AUSTRALIAN ONLINE GO CLUB

Connecting Go across a continent

Go in Australia has not grown for many decades, membership has hovered around 350 for many years. We know there are players in the community but have been unable to engage with them or encourage them to start clubs or register with the AGA. This is not atypical behaviour for Go clubs around the world but it takes on a whole new meaning when mapped across the expanse of Australia. To put distances in perspective – London to Moscow is the same as Sydney to Perth and while the distances between other major cities is less, they are significant. Also, travel across a city such as Sydney or Melbourne can take 60 to 90 minutes – and that's on a good day.

The true nature of the problem was clearly brought to light in a survey of members in 2017. The key problems the respondents identified were 'not enough players in my area', 'no AGA club near where I live or work', 'not enough time to play', 'hard to find a teacher' and 'hard to improve'.

The Australian Go Association like all amateur associations around the world cannot wave a magic wand and set up clubs across the country, make people want to play, visit their club/home to teach them or give a person more time to play Go.

At first sight these seem insurmountable problems, but David Mitchell shared an idea with Tony Oxenham, James Kaaden and Michael Hyde which has evolved over the past 6 months and addresses a large proportion of the problems.

The solution

The solution is not a world shattering big bang idea or piece of technology but the assemblage of components that together work to create a virtual Go Club - The Australian Online Go Club.

Using common Internet services, the club enables people to find each other, arrange games at a convenient time and eliminate travel. This in turn lead to the creation of friendships across the country. In addition, volunteer teachers play teaching games and give lectures which form a video library that will help people learn in the short and long term.

At the beginning we really didn't know what was required but what was clear that we needed a clear set of aims and to target the right audience.

Aims & audience

Address the issues identified by Australian Go players
- **Get more people to play - not enough players**
- **Ensure there's a local AGA club**
- **Teaching and learning to improve kyu players**
- **Agile approach for people with limited time**

A nationwide community practicing the art of Go;
To focus on kyu players and those in remote locations.
A group of Dan players who will teach & record lessons
Recording lessons to create a library of videos, and
Individuals should not have to pay.

Our strategic goals were clear and are the fundamental drivers for the club.

The virtual Go Club is limited to Australian Go players with a particular focus on kyu players and those in remote areas. Our aim is to create a close friendly environment where people don't feel threatened and can find help so they can play and improve their skill.

To solve the technical issues, we decided to use whatever free Internet services did the job and to have a flexible, agile approach – no sacred cows, nothing set in concrete.

Constraints

No solution can do everything and we did identify some things that we felt were critical for success.

Dedicate the club to players in Australia

Allow the members to shape the club activities

No way for pedophiles or others to use our club

Give people maximum privacy while allowing them to contact other members

Overall operating costs to be zero

As mentioned above our aim is to create a sense of community so we limited membership of the club to Australian Go Players. Some people are happy to play on open servers but there are consistent complaints of bad or rude behaviour, refusal to review a game, silly time limits and worst of all ridicule of beginners by stronger players. So, we limited membership to create the environment where a sense of security, community and friendship can flourish.

Member behaviour was another key factor to success, we defined a set of principles that we believe are self-evident. We felt that stating them would help people know what to expect, what is expected of them and the overall purpose of the club.

The principles are:

1. The art and practice of Go is something to be enjoyed.
2. Respect and courtesy are essential whether playing or reviewing a game.
3. Learning and teaching are more important than winning.
4. Playing games is essential to improve your and your opponent's skills.
5. A match consists of two parts, playing and reviewing the game.
6. Everybody has ideas that should be listened to.

Every member agrees to abide by these principles. Being in Australia and being a known person also helps moderate some of the uncivilised behaviour found on Go Servers without the need for referees or policing.

We had a hard decision to make when it came to children. Paedophiles stalk and groom young people on the Internet and that's a real concern, nobody wanted to provide a platform that could possibly be used for that purpose. Unfortunately, this meant restricting membership to adults. As and when technology improves and there is reasonable protection for children we will be more than happy to include them in the club.

Privacy and security of information was another concern – we decided to collect and publish only the most basic information about a member on our websites, information that is in the public domain – the member name, state, rank and optionally KGS, OGC and IGS user names.

People who register must agree this information can be used by the club with the guarantee that the club will not sell it. The club does not need any more information to function because communications take place using Facebook messaging so delicate contact information such are email address, phone number etc is simply not required. The only reason member information is on the website is to help players find somebody of a similar grade, or in their state or to find a teacher.

The set-up of the club was cost free. Most of the services and facilities we use are self-managing. The hardest administration process is registering a new member on the web site which consists of adding their name, rank and state to a table on the website (about 2 minutes work per member). The web sites are hosted on a popular Web Hosting provider at minimal cost. (Note: David Mitchell hosts the sites on his business hosting account so there is no additional cost to him or the club).

Time is the biggest cost - playing teaching games or reviewing games does take time. Game commentaries generally take about 40 minutes plus the time to play the game but we are particularly pleased with the reception of the game

commentary videos, each video is watched by around 10 people and the library currently stands at 55 and growing.

Weekly lectures started at the beginning of March and again are recorded – this means the audience will be larger than just those attending. The lectures are between 30 and 40 minutes long and take the lecturer a couple of hours to prepare.

It should be noted that we have put copyright on all videos and teaching materials – there is no problem sharing, we just don't want somebody taking financial advantage of the volunteer teacher's efforts.

Technical solution

As mentioned earlier rather than build something new we decided to leverage an Internet of Things (IoT) approach.
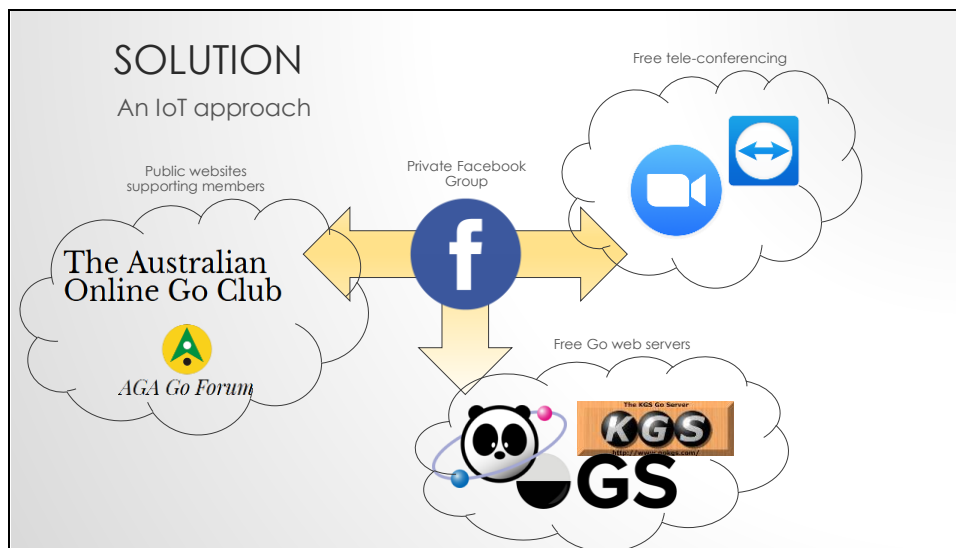
The central component is a private Facebook group which acts as the repository for videos, request for games, questions and social networking. (Note: players message each other through Facebook to arrange games).

We established two websites because some information should not disappear from view down a Facebook discussion list. The AOGC website contains the principles, policies, member and teacher lists and a means to register. The second web site was created to contain documented lessons.

Games would be played on any Go Server provided the server allowed the players to save the kifu.

Game reviews would be through any free teleconferencing facility but so far everybody has used Zoom.us which is easy, simple, free and the video quality is more than sufficient for the need. It should be noted that videos are only published in the private Facebook Group and only if both people agree.

The project & story so far

This is not a one-off project, it's the establishment of a club and organization that can continue for many years. The goals for the first year are:
- 60 members – a number equivalent to 20% of the AGA Go Playing population
- Two teaching videos published per week in the Facebook group
- Increase sense of community among Australian Go Players.

The following is a brief history of the past 6 months

- A group of 4 started in October 2017 with just Facebook and Zoom. Playing, reviewing and recording games against each other.

- The need for the websites to hold the club rules & policies was quickly identified and the sites created using WordPress.

- The group grew to 10 by January 2018 – it was then clear we needed a member list and teacher list.

- Five dan players volunteered to become teachers and membership increased to around 15 by the end of January

- We established a Board of Directors for the club consisting of David Mitchell, James Kaaden, Michael Hyde, Cary Jin, Xin Lei, Cindy Xu and Daniel Li.

- Admin of the web sites was shared in early Feb and it became clear we needed a method for people to register so we could keep the website member list and Facebook member list in sync.

- In mid-Feb it was suggested we start lectures. Following consultation with members it was decided to hold lectures on Monday evenings at 7:00pm

- In early March membership reached 40 with more than 68% being kyu players.

In summary, we are on track with membership numbers and well ahead with the teaching videos. It's hard to measure the sense of community but as there was none before we must be doing something.

The game commentary videos are proving to be a very effective method of teaching – every video is watch by at least 10 other people, sometime much more. We have even greater expectation for the video lectures.

We have already extended the scope from game commentaries to lectures and are looking at a weekly 'Go Clinic' to address members questions.

We also believe this solution to be scalable both up and down. "Up" in that we are thinking of inviting players from New Zealand to join thus extending the scope but still retaining the antipodean flavour. "Down" is also possible because the solution can operate in a much smaller geographic area than Australia, it could work on a city or regional basis.

Appendix

AOGC Website – club.artofgo.org

The Australian Online Go Club

Home ⌄   Members   Teachers   Join Us   Links   Game of the Week

Home

This is the home of the Australian Online Go Club. To apply to join complete & submit the form on the Join Us page when you submit the form you will be directed to our Facebook group. There is no fee but please note, we only accept adult Australian Go Association members or members of an Australian Go Club. If you are resident in Australia, over 18, want to join and do not belong to a club please contact David Mitchell – david@1wilshire2230.net.au

Before asking to join please read the About and Privacy pages which explains why the club was established, how your information is used, how to get a game and other useful things.

Members of the club practice the art and skill of Go and abide by the following principles that we hold to be self-evident...

1. The art and practice of Go is something to be enjoyed.
2. Respect and courtesy are essential whether playing or reviewing a game.
3. Learning and teaching are more important than winning.
4. Playing games is essential to improve your and your opponent's skills.
5. A match consists of two parts, playing and reviewing the game.
6. Everybody has ideas that should be listened to.

Go Forum lessons – forum.artofgo.org

AGA Go Forum

Lessons for AGA members

Beginner Lessons   *Intermediate lessons*   *Strong Kyu lessons*   *Dan lessons*   *Game Review*   *Video lessons*

Home Page

The Australian Go Association's aims are to promote the game of Go in Australia – this involves co-ordinating Go activities in Australia, in particular, a range National Tournaments and conferring National Titles and individual rankings.

To help players improve the AGA also maintains teaching material on this website for members to help improve overall strength. The contributors to the web site include An Younggil 8P; David Ormerod 5d; David Mitchell 4d and James Kaaden 3d. All articles are moderated before posting but if you spot any problems, please let us know through the 'contact us' page.

We also review and comment on games or positions, so send your game (in .sgf format) to us using the Contact Us page.

(c) Copyright – The copyright for all material on this site is with the author. All material published is available free of charge and may be shared with anybody. No material may be used for commercial purposes either direct or indirect.

Facebook Group Discussion page

Australian Go Club

Search: Australian Go Club

David | Home | Find Friends

Australian Go Club
🔒 Closed group

About
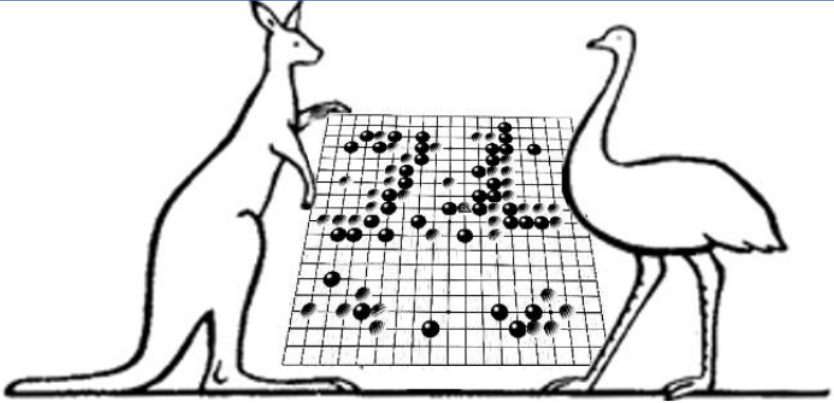**Discussion**
Members
Events
Videos
Photos
Files
Manage Group

Search this group

Shortcuts

- Australian Go Club
- Students Playing Go [S...
- UNSW Go Club
- USYD Go Society [2]
- Australian Go Congress
- Farina & David IT Help ...
- Sydney Go Club
- Queensland Go Soci... [5]
- Australian Go Associ... [1]
- Australian Go Associ... [5]
- Melbourne City Go Club
- Go (Weiqi) Players... [20+]

Joined ▾ | ✔ Notifications | ➤ Share | ••• More

PINNED POST

David Mitchell uploaded a file.
20 February at 16:39

Some of the new players have asked questions about the way the club
works. We have created the attached FAQ document to help. Enjoy!

AOGC FAQ .pdf
PDF

Download | Preview | Upload Revision | History (2)

👍 Cary Jin, Michael 'Micka' Hyde and 3 others   Seen by 28

👍 Like   💬 Comment

RECENT ACTIVITY ▾

Peter Simpson
Yesterday at 00:53

Facebook page events

Australian Go Club
🔒 Closed group

- About
- Discussion
- Members
- **Events**
- Videos
- Photos
- Files
- Manage Group

Search this group

Shortcuts
- Australian Go Club
- Students Playing Go [S...
- UNSW Go Club
- USYD Go Society [2]
- Australian Go Congress
- Farina & David IT Help ...
- Sydney Go Club
- Queensland Go Soci... [5]
- Australian Go Associ... [1]
- Australian Go Associ... [5]
- Melbourne City Go Club
- Go (Weiqi) Players... [20+]
- Baduk-Go-Weiqi W... [20+]
- See more

https://www.facebook.com/groups/115841020120043/about/

Events   Calendar

Settings ▼   **+ Create Event**

Today

19:00   **Cary's Lecture - Direction of Play**
https://zoom.us/j/122576557
James Kaaden and 5 other friends are going.
[Maybe ⇕] [✉ Invite Members] [✎ Edit] [✕ Cancel]

Monday, 12 March 2018

19:00   **David Mitchell's lecture on trick moves**
https://zoom.us/j/194541458
James Kaaden and 4 other friends are going.
[✉ Invite Members] [✎ Edit] [✕ Cancel]

Monday, 19 March 2018

19:00   **James Kaaden's - Rewire your Go**
https://zoom.us/j/902424926

● Chat (8)

Facebook page videos

Dan vs DDK; 4 stones; comments aimed ay all Kyu players. This is the review of the game I played with John Smith today. Thank you for the game, John. 😊 John played black with a 4-stone handicap. Reading and life & death is often the determining factor of a game. If John or others can improve on these aspects of Go, their level will probably soar rapidly.

https://www.facebook.com/cary.jin.5/videos/g.115841029129943/2012697972078742/?type=2&ifg=1