

# Pente proves fashionable

## Backgammon look out

What board game is the insider's favorite to outsell Monopoly, Scrabble, Life and all the other classics in the next three months? Pente.

Pente? If you haven't heard of it, no doubt you soon will. The Americanized version of an ancient oriental game, Pente (pronounced Pen-tay) is replacing backgammon in fashionable areas of the Southwest and is spreading north and west quickly as the lucrative Christmas season draws near.

"Four years ago, a chess-playing friend in Oklahoma showed it to me," says Tom Braunlich, then a journalism-philosophy major at Oklahoma State. "My first reaction was that it was so easy, it wouldn't amount to much. I soon changed my mind."

Changed his mind so much, in fact, that Braunlich now has two Pente world championships and has authored the only two existing strategy books on Pente — cleverly titled Pente Strategy Number One and Pente Strategy Number Two.

Braunlich was in Eugene this week in the course of a 12-city promotional tour through Western states. He autographed copies of his book at Parlour Games, where Pente accounted for an astonishing \$8,000 in revenue during the 1981 Christmas season, according to Pente District Manager Frank Miller.

Braunlich, now 24, says his first book sold 100,000 copies.



Based on the ancient oriental game of GO, game sellers predict Pente, the newest in "gorgeous games," will corner the market.

"From what I've heard, the best selling backgammon book sold 125,000 copies," he says. "At the time (the book was written) it was all we knew about the game. It's not like chess where you have 500 years of literature to back you up."

The comparison to backgammon isn't accidental.

An advertising brochure describes Pente in this manner: "In minutes, you can learn, play and win. Pente's subtle objectives — to get five stones in a row or to make five captures — mask an intriguing game that grows in complexity with the interest and skill of the player."

"Pente on the surface is a very tranquil game," says Braunlich. "But it quickly becomes cutthroat."

"It does have a lot of similarity with backgammon. It's quick and easy to learn. It fits in very well with the nightclub-type atmosphere. Many people think that it will be the game of the '80s just like backgammon was the game of the '70s."

Pente is a descendant of the ancient oriental game of GO, which is believed to be one of the oldest games in the world. But, as Braunlich notes, the oriental version was not active enough to captivate an American audience.

"It's like the difference in thinking of the East and the West," says Braunlich. "Martial arts attacks are very subtle, where you use the opponent's weight against him. On the other hand, boxing in the West is very straightforward — attack and punch."

So, the game is a mixture of America and the Orient. Then why is Pente, which is the Greek word for five, marketed with likenesses of Achilles and Ajax?

"At the time this game was coming out, it was the end of the Vietnam war," says Braunlich. "Anything oriental was very bad."

While video-games seem to be drawing huge amounts of

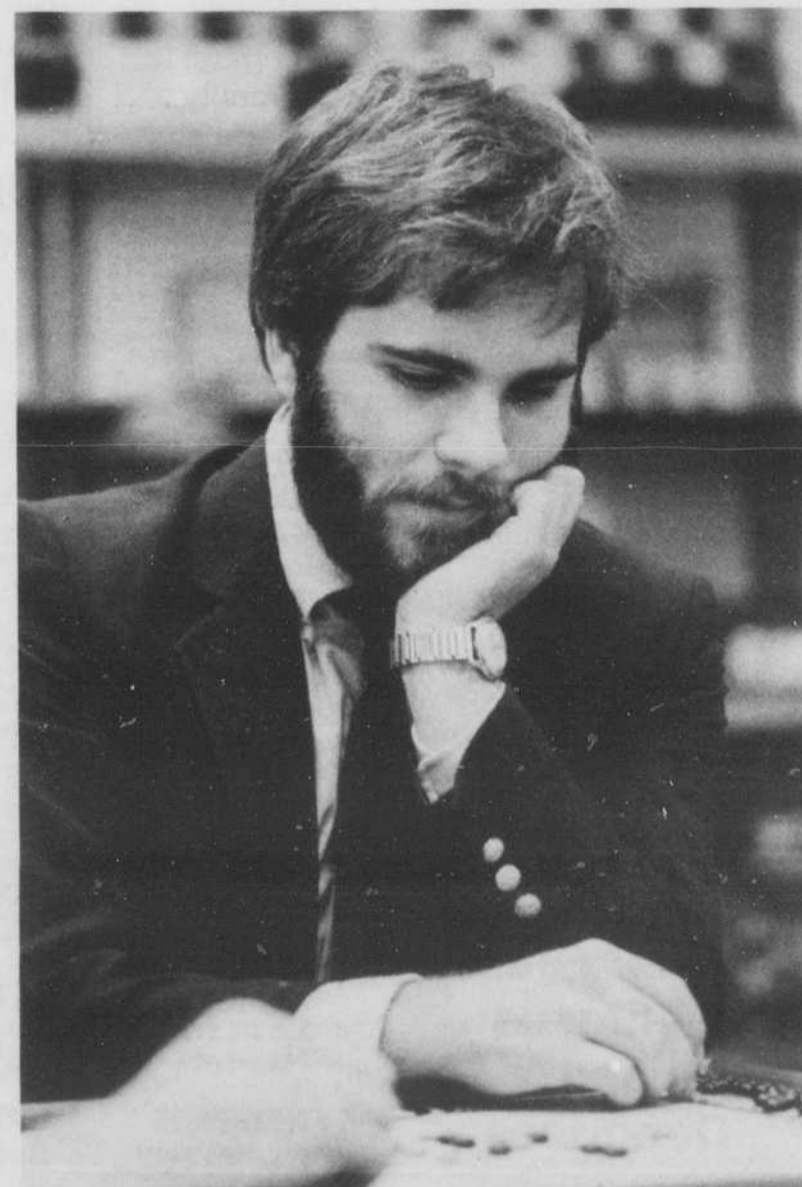
revenue from other forms of entertainment, Braunlich says Pente will survive.

"Sure, computers are great fun. But the real reason we'll always need to play board games is that it provides a social interaction you can't get with video games."

Pente boards sell for as little as \$15, but it is clear that the new company is directing its brash marketing campaign towards upper-middle class, college-educated clientele.

Story by Sean Meyers

Photos by Bob Baker



Tom Braunlich contemplates the Pente board, field of his two world championships. Braunlich was in Eugene this week to promote his second strategy book.

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