

THE SURROUNDING GAME Movie AN INTERVIEW WITH COLE PRUIT

By Peter Shotwell
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This fall, I found that Cole was in Los Alamos, New Mexico, collecting data on the total neutron cross-section of tin for his PhD thesis at Washington University in St. Louis. Los Alamos is near my new home-to-be in Santa Fe, so I took the opportunity to find out what's happened, what's happening, and what will happen with his movie project on which he says they are doing the final editing and will be out in 2016.

I asked him how this all started—whose idea was it since there are more than a half-dozen people listed on the movie's website?

I'll start at the top. Will Lockhart is the director-producer and I'm co-director and producer. I met Will at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island in my junior year in 2010 where my major was in bio-physics. I had played about 10 games of Go, but then he started a Go club there and I played a lot over the summer and now I've gotten to about 3-dan. He was two years behind me and we found we had a lot in common and I had found something that I really wanted to get involved with.

After I graduated, in the summer of 2011, I went to China with Will and other members of the Brown Go club because the Shanghai Ing Foundation hosted a big college event. We also went to Hangzhou and saw the Go museum there. Then I moved to Boston and not knowing what I wanted to do, was working at various jobs, but I also got very involved with the Boston Go scene for a year.

Will's family is very involved in film and media—his mother and step-father are very well known in television and they have worked on major productions. So Will had this idea that Go "needed a movie" to become known outside of, well, Go circles and we both agreed that there is so much to it and it is so-little known.

Then we went to the February 2012 New Jersey tournament. I was about 3- or 4-kyu and it was the first big tournament I'd been to. There were over a hundred people. On the ride back, at least this how we remember it, we were really ginned up and started talking about what should be in a Go film? Well, of course, there's the legacy in Asia, there's professional players now that are at the top of their craft, there's also the craft of making the equipment throughout history—Japanese who have been doing this for fifty years—so we could ask, "How many times do you have to polish the stones?" etc. I knew a little about this last item because I had made my own board, but I had no experience in film and Will had only some through osmosis from his family. However, I was in Boston with jobs I had no interest in and Will was about to graduate from Brown, so we said to each other, "Let's think about it!" I was always interested in biology and physics but I wasn't sure about grad school at that point—I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do and doing a movie about Go suddenly seemed to be what to do, if it was possible. We talked about it for a couple of weeks and this crazy idea seemed to be doable, but what would it be about? Then we found out in April of 2012 that a

tournament was going to take place at the Go Congress in North Carolina in August to select the first professional outside of Asia. "This is the story!" we thought, "but is it going to work?"

We put together a one-page proposal to Min Xiao who manages the American Ing Go Center in Boston, although she doesn't play herself. She had been helpful in setting up the first collegiate "embassy" that had sent the 11 of us to China and we had been involved in making contacts for her funding the American Collegiate Go Association the year before as a means of spreading Go in the West. We said we would like to get an exploratory grant to see what we could come up with and surprise! She said, "Here's \$3,000!"

Looking back, we were woefully uninformed but we worked out what we needed to do—make a trailer that would tell people what we were up to and then start a Kickstarter fund. We just knew, wow, the time was NOW.

I talked with a friend, Nik Gonzales who I knew from stand-up comedy at Brown—he was just graduating, didn't have any plans, and he had a camera and knew how to use it, so we asked if we could pay him a little to come with us around the country.

We started with the Feng Yun Go School in New Jersey. She was a 9-dan pro who had abandoned her Go career and immigrated from China, but whose husband had then gotten sick, so she opened a Go school to support the family. We had no idea of what we were doing, of course, but we filmed anyway and this was how it was going to go. Finishing something prepared us for the next step which then prepared us for the next step, and so on. In Los Angeles, we filmed the Cotsen tournament where we knew that three of the top Korean pros would attend and so we did our first interviews. Then it was on to Boston, gathering more material for our trailer. Because Nik still had access, I managed to get into the Brown Media Department where they had some computing and editing machines and somehow, commuting from Boston where I was working, over the next few weeks we put it together and put it up on Kickstarter and reached our goal in four days—\$15,000! We now knew the project had potential—the Go community was hungry for more! Quickly, another \$10,000 came in and we realized, hey, this is going to be bigger than we thought! It could be a feature and not just a little 20- or 30-minute affair. And we now had the means to go to film the pro tournament in North Carolina. Not only that, because the Ing Foundation was willing to give us more financial support, we could go to China where we could stay with them in Shanghai and film the semi-finals of the Ing Cup. And we would have enough left over to go to Korea. It happened so fast!

That summer I moved back to Providence and Will and I went to work full-time. Our friend David Glekel from the New York Go Center went with us to the Canadian Open, where, for the first time, the quality of our filming reached a level acceptable for an indie feature. That summer I was also able to put my meager website construction knowledge to full use while Will and I prepared for the Congress in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Then we filmed 80 hours at the Congress in August. Luckily, we had been following Andy Liu because we thought he would emerge as the winner, which is what

happened. We also filmed the two-day Go Symposium that was held at the Congress, and interviewed many of the other Congress participators. It was my first Congress and it was quite an event for me!

For the China and Korea trip, we then hired Colin Sonner, a professional cinematographer who really stood out among all the people we interviewed in New York City. The film couldn't have existed without him. And, of course, there were many, many others without whom things would have been very difficult.

And so the four of us, Will, Nik, Colin and I, went off to China, where Min Xiao had arranged for Cherry Shen to translate for us. She had been the translator during my first trip with the college students and was a student at Oxford where fortunately the classes start later than we do in the States.

Our first stop was going to be a look at the incredibly tough Go schools that only graduate a tiny few out of hundreds into the pro ranks. Then there was to be the Ing Cup near Chengdu in Sichuan Province and then Beijing and Tianjin. But we had a scare because when we arrived at Shanghai, we found that no schedule had been arranged for us. However, we didn't know that Qiang Xiao, Ming's brother who also worked for the Ing Foundation, was connected everywhere! A few phone calls later and the whole month had been set up!

After filming in China for about 40 hours, it was on to Korea where we were also warmly greeted. By the way, all this time, we were also filming the general public who were involved in one way or another with Go, finding out that the thing about documentaries as opposed to narratives is that they are not scripted, so we never knew where the conversations were headed. In other words, the narrative would only come afterwards in the editing. So it was also lucky we filmed way too much—160 hours in all—because it included a lot of things that we kept which we hadn't thought about at the time that they were shot. This was the benefit of cluelessness!

In Korea, we were able to take a look into the 24-hour Go TV station, some Go schools including the one where Will's brother Ben was studying, and also we visited Myongji University which offers the only university-level Go degree program in the world. There was also a memorable afternoon at the Six Brothers Go Factory outside of Seoul. It's the largest in the world and they took great care in showing us the whole process of making Go equipment. That, their reverence toward Go, and their incredible showroom and its treasures, will be major high points in the film. Also, we filmed Mr. Song, the world's strongest blind player. Will, a 5-dan, lost to him. Chaelim Kim, a former Korean insei who went to Thailand and Malaysia to promote Go, also gave us a lot of help.

We came back to the States in November 2012—it had been quite a year! Not only that, but in the spring, I had been accepted at Washington University in St Louis. They gracefully let me postpone for a year because of the film, while Will had taken off a semester from Brown. It all was, as you can see, well worth it. We had a viable project going in high gear and we still hadn't visited Japan. But we had 120 hours of film and an idea of the storyline so it was time to start putting it together, but we needed funding to hire a professional editor. We really felt by this time that, yes, it was

going to be several more years, including going back to Asia, to make it shine, but we felt what we had and would get was great enough to warrant that.

Will had one more year of school and I went back to New York where I set up and managed a coffee shop in the Village, working 80 hours a week. But we raised enough money for the trip to Japan, and we brought in a couple of more people to help us. We needed a better website and Ken Kansky, a California programmer and a Kickstarter funder, said he'd do it and he did. He maintained it for a year and so he was another person without whom the film would not have happened.

By June, we had raised another \$10,000 for editing and the trip so I left the coffee shop and Will, Colin and I departed for Japan. We had talked with Tom Urasoe of the Nihon Ki-in who said we could film there and also had contacted the Kansai Ki-in. Ben Lockhart had told us we might be able to meet with Go Seigen, and the Ing Foundation was also sponsoring a college-level tournament in Shanghai, so we would go there afterwards. David Gleckel had moved to Japan so he translated for us and James Davies also pitched in but unfortunately, we missed interviewing John Power and Richard Bozulich because our time was so limited and we were trying to focus on the professional scene. Sandro Poldrugo also helped us as a translator in Tokyo. We interviewed a number of top players (including Iyama Yuta) and filmed a tournament game in the Yugen-no-ma, possibly the most hallowed spot in Go-dom! We found the scene in Japan to be much different and more traditional than the more competitive atmospheres in China and Korea. Then, through Michael Redmond, we were able to reach Go Seigen. I think it was his last interview because he died a year later and was known for rarely giving them. It took place on his 99th birthday and we knew that would clench the importance of the film.

By now we had 160 hours of film which we wanted to compress into 90 minutes. For the few weeks before I started graduate school, we watched everything we had started the process of winnowing it down.

About a third or half was thrown out and then another month of work got it down to 40 hours which is when we started to look for an editor. Through a friend of a friend, Will found Richard Miron who was young, very professional, didn't charge an arm and a leg, and was enthusiastic—you'll hear about him in big film productions in the future, I'm sure. Up to this time, Will and I had shared the direction and production but now I was in school so that had to change. I switched to co-producer for the website, fundraising, etc. and Will, who worked with Richard on the editing, is now responsible for, I would say, 2/3rds of the final product. I probably put in about \$25,000 of my savings but Will and his parents put in a lot, too. Will's been down in the cutting room trenches much more than I have and he deserves recognition as the full director and producer.

Right now, the music is temporary (we have a composer who will score the final version) and there will be a lot of animation that was done by Xiangjun Shi who Will knew at Brown and is now a professional animator in Los Angeles. There's still a bit more animation work to be done to clarify things like: What does it look like when you read out a sequence? What are strong players thinking about? What does Go "mean" if it has a meaning? And so on. Then, once the tweaking and tuning is done, the last step

of post-production will start—sound mixing and mastering, color correction. Also, we'll be sending out such things as posters, stones from the American professional games, and DVDs of the film to those patient Kickstarter funders who've been waiting for two extra years. Additionally, there'll be film festivals and the production of DVDs and foreign rights to think about. Eric Cotsen has promised to give us a fair chunk of money for distribution of the film after we have a final cut.

In March 2014, we traveled to Palm Springs to compete in the American Documentary Film Festival's "Film Fund Pitch" contest. We were one of three out of six that received \$5000 and a stamp of approval from the festival—it was our first institutional funding from the film world! And, by the way, our goal is not to make money, but if that happens, a percentage will go back to the AGA.

So what's left to do? Just four months ago, after getting it down to about a hundred minutes—about 10 minutes longer than the goal—Richard had to leave. He really did an incredible job and he's greatly appreciated, so now, due to his and Will's work together, the full story is in place. It's been screened for over a year to Go and non-Go test audiences and there is only a few things left to finish, including an important "State of American Go Scene." In that area, Terry Benson has been a big help because he's also been in TV for a long time so he knew what we needed to know. And some ancient history needs to be added to ask at the beginning how and why Go has survived with such vim and vigor for so long. It's been a long trip for us, too!