

The Origins of Canadian Byo-Yomi

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In a recent issue of the *Canadian Go Gazette* (Vol. II 1996/97, p. 21), Isabel Chang gives a report on her trip to Japan to represent Canada at the 6th World Women Amateur Go Championship. At the end of her report, she mentions that for the first time Japan adopted the Canadian byo-yomi in an international event.

Many readers may not be aware of the contribution, albeit a small one, that Canada has made to world go with the development of this particular form of overtime. In Canadian byo-yomi, as many readers know, each player is given an indefinite number of byo-yomi periods in which he or she must play x number of stones, usually 30, in x amount of time, usually 10 minutes (this is the traditional format for tournament games in which each player is given one hour of regular time). The allotted time in these byo-yomi periods is not cumulative; this means that if a player uses, say, 7 minutes in the first byo-yomi period, he or she cannot begin the second period with 13 minutes, but rather with 10.

(Incidentally, there's also a variant of the Canadian system known in Canada as *progressive* byo-yomi. The first time I encountered this form of overtime was in the early 80s, perhaps 1983, in a tournament organized in Ottawa by Ian Campbell. In this system, the number of stones that must be played in each period of byo-yomi is increased by a certain number, usually 10 stones. For example, if 30 stones are played in the first period, then 40 stones must be played in the second period, and so on.)

Given the widespread use of chess clocks in Western go tournaments and the difficulty experienced by tournament directors in finding the volunteers needed to monitor overtime *à la japonaise*, it's difficult to imagine that a system of overtime similar to the Canadian byo-yomi would not emerge eventually as a natural substitute to the Japanese style of overtime.

This is why it might seem presumptuous to think that this simple and elegant solution to the problem of monitoring overtime in go was not used elsewhere in the world before it was first used in Canada. But the reference to this particular kind of overtime as *Canadian* seems to have stuck. This is the term used to describe it in *The Official AGA Tournament Guide* (1991, p. II 2-9), and readers of *rec.games.go* have undoubtedly seen references to it as such, I know I have.

When did this system of overtime develop in Canada and how did it come to be known as *Canadian* in the international go community? When I played in my first go tournament, the 3rd Canadian Open (1980), it was already in place, and I have never known any other system of overtime in my go-playing career. Local go lore has long held that this system originated here, in Montreal, and was “invented” by Denis Labelle, a statistician and, at the time, a dedicated go enthusiast.

After reading Isabel's article, and with her prompting, I decided to look deeper into the origins of this overtime system. I began my probe at the last Canadian Open (September, 1997, in Kingston,

Ontario) when I asked Pat Thompson, veteran tournament director and director of the first Canadian Open (December 1978, in Toronto), if he could recall what system of overtime was used at Canada's first national tournament, but he couldn't remember.

Denis Labelle, the supposed inventor of this system, told me flatly, when asked, that he couldn't claim the credit for having introduced this system to Montreal players. Instead, he claims that Louis Leroux, a longtime local player, introduced this system after participating in a go tournament in Calgary, Alberta (the 2nd Canadian Open was held there in October, 1979). But, when asked, Louis couldn't remember having played in the Calgary tournament.

Putting aside oral history, what light can the written records shed on this matter? In terms of tournament announcements, I couldn't find the one for the 1st Canadian Open, and the tournament announcement for the 2nd Canadian Open, the one held in Calgary, doesn't make any reference to the kind of byo-yomi that was to be used.

Fortunately, however, I still have the tournament announcements for the early Quebec Opens. The first one (September, 1979), one month prior to the Calgary tournament, announced that the overtime would be a byo-yomi of 30 seconds, suggesting that the Japanese style of overtime was used. However, the tournament announcement for the 2nd Quebec Open (May, 1980) clearly states a byo-yomi of 30 stones in 10 minutes, establishing clearly that the Canadian style of overtime was in place in Montreal by May, 1980, seven months after the Calgary tournament. These facts would fit in nicely with the Calgary theory of the origin of the Canadian byo-yomi, provided Louis Leroux did play in that tournament and provided the Canadian byo-yomi was in fact used then.

How the term *Canadian* came to be used to describe this system is, to my mind, fairly straight forward, and the story begins with the participation of American go players in Canadian tournaments. One influential American in this story is Terry Benson, a longtime go organizer in the United States. Terry was present at the 1st Canadian open in Toronto where he acted as tournament director (perhaps in an advisory capacity) along with Pat Thompson and John Williams. Of course, I don't know for sure whether the Canadian system of overtime was used at this tournament.

I do know, however, that Terry Benson was also present at the 3rd Canadian Open (October, 1980, in Montreal); his name appears as a participant in that tournament in the Canadian Go Association's newsletter (Vol. 3 No. 1, January, 1981, p. 3). I also have the tournament announcement for the 3rd Canadian Open, and it clearly states a byo-yomi of 30 stones in 10 minutes. Furthermore, I also know that the tournament director was Jean-Luc Reiher, the same person who directed the 2nd Quebec Open five months earlier when the Canadian system was used for sure, perhaps for the first time in Canada.

Incidentally, when contacted, Jean-Luc Reiher couldn't remember how the Canadian byo-yomi came to be used in the 2nd Quebec Open. What he does remember, however, were discussions with other tournament directors, such as Pat Thompson, and some brainstorming within the executive of the *Association québécoise des joueurs de go* (Quebec Go Association), the organizing body of the Quebec Open, to find a better way to manage overtime.

(In passing, the *AQJG* soon adopted the new overtime system in Article 7 of its official tournament regulations. The booklet containing these regulations was printed in March, 1983.)

At this stage in my research, I had formed the opinion that Terry Benson, after participating in the 3rd Canadian Open (1980), probably mentioned this overtime system to his fellow American go players when he got back home, and, to distinguish it from the Japanese system of overtime, he probably referred to it as the Canadian system.

This opinion was confirmed when I communicated my facts to Terry Benson. He confirmed that the first time he saw the Canadian system used was when he participated in the 3rd Canadian Open. Impressed by its simplicity, Terry adopted it at the earliest opportunity, which was a month later, at the 1st Manhattan Go Club Tournament, November, 1980, in which he specifically referred to this system as *Canadian*. Furthermore, in the issue of the *American Go Journal* (Vol. 15, No. 5/6) following the Manhattan tournament, he and Roy Laird, longtime editor of the *American Go Journal*, devoted four paragraphs to the Canadian system, explaining how it works and giving credit for its creation to the tournament organizers in Montreal. In the following year (1981), Ken Koester, the author of *The Official AGA Tournament Guide*, used the Canadian system in the NOVA Spring Go Tournament. Koester's report on the tournament in the *American Go Journal* (Vol. 16, No. 1) again referred to this system as *Canadian*. Terry ended his response to my inquiry saying that he used the Canadian system in every tournament he has directed since the 1st Manhattan Go Club Tournament, and that the term *Canadian* was used in many tournament announcements to describe the system of overtime that was to be used.

The first time I had ever seen the reference to this system as *Canadian* was when I read *The Official AGA Tournament Guide* (1991). Tournament directors in Canada have never given a name to this particular form of overtime. In tournament announcements, the Canadian practice is simply to state the conditions of the byo-yomi as being 30 stones in 10 minutes. I presume that Canadian tournament directors have never used a term to describe this system of overtime because to do so would impose the need of having to define the term in each tournament announcement, and that, consequently, it was preferable to simply state the conditions of the byo-yomi.

If this system of overtime is becoming known more and more throughout the world as the Canadian byo-yomi, and if it is being adopted as widely as seems to be, it's due entirely, in my opinion, to the American Go Association: first, because of the influence AGA wields in the world go community; second, because the AGA organizers refer to this system as *Canadian*; and third, because the AGA uses this system of overtime in the U.S. Go Congresses, thus providing an ideal forum to showcase the practicality of using this system of overtime to players from around the world.