OFFICIAL BEGINNERS' SECTION

White to play

Welcome to the third Official Beginners' Section of the British Othello Federation's newsletter. This issue we have a beginners' article on diagonal control by David Haigh, and an intermediate article on surviving the opening by Karsten Switness. We also have the solution to last issue's crossword.

Puzzles, articles, letters, cartoons etc. should be sent to the Section editor:

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Game over!

Notation.

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			●	○			

The start position

a1	b1	c1	d1	e1	f1	g1	h1
a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2
a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3
a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4
a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5
a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6
a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7
a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8

The names of squares

a1	C					C	h1
C	X					X	C
C	X					X	C
a8	C					C	h8

Special squares

The board is split into eight columns and eight rows. We label each column with a letter, from ‘a’ for the left-hand column to ‘h’ for the right-hand column. We number the rows from ‘1’ for the top row to ‘8’ for the bottom. This is the opposite convention to that used in chess. So, as shown above, the top left corner is called ‘a1’, and the bottom right is ‘h8’. The pieces used in the game are called ‘discs’.

Some of the squares on the board are especially important. The four corner squares (a1, h1, a8 and h8) are very useful to have, since they can never be taken away from you. As a consequence, it can be dangerous to play to a square next to an empty corner too early in the game (your opponent might be able to use your disc to play a move in the corner). The squares b2, g2, b7 and g7 (one diagonally in from a corner) are known as ‘X-squares’. The other squares one away from a corner are called ‘C-squares’. These are shown in the third diagram above.

We sometimes use compass directions when describing regions of the board, so for instance the area of the board near to h1 is called the North-East corner.

SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD *by Mark Wormley.*

Here is the solution to last issue's crossword. I hope you enjoyed it!

Crossword solution ps file has gone missing!

Things to remember: DIAGONALISATION! *by David Haigh*

"Othello is a game of chance." Who said that? Someone who hasn't played much Othello? Maybe. But I in fact heard it said by a very good player, good enough to be in the top ten of the rating list.

"What do you mean?", I asked. "Well," he said, "suppose it's your move and you have two equally good-looking moves. Try as you can, you can't decide which is better. So you mentally flip a coin and make one of the moves. Now, unknown to you, one of those moves was really a game-winning move and the other a game-losing move. So the outcome of the game has been decided your mental coin flipping, i.e. chance. This happens more often than you might think, to players of all abilities."

So what distinguishes a good player from a poor player? One answer is that the good player encounters fewer situations where moves look equally good. To a beginner, with very little experience, many of his/her moves will look indistinguishable, impossible to choose between; I'm sure you know what I mean! Read on, and I'll describe one thing you should bear in mind, which could help you to decide between otherwise equally good-looking moves.

One thing Othello novices soon learn is that the X-squares, the squares next to the corners but not on the edge, are very often bad places to go to, so one delays going there as long as possible. But eventually someone will have to go there. What will happen when they do?

That depends. One thing that it depends on is what the two *main diagonals*, i.e. the squares from c3 to f6 and c6 to f3, are like. There are three types of main diagonal to watch out for:

1) it is all one colour;

2) as you look along it from one end, there is exactly one change of colour, as on c3-f6 in figure 1;

3) there are two (as on c6-f3 in figure 1) or more changes of colour.

In figures 1 and 2, only the discs on the diagonals are shown.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Type 3's are dodgy for both players. If either player goes to an X-square on this type their opponent will be able to take the corner. In figure 2 white has had to go to g2 (by flipping pieces not shown) and black will now be able to go to h1.

Type 1's are good for the player whose colour they are. This player can go to each X-square in turn and not immediately give away a corner. These extra two moves will very often be very useful. Conversely, type 1's are not good for the other player.

Type 2's are more interesting. Whoever goes to the right X-square first can make the diagonal all his/her colour, so it effectively becomes a type 1. This type is potentially good for either player. It's a sort of race, the winner being the player who has the foresight and/or courage to go to the X-square first! In figure 2 black has won this race by going to b2.

The lesson to be learned from this is that it can be good to have the main diagonal all your colour. This is called *diagonalisation*. Apart from allowing you some extra safe moves at the end of the game, it is also an essential ingredient in one of the ways used to attack a weak edge. So, if you are trying to decide whether to make a particular move, one thing to consider is what it will do to the main diagonals. Will it help you to diagonalise? Or will it stop your opponent from achieving this, or even ruin his/her existing diagonalisation? If the answer is yes, the move is probably better than an otherwise equally good-looking move which has no such effect on these diagonals.

However, it should be stressed that you should not try to diagonalise too early in the game, because in the early stages it is too easy for the opponent to cut accross your diagonal. Diagonalisation is a ploy best left to the later stages of the game.

To finish, here are two very similar looking positions. In both positions it is Black to play. There is just one difference between these positions. In figure 3, White has managed to use diagonalisation to fool Black. If Black had been more careful and kept a piece on the c6-f3 diagonal then the win would be easy. Instead, Black will have to give away all the corners, and White wins. In figure 4, Black has been more sensible. This time White is made to pay for taking all those weak edges, as Black simply takes all the corners and wins easily.

Figure 3: Black to play

Figure 4: Black to play

How to survive the opening *by Karsten Switness.*

Two novices turned up to the Cambridge Xmas tournament, and I'm told they both knew what they were doing, and by and large played decent moves, but won just one game between them. It was suggested that one of the reasons was that they didn't know any openings, and were quite dead by move 10, even against the lower-ranked of the experienced players. Well, maybe. So, in response, here is an article designed to get the novice through the first few moves. The aim is to get into a position where (a) nothing terrible is going to happen too quickly unless you do something stupid, and (b) the experienced player is more or less out of their opening book. So the lines I'll be advocating probably aren't the best moves; to find out what those are, consult the series of opening articles by Graham Brightwell.

1. You are White.

1. Play the Perpendicular

2. Avoiding the Tiger

3. Playing the Rose

Let's assume your opponent plays 1f5; you'll have to remember what to do in the different "orientations" that arise after the other first moves. I suggest you play the *Perpendicular opening*, 2d6, as shown in Figure 1. This has the merit that there are only two variations to learn. The *Diagonal opening* 2f6 is also OK, but avoid the *Parallel opening* 2f4. But you know that, because you've read *Brief and Basic*, haven't you?

There are three moves that Black is likely to try: (a) 3c3, (b) 3c4 and (c) 3c5. See Figure 1 again. People are used to playing either 3c3 4d3 5c4 or 3c4 4d3 5c3, which come to the same thing, namely the *Tiger opening*. (Openings named by the Japanese tend to have animal names.) So don't let them do that: play 4g5 against either (a) or (b)! See Figure 2. This is called the *Ganglion*, because it's gangly. (Openings named by certain British players tend to be more, er, descriptive.) It's not usually a very good idea to turn over a whole outside wall like this, but this turns out to be OK, and most Blacks don't know all that much about it. After this, just play "normally". That means trying to play *quiet moves*, i.e., moves that turn few discs, and don't put pieces out on the edge of the position. Above all, think ahead! If you play your move, where will the opponent play? Does your fairly quiet move allow them a very quiet move as a consequence? Where might you play after the response you're expecting? If your opponent plays (c) 3c5, then I'm afraid there's a bit more you need to remember. See Figure 3. First of all, the only good move at move 4 is 4f4, which is the only move turning two discs rather than one. (Why? Because every other move has a good response: 4b4 or 4b6 can be met by 5b5, while 4f6 can be met by 5e6. Where are you going to go after any of those? Think ahead!) If Black doesn't play 5e3, then you're already doing well, and if he does, then 6c6 is a good example of a quiet move: it turns just one disc, at d5, and the move doesn't open up any really nice responses. Now Black might not play 7d3, but most often he will. See Figure 4.

So far, you're playing down the most travelled path in Othello, so it's about time to leave it. There's not a great deal wrong with the obvious quiet move (a) 8f3, so why not play it? This is called the Ralle move 8, after the French player Paul Ralle, who in 1984 used the opening to become Europe's first ever World Othello Champion. (Openings named by the French tend to be named after people.) Another possibility is (b) 8g5, which must have a name, or you could even try playing the best move (c) 8f6, as long as you remember to meet 9e6 with 10d7. This leads to the Rose opening, which your opponent will doubtless know backwards (7d10 6e9 6f8 ...), but I'm sure you'll cope.

2. You are Black.

The first piece of advice here is to play 1f5. All opening articles written these days assume that Black plays 1f5, and you don't want to have to translate to a different orientation. Actually 1d3 is supposed to be psychologically strong, stabbing at the heart of your opponent's position immediately. Britain's own Pete Bhagat won three European Championships using this move.

5. Avoiding the Rose

If your opponent plays the Perpendicular, then play down the Rose line as shown in Figure 3 until move 6. (If your opponent does something different at move 4 or 6, then don't worry, you're winning – just play sensibly.) Then you can either carry on down the Rose line if you don't mind being in your opponent's book, or you can choose 7f3, as shown in Figure 5. This is called the *Shaman move 7*, after David Shaman, who is the nearest thing there's been to a British World Champion. David won the title in 1993, representing his native USA, but in 1992 he played for us, since he was living here at the time. Doubtless 7d3 is better, but this is perfectly OK, and much less well known.

Alternatively, your opponent might play the Diagonal.

6. Against the Diagonal

7. Two possibilities.

8. Avoiding the Tanida.

The first thing to get right is move 3, which has to be to e6. Now White can play either 4f4 or 4d6, leading to symmetric positions. See Figures 6 and 7. There's a wide variety of choices here, but for some reason 5c3, 5e3, 5g5 and 5g6 are played far far more than the others. My advice here is to avoid playing next to the edge (e.g., 5g5 or 5g6), since these tend to lead to openings where you can die quickly and horribly if you do the wrong thing. Figure 7 shows two safer options. Move (a) 5d3 is the best of the unknown ones, while move (b) 5e3 is, exotically, the *Cow opening*. If you try this, it's advisable to know what to do against the usual response, 6c5. See Figure 8 for a suggested continuation. The move 7c4 is the most common; (compare this with the move 4 in Figure 3: it's the same theme), but move 9 isn't. Instead, 9b5 is the normal move, leading to the *Tanida opening*, named after Kunihiko Tanida, who won the World Championship at age 15 in 1982, the youngest ever World Champion. The recommended move 9c6 obviously leads to similar play. These move 9s are examples of *waiting moves*: there is no good move over to the East, so pick off the one one isolated White disc, and get the opponent to break through. Expect a reply which is again a waiting move, namely 10e2. Now choose the move that looks best, and away you go. Good luck!

Next time: how to survive the early midgame. (Maybe.)