



OLYMPIAD NEWS

Issue 3

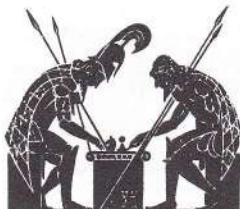
Tuesday 24 August 1999

Ask a Silly Question...

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Taste is the enemy of creativity. – Pablo Picasso
1881-1973



How can you measure people's creativity in a competition? 'I just ask them silly questions and see who comes up with the silliest answers,' says MSO's resident Creativity question setter, Bill Hartston. Here is Bill's report on this year's event.

Measuring creativity is, of course, a little more scientific than just asking silly questions, and the first round provided a good example of how to separate the truly creatively gifted from the ordinarily creative. Under the heading of 'Biological Creativity', we asked the contestants to suggest specifications for a redesign of the human body and specify changes in laws that would follow their alterations. There were plenty of extra eyes, ears, limbs and some very curious relocations for genitals among the more common responses, and chameleon skin was another popular idea. David Bodycombe, the eventual gold medallist, went instead for a second anus to expel fatty products as a slimming aid, and a ball-point pen in place of the middle finger. His anally-connected law change took place in France where all hotels would have to install an extra bidet. Philip Bateman, who won the first ever Creativity event in 1997, relocated our heads inside our chests, thus dispensing with necks altogether. He pointed out, however, that it could lead to confusion between pairs of spectacles and brassieres.

Round two, Millennial Creativity, put the contestants in the position of archaeologists 100 years hence who have just dug up six chessmen. What were they for? Then, a year later, they dug up a chessboard. How did this change their view?

One contestant had the chessmen as a set of orifice cleaners for a baby, with the bishop used to de-wax ears. David Bodycombe saw them as a cocktail-making set, centred on the knight as a bottle-opener.

Round three, Administrative Creativity, asked for a government White Paper to regulate the spread of creativity. Lucy Broomfield insisted that her White Paper be printed on the sort of tape the police use to cordon off areas of the streets. They could thus use it to contain creative outbursts. David Bodycombe's White Paper was bureaucratically pre-folded into a paper aeroplane – for speedy delivery.

Round four, Creative Accountancy, began with government accounts and ended by asking the contestants to account for their failure to win the competition. The first part was suggested by a rather feeble sell-off of government assets earlier this year, when the only items listed as having been disposed of were a horse, a fork-lift truck (plus battery), a large number of lawn-mowers and a landrover. What on earth had they all been for? Maguy Higgs opted for a plan to turn the Channel Tunnel into a underground racetrack (the fork-lift trucks were needed to lift up and dispose of the rail tracks, the horse was a guinea pig, the landrover was needed to convey personnel, and the lawn-mowers were held in reserve until the grass grew).

And finally the excuses: The winner was a mason. I'm allergic to gold. It's more polite to come second. And the excuse David Bodycombe didn't need: My third finger wasn't writing properly.

Seoul Mates

A contingent of Korean Mind Sports players, led by Go legend Cho Hoon-hyun 9-dan, arrives at the MSO on Thursday. Cho studied in Japan where the professional game first blossomed, then returned home with the goal of lifting his countrymen to top level, a task he accomplished with resounding success. His disciple Lee Chang-ho is considered by many to be the strongest player in the world today, and Lee's success has ignited an unprecedented blaze of popularity for the game.

Cho will lecture on the 26th from 2:30 to 3:30 pm on level 2. On Friday the 27th he will give a ten-board simultaneous exhibition beginning at 2:30 pm, again on level 2. Spectators are urged to come along and watch a truly top-level player.

Man vs. Machine II

Today one of the strongest Shogi (Japanese Chess) players in the West, American Larry Kaufman, pits his wits against Jeff Rollason's Shotest, bronze medal winner in the prestigious World Computer Shogi Championship in 1998. The duel begins at 3:30 pm on level 2.

Yesterday, in the first Man vs.

Machine challenge, the silicon brain emerged triumphant after an eerily human performance. Tom Eckersley-Waites, the reigning British under-12 Go Champion, had the program on the ropes when the machine suddenly embarked upon a series of strange moves which programmer Mick Reiss described as 'designed to confuse'. The cyber-psychology worked - Go4++ turned the tables and won in devastating fashion.

Don't just stand there...

Beware - not all of the pseudo-Roman trappings adorning the venue are just show. You may suddenly find yourself jabbed by what appears to be a bronzed statue. The living sculptures on exhibit are actually Richard Yatkwan and Maurizio D'Apollonio. Richard, who is self-taught, has become quite well-known after several months posing in Covent Garden. Maurizio is a mime - known best for his Bubbleman character - and they often work together. For some reason, I am not surprised to discover that standing stock still is interesting work.

Richard concentrates on the physical aspect of his unusual calling. In particular, he informs me, you need to be especially

strong in the legs. Spectators quite often amuse themselves by trying to topple living statues with a sudden slap to the thigh from behind. Other hazards for the professional statue are people who get a laugh out of putting foreign objects in an outstretched hand or using a statue as an ashtray.

Maurizio makes voluntary paralysis sound like remarkably like a Mind Sport. 'It's really all in the head, all concentration. You have to believe you can do anything, and then you can. You can keep your eyes open an hour and a half without blinking - it's all in the mind.'

And don't feel safe from surprise now, either. Richard and Maurizio are planning to change their disguises later in the week.

Word Perfect

Mark Goodliffe, a finance director from West London making his first appearance in a championship final, won the annual Times Crossword Championship held at the MSO.

The winner's average time was an amazing 8½ minutes per puzzle. The conquered field of 21 included two former champions and 17 contestants who advanced from the semi-final without committing a single error.

MSO Title Awards

Congratulations are due to the following who have achieved MSO titles. (Please note that this list does not include those who have achieved titles, but still have the opportunity to upgrade them before the end of this year's Olympiad.)

Grandmaster Awards

Femi Awowade (Nigeria) Scrabble
Bruce Birchall (England) Creative Thinking
Anatoli Gantvarg (Belarus) Draughts 10x10 (10 min)
Zuan Guo (Holland) Go 19x19
Anne Jones (England) Speed Reading
Ron King (Barbados) Draughts 8x8
Ron King (Barbados) Draughts 8x8 (10 min)
Michael Sandeman (England) Shogi (15 min)
Guntis Valneris (Latvia) Draughts 10x10
Shutai Zhang (China) Go 13x13

Shutai Zhang (China) Go 19x19
Makota Suekuni (Japan) Othello

International Master Awards

Michael Adams (England) Chess (5 min)
David Bodycombe (England) Creative Thinking
Eric Cheymol (France) Shogi
David Howell (England) Crosswords
Michael McDowell (England) Chess Problems
George Miller (England) HexDame
Leo Springer (Holland) HexDame
Alastair Sutherland (Scotland) Crosswords
Guntis Valneris (Latvia) Draughts 10x10 (10 min)

Candidate Master Awards

Paul Smith (England) Intelligence

Game Boy

Demis Hassabis is one of the stars of the Mind Sports Olympiad, having won medals in numerous events in all three Olympiads to date. As well as being a games aficionado, Demis has recorded impressive academic achievements and runs Elixir Studios – a highly successful company that writes computer games.

Have you always liked games?

Yes. My first love was chess which I learnt when I was four years old, going on to become the world's highest rated 12-year-old player. However, during my early teens I started concentrating on my schoolwork – I took my A levels three years early – and also became interested in computer game programming. Chess therefore began to take a back seat and to be honest, my chess strength has not improved all that much since I was 12.

At the age of 16 I took a year out before going to university, during which I co-wrote a computer game, *Theme Park*, which went on to sell four million copies and became one of the top 20 selling games of all time. I then went to Cambridge where I graduated with a Double First and became interested in many other Mind Sports besides chess.

Overall, I represented Cambridge in seven different games, including Chess and Go. Cambridge actually has the strongest Go players in Europe as there is a large Japanese and Chinese student population. I learnt a great deal about Go there and managed to win a few events.

Are you interested in physical sports or do you concentrate exclusively on mental challenges?

No, not at all. At Cambridge I represented my college at five physical sports: badminton, table tennis, football, squash and volleyball. However, my best event was probably table football – I was Cambridge champion three years in a row and finished fourth in the UK Championship. Table football is a great game, similar in technique and skill to table tennis in that it requires excellent hand-eye coordination. It is a huge game in the US and they even have professional players there.

Which, in your opinion, are the best Mind Sports?

I think there are five great games. First, Chess which I think is the best arbitrary game. It has evolved over a period of many centuries and is a beautifully balanced game. The interplay between the pieces is perfect and the complexity is at a level which is finely tuned to the capabilities of the human mind.

Go is the purest game. Despite its incredibly simple rules, it generates fantastic complexity. There is only one idea (to capture territory) and there is really only one artificial rule, 'ko'.

The third great game is Shogi, which is also the most fun to play. It is not as well balanced as Chess but makes up for it with the energy of the play. Chess can sometimes be a very static game due to the nature of the pawn structure, but Shogi is a tremendous fight, with vicious attacks and counterattacks; and draws are almost unknown. Also to become strong at Chess you need very good knowledge of the openings. In Shogi this is not the case – theory is less important as the two armies start some distance apart and do not collide for many moves.

Another favourite of mine is Diplomacy, which is very different from other Mind Sports, as it relies almost entirely on pure human interaction. You all start off completely equal and the object is to use your powers of persuasion to do deals to get what you want. It is almost a game version of capitalism.

Finally, I would choose Poker to complete my set of great games. There is obviously much luck in Poker but it also has a fine balance of psychology, reading your opponents and bluffing.

Do you think games are important?

Yes. You often hear metaphors

used, with people saying things such as 'business is like war' or 'politics is like war'. However, I think everything can be related to games. Different Mind Sports encompass all of the methods of human interaction that occur in the real world.

How do you think the best Mind Sports computer programs match up against the best humans?

In fact, what I find really amazing in this context is the incredible power of the human mind. Computers can be programmed to do some clever things, but the achievements of the human brain are so much more impressive. Although Deep Blue famously beat Kasparov in a Chess match in 1997, Chess is almost the ideal game for the kind of brute force lookahead that computers do so well. However, with games that rely more on intuition, the standard of computer play markedly deteriorates.

For example, Shogi is much more difficult for computers as pieces can be 'dropped' onto any square on the board and the level of complexity vastly increases. Go is in a different dimension altogether and relies hugely on intuition. Not surprisingly, computers are currently hopeless at it.

Can you see how this might change?

Yes, it's possible – and I actually have some ideas myself about this with regard to Go, though I would like to get better at it first. The technology that made Deep Blue so strong is not portable to Go and is, in fact, not terribly useful in any other areas. I think that when a successful approach to the problem of Go is found, this will be of tremendous value as a new technology which could be used in many different environments.

Day Three Medal Winners

Mind Mapping World Ch

- 1 E. Collier (Scotland) gold
- 2 J. Goldstein (USA) silver
- 3 D. Holloway (England) bronze

Poker Razz

- 1 M. Haytack (England) gold
- 2 G. Lee (England) silver
- 3 C. Harris (England) bronze

Poker Razz Junior

- 1 C. Harris (England) gold
- 2 T. Niccoli (England) silver
- 3 G. Hassabis (England) bronze


Speed Reading World Ch

- 1 A. Jones (England) gold
- 2 A. Baron (England) silver
- 3 K. Wilshire (Wales) bronze


Speed Reading World Junior Ch

- 1 P. Rivera (Puerto Rico) gold
- 2 R. Cordero (Puerto Rico) silver
- 3 A. Kothari (England) bronze





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Medal Table after Day Three

	G	S	B	Total
England	25	26	26	77
USA	2	1	0	3
China	1	1	0	2
France	1	1	0	2
Holland	1	1	0	2
Japan	1	1	0	2
Puerto Rico	1	1	0	2
Jamaica	1	0	1	2
Scotland	1	0	1	2
Germany	1	0	0	1
Korea	1	0	0	1
Israel	0	2	1	3
Nigeria	0	1	1	2
Grenada	0	1	0	1
Austria	0	0	1	1
Czech Rep.	0	0	1	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Lithuania	0	0	1	1
Wales	0	0	1	1

MSO Records

The numbers at this record edition of the MSO continue to grow. There are now over 2850 entries from 1350 players, representing 53 nations.

www.msoworld.com

To coincide with the Third Mind Sports Olympiad we are delighted to announce the launch of a very much upgraded web site. The address is: <http://www.msoworld.com/>

When you visit the new site you will find, amongst other things, that you can play other users at approximately 50 different games from six different game categories. These games are from the 'Zillions of Games' collection and we are delighted to be working with Zillions Development Corporation on the creation of the site. Using the site is *absolutely free!*

Other features of the new site include a Mind Sports 'webzine' which will bring you news and feature articles, regularly updated. Our news editor is Jonathan Tisdall, an International Grandmaster at Chess and a professional Mind Sports journalist. (Please send him news and articles to: jtisdall@usa.net).

Today's Events

Abalone World Ch..... am
Backgammon..... pm/eve
Bridge for Beginners..... am
Bridge Multi' Teams ...am/pm
Chess MSO Masters .. pm/eve
Chess Olympiad Ch am
Chess 25-minuteeve
Chinese Chess.....am/pm
Countdown pm
Draughts 10x10 Rapid..... pm
Entropy World Ch..... pm
Intelligence World Ch..... am
Japanese Chess..... am
Mastermind..... pm
Mental Calculations pm
Othello Olympiad Ch pm
Owareeve
Poker Canadian Stud am
Scrabble Weekday..... am
Scrabble Eveningeve

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