

A Way to Improvement of player's standard

By Alexander Nosovsky (Part 1)

Many new clubs and new players have appeared recently and they all are going to repeat , the way from a little club to a big one, from a beginner to a master. It is known that besides a good player beginners progress and achieve his level more quickly. However, improvement of player's standard stops when a club stops its contacts with "the outer world". That is why it seems useful to me to describe the way of standard's improvement. To point out some defects, typical for certain stages, to give some advice.

#1 From a Beginner to a Master

Acquainting himself with renju , every beginner likes combinations, though they are not complicated yet, just 2-3 fours. He often makes fours even without any use, without seeing the victory.

This stage can be described in two words in such a way : a threat - a defense, no defense - a defeat.

The second stage of acquainting with the game begins at the moment when the beginner starts preparing the winning combinations instead of just putting into practice the combination he has noticed.

Here, a typical method is making a three, which the opponent can stop only in one way and hoping he will make a mistake.

The next stage is distinguished by the ability to carry out combinations consisting of 5-7 moves. However, being carried away with combinations the player forgets about the necessity of defense. And as it often happens, at the culminating point of completing the combination with a three, the opponents VCF comes.

As a rule, this is the last stage in education of an amateur player, a typical representative of the no organized renju. Practically every player joining a renju club has some defects of these stages.

Joining the club, he learns renju rules. The first response to forbidden moves rules - What are they for ?

Actually, these rules has not been necessary at the described stages, but it is simply a must for further improvement of skill.

Beginning to play with forbidden moves, the player polishes his ability to choose the right order of winning moves (when playing black) and the ability of thinking for the opponent, seeing his combinations (when playing white). It is rather difficult to understand the rules of forbidden moves in details, especially if there is neither literature nor a good player beside.

But without a detailed understanding of forbidden moves you can't be even a good crosses& noughts player. It is necessary to remember that it is not the superficial resemblance to a three or a four, but the possibility of their turning into a five, that matters.

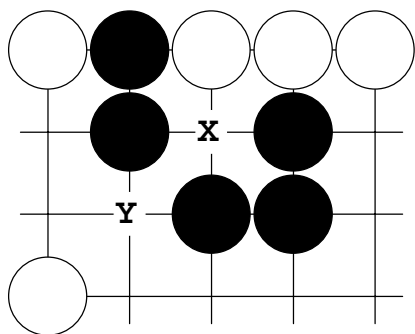
As I have already pointed out, the further improvement of player's standard is possible mostly in clubs and it is necessary to master the ability of planning and preparing combinations. At this stage, the player learns typical combinations, and then, learns to create corresponding typical situations in his own games. The defects of the first stages are also eliminated at this stage. The player studies many problems and thus prepares the basis for developing his ability to think out combinations in games.

It is a very important stage (approximately corresponding to 5 kyu) and the seriousness of player's attitude to renju is tested at it. Players with no aptitude, players who don't consider renju to be a sport, drop out.

They usually don't study either literature or theory, leave tournaments and don't pay member's fees. Experience shows that their interest for renju decrease after 2-3 months and after a couple of years they go out of renju's sight even if the work in the club is organized in the best possible way.

It is interesting that after the first acquaintance with forbidden moves almost all the players prefer to play white, because you don't need to care about not making a forbidden move. Actually, they don't try to win by using the forbidden moves rules, but just play crosses & noughts.

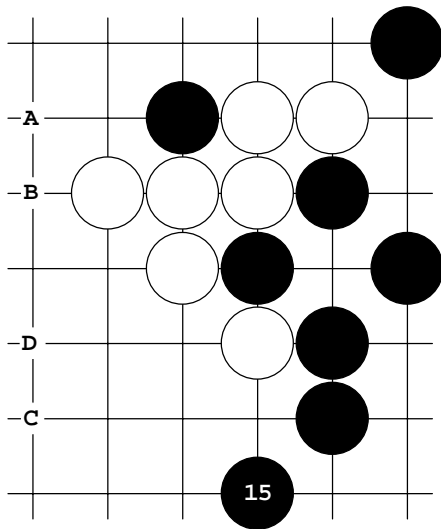
But further progress is possible only with mastering all the methods possible according to the rules. How can I describe the first satisfaction that appears when you carry out a several moves combination forcing to make a forbidden move, and look at the puzzled opponent who stops the direct threats but step by step comes to a fine final. Victories using overline or double-four is particularly pleasing. And the "double forbidden move" , of XY-type , is in truth a pearl in renju's crown.



A double-forbidden move. Even if it is Black's move, he can not escape from the forbidden moves in X and Y.

There is a characteristic mistake, typical for this stage of mastering renju - a kind of euphony of forbidden moves, when the player tries to win all the white games by forcing the opponent to make a forbidden move. This excess, as all others, must be got rid of, sometimes at cost of annoying defeats.

The next stage is mastering such methods as VCF-threats and counter-four. The feeling of their beauties fills the player and he starts using them everywhere. It happens very often, that if he has two possibilities of blocking a threat, he chooses the defense with use of a counter-four. Sometimes it causes a fine victory, sometimes - an annoying defeat. There is a period when the player tries to finish all the games with a double VCF-threat, sometimes losing the game or the chance for victory (it is the level of 3-4 kyu).



A counter-four . By playing 15, Black stops White's VCF victory in a smart way. After 15 try to play out White's winning combination A,B, C, and D. The next stage of player's progress is stubborn defense and awaiting of opponents mistakes. No doubt it is a must to be good at acting on the defensive, sometimes it is necessary to calm the situation or to entangle the opponent in a house-Net. However, to my opinion, you can't be on the defensive all the time, without trying to go into counteroffensive at the first opportunity. There are players everywhere who profess the defensive till the opponent is enfeebled and loses the game himself - this is their motto.

Sometimes in case of wrongly chosen plan of attack or inadequate opponents skill such tactics bring victory. However, stagnation of creative activities and descent in rank is characteristic for defenders.

It is difficult to characterize the next stage, which corresponds to 1-st Dan and higher. It can only be stated, that possessors of Dans are distinguished by continuous struggle in an equal situation by use of "Yobi" . As a rule, such players carry out their own opening analyses. But ,I underline that it is too early to generalize from only 10-20 players.

2 On theoretical and Psychological Preparations

In all games a conflict develops between two personalities. That is why it is necessary not only to play well , but also to understand the inner state of the opponent, to choose the strategy that is most favorable for yourself and least acceptable for the opponent. Here I would like to give some advice about both sporting and psychological preparations for the game.

To play successfully it is necessary not only to possess good knowledge of theory, but also to keep up with the literature (newsletters, collections of games, "Renju Sekai", "Renju World", Renbase of games). It is particularly important to study those novelties, which are part of your repertoire or these who are popular in your club. To have possibility to possess new information sometimes is more important than other knowledge's.

If you have not access to RenBase-Subscription and your opponent have it you can lose game against him , only because he possesses new information. Internet gives you new possibilities to receive games from different countries just after finishing this games.

Some players consider knowledge of openings to be unnecessary and play at sight. But the opening is a very important stage of the game. Mistakes in the opening can turn out fatal and lead to a defeat, whereas a well played opening makes further play easier.

The other excess is learning openings by heart. Understanding of the game is substituted by memorizing . Instead of making use of a transposition of moves or a different position in regard to the board's edge in some variant, such players themselves transpose moves in order to return to the known pattern.

Long ago J.R. Capablanca formulated a classic principle of game. Each move must be checked, however obvious it could seem from afar. This entirely applies to renju. Each move in a game must be thought over, must constitute a part of some offensive or defensive plan.

Some players are carried away with thinking over their defensives and offensives and get into time-trouble. In order to decrease the time you spend you can use the following rule. Block the fours at once (certainly, if you have no four at your own). If your opponent has made a three and you have found his victory from one end - block it without thinking any more - don't look for his victory from the other end - for you can't surrender too late.

Some other players, on the contrary, play quickly, sometimes they are defeated in a winning position. They can be advised such a thing . After calculating some combination, write down the move in the protocol, calculate the main variant of your combination once more, then place the stone on the board, but slowly (no matter how strong your desire to win is). After your opponent's move calculate all the variants once again and after that play out your combination until you win.

Some people ask : "How to solve renju problems ?". It is a very important question, because problem solving is a good training for the completing stage of a game.

When you are solving a difficult problem , first of all make sure it can't be solved by any sequence of threes and fours. Then try to win substituting some threes and fours by VCF-threats - in those places , where opponent's threes and fours appear that interfere with your victory.

When solving problems, some people leave out important variants - so I'll give such advice: when there is a situation where the opponent has several defending moves - make a list of these points and count in even the most incredible defenses. Then cross out in that list the moves after which you have an obvious victory. And after this examine carefully two-three main variants. You can also use this technique when playing by e-mail.

Now about psychological methods.

The first and most simple psychological method is using "opening novelties" - unexpected moves in known variants. They always affects opponent's thinking unpleasantly. And the strength of the move is not important as the psychological effect of surprise, unpleasant awareness of ignorance; they often lead to perplexity, decrease of the exertion of the will, further mistakes and defeat.

However, you should not use pseudo-novelties too often. Countermeasures against opponent's novelty can be different: you can. For instance, leave the opening pattern earlier and thus prevent the opponent from using his novelty, or , being sure of your variant, you can meet it (the novelty) and try to refute it.

The second way is much more interesting, for it develops the theory, and it often happens that the player who meets a novelty has already refuted it at home while analyzing this variant. In this case the novelty becomes a boomerang against the player who uses it.

When you are preparing for a specific game it is reasonable to analyze the opponent's game according to the following scheme:

1. Analyze how your opponent plays when he meets a novelty.
2. Look whether he gets into time-troubles.
3. Look which openings were used and his results in these openings.
4. Pay special attention to the games of the recent period.
5. Find out which color who is better for him.
6. Analyze such things
 - a) quality of his play in better, equal and bad situations;
 - b) quality of his play in situations of various essence (double-edged, defensive, passive);
 - c) ability to invent original strategically and tactical ideas.
7. Analyze opponent's behavior in typical situations appearing in tournaments:
 - a) "all or nothing" - both players need a victory;
 - b) situation of a compromise;
 - c) the result has no significance;
 - d) influence of lack of success;
 - e) efficiency of playing with opponents of various standards.
- 8) influence of quantity of games during playing day.

In conclusion I want to advise for all the players who strive for skill to write down all games from tournaments they take part in and all games they can get. Studying other player's game is also an important part of training.

ONCE AGAIN - PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS

Part 2 by Alexander Nosovsky

"Well, in our country", said Alice still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else - if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."
"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else you must run at least twice as fast as that!"
(L. Carroll Through the Looking Glass)

In Part 1 (published at RW N1 1989) there was an article about such important aspects of renju like theoretical and psychological training. Here I would like to return to the problem and add some more strokes.

We have to point out, that the last five years after creating RIF are noted for a closer interrelation between european and japanese schools of renju. It helps make some notions about style of playing renju. Incidentally, even in Japan there exist Tokyo and Kyoto ways of renju development.

First, I shall say the main thing: after a lot of thinking together with 12 years of practical playing I came to the conclusion that your main adversary in the game is not your opponent but yourself. Only overcoming yourself you can get satisfaction from the play and its outcome. The said is true only if the result comes from the process of playing and not from good homework in theory.

More than 75 % of the games are lost due to ignorance in debut continuations. We shall later return to this aspect of playing, and now - about psychological training.

The main reason of painful defeats is underestimation of your opponent. Many renjuists, when playing against someone, whose "image" is not as high as their own, think that he will surely make a mistake, or are frivolous in choosing not an optimal debut.

But when the said opponent doesn't make a mistake, underestimation ends catastrophically. This hope for a mistake won't let you concentrate only on the play, you'll be waiting for it and not try to make him play your way.

It might seem paradoxical but to win the game you have to be not too eager to win it! When a player wants to win a game too much, he has a thought inside his head "What have I got to win it for?" The result - he can't reach the needed level of concentration. Moreover, when an eager-to-win player throws himself into an attack, it very often happens, that he under calculates the reasonable risk. If his opponent is playing correctly - he loses the attack and the whole game with it. Not only psychology but also your theoretical and technical readiness are important in renju. They must go together.

During the game the main thing is to get tuned on the battle, concentrate all your thoughts on the play and not divert yourself with walks in the hall, talks with other players, etc.

Full concentration helps you reach utter clarity of your mind. You'll easily calculate the long variants, control all lines and intersections and their interrelations, see all the flanks, not only parts of the board. Catching your opponent's incorrect reaction (e.g. on your move on the left flank), you can reach a decisive advantage on the other flank.

From time to time strong european and japanese players experience this state of mind, which depends mostly on their general condition. It's like an inspiration, some feel it after good drinking the day before - but that's not a controlled concentration.

The strongest japanese players can order themselves to enter this state . Maybe, it's the result of a certain training. If you watch their play, you'll see, that very often, somewhere by the 15th move they take a long time to think. In the same debut europeans just go on playing by the theory. Sure, from the rational point of view there's no sense thinking something over the board, it's better to save time and use theoretical knowledge you got while homeworking.

It seems, the japanese, while thinking over the position and calculating, at the same time are trying to concentrate i.e. to reach the state of full psychologic alertness.

"Maybe, they just don't know theory?" - an unsophisticated reader will ask. I can answer, that as a rule in the after-the-game comments the strongest players point out that their theory came to an end 8-10 moves AFTER they had taken this long thinking interval.

To enter the state of concentration you may try reading some short (two-three lines) japanese poetry, amazing in its depth. Thinking over this or that verse a player enters a state of concentration, and gradually all irrelevant thoughts fade away. Then throw everything away with just one mental effort and let yourself sink into the game.

For example:

Always I thought,
that I knew how to win.
But now I know - to win not more than to lose.

However, the choice of poetry is strictly up to you - the aim is to stop thinking of anything (victory, defeat, etc.) but the game itself.

The japanese also have a strong school of determining points, from which to continue and develop an attack. True, the moves they make are too elegant sometimes more elegant than effective. With europeans the art of *mise* and *yobi* is a bit mechanistic, but is mostly the result of calculations.

A more encyclopaedic european approach to debuts workings and theory of debuts helps materialistic-minded europeans avoid mistakes in the initial stage of the game. The same approach in debut building is also characteristic of japanese players, but mostly of high-level ones. An average player here doesn't abuse theory with dull studies.

As we have already pointed out, 75 % games in renju end with a defeat due to a wrong choice of a debut, a mistake in a variant of development and, at last, an inexact move. So, knowledge of debuts for the most part determines your performance as a player.

To facilitate debut studies the "Zvon Kamney" or "Click of the Stones" book ordered and made a computer program named RenBase -98 as well as Base-17000. This computer program together with notebook computers is a way to renju progress.

But we're off the track - let's return to discussing psychological aspects of renju. Renju technique by itself can't bring much success. Think over the epigraph to this article about the country behind the looking glass. In fact, renju is a country where you can stay where you are only constantly moving forward. Just stop and let yourself a rest - and already you are far behind. You must move forward in spite of yourself.

A sophisticated reader can ask the author, what is to be done if both players live according to recommendations of this paper and achieved concentration at the game. There is only one answer - it will only depend on you, which of you will better ask the Got for a help. If both players are equal - there is such an ending called a draw.

Once again PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS - Electronic Grade.

Part 3 E-mails competitions at Pbem-server, software Tools and programs

By Alexander Nosovsky

Now we have e-mail World Championships and Computers becomes usual as TV set at home. Many of players have computers at home or during their job.

There are many sites in Internet with different software and playing places.

Now, I want to investigate new problem - using last computers programs.

We have challenge from computer software it becomes better and better.

Does we have to prohibited to use this Renju-Tools ?

May be someone answer for this question as "Yes" , but I am sure 95 % of us say "No" on this question.

Does we have to protect our renju games from different tournaments by copywriter to prevent spreading information ?

If we say "Yes" on this question we have to prohibited to participants to write the games during tournaments, and Magazines to published this games, and we also have to discuss who is owner of copywriter on the game player who have played it or organization which have organized it.

The Base of game is the same as Collection of Game published as a book or Magazine, just in computer-data form.

We can not stop progress - the idea to receive new games from different tournament sitting at home by e-mail is mainstream of progress.

It is rather strange to list pages with games in printed or handwritten notebooks in 21 century.

Renju-Subscription on games is the most natural for all renju players.

Great progress in theory of Renju by recent of years connected first of all with using Computer databases and book of theory. Many players don't mistakes in opening and it is not easy to find victory for former favorites.

It is also depends of E-mail games between strong players , such players as Hasegawa, Kawamura, Meritee, Reims, Fedorkin able to play good games.

Some Pbem playing psychological methods.

1. Many players wait 20-21 days (because it is running forfait program only in Fridays) and make show or subscribe commands for receiving information about your other games or about the same opening variants . They just repeat moves which have made the strong player in another game, so you have alternative to play against the top player or to make another move but may be it will be mistake.

2. If you play the same variant with many opponents you have to wait that they will repeat moves of strongest answers of your opponent, or someone from

your "friends" will send info to other your opponents, like (look the game N2222).

3. But there is also possible counter-methods which you can use.

For instance, in the case of using point 2, you can wait to make moves in other games, give your opponents to go deeply. If you have novelty for instance at 15 move make it so that your opponents can not see it before all of them will make 14 move. Wait because total time period of the game is 135 days (115 days for players the same country).

It means that if you lose time at one of your opponent other will lose time, too.

Remember that it is possible to think not more then 6-7 times above 21 days.

4. "Pressing " you can send your moves very fast just after receiving moves from your opponent.

It is good method because you save your time, and your opponent will need time to thinking, if position is complicate he will think a lot, (it is also necessary to make job it takes time). You can think during his time of thinking.

5. At the end of tournament there are often situation when you have 55 days and your opponent above 125-130. It is possible to make moves not in fast manner. Your opponent is waiting your move and wanted to answer fast, but this case you can send him move once 10-19 days , it is also good to analyze if he possible to answer during weekends, which time is he slipping and so on.

So, don't let your opponent to use this methods.

If you will send moves in such manner your opponent will lose time above 5-6 hours every move and sometimes he have to go far from his computer you can catch him in this situation too, by subscribing his other games, so you will see time and dates of making his moves in other games.

6. Don't agree draw with opponents before the last dates of the tournament.

If you finish your games first and your opponents will still playing and you depending of their results in 99 % of cases it will be not in your profit.

One of your opponents will lose by time, to give necessary points to your concurrent.

Playing programs and Renju-Tools in e-mail competitions

Playing programs which were created for participation in Renju WC among Computer programs let us to use it for analyzing real positions. It is possible to use it in real games, as on-line or as e-mail tournaments for checking your ideas.

If you can win against computer may be you can win against your opponent, if you can not win against computer program - you need more time for investigations.

The **Blackstone** playing program able to analyze above 40 points with deeply 16 moves.

It is very useful to run many variants of Blackstone program with the same position which you are playing. You can save position and then just load it from file adding only new moves of your opponent for analyzing.

Use my advise for analyzing from part 1 in practice, just run program with all possible answers which you detect using method from part 1.

In many cases Blackstone will find the best move (especially if VCT positions, it is possible to find fast defense or fast victory just running the program on your computer.

You are working and then only see results of calculations of different variants and make a decision. Remember sometimes it is better to play not the

strongest answer to give your opponent to start attack which will result in weaknesses in his position

. The RenBase-98 program allows you to place stones in a certain position (if it calls for permutation of moves, you may use unnumbered stones), and then it will find all the games with this initial position for you.

It is also possible to see statistics in previous positions

Giving the program your opponent's name you can:

1. Look through all the debuts, used by your opponent - as a rule, the repertoire doesn't change. It's hardly probable, that he will use a debut, he never played before. Most likely he'll use one of the debuts he successfully used at the latest competition.

2. Therefore pay most attention to his latest competition.

3. Now look, what color you'll be playing against him with and try to find a debut that you know better than he does. If he will want to use the debut you have chosen for yourself then you'll have to decide what type of this debut you prefer - vertical or diagonal.

Remember that your opponent may be also use Computer-Base software.

4. With the help of the program choose the games where your partner changed color and plan your strategy for the game. Remember, if you have managed to find the debut you'll play and made your opponent play the variant you can look at five minutes before the game - it's 30 % of your success.

5. But RenBase can add 20 % more: it'll take you minutes to build on the left half of your monitor the position of your variant and review all the games played with this initial position. Maybe, someone has already found a better continuation and you forgot it. But don't you get the impression, that the program will solve all your problems for you. To have the program is not enough to play good renju - it is only a good tool helping facility during your training process.

6. Blackstone able to add 70 % to your strength, just checking and prevent you from stupid mistakes, which are very often for some part of players.

Your opponents will sense your real strength.

Keep in mind that no one but you can correctly determine the debut (the program will only quickly supply you with the needed information !). Using the data you will be playing not some losing variants, but variants which will be actual. When entered into the RenBase-98 your games will serve both you and your opponents in developing your playing and renju.

Remember, if you don't use RenBase-98 & Blackstone - maybe your opponent does !