, which shall apply in all cases where a TD has not announced a Responsible Moves policy for their tournament in advance.

4.2.3.2.1 Legal Moves

Legal Moves: All illegal moves must be corrected if noticed before the opponent has made a valid roll.

Whenever the Legal Moves rule option is in effect, all illegal checker moves that are noticed by either player before the next valid roll of the dice has occurred must be corrected in accordance with section [4.2.3.3](#). This rule establishes both an obligation for players to correct illegal moves as well as a time limit after which correction is no longer mandatory. The obligation to correct an illegal checker move means that a player must not condone any illegal move that they notice before the mandatory correction period ends. Correction of an illegal move is no longer mandatory once the opponent of the offending player has made a valid roll of the dice. If the opponent doubles or makes an invalid roll, that does not end the mandatory correction period. Even if a double has been accepted or rejected, possibly accompanied by a resetting of the board and scoring the game, the mandatory correction period remains in effect until a valid opening roll of the next game. If the opponent is closed out and does not roll their dice, then the mandatory correction period shall end when the offending player has made their next valid roll of the dice. The intention is to allow the maximum amount of time for correction to occur without permitting any player access to future information before deciding whether to point out and require correction. Unlike the rule regarding [4.2.1 – Errors in the Starting Position](#), the Legal Moves rule does not state that both players may agree to make late corrections after the mandatory correction period has lapsed.

The Legal Moves rule option is philosophically aligned with the ideal of good sportsmanship and to foster a culture that is welcoming to players; that players should self-referee their matches with integrity to ensure that the rules are followed, and that the outcome of each game of backgammon is the result of one's choices as constrained by the dice rolls rather than allowing the misreading of the dice roll or similar visual failings to become a factor in play.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.2.3.2.2 Responsible Moves

Responsible Moves: If an illegal checker move occurs, the opponent must either require it to be corrected or to stand. No other type of infraction may be condoned.

Whenever the Responsible Moves rule option is in effect, after any illegal move has been pointed out as required, the opponent of the offending player must either announce that they require the illegal move to be corrected or that they require that the illegal move shall stand. This rule explicitly allows the opponent to condone a rule violation. However, it does not permit the opponent to do so silently. They must explicitly state that they are choosing to condone the illegal move. The same mandatory correction period is applicable whether Legal Moves or Responsible Moves is in effect as described in section [4.2.3.2.1](#), except that requiring correction is an option for the opponent rather than an obligation and the offending player has no right to compel correction. Once the opponent rolls validly, they may no longer require that an illegal move be corrected.

Notwithstanding any policy of Responsible Moves that is in effect for the tournament, a designated match monitor is empowered to require correction of any illegal checker move that they might observe or that is brought to their attention by the players. The TD is implicitly a designated match monitor for all matches at the tournament and may therefore require correction of any illegal checker move that they may observe or become aware of. Based upon that implicit authority, the TD may define limitations that shall apply to the Responsible Moves policy such that certain types of illegal actions involving the checkers must always be corrected. For example, a TD may choose to always require correction of any so called “Impossible Move”, the most common example being when a player places their own checker on the bar.

When the Responsible Moves rule option is in effect, players may agree to play as per the Legal Moves rule. Effectively, such players are simply agreeing that in accordance with their permitted choice under the Responsible Moves rule, they will always choose to require correction of any illegal move and will never choose to allow any illegal move to stand. Any such agreement is deemed to be consistent with good sportsmanship and shall not be interpreted as collusion amongst the players involved. However, violation of such an agreement is poor sportsmanship. The TD is under no obligation to enforce any such Legal Moves agreement made between the players, though the TD may agree to do so. Players so agreeing should note Legal Moves on their scorecard. A player who has agreed to play Legal Moves may honorably revoke such agreement at any time, provided that such revocation is not accompanied by an attempt to avoid correction of an illegal move that has just been made.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Responsible Moves rule only permits the opponent to condone an illegal move of the checkers. This rule does not give any player license to condone any other type of rule violation that might occur during play. It is a very common misconception that Responsible Moves permits a player to take advantage of any kind of rule violation that their opponent might make to their detriment, for example: doubling while leading 1-away during the Crawford game. That is not the case. While such license could never be logically inferred from the first sentence, this rule’s second sentence explicitly states that no other type of infraction (aside from an illegal checker move) may be condoned to dispel any such misconception.

The Responsible Moves rule option is philosophically aligned with an ideal that backgammon is a skill game that demands concentration and focus and that players must bear personal responsibility not only for their choice of plays, but also for any misreads or miscounts that they might make that result in an illegal move that is to their detriment.

4.2.3.3 Correcting an Illegal Move Prior to the Next Valid Roll

Correction requires reverting to the original dice roll and position and resuming play from there.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

This rule covers the situation where correction of an illegal move is required during the mandatory correction period - after the offending player has ended their turn having made an illegal checker move, but before their opponent has rolled their dice validly. The procedure is the same regardless of whether correction is required because Legal Moves is in effect and correction is mandatory, or if Responsible Moves is in effect and the opponent chose to require correction.

If a correction of an illegal move is required, the opponent of the offending player shall point out the illegal move and may hit their clock to reactivate the offending player's time. Either player may pause the clock for any reason related to the alleged illegal move and should pause the game clock whenever the correction will take place after the offending player's dice have been lifted from the board, due to the greater complexity of such a situation.

If the players agree on the facts, then the illegal checker move, and all subsequent game actions shall be undone. The checkers, dice, doubling cube, and match score shall revert to the game and match state that existed after the offending player rolled their dice, but before the illegal move took place. The offending player's time is restarted on the game clock, with a full delay time. The offending player shall then make a legal move, and the game shall continue normally. Rather than fully reverting to the original position, if it is clear to both players that the illegal move was a simple case of one checker being moved the incorrect number of pips, the offending player may shift that checker to the legal location. Similarly, if the players agree that an illegal move has occurred but cannot agree on how to restore the original position, they may make a surgical correction to the ending position if they agree that it results in a legal move.

If the players are unable to agree on the facts, they may summon the TD to mediate a solution. If the TD is unable to determine the facts with sufficient precision to allow for a fair correction to be made and presuming that the opponent did not raise any objection about this potential illegal play prior to the turn being ended, then the TD should rule that the play that had been made when the turn was ended stands. The opponent is always permitted and in fact encouraged to raise an objection to any potential illegal move in the making before the turn is ended. If the opponent is the player being disadvantaged by the illegal move, they could have objected earlier. Thus, in the absence of any such objection having been raised and having potentially allowed the moving player to remove any offsets in the checkers that they would help recreate the original position, and having potentially lifted the dice to remove evidence of the dice roll, the burden of proof tends to shift to the opponent to make their case regarding any correction to be required. On the other hand, if the offending player is the one claiming to be disadvantaged by their own illegal move, but they cannot make a convincing argument for the facts, then allowing the play to stand works to the detriment of the player who caused the dispute.

The Rules do not entitle the offending player to restoration of any game clock reserve time that they might have consumed while making the illegal move.

4.2.3.4 Correcting an Illegal Move After the Next Valid Roll

The Rules do not authorize two players to agree to make corrections for illegal moves that are discovered after the next valid roll has been made. Once the dice have been rolled validly, any illegal move that may have been previously made shall stand. The intent is not to consider two players who agree to make such a late correction to be colluding and guilty of an ethical violation. However, if the TD is called upon to rule in case of any dispute, they should rule that the illegal play stands. In no case shall players undo any previous roll of the dice or previous legal moves.

4.2.3.5 Illegally Passing a Turn

A player who is in a position where moving their checkers is impossible, such as by having a checker on the bar closed out might illegally pass their turn once the condition preventing their movement is removed, such as the closed home board being reopened. Most commonly, such a player habitually hits their clock during the close out and then continues to do so by habit once they can move again.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Illegally passing a turn is a rule violation that is distinct from an illegal move of the checkers because passing one's turn is outright against the rules of backgammon and an illegal checker move requires a dice roll, which has never occurred. Although the handling of this kind of illegal action is being covered here due to the common context, such an illegal action is not within the scope of the Illegal Moves rules listed in section [4.2.3](#). Therefore, because passing a turn is not an illegal checker move, it must never be condoned by the opponent even if Responsible Moves is in effect. By rolling their dice, the opponent has failed in their obligation under section [1.1.6](#) to point out the infraction and when a clock is in use, they have also violated their obligation under section [4.3.3](#) which requires that a game clock that is running against the wrong player must be pointed out and corrected; they are obligated to restart their opponent's clock so that they may take their turn. Thus, the opponent is not free from responsibility. For this reason, and because illegally passing a turn may occur so quickly and so easily, correction shall require reverting back to the position that existed when the turn was illegally passed and continuing play from there. Correction of an illegally passed turn in this manner shall be mandatory until either the offending player rolls their dice on their next turn or again illegally passes their next turn. The TD should enforce this interpretation and method for correction of an illegally passed turn if called upon to make a ruling.

4.2.3.6 Correcting Invalid Backgammon Positions

When an "illegal move" results in a configuration of the checkers on the board that represents an invalid backgammon position, that position must always be corrected and rendered valid whenever it is detected, without any time limitation on mandatory correction and even if Responsible Moves is in effect. If noticed before the next valid roll it must be corrected in accordance with section [4.2.3.3](#), and otherwise in a manner agreeable to both players. If the players are unable to agree on a suitable correction, the TD shall take appropriate corrective action. While this class of illegal move is not specifically addressed by the rule, it should be clear that upon discovery of such a condition, the invalid backgammon position must never be condoned, and that the position must be revised so that it is both valid and playable. The following are examples of impossible positions: both players have checkers located on the same point; a checker is on the playing surface, but it is not clearly positioned on any specific point; both players have a checker on the bar against mutually closed boards.

4.2.3.7 Checker Illegally Removed from Play

If a move has been made in which a checker has illegally been removed from play, and that illegal move is not corrected, then the illegally removed checker is not considered to be borne off; the offending player can still lose a gammon or a backgammon. The illegally removed checker shall remain out of play for the remainder of the game. The handling of this situation is the same as in section [4.2.1 - Errors in the Starting Position](#) when the game begins with one or more checkers off the board and that error is never corrected.

4.2.3.8 Penalties

No time or other penalty is explicitly prescribed for making an illegal move. Repeated violations of this section shall result first in a warning from the TD, and subsequently in any sanctions that the TD deems just and appropriate. To be clear, and blunt, a player is cheating if Legal Moves is in effect, they are aware of this rule, notice an illegal move, whether their own or their opponent's, but then choose not to immediately point it out.

If a player is very low on time, an illegal move may occur due to the time pressure. If called for a ruling, the TD should attempt to assess whether the illegal move was unintentional and due to sloppiness resulting from rushed play or was intentionally committed to stop their clock from running and gain a full delay time if they are required to correct it. Mere sloppiness should be tolerated if it does not become repetitive and disruptive to the match. A warning or penalty should be assessed for intentional attempts to circumvent the time control. However, the TD should keep in mind that such an intentional illegal move is in a different category than usual because the offending player is not doing so with the hope of getting away with the illegal move; they have likely done so in panic and intend to correct it if indeed the illegal move was not to their disadvantage and condoned.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.2.4 Settlement Agreements or Use of Future Knowledge Are Prohibited

Except as provided in these Rules, all games and matches must be played to completion in strict accordance with the rules of backgammon. Players must not collude or otherwise agree to alter the normal sequence of random dice rolls, legal moves based upon those dice rolls, and positions resulting from those moves that comprise a complete and proper game and match. Players must neither agree to end a game or match, nor alter an existing checker and cube position, nor agree on any non-random dice roll based on a negotiated settlement agreement.

It is also prohibited, for any moves to be made with the foreknowledge of future events, such as by agreeing that one player is to be given the “best play” of a specific roll where said “best play” would only be determined and made after the other player’s next roll and move are known. Any such agreements are prohibited and shall be considered invalid and unenforceable.

4.3 GAME CLOCKS

4.3.1 Handling of the Game Clock

A player must use one and the same hand throughout their turn (including hitting the clock).

To end the turn, a player must hit the game clock with the same hand that was used for moving the checkers. This helps to avoid confusion by making it easier for the opponent to follow the sequence of events and helps to ensure that the position is not altered in the process of ending the turn. Hitting the game clock with the other hand still signals the end of turn, however the opponent must inform the offending player that they have violated the rule and are required to use the same hand.

4.3.2 Stopping the Game Clock

Clocks must not be stopped except in limited situations, most notably between games, when a die gets away, and during a dispute.

Stopping the game clock is only permitted in the eight circumstances listed below.

- (a) When a game has ended. The game clock must be stopped between games;
- (b) During breaks. The game clock must be stopped during breaks, which can potentially occur mid-game. If one or both players are leaving the game table, both players should write down the game clock times on their scorecards.
- (c) When a die falls on the floor or otherwise gets away from the players and must be retrieved. Once either player leaves their seat to search for the missing die, the game clock must be stopped;
- (d) When there is a dispute, or if the TD is called. Any situation where the players must suspend play to resolve confusion, determine the facts or establish the relevant rules shall be considered to represent a dispute. The game clock should be stopped if discussion regarding a dispute by the players continues for more than a few seconds, and must be stopped if the reserve time is decrementing or once it is decided to summon the TD;
- (e) When a player must return the game dice to their opponent after having lifted them when ending their turn in accordance with section [4.1.6.1](#), though the delay should just be reset if the transfer is efficient;
- (f) When a player has committed a Fast Grab, having picked up the dice before the opponent has ended their turn in accordance with section [4.1.7.1](#);

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

- (g) When a player notifies their opponent of an alleged illegal move that has taken place in accordance with the provisions of section 4.2.3; and
- (h) When a player wishes to resign or claim the game currently in progress in accordance with the provisions of section 4.5.

4.3.3 Errors in Clock Management

Players must immediately announce and rectify any instance where the clock has been set incorrectly, is not paused when required or is running against the wrong player. A player is entitled to restoration of lost time if their clock was not hit or paused when it should have been.

Both players are responsible for properly setting and managing the game clock throughout their match to ensure that it is assessing time against the appropriate player and not operating during any of the circumstances listed in sections 4.1.6.1 or 4.3.2. Both players are obligated to immediately announce any instance when noticing that the game clock has been set with an incorrect amount of reserve or delay time, is running against a player at a time when the clock is required to be paused or is running against the incorrect player. Any such error must be corrected.

Game clocks are intended primarily to ensure that matches are played on a level playing field and proceed at a suitable pace, not as opportunities for one player to take advantage of another player's faulty clock management. A player who is aware of this rule and deliberately allows their opponent's time to run when it should not be running is cheating. When the TD becomes aware of time management errors, they should instruct and warn the players on their obligations under this rule and should sanction any player who they believe has intentionally caused or failed to announce any such irregularity.

If the game clock was incorrectly running against a player and has resulted in a meaningful loss of time, they are entitled to restoration of any lost reserve time. In the process of any such correction, a player whose time was not running when required might be subject to an adjustment by the TD. The intent of this rule is that the clocks for both players should always mirror what an infallible timekeeper would show on their clock, and that any significant deviation from that due to errors in clock management may be corrected. If both players agree on the proper adjustment, they may adjust the clock if they feel capable of doing so. In case of a mishap, it is best to note the clock times before adjusting the clock. Another knowledgeable person may be enlisted by the players to assist with adjusting the clock. Otherwise, to claim this time restoration when uncertainty remains, the TD must be called immediately. The TD shall then rule regarding how much time is to be restored on the game clock based on all available information from recording devices, the players, and any witnesses, estimating a fair time adjustment if necessary. For the sake of efficiency, the TD may defer making the clock adjustment and instead promise to apply the agreed or determined time adjustment later in the match, only if it turns out that the extra time is needed. The players may similarly agree to defer making the clock adjustment if they have settled the dispute without having called the TD. Any such agreement should be recorded on the scoresheets. However, players are forewarned that such an agreement to defer adjustment is dependent upon the clear communication and honor between the players. If a dispute over any deferred adjustment arises later, the TD may be called to adjudicate and should consider any claimed agreements along with any other facts that are available.

Ultimately, if there is any dispute over whether an error in time management has occurred and by extension, the question of whether a player is entitled to a time adjustment, the burden of proof and to make a convincing argument for time restoration to the TD falls upon the player who is requesting that lost time be added to their clock. The argument from a player that they do not play slow and should not have so little time left is not a convincing one. The best time to appeal for time restoration is immediately after the error occurred when memory is fresh, and the related facts can be clearly articulated. Players must be vigilant and must pay close attention to their remaining clock time throughout the match so that they do not time out without being aware that their time was low.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

When a close out occurs and the players neglect to continue hitting the clock to end turns, the player who is moving will have been denied their per-move delay time and will therefore have consumed extra reserve time. They are entitled to restoration of that lost time. While the fair adjustment can only be determined with the knowledge of the facts regarding the number and nature of moves played without hitting the clock, a few generalities apply to any such correction. The lost reserve time is exactly equal to the amount of delay time that would have been used had the players been hitting the clock to end turns. It is reasonable to presume that the average amount of reserve time lost per move will not be less than 6 seconds, nor can it ever be more than the per-move delay time. Moves played during a close-out will tend to be straightforward, without significant thinking time being required, and in the situation at hand, no additional time was consumed to hit the clock. Therefore, it should be estimated that 6 seconds of reserve time was lost per move, if there is no other information to suggest that a larger number is more appropriate for the circumstance. It is also necessary to determine or obtain a best estimate for the number of turns that were not properly ended by hitting the clock. The number of seconds of reserve time to be added back is then 6 seconds times the estimated number of turns that were completed without the clock having been hit.

4.3.4 Consequences of Reserve Time Expiration

A player loses the match when it is noticed that their reserve time has expired, unless they can then validly claim the game and match.

The purpose for using game clocks in backgammon match play is to create a level playing field via a fixed budget for thinking time so that the tournament is kept on schedule and to create an enjoyable playing experience for the players. The purpose is not to provide players with an alternate way to win the match aside from reaching the designated match length first. Aside from so called “speed” events, the standard time controls are intended to be sufficient for players to complete their matches at a comfortable pace without running out of time. While players are ultimately responsible for a failure to properly manage the use of their reserve time, it is best for the game that whenever a time expiration occurs, the player was at least aware of the fact that they were low on time. Therefore, as a matter of generous sportsmanship, players noticing that their opponent has less than one minute of reserve time remaining on their clock are encouraged to provide a one-time warning to their opponent that they are low on time.

Reserve time is deemed to have run out when one of the players, or a member of the Tournament staff correctly announces that a player’s reserve time has expired. If a player’s time has run out, play must cease immediately, and the game clock must be stopped if the non-timed-out player’s time is currently active. If a player notices that their own time has expired, this rule is still applicable and to continue play is a rule violation; therefore, they must announce it. If it is determined that the expiration might have been caused by an error in clock management as covered by section [4.3.3](#), the TD must be summoned and shall first apply the rules related to that section. Unless the TD makes a time adjustment that eliminates the expiration, the timed-out player is first given an opportunity to claim the game according to the provisions of section [4.5](#). We can assert that any timeout will have occurred while the timed-out player’s clock was running; therefore, this claim shall be assessed based upon the board state that existed at the last moment when the timed-out player’s time was activated – generally, at the moment of announcement if they are currently on turn, or at the end of their last turn if they are not currently on turn. This means that no dice roll or checker movement by the opponent is relevant to the claim assessment if the opponent is on turn. The TD has discretion to invalidate the claim if it can be conclusively determined through available evidence that the expiration occurred before a valid claim could be made; such evidence constitutes the notice of reserve time expiration referred to by the rule. If the claim is valid, the score shall be updated accordingly. If the updated score decides the match in favor of the timed-out player, then that player is the match winner. Otherwise, the timed-out player loses the match, and their opponent is the match winner, regardless of the current score. In summary, a valid claim prevails over a loss on time if both conditions exist simultaneously. If the reserve time of both players has expired before anyone announces the expiration of time and it is not possible to determine which player timed out first, then the remainder of the match shall be played with a nominal amount of reserve time reinstated on both players’ clocks as shall be determined by the TD.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

As described in detail in section [3.4.4](#), if the TD has specified that the reserve time shall be divided into two banks of time, then reserve time has not run out when a player has depleted their primary time bank. If that happens then their secondary time bank shall be added to their clock, and they shall continue the match. Only when their secondary time bank is depleted shall their reserve time be deemed to have run out.

4.4 DOUBLING CUBE

4.4.1 Initial Position of the Doubling Cube

At the start of every game, a single doubling cube shall be positioned with the '1' or '64' or other non-numeric side facing up and centered either to the left side or right side of the board, off the playing surface. If the center of both sides of the board is occupied by equipment such as a game clock on one side and a baffle box on the other side, then by mutual agreement of the players the doubling cube may initially be placed to either side of or behind the game clock or baffle box or centered on the bar. If the doubling cube has not been placed in such a "centered" position, then it must be centered as soon as either player notices the error. There is no time limit for correcting an error in initial doubling cube placement. The initial value of the doubling cube is always deemed to be '1' and its initial position is always deemed to be centered and owned by neither player, regardless of where the doubling cube is physically located and which cube face is physically pointing upward, prior to any doubling cube action. As noted in section [1.6.1](#), a spectator may point out an error in initial cube position directly to the players before the opening roll of the game has been played. After that point in time, spectators should inform tournament staff rather than the players regarding any perceived error in initial setup. During the "Crawford" game (see section [4.4.8](#)), the doubling cube should be removed entirely from the board area to clarify that it is not in play, but regardless of its physical position, the doubling cube is deemed to not exist during the Crawford game. No other doubling cubes should be in plain view within the playing area during a match.

4.4.2 Current Cube Value

The correct and current value of the doubling cube is defined to be 2 to the Nth power, where N is the number of times that the doubling cube has been legally offered and accepted during the current game. At the start of each game, N is 0, and the cube value is 1. Only during the time interval between the offer of a double or a redouble, but prior to a take/pass decision shall the value displayed for a non-centered cube be anything other than the current cube value. While the cube is being offered, the value displayed shall be the value at which the cube is being offered – that being one level higher than the current value.

This correct and current cube value holds and is in force, regardless of whatever number is physically displayed on the doubling cube at any moment in time. If either player notices that the cube value displayed for a non-centered cube is not the same as the current cube value, the error must first be pointed out; if the opponent agrees regarding the error, it must be corrected immediately in accordance with section [4.4.10](#). The correct scoring of the game at its conclusion is based on the current cube value at that time, not any value that is erroneously displayed.

4.4.3 Current Cube Position

When each new game starts, the correct and current position of the doubling cube is 'unowned and centered' and shall be physically positioned as described in section [4.4.1](#). After player A (player B) has accepted a double or a redouble, the correct and current position of the doubling cube is 'owned by player A' ('owned by player B') and shall be physically positioned off of the playing surface in or around one of the two corners of the board nearest to player A (B) so that it is clearly visible to both players and obvious by its physical position that the cube is owned rather than centered and that the owner is Player A (B). Many boards have a special compartment near the bear-off tray that serves this purpose.

This correct and current cube position holds and is in force, regardless of wherever the doubling cube may be physically located at any moment in time. If either player notices that the cube's physical location is inconsistent

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

with the current cube position, the error must first be pointed out; if the opponent agrees regarding the error, it must be corrected immediately in accordance with section [4.4.10](#).

4.4.4 Proper Time for Doubling and Redoubling

A player may only offer to double the game's current value at the beginning of their turn, prior to their first attempt at rolling the dice. Once the dice have been rolled, even if the resulting roll was invalid, a double is prohibited for the remainder of that turn. An attempt at rolling is deemed to have been made if the dice cup was turned over and at least one die has emerged, or if at least one die touches the baffle box when dropping the dice directly from the hand. If a die emerges from the dice cup during shaking, an attempt to roll has not been made.

Either player may offer an initial double of the game's value. Once a player accepts a double, that player takes sole ownership of the doubling cube at the increased value. Thereafter, only the player who owns the cube may offer to redouble the game's current value to the next higher level. A player is said to have access to the doubling cube either when that player owns the cube, or when the cube is unowned and centered because an initial double has not yet been made by either player. A player is said to have no access to the doubling cube when that player's opponent owns the cube. Only a player who has cube access to the cube may double. While cube access is a necessary condition for doubling, it is not sufficient – there are other conditions that disallow doubling, as described in sections [4.4.8](#) and [4.4.9](#).

4.4.5 Actions that Constitute Doubling and Redoubling

If a player touches the cube or makes any statement or gesture that reasonably implies an intention to double, then they must double at that time, or on their next turn if not yet legal. Merely reaching for the cube does not by itself imply an intention to double. A player wishing to move the cube without doubling must state that intent prior to handling the cube.

4.4.5.1 Best Practice

A player should convey that they are making an initial double by placing the doubling cube on the playing surface to the right-hand side of the bar so that the side of the cube facing up shows the value of '2' being offered (the physical act) and by simultaneously saying the words "I double" or similar language (the verbal act). Although it is best practice for a player to perform both the physical act and the verbal act when doubling, either the physical act or the verbal act alone is sufficient to constitute a valid double to which the player is bound. Once made, the verbal act should then be followed by the physical act, unless the opponent has already passed the double in response. Any subsequent redouble should be handled in the same manner; the cube value currently in effect is increased by a factor of two when placed on the playing surface to show the new value being offered.

In matches using a game clock, after a player has doubled, they must immediately hit the clock to activate the opponent's time so that the opponent, is "on the clock" while considering whether to accept or reject the offered cube. If the player who doubled fails to hit their clock, the player who has been offered the double must not knowingly allow their opponent's clock to continue running, and if aware must instruct their opponent to hit the clock as per section [4.3.3](#). At a minimum, the doubling player's delay time should be reset when the double is accepted if the accepting player first notices that their clock was not running at that time. However, in cases where the double and take are nearly instantaneous actions, the players are not obligated to exchange hits of the clock in order to reset the delay time on the doubling player's clock.

4.4.5.2 Binding Actions, Gestures and Statements

At a time when it is legal for a player to double, if that player has touched the cube, then they are deemed to have doubled; if that player has made any other statement or gesture that reasonably implies an intention to double, then they are deemed to have doubled. Merely reaching towards the cube without physically touching the cube does not imply an intent to double; therefore, a player who has reached toward the cube without touching it has not doubled, absent other accompanying evidence of intent to double.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

The intent of this rule is to the greatest extent possible define a clear and non-subjective test for whether a player has doubled. The act of touching the cube has been established by this rule as that test; the player has either touched the cube or they have not. Although one may argue that reaching implies an intention to double, this rule explicitly states that it does not. A rule that is specific to a particular circumstance always prevails over a more general rule. Pointing directly and steadily at the cube is not the same physical gesture as reaching for the cube and shall generally be interpreted to imply an intention to double.

Once a player has touched the cube or otherwise conveyed an intention to double, they are considered to have doubled at that instant; the double has still occurred even if the player does not subsequently place the cube on the board or hit the game clock. The acts of placing the cube down and hitting the game clock facilitate clear communication and proper time keeping, but those actions are not required to confirm or finalize a double.

Retracting a double is prohibited. The opponent of a player who wishes to or attempts to retract a double that they have made must require that the double stand, even if it would be to their benefit to permit the retraction. This is no different than a player seeking to change their legal move after they have ended their turn. It is prohibited.

If a player wishes to move, reposition or reorient the cube without the intention of doubling, then the player must first state “repositioning the cube” or words to that effect prior to handling the cube. Otherwise, the act of touching the cube might be construed as an act of doubling. If the cube’s physical position or displayed value was incorrect and the player who handled it without doubling was attempting to correct that error, the TD should take that into account if called to rule during any dispute that might arise. However, that player is responsible for causing the dispute by failing to make their intentions clear in advance, so the burden of proof to show that they had no intent to double falls on them.

4.4.5.3 Premature Actions and Statements

If a player who has access to the doubling cube performs the verbal or physical act of doubling before it is legal to do so, or verbally states that they are going to double, or words to that effect, then that player must double at the first legal opportunity to do so. If a player becomes so bound to double on their next turn, their opponent is entitled to first finish their turn, revising their play if desired, with the foreknowledge that the opponent will be doubling on their turn. There is nothing in the rule that precludes the “evidence of intent” regarding a double decision from including conditional statements of intent; such conditional statements of intent are binding if the stated condition is met. For example, if a player states: “if you hit me, I will double”, then they are bound to double if they are hit but are not bound to double if they are not hit.

The intent behind this rule is to deter players from capriciously handling the doubling cube when they cannot legally double, engaging in distraction, misleading statements, intimidation or other psychological warfare against their opponent regarding future use of the cube. This is achieved by compelling them to follow through on any such premature actions or statements that they might make.

As an exception, if the verbal or physical act of doubling is performed by a player during their turn, after they have made an invalid dice roll but before they have made a valid roll, that double is late rather than premature and is null and without effect. That player should be told that it is too late to double as per section [4.4.4](#). However, if instead of attempting to double during this period, the player states that they will double on their next turn, then they are bound to do so. As a second exception, if a player prematurely states that they are going to double while the cube is in its initial, centered position, and their opponent subsequently doubles before the player’s next turn, the player is no longer bound by their stated intention to double, because their implied intention was to make an initial double from 1 to 2 and not a redouble from 2 to 4.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.4.6 Actions that Constitute Accepting or Rejecting the Cube

Absent other evidence of intent, a take or pass occurs when the cube is placed down outside the playing surface.

4.4.6.1 Best Practice

A player should convey that they are accepting a double by moving and placing the doubling cube down in their 'owned cube' position (see section [4.4.3](#)), located on the side of the board nearest to them, off the playing surface with the new cube value showing face-up (the physical act) and saying "I take" or similar language (the verbal act). A player should convey that they are rejecting a double by returning the cube to its initial, 'centered' position (the physical act) and saying "I pass" or similar language (the verbal act). Although it is best practice for a player to perform both the physical act and verbal act when accepting or passing a double, either one alone is sufficient to constitute a valid take or pass to which the player is bound. Once made, the verbal act must then be followed by the physical act. Any subsequent takes or passes should be handled in the same manner.

In matches played using a game clock, the player after accepting a double shall immediately re-activate the opponent's time so that the opponent is once again "on the clock" for purposes of the game continuing. If the player passes the double, the game clock must immediately be paused until the start of the next game. If the player who has taken or passed the cube fails to hit or pause the clock as required, their opponent must point that out and ensure that the error in clock management is corrected as per section [4.3.3](#) because the player's action has been completed and it is either the opponent's turn or the game is over regardless of the state of the clock.

4.4.6.2 Binding Actions, Gestures and Statements

If a player who is considering accepting or rejecting a double makes any other statement or gesture that reasonably implies an intention to accept or reject the cube, then the player shall be deemed to have so acted. Regarding the physical act, absent accompanying evidence of intent, no take or pass decision is implied by the lifting of the doubling cube, or by moving the doubling cube in any direction. It is the act of placing the doubling cube down outside of the playing surface, combined with the location at which that touch-down of the cube occurs that commits the player to either a take or a pass decision. The player deciding whether to take or pass may therefore reposition the cube on the playing surface without notice. The intent of this rule is to the greatest extent possible define a clear and non-subjective test for whether a player has taken or passed the cube. The act of placing the cube down outside of the playing surface has been established by this rule as that test; the player has either placed the cube down or they have not. Placing the cube down outside of the playing surface makes conclusive and irrevocable the fact that a cube action has occurred. The location at which the cube was placed down determines whether a take or a pass has occurred. As discussed in more detail in section [4.4.3](#), If the cube is placed down in 'centered' position, then the cube has been passed; if the cube has been placed down in an 'owned' position, then the cube has been accepted and is owned by the player who so acted. Typically, placing the cube down in any position that is not 'centered' but is on the acting player's side of the board shall be interpreted as an action to take the cube. Other unambiguous actions in response to a double that convey the intent to begin a new game such as updating the score or starting to reset the checkers are generally interpreted as intent to pass the double. If no prior intent or explanation had been expressed, hitting or pausing the game clock conveys the intent to take or pass the double respectively.

Once a player has placed the cube down outside of the playing surface or otherwise conveyed an intention to take/pass the double, they are considered to have taken/passed the double at that instant; the take/pass has still occurred even if the player does not subsequently hit or pause the game clock. The act of hitting or pausing the game clock ensures proper time keeping, but that action is not required to confirm or finalize a take or pass.

Retracting a take or pass decision is prohibited. The opponent of a player who wishes to or attempts to retract a take or pass action that they have made must require that the take or pass action stand, even if it would be to

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

their benefit to permit the retraction. This is no different than a player seeking to change their legal move after they have ended their turn. It is prohibited.

If the player who was offered the double makes two distinct actions that indicate opposite intent, the first action taken shall prevail because that action is irrevocable, rendering the second action irrelevant. For example, if a player says: “I take” and then proceeds to center the cube, then the action to take shall prevail over the action to pass. Such a player can of appeal to the TD to allow their second action to stand, but the burden of proof is on them to show that the second action reflected their original intent rather than a change of heart. A disconnect between one’s true intent and a verbal act shall typically be considered more plausible than a disconnect with a physical act, so if the physical take/pass act occurs first, which for this purpose might include unambiguous physical actions like scoring the game or resetting the board, it will almost never be proper to overturn it.

4.4.6.3 Premature Actions and Statements

Prior to being doubled, if a player states their intention to take/pass the cube, then that player is bound by that statement and must so act if the opposing player doubles at their next legal opportunity to do so. Any such obligation to act ends once the dice have been rolled by either player. If a player becomes so bound to take/pass on their opponent’s next turn, the opponent may consider whether to double with the foreknowledge of that player’s take/pass decision. There is nothing in the rule that precludes the “evidence of intent” regarding a take/pass decision from including conditional statements of intent that precede and anticipate the act of doubling; such forward-looking statements of intent are binding. For example, if a player states: “if I miss the shot, I will drop”, then if they miss the shot, they are bound to drop a double if offered on their opponent’s next turn but are not bound to any action if they do not miss the shot. The intent here is the same as regarding premature doubling actions – see section [4.4.5.3](#).

4.4.7 Ambiguous and Inappropriate Cube Handling

Players who handle the cube in a capricious, confusing, or careless manner are at risk for unfavorable rulings. If there is any ambiguity in the way a player handles the doubling cube or in their actions, statements, or gestures regarding offering or accepting a double, then the TD should resolve any dispute caused by that uncertainty against the player who created it. All actions that relate or that might be perceived as relating to the cube should be deliberate and direct; actions, statements and gestures that are non-committal should be avoided. A player who reaches for the cube or performs any other action with the goal of drawing a reaction from their opponent prior to committing themselves to a cube decision, or who knowingly allows the cube to remain at the wrong level, is acting contrary to the spirit of the game and with bad sportsmanship and may be subject to sanctions by the TD. Players should avoid reacting to actions that are ambiguous or inappropriate and should not hesitate to warn their opponent for taking such actions or to inform the TD if such actions persist.

4.4.8 Crawford Rule

The doubling cube is removed from play for the first game after either player is exactly one point away from winning the match (the Crawford game). Any cube action during the Crawford game or with a dead cube is void.

The so-called “Crawford Rule” shall apply to all tournament matches, meaning that the doubling cube will be out of play for the first game, and only the first game, after either player has reached a score that is exactly one point away from winning the match (“the Crawford Game”) based on the match length in effect. The doubling cube should be physically removed from the board during the Crawford Game to prevent its accidental introduction into play, but regardless of its physical location, the doubling cube is not considered to be part of the game equipment during this game and therefore all cube actions are prohibited. The correct and current cube value during the entirety of the Crawford game is always ‘1’, regardless of any other physical cube state that might be erroneously displayed at the board, and even if the players fail to realize that the current game is the Crawford Game. During the Crawford Game, while neither player has access to the doubling cube, gammons and

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

backgammons will continue to count as two and three points, respectively. After the Crawford Game has ended, the doubling cube shall be returned to play for allowable use in any subsequent “post-Crawford” games. If the TD concludes that either player has offered or accepted a double with intent to violate its prohibited use during the Crawford Game, then the TD should sanction the offending player in the form of penalty points, match forfeiture, and/or Tournament disqualification.

4.4.8.1 Erroneous Acceptance of Crawford Game Double

If a player erroneously doubles during the Crawford game, and the other player accepts, then the double shall be retroactively deemed void, and the match shall continue as if the erroneous double had never occurred. If the irregularity is detected after the Crawford Game has ended, it shall be treated as an error in scoring; the number of points awarded for the Crawford Game must be corrected to reflect the actual number of points required to be awarded for the game’s outcome using a cube value of ‘1’. For more details on the handling of errors in scoring, refer to section [4.6](#).

4.4.8.2 Erroneous Pass of Crawford Game Double

If an erroneous Crawford game double is passed, then the pass shall be retroactively deemed void. The Crawford game shall resume with the cube removed based on the checker position that existed when the improper double was made, with any doubts resolved against the player who made the illegal double. If necessary, any game currently in progress shall be suspended while the Crawford Game is completed. After completion, the score must be corrected to reflect the actual number of points required to be awarded for the game’s outcome using a cube value of ‘1’. Provided that the correction does not end the match, the match shall be played to conclusion as post-Crawford, first resuming any game that had been suspended from the point of suspension.

If it is not possible to approximate the checker position that existed when the improper double was made and no other fair solution can be devised, then the TD should declare the entire Crawford Game to be void as if it had never been played, with any points originally scored for the voided game decremented from the relevant player’s score. The number of points scored for all other games shall not be modified since none of those games are deemed to be the replacement Crawford Game. The current game, if one is in progress, and otherwise, the next game, shall then be played as the Crawford Game, with the cube removed from play and using a cube value of ‘1’ to score that game once completed. After that replacement Crawford Game has been completed, the match shall continue, if necessary, with all subsequent games being post-Crawford. While the player who had scored the win due to the pass of the Crawford Game double is being penalized by having that game nullified, they are at fault for illegally doubling during the Crawford Game and serious rule violations may result in serious consequences.

4.4.9 Dead Cubes

The cube is dead for a player who would win the match by winning the game at the current cube level. Any cube action with a dead cube is void.

A player is prohibited from offering the cube when its current value is sufficient to guarantee that they will win the match simply by winning the game (non-gammon). In such a situation, the cube is deemed to be “dead” for that player. A dead cube still maintains its current value and position; however, the player for whom it is dead is deemed to no longer have cube access and therefore it is illegal for them to offer a double. A cube being dead for one player does not imply that it is also dead for the other player, so if the cube is centered, one player might have cube access while the other player does not.

The following are examples. If the score is 7-5 in a 9-point match, and the leader is holding a cube having a value of ‘2’, then the cube is dead for that player and they are prohibited from redoubling to ‘4’ because if they simply win the game, they will receive 2 points at the cube’s current value and will thereby win the match 9-5. However, if instead, the trailer is holding the cube at ‘2’, the cube is not dead for that player, and they may freely

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

double because they will not win the match simply by winning the game. If the score is 8-5 in a 9-point match, the Crawford game has already been played and the cube is centered, the cube is dead for the leader because they only need 1 point to win the match, which is the current cube value, but the cube is not dead for the trailer because they cannot win the match simply by winning the current game.

In the case of an erroneous double by a player for whom the cube is “dead”, that double and any further cube action shall be deemed invalid and void and dealt with in the same manner as an erroneous double during the Crawford Game (see section [4.4.8](#)), with the prior (dead) cube value determining the number of points scored for the prevailing player. The opponent of a player who offers a “dead” cube must immediately point out the irregularity; the illegal double must never be condoned. A player who knows that a cube action is illegal and must not be condoned yet permits it to stand anyway is cheating and may be sanctioned as such by the TD.

As an example, it can never be legal for a player to lose a match by passing a double because that can only happen if an illegal double with a dead cube had previously occurred and had been illegally condoned. If this situation occurs, then not only is the current double invalid, but so was the previous double, since it will have occurred on a dead cube. The original dead cube double and all subsequent cube actions are void and must therefore be corrected as described above.

4.4.10 Cube Displayed or Turned to Incorrect Level

The doubling cube must always be returned to its proper position and level if an error is agreed.

Any situation in which the doubling cube’s displayed value and physical position does not match the currently correct cube value and position as defined in sections [4.4.2](#) and [4.4.3](#) respectively, must be corrected. The cube’s official value and position for purposes of scoring and legal play shall always be as described in those sections regardless of any alternate physical reality that might exist at the board. Such discrepancies if not promptly corrected may result in dispute, illegal actions and scoring errors. In no case is an incorrect physical state ever considered to be correct simply because it isn’t noticed or because too much time has passed.

If either player notices such an error in cube value or position, they must first inform their opponent of the discrepancy they believe to exist. Only if both players agree that the current physical value or position of the cube is incorrect shall the error be corrected. Otherwise, the TD may be called to help resolve the dispute. It is critical that such discrepancies not be ignored because the passage of time can make the facts more difficult to determine. Ultimately, if the TD is unable to establish sufficient evidence or doubt to justify a ruling to the contrary, the current physical value and position of the cube shall prevail. If the players agree on the facts regarding the number of times the doubling cube has been offered and accepted, or if the TD renders a judgment on that number, then any error in the currently displayed value must be corrected accordingly. Similarly, if a game has ended on the pass of a double, the score must be corrected in accordance with section [4.6.3](#) if the final cube value is determined to be different from what was used for scorekeeping.

If a player doubles when it is legal to do so but presents the cube at an incorrect value (*i.e.*, to a value other than twice the correct current value), or if the opponent accepts or rejects a double at an incorrect value, then the cube action will be deemed valid, but at the correct value instead of at the incorrect value.

4.4.11 Automatic Doubles, Beavers, and the Jacoby Rule

For the avoidance of doubt, additional doubling rules that sometimes apply in the context of social backgammon play (including but not limited to “automatic doubles,” “beavers,” and the so-called “Jacoby Rule”) are not applicable to the commonly accepted rules of backgammon match play and therefore are not permitted in tournament backgammon. Any such improper change in the cube value shall be void and must be corrected whenever it is noticed that such an irregularity has occurred. If a player doubles because they incorrectly believed that they cannot otherwise benefit from winning a gammon due to the Jacoby Rule, that double shall stand because it was offered legally. Automatic doubles and beavers are cases of cubes being turned to the incorrect

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

level and are handled as such in accordance with section [4.4.10](#). Failure to score a gammon or backgammon because the Jacoby Rule was illegally applied is an error in scoring and is handled as such in accordance with section [4.6.3](#).

4.5 COMPLETION

All games, and matches must be played to completion unless ended by the pass of a valid double, by the expiration of a player's clock reserve time, or in non-contact positions by the resignation or valid claim of a single game, gammon, or backgammon. Otherwise, only the legal bear-off of a checker saves a gammon.

The rules of backgammon match play must be strictly followed, and in general, all aspects of the match must continue under those rules to their natural and legal conclusion, except as noted below. All games and matches must be played to completion unless ended either by the pass of a valid double, the expiration of a player's game clock reserve time, or in non-contact positions the resignation or valid claim of a single game, gammon, or backgammon. Intentionally making anything other than a complete and legal move of the checkers is a serious violation of the rules, regardless of whether the opponent is permitted to condone such a move. Otherwise, the players are not permitted to agree on the outcome of a move, a game, or a match (see section [4.2.4](#)). Players must not agree to roll back the game or match to any point in time prior to the last valid roll. Except as provided in section [4.8](#), all matches must be played to their designated match length.

4.5.1 Conceding the Game

Once contact has been completely broken between the opposing checkers, a player may concede (resign) the game as a single game, a gammon, or a backgammon. Contact is also considered to be broken in any position where it is impossible (not merely unlikely) for the conceding player to win the game via legal play, for example: having a checker on the bar against two checkers remaining on the ace point. The concession may be offered by a player at any time during their turn: before rolling, after rolling, or after moving one or more checkers. Except as noted below, a player may accept a concession by their opponent even if there exist dice rolls that could result in a more (or less) favorable outcome for the conceding player. If the concession is accepted, the game shall immediately end and is scored the same as if the game had been played to completion and had ended with the conceded result. By implication, and as an exception to the above, a player is prohibited from conceding an outcome that is, according to the rules of backgammon, precluded by the current position – to concede a gammon, the conceding player must not have borne off any checkers; to concede a backgammon, the conceding player must also have at least one checker in their opponent's home board or on the bar. If the player being offered the concession is unsure about whether to accept the offer, they may pause the game clock to consider the offer and may make a counteroffer. If the concession is not accepted, the game clock is restarted, and the game continues. Players are on notice that the TD may sanction any player judged to be unreasonable and thereby causing delay to the match and the tournament. It is unreasonable to refuse to accept a concession that is instantly obvious as being the most severe outcome possible, and it unreasonable to concede a less severe outcome while knowing that a more severe outcome is possible.

4.5.2 Claiming the Game

Once contact has been completely broken between the opposing checkers, a player may claim the game as a single game, a gammon, or a backgammon. Contact is also considered to be broken in positions where it is impossible (not merely unlikely) for the claiming player to lose the game via legal play. The claim may be made by a player at any time during their turn: before rolling, after rolling, or after moving one or more checkers. The claim may also be made by a player when it is noticed that the time on their game clock has expired (see section [4.3.4](#)), even if it is not their turn. If the claim is determined to be valid, the game shall immediately end and is scored the same as if the game had been played to completion and had ended with the claimed result. A claim is defined to be valid if the claiming player would achieve the claimed outcome (or better) if the game were to continue with the claiming player rolling 1-2 and their opponent rolling 6-6 on all future rolls. If the opponent

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

disputes the claim, the players should generally continue playing until the outcome becomes clear and the opponent concedes or accepts another claim. However, either player may summon the TD to adjudicate the dispute. The TD may make a ruling on the validity of the claim. In the case of a claim made at the time of a game clock expiration, either player may challenge the TD's ruling, and insist that the claim's validity be determined through play, in accordance with its definition, as stated above; given that such a ruling decides the match, the TD should indulge any such challenge. Players are on notice that the TD may sanction any player judged to be unreasonable and thereby causing delay to the tournament. It is unreasonable to refuse to accept a claim that is instantly obvious as being the least severe outcome possible, and it is unreasonable to claim a more severe outcome while knowing that a less severe outcome is possible.

4.5.3 Saving Gammon

Otherwise, only the legal bear-off of a checker saves a gammon.

To save gammon, the rules of the game of backgammon require a player to legally bear off at least one checker after having moved all checkers into their home board. Due to an error in the starting position or an illegal move in which a checker was improperly removed from play, it is possible for a player to have fewer than 15 checkers on the playing surface without having ever legally borne off a checker. A gammon or a backgammon may still be lost despite such an error unless and until that player legally bears off a checker. This rule makes the above interpretation of the rules of backgammon explicit to leave no doubt. The word "otherwise" refers to the other cases explicitly defined within section 4.5 where a gammon may be saved without legally bearing off a checker, specifically: when a single game resignation is validly accepted or claimed. When a valid double is dropped, the decision to drop and subsequent scoring is always based upon conceding the loss of a single game; the save of gammon is always implied by the drop of a double.

4.6 SCOREKEEPING

4.6.1 Recording the Match Score

Both players should keep their own running, written score.

Both players should keep their own running, written score of the match. The match score at any time comprises the total number of points accrued by each player to that point as well as the length of the match in points. The initial match score shall be 0-0 and shall increment for each player as they earn points. The first player whose score reaches the designated match length shall be the match winner. Players may use a scoreboard, but that should be in addition to, not a replacement of keeping a running, written score. The players should update their individual score sheets after each game and should verbally agree on the score before starting a new game. Before the start of the Crawford Game, the players should announce that fact to one another. To minimize the possibility of dispute, each player should maintain the running score in two columns beginning at the top of the scoresheet, writing their own score in the left column and their opponent's score in the right column, and when announcing the score between games should state their own score first and the opponent's score second. Each line on the scoresheet should show the total number of points accrued by each player during the match – so that the number of points earned in any individual game is always the difference between the score on that line and the previous line. Scoreboards may also be used in addition to written score sheets at the option of the players or at the request of the TD. A scoreboard should be positioned to either side of the game board, with a player's score displayed on the side of the scoreboard nearest to them. The placement of the doubling cube, game clock and baffle box shall take precedence over the placement of a scoreboard. The TD may require that a scoreboard not be used if there is insufficient space on the table to accommodate it.

4.6.2 Updating the Score After the Completion of a Game

The ***final game value*** is the number of points associated with the game's outcome: 1 point for a single game, 2 points for a gammon and 3 points for a backgammon. The ***final cube value*** is the correct cube value in effect at

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

the end of the game, as defined in section [4.4.2](#). The number of points to be added to the winner's score at the end of a game is the *final game value* multiplied by the *final cube value*.

4.6.3 Errors in Scorekeeping

Absent evidence to the contrary in a scoring dispute, if only one player has kept a written score, then it shall prevail; otherwise, the trailer's scorecard shall prevail. All scoring errors must be corrected when noticed, even if previously agreed by both players.

The correct and legally binding record of score is always whatever an infallible scorekeeper would show on their scorecard, and the correct score shall always prevail regardless of the record of score that either or both players have written on their scorecards. Just because both players have recorded and confirmed the same, but incorrect score after a game does not make that incorrect score binding going forward; it only makes it unlikely that the mutual error will be discovered.

Errors in scoring must be pointed out and corrected as soon as noticed. Any situation where a player is uncertain of the correct score or observes that two records of the current match score do not agree must be treated as an error in scoring. There is no statute of limitations on correcting scoring errors and thus the passage of time never renders as correct any previous agreement by both players on an incorrect score.

When a concern about scoring is raised, the facts shall be examined and it shall be determined if a game had been scored incorrectly, not scored when it should have been or if points were added to the score more times than the number of games completed. In theory, correction requires determining the correct running record of score for the match that an infallible scorekeeper would have shown on their score sheet and then revising all other records of score to match that correct record. In practice, to correct a score sheet, the incorrect line on the score sheet is first modified, deleted or added in the correct position, to show the correct number of points scored, and then the score recorded for each subsequent game thereafter is adjusted up or down accordingly. When adjusting the scores for subsequent games (and for any game currently in progress), if it is determined that erroneous doubles were unknowingly made in the Crawford Game (section [4.4.8](#)) or in Dead Cube situations (section [4.4.9](#)), then those errors must be corrected as well.

The TD shall resolve all scoring disputes with the proviso that if only one player has maintained an individual score sheet, then the information on that player's score sheet should take precedence absent uncontroverted evidence to the contrary. Some electronic scoreboard applications maintain a running record of the score that is equivalent to a written record and may be consulted by the players or by the TD in case of a scoring dispute. If both players have maintained a written score sheet of equivalent quality and the TD cannot find any evidence to support a conclusion that one is more likely to be correct than the other, then the scorecard of the current match trailer should prevail whenever the question of who trails is not itself in dispute.

If the correction to the score results in a player reaching the match length, then that player is declared to be the match winner. If the correction causes a player that had previously reached the match length to have fewer points than the match length, then the match must be resumed and played to completion from the revised score; however, if the incorrect match result was already reported to Tournament staff, the TD shall first determine whether to void that reported result in accordance with section [4.7](#) (if not voided, match resumption is moot).

As noted in section [1.6.1](#), spectators may between games directly alert the players to errors in scoring. If so, they should only point out the existence of a difference between score sheets or a potential error, while only providing more information once the players agree to ask for it. During a game, spectators should bring scoring errors to the attention of the TD.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.7 REPORTING RESULTS

Both players are responsible for ensuring that their match result is promptly reported to designated staff and verifying that the correct result has been posted on the Tournament draw sheet. The TD must be notified promptly if an incorrect result was posted; it may be corrected even if the next match has started.

When a match has been completed, the outcome must immediately be reported to the TD or to another designated Tournament staff member. The reported result will then be posted by the Tournament official on the official Tournament draw sheet.

For some tournament formats, the manual posting of a result requires recording a 'W' and 'L' (or equivalent) for the respective players. For conventional elimination bracket formats, this posting entails advancing the match winner and, if applicable, the match loser to their next match by writing the player's name on the corresponding line on the draw sheet.

Players must not themselves attempt to post any match result on official Tournament documents; only Tournament officials may do so. However, at some tournaments, the official Tournament draw sheet might be maintained electronically such as by using a website or other software. In that case, the TD may authorize players to self-report their match results directly into the software using their personal electronic devices or by other means that the TD shall specify.

Both players, if they remain alive in the event, are responsible for immediately reporting the result of their match, and for verifying that the correct result has been posted on the Tournament draw sheet. It is not necessary for a player to report the result if they have personally verified that the correct result has already been posted. However, the rule makes reporting the responsibility of both players rather than just the match winner so that if the winner fails to report, the loser must still report as a backup, thus avoiding delays to the start of subsequent matches. If an incorrect result is posted, it may be corrected within a reasonable amount of time even if one or both players have started their next match in the Tournament, provided that, in the TD's judgment, the balance of equities for all concerned parties still favors correcting the erroneously-posted result and that the tournament schedule can accommodate any delay that such a correction will cause. The failure of players to promptly report a match result might cause tournament delay by preventing the start of the next match (not necessarily their own), in accordance with section 2.2.1. A player who fails to uphold their obligation under the Rules to immediately report their match result, may be subject to sanctions by the TD, even if they are not otherwise subject to penalty points under section 2.2.5 for causing explicit delay to the next match. To be clear – a player who takes an otherwise allowed break between matches before reporting their match result is in violation of this rule.

4.8 MATCH LENGTH

4.8.1 Designated Match Length

Both players must verify the posted length of their match and must not knowingly play to another score.

Match lengths must be posted by Tournament staff on the relevant draw sheet, potentially varying between rounds. Match lengths may also be designated in writing within the official Tournament brochure, or website. TDs should take care to ensure that the match lengths documented in those official sources are consistent and should announce any necessary deviation to players in advance. To provide additional clarity to players, if the designated match length must be changed from what was published in advance, the TD should note "revised match lengths" or words to that effect on the draw sheet, in addition to writing the new match length numbers. Notwithstanding any of the above, the TD has the authority to change the length of any match as they may deem necessary to meet the needs of the tournament and should communicate any such change on the drawsheet on the bracket, or next to the round or individual match for which the revision shall apply. Absent an express directive

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

by the TD changing the designated match length based on the needs of the Tournament, the designated written match length shall take precedence over any other instructions given by Tournament staff or other players. The match length written on the draw sheet shall supersede the match length written on any other official source.

In cases where late round matches have no larger significance aside from to the players involved, in the interest of time the TD may decide to equitably settle those matches rather than have them be played.

4.8.1.1 Obligation to Verify Match Length

Players are responsible for verifying the designated match length from the draw sheet or other official source and must then play their match to the designated length, setting clock reserve time accordingly if applicable. A player who notices a discrepancy between official sources should bring that discrepancy to the attention of the TD, unless it is already clear from an announcement or other posted notice that the TD is aware of the difference, and that the match length on the draw sheet is correct.

4.8.1.2 Player Agreements Prohibited

Players must not intentionally agree to play to a score that is different from the designated match length. If the TD concludes that the players have done so, then the TD may impose appropriate sanctions against one or both players. If both players agree that special circumstances exist that could justify changing the designated match length, they may discuss the situation with the TD, who has the discretion (but not the obligation) to designate a different match length by posting such a revision on the draw sheet; only then shall the match be played to that revised match length. An example where such a match length revision might be approved is for a finals match of a side-event in which there are no interested parties other than the two players making the request. Similarly, the players may wish to not play their late-round match at all and be declared a draw. Those players must not implement such a split on their own but may similarly request such a declaration from the TD.

4.8.2 Matches Played to the Incorrect Length

Upon discovery that the match length used is wrong, any game in progress shall be completed. The match length used shall be changed to the posted value if no player has reached either the used or the posted length.

If a match is being played to the wrong length, the irregularity must be resolved in strict accordance with the rule; players must not agree to complete the match in any other manner. The phrase “posted value” shall be interpreted to mean the designated match length as defined in section [4.8.1](#). The phrase “match length used” shall be interpreted to mean the match length that is being used by the players for their match at that point in time, which will initially differ from the designated match length if this rule is applicable. Any player who is aware that they are playing to the incorrect match length and fails to disclose that fact promptly to their opponent and to the TD has committed a serious violation of these rules and is subject to sanctions. The TD may impose a remedy that deviates from this rule if they consider it likely that such an impropriety has occurred.

Particularly when matches are being played to a longer length than has been designated, a failure to correct the irregularity can cause delays to the tournament schedule. By its very nature, a match being played to the incorrect length creates a difficult situation for the players and for the TD. One player or another will necessarily be harmed to some extent, either by changing the match length or by leaving it at the incorrect length. The best that a rule can hope to achieve in attempting to resolve the situation is to protect the integrity and schedule of the tournament while minimizing the impact and perceived injustice to the players involved. Due to the many potential impacts and the complexity of the situation, the TD must be engaged. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence.

In cases where players obtained incorrect information about match length due to conflicting official tournament sources, the TD should, in the absence of concern about impact on the tournament schedule, accommodate a request if made by both players to be permitted to complete their match to the incorrect original length.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

4.8.2.1 If Noticed When a Game Is in Progress

No changes are made to resolve a wrong match length situation while a game is in progress. If it is discovered that a match is being played to the wrong length while a game is in progress, that game, and only that game, shall be played to completion with the originally used match length remaining in effect for the remainder of that game. The Crawford Rule and Dead Cubes rule continue to apply during that game, if applicable, based upon the score relative to the used match length. After the game has been completed and scored, the irregularity is then resolved as described in section 4.8.2.2. Although the match length remains unchanged while the current game is played to completion, players may make their moves and doubling cube decisions with the foreknowledge that the match length might be corrected after the current game is over; no inference of bad sportsmanship should be made from any such play that might occur.

4.8.2.2 If Noticed When a Game Is Not in Progress

If it is discovered that a completed match had been played to the incorrect match length, then the match result shall stand. In addition, if a match being played to the incorrect length is concluded by the completion of any game that was in progress at the time that the match length error was detected, then the match result shall also stand. Otherwise, lacking a completed match, the length of the match in progress shall be changed from the incorrect match length originally used to the correct designated/posted match length that should have been used if and only if neither player's current score has yet reached the designated match length. If instead, either player has already reached the designated match length, then the match shall continue to conclusion without correction using the incorrect match length originally used. Thus, the match length is only corrected in cases when the match will have at least one more full game to be played using the corrected match length. A match is never ended as the immediate consequence of correcting the match length.

If the TD believes that the tournament schedule cannot tolerate continuing play to the incorrect match length originally used, then they have justification to make a narrowly tailored exception to the rule and may require that the match length be shortened. To be narrowly tailored, the match length should be shortened as little as possible to alleviate the concern over schedule. Note that concern over the tournament schedule need not be limited to the event in question but may also include the availability of players to complete matches in other events.

This method of handling match length errors seeks to strike a good balance between the desire on the one hand to have all matches end when the designated match length is reached and on the other hand to simply allow the match to continue to the incorrect length as both players had intended in good faith and based their decisions on. If the match length gets increased by any correction, then the impact is low. If the match length gets decreased by any correction, at least the match will always continue so that both players still have some chance to win. There is no solution to this unfortunate situation that makes everyone happy.

4.8.3 Adjusted Game Clock Settings.

The TD may adjust clocks.

In all instances where the match length in use is being corrected, before play continues, the TD may make any adjustment to the reserve times on the game clock (including no adjustment at all) to best balance the needs of the tournament and fairness to the players. If the TD wishes to make a reserve time adjustment, the recommended method for determining the adjusted time is described below.

The ***basic time adjustment*** is the number of minutes of reserve time that corresponds to the number of points by which the match length is being changed. For example, if reserve time is normally allocated at 2 minutes per point of match length, then if the match length is being increased by 4 points (or decreased by 4 points), the ***basic time adjustment*** is 8 minutes.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

If the corrected match length is longer than the original match length, then the reserve time of both players should be increased by the **basic time adjustment**.

If the corrected match length is shorter than the original match length, then the reserve time should not be blindly reduced; this might cause a player to incur a time expiration, or to be extremely low on time. The TD should compute two different time values for each player and set their reserve time to the larger of the two values. The **residual time** is calculated to be equal to the player's current reserve time minus the **basic time adjustment**. The **prorated time** can be thought of as taking the number of minutes per point of match remaining that the player had managed to preserve on their clock under the original match length and budgeting them that same per point of match remaining time on their clock for the corrected match length. The **prorated time** is calculated to be equal to the player's remaining reserve time divided by the total away-points of both players based on the originally used match length, multiplied by the total away-points of both players based on the corrected match length. Each player's reserve time shall then be set to the larger of that player's **residual time** and **prorated time**.

Example: A match that was being played to 11 points is being corrected and will now be played to 7 points. The corrected match length is shorter. The score is 5-3 and Player-A has 16 minutes remaining, while Player-B has 9 minutes remaining. The match length is being changed by 4 points, so the **basic time adjustment** is 8 minutes. The **residual time** for Player-A is $16 - 8 = 8$ minutes. The **residual time** for Player-B is $9 - 8 = 1$ minute. Using the original match length of 11 points, the 5-3 score is 6-away, 8-away, for a total of 14 away-points. Using the corrected match length of 7 points, the 5-3 score is 2-away, 4-away, for a total of 6 away-points. The **prorated time** for Player-A is $16 / 14 * 6 = 6.85$ minutes. The **prorated time** for Player-B is $9 / 14 * 6 = 3.85$ minutes. For Player-A, the **residual time** of 8 minutes is larger than the **prorated time** of 6.85 minutes, so the reserve time for Player-A is adjusted to the **residual time** of 8 minutes. For Player-B, the **residual time** of 1 minute is smaller than the **prorated time** of 3.85 minutes, so the reserve time for Player-B is adjusted to the **prorated time** of 3.85 minutes.

5 DUE PROCESS: COMPLAINTS, RULINGS, APPEALS

5.1 COMPLAINTS

If players cannot quickly resolve a dispute, the clock must be paused, game materials left undisturbed and the TD summoned, who shall make a ruling.

If a dispute arises between players, that cannot be resolved within a few seconds, the game clock must be paused. Players should make an initial attempt to resolve the dispute between themselves. One of the keys to resolving a dispute is to determine the facts that are relevant to the situation at hand. Therefore, the players must not disturb the dice, checkers, doubling cube, scorecards, or any other relevant items until they are able to agree upon a solution. Sometimes the dispute may arise because of such a disturbance and the facts may become confused. For example, when a player shuffles checkers and the original position becomes uncertain. If the players are unable to resolve their dispute quickly, then they must summon the TD and must not thereafter disturb the game materials while waiting for the TD to arrive.

The TD may intervene in a match without being summoned by either player, or without a dispute existing between the players. This may be in response to the observation and report of a potential irregularity or anything else of concern about the match or players involved by any spectator or Tournament staff. As noted in section [1.1.7](#), the TD may also intervene in response to any direct observation of an irregularity, but they are not obligated to do so.

The TD shall determine the nature of the complaint, hear evidence and argument (see section [5.4](#)), and may first attempt to mediate a resolution between the players, explaining any relevant rules to the players in the hopes that both players will agree on a proper resolution, but also to educate the players in the hopes of avoiding future disputes as well as for transparency so that the players have an opportunity to challenge the TD on the substance or interpretation of any rules that may inform the TD's ruling. If challenged about the rules, the TD should have

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

ready access to the Rules document and/or this Ruling Guide and be able to point the players to the relevant text. If the dispute remains unresolved, the TD shall render a decision, and if applicable – a remedy. As described in section [1.1.5](#), if the decision relates to a violation of the Rules, the TD may also impose a penalty.

The TD, in their role as arbitrator or judge, must be impartial regarding any dispute that they are called upon to settle and should avoid conflicts of interest. Section [1.1.4.2](#) discusses these requirements in detail.

5.2 RIGHT TO APPEAL TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR RULING

An aggrieved player may promptly appeal any TD ruling and intended corrective action.

After the TD has made a ruling and explained any relevant rules to the players, both players may independently decide whether to accept the ruling or to appeal the ruling. It does not matter which player initially summoned the TD for a decision; either or both players may appeal the ruling, in whole or in part. The TD may also directly initiate an appeal on any question and may decline to make an initial ruling if doing so. Players are expected to carefully consider any explanation of the Rules and rationale for the decision that the TD provides. They may then appeal if they truly remain uncertain, unconvinced, feel that the decision is unfair or unjust, or that due to the circumstances, the application of the rule in question is contrary to the spirit or intent of the rule. Players should not appeal simply because the decision hurts their winning chances. A player who establishes a pattern of abusing the appeal process through frivolous appeals may be subject to sanctions for disrupting the Tournament. Conversely, a TD must not retaliate against a player who legitimately exercises their right to due process under these Rules. TD decisions believed to be retaliatory are also subject to appeal. However, a TD who bans a player from future tournaments or denies them entry into future events at the same tournament is generally not considered to be retaliating.

Notwithstanding the above, on occasion, a TD is faced with a situation in which it appears likely that bad sportsmanship is involved and yet the letter of the rule calls for a ruling to be made in favor of the player who acted poorly. In such a case, it might be reasonable for the TD to warn that player that they will be subject to sanctions for their behavior, if they insist upon using the rules as a weapon for unfair gain. For example, suppose that a player deliberately attempts to trick their opponent into committing a fast grab to claim the associated penalty by pretending to have hit the clock without having physically hit it. In that situation, the TD is not retaliating in response to being challenged but is acting to defend the integrity of the game and to obtain a fair and just outcome.

No overt action is required by the players to accept the TD's ruling; they simply carry out the decision and resume play. An aggrieved player wishing to appeal any ruling made by the TD must do so promptly. To appeal a ruling, the player must explicitly state to the TD that they wish to appeal and explain which aspect(s) of the ruling that they are appealing if their appeal does not apply to the entire ruling. In most situations, any appeal should be made before any further tournament play that is affected by the ruling has occurred. If a player continues to object to the TD's ruling but does not state that they wish to appeal, the TD should remind that player that they have the right to appeal in case they are not aware of that right.

In general, all rulings made by the TD are subject to appeal. However, because the TD is responsible for the safety of participants and for maintaining an environment in the playing area that is conducive to play and enjoyment by the attendees, the TD may require a disruptive or dangerous participant's removal from the playing area. If the concern is disruption due to the heat of the moment, or a concern for safety that might be resolved, then the TD may require the player's temporary removal and that any appeal process take place outside of the playing area. If the TD rules that an individual must be permanently removed for reasons of safety and shall not be permitted to return or has summoned security or law enforcement to remove a disruptive individual, then such a decision shall be final, and no appeal shall be permitted.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

5.3 RULING COMMITTEE

The TD shall convene a Ruling Committee of 3 or 5 qualified and impartial players to independently consider evidence and argument, and by majority vote may reverse, or modify the TD's ruling. All persons involved in the dispute are entitled to make relevant representations to the TD or Ruling Committee.

An appeal lodged in accordance with section [5.2](#) shall be heard and decided by a Ruling Committee formed as provided in section [1.3.2](#). The Ruling Committee shall hear the appeal as soon as possible and ideally, before the TD has imposed any sanctions on affected players for alleged violations of these Rules.

The Ruling Committee will collect evidence, hear argument, and discuss the questions at hand. If the TD had directly initiated the appeal without making an initial ruling, then notwithstanding any statements to the contrary below, they may fully participate in all activities of the Ruling Committee; otherwise, the activities of the Ruling Committee shall be conducted independently of the TD aside from the role that any party to the dispute or witness might be required by the Ruling Committee to play in the investigation. Upon convening the Ruling Committee, it is appropriate for the TD to provide them with a summary of the known facts about the situation, the ruling that was made, and the aspects of the ruling that are being appealed. This should be done in the presence of both players, who should have an opportunity to comment regarding any perceived inaccuracies or omissions regarding the TD's summary. This summary is for the purpose of expedience, to quickly bring the Ruling Committee up to speed with what is known. This does not in any way preclude the Ruling Committee from directly gathering the same or new evidence or argument.

Once all evidence and argument has been gathered, the Ruling Committee will discuss the issues at hand in private. Neither the TD, nor the players are privy to that discussion. The Ruling Committee may uphold, reverse, or modify the TD's rulings. They may choose to consider and decide various aspects of the ruling separately, or they may consider them collectively. The members of the Ruling Committee should generally feel free and unencumbered when deciding whether to overrule the TD on questions of interpretation or application of the Rules. However, in situations not covered by the Rules, where the TD's ruling is a matter of exercising their pure judgment and discretion as allowed under section [1.1.4](#), the Ruling Committee should generally uphold the ruling, except in extreme cases where in their judgment, the decision made was clearly unjust.

The members of the Ruling Committee will vote separately for each decision that they agree to make. The vote will also take place in private. The vote tallies are then reported to the TD; only the total vote tally is reported for each decision, not how any individual member cast their vote. If a majority vote by the Ruling Committee supports changing the TD's original ruling, then the Ruling Committee's decision prevails and must be implemented; otherwise, the original ruling shall stand. This exhausts the player's right to appeal.

Some will argue that a super-majority of the Ruling Committee should be required to overturn a decision by the TD to ensure that the TD's opinion is represented in any final decision. That is a valid point of view. However, the rationale for using a simple majority in this rule is that the TD already has substantial influence on any decision. Firstly, the TD can explain the rationale for their ruling or show the relevant rules to the players involved. If their argument is convincing, their ruling will not be appealed. If it is appealed, the TD will have the opportunity to explain the rationale for their ruling to the Ruling Committee. Secondly, the TD is empowered to choose the members of the Ruling Committee. While the TD must not choose Ruling Committee members who they have reason to suspect will be biased to support their rulings irrespective of the merits, they may choose impartial individuals known to have a similar philosophy and a similar interpretation of the Rules.

5.4 EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND ARGUMENT

All persons involved in the dispute are entitled to make relevant representations to the TD or Ruling Committee.

Ruling Guide (For the USBGF Tournament Rules – 2024)

Before resolving any factual dispute, both the TD and, if formed, the Ruling Committee may examine all relevant physical evidence such as the game equipment and scoresheets; they may question players, witnesses, the TD, and staff as to their recollection of relevant events. The TD when called to make the initial ruling as well as the Ruling Committee when hearing an appeal are permitted to seek expert testimony about the Rules, their intent, interpretation and precedent from any such experts that might be available for consultation. The overarching goal is to reach the right decision.

All players involved in the dispute must be allowed a reasonable opportunity to freely make relevant representations about the situation under dispute, in addition to answering any questions that might be asked. Both players must direct all statements, questions, or requests to the TD or Ruling Committee, not to other players or spectators. When speaking with the Ruling Committee, the players may introduce new evidence or perspectives that were not previously presented to the TD prior to the appeal. Spectators must not make any representations unless they are asked to do so by the TD or the Ruling Committee. A spectator who has relevant information may so inform the TD but must wait until they are questioned to provide any details. A player involved in the dispute may request that the Ruling Committee question any other individual that they believe has information that is relevant to the decision.

Once the TD is called to make a ruling, they effectively become involved in the dispute and may therefore make relevant representations to the Ruling Committee. The Ruling Committee should question the TD, to understand the basis for their ruling. During any discussions with the Ruling Committee, the TD must not attempt to limit their inquiry, influence, or coerce them to support the ruling made, or create the appearance of doing so. The TD should stick to the facts, the Rules, the relevant text in this Ruling Guide, and the rationale for the ruling, and let that information speak for itself. The TD may ask to have a private conversation with the Ruling Committee to provide additional information that is confidential or might not otherwise be suitable for discussion in public, or with the players involved.