

Igo and Me

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December 20, 2018

I saw a Go puzzle in a magazine when I was a kid. I didn't know what that was. I played Checkers and know a little bit of Chess at that time. I didn't understand Go, but I must have liked how the game looked like, the black and white stones on a grid. With a child's twisted logic, I tried to design a game similar to what I saw in the magazine. I got the surrounding idea right, but I tried to mix it with the concepts of moving pieces and starting with a full army on opposite sides, instead of an empty board. In one turn a stone could move to an adjacent intersection. This was unplayable: white and black collided in the middle, then nothing happened. Therefore, I changed the rule of moving to the rook's movement in Chess. This turned out to be a good game. Later, I found it in a book about the history of board games. So, it was definitely not my invention and I was a bit disappointed.

In 2004, during my PhD years, one of my fellow students discovered Hikaru No Go, the anime series in the form of a very diligent fansub. I started playing while watching the series, first online (on the Dragon Go Server), then after buying a proper Go set, with friends also. I played just for fun, for the next seven years or so. I had periods when I tried to improve my skills seriously by reading books and solving problems, but these were not sustained efforts. Just playing doesn't lead to much improvement, so I got to around 14kyu. Then, life got busier, I moved to Australia, and slowly disappeared from Go servers.

Even without playing, the game stayed in my thinking. I found that Go wisdom, which is often about finding a balance, is applicable to life itself. One such balance is the issue of confidence and overconfidence: a seemingly lost situation can often be rescued, while considering victory prematurely often gets punished severely. In Go, a good move serves at least two different purposes. This is a good trick in professional life, where the lack of time is a common problem. For instance, designing the Igo Math course followed this logic. First, I thought about picking up Go again when my son was turning four, simply to play the game as a family program. I realized that it would be educational as well. Go is more fun than school problems. I consider playing as an enjoyable way of doing mathematics. As an obvious next step I realized that it's not just my son who could benefit from this, but that is exactly what I'm trying to do in my work at a university: teaching mathematics and computing in an entertaining way. There was another bit of Go knowledge in designing the course. Keeping 'sente', the initiative, was another motivation for creating this course. In the middle of curriculum reform, a very important and demanding

academic activity, I found it safer to be ahead and launch new courses early, shaping the process, rather than being dragged by it and only reacting to the changes. I bet that the transformative power of this ancient game is relevant for what our thinking has to perform in the future.