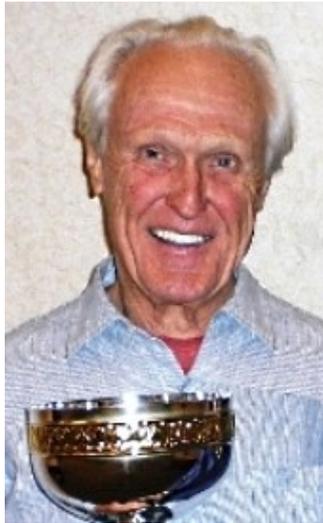


Ed Bennett: King Of The Mountain

by Karen Davis

Ed Bennett lives in an octagonal home (with stunning views in all eight directions) perched atop a mountain in the Sangre de Cristo range outside Santa Fe. He keeps fit by hiking the mountain trails on his property. This exercise regimen reflects the disciplined character that has helped him climb to the top of the vocations and avocations he has pursued over his lifetime.

Ed grew up in Pennsylvania, but was treated to winter vacations in South Florida. He took up tennis seriously at age 12, and won the Boys' Championship of Pennsylvania at age 15. The adobe guest house next to his home is filled with tennis trophies, including one several feet high, which Ed won as a freshman at Yale in the fall of 1954. He maintains that tennis and backgammon require the same psychological qualities. They are both one-on-one sports, where each opponent is trying to outlast, outsmart, and outmaneuver the other. Ed says that they are essentially the same game on different surfaces, though "backgammon players tend to be somewhat smarter and the tennis folks somewhat skinnier!"



Ed Bennett

After graduating from Yale, Ed served as a 1st Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps at Quantico, Virginia, from 1958 to 1960. In the Marine Corps School he received leadership training, learned tactics and weaponry, and participated in war games. And other games. Playing for the Corps, Ed placed first in the tennis doubles for the mid-Atlantic region, and was ranked among the top ten in singles in the DC area.

He went back to Yale and acquired a law degree in 1963. After a short stint with Cadwalader, Wickersham and Taft, a Wall Street law firm, he returned to Pennsylvania to help manage his family's affairs. Eventually he left for New Mexico when he accepted a position as the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the First National Bank of Santa Fe, the Southwest's oldest independent bank (chartered in 1870). By the time Ed stepped down as CEO after 26 years, everyone in the company was a winner. Due to his oversight and leadership, the employees owned nearly 20 percent of the bank's stock.

In fact, it is Ed's exemplary character that is most often noted by his friends and fellow backgammon players. Ed said that his father taught him how to properly comport himself at a gaming table, whether the game in question was poker, gin rummy or backgammon. Malcolm Davis said he struck up a friendship with Ed several years ago at a Pittsburgh tournament because he was immediately impressed by how polite and nice he was. Of course, their mutual love of fine wine and gourmet food helped forge that friendship—I've tagged along on many a dinner to enjoy their company and camaraderie as well. It's a mutual admiration society. Ed says of Malcolm, "He's a beacon of how to handle oneself in backgammon: he never gloats, never complains."

With Ed's retirement from banking at the end of 2005, he began making a disciplined effort to improve his backgammon game. He subjects himself to the incessant criticism of his favorite bot. He invites friends to his mountaintop aerie for a friendly chouette (over a fine glass of wine!). Often the afternoon winds down into an evening dining out at a gourmet restaurant in downtown Santa Fe, where you can, as a complement to the menu, see the artists displaying their work. To judge by all the wonderful art on display in his home, Ed has done his part to support the Santa Fe artists' community.

Backgammon became a part of Ed's life in the late 1970s when a friend gave him Barclay Cooke's *The Cruellest Game*. Ed knew at once that backgammon was the game for him. The book, he says, literally changed his life.

Ed's first backgammon tournament foray was a stellar lack of success: he lost 0-11 in the Plimpton Cup World Amateur Championship in Las Vegas in 1979. But as we've learned, Ed is not a quitter. After almost 25 years of trying, his first major win was the Chicago Open Championship in 2003 at the age of 67. In fact one of the attractions of backgammon to Ed is that players can continue to improve and compete for a long time—unlike tennis, where older players can't do what they could when they were younger.

And Ed does just get better and better. In 2009 he emerged victorious in Carol Joy Cole's Michigan State Championships, a win that helped land him in third place in the 2009 American Backgammon Tour standings. His best individual wins were over Sander Lylloff and Francois Tardieu at the World Championships in Monte Carlo, and he was a finalist in the 2008 Fortis World Team Championship, teaming with his son Adam and Stephan Kostov.

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Edward B. Bennett Backgammon Record

- Michigan Summer Championship Winner 2009
- Chicago Open Championship Winner 2003
- Nevada State Championship Finalist 2002
- Mid-Atlantic Championship (Baltimore) Finalist 2009
- Southern Open Consolation (St.Simon's Island, GA) Winner 2004
- New Mexico State Consolation (one day event) Winner 2007
- Las Vegas Open \$100 Saturday Jackpot Winner 2009
- Pittsburgh Open Mulligan Jackpot Winner 2010
- Florida State Royal Palm Classic Jackpot Finalist 2002
- Florida State Royal Palm Classic Jackpot Finalist 2003
- Boston Open Doubles (with Larry Leibster) Winner 2003
- Las Vegas Open Doubles (with Richard Munitz) Winner 2009
- New Mexico State Doubles (with Jan Brennan) Winner 2011
- Minnesota State Blitz Event Winner 2007
- Florida State Blitz Event Winner 2009
- Mid-West Championship Leapgammon Event Winner 2008
- Fortis World Team Championship Finalist 2009

“Top Ten” ABT finishes:

- 9th Place 2003
- 3rd Place 2009

It is his disciplined approach to the game that Ed credits with his success. His early tutor was John Trijonis, who graduated from Cal Tech at the top of his class with a Ph.D. in meteor-

ology, and later advised the City of Albuquerque on air pollution control. Ed took lessons from top players like Bill Robertie, and read everything he could get his hands on. His backgammon and games book collection numbers over 500 books, including a dozen editions of Jacoby and Crawford, some of the earliest backgammon books from the 17th and 18th century, books with backgammon characters such as New Yorker writer E. J. Kahn's 1979 study, *Far-Flung and Foot Loose*, and John Bradshaw's 1975 *Fast Company*, which profiled Tim Holland, among other famous games players. In the 1980s, Ed pored over the mimeographed copies of Danny Kleinman's dozen books. He credits Bill Robertie with the modern style of backgammon writing, citing his analysis of the 1981 Lee Genuid vs. Joe Dwek World Championship match as a case in point. Kit Woolsey and Antonio Ortega, says Ed, followed with excellent books. He says that just as the 1970s were the Golden Age of Backgammon, so today is the Golden Age of Backgammon Literature. Backgammon bots are so deadly accurate that it is possible to learn quickly with modern-era books.



Adam Bennett

Ed has teamed with his son Adam in recent years and has beamed with pride as Adam's backgammon career has taken off. Adam, for his part, notes that he “got into the sport as a way to spend time with my dad. I wouldn't be playing at all if he had not been active in the community.” Adam first learned the rules of backgammon in the late 1970s after he got a board for Christmas, and started playing seriously in 2004 when his dad invited him to go to the Las Vegas Open.

Raised in Pennsylvania and New Mexico, Adam followed in Ed's footsteps as an undergraduate at Yale, and then earned an M.B.A. degree from Tulane University, which launched him on a career in real estate finance. While residing in Wisconsin, Adam returns to New Mexico frequently, most recently to serve as Associate Director and auctioneer of the New Mexico State Championships. He is a noted backgammon author, having written a series of pieces for the Chicago Point in 2006 on the Monte Carlo World Championship, and photoessays in *GammonVillage*. His article, “American Backgammon Tour Contenders,”

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graced the pages of PrimeTime Backgammon in the January/February 2011 issue.

Adam has a notable backgammon record of his own. He joined his dad in the top ten of the ABT in 2009 (Ed ranked 3rd and Adam 7th). They were runner-up in the 2008 Fortis World Team Tournament (along with Stephan Kostov). Adam won the 2009 Prairie Classic in Peoria and the 2005 Colorado State Championship. He won the consolation in the 2008 Wisconsin State Championship, his first ABT Open event, besting all of the top three ABT players including Neil Kazaross in the final round of the consolation. He scored another major win in the consolation of the 2009 at the Michigan State Championship, with his dad winning the event!

Adam Bennett Tournament Wins:

- 2005 Colorado State Championship
- 2009 Prairie Classic, Peoria

2nd Place/Consolation:

- 2010 New Orleans Sweet Sixteen, Consolation Winner
- 2009 Midwest Championships, Runner-up
- 2009 Michigan State Championships, Consolation Winner
- 2008 Wisconsin State Championship, Consolation Winner
- 2007 Pittsburgh ABT, Runner-up (Advanced Division)
- 2006 TrueMoneyGames tournament, Monte Carlo, Runner-up

Last Chance:

2007 Midwest Championships, Winner (Advanced Division)

Doubles/Team:

- 2010 Lincoln/Douglas Doubles with Mary Hickey, Peoria, Winner
- 2008 Fortis World Team Championship with Ed Bennett

and Stephan Kostov, Runner-up

Both Ed and Adam give generously of their time and talent to the game. Without any financial gain, they help promote the New Mexico State Championship tournament, which, with its delightful ambience, is quickly becoming one of the must-attend tournaments on the ABT.

Both father and son are members of the U.S. Backgammon Federation, with Ed having joined in the very early days as the 10th member and Gold Founding Sponsor. Ed would like to see more young, serious players enter the game, and applauds the USBGF's leadership under Perry Gartner, as well as the Federation's initiative in promoting the establishment of backgammon clubs in colleges around the country. Drawing upon his experience in competitive tennis, he'd like to see a "leader board" published in PrimeTime Backgammon of the top Open, Advanced, and Novice players including:

- 1)ABT points
- 2)Master Jackpot points
- 3)Combined ABT and Masters points
- 4)Combined win/loss percentage
- 5)Total tournaments played
- 6)Total matches won

This is such a good idea that we'll adopt it in the next issue. A USBGF Committee including Perry Gartner, Art Benjamin, Patrick Gibson and Rich Munitz is developing a USBGF point system. Ed notes that statistics have done wonders for professional sports. There's no reason they wouldn't have the same impact on backgammon.

To Adam Bennett, "It's a no-brainer to become a member of the U.S. Backgammon Federation." When asked how the USBGF could best promote backgammon, he, like his father, mentioned expanding the use of ratings, especially rated tournaments for schools. It works for chess, says Adam, and he feels that the USBGF's college and high school club initiative is a positive development which will bring new blood to the backgammon community. Adam would also like to see clock use at tournaments become more widespread.

Like the Barclay and Walter Cooke father-son duo of an earlier era, both Ed and Adam Bennett are talented, accomplished backgammon players. We are grateful for the unique contributions they make to the game we all love. We'll watch as they continue to scale new heights!