

A man with glasses and a dark suit is seated at a low wooden table, focused on a Go board. He is holding a white stone in his right hand, ready to move it. The board is filled with black and white stones. To his left are three wooden bowls containing stones. To his right is a traditional Japanese stool with a patterned cushion. The background features a wooden shelf with a purple vase and a calligraphy scroll on the wall.

**ANTTI
TÖRMÄNEN**

PROMOTED TO 1 DAN PROFESSIONAL BY THE NIHON KI-IN

On 8 December 2015 the Nihon Ki-in announced the Finnish-born Antti Törmänen as a professional go player. Antti Törmänen made his debut as a professional on March 29 of the following year. Pavol Lisý and Kim Ouweleen asked him a few questions. At the end of the interview a game commentary can be found, in which Antti kindly provides insight into a match he played against Ogawa Tomoko 6p, author of *The Endgame*.

INTERVIEW

Hello Antti. Congratulations on becoming a professional player! We are very happy for you. Before asking you about the pro-exam, could you introduce yourself briefly?

Antti Törmänen: Thank you! I am Antti Törmänen, a twenty-seven year old Bachelor of Science from Oulu, Finland. I started playing go back in spring 2002, participated in over a hundred European amateur tournaments, and finally became insei at the Nihon Ki-in in fall 2011.

You have been staying in Japan recently. How long have you been living there?

Antti Törmänen: I lived in Tokyo first for seven months in 2011-2012, after which I briefly returned to Finland. Since April 2014 I have been living here again, so altogether it comes to a bit over three years.

You have been studying in Tokyo as an insei, along Nikola Mitić 6d from Serbia. When did you get the idea to try and become a professional go player in Japan? And how was it to be an insei?

Antti Törmänen: Even though the other insei are children, that fact is easily forgotten in the background, and the struggle to get upwards in the league rankings becomes the main focus. The games with insei and game reviews with professional teachers are by far the best learning experiences I've had. On the other hand, if you get in a slump and start losing repeatedly, life could get very tough.

I first got the idea to become insei in 2009, when I was about to enter the top ranks in Europe. I figured that if I wanted to become stronger, the fastest way would be to study in Asia. My interest in Japanese culture incited me to see if I could become insei at the Japanese Go Association. For becoming insei, it is necessary to get a recommendation from a professional player. Serendipitously, I had met Kobayashi Chizu 6p, my current teacher, at the EGC in 2007, who at the time praised me for my concentration. I contacted her by email, and luckily she remembered me and was willing to receive me in Japan.

I was in the middle of my university studies, but in 2011-2012 I took seven months off to see what insei life was like. The insei are divided into five classes by strength, A-E, with A being the strongest. Each class plays a monthly league tournament, and according to the results, a number of players are promoted or demoted. I started in October 2011 as a European 6 dan, and rapidly made it into C class, where I got stuck. By April 2012 I would have gotten promoted to B class for the first time, but it was time for me to go back to Finland.

After I finished my university degree, I decided that rather than pursue a normal job, I would try to become a professional go player. In April 2014 I again started in the insei league – this time directly from C class, due to my previous results. After I got settled in Japan, I quickly made it to A class, from which I was immediately demoted to B. After that, I was constantly jumping between A and B class.



The new shodan ceremony on 29 March 2016: Antti Törmänen (right) receives his dan diploma from the chairman of the Nihon Ki-in

In September 2014 I was able to participate in the professional exam preliminary, in which B class insei and non-insei applicants fight for six spots in the main exam. My results were a little short, and I was unable to make it to the main exam. After a year of training – and jumping up and down the classes – in 2015 I was able to stay in A class, thus getting in the main exam directly. In the actual professional exam, I was barely able to score the necessary winning percentage of 50% or more, which let me get recommended for a western professional slot.

Can you explain the system of the professional exam at the Nihon Ki-in?

Antti Törmänen: Normally, the Nihon Ki-in employs six professionals a year. One of these comes from the

branch office in Ōsaka, chosen by an exam, and another one in a similar fashion from the branch in Nagoya. The Tokyo headquarters has three different exams. The female exam, held in January and February, decides one professional. The strongest insei by average ranking between April and June gets likewise employed – this is called the summer professional exam. Finally, the winter professional exam takes place in October and November, in which the top two players of sixteen participants, both insei and outsiders, qualify for professional. Personally, I was made professional by special recommendation, due to satisfactory results in both the insei league and the professional exam, similar to Hans Pietsch nineteen years ago.



The cover of the April 2016 edition of Go Weekly, featuring Antti Törmänen's "New shodan celebration game" with Yamada Takuji 8p

When did you know that you were going to participate in the pro-exam? How did you feel about it? Did you expect to become a professional?

Antti Törmänen: The insei participants for the professional exam are decided by average ranking in the leagues in July and August; the top 10 insei make it straight into the main exam, and places 11-20 have to go through a preliminary with outsiders. I was playing in A class in July, and for the first time was able to remain there without dropping down, which secured my place in the exam. I imagined I would have gotten through the combined preliminary too, if necessary, but I did feel a sense of relief and could then concentrate fully on studying in August and September.

I didn't make any assumptions about what kind of a score I would get in the exam, or if I could possibly make it or not. The top players of A class certainly felt stronger to me, but when we're talking of a single game, anything can happen.

When did you play the first qualification game? How was the process of the qualification overall?

Antti Törmänen: In addition to the top ten players of July

and August, six more players entered from the combined preliminary, held in September. B class insei and four outsiders fought for the six spots. Once the sixteen players are decided, a two-month lasting round robin tournament is played on weekends, one game a day with thinking times similar to the European Go Congress.

The first game was on Saturday, October 3. My opponent was Ōomote Takuto, the Japanese amateur Meijin who also made it professional from the exam. I was somehow able to get in a good rhythm and keep the game close all the way until the end, and finally it turned out I won by half a point.

How did you feel before, during and after the decisive game?

Antti Törmänen: There was no clear decisive game for me, since my becoming professional would depend on if the Nihon Ki-in personnel thought me worthy of recommendation or not. I did know that getting over a 50% winning ratio in the exam could make a big difference however. After the final required win in the second-to-last game I did feel a little bewildered, wondering if "it" happened just then and there or not.

What are your plans now, after becoming a professional player?

Antti Törmänen: I plan to remain in Tokyo and compete in professional tournaments indefinitely. Early on my salary will be fairly limited, so I imagine I will also be teaching go both online and offline, and possibly writing some go literature in English.

Do you plan to come back to Europe in the future? And will you participate in major European events like the EGC or the Grand Slam?

Antti Törmänen: I will at least pay a visit once in a while to keep up with my family and friends, but as of now I have no plans to play in European tournaments.

Thank you for your time. Good luck in your career as a professional go player!

Antti Törmänen: Thank you!

Game Commentary by Antti Törmänen 1p

Game 1

Judan C Preliminary, round 1

Black: Antti Törmänen 1p

White: Ogawa Tomoko 6p

Komi: 6½ points.

Time: 175 minutes each

+ five times 60 seconds byo-yomi.

Played on 28 July 2016.

Black wins by resignation.

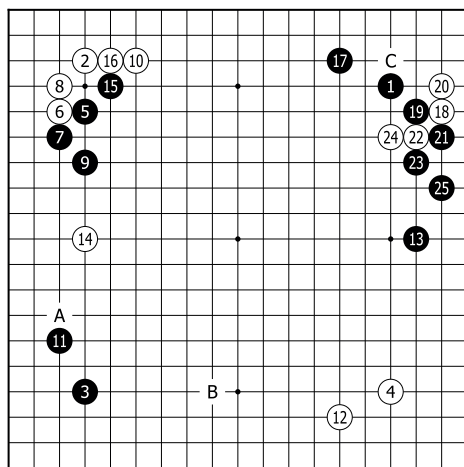


Diagram 1 (1-25)

Diagram 1 (1-25). *The wrong choice of joseki*

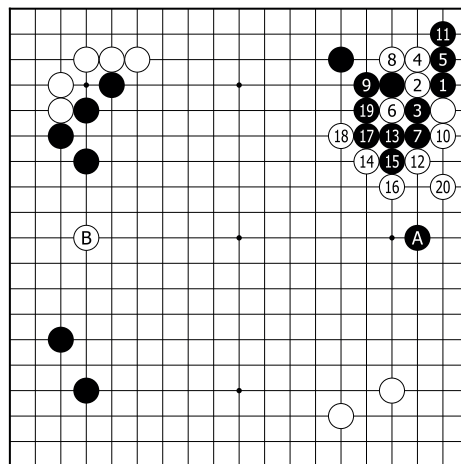
Black 11. Black's ogeima enclosure of A instead is somewhat more common. I played 11 with the idea of pushing white to invade the left side, and then aiming to take the initiative with the subsequent attack.

Black 13. Of course a common move, but it is also keeping an eye on white's inevitable invasion at 14. Should white have to escape towards the right along the middle line, black 13 will be waiting.

Black 17. Exchanging black 15 for white 16 and then playing elsewhere is an imitation of AlphaGo of sorts. There are still wide open areas on the board. I did not feel rushed to attack white 14.

White 18. I thought this invasion early. Personally I would have played something around B to give background support to the stone at 14.

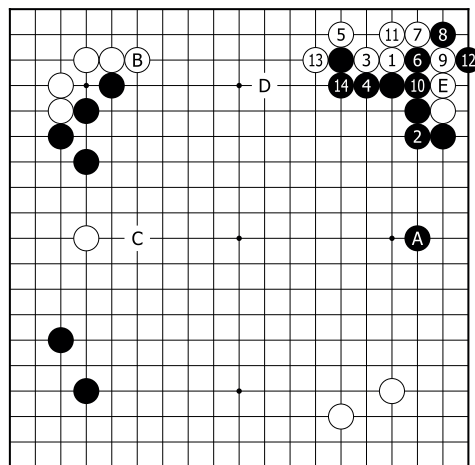
Black 19. Playing at 20 instead would probably have been the usual response, but I disliked the result that follows. See *Variation 1*.



Variation 1

Variation 1. After the sequence of 1 up to 20, black's corner territory is not small, but the stone at A would be rather weak. As a result, it will also be harder for black to attack white B later in the game.

White 22. The wrong choice of joseki. White cannot play this cut when she does not have the ladder. White C instead was proper, see *Variation 2*.

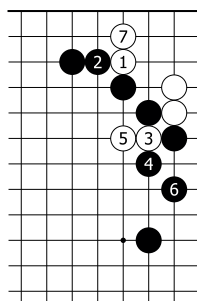


Variation 2

Variation 2. White should play at 1. Connecting with 2 is best for black locally. The result up to black 14 would follow. Black A might become a redundant extension from a strong group, but white 13 is also moving towards the already strong white group

at B; the upper side was uninteresting for making territory in the first place.

Why I went for this line of play – as opposed to originally taking the corner with E – was that later black can use pressing moves such as C and D to get a strong presence in the centre.



Variation 3

Variation 3. Note that if black plays at 2 instead, white will make life in the corner comfortably. This is not recommended for black.

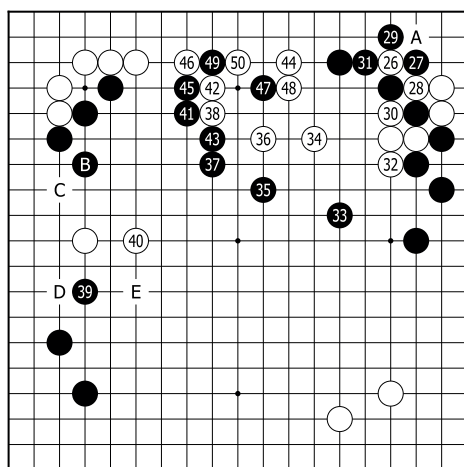


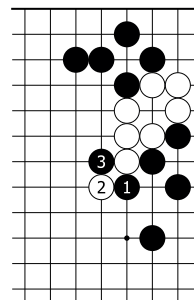
Diagram 2 (26-50)

Diagram 2 (26-50). *Preparing the attack*

Black 27. The mentioned ladder starts with white A and black 29, towards the lower left corner.

White 28. Since the ladder is good for black, white has no choice but to cut here, but a heavy group is the result.

Black 33. Slack. The idea was to make a connected shape with black B, but black should have played the hane instead. See *Variation 4*.



Variation 4

Variation 4. Black should play the hane at 1. If white responds with a hane at 2, black can immediately cut with 3.

Black 39. Overall, black does not have a bad flow, but the black stones in the centre and the upper left have become a bit thin.

White 40. Because of moves such as C, D or E, it is hard for black to attack white effectively.

Black 41. Unable to mount a strong attack, black goes for strengthening his own stones for the time being.

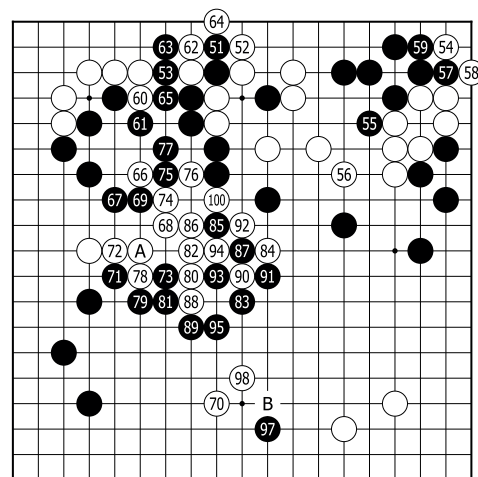


Diagram 3 (51-100)

(96) at (90) 99 at (87)

Diagram 3 (51-100). *White is in trouble*

Black 65. Black reduced some white territory on the upper side and gained thickness, with which black can attack white's group at A. In return, white got sente. Were she to play at 79 next, a long game would follow.

White 66. This move ended up as an overplay, seeing as how black's group is a lot stronger than white's.

Black 69. Move 66 became a direct loss for white.

White 70. Dangerous. Escaping with 81 was proper for white, even if black would then get to extend on the lower side first.

Black 73. After black mounts this attack, white is in trouble.

Black 83. Black is saying that it is fine even if white lives, as long as black gets strong shape and sente to next attack at B.

White 90. Good technique by white.

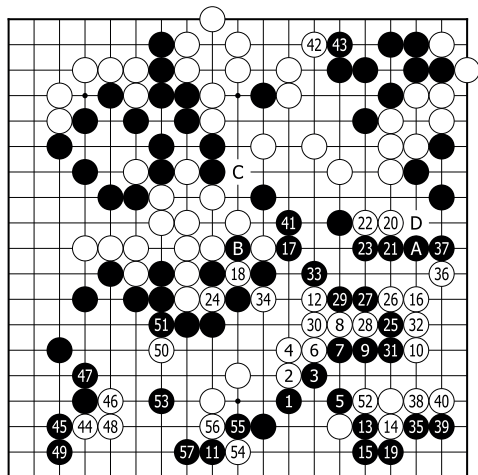


Diagram 4 (101-157)

Diagram 4 (101-157). *Too late for a comeback*

Black 1. From this point onwards, white has trouble getting any more territory anywhere, while black can harass the white groups as much as he wants. A black win is almost certain unless a big mistake comes up.

Black 13. There probably would have been a stronger attacking sequence available, such as the combination of black 17, white 18 and black 32, but I deemed the cut at 13 enough for a safe win.

Black 19. It was obvious that white's only way to win the game was to kill the A-group on the right side, but I could see no way for her to accomplish it. Therefore I chose this move, which is big in terms of territory.

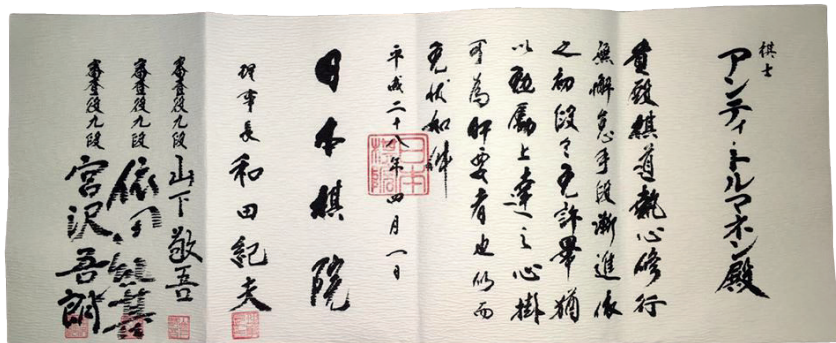
White 24. If white does not play here, B is practically black's sente, making it easy to escape with a move such as 33.

White 32. White would like to play 33 first, but then black would counter with 32.

White 40. White has to defend her own group first before considering attacking with a move like 41.

Black 41. C and D are now miai for life and black has a territorial advantage. Endgame follows, but black is leading by about ten points.

White resigns after move 157.



Antti Törmänen's
professional dan certificate