

羽生善治と AI 世代  
絶対王者に挑んだ若手棋士たち

Yoshiharu Habu and the A.I. Generation:  
The Young Players Who Challenge an Absolute Champion

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJVona5k4RE>  
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6vvum7>

[When we were born, he was already a star]

<As expected, he's *Ōza*. Of course he's *Ōza*.>

<He's an inspirational star.>

<Would you call him a towering wall? He's a target who needs to be knocked down.>

*Ryūō*,<sup>1</sup> Yoshiharu Habu, 48 years old.

[*Ryūō* title match, Game 1, October 11]<sup>2</sup>

On this day, he challenged the records of his predecessors and unknown territory.

His goal: to win his hundredth major title. Habu has continued to stand atop the *shogi* world for approximately thirty years.

[47 years old, *Eisei* seven-crown achievement<sup>3</sup>]

Additionally, last year he became history's first to reach *eisei* achievement for all seven major titles—a first in the world of *shogi*. However...

<Habu: I lose.>

On the other hand, last year he lost to two younger players one after the other.<sup>4</sup> Things are moving in the direction of AI, artificial intelligence, whose abilities have improved in leaps and bounds.

<The first move is 3-8 gold general.>

<Is he holding his head in his hands?>

Its ability is beyond that of professional players. Somehow, young players have been meticulously using software to research how to play *shogi*—the towering obstacles before Habu. How will he approach them?

Habu: There's no question that they (A.I.) are strong, but I think that we shouldn't consider them as absolutely correct.

We followed the struggles the geniuses that welcomed this turbulent era.

[Yoshiharu Habu and the A.I. Generation]

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<sup>1</sup> *Ryūō* (lit. "Dragon King") is one of the eight titles in professional *shogi*.

<sup>2</sup> This documentary was aired shortly after the first game of the 31<sup>st</sup> *Ryūō* title match on October 11, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Eisei* (lit. "Lifetime") titles are given to players who have won and defended a *shogi* title for five consecutive years (e.g. Lifetime *Ryūō*). *Eisei* is awarded to a professional player who has maintained all seven major titles simultaneously. In December 2017, Habu became the first professional player to complete *Eisei* status with all seven titles.

<sup>4</sup> The documentary shows Habu losing one game in the 88<sup>th</sup> *Kisei* title match to Shintarō Saitō (25) and to Sōta Fujii (16) in the Asahi Shimbun Open, however these two games are not the focus of the documentary.

Saitō: My workshop is within walking distance of Sendagaya Station: The Japan Shogi Association. The veterans here have played numerous games.

Nice to meet you. I'm Asuto Saitō, and I just became a pro player this year. I'm the second youngest behind Satō Fujii. My dream is, of course, *Meijin!*<sup>5</sup> However, I have to start fighting at the lowest rank.

<I still have a ways to go. I want to be more active and put myself out there.>

Saitō: If you win, your rank increases, but if you lose successively, you will retire for long. It's a harsh world where results are everything. Beneath the shogi game room where we're desperately fighting, admirable veterans are at work.

Yoshiharu Habu *Ryūō* was signing all of the amateur's shogi licenses.<sup>6</sup>

<About how many pages can you write up today?

<Habu: Oh, I don't really know (laughing). There's quite a lot to write, so...>

<Is there a discount for the licenses?>

<Habu: (Laughing) Not really. Even if I raise the price, I might make some people angry, so sorry about that.>

Saitō: That's right, the usual Habu-sensei laughs with a friendly expression. Even after losing a match, he exits the game room grinning. A novice like me can't possibly make that quick of a transition.

Habu: When the results come out, it's best to forget it, but... No matter whether you win—even if you win. When I lose or win, no matter the outcome, I forget pretty quickly. In both scenarios, I forget. I think that the extent to which you can forget is “forgetting power.” If you forget, then you can move on, but if you can't forget, you can't change. In other words, if you can forget, there will be change.

Saitō: By turning “forgetting power” into a weapon, Habu-sensei has continued his long career at the top. This year, he's challenging records in uncharted territory.

[The 76<sup>th</sup> Meijin Title Match, Set of 7 Games, Game 1, Tokyo]

[*Ryūō*, Yoshiharu Habu]

Habu is looking to claim his 100<sup>th</sup> title. In April, he challenged the most traditional title in the world of shogi. He's made a name for himself as a challenger in the finals. His opponent is Amahiko Satō, 30 years old. Two years prior, the young ace claimed Habu's *meijin* title. He's been looking forward to a rematch with Habu ever since.

[*Meijin*, Amahiko Satō (30)]

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<sup>5</sup> *Meijin* is the most prestigious title in professional *shogi*. It is a title that is awarded to masters of other Japanese traditional arts, such as *go* and *ikebana*.

<sup>6</sup> This is referring to certificates awarded to amateur players who have achieved a rank.

Satō: When I was a child, Habu-san became a popular figure. He had the overwhelming presence of a star, and he was the strongest player out there, so there wouldn't be any harm in experiencing a match against him.

The fierce battle at the summit began. The game began with a form known as the side pawn capture, Satō's specialty.

The numbers displayed at the top corners of the live video represent the A.I.'s interpretation of the situation, also called an evaluation value. The plus sign indicate an advantage, and if the value exceeds 2000, then the player is expected to win. In recent years, shogi software has evolved to exceed players, and that evaluation was adopted on the stage of the title match.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> turn after the game started the scene was already tense.

<Oh, he did it.>

Habu, 2-6 rook.<sup>7</sup>

<Oh, a crucial move.>



If left alone, the enemy side will be open to infiltration by the rook. However, if there is a bishop exchange, from this standpoint the opponent can drop a 4-4 bishop to attack. The game has been thrust into a grand formation where both players' pieces are contending. It's very precarious. Satō sank into deep contemplation.

Satō: After all, I had to come to grips with it. Not thinking “it's a big game, so stay calm,” meaning to choose the best move without compromising—that always feels like Habu-san.

<sup>7</sup> The first number indicates the file, and the second number indicates the rank to which a piece has been moved.

Habu, who's jumped through various hoops, has one thing on his mind first and foremost: "Fate smiles upon the brave," to dive in fearlessly, and to stand up to your opponent even if they have special tactics.

Habu: It's impossible to ignore your opponent's strengths, so you must deal with them somewhere along the way. It's hard for me to always accept this, but I think that I have to at some point. I think that I always have to play to my opponent's good form.

Habu, who began shogi at the age of seven, was feared as the "red capped terror"<sup>8</sup> at his local shogi dōjō. He debuted as a pro in his third year of middle school.<sup>9</sup>

<Kunio Yonenaga<sup>10</sup>: Oh, finally! A superb play.>

<It's "Habu magic.">

<Being able to stand on such a stage in his teens...>

<As you'd expect, this is the first time in history that someone as young as 25 has held seven titles simultaneously.>

In the blink of an eye, Habu made major improvements and became a rising star, challenging his opponent's strengths directly.

[Morishita System]<sup>11</sup>

Even if it was an uphill battle at first, he overcame all odds and beat those tactics.

[Fujii System]<sup>12</sup>

Akihito Hirose 8-*dan*, then 23 years old, had also claimed several titles. When he was challenged by Habu, his Ranging Rook *anaguma* play was blown to bits.

Hirose: I pointed out the *anaguma*<sup>13</sup>, and even then it was completely shut out and beaten up. Slowly but surely, I felt as if I wasn't going to win.

With triumphant strides, Habu unraveled Satō's play with each brave turn.

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<sup>8</sup> The "red helmet" refers to the red baseball caps popularized by the Hiroshima Carps baseball team.

<sup>9</sup> Habu was 15 years old at the time.

<sup>10</sup> Although retired, Yonenaga was a commentator for the famous game between Yoshiharu Habu and Hifumi Katō (retired) in 1989.

<sup>11</sup> The Morishita System, by Taku Morishita, is a modified version of the *yagura*, one of the most common shogi opening formations.

<sup>12</sup> The Fujii system, by Takeshi Fujii, is meant to combat defensive plays, specifically against opponents who combine Static Rook and *Anaguma* castle.

<sup>13</sup> *Anaguma gakoi* (badger castle) is a very defensive formation in shogi that relocates the king into one of the four corners of the board, allowing for maximum protection.

In deep thought, they dove into the final contention between strategies. It became a fierce battle of wits. To some extent, Turn 47 provided Habu with an advantage, as he let loose a surprising move.

<Nakamura: 3-8 king.>

<Hifumi Katō: This is nicely mystifying, isn't it?>

Habu, who attacked Satō could have made a safe move by dropping his captured silver general by the king for defense, but he chose not to do that.

Habu: Normally, based on estimated risk you would think that you can't make that move.

<Commentator: Satō *Meijin* seems to be the more troubled of the two.>

At this point, the A.I. assessed Habu's move of 3-8 king. In one fell swoop, Habu's evaluation value of -660 turned to +580. Is this a reversal? However, as the game continued, Habu's evaluation value rose yet again. Then, on the 97<sup>th</sup> turn...

<Timekeeper: 50 seconds.<sup>14</sup> One, two, three—>

<Satō: I lose.>

Satō's defeat. It was the first game where Habu's judgment exceeded that of A.I.

Habu: How should I put this...Of course, the software will be a helpful study reference, but that's about it. Of course, I think that I'm a bit biased. Put simply, it's been said that last year's version of the software won around 70% to 80% of its games, however if you then fast forward a year, it will be obsolete. So, even the current version has imperfections, right?

Satō took the second game, and both players were tied 1 to 1 upon the third game.

[The 76<sup>th</sup> *Meijin* Title Match, Set of 7 Games: Game 3, Kofukuji Temple, Nara]

Habu unfolded the game with his first turn, this time in Nara.

The 61<sup>st</sup> turn: 4-3 pawn.

<Taichi Nakamura 7-dan: 4-3 pawn, that's clever!><sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Professional shogi players adhere to time controls, which in *meijin* title matches is nine hours per player. Thus, players must be aware of the time that they consume by thinking and pace themselves throughout the entire game. The game is said to have moved into *byōyomi* for a player who has consumed all of his or her thinking time. At this point, he or she must make all future moves within an allotted time that does not roll over in future turns. In the *meijin* title matches, players that have reached *byōyomi* have one minute per move for the rest of the game.

<sup>15</sup> Taichi Nakamura 7-dan previously held the *Ōza* title until October 8, 2018. The current titleholder is Shintarō Saitō, who makes an appearance later in the documentary.

Satō: Habu placed the pawn in this spot. This is a throwaway piece—it will be captured by the silver general immediately. The common play would be to leave it, as it is very important to keep track of. Despite this theory, Habu-san still threw away his pawn.

The 3-4 pawn's purpose was vexing. That was it: Habu at his best, impeccably demonstrating his full view of the board with one turn.

The midgame in shogi is where the selection of plays becomes difficult, because there are infinite possibilities on both sides. At that point, it's impossible to read all of the options. That said, it comes down to choosing the correct moves by intuition, a big picture view supported by plenty of experience.

Habu: When I can't determine the right thing to do, I think, "somehow, from experience, this move would probably be good," or "somehow, intuitively, this move would probably bad." It seems like a judgment based on "for some reason or other," and there's no choice but to choose a play.

The true purpose of the precious pawn that Habu threw away will be revealed later on. After the 22nd turn, the 83rd turn: 2-6 knight.<sup>16</sup> With this, the silver general that Satō was protecting became the knight's next destination. With the 3-4 pawn, Habu obscured the view of the board for this very moment. Even veteran players were astonished by Habu's strength, which does not seem to dull with age.

<Manabu Senzaki 9-dan<sup>17</sup>: I think it's amazing, really. I think he's been working hard. He and I are the same age.>

<Yasumitsu Satō 9-dan: You could say that there's a very profound feeling that the younger people don't quite have.>

<Kōichi Fukaura 9-dan: If he shows negligence, he'll definitely be taken off guard. As expected, he's not allowed to show even a little bit of carelessness.>

Satō, who was overwhelmed by the big picture, could not withstand Habu's latent power.

[Habu victory, Game 3]

Satō: How many points are there already? In a sense, he's not an opponent who can win just by thinking of winning, rather more like a feeling of "I can't help it, but I've already lost to this opponent, Habu." Again, I was aware of Habu-san's strength, but without deliberating more carefully I became stubborn and hungrily pushed ahead.

Satō: Habu issued his wide perspective to Amahiko at the Meijin title match. This is considered a skill not found in artificial intelligence. However, more recent artificial intelligence is progressing beyond this.

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<sup>16</sup> *Keima* pieces have equivalent motility to knights in Western chess.

<sup>17</sup> Manabu Senzaki, Hasumitsu Satō, and Koichi Fukaura are all players who debuted around the same time as Habu and are still fairly active.

In a competition between shogi players and software that began five years ago, players had more losses than wins.

[Shogi *Denou* Tournament: 2013~2015; Professional players – 5 wins, 9 losses, 1 draw]<sup>18</sup>

[*Denou* Tournament, 2<sup>nd</sup> match (last year)]

Additionally, Amahiko *Meijin* faced off against the strongest shogi software last year.

[Shogi software: Ponanza]<sup>19</sup>

<Ponanza’s opening move is 3-8 gold general?><sup>20</sup>  
<Is he holding his head?>

Saitō: The result was two consecutive losses for Amahiko. The strength [of software] had quickly exceeded that of humans. Amahiko, who was shown the strength of A.I., took up a similar method of play.



Saitō: From a straightforward perspective, computer software can’t make a failing move, so up until now humans fell short of conjuring these plays, but A.I. brings out the moves that aren’t in human theory.

<sup>18</sup> *Denousen* (lit. “Electric king battle”) involves competition between professional players for a chance to play against sophisticated A.I. software in the final match. Robotic arms have been developed by a Japanese auto parts manufacturer, Denso, to physically simulate moves stipulated by A.I.

<sup>19</sup> Ponanza is currently still widely considered to be the most advanced shogi A.I.

<sup>20</sup> This is not a conventional opening in shogi. However, Shōta Chida 6-dan, a player known for his enthusiasm towards using software, later used it successfully in professional games.



Saitō: This is my room. Now, many of us younger players who've been shown that are unable to compete with those at the top are conducting research using shogi software. There are many to choose from, but my personal favorite right now is *Pompoko*<sup>21</sup>, which sounds like a raccoon.

Cameraman: Cute!

Saitō: But this “raccoon” is pretty strong. It knows things like the best move to make, for example...Just by inputting the opponent's information in the shogi software, it can make countermeasures with ease.

<Welcome.>

<Saitō: Hello, I'm the shogi player, Saitō.>

<Come on in.>

Saitō: Please excuse me...This is the workshop that my seniors and me visit. Here, we figure out new plays for which A.I. immediately comes up with countermeasures.

Eiji Iijima 7-dan: There is really a feeling that the lifespan of a [new] strategy is shortening. It doesn't even last a year.

Saitō: In such a whirlpool of information warfare, we are fighting.

Accepting the challenge to defeat the insurmountable wall known as Habu, there are several young players. Among them, there is one who stands before Habu, and he is said to have absorbed the most play styles from A.I.: Masayuki Toyoshima, 28 years old. In the midst of the *Meijin* title games, he challenged the *Kisei* title that Habu held.

[Osaka, Fukushima Ward]

Since he was a child, Toyoshima would drop by the Osaka Shogi Hall. He was reputed to be a boy genius in the Kansai area.

[Kansai Shogi Association Dōjō]

<I've played against him in shogi.>

<Oh, you have? What was he like?>

<He was strong!>

<Toyoshima was strong, even while he was sniffing. As I thought, he's changed, he's heading to the top.

At the age of nine, he was the youngest in history to have been admitted into the professional shogi players' encouragement society. By the age of 16, he made his professional debut. Everyone watched on intently, anticipating the outstanding talent that could soon begin claiming major titles. However, the fact is that things were harsh—he failed all four attempts at the title.

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<sup>21</sup> “Pom Poko” is also the title of a 1994 film about raccoons animated by Ghibli Studios and directed by Isao Takahata.

[62<sup>nd</sup> *Ōza* title championship, 2014]

The one standing in the way was none other than *that* man.

He held the *Ōza* title for the past four years. During the *Ōza* title match games four years prior, he followed up two consecutive losses with two consecutive wins. By the endgame, he was overwhelmed by Habu's superior view of the playing field as a whole since the midgame. He had lost.

[Complete defeat to Habu in the final game]

Afterwards, a brief comment escaped from Habu:

Habu: You've unintentionally turned it into uninteresting shogi.

His own way of playing shogi, which he had worked so hard on, had become uninteresting.

Toyoshima: I was disappointed because others also had expectations for this title match. As expected, his experience with the midgame and his profound speed and grasp of judgment were strong.

Toyoshima's shogi would soon be impacted by a major event.

[3<sup>rd</sup> Shogi *Denou* Tournament]

He participated in the tournament that pits professional players against software. Toyoshima, who practiced over one thousand games against shogi software, was fascinated by the A.I.'s strength.

Toyoshima: The software is also very strong in the midgame, so it seemed to me that if I were to take it in and incorporate it, my level would increase.

To defeat Habu and take the title, he wholeheartedly immersed himself in research with shogi software from dawn until dusk. It was at this point that Toyoshima stopped attending study groups with other shogi players. He seldom showed his face at the Osaka Shogi Hall.

Saitō Shintarō 7-dan<sup>22</sup>: That's right, we haven't had the opportunity to meet lately.

Takayuki Yamasaki 8-dan: I have no idea what he's up to. Perhaps he already went to get married! I don't know much about his private life at all.

Turning his back to the shogi hall, Toyoshima repeatedly sparred with shogi software as his partner. We were curious to hear about this decision.

[89<sup>th</sup> *Kisei* title match, Game 1, Awaji Island, Hyogo]

For the fifth time, Toyoshima would earnestly challenge Habu as his rival.

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<sup>22</sup> In the documentary, Shintarō Saitō is shown with his rank (7-dan) but became the current *Ōza* titleholder (November 2018) soon after its airing.

<Commentator: It's become a bishop exchange.>

Toyoshima adopted the bishop exchange as his specialty. Both players give each other their bishops. It's a tactic that involves many intense offensives. From here, Toyoshima showed what he was truly made of. He made a quick attack backed by his research with shogi software.

[Turn 37: 5-6 gold general, Thinking time elapsed: 0 minutes]

By the midgame, there was a big difference in the allotted time spent by each player.

[Thinking time elapsed up to this point (Turn 42): Toyoshima – 11 minutes, Habu – 53 minutes]

Toyoshima's strategy was to leave plenty of time for the midgame. The strategy was a success. Even upon entering the endgame, Toyoshima turned the tide and besieged his opponent.

<Timekeeper: 50 seconds. One...>

<Habu: I lose.>

[Toyoshima victory, Game 1]

Habu reversed his loss in Game 2, but in Game 3 Toyoshima took the lead with two wins and one loss, chasing Habu into a corner.

[*Kisei* title match, Game 4, Iwamuro Onsen, Niigata]

In the next game, Game 4, Habu would surrender his title should he lose the game. In person, he showed Toyoshima that "fate smiles upon the brave."

Again, there was Toyoshima's specialty, the bishop exchange. After entering the midgame, there was still a wide gap in the difference of time spent. He approached this situation according to his research. Toyoshima launched an attack, but Habu was waiting for this moment.

<Commentator: Incredible.>

Turn 63: 2-2 pawn. Habu breached the defenses and cut deep into Toyoshima's encampment. In fact, Habu was warned up to make that play if such a situation were to arise. For the first time, Toyoshima submerged himself in long contemplation.

Toyoshima: 2-2 pawn is a risky move, so I didn't think that he would do it. I've done the research countless times, but seeing the play being done in actuality, I recognized that it was serious.

[Turn 64, 4-5 silver general promotion; Thinking time elapsed: 32 minutes]

With this single turn, the amount of time that Toyoshima spent thinking increased, and in turn the time that he had remaining was declining.

[Turn 64, 5-5 bishop; Thinking time elapsed: 49 minutes]

[Thinking time elapsed up to this point (Turn 72): Toyoshima – 174 minutes, Habu – 124 minutes]

As indeterminate as it was, the game was heading towards the endgame. Turn 79: Habu, 7-5 bishop. It was a huge play.



It was directly threatening Toyoshima's king. Toyoshima had two choices: he could drop his knight in one of two places near his king in order to obstruct the bishop. His choice was to drop the knight on 5-4. It would become a painful mistake. He overlooked the attack that Habu would make next: 6-4 silver general. With one move, Habu presented Toyoshima with a fork—while Habu could capture Toyoshima's bishop, he could capture Toyoshima's dropped knight and approach the king.



Toyoshima: So much time had already disappeared, so when I chose between two options to make a quick play, I felt like I was making the wrong choices. It was a technical shortcoming.

<Toyoshima: I lose.>

[Habu victory, Game 4]

At this point, the title series was tied 2-2, and the battle would carry over to the fifth and final game. Would the nightmare from eight years ago return?

[Hatomori Hachiman Shrine, Sendagaya, Tokyo]

Saitō: Even that genius, Toyoshima, struggled on the road to a title.

[“Please help Habu-sensei safely defend the *Kisei* title.”]

I wonder if there will be a time where we’ll say, “As usual, *he* is continuing to win” as well.<sup>23</sup>

[Sōta Fujii 7-dan (16)]

For me, who struggles profoundly to win four games, I can’t even begin to imagine that. There are 165 active professional shogi players. Over 80 percent of them have never had the experience of acquiring a title.

[Many players won’t have a shot at a single title]

Many players will finish their professional careers like that.

<sup>23</sup> Saitō refers to Sōta Fujii, who, despite having a relatively recent debut in 2016, has quickly ascended the ranks and achieves impressive winning streaks.

<Habu: Thank you in advance.>

<Thank you in advance.>

Habu-sensei has won titles 99 times in that world of harsh battles. Even recently, as continues his rough fight against younger players, he smiles. Could it be that looking forward to adversity matters most? And surely, *that* person...

[Okayama Prefecture]

Satō: Well, I feel like it can't be helped!

We now return to Satō, who wrestled with Habu in the *Meijin* title match.

The fourth game of the *Meijin* match was in Fukuoka, where Satō spent his time until elementary school graduation.

Satō: This area is really nostalgic. I often played in places like this park.

Satō remembers playing shogi when he was four years old. He was interested and enthusiastic in beating the adults in his town's shogi dojo. He aimed to become a professional. That was twenty years ago. Just like how it couldn't be helped that he enjoyed shogi, back then, is that how he goes about shogi right now?

In a nostalgic place, Satō remembered what was most important.

Satō: I'm not just doing this job to earn money. I have memories of genuinely enjoying shogi, and those memories are tremendously important to me.

"Let's enjoy ourselves for fun." He renewed his determination.

Satō: If I obsess over the results, I feel that I'll become too focused on winning and put too much weight on my shoulders.

His mind cleared the smokescreen from Habu's counterattacks.

[*Meijin* title match, Game 4, Fukuoka]

Game 4—with proud strides, Satō once again challenged Habu. It became a game of fierce attacks, but Satō put up a good fight. Satō's momentum continued Game 5, which was his victory.

[*Meijin* title match, Game 6, Tendo, Yamagata]

He was finally closing in on Habu. If Satō wins this game, he will have defended his title. Satō was feeling refreshed as he approached this day.

Satō: It was curiosity for a new kind of shogi. I wanted to work together with a great senior like Habu to put on a great show for everyone.

<It is time to start, and Satō will move first.<sup>24</sup>>

As soon as the game began, Habu delivered a strategy that exceeded Satō's expectations: turn 2, 6-2 silver general, a completely unorthodox tactic.

<Huh? Is there such a thing?>

<His first move is a surprise.>

As it was the be-all and end-all, Habu ran into the game using a tactic with which he had little experience. Satō approached Habu's way of playing shogi with interest. They were inspirational stars totally absorbed in reading one another's moves, pushing and pulling—both players made their way on a road untraveled that unfolded cautiously before them. Satō struck deep into Habu's encampment. Habu just barely dodged it.

<Timekeeper: 30 seconds. It has been two minutes.>

Between the two, there was a feeling of euphoria.

Satō: How should I put this...Playing against Habu is uplifting and fun, and it feels exciting. It's not just a game, but rather if you look at it as creating a performance, Habu is really the best opponent to do that with.

Habu: Just like in a tennis rally, wouldn't it be the most enjoyable if your opponent hit a difficult ball to you? That's why it wouldn't be fun if you returned with an easy swing. If your hit is easy to return... (Laughing) What I'm saying is, if your hit were easy to return, it wouldn't be as fun, (Laughing) but if you can return a good hit, then it's fun.

Until Habu finally made an error, he was struck by fierce attacks.

<Habu: I lost.>

[Satō's victory, *Meijin* defense]

Satō managed to defend his *Meijin* title.

<Cheers!>

After seeing the fight with Habu through to the end, he had a response.

Satō: Defending that *Meijin* title, it's not just about the result, but also its contents, and I personally think that it was a good game.

[*Kisei* title match, Game 5, Tokyo]

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<sup>24</sup> *Sente* (lit. "first move") is black and moves first. The playing order is randomly determined by *furigoma* (lit. "shaking pieces") wherein a third party takes five pawns from one of the players and tosses them onto a cloth on the floor. If the more pawns land with the non-promoted face (歩) facing up, rather than the promoted face (と), the player whose pawns were thrown will be *sente*, and conversely for the other player.

Will Habu achieve one hundred total titles? Or will Toyoshima's wish for his first title come true? The fated final game of the *Kisei* title match began. Toyoshima's strategy was, of course, his specialty bishop exchange. However, today's Toyoshima appeared to be different. He was able to change his attitude from four years ago.

Toyoshima: Since there were harsh times when I was wavering between hope and despair, I wanted to relax as much as I could.

Toyoshima spent his time relaxing by watching television and read *manga*. To that extent, he eased himself off of researching with shogi software.

Toyoshima: I wanted to improve my midgame power, however to some degree I gave up. I felt that I could make use of my own strengths.

On turn 38, he made a play that surprised Habu: 4-1 rook. The rook became the crux of an attack, dropped behind his own king. In that moment, he wasn't able to use the rook for an attack at all. He ignored theory.

4-1 Rook was quite passive and it wasn't a confident move, but I thought that I wouldn't be able to win against Habu if I didn't come up with a new strategy.

Habu: I hadn't considered that move in the slightest. I wondered if such a play existed on earth, but it wasn't the case. It didn't feel like an idea that could have come from software. Even if I say that Toyoshima has an impressive imagination, or was creative, it's still very difficult to explain what I mean. I can't put in a way other than "amazing."

Upon seeing this move, Habu launched an attack. However, Toyoshima calmly went for a counterattack. Then, finally, he had compromised Habu.

Toyoshima's winning form was one that lends itself to a 7-move mate that professional players can recognize at a glance. Yet, Toyoshima didn't make the winning move immediately, and withdrew his hand once.

Toyoshima: If I made an error, the game would continue to go badly, so I ran through the final move over and over again.

At this point, Toyoshima left his seat. He returned within ten seconds. Even so, he didn't make the play. With a small nod, he finally did it.

<Habu: I lose.>

Toyoshima toppled his opponent, Habu, and captured the title of his dreams.

[Toyoshima's victory; *Kisei* title acquisition]

Toyoshima: I felt that if I didn't win this title, I was going to quit, so there was some fear involved. I guess you could say that I was relieved. I was relieved that it was finished.

<Players in Kansai said, "I haven't seen Toyoshima.">

Toyoshima: (Laughing) That's right.



<They said, “I wouldn’t be surprised if he got married.”>

Toyoshima: (Laughing) That’s harsh!

Masayuki Toyoshima, 28 years old, returned to his old self—a man filled with smiles. Meanwhile, Habu looks forward to his goal of acquiring his 100<sup>th</sup> title,

Habu: (Laughing) For example, I heard that software would be competing in the 422<sup>nd</sup> Olympics, but that’s not it! (Laughing) Every year, my teacher and all of the players would get angry, but I think that it’s important to not get distressed in each and every situation.

Finally, we asked Habu a question: How far will you keep fighting with the young players who are continuing to work hard?

Habu: That’s a tough question. It really is difficult. I think that it will continue for eternity. It’s pretty hard to tell.

Saitō: Two months after his fierce fight with Habu, various parties were held to celebrate Toyoshima’s title acquisition.

[*Kisei* Celebration, September 13]

Saitō: Toyoshima would go on to challenge and win the *Ōi* title, and become a two-crown player. He jumped to the top of the “post-Habu”<sup>25</sup> players. Last but not least, Amahiko—Amahiko would go on to achieve 14 consecutive wins after the *Meijin* title match. It’s the highest winning streak of the year.

Saitō: Am I the only one who thinks that, by overcoming the wall known as Habu, both of them have emerged even stronger? As for me...

Saitō: Long time no see.

Toshio Miyata: What—go and win a game!

Saitō: In light of my poor performance, my teacher told me to win. I’ll do my best without forgetting my original intention so that I can show him my hour of triumph!

[31<sup>st</sup> *Ryūō* title match, Game 1, Tokyo]

[Aiming to claim 100<sup>th</sup> title, Habu]

He is off to a good start with the first game of the *Ryūō* title match.

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<sup>25</sup> The generation of *shogi* players immediately following Habu is often called the “post-Habu” generation.