



newsletter

Australia New Zealand Backgammon Federation

Spring 2024

malcolm in the middle of everything!

If there's ever been any doubt about who owns the current title of Australia's best tournament player, Malcolm Hutson has put it to rest in the past 18 months.

Winner of the inaugural ANZBGF Championship in 2023, Malcolm has been on a winning spree ever since. He took home the Jackpot Prize in Macao earlier this year and, in the hugely successful Queensland Championships, claimed the Masters and Speed Championship and was runner up to Joanna Kerynia in the Open itself. He didn't win on his trip to Monte Carlo for the World Championships, but wife Sophie won the 128-strong DMP event and placed highly in the women's tournament.

Then, just before we went to print, Malcolm had remarkable success in the 2024 Oasis Dubai International Backgammon Cup in September. He won the event's Speed Championship before beating legendary World number one player Masayuki "Mochy" Mochizuki in the Mega Jackpot final.

The rich prizes aside, it confirmed Malcolm Hutson is well and truly a world-class player.



our new backgammon playground

Recognised as Australia's holiday playground for more than 70 years, the Gold Coast is fast becoming the home of the backgammon getaway. The Australian Open has become a mainstay of Gold Coast backgammon activity for almost a decade, with Simon Woodhead turning on a top-class tournament every year. Now it's been joined by another big tourney – the Steve Roberts-driven, greatly upgraded, Queensland Open.

Instead of being a rival to the nationals, the Queensland title and its associated events has become an ally. Instead of choosing one or the other event to attend, many players have already committed to both events.

Splitting the two events is the Sydney Majors, an event that as the name suggests, attracts serious competition. Both Gold Coast events run opens, masters and speed titles and both offer very good prizemoney in a premium holiday setting. This year's Queensland Championships were held at Mermaid Beach in August and, in a change of direction, the Australian Championships will be held at beautiful Tweed Heads for the first time in November.

There's something on the coast for everyone – and plenty of time to recover before playing the ANZBGF Championships in Melbourne in June.

NZ rolls ahead

New Zealand has taken the lead in ANZBGF practices by introducing baffle boxes as a “preferred” option for its 2025 NZ BG Championship. That essentially means that, unless both players choose not to use the device, it must be used. If one of the two players chooses it, it's in use.

This is a practice that's coming into play around the world and it's nothing to fear. If you've ever thought your opponent didn't roll properly and the dice just dropped out of the cup with double sixes, the baffle box will eliminate that from happening again. It also stops that annoying practice of your opponent throwing the dice hard and having them bounce off the board, only to do the same thing again in a series of invalid rolls. It's the way of the future and we all need to get used to using it.

The baffle box won't give you better rolls but it will take complaints and delays out of the game while we search the floor for those missing dice.



name change to honour SA great

The South Australian Backgammon Association has changed the name of its former Spring Tournament to the John O'Grady Memorial Championship in honour of one of the great pioneers of Australian backgammon.

John, who passed away earlier this year, was a tireless organiser and treasurer of the SA club until Covid forced him to isolate due to declining health. Such was his work ethic and commitment to the game, he could be seen getting interrupted in his matches at SA's major tournaments to take ongoing entries and buy backs. He never complained, though, considering it part of his work on match day. Fittingly, John finally won the coveted SA Open in 2012, defeating Jack Clark after finishing runner up the previous year. We will continue to play in his honour.



doing Eva proud

A strong field including all the usual suspects of Australian backgammon turned out for the fifth instalment of the Eva Bitel Championship before finalists David McAllister and John McAleenan turned on a final for the ages that would have made its namesake proud.

The two Macs took the best of three final to a tiebreaker before David recorded a win that had players everywhere scratching their heads in disbelief. David did the “impossible”, hitting John’s last remaining checker and somehow clearing all 15 pieces from the board before the single piece could make up the 24 places needed to bear off. We still can’t quite work out how it happened against massive odds, but history will show David McAllister is the 2024 Eva Bitel champion. That’s backgammon!

inaugural live champ may be decided at nationals

Ben Phillips has been a tearaway leader since the Live Points format was introduced at the end of 2023 but Grant Hoffman and Malcolm Hutson are closing on him. In order to launch the Live Points format at a major event, the inaugural calendar runs from late 2023 to the end of 2024 – after that, it’s every calendar year.

The anomaly, however gives players two instalments of the Australian Open to stake their claim. In a game based on rich prizes and big trophies, the Live Champion receives neither – he or she, however, will have their name on the ANZBGF website for all of the following year, entry to the ANZBGF Championships the following year and a framed certificate of the win.

So the bragging rights do come with some handy prizes.

as easy as BMAB

The name BMAB may confuse some backgammon players but getting involved in the test of backgammon proficiency is as easy as ABC – achieving the desired results, however, may be more difficult.

BMAB stands for Backgammon Masters Awarding Body and it is the preeminent means by which backgammon skill is calculated. The BMAB tournaments, run in Australia by Andrejs (Andy) Liepins, are held at the ANZBGF Championships and the upcoming Australian Open each year. Players who choose to participate in BMAB matches are filmed, their results tabled, and a proficiency rating calculated. Winning or losing has no impact on the standard achieved.

While participation has been fairly limited so far, Andy hopes more players will get involved in the next couple of years to confirm the improving standard of Australian backgammon.

Not surprisingly, Malcolm Hutson is the first Australian to achieve Master (M3) standard, but there are several more players not far away. There may be a lot of luck in backgammon – sometimes we complain too much – but there’s no luck in achieving BMAB master or grandmaster status.

improve your game

If you've ever wanted to improve your backgammon game, you have a few options – roll exceedingly well in every match you play, get a lot of live and online match play, study your results through XG or perhaps dole out a few dollars for tuition. The latter is a sure-fire way to bring down your PR and have you playing better.

In Australia and NZ, there are a few of the more experienced players offering tuition, while it is also available from some of the giants of world backgammon at a higher price. Mochy teaches the game, so do fellow Giants Michy, Marc Olsen, Phil Simbourg, David Presser, Bob Wachtel and the list goes on. Closer to home, lessons are available from some of our leading players like Mick Dyett, Grant Hoffman and Steve Roberts.

presidents message

Australian and New Zealand backgammon is going from strength to strength, with outstanding competition regularly held on both sides of the Tasman. The recent success of the Queensland Championships has created a third huge weekend of national backgammon across Australia each year – nestled in between the ANZBGF Championships and the Australian Championships. On top of that, the annual Eva Bitel and Three Strikes tournaments were overwhelming success stories. And the NZ Online Backgammon Championship was a resounding success and offered excellent “virtual” support to the NZ Open and North Island Backgammon Open.

On a more sobering note, it's unfortunate that we need to remind those playing at live events to show manners and etiquette. At the ANZBGF Championships in Melbourne in June, several players ignored calls to use clocks for all matches. When clocks are listed for an event, they're non-negotiable. It was disappointing to see experienced players flout the rules and agree to play without them. This isn't fair to other players and, in future, stricter penalties including disqualification will be imposed. It was also disappointing to have a vocal – no it wasn't vocal, it was loud – chouette disturbing the finalists in the ANZBGF final. In future, whether it's a chouette or just people talking too loudly, we ask them to either keep their voices down or take it outside.

If we all work together and show courtesy whether we're playing or not, everybody wins.

Shane McNally

leaderboard

Here's a look at the Top 25 as rated by ANZBGF at the time of publication

1 David Reitzin	1,827.09
2 Steve Roberts	1,797.10
3 Saeed Nourmohammadi	1,792.35
4 Simon Ustick	1,785.89
5 Malcolm Hutson	1,770.70
6 Mick Dyett	1,761.49
7 John Parker	1,758.89
8 Joseph Heled	1,756.43
9 Greg Kurrell	1,747.97
10 Steve Clarry	1,741.76
11 Hossein Haydari	1,733.85
12 Martin Pikler	1,730.73
13 Joanna Kerinya	1,728.16
14 Grant Hoffman	1,722.98
15 Steve Nelson	1,716.05
16 Peter Brown	1,715.23
17 Vince Turner	1,706.62
18 David McAllister	1,699.35
19 Gerhardt Macor	1,692.61
20 Steve Quinn	1,679.06
21 Ned Marootians	1,678.26
22 Brian Ramsey	1,678.23
23 Simon Woodhead	1,677.49
24 Bill Marczak	1,676.76
25 Dilhun Akpinar	1,674.37

are you an anzbgf member?



To stay up to date with all things backgammon in Australia and New Zealand, become a member today. This not only helps to keep you in the loop but it goes a long way in supporting our game and acclaimed events. Become an ANZBGF member at <https://anzbgf.org/membership> or scan QR code.



AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND
BACKGAMMON FEDERATION

Thank you to our Lifetime Members

Simon Woodhead (QLD)
Rosalind Baker (QLD)
Grant Hoffman (NZ)
Adam Makda (NSW)
Vale James Lyons (NSW)
Denby Pettitt (UK)