

Basic principles of one-minute gomoku

Written by Zoltán László and Sandra Jones

11th May 2017

The idea to write this article came to one of us, Sandra, who was inspired by the success of Gomokuworld's Online World Blitz Cup 2017 and wanted to give some material to those who are relatively new to one-minute swap2 gomoku to help them better understand this kind of sport and make progress. Obviously, progress is achieved by practice, but it seemed to her that it is essential to understand some basic principles and to practice in the right way, unlike she often did – she usually simply clicked to entertain herself, not trying hard.

To write a good and accurate article, Sandra asked Zoltán, one of the best one-minute players, for help, and the result is this article, which was written jointly by us and essentially conveys Zoltán's philosophy.

His philosophy is based on the notion that in one-minute gomoku, there are four essential components of skill: defence, attack, speed, and creativity. Of them, defence has to be learned first. Correspondingly, there are a few levels you have to consecutively pass in order to become a good one-minute player.

Initially you are at level 1 – absence of elementary skills, that is, you often miss simple wins of yours and your opponent. Let us call this level “beginner.”

As long as you miss simple wins, studying more complicated things (e.g., tricky swap2s and openings) will not help you play better. You first have to learn to instantly see simple wins.

Thus, your first aim is to reach the level at which you never miss a two- or three-moves-long win. To achieve this aim, you must pay attention in your training games primarily to this aspect, that is, to focus on not missing a simple win.

Hard training will lead you to reaching level 2 – let us call it “advanced.” In a game between an advanced player and a beginner, the former is more likely to win because he makes fewer mistakes.

And it is only now, when you practically never miss a two- or three-moves-long win, that it is time to start working on the next component – attack. Basically, it is about fighting for the initiative and/or advantage. In a match between two advanced players, the most decisive factor is who is better at attack.

Here, you can choose between two different attacking tactics, positional and direct. Of course, sometimes you cannot really choose, or, to be exact, sometimes the choice is dictated by the position. You need to understand the basics of positional play – that is, the idea of accumulating resources in a certain area to later use them to create threats. And the most dangerous kind of a direct attack is a double attack. A double attack is basically an attacking move that creates a position in which there are at least two different ways to continue the attack and the defending player can block only one of them.

Obviously, one cannot learn to play gomoku only by playing one-minute games, so you need to play

longer games as well. Thorough thinking will help you understand deep reasons for each move and help well understand gomoku in general, which is essential for playing gomoku at a high level.

When you reach a certain level of quality of your moves, you are at level 3 – let us call it “expert” - and starting from this level your speed matters a lot. In a game between an expert and an advanced player, the former is more likely to win, although the difference is smaller than between level 1 and level 2, and if two experts face each other, usually the most decisive factor is speed.

A good example is the WBC match between Matiss and BBJ as well as the WBC match between Gergő and Fire. Matiss and Gergő tried to out-calculate their opponents and were crushed by speed.

Another good example is the WBC match between Peking and Zukole. They are very good at calculating, but came to competing in speed. Zukole was losing 4-6 after the first ten games and then started playing faster, which allowed him to eventually win the match.

Note that if you start playing too fast and focusing on the clock rather than on the position, you may start missing wins and giving the initiative and advantage to your opponent, but if you start thinking too deep, you may be crushed by speed.

As soon as you reach the expert level, you need to start working on your speed. This is done by learning shapes in the process of playing as well as by analysing positions in which you had a difficulty choosing a move or from which you lost. It is really critical to analyse your mistakes and correct them.

Zoltán denotes this by the Hungarian word “rutin” and explains that it is an automated algorithm, i.e., in each position he knows how to play, how the opponent can respond, and how to play next. Having played dozens of thousands of games, he says he can easily predict next moves from the opponent's style, and this is obviously a big advantage.

As soon as you build your own “rutin” and achieve a speed comparable to that of, say, Fire, you are at level 4 – let us call it “master”. In a game between a master and an expert, the former is more likely to win, but the difference is less than between level 2 and level 3.

It is only after you become a master that you should learn more subtle things. One of such things is that the time that your opponent spends on his moves depends on your moves, so you can try to confuse your opponent by putting him in non-obvious positions. Also, besides in-game traps, players can use pre-game traps like various schemes or prepared swap2s. Pre-game traps may be quite effective in a tournament like the WBC because the opponent has no time to analyse.

Such subtle things are what it means to be creative, which is the last remaining component on the list in the beginning of the article, and learning such things will make you a real ace of one-minute gomoku – like Zoltán or even better, as there is no limit for improvement!