

BGA Election Communication from Colin Williams

Fellow BGA Member,

With Toby Manning retiring after many years of service I have put myself forward as a candidate for President of the BGA. This is a brief note to introduce myself and explain my background, and my plans should I be elected.

Having played chess, bridge, and other mindsports in my youth the one that stuck with me was Go. I fell in love with the interplay of strategy and tactics, and the magical way that the board position changes and flows throughout the game, even though the stones remain static.

I have been part of the BGA management team as Secretary for several years now and was on the governance committee that managed the conversion to a CLG (Company Limited by Guarantee). Some of you will have seen me at various tournaments up and down the country, usually delivering the clocks and sets that the BGA loans out for local events.

I have represented the BGA at several EGF meetings, both online and in person.

The BGA is there to support and promote Go across the whole of the UK. During my time running BGA tournaments I have organised the first ever British Congress in Northern Ireland, and initial discussions are underway to hold it in Edinburgh next year (no promises).

Go deserves to have a much larger player base in the UK, as it already does in other European countries such as France and Germany. This is an issue the BGA management team has discussed frequently. Ultimately the main factor in recruiting and encouraging new players will be the actions of all of us as active players, though I believe there is much the BGA can still do to support us in that.

I would like to see an easier path into Go for people who have heard about the game and want to learn more. This means amongst other things having:

- a website where the landing page is tailored to new players;
- a clear process for handling enquiries from new players, including knowing where to point them to ensure the people they talk to are best able to speak to and encourage beginners;
- better collateral to introduce people to the game, in terms of both online and physical material;

- better support for clubs who want to implement a local recruitment/advertising drive.

We already have a very active Youth Group who organise a number of events including the annual Go camp at Caythorpe. They are successfully expanding the number of youth members and players, and I am keen to hear ideas from those involved as to what more can be done there.

To support and retain our current players, especially the younger ones, we need to make sure the BGA is relevant to them and communicates in appropriate ways. This will mean expanding out into relevant social media rather than relying solely on e-mails.

Traditionally the BGA has focused on supporting face-to-face play through clubs and tournaments. Under the current management team that has started to change with the introduction of some initiatives to support online play, such as the Discord channel for student clubs to use. However I am sure there is still a community of online Go players for whom the BGA remains a 'closed book'. Our remit is to support and promote Go in the UK, and I believe that should include online players just as much as face-to-face players. Ideally I would like to see the BGA hold an annual online e-Congress (as in 2021), though from personal experience I fully understand the work involved in that, and will not enter into it lightly.

Under the current management team, the BGA already has a number of initiatives under way. These include a technology update to bring our website server and supporting software up to date, improvements to our payment systems to give better links to our membership forms, and the ability for tournaments to accept entry fees by card (currently under test). I am keen to continue these to their completion, and to implement further efficiencies to reduce the administrative burden on the BGA, its volunteers, and its members – especially those who run tournaments.

We must not forget that the BGA faces a number of other significant challenges. Two I would highlight here are:

- a) Cheating, especially the use of AI. This is not specifically a UK issue, and other EGF members are grappling with the same problem. Sadly in recent times we have seen a number of accusations of cheating. Some of these have involved UK players, and some foreign players at UK events. To help manage these issues we have introduced both the BGA Code of Conduct and the Disputes Panel, with the latter acting as a clear and impartial process for handling complaints about BGA members. We have also introduced guidelines for players in our representative teams as to how best to protect themselves from such accusations, especially in online events. We will need to continue to be vigilant and adopt best practice in this field as it develops.

- b) Our membership of the EGF is overall a good thing, however changes there have meant that our membership fees have increased significantly in recent years. The EGF itself has had financial difficulties, but now in part due to the fee increases seems to be coming out of them. It is very likely that at their 2024 AGM the EGF Executive will propose a new membership fee system. We have already been discussing with them what that might look like. We need to continue to work with them to try and shape their proposals in a manner acceptable to us. We, along with other EGF members, also need to ensure that future EGF budgets remain 'balanced'.

I am very much aware of the management challenges the BGA has. The President is the titular head of the BGA, and as such the main point of contact for external organisations. The BGA though is run by the Board of Directors, and the President on their own cannot change BGA policy without the agreement of the Board. This consensus-based approach is something I am familiar with and is entirely consistent with managing a volunteer run organisation.

There are many things that I would like the BGA to do, but we remain limited by the skills that our volunteers have, and the amount of effort they are willing to contribute. It is easy to ask or expect more than people are prepared to give, which can quickly lead to them backing away altogether. Implementing change will only be successful if fully supported by both the volunteers and the wider membership. The result of this is that change can come, but typically will have to be introduced more slowly than in a commercial organisation.

If you approve of my thinking, I would very much appreciate your vote at the AGM on May 23rd, either in person or through a proxy vote.

Finally, for those interested in it, I have included a brief 'Go Cv' below.

1970s	Learned to play at school
1980s/90s	With Steve Bailey ran the 'West Surrey Handicap Tournament' for many years. This was a weekend event aimed at kyu players, with a teaching day and a tournament of four stone handicap games.

** Playing break due to family and work commitments **

2018	Started again at the Bristol club. Gradually took over the organising of the annual Wessex tournament.
2020 on	I became BGA Secretary, and hence also a director of the T Mark Hall Foundation. I created the Online Committee, and for a short time managed the Technology Committee. I have created the BGA YouTube channel, and edited and posted the initial videos on it.

2021 Supported by Matt Marsh and Tony Atkins I created and ran the BGA's first online e-Congress, a two-week event with several different tournaments and lectures. With 245 players from 36 countries this was the largest event run by the BGA since hosting the European Congress in 1992.

2021 on In addition I took on the chair of the Tournaments Committee, responsible for arranging BGA tournaments and the provision of kit to local events (aided by several dedicated helpers).