

Improving Your Play

Sharpen Your Game: How Anki Cards Can Transform Backgammon Learning

By Joe Calvaruso

We published the first part of this article in our previous issue, but as Joe Calvaruso pointed out, in doing so we did our readers a disservice by breaking the article's continuity. PrimeTime regrets the decision and we now present the entire article in one place. — Ed.

Backgammon isn't just a game—it's a mental sport. To succeed at the highest levels, we need more than tactical knowledge or raw talent; we need a mind trained to see patterns instantly, to recall probabilities without hesitation, and to make sound decisions under pressure. The best players don't just memorize—they internalize. And to reach that level, we must move beyond passive study to active engagement. Fortunately there is a smarter, faster, and more lasting way to improve: active recall and spaced repetition, proven by cognitive science and made practical through a powerful tool—Anki.

In the landmark paper “[The Power of Testing Memory](#),” researchers Henry Roediger and Jeffrey Karpicke showed that testing or repeated low-stakes quizzes significantly improves long-term retention, even more than repeated studying. That's because retrieval strengthens memory traces and creates more durable learning. The authors highlight how testing identifies knowledge gaps, helping learners diagnose weak areas in real time and adjust study strategies accordingly. Testing primes the brain to absorb new information, a phenomenon where retrieving prior knowledge enhances comprehension of subsequent content.

In backgammon, this means the difference between hesitating when you face a familiar position—or instantly recognizing the right move or cube action because you've tested yourself on it before. The science is clear: what we retrieve through active and repeated quizzing, we remember. And in backgammon, what you remember can often be the difference between an early exit and a championship win.

That's where Anki comes in. Anki is a flashcard app available on multiple devices that uses spaced repetition, a technique that schedules review sessions at the exact moment you're about to forget something. This method supercharges your memory and ensures that what you study actually sticks. You're not cramming—you're building knowledge that endures. Even just 10 minutes a day using Anki can create the kind of mental sharpness that separates good players from great ones.

But what makes Anki even more powerful for backgammon players is the extraordinary work of Rainer Birkle. After researching the concept of Anki in 2021, Rainer has developed a comprehensive, expertly curated set of Anki decks designed specifically for backgammon improvement. These are not generic trivia cards—these are deliberate, targeted learning tools that challenge you to think like a top player. Each card is crafted to push you to recall the right concepts, rather than simply recognizing them. “You’re at Gammon-Go—should you double?” “What’s the best checker play in this prime vs. prime scenario?” These are real questions you’ll face over the board, and by training with Birkle’s cards, you’ll face them with clarity and confidence.

What’s special about these decks is that they grow with you. Anki’s intelligent scheduling algorithm adapts to how well you know each concept. Rainer explains: “When you answer a card, you rate how easy or difficult it was to recall. If you struggle with certain match equity decisions or cube actions at awkward scores, those cards will appear more frequently. If you’ve mastered an idea, it will show up less often, just enough to keep it fresh. This way, your study time becomes personalized, efficient, and meaningful—no wasted hours, no fluff.” Over time, this creates a personalized learning plan that evolves with your skill level. Rainer reminds us to “let the spaced repetition system (SRS) do the hard work of reminding you when it’s time to revisit that idea.”

More importantly, retrieval practice using Birkle’s Anki decks simulates real match conditions. In a tournament, there’s no pause button, no textbook to consult. You must trust your preparation, knowing you’ve trained your brain to recall, not just to recognize. By practicing active recall every day, you’re not just learning facts—you’re rewiring your brain to respond under pressure, to see through complexity, and to make the best move instinctively.

One of the most impressive aspects of Rainer’s Anki decks is the depth and variety of features they provide to support serious study. Each card offers rich detail, beginning with Checker Play, which includes overviews at neutral scores as well as Double Match Point (DMP), Gammon-Save, and Gammon-Go results. Cube Action cards present a full Score Matrix that maps the correct decisions for every score in a seven-point match, while advanced metrics such as Cube Efficiency, Gammon-Adjusted Wins, Recube Vig, and Volatility (including separate positive and negative volatility) allow players to sharpen their cube judgment using insights from *The Theory of Backgammon* by Dirk Schiemann.

Other tools include Take Points & Gammon Values, a Pip Count Trainer that tracks both accuracy and time, and vivid graphics and move lists generated from XG analysis. Beyond the individual cards, the system’s robust categorization and filtering options enable players to organize material by tags, making it easy to target specific scenarios or weaknesses, while full synchronization across devices ensures study is seamless anywhere. Together, these features transform Anki into more than a flashcard app—it becomes a comprehensive, customizable learning platform for backgammon mastery.

Key Features of Rainer Birkle’s Anki Decks

- Checker Play: Neutral score, DMP, Gammon-Save & Gammon-Go results
- Cube Action: Full 7-point match Score Matrix plus advanced metrics (Cube Efficiency, Gammon-Adjusted Wins, Recube Vig, Volatility)
- Counting Trainer: Practice shots, jokers, and anti-jokers with instant feedback
- Pip Count Trainer: Measure speed and accuracy of pip counting under time pressure
- Take Points & Gammon Values: Essential reference for critical match decisions
- Categorization & Filtering: Powerful tagging system to target specific positions
- Synchronization: Study seamlessly across all your devices

Anki users enjoy the detailed information displayed on positions from popular backgammon books. Below is a list of the top authors who have contributed content to the Anki project so far:

- Dirk Schiemann
- Michihito Kageyama
- François Tardieu
- Hal Heinrich
- Hisayasu Kato (a.k.a. Ryuichi Shina)
- Nick Blasier

Rainer has developed a structured routine that leverages Anki on both his mobile device and desktop computer for daily study. His approach shows how flexible Anki can be when adapted to the specific needs of a serious backgammon student.

Rainer's Daily Work With Anki

On his mobile device

- Memorizing take points and gammon values with the Match Theory deck
- Working on his weaknesses with his “Personal Deck” deck (flagging cards where I have to extend the analyzing and/or ask my coach)
- Learning with Dirk Schiemann's theme decks compiled from his personal position database
- Learning the Opening Replies
- Studying endgame technique with Ryuichi Shina's “Checker Play Encyclopedia – Endgame”
- Studying prime versus prime checker play with Ryuichi Shina's “Checker Play Encyclopedia – Prime vs. Prime”

On his desktop computer

- Creating new Anki cards for each of his blunders and opening errors
- Extending old cards with notes, comparable situations, etc.
- Creating filtered decks/searches for his theme-based studies

Cube Action: Score Matrix with the correct actions for all scores in a 7-point match.

Ryuichi Shina's Cube Action Encyclopedia | 1 Man Back - #0-Outer(B)-\$a

Black on roll. Cube action?

Pip Count: ○ 128 - ● 139 (-11)

Copy XGID
Show Dice Distribution
Show Tags
Show XG2Anki Info

Unlimited Games (no Jacoby, with Beavers)

Winning Chances D/T (click for ND)
 ● 65.76% (G:31.45% B:0.54%)
 ○ 34.22% (G:8.58% B:0.47%)

Cubeless Equity: N: +0.533
D: +1.090

Cubeless Equities:
 No double: +0.730 (-0.114)
 Double/Pass: +0.844
 Double/Pass: +1.000 (+0.156)
 Best Choice: Double/Pass

Cube Efficiency: 0.311
 GAW + RV > 25%?
 22.75% + 6.15% = 28.90%
 (D - DT) / D = 23%
 Volatility: 0.271 0.311 0.242

Score Matrix for Initial Double

	2a	3a	4a	5a	6a	7a
2a	D/T 59/120	N/T 375/755	N/T 928/1473	N/T 726/1145	N/T 819/1336	N/T 1169/1668
3a	D/P 11/347	D/P 174/119	N/T 65/369	N/T 100/466	N/T 207/637	N/T 328/859
4a	TG/P 4/786	D/P 41/557	D/P 118/292	D/P 138/147	D/T 173/44	D/T 65/223
5a	D/P 107/227	D/P 144/105	D/T 213/15	D/T 140/115	D/T 95/218	N/T 8/362
6a	D/P 68/215	D/P 121/100	D/P 189/6	D/P 177/8	D/T 146/76	D/T 116/143
7a	D/P 66/252	D/P 88/154	D/P 169/34	D/P 167/15	D/T 147/78	D/T 111/148

Analyzing Level: XG++

Notice: The numbers in the table cells show the size of the error for each player in millipoints if the wrong action is taken. You can click on a table cell to get more information about its specific match score.

Show Simon Barget's Activity Spectrum

Perhaps the best example of expanding the utility of the Anki Method and achieving success with it is Dirk Schiemann—one of only two Super Grandmasters, former Online Backgammon World Champion, and holder of the 2021 UBC Contender title. He has also earned wide acclaim for his deeply analytical and mathematically rigorous work *The Theory of Backgammon*, regarded as a major milestone in backgammon literature, as well as *To Hit or Not to Hit*, a practical guide that helps players refine their strategic judgment in one of the game's most frequent and critical decisions.

Dirk acknowledges that many factors have contributed to his attainment of the Super Grandmaster level, but he credits Anki as a possibly decisive reason for his improved performance. Dirk stated that “The Anki method is particularly powerful because it makes studying more efficient, presenting abundant information for each position,” which enables him to quickly grasp the optimal choice. He continued: “Creating and reviewing the many decks is most likely the reason I was able to progress to the next level. It was not a coincidence that my improvement increased.”

His approach emphasizes mastering the “bread-and-butter” positions that occur frequently and exert a major influence on performance rating (PR). “I spend most of my time on positions that I encounter frequently instead of ones that may be super interesting but occur very infrequently,” he added. To this end, he has created hundreds of categorized positions, such as high-anchor holding games, doubling decisions, and bearing-in plays.

Beyond these basic categories, Dirk is a collaborator with Rainer and has also developed several card decks of common situations, along with precise “tags” that target specific positional types, allowing him to deepen his focus and sharpen his decision-making. His extensive database is shown in Exhibit A, improves the ease of studying the game himself and coaching his students.

Another frequent user of Anki cards is Karen Davis, who has been at the heart of organized backgammon in the United States for more than a decade, widely regarded as the central figure in the growth and success of the U.S. Backgammon Federation, Women's World of Backgammon, and the launching of *PrimeTime Backgammon Magazine*. Beyond her leadership, Karen is a stellar tournament organizer and an accomplished competitor who has competed on the international stage with Team USA, earned major tournament victories, and achieved Master ranking with the Backgammon Masters Awarding Body.

Karen has fully embraced the use of Rainer Birkle's Anki decks as a key part of her training routine. “I have all my BMAB, ABT, UBC, and World Competition match blunders turned into Anki Cards – Rainer is so wonderful to supply the decks in less than 24 hours!” she explains, noting that she also purchases prepared decks for backgammon books she studies, such as Dirk Schiemann's *To Hit or Not to Hit* and François Tardieu's *Backgammon Strategic Concepts*.

While she readily admits she hasn't mastered the vast trove of material, she points to three ways the cards have proven especially valuable: “They compel me to carefully review my own match blunders, quiz me on book concepts to ensure that I truly internalize them, and they offer the unique and enjoyable challenge of training my ability to estimate winning and gammon probabilities in cube decisions.” As she puts it, the Anki decks help her test whether she's “really internalizing the material” and ultimately sharpen her cube play in a way that few other tools can.

Julius High is a celebrated backgammon player, former USBGF Board member, and winner of the inaugural BMAB Players Cup. But he is likely most known for his role as a backgammon coach of many students and co-instructor with Tom Jayne of classes for novices held in person at most tournament events. He has been playing seriously for over 15 years after Ray Fogerlund, one of the most accomplished tournament players in modern backgammon history, offered to spend time improving his game.

Julius High has taken Anki far beyond a simple memorization tool by weaving it into his coaching practice. He not only uses categorized decks and tags but also enriches the cards with explanatory notes and rationales, helping his students understand why a decision is correct, not just what the correct move is. This layered approach blends retrieval practice with elaboration and dual coding, two evidence-based learning strategies that deepen comprehension and accelerate improvement. The result is a powerful system that resonates with his students and equips them to carry insights from study into live play.

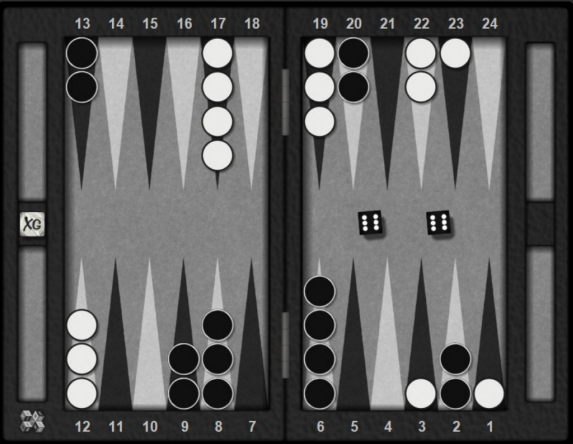
- Elaboration involves asking “how” and “why” questions, encouraging learners to make connections with prior knowledge, which leads to deeper understanding.
- Dual Coding combines verbal and visual representations, increasing the likelihood of successful encoding and retrieval by engaging multiple pathways.

This two-step process of self-explanation followed by spaced testing engages your memory at multiple levels, reinforcing both understanding and recall. Integrating written explanations into an Anki routine transforms each flashcard into a moment of active, expressive engagement. When you pause to write (or speak aloud) your thought process behind a checker play or reference position, you move beyond surface memory and activate higher-order thinking. This not only helps with retention but builds your ability to transfer knowledge—so when you face a similar, but not identical, position over the board, your brain can adapt the core principle rather than search for an exact match. Over time, you'll find that concepts you used to forget now come to you more effortlessly during matches.

One of Julius's students who exemplifies this approach is Gershon Distenfeld, a passionate backgammon player and accomplished poker professional whose disciplined study and generous spirit have made him stand out both at the board and beyond.

Distenfeld, a lifelong backgammon enthusiast who has recently rededicated himself to the game, has found Julius High's Anki-based coaching to be transformative. Gershon explained that "Our sessions are structured around focused topics—sometimes chosen by Julius, other times by me based on areas I want to strengthen." Together they review positions through multiple game formats, with Anki cards

Dirk Schiemann | The Theory of Backgammon | (Page 217)



Pip Count: ○ 136 - ● 143 (-7)

Attention: The best move depends on the match score!

Copy XGID Show Tags Show XG2Anki Info

Unlimited Games (with Jacoby)

20/14(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,950
P: 74.1 22.6 0.6 O: 25.9 4.2 0.1	
20/14(2) 13/7(2)	+0,923
P: 74.3 17.0 0.5 O: 25.7 3.6 0.1	
13/1* 9/3*(2)	+0,827
P: 70.6 41.6 0.8 O: 29.4 5.6 0.2	
13/7(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,873
P: 70.7 31.3 1.0 O: 29.3 5.1 0.2	
20/8 9/3*(2)	+0,851
P: 70.5 24.4 1.0 O: 29.5 5.2 0.2	
20/8(2)	+0,789
P: 69.9 14.5 0.4 O: 30.1 4.6 0.1	
13/1*(2)	+0,709
P: 67.1 31.4 0.3 O: 32.9 6.3 0.2	

a 20/14(2) 9/3*(2)

b 13/1* 9/3*(2)

c 20/14(2) 13/7(2)

Neutral Score

20/14(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,977
P: 73.8 24.4 0.7 O: 26.2 4.4 0.2	
13/1* 9/3*(2)	+0,938
P: 71.0 42.2 0.8 O: 29.0 5.5 0.2	
13/7(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,921
P: 71.1 31.3 0.9 O: 28.9 5.0 0.2	
20/14(2) 13/7(2)	+0,917
P: 74.2 17.8 0.5 O: 25.8 3.5 0.1	
20/8 9/3*(2)	+0,873
P: 70.3 25.5 1.0 O: 29.7 5.4 0.2	
20/8(2)	+0,803
P: 70.5 12.9 0.3 O: 29.5 3.9 0.1	
13/1*(2)	+0,746
P: 67.0 31.4 0.3 O: 33.0 6.1 0.2	

DMP

20/14(2) 13/7(2)	+0,478
P: 73.9 19.3 0.6 O: 26.1 3.6 0.1	
20/14(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,471
P: 73.5 25.0 0.8 O: 26.5 4.2 0.1	
13/1* 9/3*(2)	+0,420
P: 71.0 42.3 0.9 O: 29.0 5.4 0.2	
13/7(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,415
P: 70.7 34.1 1.4 O: 29.3 5.3 0.2	
20/8 9/3*(2)	+0,393
P: 69.7 28.5 1.5 O: 30.3 5.6 0.2	
20/8(2)	+0,391
P: 69.6 14.7 0.5 O: 30.4 4.5 0.1	
13/1*(2)	+0,342
P: 67.1 32.9 0.4 O: 32.9 6.5 0.3	

Gammon-Save

20/14(2) 13/7(2)	+0,409
P: 73.8 18.1 0.5 O: 26.2 3.3 0.1	
20/14(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,387
P: 73.4 25.0 0.8 O: 26.6 4.1 0.1	
13/1* 9/3*(2)	+0,314
P: 70.9 41.8 0.9 O: 29.1 5.3 0.2	
13/7(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,309
P: 70.6 33.3 1.4 O: 29.4 5.1 0.2	
20/8(2)	+0,299
P: 69.5 15.2 0.5 O: 30.5 4.6 0.1	
20/8 9/3*(2)	+0,283
P: 69.6 28.5 1.5 O: 30.4 5.5 0.2	
13/1*(2)	+0,218
P: 66.9 31.4 0.3 O: 33.1 6.1 0.2	

Gammon-Go

13/1* 9/3*(2)	+1,233
P: 70.5 41.2 0.8 O: 29.5 5.6 0.2	
13/7(2) 9/3*(2)	+1,037
P: 70.9 31.0 0.8 O: 29.1 5.1 0.2	
13/1*(2)	+0,970
P: 67.1 31.4 0.3 O: 32.9 6.4 0.3	
20/14(2) 9/3*(2)	+0,964
P: 73.4 24.7 0.6 O: 26.6 4.8 0.2	
20/8 9/3*(2)	+0,915
P: 70.4 25.4 0.8 O: 29.6 5.5 0.2	
20/14 13/7 9/3*(2)	+0,894
P: 64.2 30.5 1.5 O: 35.8 9.8 0.7	
13/7 9/3*(2) 8/2	+0,865
P: 64.2 29.0 0.8 O: 35.8 7.1 0.3	

Number of Different Best Moves: 3

Attention: At a neutral score the best move depends on the position of the cube!

○ Middle ●

20/14(2) 9/3*(2) +0,985 P: 73.7 24.7 0.7 O: 26.3 4.4 0.2 13/1* 9/3*(2) +0,981 P: 71.0 42.2 0.8 O: 29.0 5.5 0.2 13/7(2) 9/3*(2) +0,943 P: 71.1 31.2 0.9 O: 28.9 5.0 0.2 20/14(2) 13/7(2) +0,926 P: 74.2 17.9 0.5 O: 25.8 3.6 0.1 20/8 9/3*(2) +0,892 P: 70.3 25.4 1.0 O: 29.7 5.4 0.2 20/8(2) +0,819 P: 69.9 14.2 0.4 O: 30.1 4.5 0.1 13/1*(2) +0,801 P: 67.0 31.4 0.3 O: 33.0 6.1 0.2	20/14(2) 9/3*(2) +0,977 P: 73.8 24.4 0.7 O: 26.2 4.4 0.2 13/1* 9/3*(2) +0,938 P: 71.0 42.2 0.8 O: 29.0 5.5 0.2 13/7(2) 9/3*(2) +0,921 P: 71.1 31.3 0.9 O: 28.9 5.0 0.2 20/14(2) 13/7(2) +0,917 P: 74.2 17.8 0.5 O: 25.8 3.5 0.1 20/8 9/3*(2) +0,873 P: 70.3 25.5 1.0 O: 29.7 5.4 0.2 20/8(2) +0,803 P: 70.5 12.9 0.3 O: 29.5 3.9 0.1 13/1*(2) +0,746 P: 67.0 31.4 0.3 O: 33.0 6.1 0.2	13/1* 9/3*(2) +0,692 P: 71.0 42.4 0.8 O: 29.0 5.5 0.2 13/7(2) 9/3*(2) +0,596 P: 71.1 32.0 0.9 O: 28.9 5.1 0.2 20/14(2) 9/3*(2) +0,590 P: 73.8 24.6 0.6 O: 26.2 4.4 0.2 20/14(2) 13/7(2) +0,541 P: 74.2 18.1 0.5 O: 25.8 3.6 0.1 20/8 9/3*(2) +0,511 P: 70.3 25.7 1.0 O: 29.7 5.4 0.2 13/1*(2) +0,479 P: 67.0 31.4 0.3 O: 33.0 6.1 0.2 20/8(2) +0,399 P: 70.5 12.9 0.3 O: 29.5 3.9 0.1
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reinforcing key lessons. What Gershon values most about this approach is its efficiency: instead of spending hours manually dissecting XG positions, Anki's categorized decks allow him to recognize patterns quickly and retain them over time. As a full-time professional and family man, he appreciates that this approach saves him time while still accelerating his growth as a player. He notes that "Unlike poker, where intensive study yields only marginal improvements, the effect of studying backgammon with Anki shows up almost immediately in performance."

Beyond the board, Distenfeld is equally known for his philanthropy. After reaching the World Series of Poker Main Event final table and winning a WSOP bracelet in another event, he donated his winnings to charity, a gesture he has repeated in subsequent events. Together with his wife Aviva, he hopes to inspire other players to follow suit, challenging the poker community to commit at least 1% of their winnings to causes that make the world better. For Gershon, "Mastery of backgammon and success in poker are not ends in themselves, but opportunities to grow, give back, and set an example of generosity." His story highlights how the discipline of focused learning through Anki can coexist with a larger vision of using one's talents and achievements for good.

Another student who has experienced remarkable progress through Julius's Anki-based coaching is Kristin Westerman, director of the Nashville Backgammon Club and a lifelong competitor who has transformed her game through structured study and data-driven insights.

Kristin knew early on that flashcards would accelerate her learning and even considered creating her own handmade decks. When Julius introduced her to Rainer Birkle's automated Anki cards, she quickly discovered the time savings and depth of information they provided—far beyond what she had imagined. With Julius's coaching and the structured use of Anki, Kristin's performance rating has steadily improved, and her tournament results speak for themselves: she has cashed in five of her last six events in the Advanced division and even secured a third-place finish in the Intermediate division of the World Championship in Monte Carlo, a long-time goal on her personal backgammon "bucket list."

Kristin stated that "What I value most about Anki is its data-driven approach." After submitting the transcriptions of her BMAB matches in Atlanta, Rainer generated cards for each of her blunders, which he and Julius then categorized. Kristin admitted that "This method not only highlighted individual errors but also revealed larger patterns in my play—such as importance of slotting key points more effectively, avoiding burying checkers, maintaining anchors, and minimizing unnecessary blots." By combining the structure of Anki with deeper analysis, Kristin has been able to identify trends, target specific weaknesses, and turn insights into measurable progress. For her, Anki is more than a study tool; it is a catalyst for growth that has deepened her understanding of the game and accelerated her rise in competitive backgammon.

Also among the many players who have embraced Julius High's Anki-based coaching are Rob and Waylon Crase, brothers and co-founders of the Olde Towne Backgammon Club in Columbus, Ohio, who have woven daily card study into both their personal improvement and their club's culture.

Regulars at USBGF live events and online tournaments, Rob found Anki on his own and Waylon was introduced to Anki by Julius at the Ohio State Tournament in March, who demonstrated its ability to accelerate learning and sharpen decision-making.

Rob eagerly described the rationale for experimenting with the cards. “The benefits of the cards, for me, is that I’ve always benefited from active recall and spaced repetition learning. That’s why we all know without thinking that $8 \times 4 = 32$. We used flash cards as children. Anki cards are the same thing on a grander scale with backgammon.”

For Rob and Waylon, Anki’s greatest advantage is efficiency. Both work full-time and cherish family time, so the ability to make progress in just a few minutes a day has been invaluable. The Crases commented, “They’re very useful and convenient. You can do them on your phone in line at the grocery or in a waiting room at the doctor, and many other places.” They are continually struck by how much information the cards display, enabling them to spot patterns and strengthen their intuition. Waylon noted, “You get to the correct play at all those different scores by simply scrolling down.”

Since then, they have incorporated daily reviews into their routine, working through many of the sets available on Rainer Birkle’s site. Rob says, “My favorite decks are second and third-roll decks. They help your game get off to a more stable beginning.” The results have been measurable: their performance ratings continue to decline, a reflection of steady improvement, while their recognition of over-the-board situations has grown noticeably sharper.

Equally inspired by Julius’s introduction to Anki by Julius is Angela Rule, who recently began playing at the St. Louis Backgammon Club. Angela’s game was already improving with excellent coaching from Joe Sylvester, one of the winningest players in history and highly sought-after lecturer who has recently resumed teaching, when she met Julius at the recent USBGF tournament in St. Louis. Angela described that “The combination of Sly’s highly intuitive understanding of the game with the immense amount of information displayed on the Anki cards has been a game-changer for me”.

Like others, she also looks forward to seeing the abundant information displayed on each card, and benefits from a detailed write-up from Julius. Angela added “I am currently enjoying *Opening Concepts* by Michihito Kageyama and plan to download cards that accompany every position in that wonderful book. Those will reinforce my learning tremendously.” Rather than relying on passive review, Angela is taking responsibility for mastering the material, important for excelling in competitive USBGF tournaments and the talent-rich St. Louis club.

From elite competitors to local club leaders, players like Dirk Schiemann, Karen Davis, Julius High, Gershon Distenfeld, Kristin Westerman, Rob and Waylon Crase, and Angela Rule are proving that Anki makes study faster, smarter, and more effective. With consistent use, it transforms knowledge into instinct, helping backgammon players turn preparation into performance.

There's something deeply empowering about this kind of training. It doesn't rely on luck or genius. It rewards consistency, focus, and a willingness to push your limits. Every time you sit down with the Anki app and test yourself on a difficult position, you're not just improving your game—you're building mental strength. You're creating the edge that will carry you through close matches, tough decisions, and high-stakes moments.

If you're serious about getting better—not someday, but starting now—this is your opportunity to not passively consume backgammon content and start engaging with it in a way that transforms your brain. Let retrieval practice and Anki do what they were built to do: take your understanding deeper, your recall faster, and your play sharper. Open the app, flip a card, and take the first step toward the player you know you can become.

And perhaps most inspiring of all: it's accessible to everyone. You don't need a coach, a bankroll, or a world championship title to start. All you need is a computer or phone, Rainer Birkle's backgammon decks, and the desire to improve. This method is already being used by some of the world's top learners in other fields—medicine, law, chess—and now, thanks to Birkle, it's available to you, tailored specifically for backgammon. Because in backgammon, the best move isn't always obvious—but the best way to get better is.

Dirk Schiemann's Theme Decks

- 3rd Roll
- 4th Roll
- 5th Roll
- Against Backgame
- Bear In
- Bear Off
- Contact
- Hit Loose
- Home-board Distribution
- How to Attack
- Leaving the Anchor
- Midpoint
- One Back Step Up
- Opening Cubes
- Pay Now or Later
- Prime Slot
- Ugly Plays
- Whether To Attack
- Which Point

How to get started

- Go to xg2anki.de
- Watch the YouTube tutorials
- Download & install the Anki software
- Create your free Anki account
- Download and import the free Anki decks
- Read the FAQ section on the xg2anki.de website 