

ChessBase Cafe

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In Playchess.com, No One Can Hear You Scream

The internet has had a major impact on just about every pastime you can name. Fans of major sports have millions of websites where they can get everything about their favorite teams. Music lovers can listen to a radio station on the other side of the world, buy CDs, and download songs. People who probably didn't know so many others shared their fringe hobbies get together and trade absinthe spoons, translate Portuguese poetry, or discuss Dennis Kucinich's presidential ambitions. Or maybe that's just me.





























It's hard to imagine a traditional hobby that has been affected by computers and the internet more than chess. The internet hasn't had the impact on the game itself that computers have had, with databases and playing engines changing the way the top players perform. But in the way it has brought the game to so many people the internet is having an remarkable effect. It has also shifted the demographic of those who play regularly now that anyone in the world can log in and play. Imagine, thousands of people, dozens of nations and languages, all of them cursing and yelling when they hang a piece.

When ChessBase launched its Playchess.com online chess server last year it was into a crowded field of places to play chess on the internet. Every CB playing program comes with free access to Playchess.com. As always, if you just installed your program make sure you get the latest software update by logging in to Playchess.com, going to the Help menu, and clicking Query Upgrade.

After the expected growing pains, Playchess has turned into one of the most active online gaming sites in the world with over 100,000 games played per day. You can even watch GMs like Adams, Short, Susan Polgar, and Nakamura battle it out. (Some will even play YOU.) Fancy stuff like audio/video broadcasts and anti-cheating algorithms add to the cool factor.

The nuts and bolts of getting online, creating an account and playing a game are fairly simple and covered in the help files. So let's look at loftier goals than playing bullet chess until your hand aches.

Some chessplayers are like Cindy Lauper and just wanna have fun. But if you are reading this you are in the category of player that is interested in improving the quality of your chess and not just the speed of your mouse. Playchess.com is a fantastic resource for improvement if you have a regimen.

Name	Blitz	Bullet	Title	Nation
 Wolf-X	2922	2639		
 softkiller	2669			
 Ullcaster	2627	2714	IM	
 Smyslov2	2575	2553		
 Mixer	2541	2056		
 chess_master	2534		FM	
 Mig	2519	2233		
 cho_hakkai	2518	2385	IM	
 rohini1332	2455	2309		
 kr_edn	2439	2249		
 hmmm	2439			
 manolash	2437	2117		
 KrauseU	2427	2379		
 Diggory	2384	2358	FM	

The most difficult step in this process isn't a technical one at all. The problem is adding gravitas to your online chess. If you don't take the games seriously your concentration will suffer and the games will be of little training value. It's hard to concentrate on online games to begin with. There are a million distractions at home (or at work, admit it) so first you have to control your environment as much as possible. That can mean turning off the telephone's ringer, closing your e-mail program, and locking the children (or parents) in the closet.

Next comes the other tough part for some people, playing longer games. We all love blitz, and bullet chess (two minutes per side or faster) can be addictive, and there is no reason to give these pleasures up. When I asked GM Larry Christiansen what he thought about his students playing blitz he said it was a good way to keep your tactics sharp. But one longer game will teach you more than twenty blitz games, especially if you need to work on the fundamentals, which require consideration, planning and time.

When you click the Seek button on the bottom left of the main Playchess screen you can tell it what sort of game you are looking for. Since most players prefer blitz it often takes a little longer to find an opponent for the longer games you need to play. Set the Challenge dialog to, for example, 25 minutes with a 5 gain per move (increment). If you only ever play blitz you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much more you see and how much more interesting the game is when you have time to use your brain and not just your hand! You'll even be able to remember what you were thinking during the game when you go over it later.

Challenges			
Opponent	Conditions	Elo	Clocks
↓ prasanna	Unrated		20m + 0s
↓ Weatherby	Rated		1m + 0s
↓ scacchipanti	Rated	1850	5m + 6s
↓ L.A nights	Unrated		2m + 1s
↓ kavalka	Rated	1182	2m + 1s
↓ Guest12278	Unrated		3m + 0s

Along with playing longer games, try to participate in the regular tournaments. Watch the blue tournament invitations in the chat pane and try to find one with slowest time control you can find. Then find its location in the Rooms pane and click on that room. The tournament organizer will add you to the participants. The atmosphere of playing in a tournament will raise the stakes and you'll focus better if you're the competitive type.


In previous columns we looked at Fritz analysis methods you can use to help you study the games you've played. One handy thing about playing against the Fritz programs or on Playchess is that all the games are automatically saved in the default folder and file ("myinternetgames"). This also saves the time used on every move, something that can be very instructive. Are you managing your time well or missing opportunities by playing automatic moves?

You can also mine your vast collection of blitz games using the Fritz database functions. For example, run a search to pick out just your losses in a specific opening and browse through them to look for common mistakes.

Try tossing all your games in one opening (all with you on the same side) into a Fritz opening book to check the statistics on how you do in the different lines. You can even do this for ALL your white games or black games, which can be fascinating. To do this in the Fritz family, open your internet games database and run a search mask (ctrl+f). Put in your name in the White field and uncheck "Ignore colors".

That will give you all your games with white in a few seconds. Now select all the games (ctrl+a) and copy them to the game clipboard (ctrl+c or right-click, edit, copy). Now create a new database (ctrl+x), call it "mywhitegames" and paste (ctrl+v). Now you have all your games with white in a database.

Go to the main Fritz board screen and create a new opening book by going to File, New, Openings book. (There is a keyboard shortcut for this too but you'd need fingers like the creatures in the "Alien" movies to press it.) Now you need to import all your white games by going to Edit, Openings book, Import games. Leave the length at 20 moves and select the database you created with your white games. Start the process, which should only take a few seconds even if you have thousands of games.

Notation	Score sheet	Openings Book		
			N	%
			Av	Perf
testbook1.ctg			987	37
1...c5			272	40
1...e5			157	31
1...e6			126	33
1...d5			120	39
1...c6			91	42
1...d6			83	39
1...b6			42	40
1...g6			40	36
1...♘f6			31	26
1...f6			11	18
1...♘c6			9	11
1...a6			2	50
1...h6			2	100
1...g5			1	0

You'll find out some very interesting information right away. I don't put too much faith in database opening statistics on the whole, but where a single player is concerned they are more relevant. Maybe you score 5% better with 1.e4 than with 1.d4, but check to see if that's because you usually play 1.e4 against weaker players. The opening book statistics will show you the average rating of the players in each line.

The most relevant number is in the "Perf" column as it compares to the "Av". That shows the performance rating for that move and you need to compare it to the actual rating average of the players who played it. Of course in our example if it's a white move that's your performance versus your actual average rating. If it's significantly higher or lower that's a line you should pay particular attention to. You may find that it's time to give up one of those gambit lines Tim McGrew is showing you in his ChessCafe column. Or better yet, that it's time to start playing one!

(Unless you plan on actually using this opening book to play against Fritz you can ignore the probabilities ("Prob") it sets for each move. Those numbers are Fritz's opinion of what is best based on the winning percentage of each line.)

The E-mailbag

Question *I have recently begun playing chess at Playchess.com. In the move window there are numbers between the plies. What are these numbers, they're driving me crazy?! When I save my game and analyze in Fritz, how do I get rid of them? – Kari Heber, US Navy, Okinawa, Japan*

Answer As the Microsoft slogan goes, “it’s not a bug, it’s a feature!” Those purple numbers are the number of seconds spent on each move. As mentioned above, this can be good information to have when you study your games later. You can delete them by right-clicking the move list and selecting “Delete Fritz commentary” (shift+alt+y). That will remove the times and other info like the engine evaluations that are inserted by some of the auto-analysis features. This will leave text commentary and variations intact. To wipe out everything choose “Delete all commentary” (shift+ctrl+y).

Question *In ChessBase is there a way to receive a list of the players with the most career wins? – Thanks, Bill Reinhart*

Answer No. You have to be creative to find out things like this and sometimes it takes considerable work. Your question is related to a specific complaint I have made about the search in the past, that you can’t search for wins or losses by a player. If you want all of Morozevich’s wins from 2000-2003 you have to first search for all his wins with white, then black, and combine them.

It wouldn’t be hard to build this sort of thing into the already fantastic Dossier function in ChessBase 8. It already calculates the player’s winning percentage with both colors and provides many other interesting facts and figures about a player’s career highlights and opening preferences.

Your best hope would be to look through the Player index of the database and check the players who have played the most games. Then run the double search I mentioned above (white and black wins) on those players. Personally I’d bet on Korchnoi. He has almost 4000 games in the Megabase and 1655 wins!

All the ChessBase software described by Mig in this column, as well as many more ChessBase programs, are available in the [ChessCafe Online Catalog](#).

Mig wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence. Yes, I have a question for Mig!



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