

# the SURROUNDING game



## Director's Statement

THE SURROUNDING GAME (2017) is the first feature documentary about the game of Go. Shot over 4 years in China, Korea, Japan, and the United States, the film reveals the magical world of Go through the coming-of-age story of America's top Go prodigies.

Our protagonists Andy, Ben, and Curtis are gifted teenagers who have devoted thousands of hours to the game. For them, Go is an escape to a world of pure logic and mathematical beauty, a reminder of the ephemeral place human beings hold in the universe. As they strive to become the first Western professional players, we explore the search for meaning that Go represents to its players, for whom the game is a distillation of conscious thought itself.

We grew up playing the game but were always amazed at its obscurity in America compared to Asia. In early 2012, the American Go Association announced plans to launch a professional Go system in the US - the first outside East Asia in the history of the game. That summer, we embarked on a multi-year labor of love to trace the story of Go as it enters its fourth millennium; our film is the result.



*Directors/Producers Will Lockhart and Cole Pruitt are master players of Go and co-founders of the American Collegiate Go Association. This is their first feature film.*

## Blurb

In East Asia, the game of Go is hailed as one of mankind's great cultural treasures. For thousands of years, masters and disciples have passed the game down as a window to the human mind.

Now, for the first time, a group of Americans enter the ring, in search of a prodigy who will change the game forever.

## Story Synopsis

Go is the oldest board game still played in its original form. Though its rules are simple enough to teach a child, the emergent complexity has inspired millennia of study.

In East Asia, Go is lauded as both art and national sport. Today, Chinese and Korean students as young as five begin training in special Go academies; those with promise sacrifice their high-school education, training for years to have a shot at becoming professional players. In the elite world of the pros, international tournaments offer hundred-thousand dollar prize purses and top matches are broadcast on 24-hour "Go TV" to millions of fans in China, Korea, and Japan. But in the West, most people have never even heard of the game.

Enter the American Go community: a ragtag group of gamers, Asiaphiles, and aging hippies, captivated by the game. For decades, they have struggled to transplant Go into American society with little success despite their burning enthusiasm. So in early 2012 they take a gamble, striking a deal to launch the first Western professional Go system. For the first time, America has a chance to compete on the world stage against the Asian titans of Go... and everything rests on America's top young Go prodigies.

THE SURROUNDING GAME follows the lives of several top American players, leading up to the competition to become the first Western professional. Brooklyn-raised Ben Lockhart, America's top white player, foregoes college to join an elite Korean Go school. His close friend, Chinese-American Andy Liu, is the strongest player in North America, despite little formal training. Introverted, quirky, and deeply cerebral, Andy probes the limitations of his own mind in his quest to transcend the tedium of normal society.

In the shadow of the game's three-thousand-year legacy, the American Go community descends into a small North Carolina town to crown the first American pros. As they battle over the Go board, the players must confront deeper questions: Can an intellectual art survive in the modern world? What drives their fanatical love for Go, and why do they find greater meaning in the game than in real life? Uncertain about their futures, they make a pilgrimage to meet the world's greatest living player, 99-year-old Japanese master Go Seigen. Despite their diverging paths, Ben and Andy face the same question: is a lifetime dedicated to Go truly worth living?

## Film Crew



**Will Lockhart (Director/Producer):** Will is a longtime member of the American Go community and a 5-dan master player, whose ideas for a documentary got the project started. He founded the Brown University Go club in 2010 and worked as a post-production assistant on the HBO pilot CODES OF CONDUCT, edited by Jay Rabinowitz and directed by Steve McQueen. Will is currently a graduate student in physics at the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ.



**Cole Pruitt (Co-Director/Producer):** Cole met Will at Brown University and co-founded the American Collegiate Go Association in 2012. When he's not working on the film, Cole is a PhD candidate in nuclear chemistry at Washington University in St Louis. His science outreach work includes "Where Did We Come From?", animated by Jorge Cham of PhD Comics.



**Kate Sanford (Producer):** Kate is a feature film and episodic television editor serving as a producer and post-production supervisor. Her work includes HBO's BOARDWALK EMPIRE and all five seasons of THE WIRE, for which she received an ACE award. Among her other credits are the films AMERICAN BUFFALO and OUTSIDE PROVIDENCE, the miniseries SHOW ME A HERO (HBO), and television episodes of THE DEUCE (HBO) and SEX AND THE CITY (HBO).



**Richard Miron (Editor):** Richard worked as assistant editor for David Teague on Roger Ross Williams' feature documentary *LIFE, ANIMATED* (Sundance 2016), as well as on *ART AND CRAFT* (Academy Award Shortlist, 2015). He received his B.A. in Art from Yale University, where he shot, directed, and edited the documentary short "Lucky Ducks," which was awarded a Special Jury Prize from the USA Film Festival. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.



**Colin Sonner (Director of Photography):** A veteran filmmaker from Brooklyn, Colin joined as DP in June 2013. His work spans narrative, commercial, and documentary film in dozens of states and several countries. Colin recently directed his own short film, *MY FATHER'S PRISONERS* (2016).



**Xiangjun Shi (Animator):** Shixie (Xiangjun Shi) is an award-winning animator based in Austin. She has a deep interest in physics and science communication, and is an expert at nimble, minimalistic expressions. She graduated in 2013 with B.A. in Physics from Brown University and B.F.A. in Film/Animation/Video from Rhode Island School of Design.



**Jon Natchez (Composer):** A multi-instrumentalist specializing in woodwinds and brass, Jon has lent his talents to dozens of bands. He is currently a member of The War on Drugs, was formerly a member of Beirut, and has performed with David Byrne, St. Vincent, The National, and Liza Minnelli, among others. In the film world, Jon has composed scores for *The Things We've Seen* (2016), *The Elvis Room* (2016), and is currently scoring *Pledge* (2017).

## Cast

### American Competitors

Andy Liu  
Ben Lockhart  
Curtis Tang  
Michael Chen  
Gansheng Shi

### American Go Organizers

Terry Benson  
Chris Kirschner  
Jeff Shaevel  
Allan Abramson  
Keith Arnold  
Andy Okun

### Professional Players

Zhao Xinghua 3p  
Nam Chihyung 1p  
Yin Mingming 1p  
Nie Weiping 9p  
Chang Hao 9p  
Lee Sedol 9p  
Iyama Yuta 9p  
Otake Hideo 9p  
Kim Myungwan 9p  
Hwa Xueming 7p  
Cho Hunhyun 9p  
Yoo Changhyuk 9p  
Takemiya Masaki 9p  
Michael Redmond 9p  
Go Seigen 9p

### Interviewees

The Shin Brothers  
Frank Lantz  
David Fotland  
Zhou Gang  
Saito Joichi  
Ichiro Tanioka  
James Davies  
Fritz Balwit  
Song Jungtaek

### Musical Performances by

Buncombe Turnpike Bluegrass Band  
Moon Hooch

## Credits

Directed and Produced by  
Co-directed and Produced by  
Produced by  
Edited by  
  
Animation by

Will Lockhart  
Cole D. Pruitt  
Kate Sanford  
Richard Miron  
Will Lockhart  
Xiangjun Shi (Shixie)

Music Composed by  
Cinematography by  
Executive Producers

Associate Producers

Jon Natchez  
Colin Sonner  
Richard Craib  
Jonathan Sidego  
Eric Cotsen  
Paul Lockhart  
Andrew Okun  
Phil Straus  
Midge Sanford  
Shanghai Holiday Weiqi Club  
William Mayner  
David Richardson  
Chris Canik  
Marietta and David Garwood  
Marcia King  
Zoë Nickolas and Marc Wortman

Additional Cinematography  
Sound Design  
Consultant  
Consulting Editor  
Production Assistants

Nik Damants  
Jeremy S. Bloom  
Gary Levy  
Mark Becker  
David Glekel  
Daniel Koch

Field Producers

Kim Chaelim  
Cherry Shen  
Shen Yao  
Michael Redmond  
Michael Chen  
Sharon Kim  
Sandro Poldrugo

Lead Translators

Camera Operators

Jonathan Sanford  
Mary Rasmussen  
Jordan Taylor Fuller

Additional Animation  
Additional Music  
Post Production Assistant  
Online Editor  
Project Manager  
Finishing provided by

Rerecording Mixer  
Sound Mix Technician  
Sound Project Manager  
Sound Mix

Distribution Consultant  
Archival Clearances  
Web Development  
Graphic Design

Anton Trofimov  
Jeffrey Levy  
Marley Cogan  
Mike Nuget  
Matt Medeiros  
Technicolor-Postworks

Eric Hirsch  
Robert Troeller  
Danny Rooney  
Goldcrest Post Production New York

Peter Broderick  
Valerie Landesberg  
Ken Kansky  
Christopher Hsing

## Anecdotes

### The 40 Game Challenge

We always wanted to communicate the incredible ability of strong Go players, but most feats in Go are hard to communicate to a general audience. So we hit upon an idea that was included in the film: challenge Andy Liu to reach 9-dan (the highest rank possible) on the most popular online Go server by winning forty games in a row in just 24 hours. The challenge was set for Thanksgiving, 2012. We invited a few other top players in New York to come witness the attempt and try it themselves. Andy began at midnight, but by three in the morning he had already suffered a few losses from trying to play multiple games simultaneously. Before he went to sleep, he admitted “this is harder than I thought”.

So at precisely noon the next day, with a plate of Thanksgiving leftovers and two cans of Redbull, he started over from scratch, making a new account to play uninterrupted for twelve straight hours. To our amazement, by 11pm he was nearing the finish line, 36 games down. Finally, at 11:56pm - with four minutes to spare - Andy won his fortieth consecutive game to complete the challenge, prompting his friend Mike to declare, “I've never seen anyone play this much in my entire life.”

### Meeting The Master

When we set out to make this film, we had hoped to interview a number of professional Go players. We never imagined we would meet the greatest player of the last century, 99-year-old master Go Seigen, one of the giants of the Go world. As we were arranging our travel to Japan, Michael Redmond (an American player who became a professional in the 1980s in Japan) contacted us, saying that he might be able to arrange a special visit to meet him.

Go Seigen was living in a retirement home about an hour from central Tokyo. Given his advanced age, we had no idea whether he would be lucid enough to talk with us or what he might say. On the train ride there we wondered, what would it be like for a man his age to look back on a lifetime of dedication to a single artform?

Three years later, our memories of the experience are inseparable from Go Seigen's scene in the film. For us, singing “Happy Birthday” to the game's greatest master was absurd and wonderful and tragic, all at the same time. More than any other moment of filmmaking, eating strawberry birthday cake with the world's greatest master exposed the strangeness of documentary, in which the filmmaker must participate directly in the reality being recorded. After years of editing, this scene feels more real than our memories from the original experience. We hope that our portrait of Go Seigen does justice to his life and preserves his legacy for future generations.



**The *Yugen No Ma*, or "Room of Great Mystery", is the most sacred room of the Go world. It is located inside the Nihon Ki-in, Japan's national Go organization and used only for top professional matches.**



**Keith Arnold (left) and Chris Kirschner (right), longtime American Go organizers, glued to the final game of the American Professional Qualification Tournament.**



To escape the intensity of the American Professional Certification Tournament, Andy Liu (left) and Evan Cho (right) play a game atop Chimney Rock in North Carolina.



**Lee Sedol**  
World Rank #1



Lee Sedol, age 33, is widely considered the world's best Go player. In 2016, he was defeated by the computer program AlphaGo, which ended mankind's three thousand year dominance of the game.



The animated world of Andy's thoughts as he contemplates mortality and the limits of his own mind:  
“Ideally, I would want to be blessed with a prodigious imagination and just create my own worlds in my mind.”



Go Seigen is universally regarded as the greatest player of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the last master of the ancient era of Japanese Go. Here, in the final interview before his death, he reviews one of his own games from 1942.

## Selected Awards and Press

[Winner of 2014 American Documentary Film Pitch Competition](#)

[Winner of 2015 Worldwide Iwamoto Encouragement Award](#)

[“In the Age of Google Deepmind, Do the Young Go Prodigies of Asia Have a Future?”](#)  
The New Yorker (11 March 2016)

[“The Mystery of Go, the Game that Computers Still Can't Win”](#)  
Wired Magazine (12 May 2014)

[“Columbia Native Co-directs Documentary About Ancient Game”](#)  
Columbia Missourian, 18 June 2012

[“Grad Student Co-directs Film About Game of Go”](#)  
The Source (Washington University in St Louis), 29 May 2014

"THE SURROUNDING GAME is a bold and impressive project that could make all the difference for Go in America."

*Andrew Okun, President of American Go Association*

"This film communicates the beauty and joy of Go both to the West and in Asia."

*Chang Hao, 9-dan professional and former World Champion*



## Technical Specifications

Resolution: 1920x1080 (Digital HD)

Framerate: 23.98 fps

Total Runtime: 1:37:05

Audio Format: SMPTE 5.1

Dialogue Languages: English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean (subtitled in English)

## Contact

**For press inquiries:**

[press@surroundinggamemovie.com](mailto:press@surroundinggamemovie.com)

**For distribution and merchandise inquiries:**

[sales@surroundinggamemovie.com](mailto:sales@surroundinggamemovie.com)

**For screenings inquiries:**

[screenings@surroundinggamemovie.com](mailto:screenings@surroundinggamemovie.com)

**For all other inquiries:**

[info@surroundinggamemovie.com](mailto:info@surroundinggamemovie.com)

**Website:**

[www.surroundinggamemovie.com](http://www.surroundinggamemovie.com)

**Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/SurroundingGameMovie](http://www.facebook.com/SurroundingGameMovie)

**Twitter:**

[@TheGoMovie](https://twitter.com/TheGoMovie)