



Thermonuclear Cricket

By Tony Payne

a league darter's position and looking at the caliber of players here, I would go for a "point fest." I would try to make him have to throw three singles to get a point lead on me; he might not have any darts to close the bull that way. That's the great struggle right now—he's wanting keep his lead and close you out. You must try to keep enough points on him so that he doesn't have a dart to throw at the bull's-eye.

A dangerous situation for you would be to only have a small point lead where he could get those points back in two darts—two single 20's, 18's or 15's—and then have that one dart to shoot at the bull's-eye.

Obviously an even worse situation would be if he could get his points back in one dart and then have two darts to try and close the bull. You therefore want to get your point total high enough to where he must point with all three darts, hoping he doesn't catch a triple. (When I talk about getting points back in three darts, I don't mean a triple but three *singles*.) But the struggle at this point is: buying enough time through points to keep him from closing the bull's-eye. Because once he closes the bull's-eye, your time has run out.

OPENER			OPPOSER	
40	○	20	/	38
60	○	19	○	55
140	○	18	X	71
160	○	17	○	103
	○	16	○	128
	○	15	X	
	B	○		

Q. Tied at 1-1 (league darts), this is the final game situation: it's Opposer's turn and he knows that Opener is not likely to close the bulls in one turn—but it could still happen. Knowing this, what would be the best line of strategy to follow—close the numbers or try to regain the point lead?

Tony: In end game situations, a good rule to follow is: *if you are behind in points, it's time to get ahead.* And this situation is no exception. The way I look at this, Opposer has lost a game and Opener as well. So, Opposer is not much better than the Opener. If he's not likely to hit three bulls in one turn, then apparently you as the Opposer are not likely to hit three bulls in one turn either. That being the case, I would suggest going after those bulls now because you are not going to be safe until you've scored *three*.

You need two bulls just to get a point lead. But Opener can still cover that point lead easily. A shot at the 20 or 18 and he's got you matched or beat on the points. Either case, a tie is just as good as having more points. So, you'd better start on your bulls now, and then worry about closing down your open numbers. If you don't get three before he does, you are out of the game. The thought of closing at this point wouldn't even enter my mind. If you want to win, you'll have to point whether you like to or not.

Another reason to throw at the bull is that a lot of times you are going to miss and you may hit that 15, 18 or 20. Those off-target darts are going to land somewhere, and they may hit those numbers for you. If you hit a 15 or 18, great! That's going to close a number for you. Even if you don't get a bull, a lucky miss will still count for something.

This is not a professional darter's situation. For a professional, there would be a different line of strategy to follow. But from

down the line and wait. So after that first miss at 17, I probably would have gone back to the 20—recognizing that I may not get another shot at it. Obviously he will try to close the 20 sooner or later, and more than likely it'll be sooner.

Anymore, that seems to be the strategy I follow. Traditional "Thermonuclear Cricket" would have me staying on the 17 trying to advance the game while taking advantage of the opportunity for all of my darts to count. But trying to out-fox players doesn't always work: until they see a trap they're not scared; they don't tighten up. And they continue to play nice and loose because they don't recognize that any pressure is being applied. Their game's still intact and a big turn by them may come back to haunt me. But, I *want* them to feel the pressure, tighten up a bit and start second-guessing themselves. So I'm going to get their attention by going back to that 20 and scoring some serious points.

Now your second dart at the 18—not a bad panic shot. If you hit the triple it's a beautiful dart. A single is okay but it is really a toss up—almost literally.

Third dart at the 20—absolutely! The only way to go.

Another acceptable strategy may have been to point all three darts at 20 before it gets closed. I love pointing that number more than any other. I figure I can hit 140, and 140 points right now would really put the hurt on this guy.

Another reason to point that 20: let's say you hit 100. Well, Opener will almost have to go for points with all three darts at the 18. He can't afford to throw a dart at a single 20 that could be a triple 18 for points. The longer you can keep 20 open, the better your chances are of winning, plain and simple. Psychologically, each time a dart hits that triple, you know the Opener is going to be pinching himself and wishing he had closed 20. And each time that triple hits, it stings just a little more.

One more maxim about the 20 is that, with two such marks on it, it's become an invitation for pointing—something that you can hardly pass up. Unless you really get behind on closed numbers, you'll want to go after the points. Like I said, it is an invitation that is too good to pass up. So for Opener, the sooner he invests one dart at 20, he can cancel that invitation. Even if a player puts 100 points on him, it may still be to his advantage to invest one dart and close 20. Then he can forget it and get on with the game. If you make the mistake of leaving it open, you can recover by closing it quickly and making up the point deficit on another number. You might as well pay your dues now while you still have time to do some damage on down the line.

OPENER			OPPOSER	
18	X	20	○	40
		19	○	○○
		18		
		17		
		16		
		15		
		B		

Q. I start well with five 20's and a round to close the 19's. However, my opponent (Opener) isn't playing dead and has secured a number to point on. Now my third turn: first dart at 17—miss, second dart at 18—miss, third dart—score on 20 (I'm now at 60). What is your opinion on the strategy of that turn? What would be the best strategy to follow? Anything I can do to improve my midgame?

Tony: A mid-game crisis? Possibly, but this definitely looks like something I would have done. The question is: should you be shooting at these open numbers while your opponent has a number on you—the 18 in this situation. And to answer—yes, I believe it can work. I would have shot the 17 because I know if I hit a single or two singles and then trip' it, I've gotten some points as well as a close.

Back to your situation: first dart at 17—miss. Well, you're both good players so obviously you have to brace yourself for some points. He's got to get his points back, and it's doubtful that he'll go any further