

The Game of Go

The History: Go is one of the oldest board games that originated in China over 2,000 years ago. It is enjoyed in many countries around the world by more than 40 million players! Despite the simple rules, the game of Go is rich in strategy and history. It is said that the game takes moments to learn and a lifetime to master. There have been many wars and battles waged on the principles of Go. Two players play the game and the object is to use one's stones to surround an opponent and dominate a larger portion of the board territory to win. There are no other Go sets anywhere like this one!

The board (goban): A high-quality board is made from 100% silicone that resists creases and lies flat when you're ready to play, unlike the vinyl mats that retain their creases and must always be rolled to prevent creasing. The surface is non-slip, which prevents pieces from being scattered when the board is accidentally bumped. The coordinates are labeled alphanumerically according to standard Go format of 19 horizontal lines and 19 vertical lines so both players can see the same coordinates. The standard-sized grid has 361 points and is cleanly printed in black ink. There are "star points" which are shown by using points on certain intersections. These "star points" are served just for the sole purpose of direction; therefore have no special meaning to the game. For reasons of perspective, the correct grid setup is in the form of a rectangle instead of a square. The long side should be stretching between the players, with the short side facing each player. From the players' perspective, the angle will make the grid appear square.

The stones (goishi): 181 black stones and 180 white stones are included in this set. These Japanese style biconvex stones are made from a high quality plastic known for its excellent aesthetic qualities and weight. There is more "heft" to the high quality plastic stones when compared to standard plastic ones. The goishi fit snugly on the grid points. As one customer has stated, "the pieces are supposed to not quite fit -- the (somewhat abstract) war game should be sized so that the stones will crowd and jostle each other, symbolic of the tensions of war and conflict." We couldn't have said it better!

The case: The nylon pouch with zipper holds the stones and board making the full-sized Go set ideal for travel. The board will best fit when folded into thirds.

Caring for the board (goban): The non-slip board may collect lint and dust from surfaces over time. Don't worry; it's easy to clean! We recommend wiping the surface with a soapy cloth and rinsing with water to clean. A lint brush or sticky tape may also be used. Your board should last for many years if not a lifetime when cared for properly.

Caring for the stones (Goishi): To keep your stones clean, we recommend placing them into a kitchen colander strainer with soapy water, then rinse. Lay them on a flat surface to dry. Another customer suggested, "I just put the stones in mesh bags and put them through the washing machine with some mild laundry detergent."

The Object of the GO Game: The object of the game is to capture as many of your opposing player's stones as possible. The end of the game is known when none of the players can set any of their stones on the board. At that time, the players add up their opponent's stones they have captured along with the amount of territory conquered. The player with the highest score is the winner.

Number of Players: The game of GO is traditionally played between two people.

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The GO Rules: Starting with black, each player places one stone on the board's intersecting points in turn. When stones are played so that it causes its opposing player's stone(s) to become surrounded, with out any way out, those stones are captured. The player's capturing stones are left on the board in order to mark their territory. The captured stones are removed from the board and collected by the player who captured the territory. In addition, this captured territory is no longer a playable territory.

A player cannot play a stone to a location if such a play would cause a previous position to be repeated.

Key Terms and Concepts

Eyes – Something extremely important to realize is that a group of 8 stones set in a square is difficult to capture because if the opponent places their stone inside this square, under most circumstances, that stone is immediately captured by the surrounding group. Now, normally no player would ever make such a move. This unoccupied point in the middle of the group is an example of an “eye”. An eye is any empty point that is surrounded completely by pieces of the same color, which is always difficult for an opponent to capture. However, “eyes” are not completely impossible to take over – the group of 8 stones can be captured by an opponent who first occupies the 12 surrounding points. After this, the group of 8 stones is trapped – if the player who owns the 8 stones plays to the middle of the group; the group of 9 stones would be immediately captured having no remaining ways out. Therefore, this is the only situation where it is legitimate for the opponent to play a stone to the middle because in doing so, the last remaining chance to become free is gone and the group is captured. The stone just played would be left surrounded by 4 ways out.

Ko – Ko is a local situation in which a position can be repeated indefinitely. For example, lay a white stone on the edge of the board and a black stone three points away from it also on the edge. Lay another white stone diagonally next to the first white stone in the direction of the black stone. Finish the pattern symmetrically by laying a second black stone diagonally next to the first black stone. Now play a white stone on the edge next to both black stones. This situation is called “Ko”. A black stone played to the remaining point in the middle captures the white stone but the white player can then play another white stone back to the same spot capturing the black stone in the same way and putting the position back to how it started. And so on. Of course, due to the third rule above, the black player would not be allowed to do this immediately after the capture of the black stone – at least one stone must be played elsewhere before black could play, otherwise the previous position would be repeated.

Seki – Yet another local situation. This term applies to an area into which neither player dares play because to do so would cause the opponent to capture territory or stones.

Sente – To have “Sente” is to be in a position to make a move that will force the opponent to take a counter-action. If a player with “Sente” makes the play in question and the opponent, instead of responding in the predicted way, makes a different play with an even greater threat, the opponent is said to have “assumed Sente”.

Atari – Any group of stones that is under threat, having only one liberty (way free from capture) is said to have an “Atari”.

Dame – A “Dame” point is an empty point between territories. When there is a “Dame” point there is no benefit to either player. These points are left alone until the end of the game and then are ignored in the end scoring.