

Which Color Is Ahead?

By Martin Shapiro

CourtShuffleboard.com scope note: The examples in this article depend on the game format and hammer sequence being played. The bracket method discussed here is specifically tied to the Florida-style sequence identified in the article; adjust the method for different formats and local practices.

Which Color is Ahead in a Frame Game?

When Yellow is out at the head, whoever has more points, even if it is just one, is ahead. If the scores are tied, no one is ahead.

When Black is out at the head, Yellow is ahead unless Black has 8 more points in singles or 16 more points in doubles, which are ties (no one is ahead). If Black has a 9 or more point lead in singles or a 17 or more point lead in doubles, then Black is ahead.

At the foot, add 8 to the score of the color that has the hammer, then refer to the above to determine which color is ahead, looking in advance to the next frame at the head.

Which Color is Ahead in a Points Game?

Whichever color can reach the game point first if every player just scores all their hammers is ahead. For instance, in a 75-point game, it takes 10 scored hammers to get to 75 (or more). Since Black gets hammers first (one in singles or two in doubles), Black is always ahead at the start of any points game.

For 75-point doubles, there is a shortcut system to always know who is ahead without having to calculate the upcoming numbers of hammers for each color to get to game point. These five scores define the lower limit of five scoring brackets*:

- -5 : Bracket One -5 to 10
- 11 : Bracket Two 11 to 26
- 27 : Bracket Three 27 to 42
- 43 : Bracket Four 43 to 58
- 59 : Bracket Five 59 to 74

(Notice that each bracket descends from the 75-points winning score by 16 points, which is equivalent to two hammer 8s, the scores that are anticipated for the head and foot hammer shots.)

When play is at the head, if both colors are in the same scoring bracket, whichever color has the hammer is ahead. If one color is in a higher bracket than the other, that color is ahead.

When play is at the foot, add 8 to the score of the color that has the hammer, then refer to the brackets above to determine which color is ahead, looking in advance to the next frame at the head.

Which Color is Ahead in a “Frames or Points” Game?

At the beginning of the game, figure out how many hammers it takes to reach game point, counting 8 points for each hammer.

If the number of frames* for the game divided by two is less than the number of hammers it takes to reach game point, then from the start of the game use the frame-game method to determine which color is ahead. For instance, if playing a “16-frame or 75-points” game, divide 16 by 2 two to get 8 (each color

will get 8 hammers), which is less than the 10 hammers needed to get to 75+ points. So in this example use the frame-game method from the start, not the points-game method, to determine which color is ahead.

If the number of frames divided by two is equal to or more than the number of hammers it takes to reach game point, then from the start of the game use the points-game method to determine which color is ahead.

Continue to use the same method unless one color gets far enough ahead (by scoring extra discs besides their hammers) that they will reach game point before using up all their hammers (then switch to the points-game method) or both colors get far enough behind (by kitchens or missed hammers) that neither color will reach game point before the hammers run out (then switch to the frame-game method).

When the game is down to four hammers or less remaining for each color, be sure to keep track of both methods at once for every frame. At any point, if neither color will reach game point before the end of the final frame of the game, the color that is ahead under the frame-game method is ahead in the game. Otherwise, whichever color is ahead under the points-game method is ahead. (The same could be said for any point in the game, but it becomes more critical at the four-hammers-remaining as the game is nearly over, leaving little time to catch up or to correct for mistakes.)

*Note: One frame = one end.

Why Does it Matter Which Color is Ahead

Whether your color is ahead or is behind determines your best strategy for each frame (and indeed for each shot of every frame).

Whenever your color is ahead, you can stick to Core Strategy – score your hammers and clear everything else off the board. There is no need to take risks to score an extra disc, stop a hammer or kitchen your opponent. If the board is clear on your last disc, score if it is your hammer or cover the ten if it isn't.

Whenever your color is behind, you need to find a way to get ahead. Scoring an extra disc, stopping a hammer and kitchening all come into play.

If the scores are tied in a frame game, look for an opportunity to take the lead. Score hammer 8s instead of 7s (you only need to get one point ahead to take the lead), score an extra disc, stop a hammer or score a hammer 10 if you have a centered backstop.

All the rest of the details and complexities of strategy are just variations of the above, ways to correct mistakes or ways to take advantage of opponents' mistakes.

*Note: The Bracket method was developed for the Florida hammer sequence in doubles: two Yellow hammers followed by two Black hammers, then repeat for the rest of the game. If a different pattern of hammers is used (e.g. YY-BB-BB-YY), the principle of calculating who will get to the final points score first based on upcoming hammer shots still applies but the Brackets aren't applicable or need to be modified accordingly.

An Example in the Form of A Quiz

For all questions, you are shooting disc #6 from Yellow Foot to a clean board. What is the best shot to take if:

1. Score is 36 to 36 in a 75-points doubles game?
2. Score is 32 to 32 in a 75-points doubles game?
3. Score is 36 to 43 in a 75-points doubles game?
4. Score is 59 to 59 in a 75-points doubles game?

5. Score is 36 to 36 in frame #14 of a 16-frame game?

.

****MY ANSWERS:

As with all shots, the first step is to determine who is ahead. "Ahead" does not mean who has more points, nor even who is expected to have more points after the completion of the current frame. To determine who is ahead, you have to do the math to figure out who will win the game counting the current scores plus the current scoring discs, if any, and assuming every player until the end of the game scores their hammers and no additional discs.

This is easiest to see in scenario #4: score is 59 to 59. Assume Yellow Foot finishes the frame with their hammer shot scoring for an 8, making the score 67 to 59. Now the Black team has two hammers, head and foot, in which they can just clear and score their hammers for 8 points each to win the game. In this Scenario, Black is ahead and Yellow Foot must set Kitchen Bait with disc #6, to try to develop either two scoring discs to win or a kitchen of Black to stop Black from winning on the next two hammers.

If you do the math, you will find that the same strategy applies for scenarios #2 and #3; and that in Scenario #1 Yellow is ahead and should just waste disc #6 (shoot into the gutter). But in the midst of a game, it is difficult to do the full math. To simplify, you should learn the Brackets method of determining who is ahead in a 75-point doubles game, as described in the book *Modular Shuffleboard* by Wilbur L. Estes. (See my post on *Shuffleboard Books* for the link to download.)

The Brackets are 16-point spreads (two hammer 8s) counting down from the 75-point game winning score: 59-74; 43-58; 27-42; 11-26; and minus 5-10. The game point is 75. To use the Brackets method during a game, you need only memorize these four lower limits: 11, 27, 43 and 59. To figure who is "ahead" at any point in the game, figure out what Bracket each color will be in at the start of the next round (i.e., the next time the discs are being shot at the head). If both colors will be in the same Bracket at the start of the next round, the color with the hammer is ahead; if one color will be in a higher Bracket, that color is ahead.

In Scenario #1, to figure the Brackets assume that Yellow Foot scores their hammer to make the score either 43 to 36 or 44 to 36 at the start of the next round. Looking at the lower Bracket limits, you can see that Yellow will be in the 43+ Bracket, and Black will be one Bracket lower in the 27+ Bracket. Therefore, Yellow Foot is ahead in Scenario #1 and should waste disc #6.

In Scenario #2, after Yellow Foot scores their hammer the scores will be 39, 40 or 42 to 32. Thereby both colors will be in the same Bracket (27+) at the start of the next round. As Black will have the hammer for that round, Black is ahead in this Scenario. Yellow Foot, therefore, should set Kitchen Bait with disc #6.

Similarly, in Scenario #3 both colors will start the next round in the same Bracket (43+) and Black will have the hammer. Yellow Foot is behind and should set Kitchen Bait with disc #6.

The same is true for Scenario #4, with the additional danger that Black is in the 59+ Bracket, just two hammers away from winning the game.

Scenario #5 as a frame game is easy to figure. With the current scores even, Black has two hammers left in the game and Yellow only has the one hammer left. So Black is ahead and Yellow Foot should set Kitchen Bait with disc #6. But did you catch my error in this Scenario?

Scenario #5 was supposed to read frame #12, not frame #14. Normally, at least in Florida, frame #14 would have been Yellow out and therefore Black's hammer. Black Foot, not Yellow foot, should have been shooting disc #6 for Black's last hammer of the game and then two upcoming hammers for Yellow. Black Foot should ask before the frame is completed for the frame to be re-played as they must have mistakenly played Black out.

To summarize the answers:

1. Yellow is ahead; Yellow Foot should waste disc #6.
2. Black is ahead; Yellow should shoot Kitchen Bait.
3. Black is ahead; Yellow should shoot Kitchen Bait.
4. Black is ahead; Yellow should shoot Kitchen Bait.
5. They started the frame shooting Black out. If correct, Black is ahead; Yellow Foot should shoot Kitchen Bait. If incorrect, Yellow is ahead and Black should ask before the frame is completed to re-play the frame