

In this fifth year of the Japan-Europe Youth Go Project, teams from Czechia, Germany and the UK were invited by the Nihon Ki-in to spend seven days in Tokyo. The idea behind this programme is to allow young people to enjoy the experience of Japanese culture and to learn more about playing Go.

The group consisted of:

Ms Jana Hricova ~ European escort

Mr Martin Kovarik ~ Czechia escort

Mr Ondrej Kruml ~ 3 dan

Mr Jan Prokop ~ 3 dan

Mr Lukas Podpera ~ 2 dan



Mr Horst Timm ~ German escort

Mr Torsten Knauf ~ 2 dan

Mr Lars Fikert ~ 2 dan

Ms Annika Tepper ~ 18 kyu



Mr Brian Dackombe ~ UK escort

Mr Matthew Hathrell ~ 8 kyu

Mr Ken Dackombe ~ 9 kyu

Ms Kay Dackombe ~ 10 kyu



The group met up at Narita airport on the morning of Monday 22nd October 2007 and was greeted by Ms Fumiko Urata from the Overseas Department. of the Nihon Ki-in. Fumiko-san was to be our main escort and translator whilst in Japan although, when it came to translating matters on the Go board, there would be many other people eager to assist.

We were taken by chartered bus to the Green Palace Hotel, our place of residence for seven days, which just happened to be five minutes walk from the Nihon Ki-in building. After freshening up and a brief meeting we went by subway to the Ginza district for a welcome dinner with the sponsors and officials of the Nihon Ki-in:

Mr Ryo Kimura ~ Nikkei inc. Newspapers

Ms Yaeko Sagawa ~ President of Sakura Golf Co.Ltd.

Ms Yuki Shigeno ~ Secretary General of IGF, 2 dan pro.

Mr Takahide Kato ~ Secretary General, Nihon Ki-in

Mr Toshiaki Kikuchi ~ Business Manager, Nihon Ki-in



After toasts and speeches and a mainly western-style meal, we returned to the hotel for some much needed sleep.

Tuesday 23rd October.

In the morning we walked to the Nihon Ki-in for a meeting with Otake Hideo, vice-chairman. Then we were shown around the building including the Yugen room and press room, the calligrapher's office where dan diplomas are kept, the main playing hall and the Go museum.



After lunch at a local snack bar, we went by subway to the Hotel Okura for teaching games by professionals in the hotel's Go salon.



Takemiya Masaki 9 dan



Ishikura Noboru 9 dan



Ogawa Tomoko 6 dan



Matsumoto Takehisa 6 dan

Later, Kay gave an interview to Go World magazine.

Ms Sagawa was also present and in the evening took everyone to a yakitori restaurant for an amazing meal (with Kirin beer and sake for the adults).



Wednesday 24th October.

This morning we took the subway to Ootemachi as a courtesy visit to Nikkei Newspapers, one of the sponsors of the Youth Go project.

After lunch we assembled in the Nihon Ki-in for teaching games with professionals: Yasuko Imamura 5 dan amateur, translated the commentaries.



Abe Yoshiteru 9 dan



Mizuma Toshifumi 7 dan



Kano Takashi 7 dan

After the games, the Igo/Shogi TV Channel recorded Ondrej playing Matsumoto Takehisa 6 dan with commentary by Ishikura Noboru 9 dan. Also, Matthew gave an interview about handicap Go to the Igo TV channel.



Thursday 25th October.

We go to the Nihon Ki-in again and into the main hall to play against the regular public players. Shoji Hosono, of the overseas department, and Yosuke Hariguchi, (call me Harry) Secretary of All Japan Students Go Association, show us how to fill in a card. Then we sit and wait for our name to be called out for a match. The Japanese are generally over-graded compared to the UK, so the group were playing at 3 or 4 stones above their rank. Kay and Matthew played three games winning two each, but Ken managed to play and win four.



After lunch we took the JR line to Azabu to play more goodwill games with some students of a Go club in a high school. This is when gifts were exchanged before the start of the games. I counted 42 desks in the classroom and was told by Uchida Hiroshi (the Science & Go teacher playing Jan in picture) that this is not an unusual number of pupils for a class! I don't think the earlier games in the morning at the Nihon Ki-in helped, because the UK group did not do so well against these strong students.



Friday 26th October.

Today is rather special as we travel by coach to the Prince's Park Tower, a very impressive hotel in the south of Tokyo. This is the venue for the first game of the Oza title match. We are allowed into the Yugen room and watch the players enter, sit, compose themselves and play the first few stones. Then we leave the playing room and have a look at the press room before making our way downstairs to a reception area where Ken gives an interview to Nikkei Newspapers.



The Czech and German players have some simultaneous games with Otake Hideo but the UK group decide to make use of the scheduled free time in the afternoon. We make our own way to Shibuya, a fashionable 'young people's' district where Kay does some shopping in a twelve storey building devoted entirely to young girl's fashion. Matthew and Ken decide to explore some of the entertainment available in the amusement arcades and I do some shopping for gifts, origami paper and a camera

battery. Just as we are leaving, the clouds drop their load and everyone scampers to buy umbrellas. Thoroughly drenched, we return to the hotel for a shower and a meal.

Saturday 27th October

The day starts with rain which is to continue all day. We have some free time in the morning so we make our own way to Ikebukuro and the Sunshine City: a huge shopping complex. After lunch we all meet up at the Igo Festival held on the third floor of one of the sections in Sunshine City.

At the opening of the event, Takemiya Masaki, Umezawa Yukari (female Kisei holder) and Takemiya Yokkoh appeared on stage to talk about their interests other than Go.



This was followed by Takemiya and partner demonstrating their interest in Salsa.

We leave the festival and travel by JR to Ryokusei to visit the home of Kikuchi Yasuro 8 dan amateur (World Amateur Champion 1992 and winner of more than twenty amateur titles). His house is the venue for a private Go Academy which produces the most number of new professionals and this



is where we shall play more goodwill games. After an exchange of gifts the games start in earnest and it soon becomes clear that despite their age, these Go students show no mercy on the board.



Kikuchi playing 'friendly' games with Kay and Ken.



Even though we had arrived thoroughly soaked, everyone was made welcome, dried out and given drinks. At the end we made our goodbyes and returned for a last meal together at the hotel.

Sunday 28th October

Last night we discovered that Ms Sagawa had left presents of Sakura Go bowls for each of us!

Up early to leave the hotel at 6:00 am by airport bus to Narita. This is because the Czech group are on an earlier flight.



Then it's final goodbyes at the airport.

In discussions on the journey back to the UK, I think Matthew, Kay and Ken had not expected such a rich and busy schedule and on reflection were realising what a unique opportunity they had just experienced. Thank you to Nihon Ki-in, EGF and BGA, and of course the sponsors.

Brian Dackombe