

## A domino laid ... is a domino played

Aggies spend time, earn money playing in domino tournaments

By Jesse Wright  
THE BATTALION

Zach Bimslager, a sophomore philosophy major at Blinn College, rests his elbows on the initial-covered surface of one of the tables at the Dixie Chicken. He raises his dominoes to his eyes then sets them face down on the table.

"I'll go three marks plunge," Bimslager says with a straight face.

The other three players at the table fall silent, and the next bidder nervously examines his hand.

Bimslager then laughs, breaking the silence.

"I'm kidding, 34," Bimslager says.

The other players chuckle, and the next bidder lets out a sigh of relief and quickly outbids Bimslager with 35.

Although this string of words and numbers such as "plunge" and "34" may not make much sense to most, to those who are part of the domino subculture, it is second nature.

It is Monday night at the Dixie Chicken and Bimslager, along with dozens of other domino enthusiasts, have packed the bar to participate in the weekly domino tournament. Usually between 20 and 34 teams of two that enter the tournament and pay a \$10 entry fee per team. Winners of the tournament take home the pot, which can be more than \$200.

"On Monday, the Chicken is the Mecca of dominoes," said Katie Campbell, an avid domino player and a senior management major.

Campbell said she plays in at least three tournaments a week, beginning the week at the Dixie Chicken. She has been playing dominoes for two years and has somewhere between 10 and 15 tournament wins under her belt.

Campbell still vividly recalls the first tournament she ever won. "There were a lot of people in the tournament, so my partner and I ended up playing until something like three in the morn-

ing," Campbell said. "The good thing is, we won the tournament. The bad thing is, I had a test the next morning that I hadn't even studied for."

Campbell said winning one's first tournament is a huge milestone to becoming part of the elite domino crowd. Campbell is now part of a group of 10 to 12 people who play every week.

Morgan Pyle, a former student at A&M, said he has won hundreds

of tournaments and placed second in the state tournament last year in Hallettsville, Texas.

"I'd say there is a group of about 10 of us that win 80 percent of the tournaments," Pyle said.

Making \$100 a night playing dominoes is nice work if you can get it. And players like Pyle get it often.

"At most tournaments, the winning team splits between \$200 and \$250, but I've won the \$1,000 tournament at the Texas Hall of Fame three times now," Pyle said.

Many domino players have the opportunity to make money even after they are out of the tournament.

"You can find a money game whenever you want to," said Eric Alzafari, a senior history major. Alzafari said many domino players will play for \$5 a game after they are out of tournaments or even while they are waiting for the next round.

Although the money is an obvious perk, it is not the main reason most die-hard domino players play week in and week out.

"I probably play five nights a week or more," Campbell said. "We all know each other, those of us who play a lot. We have each other's phone numbers, and we always call each other just to play."

Alzafari agreed that the main reason he plays dominoes is for fun.

"We had a party at my house a few weeks ago. It basically consisted of three games of dominoes going on at once," Alzafari said.

Alzafari said he has gone so far as to get trophies made to hand out to winners of tournaments at his house.

Although most may not be as enthusiastic, Campbell urges anyone interested in dominoes to get a taste of the game.

"It's a lot of fun, and we encourage new faces to come out and give it a shot," Campbell said.



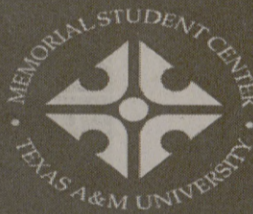
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Frequent domino players at the Dixie Chicken, clockwise: Colin Smith, a sophomore finance major, Justin Kleeman, a junior marketing major, Ryan Tuggle, a senior psychology major and Nick Waltz, a senior construction science major.

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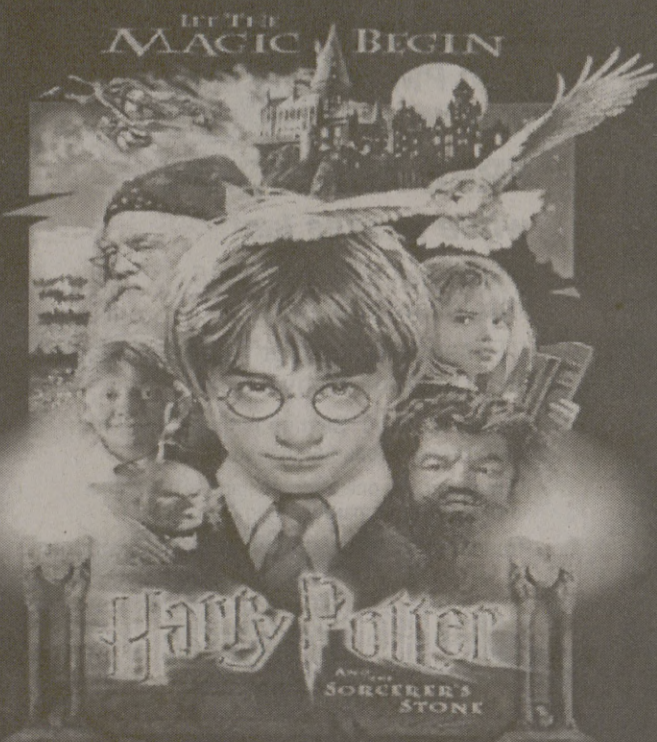
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