

Why do I want to be President of the BGA?

Gerry Gavigan

The answer is simple: I want Go to be more popular in the UK and if elected I will use the role of President to expand an outwards looking strategy to raise awareness and promote grass roots activity, searching out and taking every opportunity to raise awareness of the game in order to increase participation.

I have no doubt that it will be a thankless and difficult task but I consider it to be front and central if Go is to thrive in the coming years.

While it is important to promote excellence we also need a wide and deep base. We can draw on analogies from strange places:

The Premier League is recognised for its excellence across the footballing world but if you ask enthusiasts what they admire about the game in England and Wales you might be surprised to discover that it is the FA pyramid. In 2006 there were 40,000 clubs registered with the FA. No-one playing for or watching Beckenham FC is worrying about winning the European Championship but they also have a non-zero chance of playing in the FA Cup final at Wembley.

BGA has a rich resource as I discovered when I was looking for material for a lecture on the history of Go in Europe that I was invited to give at UCL a couple of summers ago.

Research for that lecture was in equal part interesting and deflating. The game we love has a long history of struggling to be recognised. I have spent a lot of time trying to understand why Go is not more popular.

As a result of this experience and with my fellow trustees having established London Go Centre (LGC) as a charity with objects to promote Go, I have adopted a strategy for promoting Go and LGC more commonly associated with David Bowie: fake it until you make it.

(In a curious co-incidence he starred in “The Man Who Fell to Earth” written by Walter Tevis, author of “The Queen’s Gambit”)

Chess has so many stories to tell and is embedded in our culture. It does not have a name recognition problem.

We need to create those stories for Go from past and future activities to help embed Go and raise awareness.

As President I would facilitate greater visibility of our activities and successes, working hard on PR and promotion.

For example I found out only by accident about the online European cities league and Gene Wong's team's success this year. Other themes include raising the profile of the Terry Stacey Grand Prix.

I would want the board to adopt some of the practices used on LGC's X (Twitter) account and make BGA's public facing activity a channel for both news and richer celebration of success.

There are some specific topics for which I am seeking a mandate:

The biggest tournament in the UK should be the British Open.

BGA should provide a guarantee/grant of £5000/year to be made available to any group (**except LGC/London**) that wants to run it with the London Open as a template, e.g., arranging for a profession-in-residence offering lectures, reviews and advice.

After five years of hard work “Not The London Open” is starting to see strength, depth and international participation similar but at the moment less than the London Open. It is my aspiration that the British Open surpasses the London Open.

The final of the British Championship should be a high profile event

The event should celebrate and promote success with a higher profile inwardly and an attempt to use it as part of the outward facing PR/outreach drive.

For the moment the promotion and presentation should be centred on the attractiveness of LGC. However others would be free to present alternative locations.

As part of the celebration of that success the British Champion should be the automatic choice for the World Amateur Go Championships (WAGC) and then the runner-up before exploring other options.

BGA should explore the possibility of introducing qualification tournaments for the Korean Prime Minister’s Cup and the World Amateur Pair Go

With the objective of raising awareness, my suggestion would be an online tournament across the year on OGS.

A new look for BGA

The website should be reskinned and simplified in order to focus on informing and attracting newcomers. It is a rich resource but the front page is visually confusing for the newcomer or passer-by. Member specific material should be behind the front page.

Encouraging wider participation

As part of all this I would endeavour to persuade others to do more, thus widening the actuality and perception of inclusivity and freeing up the President to do the difficult and potentially unrewarding task of raising the visibility of Go externally.

I would like to move the BGA from doing stuff to enabling stuff. I would also like to reverse the probably unintended consequences of centralising activity to the BGA. In days long ago club secretaries had bigger roles, I would like to try to restore the importance of that role.

I would like to see the BGA board stopping doing things that could be better done by others in support of British Go.

Creation of more Go centres across the UK.

Thanks to TMark Hall's legacy we have LGC.

Internationally it is recognised as an important resource. The European Go Federation has benefited from its existence. We are in discussions with the Nihon Kiin to bring the WAGC to London. This would be a European/western initiative. A number of top Europeans have indicated a willingness to make it work. I would want the BGA to be prominent.

I would work on diluting the perception that LGC is somehow in competition with BGA but rather a strategic resource.

For example the BGA could benefit by relying on LGC's active YouTube channel (which has over 1400 subscribers and more BGA videos than does the more BGA YouTube channel. We do not need two channels. It is not a competition. We should focus our efforts not dilute them.

Looking to the future, BGA should be trying to replicate the LGC model in other parts of the country.

LGC the charity is a template that could be adopted by others. I would like to set up a working group to see how we can achieve this. It must be possible to attract philanthropy from education and social trusts if not sponsorship. As a charity LGC could seek legacies similar to that of TMark in order to fund the creation of these centres.

Surely Cambridge and Manchester are candidates. We should work on identifying others.

My objectives are ambitious. Success will neither be obvious nor quick. This does not mean we should not try.

Thank you for reading.