



WAYNE GOULD
1945

Sudoku

CHAPTER 22

WAYNE GOULD

“Judge to Sudoku Guru”

Wayne Gould is probably another of our featured PG-40-ers who provokes the question from a lot of people “Who?” However if you say “Sudoku” the reaction will be completely different and Wayne Gould is the man who single handedly first popularized Sudoku in just about every country outside Japan; the country where it first became popular. Wayne’s amazing story is one of turning the tables on Japan, a country whose post-Second World War economic success was built on taking other’s inventions and making them better, quicker and cheaper, his tale has a lot of value for any “old-timer” looking for inspiration.

Wayne Gould was born in a small town in the distant country of New Zealand in 1945. After qualifying as a lawyer he moved to Hong Kong to practice, staying there until 1997 and retiring as a higher court Judge when Hong Kong was returned to China by Britain. Like many civil servants at the time of the handover of Hong Kong he took “early” retirement at the ripe old age of 52, after a good life in one of the last outposts of the British Empire.

In the same year, Gould is reported to have visited Japan where he discovered some strange number puzzles while browsing in a book store. He was drawn to the puzzles because, surrounded by a sea of books written in Japanese, they stood out as independent of any language. The

very thing that drew Wayne to Sudoku was probably to prove the single most important contribution to its astounding popularity around the world.

Who invented Sudoku? My initial response is to say “Who cares?” but that’s not really what I mean. I think “It doesn’t matter” is probably closer. You can always do a simple internet search and find the facts if you want to know the story but what is important is that it was Wayne Gould, a 52-year-old Wayne Gould, who popularized it around the world and then reaped both the satisfaction and monetary rewards.

Gould was “lucky”; he discovered an idea with great potential and as a “retiree” he had the time and economic security to try and exploit it. He set off on a unique journey to exploit his initial insight, spending six years sharpening his computer skills and creating a program that created Sudoku puzzles. Crucially, he was then able to create puzzles at different levels of difficulty, allowing them to engage both young and novice players yet keep his “customers” as their ability to solve the puzzles improved ... resulting in a craze that’s now become a worldwide obsession.

Gould latched onto an entertaining and educational pastime that everyone could enjoy, it was free of linguistic ability or general knowledge and one which doesn’t even need equipment apart from a good brain and a pencil. Having had the insight, Gould was perceptive in marketing the puzzles, counter intuitively giving them away free to newspapers and taking the buzz that was generated to sell books and electronic games from his own website “Sudoku.com”. The millions of dollars of free publicity created a worldwide phenomenon and drove people by the million to his website to look and to buy.

Numbers have played a big part in Gould’s life. He used to hand them to criminals convicted in his court and then he sent numbers back out into the world with his Sudoku puzzles. Happily for him they are now coming back into his bank account. In late 2005 he was reported to have claimed that his firm had received “well over \$1 million” in revenue in less than a year from the game itself. Gould’s Pappocom Sudoku puzzles were reported by Time, in 2006, to have resulted in sales of four million books and the story cites over 400 newspapers around the world as carrying the puzzles; impressive numbers indeed.

Like many people who find success later in life Wayne Gould had a successful first career and also enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle that allowed him to exploit his killer concept. Perhaps most importantly though Gould kept his eyes open when he traveled, was open to an idea when it came to him, and was able to see the potential Sudoku offered. The potential was rich enough to motivate him to then invest six years of his time and money before seeing any real possibility of a payback.

Gould differs from many of our other PG-40ers in that he has to large extent been behind the scenes and let the numbers do the talking for him. He has in effect created a niche where he owns no patent or significant intellectual property in the “game” itself but he has prospered despite that and in the face of competition out there cashing in. However in any market there is always a leader, and very often the person who seizes the first mover advantage can reap significant rewards.

Wayne Gould took the first mover advantage; he had the vision, time, energy and desire to see that the simple number game he discovered in a far-off land could take world by storm, if presented simply and effectively. In addition to personal wealth and a rich vein of satisfaction, Gould has gained worldwide recognition being named one of the world's most influential people of 2006 by Time magazine. Not too bad for a man from a small New Zealand town who was supposed to be riding off into the sunset in 1997.

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