

TEACH YOURSELF GO

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I was a bit doubtful about writing a review of this book written by Charles Matthews. How could a ‘weak knee dan¹’ hope to comment on or criticise a book written by a stronger player and intended for much weaker ones? The answer was to assume a different persona and in fact I have tried to look at the book from three different perspectives.

a) How would the ordinary ‘person in the street’ who is browsing in a bookshop perceive it? Will he or she pick it up and better still buy it?

b) Many people hear about Go from the publicity ‘machine of the BGA or via the Internet. They want to learn how to play Go. Is this the book for them?

c) When a beginner arrives at a Go club there is usually someone willing to teach the rudiments. The problem is whether they know how to teach. Does the book give a systematic

treatment that can be adopted for use by the budding Go teachers?

To start with the conclusion, I believe the book succeeds on all three counts.

I have tried the book on non-Go playing friends – they found it ‘interesting’. Beginners have read sections and found it easy to follow and ‘useful’. I have compared it with some of my own notes from when I was teaching Go at school and realise many of the mistakes I made.

My usual mistake, and probably the same for many others, was to make too large a jump in strategic or tactical perception at various points, *Teach Yourself Go* avoids this and takes a measured step-by-step approach through the facets of the game.

For the browser, the presentation and the blurb are most important. The *Teach Yourself* books have certainly been brightened up when compared with my old Chess and Spanish books in the series. A colour picture of a real game on the front and a blurb on the back that makes the game seem possible, even easy, will surely encourage people to look further. It is a crucial aspect in widening the appeal of Go and why I believe this book is so important. The browser will be tempted to look further and the first chapter – *Five Lessons* – is as good an introduction to the game as I have seen. Instead of a sterile listing of the rules, Charles Matthews takes the reader through what actually happens in a game of Go. It all seems so easy. I have seen various attempts to write, or codify, or simplify the rules and

¹Note for newcomers to Go: this is a time-honoured pun on the Japanese word ‘nidan’ which means 2 dan.

they are nearly all incomprehensible. They certainly do not help a reader to play the game. In *Teach Yourself Go* there is no actual list of the rules but, as Charles says by page 15, 'The concepts and rules given so far are more than enough for you to play your first games of Go.'

The beginner will also find this the book for him or her. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with Capture, Cutting and Connecting, and Eyes in that order. The chapters are sub-divided, headings in bold with lots of sub-headings – all key features of good text books in any subject. There are hundreds of diagrams and I particularly liked the final position diagrams and even occasional recap diagrams. This is a book that is really trying to see things from the point of view of the beginner. One or two examples and problems seemed quite complex, however. This may not be a bad idea to show that there is more to the game than simply reading to page 15. But one or two problems seem well beyond understanding even with the solutions and should perhaps have had some sort of 'health warning'. Still there is nothing to compare with an instance at our club when a beginner turned up and was told about aji-keshi in his first ever game.

This leads nicely on to the principles of good teaching. You need to know the students and their capabilities.

You need a systematic treatment of the subject. You need to recap. You also need to challenge the student. Once again *Teach Yourself Go* delivers the goods. Following from Chapter 5 on Eyes there are further sections on Ko, Seki and the Endgame. Basic strategy on Corners and Sides; Middlegame and Finishing off a game are also covered. It all seems so logical. Every club should have a copy and use it at their meetings. When Joe Bloggs comes over from the bar and asks 'What's this game? Is it like Othello?' then use the the blurb and selected bits of page 1.

The final chapter is entitled More about Go. It contains the practical information needed to get started such as how to find a Go club or Go equipment. There is a brief summary of computer Go which is also important in attracting people to the game. It also gives a feeling for the importance of Go, especially in the Far East. 'Cho Chikun has won enough prize money to make him a yen billionaire' suggests Go is a bit more than 'just like Othello'.

Page 137 is entitled Cutting Point Disasters. It gives just two examples of mistakes that beginners make. It is so true. This book gets right into the mind of a person learning Go. Have I been a bit over the top in my praise for this book? I don't think so. Its brilliant.