

Chapter 5:

Scoring Spots

Bingos are the flash and glitz of Scrabble. Like a touchdown in football or a home run in baseball, bingos are significant plays that alter the game's landscape. They excite spectators and can change the psychology of the match in one swoop.

However, bingos aren't the only important plays. While those plays make the highlight reels, the walks, singles, 11-yard rushing plays, and mundane defensive plays truly make or break these sports. Likewise, in Scrabble, most games aren't decided by bingos, but rather by the grunt work: the 30 point scoring plays.

In the previous chapter, we proposed a basic lemma: create bingo lines when behind and close bingo lines when ahead. You might think the same rule applies to scoring spots, but this is not the case. Scoring spots are more complex than bingo lines. In general, leaving lucrative scoring spots is usually a bad idea. Indeed, when a scoring spot can potentially score 50 or more points, creating or leaving such a spot open is usually a bad idea.

However, opening scoring spots can sometimes be beneficial. Whether or not you should open or close scoring spots depends on your leave, the board the score, your opponent's previous plays, and entropy. This chapter will explain when to create and block scoring spots, showing you how to win the fight for points within the trenches of Scrabble.

Scoring Spots

When should you block scoring spots? The answer is not as easy as asking yourself if you are ahead. While you usually want to block scoring spots, at times creating scoring spots can actually be beneficial.

You should block scoring spots when:

- There is one scoring spot that is far more dangerous than any other. Even if you can't score well, depriving your opponent of this scoring spot is important.
- Your opponent often has tiles conducive to a certain spot. If the pool contains many high point tiles and your opponent has a random rack, you should block open bonus squares.
- When neither player has a significant lead. In these cases, reducing your opponent's equity is more important than altering the entropy.
- The scoring spot can easily be used to score 50 or more points with the J, X, or Z.
- You need to create a volatile board. When behind, scoring options allow your opponent to withstand a bingo and outscore you.

You should leave scoring spots open (or create new ones) when:

- You have tiles that are conducive to open bonus squares.
- Open scoring spots produce a favorable entropy level. In these cases, the preferable entropy outweighs the reduction in your opponent's expected score, as discussed in Chapter 1.
- When you are making a *delay*.
- When your opponent probably does NOT have tiles conducive to open bonus squares. This will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 9.

Diagram 1:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	TW			DL					TW			DL			TW
2		DW				TL				TL					DW
3			DW				DL	DL						V.	
4	DL			DW								W.	E.		DL
5					DW						DW	I.	T.		
6		TL					TL		T.	A.	B.		D.		TL
7			DL				DL		B.	O.	O.	T.		DL	
8	TW			DL				Y.	A.	Y.			H.		TW
9			DL				T.	A.	W.	E.	D.			DL	
10		TL	S.	H.	?	I.	R.	N.	S.		TL				TL
11			O.	I.	L.	E.	D.							DW	
12	DL			DW				DL					DW		DL
13			DW				DL	DL					DW		
14		DW				TL				TL				DW	
15	TW			DL					TW			DL			TW

A, E, I, O, T, V, ?

Choices: ObVIATE 5b (70),
ObVIATE m8 (73), VIOIATE 5b (70)

Diagram 2:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
1	TW			DL					TW			J.			TW	
2		DW				TL				TL		A.			DW	
3			DW				DL	DL				I.		DW		
4	DL			DW								L.			DL	
5								I.				I.	S.			
6		TL					N.	TL			TL	N.			TL	
7			DL				F.	DL	DL			W.		DL		
8	TW				G.	A.	Z.	O.	O.			I.	DL	B.	A.	Y.
9			DL				U.		P.	E.	R.	?	N.	E.	A.	
10		TL					N.	TL				TL	D.			TL
11													S.			
12	DL			O.	D.	E.	A.		DL					DW		DL
13			P.	O.	X.				DL	DL					DW	
14		DW					TL			TL					DW	
15	TW			DL						TW			DL			TW

B, C, E, I, K, L, Q

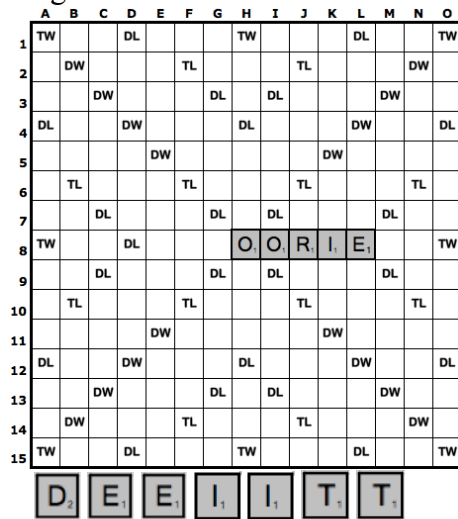
Choices: QI j5 (29), BLACK 2j (38)

In Diagram 1, you have multiple spots to play your bingo. ObVIATE m8 scores the most points, but also creates new bingo lines and scoring spots on rows 14, 15, or column I. Withholding these openings is more important than scoring an additional three points.

Meanwhile, both ObVIATE and VIOIATE at 5b allow your opponent to make lucrative parallel plays. ObVIATE allows fewer lucrative parallel plays using bonus squares. Although it opens the O for the 6b TLS, this opening allows fewer high scoring plays than the overlaps or underlaps after VIOIATE.

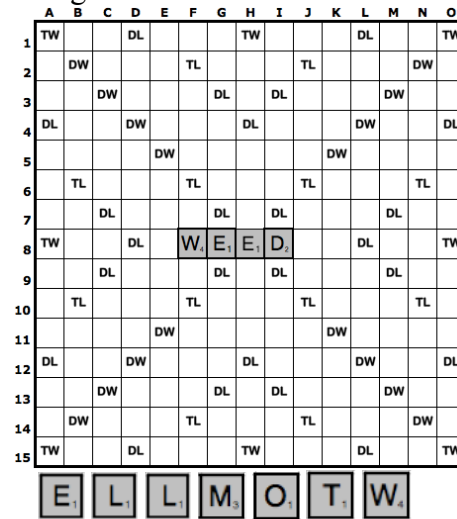
In Diagram 2, you would normally play QI. Although QI scores 9 fewer points, the BCEKL leave is much better than EIQ, and would easily be worth the sacrifice in points. However, you should still play BLACK since it blocks scoring plays and bingos using rows 1, 2, or 3. The J at 11 is especially lucrative for your opponent.

Diagram 3:



Choices: TEIID 9e (16), TIED 9f (15), TIE 9g (10), TIDE 9g (17), DIET 9h (16)

Diagram 4:

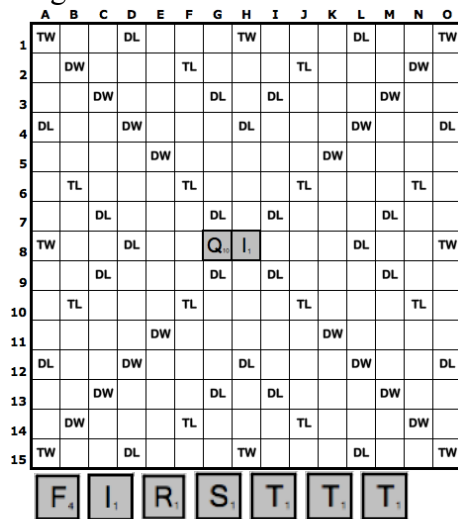


Choices: MELLOW 9e (27), MELLOW 7b (30), TOWEL e8 (25)

In Diagram 3, you should play DIET since it limits your opponent's scoring plays. DIET makes the board less receptive to parallel plays and vertical plays through OORIE.

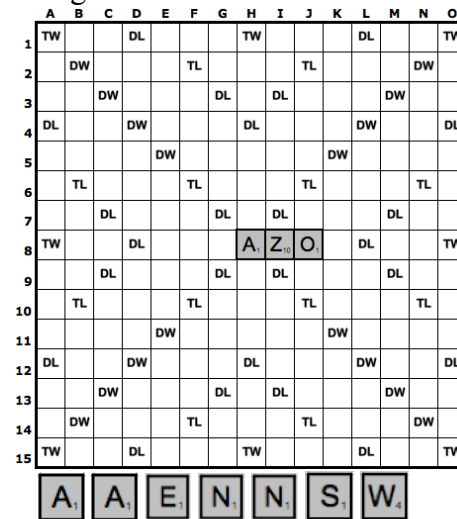
In Diagram 4, you should sacrifice 3 points to play MELLOW at 9e. While both options allow parallel plays, the parallels allowed by MELLOW 7b are more lucrative.

Diagram 5:



Score: 0-22
 Choices: FRITT 9e (24), TIT 9f (18), FIT 9f (21), RIFT 9f (26)

Diagram 6:

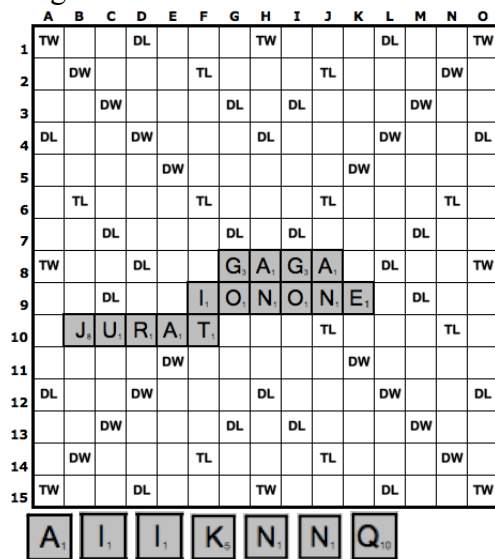


Score: 0-24
 Choices: WAN 9h (26), NAW 9h (26), WEAN 9g (28), AWN 9i (24)

In Diagram 5, FIT limits your opponent's scoring options better than other plays. While your opponent struggles to score, you can organize your rack into a bingo.

In Diagram 6, you want to limit their scoring options while maximizing your own chances at either a high scoring play or a bingo next turn. WEAN is best since it makes scoring difficult for your opponent, especially if they don't have an N or a hook to ZA.

Diagram 7:



Score: 20-46

Choices: QUININ c9 (50),
QUININA c9 (52)

Diagram 8:



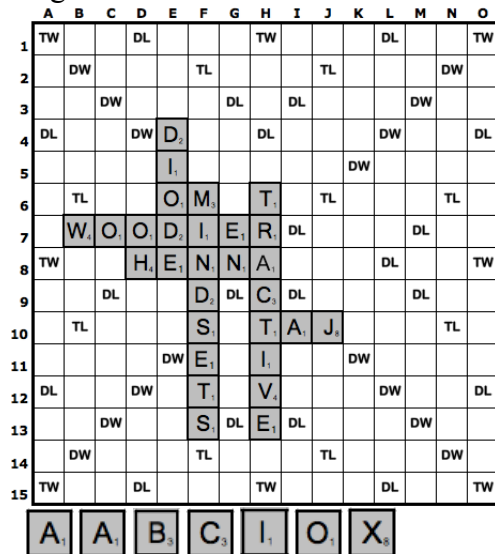
Score: 98-93

Choices: QUIT k11 (50),
QUIRT k11 (52)

In Diagram 7, you should play QUININA instead of QUININ. It is not worth setting up your A hook, since your opponent will often take the hook with the A, E, or S, and get the 16 points for QUININA in addition to the points for his/her play on row 15. Leaving hooks is not a good idea when there are many hooks available (5'A', 11'E', or 4'S') and when the hooked word scores well. Your opponent will know and find the hooks consistently.

In Diagram 8, you should play QUIRT instead of QUIT. Although QUIT keeps a much better leave than QUIRT, QUIRT is much better defensively. Putting a T in row 15 is less dangerous than leaving the E or S hook at 15k after QUIT.

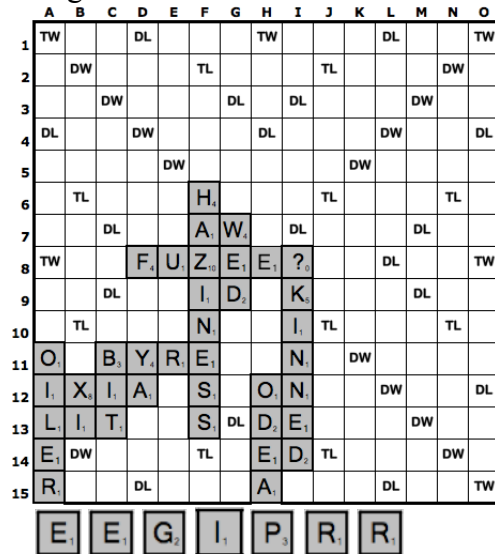
Diagram 9:



Score: 111-117

Choices: TAXICAB 6h (40), COAX d2 (41)
BOX d3 (39)

Diagram 10:



Score: 172-200

Choices: SPONGIER 12f (22),
PEDIGREE 14g (28),
GRIPE e2 (21), GRIEF d4 (18)

In Diagram 9, although TAXICAB keeps a better leave than COAX, it creates dangerous scoring and bingo spots that allow you better options than any other place currently on the board. Your opponent can easily make a parallel or hooking play and score well while blocking the board. Thus, you should play COAX and severely limit your opponent's options.

Opening the board is bad unless you can access the openness you have created. While you would like to open the board, TAXICAB is easy for your opponent to close down while scoring well. Your opponent is likely to make a play that leaves nothing open for you.

In Diagram 10, your highest equity plays are PEDIGREE and SPONGIER. However, both plays open a number of scoring and bingo spots that your opponent will either use or block next turn. SPONGIER and PEDIGREE are poor plays since they give your opponent good options while still maintaining poor options for your own rack.

GRIPE scores 3 more points and keeps a nearly equivalent leave, but is still inferior to GRIEF. GRIPE exposes the G, R, and I to potential bingo and scoring options for your opponent. For these reasons, GRIEF is the best option.

Opening Bonus Squares

Earlier, this book recommended that you avoid placing vowels next to bonus squares to prevent your opponents from making 30+ point plays using tiles such as the H, W, X, or Y. Giving your opponent lucrative scoring spots is detrimental to your winning chances.

However, sometimes this rule should be broken. You should leave bonus squares open when the open bonus squares are conducive to your leave, yet unlikely to help your opponent's leave.

Diagram 1:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	TW			DL			P	TW				DL			TW
2		DW					TL	O		TL				DW	
3			DW					I		DL				DW	
4	DL			P	A	W	N	E	D			DW			DL
5					DW		A	T			DW				
6		TL					X	I		TL				TL	
7			DL				E		DL				DL		
8	TW			W	H	E	R	E			DL				TW
9			DL				DL		DL				DL		
10		TL					TL			TL				TL	
11					DW						DW				
12	DL			DW				DL				DW			DL
13			DW				DL		DL					DW	
14		DW				TL				TL				DW	
15	TW			DL							DL				TW

A, F, I, R, R, R, U

Choices: PURR 1g (18), FRIAR e1 (22),
PURI 1g (18)

Diagram 2:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	TW			DL				TW				DL			TW
2		DW					TL			TL				DW	
3			DW				DL		DL					DW	
4	DL			DW				DL				DW			DL
5					DW							DW			
6		TL					TL			TL				TL	
7			DL					DL		DL				DL	
8	TW			B	O	O	K	E	D			DL			TW
9			DL					DL		DL				DL	
10		TL					TL			TL				TL	
11					DW						DW				
12	DL			DW				DL				DW			DL
13			DW				DL		DL					DW	
14		DW				TL				TL				DW	
15	TW			DL							DL				TW

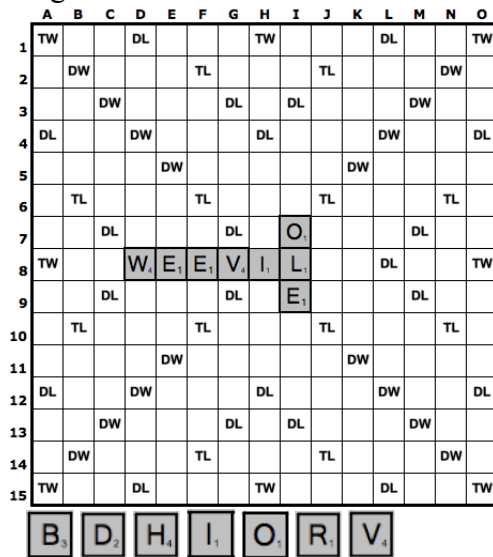
E, G, O, O, O, R, X

Choices: OXO 9b (22),
GOOK g5 (10), GOOD i5 (7),
BOOGER d8 (18)

In Diagram 1, you should play PURI 1g. PURI opens the 2j TLS for both you and your opponent. However, the only tile that can play lucratively at 2j is the F. Since you have an F in your leave and your opponent is unlikely to have an F, opening the 2j TWS is actually beneficial. Thus, you should play PURI instead of PURR, despite leaving two Rs on your rack. PURI may allow you to play FRIAR, FARER or some other word next turn for 45 points.

In Diagram 2, the best play is the overt setup of GOOD i5 for 7 points. While your opponent might recognize this as a setup, it is not a useful square for your opponent, since it is unlikely your opponent has an O, and many plays blocking the 6j TLS will leave you a good X play anyway. There are only 3 Os remaining in the bag. Since your opponent is unlikely to have an O, the 6j TLS is more useful to you than your opponent.

Diagram 3:

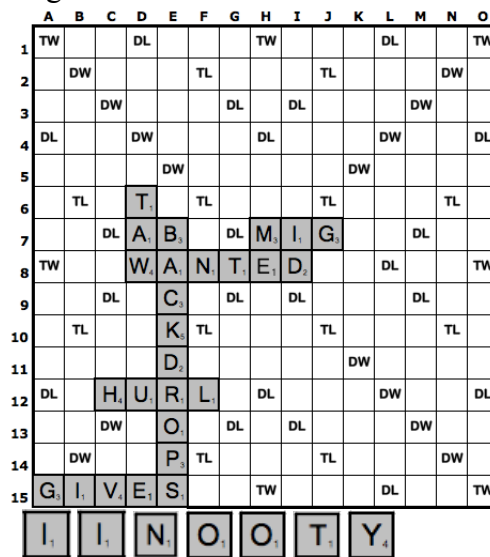


Score: 32-5

Choices: OVERBID e6 (26),
VERBID e7 (24), BOVID 10h (23)

Last play: OLE i7 (5)

Diagram 4:



Score: 130-75

Choices: YO 13b (20), YONI c3 (16),
TOYON f4 (21), POINTY 14e (21)

Last play: TAW d6 (10)

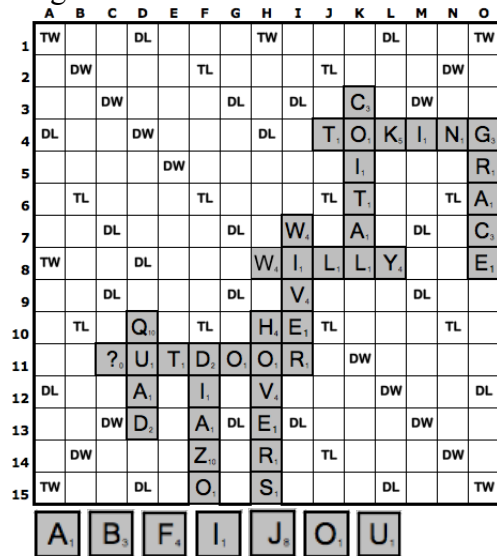
Opening bonus squares can also be useful if your opponent cannot use them, even if you have no high point tiles in your rack. Doing so may result in drawing a big score next turn or may force your opponent to sacrifice equity to block.

In Diagram 3, you should play OVERBID because of the f6 TLS that OVERBID opens. Because your opponent is fishing, opening the f6 square is beneficial since your opponent is unlikely to use the square. Thus, the open TLS at 6f is more useful to you than your opponent.

In Diagram 4, you should play POINTY. Again, your opponent has shown that they have bingo tiles, so you should set yourself up by opening a TWS square that your opponent is unlikely to use.

Remember that your opponent could always draw high point tiles, so even if they make a play such as exchange 3, there is a risk in opening good scoring spots. You should be careful when using implication to open bonus squares, since some opponents mistakenly keep tiles such as the X and Z when it is inappropriate to do so.

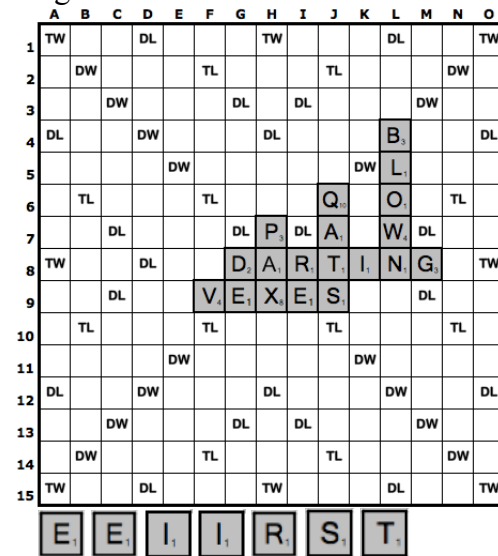
Diagram 5:



Score: 170-135

Choices: FUJI n8 (35), BIJOU n8 (34)

Diagram 6:



Score: 89-82

Choices: VIE f9 (8), GIE m8 (5)

In Diagram 5, you shouldn't mind opening the o12 DLS and o15 TWS by playing BIJOU since there are already several scoring spots available. The AF leave is a significant improvement over ABO because of the improved vowel-consonant ratio.

In Diagram 6, GIE is best. You should not be afraid of the n10 TLS, since those plays will open column o to play your likely bingo next turn. GIE creates a bingo line that is more difficult to block than the bingo line created after VIE. The increase in your opponent's average score is negated by your own increased bingo chances and your own average score.

Scoring Spots

Diagram 7:

TL				TL		
	DL		DL			
		☆				
	DL		DL			
TL				TL		
C ₃	H ₁	H ₄	N ₁	O ₁	P ₃	X ₈

Score: 0-0

Choices: CHOP 8g (22), CHOP 8f (22)

Diagram 8:

TL				TL		
	DL		DL			
		☆				
	DL		DL			
TL				TL		
A ₁	C ₃	E ₁	O ₁	T ₁	X ₈	Z ₁₀

Score: 0-0

Choices: ZAX 8g (38), ZAX 8h (38),
COZ 8g (28), COZ 8h (28)

Diagram 7 illustrates the concept of parallels and re-parallels. Instead of playing CHOP at 8f, take a look at what happens if you play CHOP at 8g:

CHOP 8f:

TL				TL
	DL		DL	
	C ₃	H ₄	O ₁	P ₃
	DL		DL	
TL				TL

CHOP 8g:

TL				TL
	DL		DL	
	C ₃	H ₄	O ₁	P ₃
	DL		DL	
TL				TL

CHOP at 8g allows you to draw OX/AX/EX/XI under CHOP for 40 points. Unfortunately, your opponent will often use the spot themselves next turn.

However, your opponent's play will often give you a high scoring comeback. The bonus square you seek is not 9i, but rather j6 or j10. Your opponent can make many parallel plays with the P. PA and PI allow you to play the X next turn, while OP/UP/PE allow you to use the H. Since your opponent's likely plays will increase your score next turn, playing CHOP at 8g is better than 8f despite leaving an O next to a DLS square.

COZ 8g

TL				TL
	DL		DL	
	C ₃	O ₁	Z ₁₀	
	DL		DL	
TL				TL

COZ 8h

TL				TL
	DL		DL	
		C ₃	O ₁	Z ₁₀
	DL		DL	
TL				TL

In Diagram 8, you should play COZ at 8h. Playing COZ at 8h allows you to play ZAX next turn for 35 points. If your opponent underlaps COZ, then you can often use the X for 60 or more points. Leaving the O next to the DLS allows your opponent to score slightly more, but is ultimately more profitable for you than your opponent. These factors make COZ superior to ZAX.

Diagram 11:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	TW			DL					TW				DL		TW
2		DW				TL				TL					DW
3			DW				DL		DL					DW	
4	V	I	N	I	C			DL				DW			DL
5	O				O							DW			
6	G	TL			N	TL				TL					TL
7	U		DL		V		DL		DL					DL	
8	E			D	E	T	E	R				DL			TW
9			DL			R	O	D	E	DL				DL	
10	Q	U	I	T	E					TL					TL
11					?							DW			
12	DL			DW			DL					DW			DL
13			DW			DL		DL						DW	
14		DW			TL				TL						DW
15	TW			DL					TW				DL		TW

A B C N O O T

Score: 166-60

Choices: BO 7g (19), BOO 7g (21),
BOOT 7g (22), BACON 7g (27)

Diagram 12:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	TW			Z						TW				DL	
2		DW		O		TL				TL					DW
3			V	E	T		DL		DL					DW	
4	DL		E	A	R			DL						DW	DL
5			G		I									DW	
6		TL			P	Y	A				TL				TL
7			DL				B	L	A	N	K			DL	
8	TW			DL			Y	A	W				DL		J
9			DL			H	E	R	N	I	A	S	DL		U
10		TL				TL					F	L	I	N	G
11					?	A	X	I	E	S	T				
12	DL			DW				DL					DW		DL
13			DW				DL		DL					DW	
14		DW				TL				TL					DW
15	TW			DL						TW				DL	TW

A A H M O R R

Score: 234-203

Choices: MAHZOR 8a (60),
ZAMARRO 8d (54)

In Diagram 9, you should close the board so your opponent can't play a bingo. You don't mind giving your opponent a TLS square since they are too far behind for the extra 5 or 10 points from 6j to make a significant difference.

For this reason, you should play BACON. Although BACON opens a TLS at 6j and keeps a weak leave, it is best because it helps you close the board. BACON allows you to limit the right side of the board better than any other play.

In Diagram 10, the primary bingo line is column l. You can play ZAMARRO setting up your H, knowing that if your opponent uses row 2 to score, they are blocking column l: their most lucrative bingo line on the board. Although ZAMARRO scores 6 fewer points, the defensive component of ZAMARRO combined with the openness of MAHZOR (opening column a) makes ZAMARRO a superior play.

When ahead, opening bonus squares is a good thing since it decreases entropy. It allows you to make consistent scoring plays, neutralizing the effect of an opponent's bingo. If both players can score 35 points consistently, the effect of a 70 point bingo is far less devastating since you are still ahead.

Diagram 13:

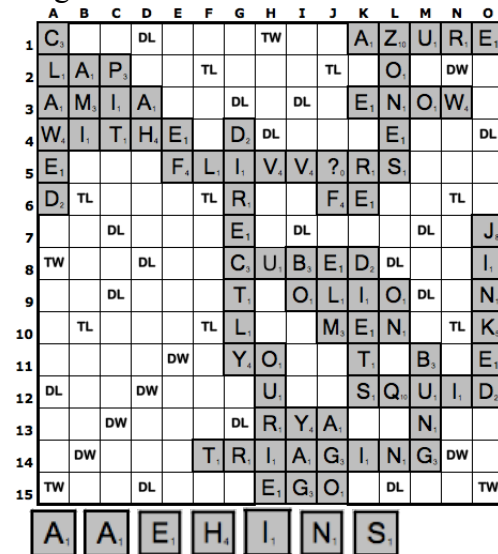


Score: 355-362

Choices: WOE 9a (20), WEE 9a (20), WEEL 9b (26)

Pool: EEEEINRRRSTTUUY

Diagram 14:



Score: 371-331

Choices: AH 2n (27), SHA 1c (16), RAWISH n1 (40), REWASH n1 (40) INDIRECTLY g2 (17)

Pool: AOOPRSTTX?

Another time when leaving bonus squares open is desirable is during the endgame or pre-endgame. At this point, broad guidelines about leaving bonus squares open take a backseat to using iterative reasoning to find the best play in the pre-endgame.

In Diagram 11, you should play WEE/VIGILANTE. This play covertly sets up the X for next turn. Even if the a8 TWS is taken, you can still use the X at 10b. If the spot is blocked with a play like TEW or YEW, it is often at the cost of some equity, and you can still usually outscore your opponent. (The reason why you play WEE instead of WOE is because there are 4 'E' left in the bag and OX o14 (29) serves as a backup play

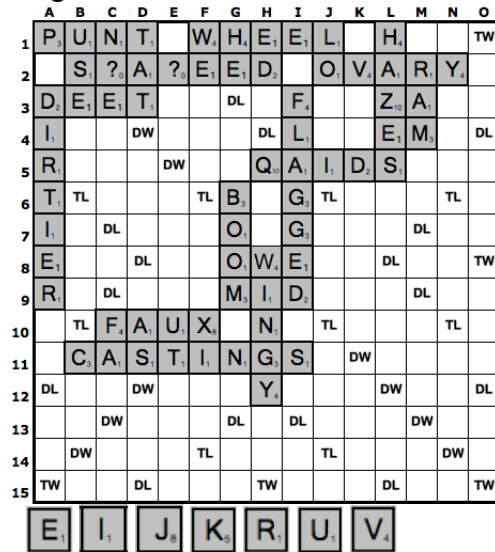
In Diagram 12, it is okay to leave a big spot for the X. INDIRECTLY is the best block to the S-PIT hook. INDIRECTLY allows you to play REWASH next turn and prevents your opponent from playing a bingo. REWASH scores enough points to win even if your opponent plays the X for 50 points next turn.

The most important factor is not preventing the X from scoring 50 points, but preventing your opponent from scoring 80 or more points with a bingo. Because of the score, you can weather potential X plays, but you cannot allow your opponent to play a bingo. While it is tempting to eliminate INDIRECTLY as a candidate because of the X, pre-endgames requires precise analysis to observe how 50 point X plays will impact the final outcome.

Puzzle Break #5:

Find the best play! Answers on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Diagram 1:



Score: 303-312

Pool: AAABCEEIIILLN
OOOOPRRTTU

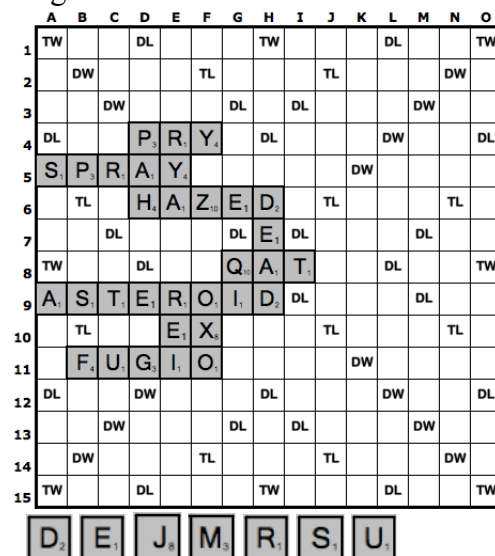
Diagram 2:



Score: 304-315

Pool: AAABCEEEEEHIM
NOPRRTTTUW

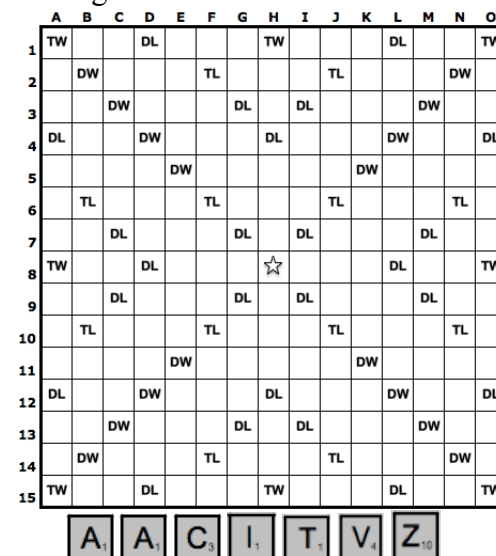
Diagram 3:



Score: 123-177

Choices: JUMP b1 (30), JAM a8 (36),
JUMPED b1 (40)

Diagram 4:



Score: 0-0

Choices: VATIC 8d (28),
ATAVIC 8g (28), VATIC 8h (26)