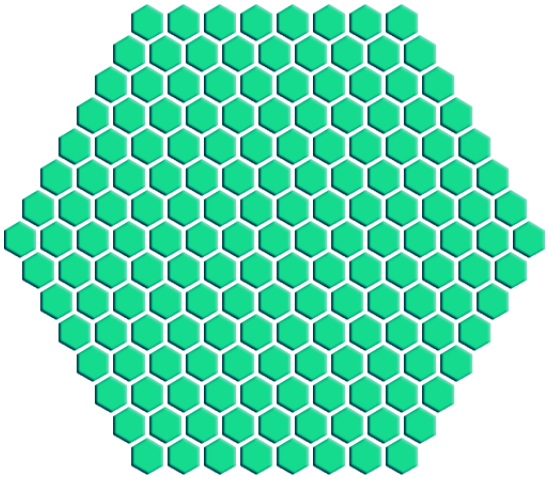
YODD

by Luis Bolaños Mures

Introduction



Base-8 Yodd board

Yodd is an elegant **connection** and **territory** game for two players: Black and White. It is played on the cells of a hex-hex board, which is initially empty. The suggested size is between 6 and 10 cells per side. Both players must have access to a sufficient number of black and white **stones**.

The **goal** of the game is to end up with the least groups on the board. Draws are not possible.

Luis Bolaños Mures designed Yodd in August, 2011.

This game is an entry in the 1,000-Year Game Design Challenge. More information here:

http://www.thousandyeargame.com/

Definitions

A **group** is a set of like-colored, adjacent stones. A single stone is also a group.

Play

Starting with Black, players take turns placing one or two stones of *either* color on empty cells. This is called **dropping**. On his first turn, Black can only place one stone.

At the end of each turn, there must be an **odd** number of groups on the board, i. e. the sum of Black and White groups must be an odd number. Here is how you can easily check it:

- Parity changes when you create a new group or join two groups.
- Parity doesn't change when you join three groups.
- If your first drop of the turn changes parity, you must change it again with your second one.
- If your first drop of the turn doesn't change parity, you can't change it with your second one.

Players can **pass** their turn at any moment, unless it violates the previous rule (this means Black can't pass on his first turn).

When both players pass in succession, the game ends. The player with *less* groups on the board **wins**.

Examples

Normally, a Yodd board will be much larger than the tiny ones shown here.

Example 1:

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

In Figure 1.1, there are 5 groups total. If a black stone is played at 'a', there will be 2 groups less on the board, so parity doesn't change. Figure 1.2 shows a legal move for any of the playes. Note that the second placement doesn't change parity, either.

Example 2:

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

In Figure 2.1, there are 3 groups total. Playing a black stone at 'a' reduces the group count by 1, so the total number of groups will be even. The second move of the turn must change the number of groups back to an odd number, as in Figure 2.2.

Example 3:

Figure 3

On his turn, Black would like to join his two groups by playing Black stones at 'a' and 'b', but he can't (Figure 3). That would reduce the total number of groups to 4, and he would need another move to restore the group count to an odd number.

Example 4:

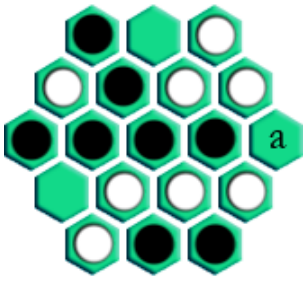


Figure 4

In Figure 4, both players have passed. Black has 2 groups to White's 3, so Black wins. Note that White can't join his groups at 'a' because there is no way to restore the group count to an odd number afterwards.

Variants

- *Xodd*: It's simply Yodd played on a square board with orthogonal connections only. Joining groups becomes harder, and the game is more tactical.

Author's notes

In Yodd, allowing players to place two stones per turn serves both as a first move **equalizer** and a way to make the game playable under the group restriction rule.

Figure 5

Meanwhile, apart from the intended goal of eliminating draws (they would be common otherwise), forcing an odd number of groups at the end of a turn has some interesting **tactical** implications which make the game feel similar to a single placement game. For example, groups separated by two empty cells can't be joined on a single turn, since the player runs out of stones to restore the group count to an odd number. Also, the **diamond** connection (Figure 5) is safe if the opponent has exactly zero or two groups adjacent to the intermediate cells, and unsafe otherwise.

Endgames are also quite tricky under this rule: you'll often want to join two of your own groups or create another opponent group, but you'll be unable to do it because you can't restore the group count anymore!

Finally, here are some basic insights into Yodd strategy:

- In the **opening**, you should try to create enemy groups in the edges of the board, so that they are likely to remain unconnected, and find a place in the center for your own groups. Outlining **frameworks** is also important, because:
- In the **middle-game**, it should be customary for the players to try and surround **territories** at least three cells wide to secure the creation of at least one opponent group there. As this group is already doomed, while your surrounding chain can still expect to join other groups, the local result will favor you. Of course, the bigger the territories, the more opponent groups you can accommodate there. Your opponent will have a hard time either connecting said groups to each other or, even worse, creating groups of your color, as you will likely be able to connect them to your surrounding chain.

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