

Report on the week of IGF meetings at the Nihon Kiin – 5/23-6/1-2007

-- by Thomas Hsiang

I was at the 28th meeting of the International Go Federation, held in parallel with the 28th WAGC at the Nihon Kiin in Tokyo. Every day I attended at least two to three meetings of various sizes with various people. This unusually large amount of activities is of course due to the much-increased international events in the past year or so and due to the upcoming World Mind Sports Games (WMSG) in 2008. I will report on each of the issues covered in these meetings below.

The people

At IGF, the attending directors were *Erik Puyt* (from the Netherlands, manager of the Amsterdam Go Center), *Runan Wang* (from China, President of the China Weiqi Association, former president of the China Qiyuan), *Martin Stiassney* (former president of the German Go Association), *Eduardo Lopez* (from Argentina, he is an IGF VP), *Yukari Umezawa*, *Yuki Shigeno* (IGF General Secretary), *Norio Kudo* (IGF president and ex-chairman of the Nihon Kiin, 9p), *Sangho Yoon* (secretary general of the Korean Baduk Association), and myself.

The new Nihon Kiin president *Hiromu Okabe* came for one afternoon and met with the international director. He is the CEO of Denso Corp. and the new IGF president. *Ichiro Tanioka*, president of the Osaka University of Commerce, has been selected to the IGF Board, replacing Ms. Umezawa. He was at most of the meetings.

Erik Puyt is the IGF representative to the **International Mind Sports Association (IMSA)** and he made extensive reports on IMSA activities, including the preparations for the First World Mind Sports Games. He left after three days and Ms. Shigeno, in consultation with the other directors, conducted the rest of the IGF business.

Koreans sent a delegation of five people. In addition to Mr. Yoon who represents the Korean Baduk Association (KBA – the equivalent of Nihon Kiin), there was *Sung-mo Yang* who is the VP of Korean Amateur Baduk Association (KABA – it handles all amateur affairs), *Seong-june Kim* who is the secretary general of KABA and the Asian Go Federation (AGF), *Dal-soo Kim*, KABA's international director, and *Woo-sang Shim*, deputy to Seong-june Kim. Koreans came in force because of three major issues: they were seeking broader support for AGF, they wanted to sell the idea of having Go as a sport item in the 2014 Asian Games to be held in Incheon, and they were consulting with IGF on hosting the next Prime Minister Cup. I met several times with the Koreans, mostly privately, to get acquainted and to understand their positions.

I also had a long meeting with the **Japan Pair Go Association** people, including *Mrs. Hiroko Taki* (founder), *Akira Suzuki* (Pandamet resident), and *Tadayoshi Nakatani* (the new Pair Go president).

IGF and WAGC

IGF has been changing in recent years to give much more voice to the non-Japanese members. For the Olympic movement and for IGF's relation with Pair Go, the western directors are handling most of the issues. This year, for the first time, a Japanese director was elected who has no ties with the Nihon Kiin. Mr. Tanioka, a university president and previously the president of the Japanese bridge association, is brought on specifically to cooperate with the western directors in dealing with IMSA and IOC.

The IGF membership has now grown to 70. The newest member is actually a restored membership of the Philippines Go Association (they were expelled in 2004). Two prospective members may join in the next few years, Greece and Brunei. Brunei actually will be the first country to benefit from a new IGF initiative that will send Go education teams to help regions develop Go clubs and players.

WAGC is for the first time not principally supported by Japan Air Line. Even the championship cup is no longer called JAL Cup! Toyota-Denso and the Chiyoda District Government are now the #1 and #2 supporters. There is talk that future WAGC's may be held primarily in Tokyo, instead of rotating through cities, to save money.

The World Mind Sport Games (WMSG)

As reported by me in the past three years, the IMSA group was formed to unite bridge, chess, draughts, and go with the specific goal of organizing an Olympic-style mind-sport competition. During the past year, intensive negotiations with the Chinese Sports Ministry and the Beijing City Government have led to a commitment by the Chinese to host the first WMSG in October, 2008, following the Summer Olympic Games in August and the Paralympics in September. The last piece of Chinese support actually came in during the week while we met in Tokyo.

In addition to the four founding sports, poker and Chinese chess (xiang-qi) have also asked to join IMSA and WMSG. For now, they are not accepted.

The big issue is now fund-raising. It is estimated that the WMSG will cost US\$ 10 to 15 millions to run. IMSA is now in the process of seeking 10 sponsors each contributing \$1 to 2 M. Of this, Go is expected to come up with 10% of the total. The Asian members of IGF will take up the primary fund-raising responsibility. IMSA has prepared a presentation slide show for use in fund-raising; I have a copy of this power-point file and it is part of the attachment to this report.

At the urge of IGF, IMSA has set the date of September 30, 2007, for deciding on whether to hold the Games and how big a scale the Games will be. The Koreans have tentatively agreed to host a special IGF Directors' meeting in October, 2007, to assess the status of WMSG.

As envisioned now, the Go part of the WMSG will consist of team competition (32 teams, 3 players and 1 back-up each), pair competition (32 pairs), and individuals (48 players) in three rounds of medal competitions lasting a total of 10 days. AGA's part will include 4 team/individual players and one mixed pair. Quite possibly the travel and living expenditures for all the players will be borne by IMSA.

Martin Stiassney and I were asked to form a working group to design a budget for the Go part of the WMSG.

The Asian Games

In 2010, the Asian Games will be held in Guangzhou. The city government of Guangzhou pushed for and had gotten agreement for Go to replace Chess as one of the competition items (for the 2006 Asian Games held in Qatar, Chess was included). However, through an unlikely sequence of comical errors by the Guangzhou government officials and some clever maneuvers by the Indian NOC, chess and cricket were re-inserted at the last moment to compensate the Indians who lost the bid for the 2010 Games. We of course asked the Chinese Sports Ministry for help. It turned out that they could not intercede because both chess and go are under their jurisdiction and the ministry leaders could not appear to be preferential to go!

So, the fate of Go in Asian Games is now in the Koreans' hands. The 2014 Games will be held at Incheon, and the Koreans "guaranteed" that they would see to it that Go is brought in. They were so confident that they actually formed the Asian Go Federation (AGF) to handle the Asian Games.

AGF was born during the first Prime Minister Cup in 2006. (Dae-yul Kim was the AGA representative to this event; presumably he had reported on this). The problem was that China and Japan declined to join AGF! These two countries, along with Taiwan, preferred to have IGF handle the matter rather than through a new organization. This came as a big embarrassment to the Koreans; and it was the main reason they sent so many people this time to the IGF meeting. The upshot was that KABA, which is the parent organization of AGF, agreed to place AGF under the wings of IGF so that the Chinese and Japanese non-participation has now become a non-issue.

The second Prime Minister Cup

The KABA officials brought the good news that the Prime Minister Cup will be held for the second time, October 9-16, 2007, in the city of Suwan. All IGF members will be invited just as in 2006. The IGF members are also urged to start the selection process for their representatives soon.

North Koreans

North Korea did not send any representatives this time. The reason was that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked them to use "North Korea", rather than DPR Korea, as

their name and not to use their national flag. This was presumably a punishment for the North Korean development of nuclear weapons. Interestingly go was chosen as the venue of punishment, because it is the sport that matters most to the North Koreans, even more than soccer. The North Koreans were furious and complained to IOC; the IOC was on their side and in turn complained to the Japanese government.

For IGF, we really could not fight the Japanese government because of visa issues. Mr. Wang (China) and I came up with an alternative strategy, suggesting an IGF resolution that would preserve DPR Korea as the official name for the North Korean membership in IGF, but leave the visa issue to Japan Air Line and the Foreign Ministry. This resolution was accepted and passed.

The World Pair Go Federation

The Japan Pair Go Association invited several of the IGF Directors (Puyt, Stiassney, Wang, and myself) separately for meetings to ask our help in establishing the World Pair Go Federation (WPGF).

The International Pair Go Tournament is in its 18th year and its primary sponsors, Mr. and Mrs. Taki of NKB Corporation, are quite pleased about the progress of pair go and wish to have a formal international pair-go organization for promoting the game and hosting the annual competition. WPGF was hence conceived and now carries an added significance that it will host the 2008 international competition in Beijing as part of the World Mind Sports Games.

From IGF's perspective, there are both positives and negatives. The contribution from NKB can in a big way solve the fund-raising problem for Go and will in fact be the first real monetary commitment to the WMSG event from any of the mind sports. This would give go a very good PR. On the other hand, IGF is also concerned that the Pair Go Federation would negotiate directly with IMSA, bypassing IGF. There was a well-known fight between Nihon Kiin and the Taki's because of the Go server issues. As a result, Suzuki and Taki are both quite hostile toward the Nihon Kiin members of IGF Board, prompting IGF's concerns.

The Japan Pair Go Association this year will write directly to the IGF member countries to invite them, instead of letting IGF handle the invitations. This particularly did not sit well with IGF Director Eduardo Lopez, who has traditionally handled all of the pair go invitations to the Latin American countries through his affiliation with the Ibero-American Go Federation. He is asking the European Go Federation to join him and ask their members to refuse direct contact with the Japan Pair Go Association and to refuse joining the WPGF. Martin Stiassney volunteered to transmit this request to EGF. However, I personally doubt very much that EGF will go along with this request.

For AGA, we need to develop a position on how to handle this matter. While we should respect IGF's wishes, we also have to take into consideration the fact that we have benefited greatly over the years from the good will and friendship of the Taki's. We have

always had direct contact with the Japan Pair Go Association and maintained a good relationship. Whether we will support the formation of the WPGF and join it is a matter for the Board and the AGA president to decide.

“Guest officials”

There was a discussion at IGF about the fate of the tradition of inviting honorary “guest officials” to the international tournaments. This year, WAGC reduced the guest-official slots by one and may reduce further next year. There was a sentiment that, in the long run, the guest-official program may have to be replaced by the directors’ meeting to better use the ever-tightening resources.

In the short term, there is a possibility that, for both the 2007 Prime Minister Cup and the 2008 WAGC, IGF may specify the guest officials to allow the directors to confer on matters concerning the Mind Sport Games. Note that this is in conflict with the AGA’s policy of selecting guest officials; this is another matter for the Board and Mike to consider.

Separately, I would also urge that we consider carefully our selection of guest official to this year’s International Pair Go Tournament, because AGA will surely be asked to have a role in the new World Pair Go Federation. I suggest that Mike Lash should go to represent AGA; otherwise Alan Abramson could also represent us well.

Attachments

The 2007 IGF Board Meeting agenda
The 2006 IGF Board Meeting minutes
Attachments to the IGF Board Meeting agenda
The IGF IMSA report
The 4/2007 IMSA meeting minutes
The 2007 IMSA president report
Several documents regarding the first World Mind Sports Games