

Teenage Superstar Sota Fujii's Win Transcends the World of Shogi

Teenage shogi phenomenon Sota Fujii has won the 91st Kisei tournament, becoming the youngest player to date to win a major shogi tournament. Fujii turned 18 a few days later, on July 19.

In Osaka on July 16, the high schooler beat defending title holder Akira Watanabe, 36, in the fourth game of their best-of-five match, going ahead 3 games to 1. With the win, Fujii gained entry into the rarified ranks of the best professional shogi players.

Considering that veteran shogi master Watanabe is considered by many observers to be the strongest player active today, Fujii certainly deserves applause for besting the best.

The previous record for youngest winner of a major title was held by Nobuyuki Yashiki, who won the Kisei title in 1990, at age 18 years and six months.

Shogi is a board game like chess, although far more complicated. It is sometimes referred to as the Game of Generals. Kisei is one of the eight major shogi titles in the world of professional shogi.

Fujii's match with Watanabe was thrilling, as his inventive, aggressive play, continuously astounded shogi aficionados. His remarkable decisiveness that defied accepted conventions even became a topic for daily news programs.

The excitement surrounding Fujii's win among the Japanese public cannot be attributed solely to the young age of this "Shogi Sage." Although shogi is popular in Japan, only a rather small minority actually play and follow the game on a regular basis. Rather, isn't the interest in Fujii's development an indication of how in our age of AI (artificial intelligence) people are fascinated with what hidden intelligence potential the human mind holds?

Over the past few years, AI has shaken up the conventional approaches among shogi players by offering many options that people would not normally think of. For his part, Fujii readily admits that he has used AI software for strategic brainstorming on different phases of his game, as part of his relentless striving to hone his decision-making faculty.

During his deciding match with Watanabe, Fujii remained cool under pressure, never rushing, many times taking more than an hour to decide on a move. In that regard, his respect for the process of formulating a proper response holds a lesson for all of us about something that our society has too often forgotten in its obsession with speed.

No matter how skilled AI may become at shogi, it will never move the human heart. Although a player might become nervous and make a wrong move, that is precisely what shows human sensibility and feelings, and reflects our sense of values. After all, to err is human.

Spectators could not help but be deeply touched while watching the sparks fly between the two top-skilled competitors facing off at close quarters, as each struggled to decide which move he would make. Many must have been struck by the strained look on Watanabe's face as he unsuccessfully fought to retain his crown, and how it mirrored the intensity of the one-to-one combat.

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Incidentally, the “Kisei” title, which literally means “Shogi Sage,” is named after a nickname for the Edo period shogi master, Soho Amano. The Sankei Shimbun established the Kisei Tournament in 1962. Since then, it has been the stage for many historic matches, with this year’s contest adding new luster to its history.

We hope that Fujii, as the new Kisei title holder, will not flag in his efforts to improve himself and do the title proud. We also hope that, as a representative intellect of this era, Sota Fujii will have a distinguished career that transcends the world of shogi.

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藤井新棋聖 将棋界の枠超えた活躍を

将棋の高校生棋士、藤井聡太七段が第9 1期棋聖戦五番勝負を制し、初タイトルとなる棋聖位を手にした。

17歳11カ月でのタイトル獲得は、屋敷伸之九段が平成2年8月に打ち立てた18歳6カ月を大きく更新する史上最年少記録である。

しかも、相手は「現役最強」と言われる渡辺明前棋聖だった。第一人者を堂々と押し切ったの快挙に拍手を送りたい。

今回の五番勝負では、若者の斬新な着想に何度も驚かされた。その一つが、第2局の序盤で指された「5四金」だ。守備駒の金将を攻めに繰り出す意表の一手は、ニュース番組でも報じられた。

常識にとらわれては浮かばない手で、大一番で用いた決断力も見事だった。

本来なら趣味の領域である盤上の一手が社会的な関心事となったのは、新棋聖の若さだけが理由ではあるまい。人工知能（AI）全盛の時代にあって、人間の知能が秘めた可能性を身をもって示してくれたからではないか。

AIは人間の思いもよらぬ選択肢を示し、ここ数年で将棋の定跡と常識を大きく変えた。藤井新棋聖は序盤や中盤の戦術研究にAI搭載のソフトを活用しながらも、自身の判断力を磨く作業を怠らなかったという。

五番勝負で何度も見せた1時間を超える長考は、結論を急がず、答えに至る過程を大事にしたいという信念の表れだろう。速度重視に傾く現代社会が忘れかけたものを新棋聖は教えてくれた。

AIがいくら強くても感動は呼ばない。人は誤った手を指すこともあれば震えもするが、そこには人間ならではの感性や感情、価値観が映し出される。

対局者が至近距離で火花を散らし、一手一手に苦悩する姿は、見る者の胸を強く打った。惜しくも失冠した渡辺前棋聖の鬼気迫る表情を通して、勝負の厳しさを知った人も多かったはずだ。

「棋聖」は異才として鳴り響いた江戸末期の棋士、天野宗歩をたたえた称号である。昭和37年に産経新聞が創設した棋聖戦は、数々の名勝負の舞台となり、今年は新たな歴史の証人となった。

藤井新棋聖は歩みを止めることなく、由緒あるタイトルの価値をさらに高めてほしい。現代の知性を代表する人として、将棋界の枠を超えた活躍も期待したい。

出典：【主張】藤井新棋聖 将棋界の枠超えた活躍を

<https://www.sankei.com/column/news/200717/clm2007170002-n1.html>