# MARTIN FILIPI
## Winner of 2017 USBGF Tournament of Champions
### By Marty Storer and Karen Davis

The USBGF Tournament of Champions is arguably the toughest online tournament in the world today. To qualify for this event, a player must have won one of the USBGF online tournaments that are continuously run throughout the year. At year's end, these champions play a single-elimination event for the title.

The 2017 Tournament of Champions was won by the Czech player Martin Filipi, who outlasted 37 other champions and finally took the final from U.S. veteran Alfred Mamlet. Only an Intermediate at the beginning of the year, Martin has now attained a 1700 Elo rating, which will qualify him for Masters divisional events. At this writing (late February 2018), his win-loss ratio is 66-41, 62%. He has won four of the 47 events he has entered.

Always interested in how players improve their games, we submitted a few written questions to Martin, and waited for his answers. Here is what he told us:

**When and why did you start playing backgammon?**
I started playing backgammon about 16 years ago. I learned about it from friends and found that I enjoyed the game. At first I only played one-point matches. I started playing with the doubling cube two and a half years ago.

**How have you tried to improve your game?**
I met some good players at my first live tournament, the Czech Open. There I found out about the Czech League. I started to play in the league, making the 100-kilometer trip to Prague every other Wednesday.

I am very grateful to Jan Honza Černý, a top Czech player, for getting me a GridGammon account so I could play online. I purchased eXtreme Gammon and started analyzing my online matches. I send matches to Jan and he comments on my mistakes. Of course this has been very helpful. Recently I got a camera for my birthday, so now I record my live matches and analyze them with XG as well.



### DILIGENCE PAYS OFF

Martin Filipi of the Czech Republic has been playing seriously for only a few years. His focused study helped him win the 2017 USBGF Tournament of Champions.

**Do you play in live tournaments as well as online?**
Yes, I do. I still have a lot to learn, but with a little luck I can do well enough.

**What have been your most memorable playing experiences?**
My most memorable experience in live play was winning the Last Chance in the Intermediate Division of the 1st Merit Open Dubrovnik Grand Prix in 2016. My opponent in the finals was was Richard Paul Krietzman-Blažević. It was my second international tournament. My online matches against world-class players in the USBGF Tournament of Champions have also been quite memorable.

**Do you prefer to play live, or online, and why?**
I prefer live play. Everything is in my hands, including rolling.

**How did you like playing in the USBGF Online Circuit?**
I loved it. I've had the opportunity to play many good players from all over the world. My first goal was to achieve a 1650 rating so I could play in Masters tournaments, and I've passed that mark.

**Tell us a little about your life outside backgammon.**
I am 40 years old. I live in a small village near Pardubice in Czech Republic. I work in IT as a team leader of technical infrastructure in a bank. I have two children. My hobbies are bicycling, woodworking, and reconstructing my house.

**What suggestions would you have for the USBGF to enhance playing opportunities for members?**
I think you're doing well. I see that you've instituted new tournaments with nice backgammon boards as prizes, and I hope they will be successful.

To complement this short interview, we decided to give Managing Editor Marty Storer five positions from Martin Filipi's USBGF Tournament of Champions final against Alfred Mamlet for analysis. As usual, eXtreme Gammon (XG) kindly consented to help.

## Martin Filipi

### Position 1
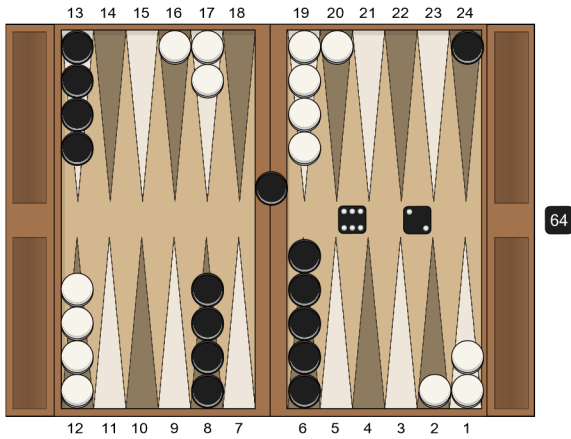


Pip: 177
Alfred Mamlet
21-Away

64

21-Away
Martin Filipi
Pip: 163

Black (Martin Filipi) to play 62

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Rollout[1] | Bar/23 24/18 | eq: -0.055 |
| | Player: | 49.03% (G:14.43% B:0.92%) | Conf.: ± 0.008 (-0.063...-0.046) - [87.2%] |
| | Opponent: | 50.97% (G:16.62% B:0.67%) | Duration: 2 hours 23 minutes |
| 2.✔ | Rollout[1] | Bar/23 8/2* | eq: -0.062 (-0.007) |
| | Player: | 47.87% (G:16.30% B:1.25%) | Conf.: ± 0.009 (-0.071...-0.053) - [12.8%] |
| | Opponent: | 52.13% (G:15.44% B:0.78%) | Duration: 2 hours 40 minutes |
| 3. | Rollout[2] | Bar/23 13/7 | eq: -0.156 (-0.101) |
| | Player: | 46.43% (G:14.59% B:1.03%) | Conf.: ± 0.018 (-0.174...-0.138) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 53.57% (G:16.84% B:0.80%) | Duration: 38 minutes 51 seconds |

Martin had an interesting choice at his third roll of the first game. He has just been hit loose on Alfred's 5 point and missed the return shots at Alfred's 5- and 9-point blots, so Alfred has a strong threat to cover his 5 point. Martin can counter by hitting with the 6, or stepping out to Alfred's bar point in hopes of making that point or hitting a return shot. Slotting his own bar is weak because it leaves a new blot vulnerable to a double shot, diversifies Alfred's good numbers (6s and 5s to hit; 4s, 3s, and 1s to cover), and fails to gain a tempo.

Martin hit on his 2 point, putting Alfred on the bar and giving him fewest hit-cover numbers: eight (24, 23, 21, 22, 11) versus 20 after 24/18 (64, 63, 62, 61, 44, 41, 33, 23, 21, 22, 13, 11). That difference is a powerful argument for Martin's play, but XG puts 24/18 very slightly ahead in the rollout!

Several factors favor 24/18 over 8/2*. First, a blot on the 2 point is badly placed, deep in Martin's board. Second, Martin leads by over 20 pips after his roll, so he would like to race if possible. Bar/23 24/18 caters to the race both by slotting for an advanced anchor and refusing to leave a blot on the 2 point where it can be hit for a setback of 23 pips. Finally, Martin's blot on Alfred's 2 point bears directly on Alfred's stripped 8 point, providing Martin many return shots if Alfred breaks the 8 in order to hit on his own bar point.

Although the 8/2* tempo hit is rarely correct in the early game, that tactic does well here. The top two plays are too close to call after 5184 trials at XG's standard settings. This seems to be a good reference position.

### Position 2



Pip: 98
Alfred Mamlet
19-Away

64
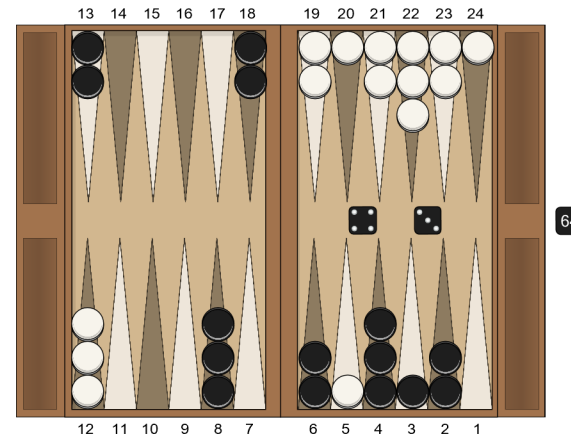
21-Away
Martin Filipi
Pip: 117

Black (Martin Filipi) to play 43

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.♕ | Rollout[1] | 8/5* 5/1 | eq: -0.349 |
| | Player: | 40.88% (G:12.87% B:0.45%) | Conf.: ± 0.011 (-0.359...-0.338) - [100.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 59.12% (G:28.11% B:0.47%) | Duration: 10 minutes 04 seconds |
| 2.✔ | Rollout[1] | 8/1 | eq: -0.423 (-0.074) |
| | Player: | 37.55% (G:5.12% B:0.10%) | Conf.: ± 0.010 (-0.433...-0.413) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 62.45% (G:11.55% B:0.23%) | Duration: 8 minutes 55 seconds |
| 3. | Rollout[1] | 13/6 | eq: -0.440 (-0.092) |
| | Player: | 36.92% (G:8.60% B:0.34%) | Conf.: ± 0.013 (-0.453...-0.427) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 63.08% (G:17.95% B:0.35%) | Duration: 5 minutes 44 seconds |

Martin played 8/1 without hitting. What else is there? It must be wrong to play 13/6, breaking the midpoint and leaving 17 shots. To justify such a big risk, Black would need a better board or fewer safe plays next turn.

XG endorses the unusual 8/5*/1! This looks feeble; Martin leaves a double return shot when his board is a weaker, and he has much work to do even if Alfred misses. But the rollout says hitting is correct by a large amount, 0.074 money-equivalent points per game (PPG).

The key factors in this decision are Alfred's big lead in the race, and Martin's stripped and precarious position after playing safe. The natural 8/1 devalues Martin's hitting chances and leaves Alfred free to run or improve his board.

Despite the danger, Martin should hit now and hope Alfred fans or rolls a missing 5. He may still hit back after Alfred hits, and his 18 anchor is good for defense. This enterprising play goes completely against Magriel's safe-versus-bold criteria, so it is very difficult to find. This is a move that only a computer could love.

# Martin Filipi

**Position 3**



Pip: 98
Alfred Mamlet
19-Away

64
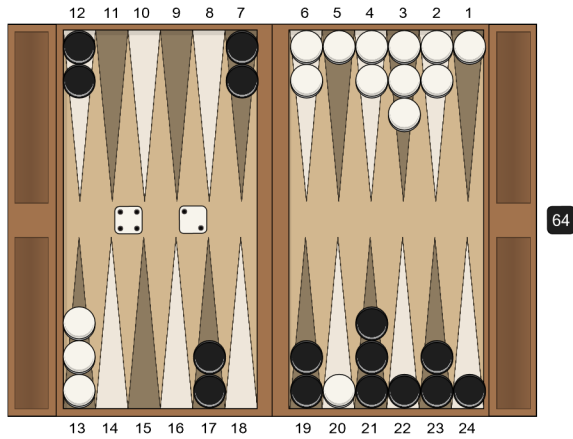
21-Away
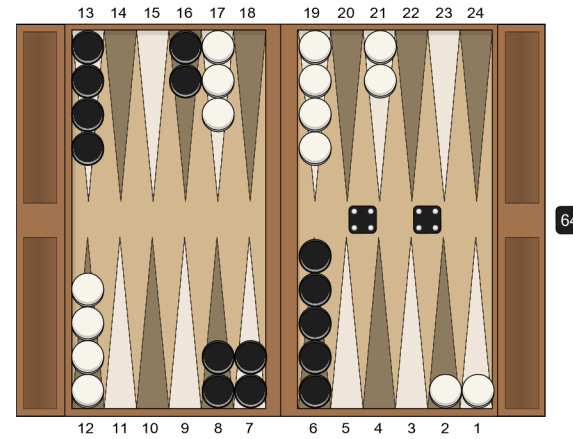Martin Filipi
Pip: 110

White (Alfred Mamlet) to play 42

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. ♔ | Rollout[1] | 13/9 3/1 | eq: +0.396 |
| | Player: | 60.23% (G:21.65% B:0.46%) | Conf.: ± 0.011 (+0.385...+0.407) - [100.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 39.77% (G:10.49% B:0.29%) | Duration: 6 minutes 02 seconds |
| 2. | Rollout[1] | 5/1 3/1 | eq: +0.313 (-0.083) |
| | Player: | 58.68% (G:12.76% B:0.17%) | Conf.: ± 0.010 (+0.303...+0.324) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 41.32% (G:6.34% B:0.08%) | Duration: 6 minutes 58 seconds |
| 3. ✔ | Rollout[1] | 20/16 3/1 | eq: +0.275 (-0.121) |
| | Player: | 58.70% (G:11.82% B:0.29%) | Conf.: ± 0.009 (+0.266...+0.285) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 41.30% (G:6.03% B:0.07%) | Duration: 8 minutes 48 seconds |
| 4. | Rollout[1] | 20/14 | eq: +0.256 (-0.141) |
| | Player: | 58.75% (G:10.00% B:0.35%) | Conf.: ± 0.011 (+0.245...+0.266) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 41.25% (G:7.17% B:0.19%) | Duration: 9 minutes 04 seconds |

[1] 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 325624567
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

This position illustrates some of Martin's problems after 8/1. Alfred played 20/16 and covered his 1 point, understandably trying to race when ahead. But although it's correct to cover with the 2, the 4 should be 13/9. That play applies maximum pressure, keeping the 5 point slotted, refusing to bury a checker, and leaving the trailer on the 20 point for more coverage. The five-point board threatens Martin's disjointed and inflexible position, and 13/9 does not preclude racing. XG's rollout prefers 13/9 3/1 by a whopping 0.121 PPG over Alfred's chosen play.

**Position 4**



Pip: 155
Alfred Mamlet
17-Away

64

11-Away
Martin Filipi
Pip: 144

Black (Martin Filipi) to play 44

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. ♔ | Rollout[1] | 13/5(2) | eq: +0.906 |
| | Player: | 73.15% (G:17.85% B:0.66%) | Conf.: ± 0.012 (+0.894...+0.919) - [100.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 26.85% (G:4.74% B:0.15%) | Duration: 9 minutes 45 seconds |
| 2. ✔ | Rollout[1] | 8/4(2) 6/2*(2) | eq: +0.745 (-0.162) |
| | Player: | 69.23% (G:22.57% B:0.58%) | Conf.: ± 0.011 (+0.733...+0.756) - [0.0%] |
| | Opponent: | 30.77% (G:6.36% B:0.22%) | Duration: 14 minutes 52 seconds |

[1] 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction.
Dice Seed: 325624567
Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller

Leading 11-away to 17-away in the score, and by 11 pips in the race, Martin made his 4 and 2 points and sent Alfred to the bar. This aggressive play works well if Alfred fans or enters poorly, but it's a big error. If Alfred so much as anchors against Martin's gappy blockade, he will have good hitting chances for a long time, and Martin will hesitate to double. His play thus sacrifices both blocking and racing equity. The 5 point would give better chances to clear safely, not to mention keeping Alfred's back checkers restrained.

Though the move made wins more gammons, the 5 point would give Martin great flexibility. Depending on the rolls, he will be able to choose among three viable game plans: racing, priming, and attacking. The immediate threat of executing one or more of those plans might easily be enough to give Alfred a difficult take-pass decision—in other words, the 5 point puts Martin on the verge of giving an efficient double.

Alfred fanned and Martin won an undoubled gammon, opening an eight-point lead. Over the next eleven games, Alfred narrowed that lead to four points.

## Martin Filipi

**Position 5**
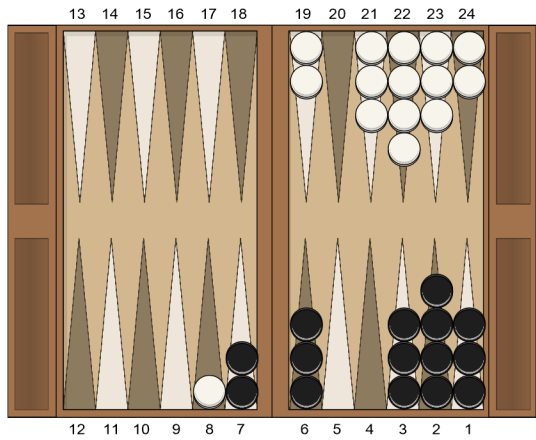


Pip: 61
Alfred Mamlet
7-Away

3-Away
Martin Filipi
Pip: 52

Black (Martin Filipi) on roll. Cube action?

| Analyzed in Rollout | No redouble | Redouble/Take |
|---|---|---|
| Player Winning Chances: | 75.62% (G:0.00% B:0.00%) | 75.64% (G:0.01% B:0.00%) |
| Opponent Winning Chances: | 24.38% (G:0.00% B:0.00%) | 24.36% (G:0.00% B:0.00%) |
| Cubeless Equities | +0.512 | +0.776 |
| **Cubeful Equities** | | |
| No redouble: | +0.587 | ±0.003 (+0.585..+0.590) |
| Redouble/Take: | -0.163 (-0.751) | ±0.001 (-0.164..-0.163) |
| Redouble/Pass: | +1.000 (+0.413) | |
| | | |
| **Best Cube action: No redouble / Take** | | |
| Percentage of wrong pass needed to make the double decision right: 64.5% | | |
| **Rollout details** | | |
| 1296 Games rolled with Variance Reduction. | | |
| Dice Seed: 325624567 | | |
| Moves: 3-ply, cube decisions: XG Roller | | |

Leading 3-away to 7-away and owning a 2-cube, Martin had a recube decision.

Should he redouble? A two-point win puts him at Crawford, with Alfred needing seven points. At that score, XG gives Alfred a 9.72% chance to win the match.

Redoubling to 4 allows Alfred to put the match on the line by turning the cube back to 8 at the first opportunity. If he trusts XG's match equity table, how much does Alfred need to take a 4-cube? He breaks even at 9.72% winning chances: below that point he should pass, and above it he should take and redouble. So Martin should be extremely cautious in giving Alfred a free recube to 8.

Martin has stacks on his low points and gaps on his 4 and 5, so his nine-pip lead is not as big as it may seem. It turns out that Alfred

## Martin Filipi

has over 24% winning chances! The position is a clear take even in the first game of a 21-point match, as predicted by the Keith Count (69 for Martin, 67 for Alfred).

Overestimating his edge, Martin redoubled to 4, a huge mistake that could have cost him the title. Alfred took and spun the cube to 8 after Martin rolled 63: 7/1 7/4. The finish was not very exciting: Alfred rolled a mediocre 53 and three moves later missed with a 5, bearing only one checker off. That miss put the game nearly out

of his reach. Martin won game and match to become champion of the 2017 USBGF Online Circuit.

We congratulate Martin Filipi on an impressive win. This is quite a feat, especially for a relative newcomer to the scene. No doubt he will post many good results throughout his backgammon career. ◆

**- MARTY STORER & KAREN DAVIS**



### *About Marty*

Marty Storer is the Managing Editor of *PrimeTime Backgammon*. In 2015 he won the Michigan Summer Championship and the USBGF National Championship East. He won the first ABT title (1993), and is a two-time New England Backgammon Club champion.

Marty has been awarded the title of Grandmaster Class 2 by the Backgammon Masters Awarding Body. He is the #28 Giant of Backgammon for 2017.

His two-volume *Backgammon Praxis* was released in 2005 to rave reviews. In 2011, with intrepid co-author Mary Hickey, he published *What's Your Game Plan? Backgammon Strategy in the Middle Game*. He is currently at work on another book, *Astounding Backgammon*.

Marty lives in southern New Hampshire with his wife, children, pet mammals, and pet bots.