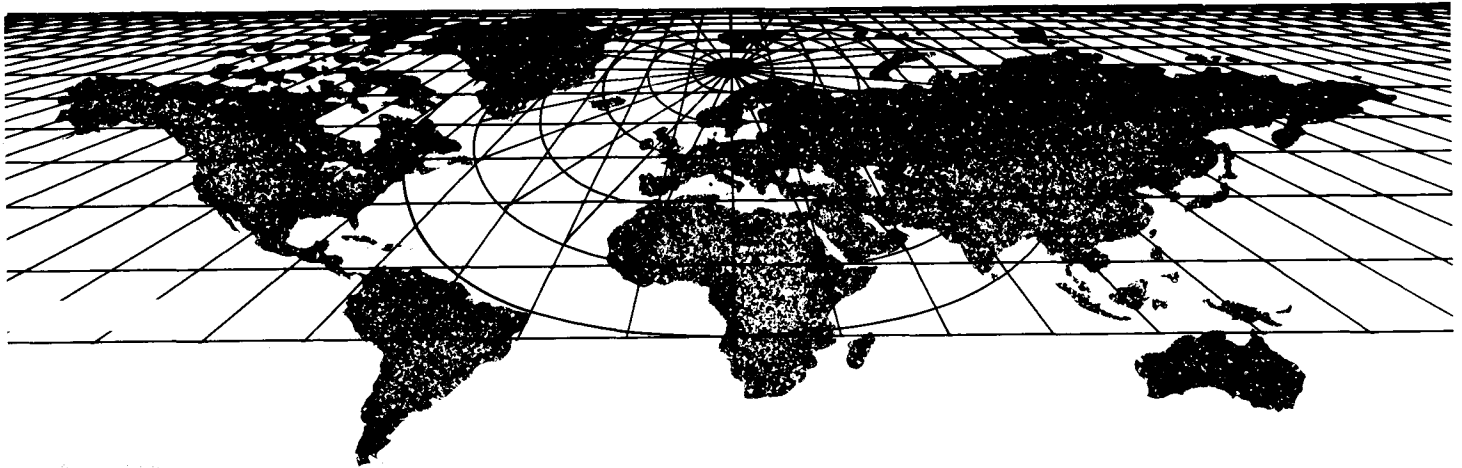


# THERMONUCLEAR CRICKET



By Tony Payne

A few columns back, I introduced various game openings and possible counterplays for Opener and Opposer. In the last two columns I highlighted several midgame situations and the counter options available to either player. Well, now we're progressing to the final phase of some game situations. Here are some endgame options that I've illustrated for you. If you ever get into one of these setups, try to remember all your options, and put your strategy to work!

**Example A.** Opener really has several options here. What he has to be concerned about is Opposer's threat on the bull's-eye. All Opener wants to do is end the game, and the less points scored, the better. But Opposer is looking to *increase* the time in the game, and the only way he can do that is to keep Opener throwing darts. So, he is going to have to score to do that. As I have discussed before, the only way you can increase time in a game of Cricket is to keep the other darter pointing. If situated as in this example, Opener has several options. He can anticipate the points and start his own points now on the 19 before Opposer gets them closed. Certainly, I would like to get points on the 19 before they're closed. I would throw at it until I hit a triple, then aim darts at the bull's-eye. I'd like to have at least one bull at this time, and preferably two or even a close (perfect darts!) after tripping the 19. Of course, a more conservative player would point the 19 with all three darts.

OPENER	OPPOSER
○ 20 ○	
○ 19 X	
○ 18 ○	
○ 17 ○	
○ 16 ○	
15	
B X	

his head above water.

The way I prefer to go is the bull's-eye route. And you can bet Opposer's next shot will be looking to capitalize on the bull if Opener *doesn't* close them. Opener should stay on the cork until he misses. Throw the first dart. If it's a miss, go down to the 19 for points. First dart in, second dart out, then he should aim to the 19 with his remaining dart. And if the first two hit center, Opener is *committed* to closing the cork. Close it and there is no way that Opposer has the gameshot.

Now on to the other side of the board. Ideally, Opposer would love for Opener to shoot all three darts at the bull's-eye and miss. Opposer's only hope now is to create time, and he can only do that by pointing, so he is going to point the bull.

In these situations, there *is* a makeable comeback. But in order for this comeback to happen, two things must occur: Opposer has to elevate his game, and Opener has to break. He has to hit a negligible round and that combined with Opposer hitting a seven- or nine-count would make Opposer's chances for the game more credible. Ideally, Opposer would like to have three bulls in his first two darts. Then it is pretty much of a toss up whether to throw the last dart at the cork or to have a nice, fat dart at the 19 and get that closed down.

But let's say Opposer does escape this round

Another option would be to go with 15s. That's not a bad one, either — especially if he hit five 15s! Opener needs to close the 15 anyway, and if he adds 30 points, it forces Opposer to hit three bulls just to keep

while leaving the 19 unclosed and gets another shot. Assuming he was able to get a point lead with the cork, he would have a shot left of t15, t17, s19. It's a makeable gameshot, but he isn't going to hit it most of the time. It's hard to hit a seven-count, especially one that calls for triples in a specific number and the single of another.

If it were me, I wouldn't try these comebacks — you'd like to make them all in one big shot. But to me to close down the 19 and take that good pointing number away from Opener is almost too good of a defensive shot to pass. Plus looking ahead again — assuming Opposer does get another shot and has a point lead with the 19 closed, the t15, t17, s19 shot is a much easier gameshot than the t15, t17, s19 shot. Why? Because if you miss a dart, you know you have a backup to use at that triple. That's the way I would look at that shot. If he hits one or two bulls then he is in more trouble than he was before he shot. In situations like this you just take a deep breath and say, "Well, all I can do is shoot the best that I can." Don't try to win the whole comeback in one shot. That puts too much pressure on yourself and it becomes difficult to execute.

**Example B.** This is a pretty clear-cut situation for Opener. It's his shot, and all he has to do to win this game is close the 15s. Everything else will fall into place. The only thing to hurt him would be to fail to close the 15, thus making it vital that he does. In this situation a lot of people just throw at the triple with every dart. You don't want to be too conservative on this shot, but you want to give yourself the option for having a gameshot here as well. So, with the first dart I would go for the t15. If it is a single, then the next two darts I shoot fat. Like I said, the important thing is to close the number. You get it closed and you can pretty much rack the game up.

OPENER	OPPOSER
34	20
○	○
○	19
○	○
○	18
○	○
○	17
○	○
○	16
○	○
○	15
○	○
	B

Now for Opposer. Obviously he has to have points, and in this situation I would much rather be pointing the bull, with its larger numerical value, than I would the 15. The other argument for throwing the bull, in my opinion, is that it takes more than one dart to close it. Others may argue *against* throwing the bull first for the very same reason. But I look at it this way: if I'm going to hit a big shot, my big shot is going to be on the cork. I'm due for it, and I have nothing to lose because I'm behind. And, assuming that I am going to throw big, then the other argument for throwing bulls is that it's going to take my opponent at least two darts to close it, too. And as many chances as not, it's going to take all three darts — three singles. And three singles means three perfect darts. Under this pressure situation, he's likely to miss a dart, and that might be all I need for my gameshot. It is imperative that I close the bulls. Let's say that Opener even has the 15 closed. Well, if he don't close the cork, I am set up for a gameshot my next round: dbull, t15, s17. Crazy things have happened.

Opposer *could* go at the 15, but I wouldn't recommend that route. Get some 15s going, then next round close the 17s, and then back on the 15 for some more points. But I don't like the 15 in this situation because even three middling darts on the 15 for Opener can be three singles. If he closes it, that means no opportunity for Opposer to come back next round and point the same number.

The difference in this shot is that it takes two great darts or three good ones to close the cork. The 15 can be closed on three passable darts. And that's the reason you have to go for the bull's-eye in this situation.

**Example C.** Again, for Opener things are looking good. You have to believe Opener is going to close the 16 to try and shut down some points. The only thing that I don't like about this situation is getting caught up and giving Opposer

OPENER	OPPOSER
36	20
○	○
○	19
○	○
○	18
○	○
○	17
○	○
○	16
○	○
○	15
○	○
	B

the first opportunity to shoot at the last two open numbers. Meaning, giving him the opportunity to close and point, whereas with your darts, you are looking to close with no opportunity to point. When points have been introduced as seen in this example, Opener has to pay particular attention to scoring as well as closing his numbers. He wants to keep a number open to point on because he needs to be able to get points back immediately without having to close another number first. In this case, if I go for the 16 — let's assume s16, t16 — then I'll go back to the 18 for more points, with concentration on the triple. If I trip the 16 with my first dart, then I'll go for 15 with the last two darts. But if I hit a single or miss the first dart, I'm going to stay on it. As I've said before, I believe I can close a number in two darts;

therefore, this is the way I'm going to shoot it. And if the 16s get closed, Opener is looking pretty good for the game. Opposer would need at least six or seven 15s to keep himself from getting buried at this moment. That's how I would attack the situation if I were Opener.

Now say it's Opposer's shot here. I would point on the 16 every dart, unless I trip it with my first. With a t16, or 48 points, he'll be in good shape, so he can then aim to close the 18. He can pretty much be assured two fat darts at the 18 and it's going to be closed. Definitely a choice shot! Those points are going to force Opener to go for 15s, and he has to really hurt the 15 to cause any

harm. Opposer's real objective in this situation is to get the point lead back and close the 18 at the same time. Force Opener to have to build on a new number to close and point, instead of leaving 18 for him to point right off the bat.

In the next TNC, I'll be evaluating a few more endgame situations for you. Remember, to be successful in the game of Cricket, you have to be able to recognize the various options available to you at *each* turn (and dart, even) in the game and determine a strategy based on your skill level. And keep the arm and mind in practice so you can execute your shots according to plan.



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