

THERMONUCLEAR CRICKET

By Tony Payne

Having the ability to take action in a Cricket game is important. This *initiative* is crucial to retaking control of a situation in which a player is shooting at a closed number behind the other.

Example 1. It is Opposer's turn. He is shooting at a number that Opener has closed (18s), but by shooting all three darts at 18s he has no chance to point.

OPENER	OPPOSER
40	0 20 0 76
74	0 19 0
90	0 18 0
	17 0
	16
	15
	B

And looking ahead, Opener's next shot will probably be at an open number, 17, with a chance to close and point. Assuming that Opener closes the 17, Opposer will come up and close the 17 behind him in an effort to protect his point lead.

These situations really bother me when I'm in a match because—say that I am Opposer—Opener, though he is behind in points, by shooting at enough open numbers eventually will take the point lead and leave Opposer with no open numbers to point on unless he shoots at, say, 16, 15, or bull's-eye out of sequence.

To clarify that let's assume Opposer hits s18, s18, s18. If Opener comes up and hits s17, s17, t17, he scores 34 points and totals himself 74. Now Opposer, trying to protect his two-point lead, comes up and shoots at the 17 in an effort to close and protect his point lead. Let's say that Opener hits s16, miss, t16, and now he has the lead with 90 points. Where will Opposer shoot next? Certainly he won't shoot at the 16s because he is down on points and now he'll go to 15s.

The point I am trying to make is that had he had the foresight to realize that this was eventually going to happen, on his initial shot instead of closing that 18, he should have went ahead and shot the 17s to get *initiative* on his side and he could shoot on an open number that he could close and

point.

You may counter that he's leaving himself open to the points on the 18. Well, what are you going to do? We saw what was going to happen to Opposer had he tried to close behind Opener, so why not think a couple of shots ahead and find you an open number, retake the initiative and start your point battle?

The tendency when you have a point lead is to try to protect it and close behind your opponent, and that's OK. Get maybe one or two numbers. But when you are in an early to midgame situation you are going to get hurt by that because, just as we saw in this example, there are too many numbers left to battle on. Opener, by shooting an open number, will get maximum credit for all of his darts thrown whereas Opposer more than likely won't get full value for his triples unless he trips the number without having hit singles on it, i.e. single, single, triple—he would only get the value of three where if it had been an open number he would have gotten the value of five darts.

Example 2.

Here's an early game situation that I find troubling. Each side has shot one round of darts. Suppose I am Opener and I have the point lead.

OPENER	OPPOSER
40	0 20 0 38
	19 0
	18
	17
	16
	15
	B

Now, like I said earlier, there's a tendency to shoot the 19s, close them up and try to protect that point lead. I have found in this situation I have had the most success staying on the 20s.

There are a number of reasons for this strategy. First, you are going to utilize the full value of your darts. Second, you have the most powerful number on the board, so why not point that out to your Opponent? Third, I believe because everybody practices the 20 and you use the 20 in 501, psychologically it is just an

easier number for players to hit.

So what would I do in this situation? When I play singles and I don't have anybody to answer to, I like to shoot the 20s. But in doubles two play as one, and there is a certain harmony that you want to keep between you and your partner. If your partner wants you to close the 19s, you almost have to close the 19s. You don't want to create a riff between you and your partner; you want that harmony there where both of you are playing as one and you both want to utilize the same strategy. Now with Rick Ney and myself, when we played doubles, suppose it is my shot and I am Opener. I am going to stay on the 20. I'm just going to beat the 20 up. Let's say that Rick has a shot now. More times than not I have seen Rick close the 19 down and then with his remaining darts, if he has any, shoot at the 20. There is nothing wrong, in my opinion, with either shot. It just depends who feels comfortable with what. Rick's comfortable with the 19 shot, so in the long run he is going to be more efficient on that shot. I am not comfortable with that shot so in the long run I wouldn't be as efficient as Rick would be in that situation, just because I don't like to shoot that way.

So getting back to our topic closing and pointing with respect to initiative, what would I do here? I would point the 20s and let my opponent come back and point on the 19s. In a situation like this you can sometimes control the numbers, making your opponent shoot the number you want him to shoot. Let's say that I do decide to close the 19. What is my Opponent going to do? Well, more than likely he will shoot at 18 to try and get the point advantage back. There, I have given him the initiative—an open number to point at to close in a point.

Now on the flipside of the scoreboard, with Opposer's turn first, it would be better to "waste" darts now (i.e. s20, s20, t20) on the 20 and close it. I would much rather close that 20 in the beginning of a

game than to suffer the consequences of being pointed on that 20 all the way through the game. You are only 2 points down; take your lumps now. Opener will come out and shoot 18s. If he closes you come out at 17s. I would much rather have my opponent pointing on an 18, a number that he is not as familiar with, and hope he doesn't have the same confidence he does on the 20.

Example 3. Here's a situation where Opener has come out with four 20s, Opposer has come back and closed the 19, then closed the 20. What does Opener do here? Well, this is pretty much the same situation as Example 1. You have the 20 point lead and the natural instinct is to close the 19, protect your 20 point lead and get the 19 closed. But the problem with this is, at what point do you stop closing behind Opposer? Let's look a couple of numbers ahead. Say you close the 19. Opposer has to shoot the 18s. You close the 18; Opposer has to shoot 17s. You are setting him up for the open numbers while you are trying to close numbers behind him.

OPENER	OPPOSER
20	20
0	19
0	18
0	17
0	16
	15
	B

Eventually you have to say enough is enough and make a stand on a number. I would rather make my stand on an important number like 18 rather than try to make my stand on 16 or 15.

Example 4. Now I want to go to some middle to end-game situations with respect to initiative. Let's say I am playing an average to above-average player. I am Opposer, it's my turn, and I am behind. In this situation I am going to shoot an open number. Anymore, you see a lot of people go for the bull's-eye, which in my opinion is the shot here unless you are playing an opponent who is not up to your abilities. What it comes down to is do you shoot the 16 or do you shoot the bull's-eye? And the question you have to ask yourself is: what is the strength of your opponent? Obviously the larger target of 16 makes it the easiest number for you to get points on. But you also want a number that you will be able to point on for some length of time, so you hope. So if the 16 is an easier number for you to close and get points on then you

OPENER	OPPOSER
40	20
0	19
0	18
0	17
	16
	15
	B

have to assume it is going to be an easier number for your opponent to close. And that may not necessarily be what you want. You might want a number where you can come back and not have to close a number your next three darts but strictly be able to get points on that number for all three darts. So, if I'm playing an opponent who is reasonably below my ability, I am going to shoot the 16s here because in two darts I reckon I ought to be able to single and trip it—so then I am going to have 16 points with one extra dart to where hopefully I am going to hit another triple and have all 64 points. That's going to force Opener to go back to the 20s and 19s to point, which is what you want him to do. You don't want him closing additional numbers, forcing the game to an end. As long as you can keep Opener pointing then you have a better chance of winning, because he is not closing numbers and forcing the game to an end. Now obviously him pointing on 20s and you on the 16s is going to be a problem for you, but that's something you must face.

Now let's suppose I'm playing an opponent as good or better than I am. Well, in that situation I want to go for the bull's-eye because I want a number that is going to be difficult for him to close so I can come back and maybe get additional

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