

## Introduction

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### Introduction

This book is not a Go primer nor even a second book, so it presumes that the reader intending to profit from it already has a firm grasp (if perhaps not yet complete mastery) of the basic rules of Go, as well as the fundamentals of life and death, Joseki, and Fuseki.

When deciding whether or not it will be worth the time and effort necessary to profit from a Go tutorial such as this, the most relevant criterion employed will almost necessarily be the amount and rapidity of improvement in your rating that you can expect in return. Although it's manifestly impossible to correctly assess this without an in-depth appraisal of your individual intellect and countless other factors, some highly relevant insight into this matter can nevertheless be gained from considering the author's own experience. As

originally conceived, this book's objective was to provide players from double digit to perhaps 5 Kyu with crucial insights into the key issues of deciding what, where, and why to play next. But as a result of my own experience, I've just come to realize that the range of players who can find in it the insights that can and will lead to significant improvement in their Go skill (and rating) extends at least to 1D AGA! How and why I've come to that startling conclusion is related next.

With the possible rare exception of a few geniuses at the very top of the Go professional ratings, every Go player throughout its extensive history has eventually reached a skill and rating plateau which they never thereafter exceed. For many players, intermediate plateaus also often hold sway for a number of months or even years, but ultimately a final, highest level is reached and then continues until age induced decline takes over, if the player is fortunate enough to live that long. As I've observed during the 60 years of my own Go playing experience, depending on the player these final plateaus range all the way from high double digit Kyu for the least apt (most of whom drop out in frustration), to high ranked 9P. But the one seemingly invariant factor characterizing them all is that once a certain amount of time has elapsed (typically 10 years or more), or age has been reached (typically 60-65), the player's then operative plateau is final, and is never thereafter transcended!

But what has just happened in my own Go playing life violates both of those seemingly impenetrable time barriers! I'm now 83, suffering from the incurable, invariably fatal Acute Amyloid Leukemia, and have been at a 1D AGA plateau for over 20 years. But despite that, my latest results definitively demonstrate that I'm now no weaker than 3D AGA, and most probably 4D, and, perhaps most startling of all, am unquestionably still improving! When I watch games on IGS between players rated 4D\* (= 7D AGA) and above, I now quickly and easily find their exact moves a vast majority of the time! The key that the reader should be aware of is that this ability didn't develop immediately after I had organized the key ideas and translated that into this book, but only reached its current state of fruition after another couple of years of integration of those ideas into my thinking. But as noted, I'm quite old by any standard and consequently undoubtedly more fixed in my thinking than the average player who will read this book, so I have every confidence that those of you who put forth the requisite effort can, as I've done, reap rewards of Go rating beyond your fondest expectations!

#### Now about the book itself.

At its most fundamental level, playing Go is heavily dependent upon pattern recognition. As a result, an essential factor in progressing from beginner to intermediate and beyond is perfecting knowledge of the key recurrent local patterns, especially as embodied in Tesuji and Joseki. This knowledge constitutes the tactical bedrock upon which Go skill is built, but even its mastery is insufficient to make one a strong player! What's missing is the ability to visualize and then act appropriately on those patterns in actual global board contexts, and that latter capability can only be realized in the service of key strategic ideas like those developed in this book. Preeminent among these key ideas is that fighting is the heart and soul of Go, to the degree that the final outcome of a high proportion of well played games is decided directly or indirectly by big battles. For that reason, mastering the art of fighting is one of the most productive of the essential

steps in becoming a strong player.

There are two quite different but equally essential aspects of fighting:

1. Deciding where, when and why it's appropriate to fight.
2. Knowing how to fight.

This book focuses on the former. Its basic premise is that a fully developed skill arsenal is unquestionably essential to becoming a strong player, but is insufficient because the full value of that skill can only be realized in the service of deep strategic understanding. It's much like driving a car - technical driving skill is essential for maneuvering safely and efficiently in traffic, but useless for getting where you want to go without an adequate road map! So the focus in this book is on how to identify which fights are necessary and/or productive and which should be avoided, rather than on how to conduct a fight once it's begun. It attempts to do what many believe impossible - to explain this essential aspect of Go to beginners and intermediates so clearly and concisely that they will thereafter think much like strong players, even if they're still far from being able to consistently translate that understanding into fully accurate and incisive play.

Of necessity, we do discuss the details of some fights, because it can be very helpful to the reader to see the sort of complications that may result from the implementation of the ideas being studied. But even in those cases, our emphasis is on identifying plausible moves which fulfill the position's overall strategic objectives, rather than on finding those that are absolutely best.

Finally, it must be understood that although this book provides a valuable road map for Go fighting in the form of a set of simple but important strategic ideas which are generally (but certainly not always) applicable, those protocols must be viewed as neither absolute prescriptions that must be slavishly followed, nor unerring guides to the absolutely best moves! Despite that important caveat, the book's premise is that mere exposure to these key ideas will provide the greatest increase in any beginner/intermediate's playing strength for the least effort expended! But, as desirable as that is, it's only a good first step. Completing the transformation into a strong player will also take much study and practice of the detailed techniques of Go, as well as lots of over-the-board playing experience - all things well beyond our present purposes, and which are therefore left for your independent effort.

### The Use Of Ratings In This Book

Except as otherwise noted, all of the illustrations in this book were taken from actual Dan level games played on leading on-line Go servers, and that means that the stated ranks are all really equivalent to 1- 3 stones stronger on the AGA scale! So although 5D may not seem all that impressive, when you realize that it's really equivalent to from 6D-8D AGA and therefore among its highest rated players, that player's judgment about where to play becomes much easier to accept as valid.

## Acknowledgement

I hereby pay my respects and acknowledge my debt to all of the many wonderful Go teachers and authors who have preceded me. Thanks are hereby offered to the vetters of this book's original incarnation, Ray Kukol 4D, Lisa Maloney, Michael Quintero, Dale Blann, Masaaki Hamaguchi, and my son Randy, who were kind enough to review the manuscript, find errors, and offer some insights into places in which it needed clarification and/or modification. Thanks are also offered to Joanne Phipps 3D and Louis Abronson 5D, who vetted the revised manuscript, found some significant errors, and made key suggestions that helped me reedit it yet again. But in the end, because I'm a Beethoven and not a Mozart, I once more rethought and completely recast everything, so that although much of the book's content is essentially the same as in the earlier versions, the presentation is now completely different. As a consequence, responsibility for what appears here, including any errors, remains uniquely mine . Finally, special thanks are offered to Jakob Meulengracht for his invaluable assistance in preparing the HTML coding of the manuscript that allowed its on line publication.

Milt Bradley, July 2008

## **Table Of Contents**

- Introduction
- Chapter 1 - The Role Of Fighting In Go
- Chapter 2 - Important Stones
- Chapter 3 - Strong/Weak Stones
- Chapter 4 - Peeps And Cuts
- Chapter 5 - Sector Lines, Enclosure & Connectivity
- Chapter 6 - S.W.O.T. Analysis
- Chapter 7 - A Sampling Of Major Fighting Scenarios
- Epilogue