

2001: The Year in American Go

by Roy Laird, AGA President

photos by Chris Garlock

2001 was an eventful year for the American go-playing community. A Chinese-American young man defeated four professional players in a row in the First North American Toyota/Denso Oza tournament; go made a brief, but well publicized appearance in the major motion picture *A Beautiful Mind*, which spurred a surge of interest in go among the general public; and the AGA's many activities included a growing focus on our presence on the Internet.

A New Tournament, A Dramatic Upset

Without a doubt, the most dramatic American tournament of 2001 was the First North American Toyota/Denso Oza Cup. Lavishly funded by Toyota and its subsidiary, Denso Corp., the Oza made its fun, festive debut on December 1-2, at the Miyako Radisson Hotel in San Francisco and the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Hundreds of players convened simultaneously in the two locations to contend for a total of \$30,000 in prizes.

The field included seven players with pro credentials from Asia and many of America's top amateurs. In a stunning series of upsets, six of seven professional players lost to top-ranked amateurs. Four of those losses were the work one man -- 21-year-old Jie Li, who defeated Janice Kim 1-Dan, Jimmy Cha 4-Dan, Ming-jiu Jiang 7-Dan and North American Master Zhu-jiu Jiang 9-Dan to win the Open Division in San Francisco. Li moved from his native China to San Francisco about two years ago. He had previously defeated Ming-jiu Jiang, but this string of wins against pros by an amateur player is unparalleled. However, Mr. Li is not a citizen, so is not eligible to represent the US in the World Oza. That honor went to Jimmy Cha, who placed second.

In the East, Feng Yun, the gentle young Chinese 9-dan, won all her games to score top honors in the Open Division. Only citizens can represent the US in the World Oza, so Ms. Feng must be content with the top prize, and the knowledge that she alone among seven pros survived the weekend undefeated by an amateur player.

Hui-ren Yang, a professional 1-Dan from China, lost on time in his second round battle against John Lee, playing with a defective clock, but went on to become the highest placing citizen in the tournament. He and Jimmy Cha played the deciding championship game on the Internet in January. After what seemed like a bad start, Mr. Yang managed to defeat Mr. Cha by 1.5 points. Mr. Yang travels to Japan this spring to enter the first round of the World Toyota/Densa Oza Cup, with a first prize of ¥30,000,000 and a new Lexus. The World Oza Cup is planned as a biennial event.

Altogether, nearly fifty cash prizes and attractive acrylic trophies were awarded to players on both coasts, down to fourth place in all sections, ranging from \$100 in the lower sections to \$2000 for the winners of the Open Division. Dozens of other

players received "Fighting Spirit" prizes -- their choice from a selection of English language go books provided by Yutopian, Kisedo and Slate and Shell publishers. All registered players also received a free copy of *Ranka*, the yearbook of the International Go Federation, as well as T-shirts and their choice of tote bags or caps bearing the colorful tournament logo.

In New York, players from as far away as Michigan, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana and North Carolina trekked to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where the Oza's Eastern Regional Championship was held in the refectory of the Union Theological Seminary. Organizers Roy and Mary Laird were assisted by Chen-dao Lin and the New York Wei-chi Society. The warm, welcoming setting lived up to its status as a National Landmark, with candles in the fireplace, a Christmas tree blazing next to the top boards, and tall leaded glass windows flung open to let in the unusually warm air.

Players milled about amiably between rounds, admiring the vast array of prizes, which also included some watercolor prints of *ukiyo-e* with go themes. Others chatted by the breakfast setup, or read their complimentary copies of *Ranka*, or played casual games. Two carloads of young go enthusiasts from Rochester stuck around to help with cleanup before starting the long drive home, weighted down with prizes.

Michael Bull, who organized the West Coast event, described the scene there.:

"The winds of change were driving rain in San Francisco on the morning of December 1. It stopped just long enough to move in the sets of stones and boards. Early on the first day is the most nervous time for a tournament organizer. Everything has been done to publicize the tournament, but you don't know how it will turn out. This time expectations were high.

"Jimmy Cha was the first player to arrive in the playing hall. He was up all night trying to solve a *tsume-go* problem. He set up the problem on a board and continued to study it. The book, he said, doesn't give the answer. Players begin to dribble in, among them professionals Ming Jiu Jiang 7-dan, Jujo Jiang 9-Dan. Jujo seems tired. Jet-lag can be a factor in this kind of tournament. Michael Redmond stopped playing the NA Fujitsu Qualifier because of the effect traveling had on his game.

"Janice Kim pro 1-dan arrives. At least there will be some kind of tournament. Go players keep coming and the hall begins to fill. Small things can pile up and become huge. Among the last to arrive, looking healthy and with shaggy hair is young Jie Li, following the advice of the invincible sword fighter Musashi Miyamoto, "arrive late for a fight."

"Round #1 produced no surprises, but in the second round, Jie Li defeated 7-dan pro Ming Jiu Jiang by 1.5 points. This is the second time they have met in tournament play. Jie won their first meeting by half a point at the Jujo Jiang Goe Tournament last January.

"In round #3 Jie was paired as White with 9-dan Zhu-jiu Jiang, the NAMT title holder. Observers bet that Jujo would avenge his brother Ming-Jiu's loss, but

after 184 moves Jiang resigned. Only one person could stop Jie from winning the tournament — Jimmy Cha. The game began in a more relaxed atmosphere in the morning of the second day. Everyone was busy with their own games, so there few observers appeared until the endgame, but by then the crowd was so densely packed you had to stand on a chair to see what was happening. The younger player probably has an advantage in this situation, being able to think more clearly with the small amount of oxygen that is available in the middle of the ring.

“The players, oblivious to the scene surrounding them, entered the 30-second byo-yomi after engaging in a flurry of ko fights. After 384 moves the game ends. Playing White, Jie Li is ahead by half a point.

“Meanwhile, another game was in progress that could determine who among the US citizen players would enter the play-off with the Eastern Champion. The game was between Jimmy Cha and Joey Hung, one of Jie Li's students. Jimmy, the heavy favorite, had a winning position in the game, but he had spent time getting there and was in byo-yomi. Mr. Cha was also forgetting to hit his clock. With just three seconds left in his last period he finally noticed the problem, striking the clock just in time to avoid losing on time. Jimmy won the game and will be the player who faces Hui ren Yang in the play-off.

“When round #5 ends, it was the TD's turn to scramble. Some players spontaneously began packing up the equipment. Even Mr. Hidekazu Suzuki who was present representing the Nihon Kiin pitched in. Soon it was time to hand out the horde of awards which I am sure was done in record time. Is there a prize for blitz award ceremonies?

“With the generous sponsorship by Toyota Denso, the AGA, the teamwork of those who put the tournament together, those who helped in so many ways, the T-shirts, caps, bags and books, the aji created by the 1st Toyota Denso North American Oza Championship is all good. Jonathan Wang, the promising young player, finished fifth in an Open section that included four professionals and Jie Li. He beat Ho Suk Yi, who will play for the USA in the next World Amateur Championship and recently took second in the 15th North American Fujitsu Qualifier.

“Western VP Larry Gross, weighing in at 18 Kyu finally finished in the money. All of you tournament players who have never won anything can take heart from this. If you play in enough tournaments, and enter at your correct rating, eventually your day will arrive.”

A Full Tournament Scene

Even without the addition of the Oza to the tournament scene, it would have been another event-packed year for American go, with more than sixty tournaments conducted throughout the year. Zhu-jiu Jiang's annual tournament for children in San Francisco again drew over 100 little ones, while other events had larger-than-ever crowds of players. Some highlights:

North American Masters Tournament: TD Chen-dao Lin and game directors Jeff Shaevel and Don Wiener produced another popular round-robin event on the Internet, this year with a field of four North American professionals and two top amateurs. In the best-of-three final, Jujo Jiang won the title for the seventh straight year, defeating his brother, Ming-jiu Jiang 7-Dan, who resides near San Francisco.

North American Ing Cup: This popular invitational event for top amateurs has been going for more than ten years, and always attracts much attention when it is played at the US Go Congress. The winner this year was Thomas Hsiang of Rochester, New York. (TD: Chuck Robbins)

North American Fujitsu Qualifying Tournament: Throughout the year, players compete in the American Go Tournament Circuit for the honor of being invited to this event. Thomas Hsiang, the winner of the North American Ing Cup, also prevailed in this event, which has been dominated for years by the North American pros who are automatically seeded into the field. Thomas's task was made easier in the second round, when Hawaii-based strong man Ted Ning managed to defeat Jimmy Cha, who has won this tournament more often than anyone else. (TD: Sam Zimmerman)

The Redmond Cup: Sponsored through a grant from the Ing Foundation, this is an invitational tournament for players under 18. In the Junior league (12 and under) Matthew Burrall came second to Curtis Tang. In the Senior League (12-17) the four-time Junior winner Eric Lui played for the first time, and had his toughest competition yet in Richard Liang of Canada. He won this year as well and so was finally graduated out of the Redmond Cup, titled the Redmond Meijin and will play in a new invitational tournament which will also take place on IGS before the finals are played on the first day of the U.S. Congress.

Next year there will be new tournament for strong young players who have aged out of the Redmond Cup, as a bridge to major tournaments like the North American Ing Cup. The new *Ing-Redmond Invitational Tournament* is for young people up to and including 25 years of age who are strong players. The first prize will be a seat in the North American Ing Cup. Mike Bull directs the Redmond Cup tournament and will also TD the Ing Redmond Invitational.

US Go Congress

The centerpiece of the AGA calendar, the US Go Congress took place this year in York, PA, under the direction of Keith Arnold. 300+ go enthusiasts and others gathered for eight days of every type of go activity that can be imagined. As always, there was an ongoing self-paired handicap tournament throughout the event, with special events every evening — a lightning tournament, a small-board tournament, “crazy go” and much more. A special schedule of children's events ensured that the next generation of American go players had plenty to do, and scholarships from the Ing Foundation grant made it easier for them to attend.

The plentiful presence of professional players always gives the US Go Congress its distinct emphasis on study and improvement, and this year was no exception.

Go associations in Japan and Korea sent teachers who worked tirelessly through the week, presenting lectures, giving simultaneous play and analyzing amateur games. (The Chinese wanted to send two professionals to the Congress to represent them and teach, but the US State Department denied them visas.) American go fans were especially delighted to welcome Michael Redmond 9-Dan, who represented the Nihon Kiin. These generous teachers from afar were joined by several professionally certified players who live here in North America. Los-Angeles based Yi-lun Yang 8-Dan put in his first appearance in several years. And Congress regulars renewed their acquaintance with old friends like Xiao-ren He 5-Dan, James Kerwin 1-Dan, Janice Kim 1-Dan and Hui-ren Yang 1-Dan.

In the US Open, directed by Sam Zimmerman, the winner was Yongfei Ge, but since he is not a citizen, Hosuk Yi will represent the US in the 2002 World Amateur Go Championship. (Mr. Yi finished second in the Open section.)

At the Annual Meeting of Chapter Representatives, the AGA Governance Commission presented a series of comments and suggestions regarding the AGA's Articles of Incorporation and by-laws. A set of recommendations may go to a final vote next year.

Summer Go Camp

Director Peter Rzepecki filed this report about the AGA summer camp, the only camp of its kind in the world:

"The fourth AGA Summer Go Camp took place at Winona, Minnesota. The Camp turned out to be a great success, very much as it did during the previous three summers. Many persons contributed to this success. This year we had four inspired instructors. Janice Kim has been with us as a principal instructor from the beginning. James Kerwin joined us for the first time. Jon Wang and Bruce Wilcox joined our pros contributing to the mix of unique teaching styles and approaches. Jon came to the Camp for the third year in a row! This year, as in the previous year, the Camp was directed by the always popular Mike Samuel supported by the always dedicated Loretta Curran. The counselors, Martin Bradshaw, Bob Metz and Bruce Price were also essential to the smooth execution of the Camp's curriculum.

"Everybody learned something during the Camp. For many campers the Camp was and always is an opportunity to play some go and just to have fun. There is, however, a group of quite dedicated players among them. A few weeks after the Camp some of the campers scored big at the Go Congress. One seven-year-old won five prizes! Wow!

"Several hundred hours of volunteer work went into the Camp organization and preparation. The camp also has many friends who contribute to a scholarship fund for the campers. These contributions allowed several kids to come to the camp. We greatly appreciate that! "

The 2002 AGA Summer Go Camp is set for July 13-20, in the same location, with basically the same team of teachers and organizers. Serious players under 18

from all over the world are most welcome! The Go Camp also welcomes donations to its scholarship fund. More information and application forms are available at <http://www.usgo.org/gocamp/index.html>.

The AGA Online

The AGA continued expanding its presence on the Internet, with a completely redesigned and vastly expanded Web site www.usgo.org, featuring a different problem every week on the home page. The "Go Resources" section is particularly worth a visit, with downloads, links to other materials, a complete bibliography of English-language go materials and the most complete list of go-related Web sites to be found anywhere on the Internet.

The new site is attracting as many as 3000 newcomers per week, not to mention our old regulars who visit often.

More and more of the Web site's visitors are signing up for *The American Go E-Journal*, the AGA's weekly electronic newsletter. The E-Journal reaches more than 3000 players worldwide every week with its mix of news, reviews and commentary. This year, Publications Coordinator Chris Garlock added a "Members Only" edition of the E-Journal, which features the complete analysis of a different game, often a top American tournament game, every week.

Other Internet-based activities included the online North American Masters Tournament, described above and in much greater detail on the Web site. The AGA also published Volume 2 of *How To Play Against the Stronger Player*, available at the Wings Go Club Web site. (Volume 1 became available online last year.) The AGA is grateful to the Nihon Kiin for permission to make this work available in English and to Wings for producing the translation. Plans for next year include further expansion of the site, continuation of the Masters Tournament, and more improvements to the E-Journal.

Help From Hollywood

Late in the year, a game of go appeared in the publicity stills in the Hollywood feature film *A Beautiful Mind*, about Princeton professor and Nobel Prize winner John Nash and his struggle with mental illness. The sight of superstar Russell Crowe puzzling over a go board has inspired a tremendous surge of interest in the game. Articles appeared in Time magazine and in newspapers throughout the US, and the number of visitors to the AGA website increased dramatically. The AGA hopes for a continued boost from the success of this film, and from all our other activities as we try to popularize go in the West.

Even with so many blessings, the AGA is most grateful for something that did *not* happen this year. On September 11, as far as we know now, no member of the American go playing community was lost.