

Mainichi Shimbun, December 27, 2016

Miura's Press Conference

"Banning Miura from playing shogi was extremely unfair"

Even though Hiroyuki Miura was banned from playing shogi for three months due to suspicions that he had used shogi software during certain games, a third-party committee commissioned by the Japan Shogi Association (JSA) stated in its report that there was insufficient evidence that he had engaged in improper conduct. On December 27, Miura held a press conference together with his shogi teacher Kazuyoshi Nishimura and his lawyer Kiyotake Yokohari. The following is a summary of Miura's statement and the Q &A session at the press conference.

Miura: First of all I would like to apologize for convening this press conference at the end of the year, when you are all very busy, and for any inconvenience I have caused. I would also like to say sorry for the concern I have caused to the many people who have believed in my innocence and given me their support.

The first thing that surprised me in the third-party committee's report was that the allegation that I left the board for 30 minutes during the game on July 26th, which was the thing that first aroused suspicion, was not true. "In that case the suspicions themselves were mistaken from the beginning." This is what I thought. It is really strange.

The second thing is that, during the three-game match to decide the challenger for the Ryuo title, even though the directors of the JSA were observing the games, there was no mention of any suspicions. That being the case, I should have been allowed to play in the seven-game Ryuo title match, since there was no cause for concern. It is most unfortunate that I was not allowed to do so.

Furthermore, a shogi event in my local area Gunma in which I often participate was scheduled for January 3rd and 4th of next year, but my participation was cancelled without even consulting me. This event would

have been my first opportunity to meet with local shogi fans after the end of my suspension from shogi.

There are other things I want to say, but first I would like to ask my teacher Kazuyoshi Nishimura 9-dan to say a few words.

Nishimura: During the 55 years since I entered the shogi world, this is the first serious incident that I have experienced. It really is a great shame. I have been deeply concerned about all the false rumors flying about, but the report of the third-party committee has proved that the suspicions were completely unfounded.

During the past two and a half months, Miura has been deprived of the most important thing for a shogi professional: the ability to play shogi. In the shogi world, this a very serious problem indeed, and he has suffered severe emotional damage as a result. I have been very worried about him. As many shogi fans are also concerned about him, I hope that he will recover his spirits quickly and return to playing as before.

Kiyotake Yokohari (lawyer): Since we are still discussing the details of this case with the JSA, there are some things I cannot divulge. However, I want to express my views on the third-party committee's report as far as possible. First and foremost, considering that the JSA has paid a large amount of money to employ the third-party committee to provide its legal services, I think it is unfortunately unavoidable that its judgment would be biased towards the JSA.

The report's conclusion that there is no evidence of improper conduct by Miura is a clear statement of fact. We were sure that no evidence of any wrongdoing would be found even after an exhaustive investigation.

However, the report's conclusion that Miura's suspension from playing shogi was "unavoidable" is a view that is biased towards the JSA and is extremely unfair. As grounds for the suspension, the committee made the following five points:

(1) At the time of the suspension, there were strong suspicions that Miura had used shogi software.

- (2) If Miura had played in the Ryuo title match in this situation, chaos would inevitably have arisen.
- (3) If Miura had played, it could easily be imagined that the credibility and authority of the JSA would have been damaged.
- (4) The decision to suspend Miura was made just three days before the scheduled start of the Ryuo title match, so there was little time available and no other realistic option.
- (5) After Miura expressed the intention not to play in the Ryuo title match, permission was granted by both sponsors for another challenger to play in his place. At the point at which Miura retracted that intention, it was impossible to go back on that decision.

In response to these five points:

- (1) The suspicions about the use of shogi software at the time Miura was suspended were based only on weak circumstantial evidence, such as statements by certain shogi professionals about "correspondence with moves of shogi software" and leaving the playing room for "long periods of time". In fact, there are players whose moves have a higher correspondence with the moves of shogi software than Miura's and the allegations about leaving the room were false. In spite of the fact that the JSA monitored both the second and third games of the match to decide the Ryuo title challenger, no suspicious behavior was observed. Therefore, the "strong suspicions" amounted to no more than speculation by certain players.
- (2) For the seven-game Ryuo title match, it was planned to search the players using metal detectors. This would have eliminated suspicions regarding cheating, so it unlikely that any great chaos would have arisen.
- (3) The one-sided removal of Miura's right to challenge for the Ryuo title because of weak allegations based on correspondence with shogi software and leaving the room ended up doing much greater damage to the credibility and authority of the JSA.
- (4) As another "realistic option," there was already the planned implementation of searches of the players using a metal detector in the title match. Furthermore, if JSA directors had monitored the match to decide the

challenger, there must already have been suspicions at this point. There was no great pressure to make a sudden decision three days before the start of the Ryuo title match.

(5) It is important to note the facts relating to Miura's expression of an intention not to play. On October 11, Miura was accused of improper conduct by several directors of the JSA and asked to withdraw from the Ryuo title match and present a notification to that effect. At first Miura refused, but then a director who had left to the room to answer a phone call returned and reported to those present at the meeting that "the Ryuo title match will not be held." In response to a director's question, "Do you understand that the match will no longer take place?", Miura felt he had no choice to accept this as the decision of the organizer and the Ryuo titleholder Akira Watanabe also accepted this.

Furthermore, the director said to Miura accusingly, "Do you understand that this will greatly damage the JSA?" and asked Miura to submit a notification of his intention not to play. Thinking that the Ryuo title match was no longer going to take place, Miura agreed. However, Miura later realized that this would be tantamount to an admission of wrongdoing, so he retracted this and refused to submit the notification. Therefore Miura made no expression of an intention not to play. In fact, the Ryuo title match, which was supposed to have been canceled, was held with a different challenger. Miura only found out about this after he had been suspended.

The committee states that it was "impossible to go back on the decision", but it was on October 11 that Miura conveyed his intention not to play and the JSA suspended him because he had not submitted a notification of that by 3.00p.m. the next day. If the JSA engaged in discussions with the sponsors through this hasty decision, it was not the fault of Miura but of the JSA itself.

Finally, the decision to deprive Miura of the right to play in the Ryuo title match was made at a managing directors' meeting, but a decision of this magnitude should have discussed at a Board of Directors' meeting. The procedures adopted were therefore also not appropriate. While it can be understood why the members of the third-party committee made their

decision, the suspension of Miura can hardly be described as "appropriate" from an objective viewpoint.

Q & A Session

Q: Will you be seeking financial compensation from the JSA?

Yokohari: Since Miura has suffered financial damage as a result of this incident, we will of course be demanding compensation. His reputation has also been damaged, so an apology will be essential. We have not held any concrete discussions yet, but we plan to do so.

Q: A certain professional player commented on Twitter that Miura was certainly guilty. It is possible he could be sued for defamation of character. What do you think about this?

Yokohari: We are discussing that among other things, but have not yet determined a clear plan of action.

Q: The Ryuo titleholder Akira Watanabe, who would have been Miura's opponent in the title match, was the instigator of the suspicions about your conduct. What is your view about that?

Miura: Well, I have played many games against Watanabe, but when he voiced his suspicions I thought, "Is that what he was really thinking about me?" I think your opponent knows if you are using software. According an article in a weekly magazine, he did not have those suspicions at first, and that's normal. I think someone must have said something to Watanabe, and that really is most unfortunate.

Q: How do you feel about shogi at the moment?

Miura: Needless to say, I haven't felt like studying shogi for the past two and

a half months, so I hope that all this fuss quickly dies down and we can return to the situation as it was before. I haven't been able to study, but I realize that I have to get good results when I return to the game, so I will do my very best.

Q: What do you now require from the JSA?

Miura: I guess it's impossible, but I'd like to go back to the situation before all this happened. I would like them to hold the Ryuo title match again, though I know that would be very difficult.

Q: What can be done to make sure that something like this never happens again?

Miura: Computers have become very strong at shogi, so I had been thinking the best thing would be to introduce strict checks, like the use of metal detectors, as in this year's Ryuo title match. Then no one would be suspected. I didn't want to suspect anyone either. I had been suggesting this for some time. Now that such an incident has occurred, I believe the best thing for the players would be to implement strict checks, such as the use of metal detectors.

Q: When you left the room during the games, what were you doing?

Miura: As other players do, I went to the room provided for us to rest. It would not be right to lie down in the playing room, so many players go there to lie down. Apart from that, I went to the washroom. I also often order food during shogi games, and players used to be allowed to go out for a meal break.

Q: How have you spent your time over the past two and a half months?

Miura: I might have been able to cope with this if it concerned only myself,

but my family was very upset. I was constantly thinking, "Why do we have to be treated like this?" My family suffered greatly, and I feel sorry for involving them. On the other hand, I got encouragement from other players and many shogi fans. Still, it's very unpleasant when all kinds of things are being said about you. It was not a situation where I could study shogi and, since it was very hard to completely prove my innocence, my biggest priority was to do everything I could to get closer to that goal. I realized that this was like the "devil's proof" (proving something that is impossible to prove), so I just tried to get as close to that as I could. I haven't been able to work on shogi at all, but I know this is not a profession where you can make excuses. It will take some time for all the fuss to die down, but I'll do my best to get back to playing shogi as before.

Q: How do you feel about your fellow shogi professionals in general?

Miura: There are players who have believed in me. However, though I don't want to say it, there are also those who didn't, and I wonder how I will feel when I confront them over the board. Even so, I'm a professional shogi player, so must go back to playing and not allow such feelings to affect me.

Q: What was your frank impression of the third-party committee's report?

Miura: I was always confident and it is only natural that the committee should conclude I am innocent of wrongdoing. I also imagined that it might reach the conclusion that my suspension was appropriate. As I said earlier, since there was originally no suspicion and no problem had been found even after my play was monitored by the JSA, why was I not allowed to play in the Ryuo title match?

Q: During your suspension, what impact have the games you lost by default had on you?

Miura: The scores of many professional shogi games are published in the

newspapers. Though I don't think it's right to say that I caused inconvenience, I would like to apologize to the newspapers for the inconvenience caused to them. It's a great pity that I was unable to play those games. I still feel that my suspension was something that could have been avoided.