

## Open-Air Tournament in Vietnam

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I recently moved to Hanoi and had the opportunity to join the 2025 KIDO SPORT Cup Baduk Festival tournament. It is organized by the Korean Association in Hanoi, Kido Sport, and the local Tuổi Trẻ go club. The tournament took place in downtown Hanoi on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November. Nguyễn Nam Hoàng, the creator of the Go Magic puzzles, invited me to the tournament where I had the pleasure of meeting him for the first time. He explained to me that the event is really seen as a festival rather than a serious competition, hence its overall more festive and relaxed atmosphere. I'd like to share with you some of my impressions of the event, and how it compares to the UK tournaments I have participated in.



*Open-air Tournament. Photo by Nguyễn Minh Lâm*

I thought it was wonderful that the tournament was open to the public and part of the much larger Vietnam-Korea Friendship Festival, celebrating Korean culture in Vietnam. Hence, the tournament was surrounded by street vendors selling Korean products or advertising services. The tournament was open-air with one big stage and a very large screen. It had a similar feel to an open-air music concert. There were quite a lot of players – 143 in total, divided into five leagues. One was dedicated to children playing on 13x13 boards. Hoàng told me that this tournament is better attended even when compared to the Vietnamese National Championship. He also mentioned that it used to be an indoor tournament, but went outside during COVID.

Contrary to European tournaments, this one did not take official ratings into account. Players were matched according to their self-declared ratings in online servers. The tournament results were also not officially recorded. On the other hand, there were some very nice awards to

motivate the players, like portable Korean barbecues and high-quality motorcycle helmets – an interesting combination of the two cultures (as motorcycles are widespread in Vietnam).

Interestingly, every participant was awarded 200k VND (roughly equivalent to €6.50) just for playing to help with lunch expenses. They also received a towel as a participation gift on the final day. There was very good funding for the event, and nobody was charged an entrance fee. That's quite different from the tournaments I saw in the UK, which are mostly supported by entry fees, the British Go Association equipment, and the good will of the organizers.

Additionally, there were no handicap games, and the pairings would not specify who takes black. Each game was decided by the good old nigiri technique where one player gets a random number of white stones, and the other tries to guess whether it is odd or even by placing one or two black stones on the board. Since players were divided into five different leagues according to their online ratings, the differences in abilities would likely not be large.

I was also surprised when we were asked to use our own phones for the match clock. Physical clocks were only provided for the highest league. Hence, different apps were used by different players, which was quite confusing to me at times. Tournaments in the UK always have clocks provided by the British Go Association, and set up by the organizers. Usually, I only use a clock app for casual matches in clubs.



*Children league players.  
Photo by Nguyễn Minh Lâm*

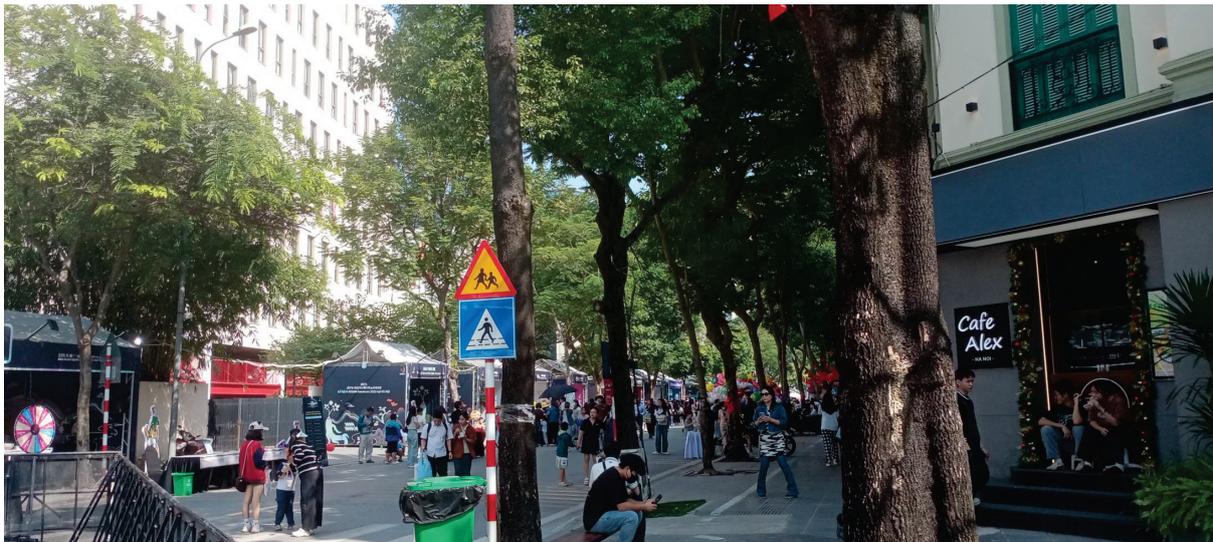


*Leandro (right) after losing his first game. Photo by Nguyễn Minh Hiếu*

Most of the players were Vietnamese and Korean, with very few Western players like me. But everyone was really nice and welcoming, and many people talked to me in English. The announcements were made in Korean and Vietnamese, so other players helped me along the way.

Another big difference was the silence. Well, the lack of it. As it was an open-air tournament, there was not the silence I had come to expect from a UK tournament. Not only might there be people talking nearby, but once in a while an announcement would blast from the speakers. Additionally, some players didn't put their phones on silent or airplane mode and left them right next to the board to act as the match clock. So, often in the middle of a game a phone nearby would suddenly cry "Shopee!"<sup>[1]</sup> Not only would you need to play well, but you would also need to stay focused in an extremely lively environment, which requires a higher level of concentration.

Unfortunately, some players didn't show up on the day, but their names made it into the pairings. There was no check-in system to record who was present like in a UK tournament. Curiously, though, we did have to wear badges with our names, so the organizers could have verified who was missing. I suspect they wanted to be flexible and allow players to arrive late. In the second round both me and a player next to me had missing opponents, and in the end we played a casual game of blitz just to pass the time. Perhaps it would had been better if we could have played each other as part of the official pairing. But at least the game was fun.



*Tournament surroundings. Photo by Leandro*

There was no official event bathroom area for the players, but since we were in the middle of the city centre, there were plenty of shops nearby, and plenty of visits to local cafes were made in between games. However, water, instant coffee, other powdered drinks I couldn't recognize, and simple snacks were provided.

A Korean professional, Lee Kangwook, was present as an observer. He is a former World Amateur Go Championship winner and currently teaches at the Go Centre in Ho Chi Minh.

[1] Shopee is a famous shopping website in Asia, which sends notifications to potential customers when they have nice deals.

Lee Kangwook did not give an official lecture, but I saw him interacting and chatting with the other players. Hoàng mentioned that previously they used to hold more activities, like lectures and simultaneous games with professionals, but this year their schedule was tighter due to the open-air format.



*Players receiving barbecue stoves and motorbike helmets. Photo by Leandro*

Overall, the tournament was a great experience. I met many friendly players of all skills and styles. It was the first time I saw such a big tournament in the middle of such a large public event. That might be an interesting idea to help promote the game in Western countries. I'm looking forward to more interesting go experiences here in Vietnam.



*Group photo by the Tuổi Trẻ Go Club*

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