

The Story of a Disturbance at the Chicago Airport

by Nakayama Noriyuki 6-Dan

It was only the end of the first week of the 2000 European Go Congress in Strausberg, Germany, but the U. S. Go Congress in Denver was starting so, early in the morning of Monday, August 7, I checked out of my hotel in the suburb of Berlin. I, Nakayama Noriyuki 6-Dan, was the only professional sent by the Nihon Ki-in so I was in a hurry to make the daylong trip to Denver, Colorado.

The flights as far as Chicago went smoothly. My itinerary, with local times, was as follows:

11:30 depart Berlin	12:40 arrive Frankfurt
13:45 depart Frankfurt	15:50 arrive Chicago
19:20 depart Chicago	20:45 arrive Denver

The total flight time was 16 hours. Moreover, there was a three-and-a-half hour layover in Chicago but, since it was the vacation flying season, I can't really complain. A representative of the American Go Association was supposed to meet me at the Denver airport.

The Chicago airport is gigantic. There are at least four terminals and, since you might have to take a tram, getting from one to another is a serious matter. I spent a restless hour making my way, at last, to the departure waiting area at gate B16. Drinking tea and reading, sitting and standing, I passed the time, but shortly before the departure time of my flight the electronic display showed "UA941 1 hour 15 minutes late". I would arrive in Denver in the middle of the night but there was nothing to be done about it. I thought my only move was to wait, but then it became "two hours late", then "three hours late". Presently the display said only "DELAYED". Oh my, Oh my... I looked around frantically only to see that, suddenly, without any announcement, UA941 had disappeared completely from the display! That was a rude shock. Usually the display should show the flight was cancelled; something strange was going on.

The waiting area was in an uproar. The passengers crowded around the counter; it was total chaos. There was just one woman United Airlines employee at the counter and she was stout-heartedly doing her best to respond but in this sort of combative urgent situation, I can't pick up English at all. Never the less, sometimes words like "tomorrow morning" and "hotel" came through. Ha haaa! I read out that perhaps tonight I would have to stay in a hotel near the airport.

The next United Airlines flight to Denver, flight UA265, was the last one, but it, too, apparently was DELAYED. Well, this was a problem. What move should Nakayama 6-Dan play?

As the commotion at the counter in the waiting area continued, some passengers were leaving in an orderly way. Probably all, in resignation, headed for hotels. However, coming for the first time to this major city, Chicago, in the dead of night, my English was not up to finding a hotel. It would be like an amateur shodan challenging Cho Chikun sensei to an even game. Translating it into go was no use. Staring in dumb amazement, after a moment I thought of a good move.

Approaching the counter, with the unsteady speech of a baby, I spoke, word by word,

“ AI KYAN ANDAASTANDO INGRISHU ONRII A RITTORU BITSU. AI HABU TSUU GO TSUU DENBAA, DENBAA, DENBAA” [“I can understand English only a little bit. I have to go to Denver, Denver, Denver”] thus I repeatedly said “Denver”. The woman in charge was dumbfounded. This old Oriental man clinging desperately to the counter really can’t be understood in English, she must have thought, there’s absolutely nothing to be done. Finally, she took my papers, called someone on the telephone, beckoned, and by gestures indicated that I was to come with her. Good, I thought, maybe I’m saved.

She left B terminal and quickly headed toward C terminal. All around, jet passenger planes boomed and roared as we ran by. I, with a heavy backpack, frantically struggled to keep up with her. If I ever lost sight of her in the crowd I wouldn’t find her in a hundred years and in her hand was my ticket for the now out of service UA flight 941. She was rather tall with long legs and I, short and slouching, could only see her dark-stockinged legs. She, with a grim visage, pushed through the crowd as she hurried on while I, with short legs and a long torso, galloped along behind. I suppose it was something like a greyhound being chased by a dachshund. Sweat ran into my eyes, my breathing was harsh. Running heavily equipped as I was, I thought I would die. I had been making these international trips to spread Go, carrying my own lunch, for 20 years and never before had so much trouble. At the time there was a cry deep in my heart, “After this year is it really necessary to do this?” Now, almost absurdly, there are happy memories but ...

Still we kept on, straight ahead. To say the least, the people we pushed aside must have been surprised. Really, what was happening could be seen from our awful facial expressions. Twenty minutes of running. Finally, the waiting area for gate C24 came into view, where United Airlines flight 265 was standing by. My escort must have been thinking, “Good, we made it.” For the first time her pace slackened. She turned back, smiled, and said, “I *am* sorry.” Perhaps she could see how terrible it had been for me. Catching my breath and speaking quickly I responded, “Nebaamaindo, sankyu mamu” [“Never mind, thank you ma’am”].

Twenty minutes of running had made my English more proficient! Her astonishment showed in her face.

At gate C24, too, a big crowd of passengers was milling around. Just before departure, there would seem to be no seats left. However, my escort got the ear of the woman at the gate to see whether somehow just one seat could be found for this Oriental gentleman. After ten minutes my goddess, winking, found something. Just as the light of hope was going out, at the last chance, I stumbled toward the entryway. "Nao yuu aa seifu" ["Now you are safe"] I said to myself slowly in English, with a large smile on my face. When I received my new ticket my fears were calmed, for the most part. It was as if, after ten hours of hard fighting, at last I succeeded in playing a desperate decisive move! An incredible trick move! I felt like I had won playing white against Cho Chikun sensei.

I reached into my backpack and pulled out a doll I had brought to give as a souvenir. Its hand was grasping a ten-dollar bill. Ordinarily, I suppose, tips aren't given to the employees of airline companies but I had the doll and I didn't care. It was just ten dollars but when the busy woman saw the doll she was overjoyed and her face lit up with a big smile.

I had gotten the last seat on the last flight. Looking around I saw stewardesses and other people wearing United Airlines uniforms; perhaps they were crew members of the cancelled flight, going to Denver to catch other flights they would work in the morning.

After fastening my seatbelt I immediately felt exhausted. This plane really didn't seem about to leave soon; probably it would arrive in Denver at dawn. Already more than an entire day had passed since I left Berlin. The lights inside the plane were dimmed and tired passengers went to sleep. I, too, fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly the interior of the plane brightened. My eyes popped open. "Have we already arrived in Denver?" I wondered, and walked around a little. The plane was almost empty. Uh oh, I had a strange feeling about this. The more I looked around the more this looked like the Chicago airport. This was awful! What could I do?

Standing still, I thought for a second. I turned around on my heels and resolutely rushed off the plane. Right away I realized I should return to the plane to find someone from the airline to help. But what had I done? I didn't know what had happened to my plane! This time maybe I ran 100 meters in around 9.9 seconds.

Then, a completely unexpected event occurred. What??? I ran right into the arms of tousle-headed Sawada Yoshi-san who was supposed to be waiting for me in Denver. By his side was the Congress director Horowitz-san.

“Sawada-san, I’m going to Denver but the flight was cancelled again! It’s terrible!”

“What are you saying? This *is* Denver! Denver!”

“But it’s got to be Chicago! When did you come to Chicago?”

“Now, now, calm yourself. The two airports look just the same! They were designed by the same architect.”

Well! I had better explain what was happening in Denver while I was suffering at the Chicago airport. The Go Congress authorities knew I was stuck in Chicago. It had also just been figured out that the United Airlines labor unions were using the tactic of “sabotaging” the travel season.

Anyhow, Sawada-san and Horowitz-san had a magnetic go board and stones and decided to play go while waiting for me. These two are well known go fanatics so as far as they were concerned what did it matter if the plane was late? Both around 3-dan, they are good partners. It wouldn’t be surprising for them to make an all-night party out of it. There was just one unfortunate thing -- at the time I arrived they were in the middle of the last game of a seven game match and the score was three wins apiece. With four eyeballs between them it would be strange indeed if they missed me after I landed.

When my flight was suddenly removed from the electric display they were surprised, as might be expected. Even though it was the middle of the night, they telephoned some Chicago go players to ask them to find me at the airport and put me up for the night. As a matter of fact, all the Chicago go players they knew had gone to Denver for the Go Congress! And the spouses left behind didn’t know my face; they couldn’t look for me.

Next, calling United Airlines and the Chicago airport, they asked them to search for me by broadcasting an announcement. But they had bad luck; after all, the place was Chicago. Now, Chicago is no longer the capital city of crime and the gang boss Al Capone is no more, but in the past a famous man was summoned by a broadcast announcement and assassinated! If it could be something like that then I would have to decide not to respond. There was no move for the two men to play now, no more actions they could take.

Experienced travelers, the men waiting may have been thinking that, because of the circumstances, I might have exchanged my ticket and transferred to a different airline. At the arrival times of flights, carefully holding up the magnetic

go board on which the stones were arrayed, keeping an eye on the position, they were going this way and that between the four terminals. Simply put, I think it's phenomenal that they even saw me.

Because of this impertinence of United Airlines (with the exception of my goddess) and its wildcat labor unions, even if it is the largest airline company in America, I will not use it again when traveling in America.

Anyhow, surpassing the limits even of omniscience and omnipotence, it's amazing that I arrived in Denver. Thinking it over now it can't be anything but miraculous, but when all my American students know of this great disturbance, they will think that Nakayama-sensei, in the nick of time, had managed to cope with a fearsome trick move.

(August 8, 2000 in Denver, sleepy, sleepy Nakayama Noriyuki)
Translated from the original Japanese by Robert McGuigan