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# Davis/Sacramento Go Club Newsletter

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*photo by John Pinkerton*

On February 25, Yoshi Sawada passed away suddenly after a brief and unexpected illness. He is survived by his wife Keiko, two sisters and nieces and nephews in Japan.

Unless you attended the Go nights on Fridays at the Burrall's, or went to the annual U. S. Go Congresses, you may not have met Yoshi. He rarely came to the weekly meetings of the club and he played in about one of our tournaments a year, but he was a strong advocate for Go, a patient teacher, and playing him was always a learning experience.

Willard Haynes

Yoshi Sawada was born on June 4, 1950 in Kinshasa, Belgian Congo while his father was stationed there working for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Six years later they moved to Belgium and eventually moved back to Japan where he attended elementary school and high school, though he attended junior high in Geneva. His father was a very strong amateur Go player; his rank was the highest, 5 dan, given to amateurs in those days, although he would probably be 7 dan in today's rankings. Yoshi watched his father play Go often, but was not allowed to touch the Go equipment and did not actually play Go while growing up. After

attending college in Besancon, France, he went to work for the Japanese Foreign Ministry in Paris. There he began actually playing Go as well as developing expert golfing skills. A few years later he came to the U.S. where he nearly became a professional golfer. Shuttling back to Japan in the off seasons allowed him to take some lessons from the Go pros and mingle with such renowned players as Ishida, Rin, and the Kobayashis (Satoru and Chizu, whose father was a good friend of Yoshi's father). He ended up in Sacramento helping establish the Japanese American Community Center and worked there until Proposition 13 eliminated its funding. During those years he received his 1 dan and 3 dan diplomas from the Nihon Kiin. He worked for Furrow's Hardware (later Lumberjack) training personnel during the early 80's, during which time I had the good fortune to meet him at the Sacramento Go Club and begin improving under his superb instruction. His legendary generosity led to the next career change; he completed an arduous task as a favor for a Japanese businessman while at Furrow's and before long he had a hectic career as highly sought-after international business consultant. As the Japanese economy has cooled, he has been able to cut the workaholic schedule back and play more Go as well as working as a professional tennis instructor at Laguna Racquet Club. He is currently ranked 4 dan and lives in the Pocket with his wonderful wife, Keiko.

Written by Steve Burrall for the club newsletter in 1998

I always enjoyed his sense of humor and his sly way of teaching you important aspects of Go.

Linda Brown

Yoshi Sawada was one of those people who must have prompted the expression: 'Those whom the Gods love die young.' During Congresses he was the irresistible Pied Piper of Go leading the way through the Pro lectures with laughter and stories, jokes and knowledge. He seemed to know all of the Pros and during that wonderful week he would go away with them on free evenings and play the game.

In Sacramento he was a happy member and participant of the Davis Sacramento Go Club enjoying Friday night pot lucks and making us all laugh. Slender and athletic, a pro tennis player and teacher, it seems impossible to accept that he has died so young and left us alone without him.

For those of us who knew him personally there is now a huge loss. For myself I wonder who will give me the latest news of my son from Japan? Who will buy me a glass of red wine when I arrive late at Congress and need resuscitation? Who will treat me and Keiko to a wonderful Japanese lunch in their lovely home after my power had been out 4 days? Who indeed? His kindness and generosity was overflowing. He was always there with a broad smile and welcome.

Not just for those of us who were lucky enough to know him personally is there a gap. He will be irreplaceable in many other groups and communities. We were fortunate to have known him. I wish I could celebrate his living every day by practicing his laughter, his joy and his generosity. For these things do not die.

None C Redmond

Sitting next to him at the post-tournament dinner was the best time I've had in years, He radiated sunny humor and good cheer. I wish I had been able to play with him longer.

Chris Scammon

At the annual Go Congresses he translated lectures by the Japanese professionals, and worked with the E-Journal crew. Keith Arnold described his importance best with this posting from the American Go E-Journal.

Willard Haynes

I like to think I am careful in my judgments, and, therefore, rarely wrong – at least away from the go board. But one of my greatest misjudgments was Yoshi Sawada. When I ran the US Go Congress in 2001, I was vigilant in keeping costs down and trying to pass those savings on to my guests. I was particularly frugal with comps – fighting the AGA to limit them, and even charging myself for room and board. And so when the powers that be insisted that Yoshi Sawada be comped, I balked. I mean, he was just a translator, and I had several Japanese speaking people on my team; I disagreed strongly with the expense.

Fortunately, this was a battle I lost. By the end of the Congress, I came to realize that Yoshi was so much more than a Japanese translator, he was a tireless worker who spent every waking hour (and I am not quite sure there were any sleeping hours) making sure my Congress was the best that he could make it.

What made him so special? Any of us who attended his lectures know. Note I said his lectures. To call them Nakayama's, or Maeda's or Takemiya's is really unfair. It was the Yoshi Show, and I wish I could watch them in reruns forever.

Quite frankly, I am not sure how strong a go player he was. He was always reaching out to strong players in the room to make sure he was getting things right. I would even jokingly say I am not sure how strong his Japanese was – because clearly the length and breadth of what he said bore little resemblance to the amount of words that seemed to come out of the pro's mouth – when Yoshi gave them a chance to speak.

No, I would say that Yoshi did not speak go, he did not speak Japanese. Yoshi spoke Pro.

He knew what a pro wanted to say, even if he did not say it. He knew how to take the most reserved pro, and bring him out of himself and make everything so entertaining and accessible – not just to the strong, not just to the weak, but to everyone, spouses and non-players included.

And he took care of them, made sure they were happy and entertained. If a pro had an issue with the way things were being done, we would never know if it were not for Yoshi. He knew, and he let us know. He lived his life like he played poker – he always made sure there was action.

The Congress gets harder every year for many of us, whose eyes gaze over new faces, looking for the old friends who will never return. In 2005, we lost the future in Greg Lefler. In 2009 we

lost so much promise in Jin Chen and Landon Brownell. Last year we lost the personification of the soul of the Congress in Nakayama.

And now we have lost the laughter.

*winter's last cruel chill  
shadows a most joyous light  
august's laughter dies*

- Keith Arnold; this originally appeared on [Life in 19×19](#), and was reprinted in the American Go E-Journal