

34 MEIJIN-SEN TOURNAMENT

by Alexander Nosovsky

On September 21-23 the spa town called Atami held the tournament of the 10 best Japanese players. The winner not only received the right to play a match with Kawamura for the title of the strongest renju player in Japan, but also the right to play in the next year World Championship. I maybe was the first of Europeans to watch the Meijin-sen Tournament with my own eyes.

Before the tournament You could hear names of Nara, Sagara, Hasegawa and Nishizono as favorites, but it seemed that Yamaguchi would be able to join the club.

After the first day of the tournament Nara and Nishizono led with 3 points each. Then followed Yamaguchi with 2 points and only after that there came Hasegawa and Sagara with 1.5 points.

But the typhoon came and advantage of the first-day leaders disappeared. The second day was colored with Hasegawa advantage. In a personal match he managed to win over Nara. We should not forget about the three-win-in-a-row of Ooi who won over Nara, Nishimura and Matura all in one day.

After the second day Hasegawa led with 4.5 points. The followed Nara, Ooi, Sagara and Nishizono with 4 points. Yamaguchi had 3 points.

Nishizono won additional game against Sagara for 3-d place.

The last day gave each to his own - Hasegawa didn't lose leadership and after winning all the three games got the right to play the Meijin match. Hasegawa nearly always plays successfully against Japanese players. In the last 7 years it was the 6th time when he won the Meijin-sen. But he never won the match against the Meijin.

Nara also got 3 points the last day but again he was second. It looks like Nara has an unfortunate way of being second, he also lost his chance in Arjeplog WC. Nishizono was third with 6.5 points, Sagara lost the additional match with Nishizono and was fourth with 6.5 points.

1. Hasegawa	7.5
2. Nara	7.0
3. Nishizono	6.5
4. Sagara	6.5
5. Ooi	4.0
6. Nishimura	3.5
7. Yamaguchi	3.0
8. Isobe	3.0
9. Maruyama	2.5
10. Matura	1.5

We must say that Meijin-sen Tournaments are conducted differently as compared to European tournaments.

First of all, before every Meijin-sen game there are two procedures: a colour play-out, and odd-even play out. Depending on the results the Black player either plays Black or changes the colour. That way the players in Japan don't know beforehand which colour they would be playing so it's more difficult for them to get prepared for the opponent.

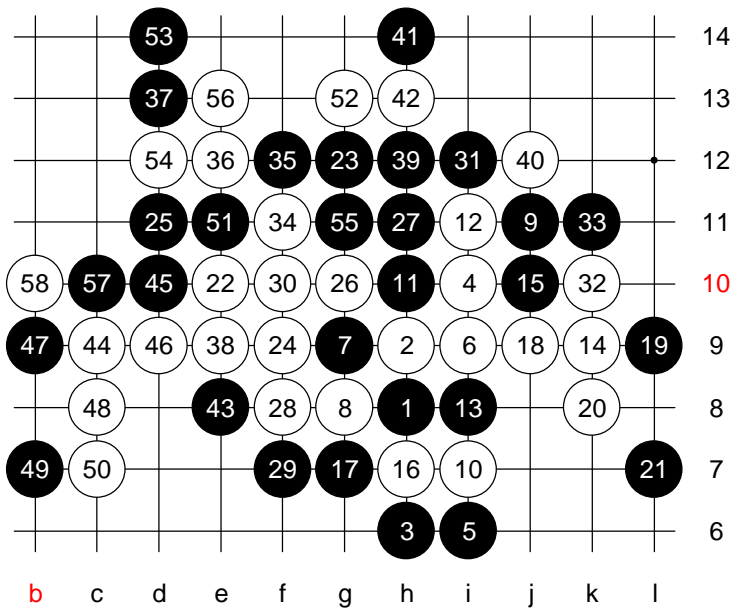
Secondly, there is a *baiomi* rule. i.e. after the player used up all his time he is to play quickly, a move a minute. This is strictly controlled by a referee with a stop-watch. As a rule a *baiomi* player loses, because his adversary plays in the normal tempo. But because of this rule nobody knows when the game will end, the adversary of this player has to wait for the end of the previous tour game. Taking into account three tours a day the third tour game may go far in the night. The quality of the third-tour games of every day leaves much to be desired.

The next tour game begins 10 minutes after the previous one ends. Meal intervals are organized: all the games stop at a certain time and the players go for a meal and then return to their games. Therefore the games of the last tour all begin at a different time: it seems the Japanese didn't take up the European tradition of playing short draws at the last tour, counting points and calculating coefficients.

The games are commented by M.Kozhin:

Meijin-sen-96 was the first important tournament carried under the new debut regulation so it is quite interesting to watch changes in debut repertoire. Indeed, it was only yesterday the 11I and 10I debuts were beyond any competition and now they left the scene and gave place to 3D (16 games), 8D (10) and 11D (8); all the other debuts were shown in the leftover 11 games. If we take up only those three debuts, then reverse was done in 16 games out of 34, i.e. in about half the games (mostly thanks to 8D debut), whereas by the former regulation reverse was done in more than 90% of the games. Black won 6 games, 6 more ended in a draw and 22 games were won by White. 3/4 of points with White stones - nearly the same disbalance but in favour of Black we evidenced before. Such a strong White play can be explained by the fact that with old regulation players nearly always got positions with initial Black advantage, so Black lost the stamina to fight for initiative in an equal position. But the situation must improve with time; You will recall that 8-10 years ago Black quite often contrived to win even 5I debut.

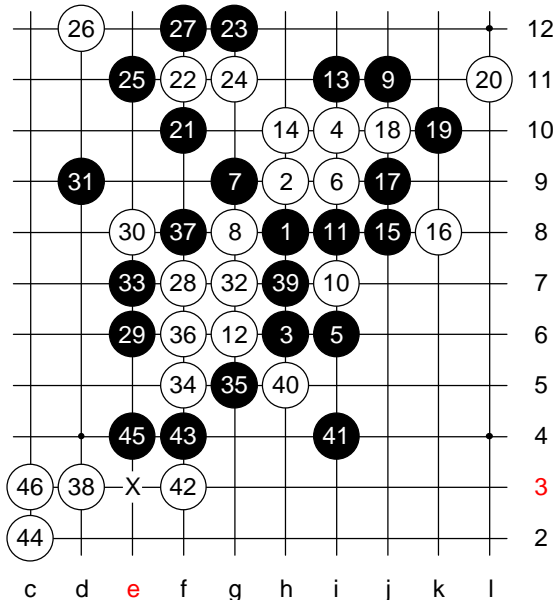
1. Isobe - Nishizono 11D, O58, 5-10, N, 77-120



11 is infrequent but quite possible. 12,14 - natural development, after which White gets initiative. But to use it is quite another thing. If 16-17, then 17-29; if 18-k7, then 19-18: Black holds the position everywhere. White choose the sharpest forced variant. The attack goes strong till move 28, but 29-30 would have stopped it

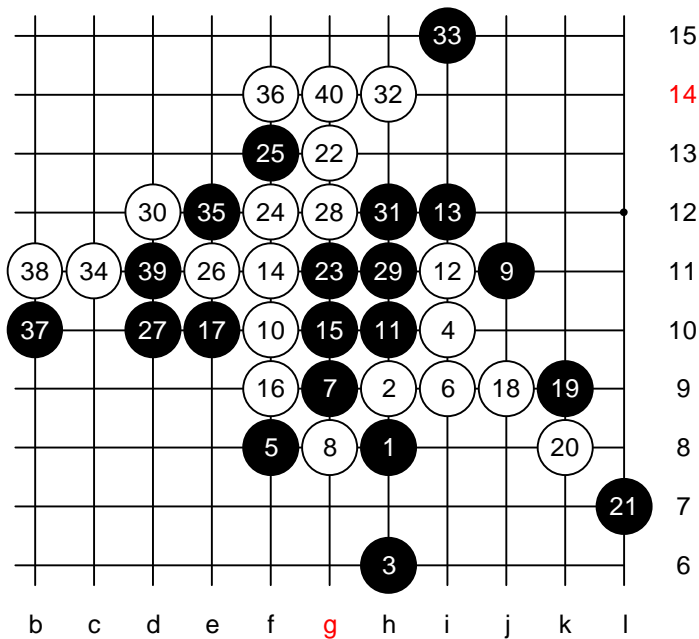
completely and after 29(?) the attack gets its logical ending. But 28-30 gave White a clean win. And still, Black had a defence: 27-43 and if White goes on with 28-34, then 29-38 - and White is completely surrounded.

2. Hasegawa - Nishizono 11D, O46, 5-10, N, 35-120



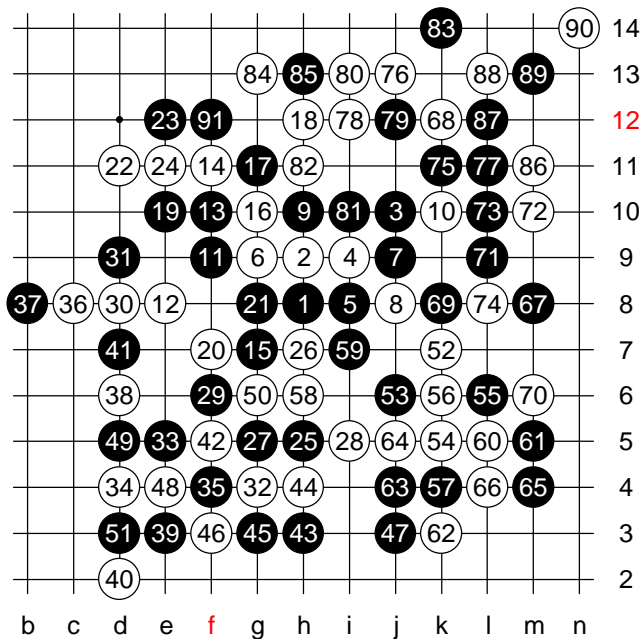
11-13 is played quite often but 13-13 was not so good: there is a future fight for tempo above whereas there still exists a threat of an attack to point 28. In course of a short exchange White gets a 26 stone, after which the Three 30 cannot be closed to point 30 - as a result White wins below. 23-24 could hardly help Black position. Maybe better is 17-k11, 18-20, 19-19, but even there Black has bleak prospects.

3. Ooi - Hasegawa 11D, O40, 5-A, R,109-59



15 It looks like this game
 is a requiem to this
 14 move 5. They used to
 play 16-29, after which
 13 Black held the
 12 position. 16(!) - and
 11 after obvious 17 there
 goes an etude win. If
 10 17-E9, then 18-D10 is
 9 not bad, it
 strengthens the
 position.

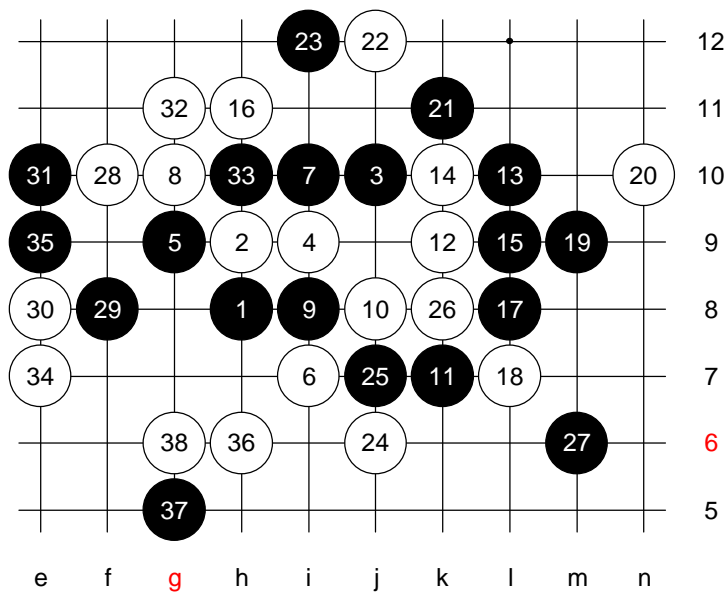
4. Nishimura - Sagara 3D, X91, 5-6, N,120-119



14 We came across an
 interesting move 12 3
 13 times at this tournament.
 12 After move 14 White
 position is quite sturdy.
 11 Moves 15 - 23 is a semi-
 attacking fight for
 10 initiative. 24(?) - loss of
 9 tempo, You should go
 8 down at once e.g. with
 7 24-16. Black plays 25 not
 6 afraid of White activity on
 5 his left and he can get a
 winning position after 31-
 32, 33-31 (or still better
 29-32, 31-29). With move
 32 White takes a lost point
 - and the game drags on.

Move 13-J11 seems stronger.

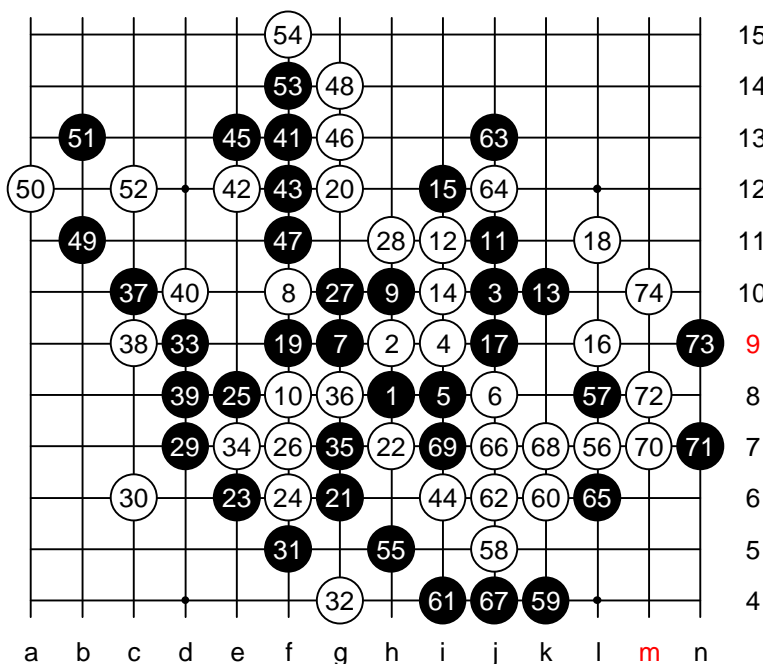
5. Nishimura - Hasegawa 3D, O38, 5-9, N, 50-48



In the classical 15-move position they nearly always played 16-17, but 16-16 is not at all worse. The forced right-flank exchange doesn't do Black any good; if you continue the attack 23-M10, then 24-M11 and Black is extinguished below. After 24 White advantage is doubtless. It would have been

much better to play 17-23 at once, after which - positional fighting.

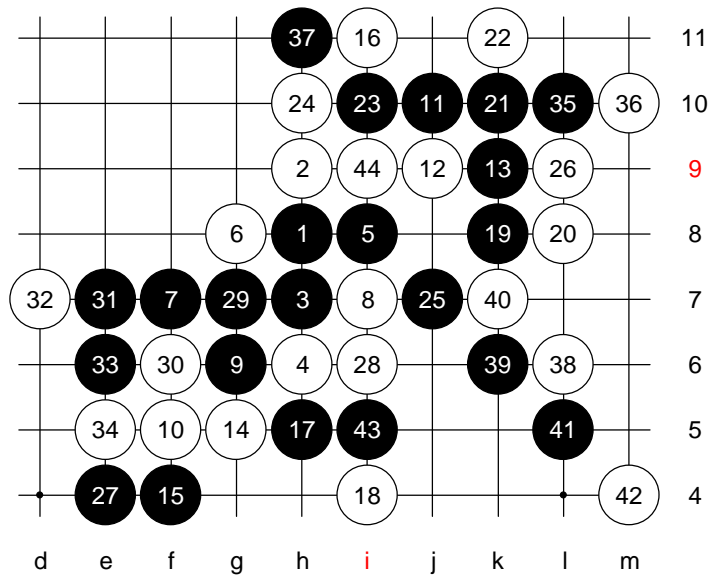
6. Nishizono - Nara 3D, O66, 5-7, N,120-120



The 19-move position has been known for a long time. They used to play 20-36, 21-25, after which Black position is practically won. 20(!) - a wonderful move, controlling the key vertical and at the same time cutting off connections from above. If You play now 21-25, then 22-21; if 23-25 then 24-23; if

21-27 then 22-21; and if 21-E9 then 22-E8. 23 - the most natural attack continuation, but after 24-35(!) White has a wonderful position; and 23-35, 25-23 cuts down development possibilities considerably. 24- inaccurate; after 25-31 Black could have begun a nice attack. 25-25 also looks strong, but after 26 White manages to defend himself.

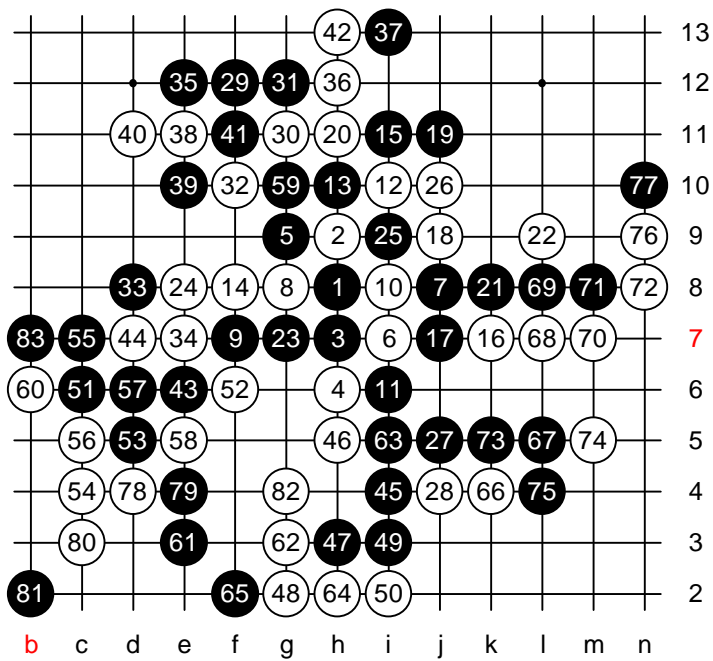
7. Ooi - Isobe 8D, O44, 5-A, N,120-22



Even with the main move 5 Black is hard put to play this debut. In this game they played an infrequent move 14, which was made to prepare the ground for move 20. E.g. if 21-25 then 22-28 (22-26 loses after 23-40), 23-21, 24-22, 25-23, 26-35, 27-32, 28-13 (!), 30-37(!) (27-28, 28-13, 30-30). But if You play 21-32 or even

19-32 Black can win. A poorly thought out attack in the right flank resulted in Black loss of tempo and later - to the loss of the game.

8. Hasegawa - Nara 8D, /83, 5-59, R,120-120



An interesting substantial game by the tournament leaders is not commented.