

# HL782's Baduk Journey

## ***Introduction***

Sometime before, I had written a document that detailed my baduk journey, and the books I had read as study materials along the way. Unfortunately, that doc has since been deleted off of my Google Drive for some unknown reason, so this is a 2nd attempt at trying to recapture and reflect upon the journey.

I was introduced to baduk by my dad. My dad and Lee Sedol share the same hometown, and my dad learned baduk from Lee Sedol's father. Nowadays, he is a relatively stable 9D on Tygem.

Anyways, sometime around 2015, my dad had a bit of a health scare. I wanted to spend some time getting closer to him and so I started to study baduk seriously at 20 years old. Beating him in a 1-1 game is my ultimate goal, and I hope I can achieve it one day.

As I progressed at each level, the 4 things I did to improve were

1. Solve tsumego problems.
2. Playing games against *slightly* stronger players (I always played as black against those 1 rank higher than me or as white against even rank).
3. Review lost games.
4. Read books about go theory.

Below are some reflections, anecdotes and recommended study material at each level. This documentation is open for comments, so please feel free to leave them if you want to discuss baduk with me. Cheers to everyone.

## DDK: 04/21/15 - 06/13/15 [53 Days]

### 30K - 17K: N/A

To be honest, I knew the basics of baduk from watching my dad play so I started out as a 16K on KGS. Know the basic rules (like how to atari), read a beginner book, then play some games. You'll be okay.

The only tip I have here is don't sign up as a 18K on Tygem. I remember I had a brief stint when I was 13 years old, where I started as an 18K on Tygem just to get constantly crushed. There are so many sandbaggers and botters there. Start at KGS instead as it is the most beginner friendly server by far. Had I started on KGS at that age... what could have been.

#### Recommended books at 30K - 17K

- English books
  - Lessons in the Fundamentals of Go - Toshiro Kageyama
- Non-English books
  - 이창호 정통바둑 시리즈 - 1. 입문, 2. 활용, 8. 초급사활

### 16K - 10K: 04/21/15 - 06/13/15 [53 Days]

I progressed from DDK to SDK in about 2 months. What helped me the most was blazing through tsumego, even problems that were technically advanced for my level. Being familiar with common shapes and vital points gave me a lot of confidence during games. I hadn't developed a 'style' of play at this point, but the seeds (attacking & killing) were definitely planted here. I pretty much played to kill (or be killed) at this point, and it was certainly very fun. As you get near SDK, read a book on basic opening theory and learn some common josekis and you'll be set.

I see people recommending the study of different josekis, specific fusekis, or worrying about strategic concepts like aji, shape, sacrifices, etc... I'm just going to bluntly say that all of that is just pointless and overwhelming at this level. I even think AI reviews are not very helpful here since you won't understand what the AI is trying to do with the optimal moves.

So just keep it simple. Read a few more moves ahead than your opponents, stay motivated and have fun!

#### Recommended books at 16K - 10K

- English books
  - Fundamental Principles of Go - Yilun Yang
  - Opening Theory Made Easy - Hideo Otake
  - Graded Go Problems for Beginners Vol. 1, 2
- Non-English books
  - 조훈현 실전바둑 시리즈: 3. 초반50수 1권 & 4. 초반50수 2권
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Tesuji Problems Vol. 4

## **SDK: 06/13/15 - 08/01/16 & 08/01/19 - 09/22/19 (1 Year, 102 Days)**

### **9K - 8K: 06/13/15 - 07/21/15 [38 Days]**

The start of SDK was honestly not too different from the DDK ranks, and I continued to progress at a rank every 2-3 weeks. I was bursting with enthusiasm and I read *a lot* of theory books here. It filled my head with plenty of ideas (that probably helped to a certain extent), but in honest retrospect, it was overkill. There are really only a very handful of books worth reading.

What really helped was meeting Justin Teng around this time and having him review some of my games with me. Of course, reviewing is easier now since we have AI available, but back then, having Justin (who is the same age as me) was an inspiration and a godsend.

When reviewing games, just pick 3-5 positions from your games that you could have done better at (where you died, where you let your opponent live, bad invasion, etc.), and go over them. Try out your variations first before asking an advanced player or the AI. And of course, don't slack on tsumego.

### **7K: 07/21/15 - 09/04/15 [45 Days]**

7K was probably the first major plateau I faced. I went through some really rough losing streaks (9 games and 11 games respectively) and played many games on tilt. Really important lesson here - don't play when you are tilted. Also, don't play when you're drunk, and don't get into a habit of playing blitz. They will do nothing but build bad habits. Instead, take some time off and let things settle a bit.

After the 2nd losing streak, I took about 1.5 weeks off from playing and spent it reading a copy of Kato Masao's "Attack and Kill". I personally really liked the book because Kato's playstyle was very aggressive and similar to mine, and I felt inspired by it. In retrospect, I don't think the book is appropriate for 7 kyu at all. Either way, something clicked in my head and I slogged over the line to 6k.

### **6K - 5K: 09/04/15 - 12/05/15 [92 Days]**

I cruised through to 6k in about a 3 weeks time, but 5k took me a bit longer than expected. It wasn't anything like the slump I had at 7k (where I was getting my ass smacked), but rather I was throwing away games that I was winning or losing very close games.

I tried to refine my issues by studying some endgame tesujis, but honestly, it's inefficient to study the endgame at this level. Instead, I recommend focusing on good basic shapes (via tesuji problems) and haengma (flow of stones) here. If your stones have good shape, you won't have to worry about getting shaken up by the opponent's provocations and losing won games.

Lastly, I fondly remember playing nearly every game around this level with the Chinese or Kobayashi Openings. It was easy to bait opponents into making bad moves or poopy shapes. It's unfortunate that

no one plays them anymore since the advent of AI, but I think it'd be fun to throw it around in my games from time to time for the sake of nostalgia 😊

### **Recommended books at 9K - 5K**

- English books
  - Attack and Defense - Akira Ishida
  - This is Haengma - Kim Sung Rae
  - Graded Go Problems for Beginners Vol. 3
  - 1001 Life and Death Problems
  - Get Strong at Tesuji
- Non-English books
  - 조훈현 실전바둑 시리즈: 7. 파워속력행마1권 & 8. 파워속력행마2권
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Tesuji Problems Vol. 1, 2
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Life and Death Problems Vol. 1, 2

### ***4K: 12/05/15 - 05/28/16 [175 Days]***

Around 4k is when the kyus start nearing dan level, so the games get trickier here. I spent 5 months as a 4k, and around here I started playing a lot more casual games. I made my first Tygem account at this time as a 1D and started to use it as a practice account.

The biggest factor that slowed my growth was how my rank had stabilized on KGS. I got to a point where I was comfortably winning against Tygem 1Ds, so I made a new KGS account and started over. I started that account with an 8 game winning streak and was promoted straight to a mid-3K. I remember thinking "I wish I had made a new account months ago", because honestly if I did, I probably would have saved 2-3 months of time (lol).

Lastly, the showdown between Lee Sedol (my idol) and AlphaGo happened around this time. Much like everybody else, I was in awe and shock. My biggest takeaway was that in baduk, any move is a valid move, if you can make it work. In that sense, amateurs have the potential to play the most creative moves, even more so than professional players. I personally really liked that.

### ***3K - 2K: 05/28/16 - 08/01/16 [65 Days]***

Getting through 3 kyu was just a natural continuation, but I hit my 2nd massive mental block at 2 kyu. Maybe it was because I could smell the Dan promotion, but I found 1Ks to be egregiously difficult.

Upon reflection, it was probably because the games at this level become complex. Instead of worrying about playing on big points, killing groups, and avoiding being killed, you actually have to start thinking about the strategic aspects of the game. Intuition, timing of invasions/reductions, accurate order of moves, and whole-board thinking become important for the first time here. In other words, you have to start focusing on the efficiency of your stones.

Personally, reading books with a focus on specific topics and solving some whole board middlegame problems for the first time helped me get over the hump. Around this level it's all about bringing the ingredients together and meshing them into wins.

### ***1st Hiatus: 08/01/16 - 08/01/19 [1095 Days]***

So after my promotion to 1 kyu, I returned to school after a 2 year gap. There was a Go Club at Cornell, and although I did visit once in a while, I honestly couldn't find a way to seriously continue my study of baduk while managing 20+ credits at school and balancing my social life. I graduated in 2018, and then started work full-time, which also required some adjusting. So for 3 years, I played 0 games, and solved 0 problems. I did watch some baduk highlights on Youtube from time to time though for fun though 😊

In the summer of 2019, I was nearing my 1 year mark at work following graduation, and had received a promotion... This reminded me of chasing rank promotions at baduk, so I decided to get back into it.

### ***1K: 08/01/19 - 09/22/19 [52 Days]***

Upon returning, I remember there were 2 things I was stunned by. The first was how much AI had changed the game in 3 years. I was saddened to see how 'simplified' the openings became, but was delighted to see how easily accessible AI was for game reviews.

The second was how quickly baduk instincts return to you. All I had to do was just pick up my copy of 501 Tesuji Problems that I borrowed from the Cornell Go Club (and never got around to returning, oops), and work through it all. In about 6 weeks, I was promoted to 1D on KGS and 2D on Tygem shortly after.

Honestly, everyone at this level should give 501 Tesuji Problems a go. It effectively carried me to 1-2 Dan.

#### **Recommended books at 4K - 1K**

- English books
  - Beyond Forcing Moves - Shoichi Takagi
  - Master of Haengma - Baek Seong Ho
  - The Great Joseki Debates - Honda Kuniyoshi
  - Vital Points and Skillful Finesse for Sabaki - Yoda Norimoto
  - Graded Go Problems for Beginners Vol. 4
  - 501 Tesuji Problems
- Non-English books
  - 조훈현 실전바둑 시리즈: 10. 일류 감각, 15. 사석작전, 25. 응수타진의 묘
  - 이창호 정통바둑 시리즈: 13. 중반전략
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Tesuji Problems Vol. 3
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Life and Death Problems Vol. 3, 4

## **Dan: 09/22/19 - 04/23/20 & 01/01/23 to Present**

### **1D : 09/22/19 - 01/26/20 [126 Days]**

The fun really starts from here. 😊

Around this time, I took some lessons from Mark Lee AGA 9D. He was a great teacher, but I stopped after a while because we always came to the same conclusion - I have the instincts of a 6D and the reading skill of a 1D. I figured if my reading was the only thing holding me back, then this was something I could improve upon my own.

To improve reading, I had to do tsumego. Unfortunately, the tsumego problems really crank up in difficulty from here. The difficulty gap between 4th and 5th volumes of Lee Chang Ho's Selected Tesuji/L&D Problems was *huge*. You have to slowly change your approach to tsumego from "solve many easy problems quickly" to "solve a handful of challenging problems with 100% depth and accuracy". This was tough as I prefer seeing immediate results, but I got used to it. It's a different thrill from getting 85% right on 100 problems vs getting 100% right on 25 problems. They are both equally sweet.

As for the games, I started playing a lot more on Tygem, and went on an absolute tear -- going from 1D to 4D in about 4 months. At this point, you can really see the style differences between KGS (docile, patient) and Tygem (fight to the death) - and I naturally fit into the latter. I think all the fighting helped because I picked up some cool tricks, and the results translated to a promotion to 2D on KGS.

### **2D : 01/26/20 - 04/23/20 [88 Days]**

For most amateurs, this is probably the level that they'll stop developing their game for a few reasons. First, it's just harder and stressful to improve from here. Second, you have a fairly sophisticated understanding of baduk at this point, and the game is enjoyable, so why bother? I asked these questions to myself from time to time, and if I didn't have my goal of beating my dad in an even game, I probably would have stopped trying as much from here too.

Anyways, as I mentioned, the game gets much harder from here. I could hold up on my own against KGS 2-3Ds and Tygem 4Ds, but against KGS 4Ds and Tygem 5Ds things were different. I really believe this is the level where cute tricks die, and the fundamentals of your game become exposed.

Fortunately, this is also the level where you can start (and should) to incorporate new areas and mediums of studying baduk. I studied the endgame seriously for the first time here by reading a book by Lee Chang Ho, and this cleaned up my game a bit. You can probably start a bit earlier than 2D, but this is the level where the endgame tesujis will actually help you win games.

I also started to replay pro games via books and Kim Sung Ryong's Baduk Lab Youtube channel. Pro games are fantastic as they are a source of fundamentals and inspiration in a leisurely way of studying

(compared to playing games or solving tsumego). In particular, I highly recommend everyone to get a copy of 3 volumes of the Commented Games by Lee Sedol for a full read through. It's worth every penny.

Last but not least, I started going to a local baduk club in my hometown and started playing against people in real life. I could tell why people get addicted to tournaments, as the intensity of playing against someone right across from you just hits different. Most of the elders here were Tygem 5D and above, so I was a bit of an underdog, but I had quite a fun time.

### ***2nd Hiatus: 04/23/20 - 01/01/23 [984 Days]***

In March 2020, a lot of things happened. COVID-19 broke out and I experienced my first heartbreak. Afterwards, I unfortunately got into some confrontations with some elders at the local baduk club (which the owner of the club sent me an apology for)... and it honestly left such a sour taste in my mouth that I didn't really want to play baduk anymore. It was a bit of a shame because I had received a promotion to KGS 3D, and was just 4 games away from a promotion to 5D on Tygem. Simultaneously, I was interested in preparing for a change of career as I didn't want to remain a software engineer much longer. So I decided to go all in on that and stepped away from the game for a while.

Fast forward to the end of 2022, I'm now a product manager, moved to NYC and spent one of the happiest years of my life. I was still subscribed to Kim Sung Ryong's Baduk Lab on Youtube, and the videos regarding cheating allegations against Li Xuanhao in the Chunlan Cup piqued my interest again.

As I was getting ready to come back, I couldn't help but think about two things. Firstly, had I not taken 2079 days off, where would I be today? Secondly, I am now 27 and I feel my brain slowing down from time to time compared to when I first started baduk - will I have enough time to *ever* reach 9 dan?

My answer to the first question is, I reasonably could have been around a Tygem 5-7D, but I had other priorities in life at the time, so it is what it is. Unfortunately, I have no answer to the second question. However, I do know that if I am to have a chance at reaching 9 dan, I'll have to study in the most efficient manner with the highest quality study material henceforth.

So, I spent the last few days of 2022 trying to figure out the best books and tsumego sets. I asked my dad and surfed the internet to see what other top amateurs were studying. I put together the list (listed below), and dove right back into the world of baduk at the start of the new year.

### ***Ramping Back Up : 01/01/23 to 01/25/23 [25 Days]***

I found out that all of my old KGS accounts were gone due to not having logged on for so long. So, I remade my KGS account, but realized it's really hard to find games on KGS at the Dan level. So, I decided to switch servers primarily altogether. I wanted to play on Fox, but setting up the client on a Mac is such a pain, so I decided to stick to Tygem primarily for now.

After losing 3 games on my old 4D account, I realized I wasn't ready to play at this level just yet, so I created a new account on Tygem. I was surprised to find that Tygem changed the registration policy to only allow beginners at 1K instead of 3D, but it didn't really matter. I soon went on a 15-2 run and got the double promotion to 2D. At the 2D point, I just went through the "Ramping Back Up from the Hiatus" Playbook listed below, and kept playing games. Soon enough, I was back at Tygem 3D.

#### **The Ramping Back Up from Hiatus Playbook:**

- 1001 Life and Death Problems (5 Moves to Live & 5 Moves to Kill sections)
- Get Strong at Tesuji (3 & 4 Star Problems)
- Graded Go Problems for Beginners Vol. 4, Section 4
- 501 Tesuji Problems
- Lee Chang Ho Selected Tesuji Problems Vol. 1 - 4
- Lee Chang Ho Selected L&D Problems Vol. 1 - 4

#### **3D : 01/25/23 - 02/09/23 [16 Days]**

So after reaching Tygem 3D again, I was hellbent on getting to 4D as quickly as possible just so I could feel that I had fully returned from the hiatus. I played 106 games in 16 days, most of them in quick time settings (5 minutes, 3 20 second Byo-yomis) and honestly, this led to me playing some really poor games. Not surprisingly, changing the time settings to 10 minutes & 3 30 second byo-yomi helped me chalk up more wins than losses, and I was promoted.

The games here usually followed the game pattern. Tygem 3Ds are stupidly aggressive without having the reading skills to back it up. Cross cuts were super common, so I remember reading "Cross-cut Workshop" by Richard Hunter - and that helped me get some advantageous positions in the middle game. Overall, instead of picking the fight first, I just made sure to settle my groups with thick & proper shapes - and captured some key cutting stones whenever I could. These usually turned into 10-15+ point leads where I closed them out with some very mediocre endgame, and won by a comfortable margin.

#### **Recommended books at 1D - 3D**

- English books
  - Graded Go Problems for Dan Players Vol. 1, 2
  - All About Life & Death - Cho Chikun
  - Lee Chang Ho's Endgame Techniques (Available on SmartGo Books)
  - Commented Games of Lee Sedol Vol. 1, 2, 3
- Non-English books
  - 이창호 정통바둑 시리즈: Vol. 3. 끝내기
  - 이세돌 명국선 Vol. 1, 2, 3
  - Weiqi Life and Death 1000 Problems
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Tesuji Problems Vol. 5, 6
  - Lee Chang Ho's Selected Life and Death Problems Vol. 5, 6



**4D : 02/09/23 - 02/27/23 [18 Days]**

**5D : TBD**

**6D : TBD**

**Planned Study Plan for 4D - 6D**

- Korean books
  - 이창호 정통바둑 시리즈: 14. 함정수 퇴치, 15. 형세판단
  - 침투와삭감 - 이창호
  - 공격노하우 - 유창혁
- English books
  - Fujisawa Shuko's Tesuji Dictionary
  - Reducing Territorial Frameworks - Fujisawa Shuko
  - Enclosure Joseki - Takemiya Masaki
  - Positional Judgement - Cho Chikun
- Tsumego
  - Gokyo Shumyo
  - Segoe Kensaku's Tesuji Dictionary
  - Segoe Kensaku's Life & Death Dictionary
  - Hashimoto Utaro's Time & Wind
  - Graded Go Problems for Dan Players Vol. 4, 5, 7
  - Maeda Nobuaki's Tsumego (前田詰碁集) Vol. 1, 2, 3

**7D : TBD**

**8D : TBD**

**9D : TBD**

**Planned Study Plan at 7D - 9D**

- Korean books
  - 사카다의 묘 시리즈
  - 동형반복 실전사활
- English books
  - Winning a Won Game - Go Seigen
- Tsumego
  - The Classics (Xuanxuan Qijing, Guanzi Pu, Genran, Shikatsu Myoki)
  - Sakata Eio's Life & Death Gems

- *Igo Hatsuyoron, Kwon Gap Yong's Baduk Academy Series\* (Tryhards Only)*