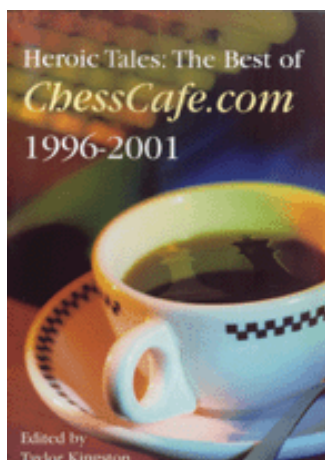


**BOOK
REVIEWS**

User-Friendly Software for School Chess Coaches

Steve Goldberg

Chess Club Manager 2.0 by Think Like A King Software (CD)
\$99.95

For the teacher, administrator or coach setting up a school chess club, Chess Club Manager (CCM) software from the Think Like a King (TLAK) series can be an invaluable organizational aid. Similarly for the existing club where record keeping seems to be a much-too-time-consuming task.



At a minimum, CCM can be used to maintain club rosters and standings, but it is capable of much more. Players are categorized by grade and by user-specified divisions (i.e. Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced) so player rankings can be viewed and printed for the club as a whole, or by grade level or division.

In addition, if the optional TLAK Chess Workouts programs are obtained, many hours of computerized chess instruction is available, suitable for players totally new to chess as well as those who have been playing for some time. Various TLAK Chess Workouts programs cover basic introductory lessons, opening and endgame instruction, and especially tactics, and have been previously reviewed at ChessCafe.

There are also motivational award certificates that can be printed for any player at any time. Some of the pre-loaded certificates include awards for "Best Player," "Most Improved Player," "Perfect Attendance," "Best Puzzle Solver" and the like. These

can be awarded by grade and division, for the club as a whole, or in any manner the user wishes. Certificates can also be customized with any title desired.

A very handy tool, if the Chess Workouts package is included, is the ability for the user to create chess puzzle handouts from many of the problems included in the various Chess Workouts programs. Hundreds of problems are available, which can be selected by the user to create a countless variety of handouts to serve as homework or as a quick assessment quiz.

A word of caution is in order when preparing to use the CCM program for the first time. Use of the software requires entering two serial numbers found on the CD case, as well as a User ID received by visiting the manufacturer's website. Alternatively, the User ID can be obtained after faxing a printable form, but be aware that these steps are necessary before the software can be used. If the program is loaded onto a computer without internet access, you may not be able to immediately obtain the User ID necessary to begin use of the CCM software.

Once the user logs into the program, the following screen appears:



If the program has been set up to require passwords (highly recommended if players as well as the coach will have access to the CCM program), four levels of access can be specified for each

person. Thus a new player can reach the Chess Workouts, if these optional programs were purchased together with the Chess Club Manager, but he or she cannot view or print any club records. Users allowed the next level of access can view and print some information, but cannot alter any. The next security level is intended for trusted assistants who can add, delete and modify player data and results, and the top level of security is reserved for the coach or club administrator. This highest level permits the user to change these security levels and passwords for all users.

Most routine functions can be accessed from the opening screen, such as working with the Chess Workouts, editing player information, and entering game results. Clicking on the "Coach's Screen" button allows further choices and brings up the following screen:



Clicking the "Initial Setup" button allows the user to specify up to four divisions, which can be used in any manner desired. Sample divisions might be Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. If divisions are used, all players must be categorized into one and only one division, although a player can be moved from one division to another.

Clicking the Settings tab at the upper left of the screen, then clicking the Scoring System button from the drop-down menu allows the selection of one of three scoring systems:

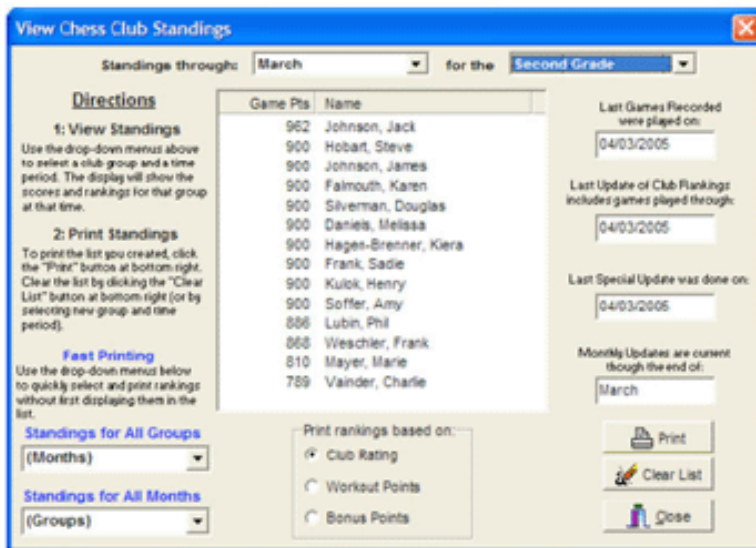
- *Standard*, which essentially uses the Harkness system from the USCF where the winner gains rating points and the loser loses rating points based on their rating differential.
- *Less Painful*, in which the winner gains the same rating points as in the Standard setting, but the loser only loses half the points under the Standard scoring system.
- *Painless*, whereby the winner again gains the same as with the Standard system, but losing players don't lose any rating points.

The program doesn't seem to directly allow the specification of different time controls, but it is possible to maintain data for varying time controls through the use of the divisions mentioned above. Instead of categories such as Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced, one division could be specified for regular tournament time controls, while other divisions could be set up for game/30, game/5, bughouse, etc.

However, any given player can only be listed in one division at a time. Therefore, if different divisions are set up as noted above, a player's name will have to be different in each division. Sarah Smith could be named Sarah Smith2, Sarah Smith3, etc. for the various divisions. The CCM program, though, will not recognize that these are all the same person. Bughouse team players might have to be specified with hyphenated player names such as Smith-Johnson to indicate each two-person team.

It should also be noted that although game results (win, lose, draw) are recorded in the database, actual game scores are not. There is also a limit of 255 players that can be entered into the database. Not many school chess clubs will exceed that limit, but presumably multiple separate installations of the program would be required for those which have more players and wish to utilize the Chess Club Manager software.

A variety of screen displays and printouts are available to show club rankings in various formats. For example, the following graphic lists the rankings of all second graders through March of the current year:



In addition, various statistical presentations are available, such as in these displays which provide total percentage won, lost and drawn as well as a breakdown against higher rated players and against lower rated players:

Statistics: 1 of 2

Total Game	No. Won	% Won	No. Lost	% Lost	No. Draw	% Draws	Score	Players
6	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%	896	Adams, Alan
4	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	899	Brown, Bob
4	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	899	Cater, Catherine
5	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	915	Doren, Darlene
8	4	50%	4	50%	0	0%	899	Harris, Harry

Statistics: 2 of 2

Total Games	Won v. Hgr.	Lost v. Hgr.	% W vs. Hgr.	Won v. Lwr.	Lost v. Lwr.	% W vs. Lwr.	Score	Players
6	2	0	100%	1	3	25%	896	Adams, Alan
4	2	0	100%	0	2	0%	899	Brown, Bob
4	2	0	100%	0	2	0%	899	Cater, Catherine
5	2	0	100%	1	2	33%	915	Doren, Darlene
8	3	2	60%	1	2	33%	899	Harris, Harry
6	1	2	33%	1	2	33%	884	Imirhu, Ichabod
8	2	1	67%	2	3	40%	915	Jacobi, Jacob

A general "stat sheet" is also available for each player showing every game result entered for the current period, as well as how his or her rating changed after each game. A sample is shown here:

Player Stat Sheet									
Jacobi, Jacob	915	10	2349	B	C	12345678	NR	10/25/05	
Name	Game	Bonus	Workout	Grade	Division	USCF ID	USCF	Exp.	
Outcome	vs. Opponent		Date	Old Score	New Score				
Lost as b.	Cater, Catherine, 900		5/3/04	900	884				Father's name: Roger
Won as w.	Youshai, Yossi, 900		5/3/04	884	900				Mother's name: Martha
Won as w.	Youshai, Yossi, 884		5/3/04	900	916				Emergency Phone: 555-555-1212
Lost as b.	Youshai, Yossi, 901		7/3/04	916	900				Teacher/Home Room: Gordon
Lost as b.	Cater, Catherine, 883		7/3/04	900	884				Dues Paid? Yes
Won as w.	Korfu, Kate, 884		8/17/04	884	900				
Won as w.	Korfu, Kate, 868		8/17/04	900	915				
Lost as b.	Harris, Harry, 882		8/21/04	915	915				

An important point to be aware of is that game results must be entered in chronological order. Once games for a given date are entered, earlier game results cannot be recorded, although error-correcting mechanisms are available in the event that an incorrect date is inadvertently specified for a game.

As noted above, customized puzzle handouts are a convenient way to produce hardcopy homework or quick club quizzes for the players. This is a sample handout that took only a couple of minutes to produce:

Chess Club Manager©
Think Like a King™ Chess Workouts©
 Handout for : Chess Academy of St. Louis 08/10/2006

Problem No. 1
No Protection #1

a b c d e f g h

A pinned piece does not protect. Black to move.

Problem No. 3
Square of... #2

a b c d e f g h

Draw the Square of the Pawn.

Problem No. 2
Corridor Pattern #1

a b c d e f g h

White to move. Mate in one.

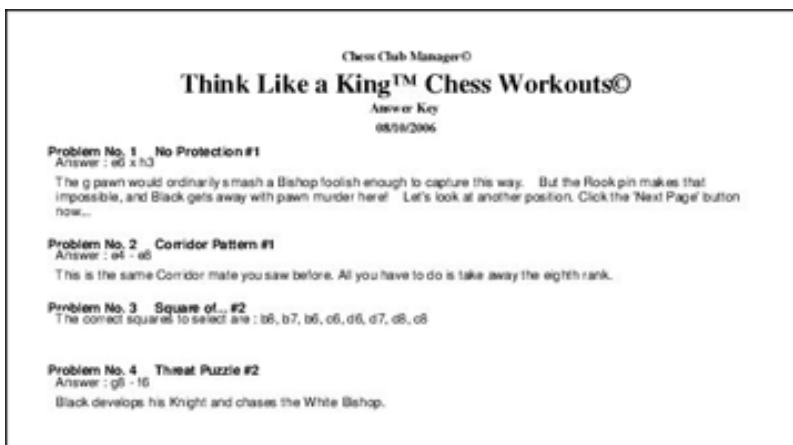
Problem No. 4
Threat Puzzle #2

a b c d e f g h

After this normal beginning, how does Black develop a new piece with a threat?

Get the Think Like a King™ Chess Workouts© for your home computer! Check our Web site at: www.schachess.com
 The Think Like a King™ School Chess Software System ©1997-2005 Food For Thought Software, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Of course, someone will have to grade the handouts. Fortunately, the program can also print the puzzle answers separately to make this as painless and quick as possible for the coach. Answers to the above problems appear as follows:



Another nice feature is the "New Year Setup" which allows the coach to carry over players to a new season without re-entering all data. Game results, rankings and statistics are erased from the previous season, but ratings are retained. Grade levels are advanced one year for each player, with all records erased for players who have graduated from the highest grade specified in the database. This information can be edited as needed, and players can be added or deleted as needed. Information can be re-set in this manner for a new school year, a new semester, or any period desired (grade levels and division placement can be edited if necessary). The software wisely repeatedly warns the user to back up old data before setting up for the new year/season (the data is lost otherwise) and gives the user several opportunities to do so before irrevocably erasing old data to begin the new season.

In addition to the motivational award certificates that can be printed, optional "thinking belts" can be purchased to provide incentives for players to advance in terms of instructional material covered and/or playing strength improved. The thinking belts are small aluminum "dog tags" available in nine different colors and are intended to be analogous to martial arts belts that are earned as a student progresses.



Although the Chess Club Manager program is reasonably intuitive to use, it can take a little exploring to learn how to perform certain tasks such as enabling password protection or displaying club rosters. A very helpful 111-page User Manual comes loaded with the program and is easily accessible by clicking the Help tab at the upper left of the opening or coach's screen page.

The chess coach is advised to carefully review the online User Manual. The manual notes that "There are even features designed to be hidden from students that you may never find if you don't know they are there!" Even those who have a phobia about opening any type of user guide will find the Chess Club Manager User Manual relatively easy to skim through.

In summary, although it would have been nice to record game scores and to be able to easily separate quick time control game results from tournament-style time control results, this software will be a very welcome time-saver for the person who wants to set up or maintain a school chess club. Player data and results are relatively easy to enter and a multitude of statistical reports help to monitor student progress. With the optional Chess Workouts programs, a wealth of self-directed chess instruction becomes available so that even a club sponsor who knows little about chess can provide an excellent training program for the players. The motivational tools such as award certificates and thinking belts aren't fancy but easily provide a convenient way to reward effort and encourage further involvement.

Order *Chess Club Manager 2.0*
by Think Like A King Software

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