

# GO IN AMERICA

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## The First Games of Go in America

When gold was discovered in California in 1849, young adventurers from China began arriving in San Francisco. Some Chinese businessmen discovered that their countrymen's labor was its own virtual "gold mine" and opened businesses supplying Chinese laborers for various enterprises. Starting in 1858 these concerns began advertising in China. By the end of the US Civil War in 1865, there were an estimated 60,000 Chinese residents on the West Coast. (1)

Some of these young Chinese pioneers must have brought playing equipment with them; others surely found ways to make do with local materials. As they stayed on and made their home in Asian-American communities on the West Coast, they probably constituted the first significant group of players in America.

By 1900 or so a few clubs had popped up on the West Coast, especially in San Francisco, where the notorious "Little Tokyo" club featured gambling, fights and even murders. By 1920 two separate Japanese clubs had been formed. (1)

## Western Eyes Get A First Look

On June 16, 1860, an item appeared in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* describing a visit to Philadelphia of an entourage of diplomats and statesmen from Japan. Commodore Perry had recently opened Japan to the West, and this visit was the start of international relations between Japan and the US. After concluding their first American state visit, the group took the opportunity to tour the East Coast. When they arrived in Philadelphia, the local chess club invited them over and asked for a demonstration of *shogi*. The reporter concluded that Western chess "[is] a puny and dwarfed offspring of the grand original."

The report goes on: "They described to us another Japanese game, somewhat similar to draughts, played on a board nineteen squares in every way." After puzzling over the board for a few moments, the Philadelphia chess players returned to *shogi*. This brief, uncomprehending encounter was probably America's first exposure with the game.

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *go* was probably played informally in Asian-American communities, but it seems to have remained totally obscure to mainstream American culture until the 1920's. The history of *go* in North America really begins with a momentous encounter in Berlin, shortly after the turn of the century.

## Dr. Edward Lasker Discovers Go

1905 was a remarkable year in Europe. In Zurich, Albert Einstein published some ruminations on “relativity” that would change the world forever. In Vienna, Sigmund Freud wrote three essays that would begin a revolution in the West’s basic concept of the person.

Nearby in Berlin, a master player was about to discover a game that rivaled his great passion, chess. Dr. Edward Lasker, who was friendly with but no relation to World Chess Champion Emanuel Lasker, was also one of the top players of his time. When Lasker was a student, his friend and fellow chess master Max Lange showed him a headline in a magazine about Eastern culture, proclaiming “The Game of Go: A Competitor of Chess.” Writing for *Go Monthly Review* in 1961, Dr. Lasker recalled what happened next:

“We naturally did not believe that there was a game which could remotely compare with chess. . . . After playing over a few sample games given in the article, we dropped the game again because we could not discover any feature in it which put it in a class with chess as far as intellectual attraction was concerned.

“One day we . . . noticed a Japanese gentleman reading a Japanese newspaper. . . . The back page of the paper revealed a go diagram, and we realized that Japanese newspapers carried go columns just as German newspapers had chess columns. When [he] left, we examined the paper he left behind.”

A few days later, the Japanese gentleman returned to the café. He explained the game and told them Black had resigned the game described in the paper. “[Dr. Lange and I] were dumbfounded. We thought Black had such an obvious advantage that if anyone should resign, it should be White.” Dr. Lange finally found a twenty-move variation that ended in the capture of a large Black group. “This was proof to us that the game really was a competitor of chess and that deep strategic maneuvers were possible in it.”

Lasker and Lange found a Japanese player to teach them more about the game and began showing it to other chess players. “Most of them only shrugged their shoulders and thought it was ridiculous that we should claim that there was a game in any way comparable to chess.” But by now they had established friendly relations with the Japan Go Association (Nihon Kiin), which gave at least one of them a shodan diploma.

When Lasker’s famous friend Emanuel visited Vienna the next year, he quickly picked up the game, soon playing Edward and his friends on even terms. One day a Japanese mathematician and strong player passed through, and the two Laskers arranged to play him simultaneously. When he suggested that they take nine handicap stones, they thought “There isn’t a man in the world who can give us nine stones. We’ve been studying this game for a year.” They lost badly, failing even to make the quick-playing Japanese player stop and think.

Emanuel Lasker turned back to chess, but Edward was determined to get to Japan and study with the masters. Learning that his company only employed

English-speaking engineers in Japan, he transferred from Berlin to London, to learn English. When World War I broke out, he found himself a “civilian prisoner of war,” narrowly avoiding five years in a British concentration camp.

Lasker moved to America in 1914 and forgot about *go*, living in Chicago until 1925, when he moved to New York. He had met Lee Hartmann (editor of Harper’s magazine), Karl Davis Robinson (a nationally recognized authority on photography, lithography and the graphic arts), and a few other New Yorkers before and had managed to interest them in the game. Now they formed a small club which met weekly at Chumley’s, a famous Greenwich Village speakeasy and bohemian hangout. This meeting formed the beginnings of what would later become the New York Go Club. Later Lasker arranged for the NY Go Club to occupy the basement of the Marshall Chess Club on East Tenth St.

In 1934, Lasker wrote what he called “an elementary book on Go.” *Go and Go-Moku* was not the first English-language book on *go*, but it achieved considerable popularity. Lasker began to receive inquiries from all over the country. With this list of names and addresses Lasker, Robinson, and Hartmann formed the American Go Association in 1935.

### **The San Francisco Go Club**

Meanwhile, another center of activity was evolving on the West Coast. The San Francisco Zen Temple had been established in an historic building, the first synagogue in San Francisco, a building that had survived the devastating 1906 earthquake. In 1931 Isobe, the temple priest, invited the two local clubs to unite in one location. Eventually, the Temple itself at 1881 Bush St. became the home of the San Francisco Go Club. The SFGC survived the Temple itself, continuing to meet there until the 1990’s when the building was taken over by a Jewish historic preservation society.

One of the Club’s early benefactors was the captain of a postal ship sailing between Yokohama and San Francisco, Mr. Yokotta. Although the Nihon Kiin as a whole had little interest in international *go* at that time and no overseas contacts, Mr. Yokotta appealed to the more internationally-minded members of the Nihon Kiin Board on the San Francisco Go Club’s behalf. Finally in 1936, the San Francisco Go Club became the first International Branch of the Nihon Kiin. On hearing the news, Meijin and Honinbo Shusai, the last hereditary master of the house of Honinbo, was inspired to produce a large-scale example of his masterful calligraphy, which still hangs in the club.

Mr. Yokotta also helped the club to acquire first-rate equipment for its facilities. He would take club funds with him to Japan, purchase the equipment, and then store in his tiny room, sleeping on the boards to save on shipping costs. Tragically, the San Francisco Go Club lost this great benefactor in 1942, when his ship was sunk by the American Navy.

### **Getting Stronger in the Relocation Camps**

With the outbreak of war, the San Francisco Go Club closed for several years. A professional in residence, Fukuda 6-Dan, was fortunately allowed to return home

rather than detained in West Coast “relocation camps.” However, most of the club’s Japanese members were “relocated. The club closed, and the building was used as a homeless shelter.

In the camps, many Japanese-Americans became stronger players. “Since many activities were limited and the remote location of the camps made diversions scarce, players found a great deal of time to devote to the game. Many played morning, noon and night, using paper, cloth or home-made wooden boards.

“Stones were a problem. They tried making stones of clay, but due to the vigorous snapping down of the stones they were continually breaking. Finally, the players bought black and white buttons for stones.”

After the war, the San Francisco Go Club reopened, and has continued to serve as a focus for activity on the West Coast. In 1985 the club hosted an historic game between Nie Wei-ping and Cho Hoon-hyun, their first encounter and first official game in history between a Chinese and a Korean professional player.

### **Help from the Japan Go Association (Nihon Kiin)**

Looking at the history of friendship and support between Japanese and American *go* associations, it is hard to believe that the nations ever had less than cordial relations. Starting in 1940, the Nihon Kiin sent a series of professionals to the West to teach *go*, a practice that continues to this day. The first such teacher was Fukuda 6-Dan, a student of Shusai himself, who arrived in New York and worked his way across the country, ending up in San Francisco. His stay there was cut short by the outbreak of war.

After the war, the Nihon Kiin began a sustained effort to help Western players. In addition to frequent tours by professional players, starting in 1961, the Nihon Kiin published *Go Monthly Review*, with English-language instructional material for serious players all over the world. When the Nihon Kiin sponsored the formation of the International Go Federation and began hosting the World Amateur Go Championship, it provided American players a goal to aim for. Since then our top players have been getting stronger every year.

Of the dozens of Nihon Kiin professionals who toured the West, none was more enthusiastic than Iwamoto Kaoru 9-Dan, a great champion in more ways than one. In addition to his distinguished tournament record, he worked tirelessly for international *go* until his death last year. The Centers he established in New York and Seattle will continue his work for years to come.

### **Postwar Growth of American Go**

After World War II, The American Go Association resumed operations in 1949, when Lester and Elizabeth Morris led the AGA’s publication of the world’s first English-language magazine, *The American Go Journal*. Now for the first time, American players who had mastered the basics could study professional games and read instructional material for more advanced players.

Production of diagrams posed special problems for *The American Go Journal* in the early days. Lester designed a special magnetic board with numbered metal stones. Machinists at Bell Labs made it to order so that positions could be set up and photographed.

By the 1960's, groups of players had arisen along both coasts, and to a lesser degree throughout the US. In Cleveland, Noble Carlson began teaching some fellow businessmen. In Washington Square Park in New York's Greenwich Village, players met every evening for friendly competition, exposing large numbers of passersby to the game. At Bell Labs in New Jersey, scientists who worked on historic projects such as the transistor played in their spare time. At Carleton College in Minnesota, a group of talented players would eventually produce America's first professional player. Go teams from IBM and Bell Labs met each to compete for a prize known as the "Rotten Hatchet."

Carleton student James Kerwin moved to Japan in the 1970's and earned his professional credentials in 1977, going on to win his section of the Kisei Tournament in 1979. Kerwin has returned to the Twin Cities area and teaches actively, there and at workshops throughout the country.

At Princeton University, Dr. Ralph Fox provided a site in the university library for a treasure trove of old materials, the DeWitt Collection.

### **Learning the Basics**

Small, stable groups of players were forming and growing around the US, but it was hard to get stronger without instructional materials in English. Aside from *Go Review*, there only a few introductory volumes by Otto Korschelt, Arthur Smith, Lasker and Shukaku Takagawa.

In the early 1960's, Richard Bozulich, a math student at the University of California in Berkeley, moved to Japan to produce books in English for serious players. He established Ishi Press, which later transformed into Kiseido, still in operation with over 30 years of service to English-speaking go lovers around the world. With the help of James Davies and others, he brought out the seven-volume *Elementary Go Series* in the late 1970's. In 1977, when the Nihon Kiin stopped publishing *Go Review*, he and John Power began production of *Go World*, a review of top professional play that as of this writing is nearing its 100<sup>th</sup> issue. Bozulich's group continues bringing go to the West, most recently with the ten-volume *Get Strong at Go* series for mid-level players.

In the late 1980's another Californian entered the go publishing business, only this time without leaving home. Sidney Yuan began selling equipment through *The American Go Journal* as Yutopian Enterprises. In 1994 he published *Killer of Go*, a collection of essays by Sakata Eio, and by 1995 he was bringing new volumes to market as often as once a month. Yutopian now offers a rich assortment of more than thirty books, ranging from games of famous players and life and death problems, to titles like *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Thirty-Six Stratagems Applied to Go*.

1994 was also the year that American professional Janice Kim published the first volume of her popular *Learn To Play Go* series. Since then, with desktop publishing easier and easier, numerous other American entities have produced publications for the English-speaking go world including Fourth Line Press, Nemesis, Whole Board Press, Slate and Shell Enterprises, and the Wings Across Calm Water AGA Chapter. The AGA has also published numerous pamphlets and booklets to help players and organizers.

After fifty years of steady support from Japanese teachers and publishers, many Japanese terms have entered the vocabulary of Western players, starting with the name by which we usually call the game itself. Strong Japanese players like Shinji Dote in San Francisco and Koshi Takashima in New York helped fledgling players to learn how to flap their wings. Some Asian terms have no English equivalent, so Western players have gotten in the habit of using words they learned in books from Japan and from Japanese teachers. It is only recently that the Western go vocabulary has taken on a more international flavor. Thanks to the efforts of English-language writers such as Janice Kim and Chi-hyung Nam, Western players are beginning to understand Korean concepts like “haeng-ma” and “jungsuk.”

### **Go Renaissance**

In 1959, the AGA established a national championship. Bob McAllister in New York and Richard Dolen in California worked out a protocol to conduct telephone matches between the East Coast and the West Coast. The first such match was held through the good services of the Bell Telephone Labs.

The strongest American player at that time was undoubtedly Takao Matsuda, who won fifteen US Opens between 1959 and 1975. He published *The Matsuda Letters* in the 1960's, the first high-level instructional material written and published in the West. By the time AGA President Paul Anderson revitalized the AGA in the mid-1960's, 35 or so chapters were in operation.

By 1974, New York-based players John Stephenson, Matthias Thim and Terry Benson had resumed publication of *The American Go Journal*. As AGA President and Journal publisher for the next ten years, President Terry Benson struggled to bring the AGA together in new ways, made possible when players from all over the country started getting to know one another at the annual Congresses.

A few years later, Roger B. White of Cleveland created **The American Go Foundation**, to receive tax-deductible donations for go-related purposes. Today the AGF supports the Summer Youth Camp and many school-related programs and other projects.

### **The US Go Congress**

In 1983, Washington-based pianist Haskell Small attended a European Congress and thought, why not here? He and Benson worked together to produce the first US Go Congress in 1984 with 64 participants. The Second Congress in Seattle in 1985 attracted more than 200 attendees, including many prominent West

Coast players as well as organizers from the East Coast-based AGA. The Annual Meeting conducted at that Congress was the first encounter among principal organizers from all over, and served to coalesce the truly national organization that we have today.

Although the US Go Congress was inspired by the European Go Congress, by no means is it an exact copy. People who have attended both events comment that the US Go Congress seems relatively less focused on competition, and more on instruction, fellowship and general merry-making. As at the European Congress, a round of the major tournament, the US Open, begins each morning, but with shorter time limits (90 minutes per player); most games finish before lunch. Players who finish early can attend pro comment sessions that begin mid-morning. This enables attendees to participate in a wide range of scheduled instructional activities with the more than dozen professional players and teachers from all over the world who attend the Congress each year. Lectures at all strength levels and simultaneous play are available every afternoon and evening, as well special seminars for strong players and private lessons.

Each evening features a special event, as well as a full schedule of pro activities. One evening is devoted to a lightning tournament, another to small-board competition. There are also team tournaments, international friendship events, and “crazy go” — a night of unusual variants such as *rengo kriegspiel* (blindfold team play), three-dimensional, cylindrical and oversize boards, multiplayer games with four colors.

Another enjoyable Congress event is the ongoing self-paired tournament. As soon as they register, players can begin challenging other participants to “self-paired” games. Played at the proper handicap, under minimum conditions of 45 minutes per player and with mutual prior agreement, these games count toward the player’s official AGA rating, and toward whimsical prizes such as the “Straight Shooter” (the person who defeat the longest consecutive string of ranked players), “The Hurricane “ (the person who plays the most games, win or lose) and “The Optimist” (the person whose rating takes the largest turn for the worse).

While some events have their light-hearted flavor, others are aimed at the serious player. For instance, in the **US Open** the top prize is the right to represent the US in the World Amateur Go Championship. Another prominent Congress tournament is the **North American Ing Cup**, sponsored by the Ing Foundation. America’s sixteen strongest players, selected by rating, compete for the largest prize of any American tournament. The Congress also hosts a special children’s tournament, the **Redmond Cup**, to select the US representatives for the World Youth Championship. The **North American Pairs Tournament** selects a male-female team to compete in the annual World pairs Tournament.

The Congress is also the site of the final showdown between the contender for the **North American Masters Tournament** and the current champion. This best-of-three series concludes the only professional tournament in the West and the only such event conducted mostly on the Internet.

## Pros Meet Amateurs in North American Fujitsu Tournament

Since 1988, the AGA has also organized the **North American Fujitsu Qualifying Tournament**, an exciting pro-am event that pits North America's strongest amateurs against credentialed professionals who reside in North America or hold citizenship in the US, Canada or Mexico. The AGA is very grateful to Fujitsu Corporation for its steadfast support for this tournament through times of economic uncertainty. To qualify for this event, top amateurs compete in The American Go Tournament Circuit, a series of regional tournaments conducted throughout the year. A point system determines who joins the field after seeded players and eligible professionals enter. The opportunity to play among professionals in this tournament inspire many American players to try harder and get stronger.

### The Internet

Americans have led the way for players around the world on the Internet. In 1992 a group of programmers in the San Francisco Bay Area led by the enigmatic "tweet" created the first facility for playing on the Internet. Ever since then, the Internet Go Server (IGS) has been the place to play on the Internet, with more than 40,000 subscribers and hundreds of players logged on at any hour of the day or night. The IGS helped the AGA to develop the facilities to host the North American Masters Tournament.

By the mid-1990's, other servers started popping up. A group of IGS'ers broke away to form a server for which they could think of no name, so it became the "no name go server. (nngs)". At the same time, Web companies began developing ways for users to play games, including *go*, directly on the Internet. Yahoo! Games, Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone and other play-for-free commercial sites began to attract hundreds of casual players, many of them beginners who were browsing through various games on the site. These sites are easier to use, but they are less sophisticated. For instance, players cannot tell the rank of other players when selecting an opponent.

More recently, a number of Asian companies have entered the fray, but none of the newcomers has achieved the wide subscription base or the depth of service available on IGS.

The AGA has also played a pioneering role is in the development of a weekly electronic newsletter, *The American Go E-Journal*. Distributed for free to anyone who requests a subscription by writing to [journal@usgo.org](mailto:journal@usgo.org), as of this writing, almost 3000 players receive its mixture of news, announcements and go-related writings.

The Internet is sure to play an important role in the future of *go* in America. For a while, it seemed as if Internet play would replace face-to-face games altogether. Clubs reported lower attendance — their members were sitting home, playing opponents from all over the world. Some Chapters even closed. It seems that these concerns, like predictions that the Internet would replace the printed word, were exaggerated. In fact, just as the Internet has given birth to a vast new array



of Internet-related books and magazines, in the end it seems to help, rather than hurt. Recently, people who learned to play on the Internet are starting to want to meet their opponent face-to-face. More and more they turn up at club night and tournaments, and become part of the American *go* scene.

### **Ratings**

Most game and sport rating system used a relatively fixed, mechanical mathematical system. Players are awarded points for winning and if they lose, points are taken away. In contrast, the AGA rating system, implemented in the early 1980's, uses a sophisticated statistical model uses large data sets from multiple tournaments to estimate the likely outcome of each pairing, then weights the result accordingly. In result is a sensitive, responsive system thought by some to be the most "valid" system in use today. Canada, the Internet Go Server and various European nations have adopted rating systems based on this "percentage expectancy" model.

### **Ing Grant**

Since 1993, the AGA has been the fortunate recipient of a generous yearly grant by the Ing Foundation. This has enabled us to develop a number of events, programs and initiatives, including:

- The North American Masters Tournament
- The North American Ing Cup
- The Redmond Cup
- The AGA Summer Camp
- The Ing Youth Congress Scholarship program, enabling up to 50 children to attend the US Go Congress
- Development, production and distribution of a variety of materials for organizers (starter sets, demonstration boards, instructional materials, promotional brochures, etc.)
- Sponsorship of various tournaments and events throughout the US

Thanks to these programs, *go* is thriving in the US as never before.

### **Children and Schools**

In recent years, the AGA has focused on developing a "sustainable community" of children who play *go*. Utilizing Ing Foundation funds, partnering with the American Go Foundation and raising money from other sources, we support dozens of teachers who are introducing *go* to children in the classroom and in after-school programs. Every year thousands of American children learn about *go* in their classrooms and after-school programs through AGA- and AGF-supported programs.

The AGA also organizes and sponsors the world's only **Children's Camp**. With support from the Ing Foundation and many private donors, we are able to offer scholarships — no child has ever been turned away because of inability to pay

the registration fee. Clubs, businesses and individuals can donate to the camp or sponsor children from their areas. Last year children traveled all the way from Japan and Korea to attend this unique event, which mixes serious study with traditional camp activities.

What about the rest of the year? The AGA also organizes and hosts a weekly "Cybercamp", for AGA Camp alumni and other children, every Saturday on the Kiseido Go Server. Other activities are in the works. The first of a series of sponsored study groups on the Internet for children is now in progress. A regular Saturday encounter between European and American children is also being planned.

### **Professionals in America**

More players with professional credentials live in the United States than anywhere else outside Asia. Our good fortune in this area began when James Kerwin of Minnesota, having achieved professional status in Japan, returned to the US and began teaching in 1980.

California-born Michael Redmond entered the pro ranks in Japan shortly thereafter in 1981. He has gone on to become unquestionably the strongest Western player of all time, making the ultimate grade of 9-Dan in 2000. Redmond, a US citizen who has won the Fujitsu tournament several times in the past.

In 1985, a legendary master teacher moved to the US from Shanghai. Yi-lun Yang, trainer of many of China's top players, devoted himself to improving the quality of American go. Today he is the busiest teacher in the US, a beloved figure who has devoted himself to teaching as top competitors devote themselves to tournaments. He is the author of three books of problems in English, published by Yutopian Enterprises.

Another American achieved the distinction of professional status In 1987, this time in Korea. Janice Kim is still the only US-born woman to have earned professional status. She has published four books which are available through her company, Samarkand, and she is a regular contributor to *The American Go Journal* and an active teacher.

No discussion of American professionals is complete without mentioning Jimmy Cha, the Korean-American 4-Dan and sometime California-based businessman, Redmond's only serious competition in the Fujitsu Cup. An unpredictable, fun-to-watch player who can cruise to easy victory over a 9-Dan on a good day, Cha is an exciting part of the American scene.

Chinese professional Hui-ren (Henry) Yang lives in the Boston are, then moved to the Boston area. With his collaborator Sangit Chatterjee he has written two books in English, *Cosmic Go* and *Galactic Go*.

Fortune smiled on American go in 1993 when a real tournament star, Zhu-jiu Jiang, arrived in San Francisco. Jiang had made his name in the First Japan-China Super Go Tournament in 1985, when he defeated five Japanese

professionals in a row. Living in San Francisco, he taught at the San Francisco Go Club and the American Ing Insitutute.

A few years later, after a series of reversals, Jiang was joined by his wife, Nai-wei Rui, at 9-Dan the world's strongest woman. In 2000, Jiang became a US citizen. He and Ms. Rui are currently playing in Korean professional tournaments. We are very grateful for this chance to cheer for these adopted "American" players. Every American player was delighted when Ms. Rui had her historic victory in the Kuk So tournament last year.

Although Jiang and Rui are away for now, Jiang's brother Ming-jiu, also a professional player, now lives and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The most recent instance of America's astounding good luck with professional players occurred last year, when the world's only other female 9-Dan, Feng Yun, moved to the US. She plans to reside in America for at least three years, and she is already active on the tournament scene and as a teacher. Because she resides in North America, she is eligible and will play in this year's North American Masters Tournament, and she gives lessons at the New York Center, in Hoboken and privately. She will teach a four-day workshop in Massachusetts later this year.

Two other North American women are also members of China's professional players association — Liping Huang of Chicago and Xiao-ren He of Montreal. Ms. He is a familiar face at US Go Congresses where she happily plays amateurs simultaneously and teaches them.

### **Go in Popular Culture**

In a recent exhibit of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese scrolls at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, one scroll prominently featured two players, surrounded by other scholarly icons — a zither, a brush. This is typical of Chinese, Japanese and Korean exhibitions one can nearly always find an image of board and stones somewhere.

For *go* to become truly popular in the West, it must first become what Dr. Susan Blackmore calls a *meme*, a "unit of cultural transmission," as chess has done. When one learns chess, one learns a paradigm and metaphor for Western thinking. Diplomatic negotiations can reach the "endgame" stage, or end in a "stalemate." A minor player in a given scenario is a "pawn." When *go* enters public discourse in the West in this way, we will know that we have arrived.

*Go* made its first significant literary appearances in Western media with the popular translation of Kawabata's *The Master of Go*. In 1979, the spy thriller *Shibumi* by Trevanian featured a hero schooled in the arts of *go* as well as the martial arts. Recently, *go* has been played or mentioned on various popular TV shows such as *Ally McBeal* and *JAG*, and in an award-winning underground film, *Pi*. The West is a long way from having 24-hour *go* TV cable channels like those in Japan and Korea, but things are improving. Later this year a Hollywood film will feature Academy Award winner Russell Crowe playing John Forbes

Nash, a tortured and gifted mathematician and *go* player, in a film entitled *A Beautiful Mind*.

### **A Bright Future**

If Marco Polo had discovered *go* when he visited China in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it might be widely known in the West today. But the fact is, among board games, *go* remains the West's best-kept secret. Even today it remains obscure, on a level that the Asian world probably cannot imagine.

Yet despite this obscurity, the small, active American community has played a leading role in bringing *go* to the West. Nearly all English-language books about *go* are produced by American publishers in the US and around the world. The strongest Western player in the game 5000-year history, an American, plays today as a 9-Dan on the Japanese professional tournament circuit. The distinguished San Francisco Go Club was the first international chapter of the Nihon Kiin and has hosted historic matches. The American Go Association is the oldest such association in the West, even older than the associations in China and Korea. Americans created and continue to operate the premier online playing site, the Internet Go Server.

The AGA published the first English-language *go* magazine, promulgated the first professional tournament on the Internet, maintains the world's most accurate rating system, and operates the only *go* summer camp for children in the world today. Nowhere in the West today is anyone working harder to bring *go* into the mainstream of popular culture.

Looking forward, it seems that the time may be near when American culture awakens more widely to the value of *go*. When this happens, the bond between our cultures will grow strong in many ways.

In order to break through to mainstream Western culture, we need to do a great deal of work. We need to strengthen our children's programs, building a national intramural system of play, and educating parents, schools and the public on the game's value for growing young minds. We need to strengthen our tournaments by building mutually beneficial relationships with sponsors. We need to focus on retaining members, helping new players climb the steep initial learning curve, when the game seems so open and formless as to be incomprehensible. If these things happen, *go* will reach a new level of prominence in the America.

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