A HOUSE RULEBOOK · SETTLED

Backgammon

The rules, written in our own words.

Backgammon belongs to nobody, so these rules are ours to write. They are the standard rules, with the doubling cube for those who play for points. Written by Nine Fathoms for Settled, 2026. Free to print for your own table.

The board and the checkers

Backgammon is played by two players on a board of twenty-four narrow triangles called points. The points are numbered for each player from 1 to 24, so a point that is one player's 1 is the other player's 24. The board is divided down the middle by a bar.

Each player's six lowest points, 1 to 6, are their home board. Each player has fifteen checkers of one colour, two dice and a cup, and the players share a doubling cube.

Setting up

Each player places two checkers on their 24-point, five on their 13-point, three on their 8-point and five on their 6-point.

The direction of play

Each player moves their checkers from higher numbers toward lower numbers, around the board toward their own home board. The two players move in opposite directions.

Starting the game

To begin, each player rolls a single die. The player who rolls the higher number goes first, and plays the numbers shown on both of those dice as their first move. If both dice show the same number, both players roll again.

After the first move, the players take turns rolling both of their own dice.

Moving

The two numbers rolled are two separate moves. A player may move one checker by one number and another checker by the other number. A player may also move a single checker by both numbers, one after the other, if the point where it stops between them is open.

A checker may land on any point that is empty, holds the player's own checkers, or holds just one enemy checker. A point holding two or more enemy checkers is closed, and no checker may land on it, though a checker may pass over it.

Doubles

When both dice show the same number, the player moves that number four times instead of twice.

Using the whole roll

A player must use both numbers of a roll whenever there is any legal way to do it. If only one of the two numbers can be used, that one must be played. If either number could be used but not both, the player must use the larger number. If neither number can be used, the turn is lost.

Hitting and entering

A single checker alone on a point is called a blot. When a checker lands on a point holding one enemy checker, that checker is hit and is placed on the bar.

A player with any checker on the bar must bring it back into play before moving any other checker. A checker enters on the enemy's home board, on the point matching a number rolled, if that point is not closed. If neither number lets a checker enter, the whole turn is lost.

Bearing off

A player may begin bearing off, taking checkers off the board, only when all fifteen of their checkers are in their home board.

A number rolled lets the player remove a checker from the point of that number. If that point is empty, the player must move a checker from a higher point by that number instead, if they can. If there is no checker on any higher point, the player removes a checker from the highest point that has one.

A player may always make an ordinary move inside the home board instead of bearing off. If one of their checkers is hit while they are bearing off, it must re-enter and come all the way home before bearing off can continue.

Winning

The first player to bear off all fifteen checkers wins the game. If the loser has not borne off a single checker, the winner scores a gammon, worth twice the stake. If the loser has not borne off any checker and still has a checker on the bar or in the winner's home board, the winner scores a backgammon, worth three times the stake.

The doubling cube

Players who play for points may use the doubling cube, which starts the game at 1. At the start of their own turn, before rolling, a player may offer to double the stake. The other player either accepts and takes the cube, and the game goes on at twice the stake, or refuses and loses the game at the current stake. After that, only the player holding the cube may offer the next double.