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A BREAKTHROUGH

This is the first issue of the new *ICGA Journal*, which can be seen as the immediate successor of the *ICCA Journal*. Although the ISSN number has changed into 1389-6911, we are continuing to count Volumes as we did in 1983 when the *ICCA Journal* succeeded the *ICCA Newsletter*. This is therefore Volume 23, with a focus on games and no longer on chess only. The contents of the current issue clearly indicate the new publication policy by giving ample attention to the game of RoShamBo (better known as Rock Paper Scissors) as well as looking at Amazons. The main emphasis is still on chess, but we do have submissions and promises of submissions on Bridge, Hex, Mancala, Renju, Shogi, Sokoban, and Solving Crosswords. So we see a bright future. Besides, chess could be considered as the *Drosophila* of Artificial Intelligence? No wonder then, that it still plays an important role in the world of games and its surrounding society.

As a case in point we only need to look at how the Royal Dutch Chess Federation (KNSB) has taken the lead in the digitized world of human players and artificial agents. Recently (March 2000), the Board of the KNSB has decided to invite a computer participant to the National Dutch Chess Championship 2000.

A wild card became available after Grandmaster Timman withdrew in favour of a tournament in Bali. Grandmaster Sosonko who was invited to replace Timman also declined, but he suggested the Board give the wild card to a computer program. After much internal deliberation the Board decided to investigate this advice more seriously. They took soundings and started negotiations with the players, the selection committee, the rules committee, the computer-chess world and their sponsors of that point in time.

Fortunately, the main sponsor of the tournament was the Computer Training Institute "The Broekhuis Group". They applauded the KNSB decision as did the other sponsor "The Rotterdam Top Sport Foundation.

"However, there were many obstacles, ranging from the rules, via the players' attitude towards computer participation, to their willingness to play. The final hurdle in the players' camp disappeared after the KNSB promised to raise the prize money by Dfl 70,000 (almost double) and to prohibit the computer participant winning any money – although it may win the tournament. Thus it was announced simultaneously that the winner of the tournament (man or machine) should become the Chess Champion of the Netherlands for the year 2000.

The program FRITZ, brainchild of the Dutchman, Frans Morsch, was a logical choice for participation in the tournament. The additional prize money was raised by several sponsors¹, all of them convinced by the fact that the role of computers in society will increase. They all believed that computer participation in a tournament with a (human) title to win is only a first step towards a world where human beings and computer agents will act on equal footing. As a tribute to Stockman (1979)² and to the first three sponsors, FRITZ will play under the name FRITZ-SSS*.

The tournament starts on May 6, but the month of April will be used by opinion leaders voicing their pros and cons. In their chess columns the International Masters, Hans Ree and Gert Ligterink, have declared the Chess Federation as unwise. In contrast, the IGMs, Piket, Van Wely and Van der Wiel, have stated that they will play. The only opposition so far comes from IGM Paul van der Sterren, who is not against computers playing in tournaments (remember the WOCIT in the 1980s), but does feel that a computer should not be eligible for a national title.

Going through the pages of this Journal, i.e., its predecessor the *ICCA Journal*, I recall that we have often challenged World Champion Garry Kasparov editorially to play a computer match with his title at stake. So far, Kasparov has avoided such a contest but he has never argued that the proposed match should be an intrusion on the highly relevant question: who is the strongest player on earth?

When questioned whether a computer program in the future should be allowed to play in national team championships, Grandmaster Sosonko replied as far back as in 1980: "No, no, no, Van der Sterren, Donner and Ligterink have no chances at all; the beast played very well this year. He has earned the sixth position. 'The beast on the sixth board' -- should be the decision of the selection committee. I believe that will happen. But then, in my opinion, computers have to be a member of the selection committee too. These times will also come".

Obviously, the world of chess is in a transition period. The relationship between humans and computers will be resolved in the near future, but the problems mentioned above only prognosticate what will happen in this century in other areas of our digitized world.

Finally, I would like to stress that the *ICGA Journal* too is in a transition period. The name of the Journal has been changed but its founding organisation is still the *ICCA*. Changing this name – as is intended – requires the approval of a Triennial Meeting. Such a meeting will take place in 2002. Until then we will continue to distinguish between the *ICCA* and the *ICGA Journal*, two names, one ambition: to strengthen ties and promote cooperation between computer-games researchers.

Jaap van den Herik

ICGA Journal readers may be interested to know that information on our publications is available on the Internet. Our homepage can be reached by <http://www.dcs.qmw.ac.uk/~icca/journal.htm>

A complete list of all articles, notes, and literature reviews published in the *ICCA Journal* and the *ICGA Journal* is available on the Internet at <http://www.dcs.qmw.ac.uk/~icca/toc.htm>

¹ The additional sponsors are: SGI, SARA, STORAGE TEK, ChessBase, Lost Boys, International Institute of Infonomics, and Bolesian.

² Stockman G.C. (1979). [SSS*:] A minimax algorithm better than alpha-beta? *Artificial Intelligence*, Vol.12, No. 2, pp.179-196.