

THE GAME OF GO

Go is an oriental board game of great antiquity. Originating in China during the 3rd millennium B.C., the game was brought to Japan during the 8th century of our era. Today, go has achieved such a high level of development in the East that it is comparable to the Western game of chess. And over the last few decades, the game has firmly established itself in both Europe and North America.

EQUIPMENT

To play go, all you need is a board criss-crossed by 19 horizontal and vertical lines along with a sufficient number of black and white "stones." Normally, a set of stones consists of 180 biconvex disks of each colour; however, rare are the games that will require the playing of 300 stones or more.

HOW TO PLAY

Beginning with Black, each player alternates in placing a stone on any unoccupied intersection of the board. Contrary to chess, the stones do not move: each stone remains in place until the end of the game unless it is captured, in which case it is removed from the board.

The object of the game, however, is not to capture enemy stones; rather, it is to encircle territory. The winner is the one who surrounds more unoccupied intersections than his or her opponent.

CAPTURING STONES

Diagram I, depicting a quarter of a board, illustrates examples of capturing enemy stones. If Black plays at 'a', he captures the white stone 1. This is so because White's stone is surrounded on three of its four sides (called *liberties*) by Black's 2, 3, and 4. (Diagonals have no significance in go.) To escape being captured, White would need to play at 'a' himself, thereby increasing the number of liberties from one to three. On the edges of the board, only three sides need to be surrounded; consequently, White may

capture 5 thanks to 6 and 7, by playing at 'b'. In the corners, only two sides need to be surrounded; thus, Black may capture 6 by playing at 'c'.

The rule of capture applies to groups of stones as well. For example, if Black plays at 'd', thereby extinguishing White's last liberty, the four white stones are immediately removed from the board; if, instead, Black plays at 'e', the white stones remain where they are.

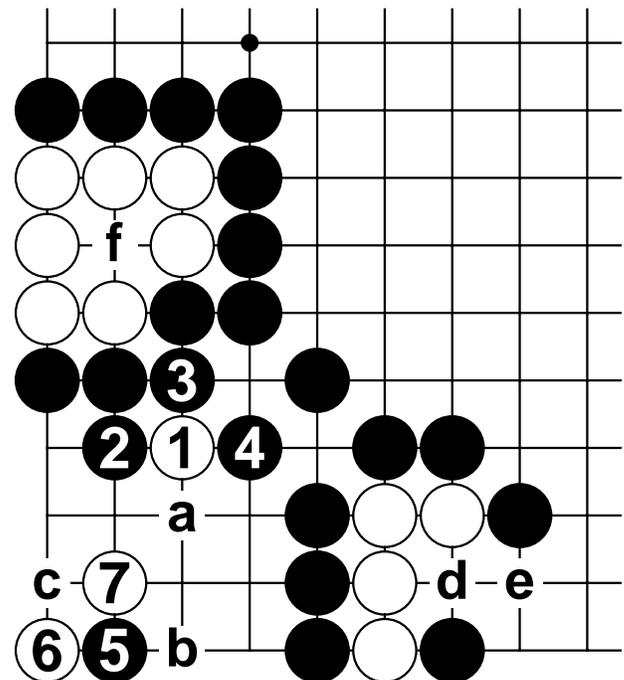


Diagram I

Let's consider another example. The group of seven white stones with an internal liberty (called an eye) at 'f' has only one liberty left. If Black plays at 'f', White's group will be removed. On the other hand, White may not play at 'f' himself. This is called suicide and it is illegal in go: no stone or group of stones may remove its own last liberty. In playing at 'f', it may appear that Black is violating the rule against suicide, but in this situation, this is not so. In the act of capturing, Black's stone retains all of its liberties since the white stones are instantly removed from the board.

In order to secure against being captured, a group of stones must have, at the very least, two internal and separate eyes. The group of nine black stones in the top left-hand corner

of Diagram II is such a group. It is alive and safe because White cannot play inside either eye on account of the rule against suicide.

END OF THE GAME

There comes a time when there is no more advantage to be gained from further play. This point is reached when neither player can increase his territory or diminish that of his opponent. Once this stage is reached, both players place stones on the remaining neutral intersections so that the borders of their respective living groups are touching one another. The game ends by mutual consent.

At the end of the game, each player removes his opponent's dead stones (groups without two eyes). (There is no need to actually surround them and remove their liberties; any group unable to make two eyes is dead.) Then, each player totals the number of free intersections under his control and subtracts the number of dead stones his opponent removed from the board during the game. The winner is the one who has the most points.

SEKI AND THE RULE OF KO

Occasionally, a situation may develop where two opposing groups are alive even though neither one has the required two eyes. In Diagram II, the groups 1-2-3 and 4-5-6-7 are said to be in *seki*. Neither player is willing to play at 'a' or 'b' because in so doing he would be reducing the number of his group's liberties to one, thus giving his opponent the opportunity of capturing on the next move. At the end of the game, this local situation is left alone and no points are counted in it.

A more frequent occurrence in go is *ko* fights. In Diagram II, 8 and 'c' are in a *ko* situation. White may capture 8 by playing at 'c'; however, Black may not recapture the white stone on his next move. If this were allowed, both players would be endlessly recapturing each other's stones. To prevent this from happening, the *ko* rule requires Black, in this case, to play in another location, ideally, in a situation where White will feel the need to respond. Then on his next move, Black may recapture the white stone. If he does so, the *ko* rule would now apply to White.

HANDICAPS AND RANKS

One of the advantages of go over other games is its system of handicaps, which allows players to enjoy interesting games despite differences in their strengths. The handicap system is also useful in establishing ranks. For example, a beginner, usually

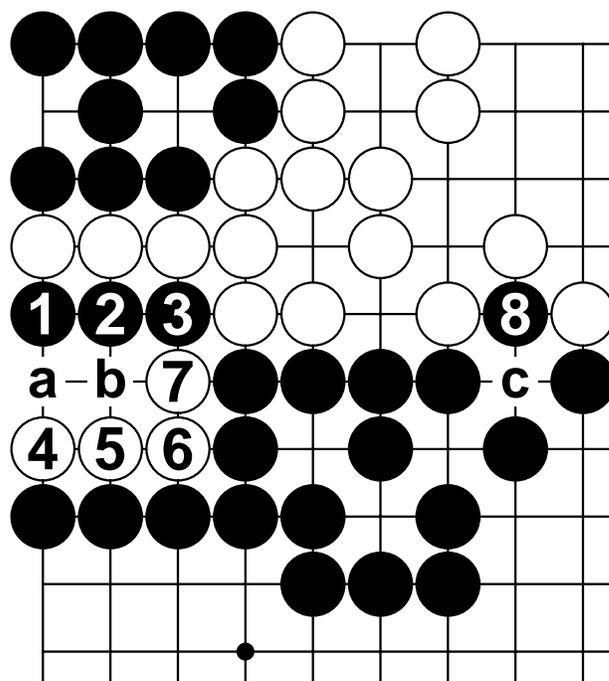


Diagram II

ranked at 30-kyu, playing against a 22-kyu player, would be allowed to place eight stones on the board before his opponent played his first move. At the rate of one stone per rank, the ranking system descends to 1-kyu at which point further progress is measured in dan ranks, beginning with 1-dan. The strongest players in the world are ranked at 9-dan.

Further Information

The growth in the popularity of go in the West has given birth to a formal organizational structure headed by the International Go Federation. The Canadian Go Association, a founding member of the Federation, came into being in the late 1970s.

In Quebec, the promotion of go is the responsibility of the *Association québécoise des joueurs de go*, incorporated in 1978.

For more information, including the places where go is played in Quebec, contact the AQJG at (514) 252-3032 or visit the association's Web site at www.fqjr.qc.ca/go.html (E-mail: go@fqjr.qc.ca).