

46th Australian National Go Championships



Written by Bob Watson 11k

Learned go at the age of 28.
Lives in Toowoomba, Australia.
History student, MC, Godzilla fan.
Username *Thaumaturge* on OGS

The 46th Australian National Go Championships were held in Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria. Navigating the complex web of Melbourne public transport reminded me I was a long way from the small rural town that I come from. The tournament was held at Nunawading Community Hub, a local government-owned multipurpose hall described as a five-star Green Star rated building (I have no idea what that means but it sounds impressive). Its numerous meeting rooms were perfect for a go tournament.

Participants started turning up well before the doors to the center were opened. Within minutes, we were sharing stories and comparing our respective go clubs. I met Andrew, who came all



Bob's name badge

the way from Hobart, Tasmania, an island state in the lower part of Australia. The Hobart Go Club is the southernmost go club in Australia and one of the southernmost go clubs in the world. It is much easier to socialize with a stranger when you share a common interest. The most common questions asked were, "Where did you come from?", and, "How did you start playing go?".

These questions were asked in a friendly getting-to-know you manner, and no one seemed to be asking about strength or rank. The question I was asked most often was, "What is the European Go Journal?". My response: "I'm here to write an article", made everyone excited.

Once the center opened, we poured in. Some set up in the main hall area and started playing 9x9 to warm up, with people kibbitzing in excited and sometimes admonishing voices.



David Bofinger and Andrew Goodly playing 9x9

The time control for this event was one hour each, with no extra time – so-called “sudden death”. There was a collective gasp around the room at the announcement as byo-yomi is typically expected. I found this interesting because, for most amateur players, one hour each is more than enough to finish. The time control was implemented because the government building closed at 5pm sharp – a seemingly fair and logical reason for such a strict time control. I spoke to the other participants throughout the day about the time control, and most people were happy with the concept. An Younggil 8p, the tournament judge, said that the absolute time would reduce endgame disputes. I witnessed only one loss by time in the A Division. In the B Division, most games ended with plenty of time remaining on the clock.

The participants were divided by strength into two divisions: A and B. I was in the B Division as I am a far better writer than go player. Something interesting I noticed amidst the relative silence of the tournament: the B Division was noisier. Kids shifting on chairs, people rattling stones in the bowl, sighs of frustration as battle plans fall apart could all be heard. This made the room feel like a living, breathing organism – a hive mind putting everyone’s mental energy into a singular goal.



B Division playing hall

When my game finished, I went to observe the A Division games which was quite an experience. The intense atmosphere was palpable as these were the best players in Australia. Their body language, their eyes and their breathing reflected their states of mind. I walked cautiously so as not to disturb the silence. Even the way they held and placed the stones on the board felt reverent.

At lunch time, refreshments in the form of sandwiches and wraps were provided, with tournament director Billy Sun walking around with a tray of food to make sure everyone was fed. This was also the moment for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Australian Go Association. It was efficiently run by Neville Smythe in less than half an hour, with all committee members retaining their positions unopposed. Go associations around the world are held together by volunteers willing to take up these often thankless positions.

As anyone who has run a tournament knows, it’s usually not a matter of if something will go wrong, but when. This is not a cynical attitude, but a reality of running an event with so many

people. There were 60 participants at this event, so a good degree of organization was required. Once the games start, things usually go smoothly for a while. I didn't notice any major disruptions to the tournament on the first day. Sorting out the player draws was the only thing outside of the games that took up a lot of time.

On day two, as soon as the center's doors were open, people rushed in and started playing warm-up games. Some played silently, others were having teaching games. All of the warm-up games attracted observers. I myself played such a game with Bank, a player from Thailand. One player had a quick game on their phone. I don't play go on my phone; the temptation to play during a dull lecture at university would be too strong for me.

One game I feel worth mentioning was against Ray Jiang, an eight-year-old 2-dan. What hope does a mere mortal like myself have against such a strong player? It should be no surprise he beat me, but it made me realize that I am envious of these kids in all the right ways. I was 28 when I discovered go and only recently have I started taking the game seriously. Young tigers like Ray were exposed to the game at an early age, allowing them the possibility to play at a remarkably advanced level. It is heartening to see a significant cohort of younger players at the event.

I didn't have time to mourn my loss as it was lunchtime and the universal food was provided: pizza! I love pizza because it is customizable, there is a pizza for every type of person. People leaned in to watch lunchtime games, carefully holding their pizza away from the board, making for a comical scene. Lunch was consumed with the typical efficiency one would expect from hungry go players.

Waiting for the final games to finish up, I saw a lot of tired faces. Some discussed topics other than go (for, as strange as it sounds, such things do exist). Most were discussing their games either on a technical level, or just the general feeling they had while playing. I will never tire of people telling me about their games: the way they explain it, how they choose their words, their tone of voice and their general body language speaks volumes about how they felt. Although tired, everyone had this satisfaction about them. Six tournament level games over two days requires a lot of mental energy which, while draining, is also immensely rewarding. But at the end of the tournament there could only be six prize-winners, three in each division. Before presenting the trophies, the volunteers were thanked, and a hearty round of applause was given. The B Division winners were then presented with their trophies by Neville Smythe, with Sebastian Oyarzun-Guillaumot coming third, Avan Whaite second and Chengen Daniel Xu in first place.



*B Division prize winners:
Sebastian, Avan
and Chengen*

Raphael Shin presented the A Division trophies with third place going to Tingxi Jin, Webber Tse second and first place to the new Australian Champion: Muxin Chen. Webber couldn't be located, so Billy Sun held the trophy for himself.



A Division prize-giving: Tingxi, Muxin and Billy

It had been a long day, and I was about ready to say my goodbyes and head back to the motel to look over my notes when a friend I had made, Mark Ahn, asked me to come to a dinner for people who had contributed to the tournament. The dinner was at Isshin Japanese Restaurant which had an all-you-can-eat selection, with Billy Sun covering the cost for everyone. I was able to share stories with other go players. My new friend Mark, who is Korean, frequently had trouble understanding me as I often talk a bit too fast when I get excited. Have you ever been with a group of people you vibe with so well that everything becomes humorous? That is what it was like at the restaurant. Every miscommunication, my inability to use chopsticks, my explanation of the small town I live in, my talking too fast when I get excited about a subject, even the story of how I discovered go had us all laughing and having a good time. I think it was about midnight when I got back to my motel room, tired and a little overwhelmed, but satisfied.

I asked Billy Sun for an assessment of the tournament and he told me in his enthusiastic manner, "Everyone is happy, therefore I'm happy!". That's not only a good motto for running a tournament but perhaps some good life advice, as well. After the tournament and dinner, each of us will go back to our own lives as students, scholars, factory workers, historians, business owners and more. Perhaps the tournament didn't change the world. But I have made more friends with whom I can share this ancient board game, as well as the experience, joy and occasional pain of participating in a large tournament. Next year, the tournament will be held in Sydney, and I'm very much looking forward to attending.