OFFICIAL BEGINNERS' SECTION

Black to play

In this issue of the Official Beginners' Section of the British Othello Federation's newsletter we have some anagrams by Colin Hands, a puzzle by Joel Feinstein, and articles by David Haigh and Karsten Switness.

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

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Has Black gone crazy?

Answer on page 13.

Notation.

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.

MORE ANAGRAMS *by Colin Hands*

Can you unscramble the following anagrams? They are all British Othello players. Solutions on page 12.

AH, BETTER GAP	BUCKETERY	CHALK WINE, SIR?
DREAMY GRADE	JOINT LIFE SEEN	KEEN, MILD, HA
LARRY DOON	PLAY NOW MUG	READY BEER GUY
RUN IT NEAR	SIR 'AS A BRAIN	SEE DJ ARMY
THAT'S WEMBLEY!	THEN NON SPEEKS	YA IN FOR THIS

Things to remember: TIME! *by David Haigh*

When playing tournament Othello one thing one has to learn is how to manage one's time. The first step along this road is to learn not to waste time. What I am about to say may seem obvious, but it surprising how often these principles are forgotten, and not only by novices.

1) If you have only got one move, for goodness' sake make it straight away, even if you don't like the look of it. There is absolutely no point in first thinking about how your opponent will respond, and what your next move will be, because

a) your opponent may not in fact make the move you expect, and

b) actually seeing the state of the board when you have to make your next move is much easier, quicker and less error-prone than trying to imagine it while you are "thinking" about the forced move.

This applies if your move really is forced, and also if your move is semi-forced (i.e. all moves except one are obviously totally disastrous).

Believe it or not, in a Regional tournament last year I saw a relatively experienced player make this mistake, and go on to lose on time.

2) If you have got two (or more) equally good-looking moves and, after a reasonable length of time thinking about what might happen next, you can't decide which is better, it is probably best to choose one of them at random. You have to recognise your own limitations and realise that you are probably not capable of deciding which is the better move, so your choice is essentially random anyway. If you just guess you've got a fifty percent chance of being right – as good a chance as if you think about it first – but you've saved yourself several minutes on the clock. The best thing you can salvage from this situation is time! [Section editor's comment: never admit to anyone that this is what you did, especially if it turns out that it was the decisive winning move!]

3) Try to learn a few standard openings, e.g. from Karsten Switness' article in the beginners' section of the February 1995 Newsletter. This will not only save you time, but it will help to save you from an early death.

Time is probably more useful in the endgame, because the situations tend to be simpler. It's nice to have a bit of time left to do some unhurried disc counting right at the end, where that extra bit of time probably *will* enable you to choose the right move. So try to save yourself some time for the endgame by not wasting time earlier on.

The other thing to remember that in many tournaments a loss on time is a 0-64 loss, the worst possible loss. This alone indicates that if you are going to lose, almost anything is better than losing on time!

Finally, here are a few points of clock etiquette to remember.

(*i*) Don't start to make your move before your opponent has pressed his/her clock button.

(*ii*) Don't press your clock button until you have flipped the last piece of your move. One way of ensuring this is to use the flipping hand to press the button.

(*iii*) Don't slam the clock button. It's bad for the clock, distracting to other players, and is quite unnecessary. It could also dislodge a flag prematurely.

(*iv*) Don't pick the clock up during the game; again it's not necessary and a flag could be dislodged.

How to Survive the Late Midgame *by Karsten Switness.*

So, here you are, half way through a game against an experienced player, whose rating is well into four figures, and you're still alive. Now what?

First of all, let's think a little about corners. Of course, it's good to have a corner, since even your super-high-rated opponent will never succeed in flipping it. A natural extension is that it's bad to let your opponent take a corner. Well, this is true up to a point, and indeed it's rarely right to give you opponent a corner early in the game. But by the time you get to this stage, there aren't that many options left, and it's very important to consider moves that do give up corners as well as those that don't. Here's an example.

Black to play and win.

This is a position where many beginners will throw away a won game. Which moves would you consider playing? What do you expect would happen next?

If you play any move on the second rank, then you will lose by a large margin. Here's what will happen. You play your move, White plays to g8, you play some other move on the second rank, then White plays to a3 (not turning on the third row), and then you have to play to either b7 or g7 – probably both – losing horribly. (See, for instance, the first diagram below.) If you don't believe that, then try it a few times. In that sequence, the fact that White has edges (i.e., he has all the discs on the a-file and the 8th rank) means that he has "free" moves at g8 and at a3. After the free moves get used up, you "run out of moves" and die.

But you don't have to let him take the free moves. For a start, the a3 move only becomes "quiet" because you turn both the e3 and f3 discs. So you need to try to leave at least one of them white. This is hard to do unless you stop White from playing g8. Fortunately there is something you can do about the g8 move, namely to play to g7 now! See the second diagram below.

After d2-g8-f2-a3.

After Black moves to g7.

g7-h8-g8-h2-a8-e2-a3-c2-b7.

Now of course White can hardly play g8, as that will let you into h8. But can't he just take the corner at h8? Yes, indeed he can, but if he's really an expert he certainly won't! Suppose White does go to h8; now you play to g8. This is a "wedge", a piece of yours inserted into middle of an edge formation, and here it's worth much more than the h8 corner you gave up for it. White has the corner, and he can take all the pieces on the h-file with h2 anytime he wants, but in return there's nothing he can do to stop you playing a8, and a3, and b7. That gets you two edges, and a vast mass of pieces he'll never turn – "stable discs". The final diagram above shows you what the board is likely to look like in a few moves time, after the typical sequence given; White is now forced to a2, and he is totally dead.

After you play to g7, White would be better advised to leave the corner well alone and play something like e2. But you are almost certainly going to win anyway. Why? Well, you are going to get to a8 at some point, either turning along the south or the west edge. When he does, White still won't have a move at b7, so you will be able to leave the empty square at b7 until right at the end of the game, when it will be a huge move for you. For instance, after g7-e2-c2, the best White can do is a3 f1 c1 f2 e1 d1 d2 b1 g1 h1 h2 g2 b2 a1 h8 a2 g8 a8 (P) b7, and you win 38-26.

If you play g7, the south and west edges will be hurting White, by allowing you to take lots of edge discs once you are established on an edge somewhere. As you can see, whenever White cut himself off completely from the two squares b7 and a8, he was taking an enormous risk, which you didn't allow to succeed, did you?

We've already seen a situation where edges are good to have, and a very similar situation where they're bad. So there can't be a simple answer to the question of whether you should take edges. Here, though, are a couple of things to bear in mind.

First, having too many edges is almost always a bad thing. Here is the sort of position you (Black again) should avoid getting into.

White to play.

True, White has in some sense "run out of moves" and has to give you a corner now. But this is a very routine kind of situation for the expert, and she will probably play to b2. The idea is again that, if you take the corner at a1, she will wedge at a2. This doesn't immediately secure lots of discs this time, but it achieves the simple aim of making it your turn to move. Now the other disadvantage of having edges comes into play; all your moves to the west turn in several directions. This is no accident! For instance, since Black has discs on the north edge, there is no way that a move to, say, h6 can not flip diagonally. The edges here are said to "poison" your moves in the west. Another feature of the position running against you is the south-west region, where you have no legal moves. What is worse, the region contains an odd number of empty squares so, whenever White wants, she can play into the region and, if you respond there, play there again. Try to avoid this – an "odd region" where you either can't play, or really don't want to play. Putting it all together, here is how White can win comfortably: b2 a1 a2 h4 h5 g2 b7 a8 a7 h7 h1 g1 h2 h6 g8 h8 g7, 25-39.

At some point earlier in the game, you must have taken too many edges. Maybe the problems had been building up all game ... or maybe this was the position three moves ago.

Black to play.

If you play a6 and b8, in either order, while White plays g5, we get the earlier position. Quite simply, you shouldn't take an edge in this position. There is still play for both sides in the east, so that is the place to look for moves. The one that stands out is g5, although h6 is also possible. If White, now or soon, applies the pressure by taking an edge herself (with a2 or g8), then you still have the option of taking the other edge. If you can avoid taking either edge, then it's White who has no access to an odd region now! In fact, the way to win from the last diagram is g5 g8 h6 h5 b2! (giving up the north edge in order to (a) get a wedge on the West edge, and (b) get two of the three moves in the North-West region) a1 a2 g1 b7, and now Black is in total control and wins easily.

Next time: how to survive the endgame.

SOLUTION TO WORD PUZZLE *by Colin Hands*

Did you manage to fit all the words and phrases in last issue? Here is one solution.

Unscrambled Anagrams

PETER BHAGAT	BRUCE KYTE	CHRIS WAKELIN
GARRY EDMEAD	JOEL FEINSTEIN	MIKE HANDEL
ROY ARNOLD	GUY PLOWMAN	AUBREY DE GREY
IAN TURNER	IAIN BARRASS	JEREMY DAS
MATTHEW SELBY	KEN STEPHENSON	IAIN FORSYTH

A BROKEN OTHELLO BOARD PUZZLE *by Joel Feinstein.*

My othello board has split into four fragments, just when I was analysing the crucial position in an interesting endgame, with Black to play (I blame the weather). Can you put the board back together? (You may have to turn some of the fragments around). Once you have done it, perhaps you could tell me which, if any, of Black's moves win? Solution next issue.

Had Black gone crazy?

(From page 6). No! Although it looks crazy for Black to give up the h1 corner, allowing White to play all of h1, h8 and g7, Black is rewarded in the South-West: Black gets to play both a8 and b8. It is close, but after g2-h1-a8-h8-b8-g7, Black wins 34-30. In the original position, all the other moves lose for Black. Try them and see!