

## Children's Grand Prix

Jana Hricova, Martin Cieply, Martin Kuzela, Martina Simunkova

### 1. Situation before the project started

We had run children courses for a few years before the project started. We had quite a lot of children in children's clubs and courses usually maintained at schools or children's centers for leisure time but only a few children tried to become regular go players. We run preliminary courses for about 300 children in each September and then regular courses for about 100 children during a school year for a few years. But result was that most children with the new school year skipped to something new and we had to start again. And even when children continued in courses, they did not play tournaments and at the age of 15 when changed schools usually stopped playing go. Regular young go players were usually children whose parents also played go and sometimes even they did not show a real interest about the game. And then there were of course a few enthusiastic and talented children whose we find during courses. But they were not many. A discussion started in 1998 how to support children not only to learn go but also start to play on regular tournaments and become active go players at least for certain period if not forever. Following results were considered to be decisive why children - beginners felt uneasy on big tournaments:

- Big tournaments are too serious for children - beginners. Children feel game more as fun and that is difficult on big tournaments.
- Time per game is too long and children are bored between games.
- Children come among strangers where usually know only their teacher. Usually there is nobody on a big tournament who could take a special care of them especially if their teacher is playing and they feel lost.
- Older children about 13-15 years get better through tournaments. But if they do not find a company and manage to make friends of similar age or do not showed extreme talent for Go they soon skip to other activities, especially when in the age of 14-15 they usually change schools.

### 2. Aims of the project

We decided to start something especially designed for children with following aims.

- To bring together children from various courses and various towns as they could meet each other, make friends and formed a good company of children with similar interests based on the game of Go. Real tournaments would become then not only events of long games for them but also social events when they could meet each other and time between particular rounds could be spent by other games and children's activities independent on adults' interests.
- To enable children easily to learn to play and compete on competitions especially designed for their mentality, to concentrate on games, to test their strengths among players of similar ages and abilities. We were persuaded that by playing children's tournament children become easier and faster stronger players at level about 20 kyu, used not only to

win but also to lose. We thought they should easier enter big tournaments then without a stress.

- We did not mean to force all children from courses to play go or concentrate only on children who start to play tournaments either. We did not mean to select only talented and perspective children. But we felt that there is a big gap between regular tournaments and children's abilities developed in children classes. We aimed to develop system of competitions, which would enable children - beginners, who are interested, to realize fully their abilities. It should be like in any other sport where a child who have just learned to play and is interested goes through a system of children's and beginners competitions before maybe one of hundred enters a premiere league.

### 3. How to reach the aims

We decided to run weekend camps, designed only for children, with a lot of Go competitions, which would enable

- to make go competitions a fun for children,
- to bring together real beginners with children - beginners about 20 kyu level to make easier for real beginners to come into contact with stronger players,
- improve children's go strength through competitions especially designed for their abilities,
- help to greater number of children to show their skills and win some prizes which improve their self-confidence.

The result was 'Children's Grand Prix'. To make event more attractive we decided include into a program also non-Go activities. But they are not included into competitions.

### 4. Rules

- Children's Grand Prix consists of a few weekend children's camps during one school year.
- Every child younger than 15 years and not stronger than 17 kyu can participate.
- First day children are divided according to their strength to two groups. 'Advanced' group is formed from children of strength between 17 an 20 kyu, the other group are 'Beginners'. First day both groups compete separately.
- Beginners group starts with atari tournament to take one stone on 13x13 go board. Children play each other. Every match between two players consists of two games. Each of the pair has once white and once black stones. The game starts with the cross of two black and two white stones in the middle of the board. Then 'Beginners' play again second atari tournament to take 5 stones. Other conditions remain as previous. (Notice: These tournaments are very fast. Both usually should not take longer time than 3 hours. Usually there is a pause for lunch in the middle of the tournaments.) Points in both tournaments are counted together and players with three best results are awarded diplomas and prizes. If there are more players with the same points they share a place and all are given prizes. (For example there can be 2 winners, 1 second player and 3 third players.)
- Advanced group starts with the handicap tournament on 13x13 go board. Time limit is 15 minutes per player, no byoyomi. If there is not more than 10 players, they play each other. A Swiss system on 7-8 rounds is used if there are more players. Children with three best

results are awarded diplomas and prizes. If more children share the same point they shared the place and all are given prizes.

- Somewhere in the late afternoon, according to non-go program, 'Problem Solving Competition' takes place. Children solve 10 problems. Again problems for 'Advanced' are more difficult than problems for 'Beginners'. The problems are the same for children from one group and each child solves it individually. A point is given for each well solved problem. Children with three best results in each category are awarded diplomas and prizes. Again if more children get the same points they share a place and all are given prizes. (Notice to problems - competitions should not be de-motivated. The idea is that problems should be of various levels as each child would be able to solve about 5 problems and an order was decided on 5 more difficult problems. Competition takes usually something between 30 minutes and one hour)
- Both groups are joined together the second day. 'Beginners' get rank according to their results in previous day taking into account more atari tournaments. Ranks for beginners vary from 21 to 26 kyu. All children together play 5 rounds handicap tournament on 19x19 board. Time is 20 minutes per person, no byoyomi. Points, SOS and SODOS are counted to make final order. First 5 players are awarded diplomas and prizes. All other children are given diplomas for participation and small presents.
- All wins on the tournament are calculated into the overall 'Children's Grand Prix Ranking'. Points from atari tournaments are divided as the possible gain was approximately the same as from 13x13 handicap tournament. Points from 'Problem Solving' are calculated as they are and points from 19x19 handicap tournaments are multiply by 3 as these points should be most important. Also 1 point is added for participation. After all cycle of 'Children's Grand Prix' tournaments is finished best 15 children are awarded diplomas and prizes for overall ranking and rest are given diplomas for participation. (Notice - The system how to count results from particular tournaments into overall ranking undergone certain modification until it was settled as it is now).

## **5. What was done and Results**

- First cycle of Children Grand Prix run during school year 1998/1999. We decided to start at the beginning of 1999 as children who start with go in school on October could fully and sensible participate. There were 3 tournaments. Last of them at the beginning of summer vacancies as a part of one week children's camp. 34 children from 5 clubs (6 children even from Poland) participated that year. Among 28 Czech children were only 5 who already played tournaments before. 15 children started later to play on regular tournaments and 13 play up today usually already with better rank than 17 kyu (The best is 11 kyu). The oldest of them will be 15 years old this year. The age of children who played that year was usually between 9 and 13 years.
- Second year of Children Grand Prix run during school year 1999/2000. It consisted already from 4 tournaments. Last of them again at the beginning of summer vacancies as a part of children's camp, which that year was run together with adult's camp. According to the experience of the first year first tournament took place already in December 1999. Also

system of counting points into overall ranking was slightly modified. 41 children from 8 clubs participated that year. For that time they were all only Czech children. Few of them participated also a year before. 17 new children started to play on regular tournaments and are still active. The youngest who started that year was Mira Sos from Zlin, 6 year old who is already 13 kyu by now. But generally there started to play many children younger than 10 years and most of them are now better than 20 kyu. Best are about from 15 to 13 kyu.

- This year, 2000/2001 again the Children Grand Prix started already in December and three tournaments were played so far. 37 children already participated. 20 of them started to play this year as real beginners. Two more children's club appeared. Also more young children about 6-7 years started to play regularly. There are planned two more tournaments this year. Last of them again during summer vacancies as a part of children's camp.
- 81 Czech children already participated on children's tournaments during two and half year of Children's Grand Prix. 35 of them started also to play on ordinary big tournaments and are still more-less active. Their ranks are often better than 20 kyu, best of them are between 15 and 11 kyu. 12 children started to play and few of them even get better ranks than 20 kyu but do not play any more. It is possible to say that 25% - 30% from children's clubs play Children's Grand Prix and that more than half of them at least for certain period become regular players. Today is normal that about 20-30 children play on big ordinary tournaments. Which is quite a big number considering that not all children participate on all tournaments.
- Clubs who did not take care of children a lot started to do something when they saw how Children's Grand Prix works.

## **6. Good and Bad. Future.**

Good.

It is certain that Children's Grand Prix works and is very popular today. Number of clubs, which started to do something with children has increased. Lot of clubs would like to run Children's Grand Prix tournaments. But it was agreed that there will be only 5 tournaments a year (year is in that case a school year from October till June). More young and younger children started to play and maybe thanks more experienced teachers their progress is much quicker and visible in generally as it was three years ago. Good work is done in Liberec where is not only children's club for small children from basic school but also one club for children from maternity school. These children do not play Children's Grand Prix except the one in Liberec and even there they have their special group with easier program than 'Beginners'.

Bad.

It is often the biggest problem how to persuade parents to let small children travel longer distances for Children's Grand Prix.

Other problems are sometimes even teachers. Some of them are too busy to travel with children from theirs clubs. Usually it is possible to arrange travelling with somebody else but this possibility is not used so much as it could be.

Certainly there is more children who would like to play 'Children's Grand Prix' but for certain reason they cannot. It is necessary to work on enabling to all who wants to play to play.

Future.

Children's Grand Prix will certainly continue like it is or with slight changes which may appear to be demanding in the future.

The question now is what to do with children who are already stronger than 17 kyu and cannot play Children's Grand Prix. Usually they are very unhappy about that fact and especially the smaller ones miss an atmosphere of the event. We decided to start with the new school year 2001/2002 another competition - 'Children's League'. Every child stronger than 17 kyu and younger than 15 years can enter it. It will consist of 5 full handicap tournaments, Swiss system. Tournaments could be 7 rounds, time limit 25 minute, no byoyomi. Tournaments will be organized together with 'Children's Grand Prix'.

## **7. Conclusion.**

Children's Grand Prix is certainly a useful activity, which has brought a lot of young players to regular play. It has helped to cover a gap between children's mentality and adult's demands on a serious game. It is attractive also for children who are not interested of big tournaments. Also it has helped children to improve their abilities by a way of playing, which is also attractive. As for competition - the model we established certainly is not the only one good and a system, which calculates an overall ranking surely is a question of taste. The most important are

- number and variety of competitions. It is recommendable to run as much various competitions on different levels as possible as everybody could find something, which he/she could win or at least get a good result. Diplomas and prizes are important. They can be small. Better a lot of small prizes than a few big.
- Bigger prizes could be for overall ranking to support children to travel to more Children's Grand Prix tournaments and not only to participate to local one when he/she lives.
- It is strongly recommended not only to play go during a weekend but to run also other activities. Very popular are visits in ZOO or Botanical Gardens, swimming pools. Generally all physical sports are very popular.