

type of go player before the war when many players just relied on having Black and playing solidly.

His style was often derided as "no-power" go, a label he rejected. Just before the 14th Honinbo in 1959 a famous but anonymous remark had it that "Takagawa's power couldn't even hurt a fly." Nevertheless, in Game 4 of that series he got rid of a buzzing nuisance with his fan—dryly adding, "So, even I can kill a fly." Ever rational, however, his own studied assessment was, "I am not as strong as some people think, and I am not as weak as other people think."

Indeed, when he won the 2nd Oza in 1954, having already won the Honinbo and 1st Nihon Ki-in Championship, he was the first to hold three major crowns simultaneously (and he also got promoted in October to 8-dan after a 10-year wait; 9-dan followed in October 1960). He considered this period his prime. In 1955 he was 40, ripe for the present ten-game match with Go Seigen.

Even less well appreciated was his record against Go. At first he was humiliated—though not the first to suffer that fate. With Go outside the Nihon Ki-in but still seen as the leading player, a series of three-game matches with Go was set up in October 1952 at no komi but at B-W-B. As already mentioned, Takagawa lost 0-3. In August 1955, with the match re-styled "Go versus the Honinbo" and now on an even basis with 4.5 komi, he again lost 0-3. In October 1956 he lost 0-3. In February 1958 he finally won a game, after 11 straight losses, but still lost the match 1-2. At this point Takagawa's stock with the public was rather low. In his own assessment he (and everyone else) was three points weaker than Go in no-komi games. He had also been beaten down to B-W-B handicap in his 1955 ten-game match with Go, though it is often overlooked that his final score of 4 wins to 6 losses was among the best of those who had been beaten down by Go.

In February 1959 Takagawa decisively turned the tables against Go with a 3-0 victory (at even), and in February 1960 followed up by winning 2-1. In February the following year he went down again 1-2, but by then he had shown that Go was not invincible.

Takagawa had the misfortune, however, at that point to see a tough rival emerge. In the 16th Honinbo in 1961 he finally had to surrender his title to Sakata Eio. As much as Sakata's emergence, though, it was Taka-

gawa's mental and spiritual exhaustion that tipped the scales against him. As if sensing that a climax had been reached, the writer Ezaki Masanori decided that now was the time to publish "Takagawa Shusaku—the Novel" in the April edition 1961 of *Shosetsu Shincho*. Takagawa was then 45. It was almost as if he was being offered his pipe and slippers.

Yet, relieved of the burden of sustaining the Honinbo record, he was able to stage a strong recovery. He took his revenge on Sakata by taking the 9th Nihon Ki-in Championship the same year, and in the following year, 1962, he beat off the challenge from Yamabe Toshiro. He even managed to win back the right to challenge Sakata in the 18th Honinbo in 1963. With the score at 2-2, he had an overwhelming advantage in Game 5, but missed an easy win and lost by half a point. This game was one of the great regrets of his life.

In July 1964, he became the first Honorary Honinbo. The accession ceremony conveniently coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Nihon Ki-in. Still, Takagawa had no intention of resting on his laurels. In 1965 he won the 4th Judan against Fujisawa Hosai. In Term 11 of the final Tokyo Shinbun Cup (1966) he beat Rin Kaiho. He was also prominent in the new Pro Best Ten, taking second place in the first four terms.

However, the press had its eyes on the new Showa generation of players born under Emperor Hirohito. From about 1965 Rin Kaiho and Otake Hideo were plucking away Sakata's titles one by one. Rin startled the go world by taking both the Meijin and Honinbo titles simultaneously. Yet in the 7th Old Meijin in 1968, it was Takagawa who showed that the old guard could still bite, and he took Rin's title. He was christened the "53-year-old Meijin". Go Seigen made perhaps the most perceptive comment. Rin was already famous for his *nimaigoshi*—double waist strength, a sumo word denoting a firm posture with both legs well planted but also symbolising tenacity and willpower. Go Seigen said Takagawa had *sanmaigoshi*—triple waist strength. He refused to back down against Rin's own tenacity or violent fighting.

"It's not that I changed my basic posture, but go is a two-player game, so you have to adapt to your opponent," he said. "However, when I look back now, it's a fact that we did play ferociously."

Wakayama Prefecture felt it was time to honour his

# GAME 1

## THE ONE WITH THE PURPLE CLOUDS

(W) TAKAGAWA KAKU, HONINBO

(B) GO SEIGEN 9-DAN

PLAYED ON 19 AND 20 JULY 1955

AT NARAYA INN, HAKONE PREF.

HANDICAP, B-W, NO KOMI. TEN HOURS EACH.

When Yokohama was forcibly opened up as a free port in 1858, many westerners arrived in Japan, only to be sledgehammered by the humid summer heat. They eventually found refuge in the nearby mountains, and settled in particular on the village of Miyanoshita in Hakone. This village, to become probably the most thriving spa centre in Hakone, soon had two hotels, the old Naraya and the new (1878) Fujiya. They competed bitterly for the new custom. Eventually a truce was called and it was agreed that Fujiya would take the foreign contingent and Naraya the Japanese.

Things stayed that way for a long time—Charlie Chaplin stayed in the Fujiya in the 1930s—and even in the aftermath of World War II, General MacArthur billeted for a time there, whereas the Japanese officials he dealt with stayed in the Naraya.

When it was decided to hold Game 1 of the ten-game match between Go and Takagawa in Hakone, there was no question that such a traditional game had to be held in the Naraya.

The Naraya still exists after a fashion. In 2001 the traditional but decaying 300-year-old inn closed to make way for construction of a cafe and guesthouse. Even go titlematches now tend to take place in modern hotels, more's the pity.

There was talk even then that the Go-Takagawa match was the end of an era, too. Having run out of suitable opponents for Go, this was to be the last match he played for the *Yomiuri* under the traditional uchikomi rules with no komi. The rise of newspaper tournaments with komi was unstoppable, and the *Yomiuri* was itself to move swiftly into the new Meijin tournament. More tellingly, however, though only in retrospect, this was to become Go's final summit—severely impaired by his motor-cycle accident, he was never to scale the peaks in the new tournaments.

The inn they stayed at was dominated by the overbearing peak of Mount Myojo (924m), the hillside of which

is used to mark a huge 大 (dai) character by means of a bonfire of bamboos during the annual Daimonji Festival (16 August, O-Bon). Preparations for the festival must have been under way as the match began.

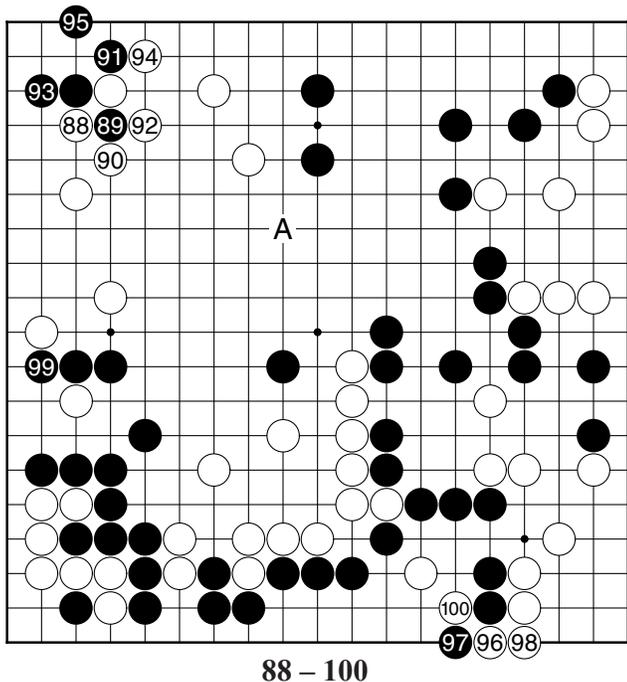
The players were in a large room in No. 1 Annexe. As the 9-dan, Go Seigen initially had the seat of honour and so took the bowl of white stones, from which he grasped a handful to start the nigiri process to decide who had Black and White. In a quiet voice, Takagawa chose *chosen*—even number, sente—and as Go counted off the handful of stones in pairs, it was found he had picked up 19. He therefore took Black and had to swap seats with Takagawa, so that the Honinbo, as White, now sat in the seat of honour. Not that it made much difference. They straddled the room, of modest but ample proportions, so that both had the veranda on one side and the tokonoma alcove, where precious items were displayed, on the other. The centrepiece of this tokonoma was a scroll with the caption Purple Clouds 紫雲, an ancient Chinese reference to times whenever a gentleman of especially illustrious virtue lived.

The scorekeeper was seated behind Go's right shoulder, on the opposite side of the door, so that whenever observers popped in they would kneel behind Takagawa's left shoulder.

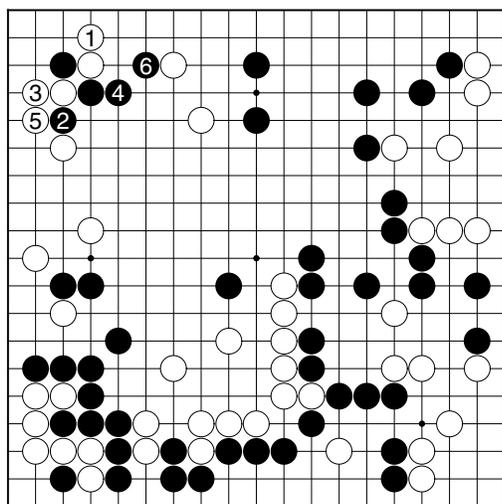
Takagawa had arrived at the spa the day before, and appeared refreshed and full of vitality. He had even shaved off an incipient moustache. Some years before, in 1949, Takagawa had to play Go at a spa in Gunma—part of a ten-game match with Go pitted against ten different high-dan players—and had made the mistake of arriving three or four days early, only to end up a bit of a nervous wreck. Ever rational, he rarely made the same mistake twice. In any case, he was arriving now in Hakone buoyed up as the Honinbo again. The accession ceremony for the 10th Honinbo had just been held at the Nihon Ki-in the week before (Go was there, of course; interestingly, apart from the shogi world in the form of Meijin Oyama, the Renju Federation was also represented by the Renju Meijin Takagi). Takagawa had reason to feel, if not confident, at least not out of place.

Although the time limits were now ten hours each, substantially less than the thirteen hours of the Kamakura match, play was compressed into two days instead of three, so players certainly had to be fit.

Go having picked up an “odd” nigiri, it was somehow



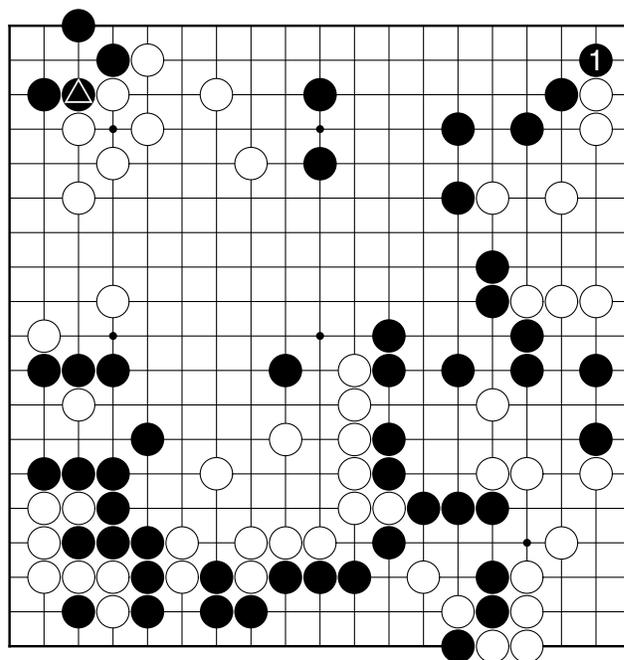
White gets into a pickle if he greedily plays ⑨⑩ at ① in Diagram 32. It is enough for him to let Black live and take sente for ⑨⑥, which made Takagawa regret his decision (a “difficult” one, he said) to defer action in the lower right. His regret was compounded by the fact that the ponnuki with ⑨② makes White thick here, which cancels out Black’s hopes of keeping some tension in the game.



⑨⑨, the sealed move, is forced simply because it is bigger than 100 (though actually Black would connect at a point above 100). It even made Takagawa wonder if he should have played there even before he played ⑧① and so on in the upper right corner. On balance and with hindsight, yes, he thought. Yet at the time he thought living in the upper left corner was enough to stay in the game. He also thought that Go should have played at ⑨⑨

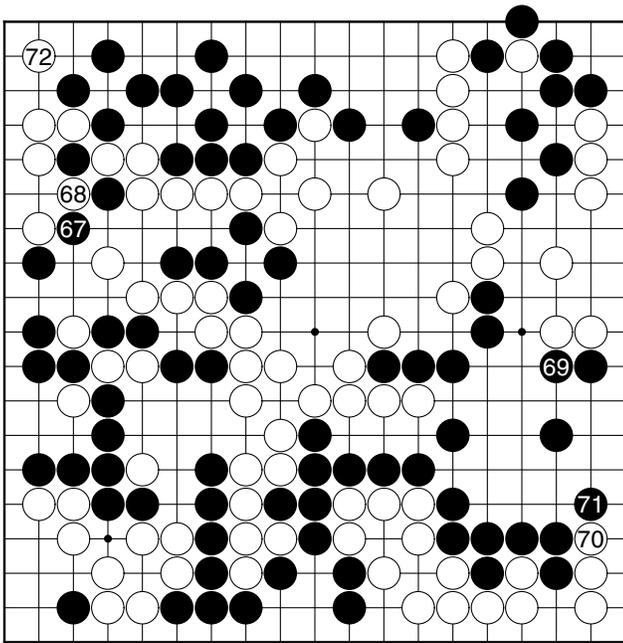
in place of ⑨⑥, in which case he planned to play A.

## DAY 2



Obvious though move 100 is, and although he was about to play there, Go spent most of his time on this move hunched over the upper right corner (which was the lower left from where he sat). He had even moved slightly to the left and closer to the board, so he was crowding this corner. It was no surprise that Takagawa played ① there, or that this was seen as a decisive point in the unusually wary middle game, as if they were trying to prove go is not a contact sport. Segoe was there in the room, parallel to Takagawa’s left shoulder, as the referee (the scorer was Sakai Masanori 3-dan), but perhaps mindful of the need to appear impartial he sat, with hands clasped, looking down only at the empty mat in front of him.

This ① is big, and was praised by young Honma Akio, then 1-dan. However, Takagawa thought he should have played ③ in Diagram 33 instead (later he refined this to include the ①-② exchange first; on this see also Diagram 36), in which case the game might still be close. All this would have been a lot easier for him if only he had played in the lower right corner first on move ⑧⑦ (△). Yet Takagawa, at the time, still resisted the suggestion that ⑧⑦ was the losing move. If pushed, he would nominate Black 101, he said. That made Honma gulp: “Wow! Have I been praising the losing move?!” Nevertheless, Takagawa did say much later (and Segoe agreed) that if he had interposed Diagram 31 before ⑧⑦ there was no way Black would lose.



167 – 172

Extraordinarily, 68 was yet another instance of shaky technique. If he had forced first at 1 in Diagram 28, he probably would have won.

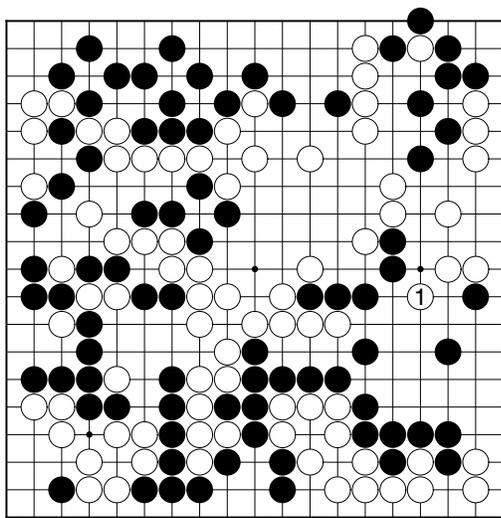


Diagram 28

Go spent eleven minutes on 72 but this was a mistake or oversight (wrong order of moves), which evoked the awful, and thankfully rare, pun *Go-san ga gosan wo shita* (Go made a miscalculation). It was a case of trying too hard. The game was excruciatingly close. Sakata estimated at this stage that White would win by one point.

Correct play for White was to interpose 1 to 6 in Diagram 29 first. Actually, Takagawa thought this made six or seven points difference.

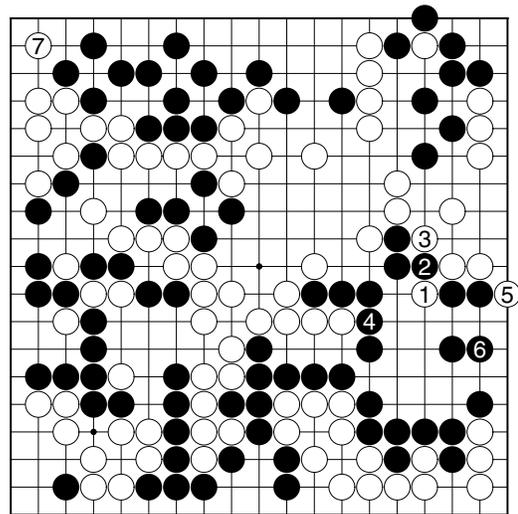
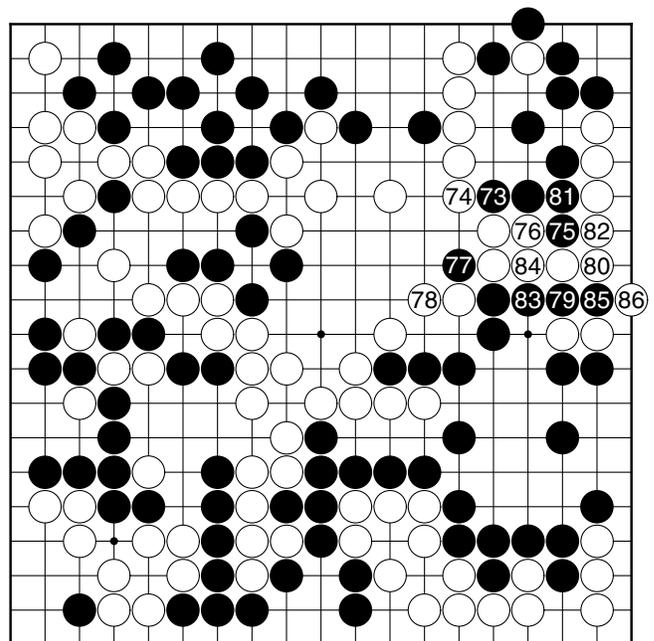


Diagram 29

At this stage Takagawa was down to four minutes left. Young scorekeeper Ishii Mamoru was getting himself ready for *byoyomi*. At this point Go still had two hours left, but he was to squander most of this time. Takagawa was simply making sure he gave up no extra points. Go was trying to find extra points—a harder job. With noisy cormorants perched atop a steep rock barely fifty yards away, the phrase that readily came to the mind of the literary-minded observer was *unome takanome*—gazing with the sharp eyes of a cormorant or hawk.



173 – 186

77 and 79 were skilful.

80 was inevitable, but painful, submission in an area where he should have had forcing moves of his own.

## POSTLUDE

Go having run out of opponents, and with the *Yomiuri* effectively now controlling the rights to the uchikomi format, the era of ten-game matches featuring Go came to an end. It did not mean retirement for him, but perhaps it was assumed that he had got used to playing rather fewer games each year than his rivals and was content to potter along, at least after the disappointment of losing the first Meijin.

His true feelings, however, were revealed in a book he wrote in 2002. Commenting on the curtain coming down on his seventeen-year ten-game match career after the match with Takagawa, and noting that he was still only forty-two and at the height of his go strength, he said, “If I had been beaten down by anyone in a ten-game match, I feel my life as a professional go player would have been over. Indeed, I was confronted by a sense of strain such that, if I had lost, I could not stay in Japan but would have to return to China. The fact is, there had been a custom in the go world, in earlier times, of granting the status of Meijin to a player who gloried in skill that went beyond the summit. But not once did talk ever emerge of granting me the position of Meijin.”

He left the topic there, at the end of a chapter. It comes over with a certain bitterness. He is, however, wrong and unfair. He is unfair because it is not just a matter of granting a title or a bauble. The expectation is that there would be a substantial pension involved, and somebody would have to pay it. The *Yomiuri* created a Meijin tournament that everyone expected him to win. It can hardly be blamed for the fact that someone else won.

Go is also wrong about the lack of discussion, even if it didn't lead anywhere. There were even magazines that, rather naughtily, used the phrase Meijin Go Seigen, but one notable example of a more serious approach was an article in *Kien* (February 1953) entitled “The Go Seigen Meijin Problem” which was a follow-on to a discussion of the current state of the go world on NHK radio, that is, it was a discussion even outside the closed walls of the go magazines. I will leave a more detailed treatment of this debate to a future Go-Fujisawa match book where it belongs. Suffice it to quote one sentence from the debate here: “On the basis of his present results in competition, there is no alternative but to put forward Go Seigen as the first Meijin.”

Nevertheless, the fact remains that to this day Go has not been granted an honorary title in Japan. He was offered the title of Daguoshuo or Great National Champion in Taiwan even before his match exploits were complete, but he modestly declined that in favour of simply Guoshou, omitting the “great”. He was also awarded an honorary doctorate at a Hong Kong university in 1986 (and seemed rather tickled by the idea that the Chancellor was an Englishman!). In recent times he has refused to allow his name to go on the ballot for the Japanese go Hall of Fame, believing that should wait until he dies. And is that really much of an honour, anyway—a plaque in the Nihon Ki-in's basement?

On the other hand, for much of the time he chose to stay outside the ranks of the Nihon Ki-in, and it could easily be argued that the *Yomiuri* built the Nihon Saikyo and then the Meijin tournament around him, expecting him to win.

Takagawa may also be considered to have gone into a sort of decline, though perhaps that was simply a reflection of Sakata's rise. He was to end with a slightly disappointing career record of 660 wins, 504 losses and 5 jigos (56.5% winning ratio). However, as Kitani found fifteen years before when the main ten-game match series began, they took an awful lot out of you, especially if you lost, and remember that he was being clobbered by Go in the three-game matches at the same time. Takagawa eventually reversed that trend, but it seems legitimate to wonder whether Go by then had lost some of his fire—not because of the motor bike accident, as that was not until 1961, but perhaps he had already conquered the final summit in his ten-game matches. Or perhaps simply because his family life had become richer with the arrival of children.

I have covered most of the background in the Prelude, but to recap, the idea of a tournament to find a Meijin, rather than relying on the traditional system of inheritance, had been in the air once the principle had been established by setting up the Honinbo tournament just before World War II. In 1940, Takabe Dohei, joint head of the Kiseisha organisation had even secured the backing of a Kyoto newspaper for a Meijin event. But the Nihon Ki-in spurned Takabe's approaches and his idea petered out into a ten-game match with his co-head Karigane Junichi (which, for good measure, he also lost).