

One week of Go in Cambridge

Sunday 25 Feb

Last week we started some teaching sessions for the stronger junior Go players in Cambridge, but there were not so many players the first time round because of the half term holiday. Today was the second session and 12 children came. We divided them into 3 groups. The top group was taught by Yike Tang 4-dan and they mostly did teaching games and game reviews. The second group was taught by Lucy Lu, also 4-dan, and because this group have mostly played 13x13 games in the other club meetings they were focusing on playing on 19x19. I taught the third group, we did some puzzles to develop understanding the whole board position and looking around for the biggest moves instead of always following the opponent.

These teaching meetings are held in a nice big modern room in Clare College Memorial Court. We brought some home made cakes for the children to eat in the break. The teaching meeting is straight before the Cambridge University Go Society meeting at 4pm so quite a few of the children stay on and play some games against the students.

Monday 26 Feb

There is no Go club today but I do a private Go lesson in my house in the afternoon. I have a rule of only teaching children up to 10-kyu level, after that they need a stronger teacher! Each lesson is usually a mixture of learning a new topic, playing a small board teaching game and doing some puzzles from the Kano Yoshinori collection for kyu players.

I have got a list of 40 teaching topics starting from the rules and hopefully including everything you might need to know to get close to single figure kyu level. Each one has some teaching materials or activities associated with it. At the end of last year a group was started of European Go teachers who want to develop a series of lesson plans to help new Go teachers so I hope I will be able to contribute something useful to that.

Tuesday 27 Feb

On Tuesdays we don't have a face to face Go meeting but instead there is an online meeting on OGS for those children who can't make it to any of the physical meetings. We have got a Zoom call alongside the meeting so we can talk and review games.

There are usually only a handful of children but they all arrive at different times so it can be difficult to organise, often I end up playing 2 or 3 games at the same time so that nobody is waiting too long for an opponent. We've also used the Go Magic skills tree as a good source of puzzles for people to do online while they are waiting for a game.

After the OGS meeting I go to a meeting about the Kids Go Server which is being developed by the American Go Foundation with help and support from the British Go Association. The server is based on OGS but with child friendly graphics and with a lot of the chat facilities removed. It's interesting to see how it has developed now there are lessons with audio added.

Wednesday 28 Feb

Today is an exciting day because the Go club at Milton Primary School near my house is restarting after a gap of about 8 years. I ran a club at this school for about a dozen years while my children were pupils there but I stopped when they left. But now I am retired from work I thought it would be good to start it up again. To advertise the club a couple of weeks beforehand, a Go Magic introductory video was shown in the school assembly and then I visited 7 different classes in one day (very tiring!) and gave a brief introduction to the rules, with all the children having a chance to try out playing atari-go.

I had been told by the school that there were 14 children signed up for the club, which runs from 7:45am until 8:45am. I was quite nervous about what the club would be like! All the players were basically beginners but they had a rough idea of the rules from the visit I had done to the school earlier.

We did a recap of the rules and played some more atari-go, perhaps next week we will look at how to finish and score a game. We also did some "spot the stones that can be captured" type of puzzles.

On Wednesday afternoons there are two clubs. The first one is in a private school called St Faith's, it takes me a bit more than half an hour to cycle there from home. This term there are only 7 children in it. The meetings are short so it's hard to know how to do any teaching and still leave time to play games. This week we do a single whole board 9x9 puzzle demonstrating a ko fight, the idea is to give the idea of how a ko fight works and to get some practice at looking for threats. It seems to go well.

From there I cycle to the other end of Cambridge where we have the Wednesdays meetings of the Cambridge Junior Chess and Go Club. This year this club will have been running for 30 years! The Wednesday meetings start with some teaching which alternates between Chess and Go. Then the main part of the meeting is either for friendly games or for some sort of competition.

This week the teaching is Go teaching and we have three teachers, I teach the middle group. Unfortunately the teaching I prepared (looking at a game that one of the children from the club played in the online Euro City Youth Go League) is not quite at the right level for the children who turned up in my group this week so we abandon that and do some capturing race puzzles instead.

Thursday 29 Feb

This morning I went to see the wife and daughter of a Go player I knew for many years who sadly died towards the end of 2023. I must have played a huge number of games with him. I said I would find some use for his Go books so I have come to collect them. I was a bit worried there would be a large amount of books that wouldn't be very useful but there are not so many and they are mostly the sort of books people will actually use, for example the Elementary Go Series.

In the afternoon another school Go club is starting, this time in the Perse School which is probably the most well-known school in Cambridge. I was a bit nervous about how many children would actually turn up, given that I haven't been able to promote the club myself within the school. But there were 9 players, 5 who could already play (including a couple of single-figure kyus) and 4 beginners. So the stronger players played each other while I taught the rules to the new ones. Afterwards we found another couple of strong players also at the school.

From there it's a short cycle journey to the Thursday meeting of the Cambridge Junior Chess and Go Club. We started this last year because quite a few parents told us that if they lived in the south of Cambridge it was not so easy to get to the Wednesday meetings at the other side of the city. These meetings are smaller and at the beginning there were just a few children who knew how to play Go, but now a lot of the players who could initially only play Chess have learned too.

Friday 01 Mar

No Go meetings today, but in the evening there was a meeting of the European Go Federation Youth Managers. I take the minutes at this meeting. Unfortunately I didn't do a good job of sending out the information about the meeting beforehand and as a result it is not well attended!

Saturday 02 Mar

There is no Go at all for me today as I go with my son to an open day at Sheffield University

Sunday 03 Mar

This morning I do some Go teaching at a schools' Chess event. The schools in Cambridgeshire have a Chess league with somewhere between 20 and 30 teams and they get together 4 times during the year and play 4 matches at each meeting. In between the Chess games, one of the offered activities is a Go teaching room. When we first did this, nearly all of the children were complete beginners and we spent almost all of our time explaining the rules over and over to different groups. But now each time we go most of the children who come along can already play although there are always a few new players.

Once this is all over, I go to the university Go meeting where the children's Go teaching has just finished (someone else took over teaching my group this week). I played a game with one of the junior players, and was winning when I managed to make one of her groups into a seki, but then I somehow managed to lose some of my surrounding stones so it was no longer seki and the game was really close again. In the end I won by one point. On the way home in the car I turned on the radio and by coincidence the programme was discussing a poem Revolutionary Letter #1 by Diane di Prima which makes reference to Go.