

ChessBase Cafe

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The Multimedia Circus

A huge number of questions have arrived in the past month. Before diving in to the mailbag we will take a look at something that has inspired more questions than any Fritz function in memory, the new Chess Media System.

Basically this is a new feature for the Fritz 8 family of programs, including Junior 8, Shredder 8, and HIARCS 9. To get it you may need to update to the latest interface version by clicking “Query upgrade” under the Help menu when you log in to Playchess.com. (Even if you don’t play there or have a member account you can log in as a guest to get the upgrade.)

Basically what the CMS does is add streaming audio and video to Fritz. You can listen to live or recorded A/V while watching a game and the moves on the board are synchronized to multimedia. We employed this concept for our “KCU” lessons back in the day at KasparovChess.com, but having everything built into the Fritz interface is a much better user experience.

In the past week we’ve been using the CMS to broadcast Radio ChessBase at Playchess.com during the Linares supertournament games. Members can enter a board and watch and kibitz as we analyze the games in progress and at the same time hear my voice and those of special call-in guests. Later you can replay these segments in case you didn’t feel like getting up in the morning to see the games live.



A personal lesson from Kasparov? No problem!

The Windows Media-based technology seems to be working well, although there have been the occasional hiccups. Most of the user questions stem from a familiar problem with ChessBase software, one that doesn't have much to do with the software. Yes, once again it's the lack of clear instructions. People who build things usually don't understand why people can't figure out how to use those things. This is why we have websites with lousy navigation, VCRs nobody can program, and, in the opposite direction, instructions on shampoo bottles.

Before getting to those instructions, there are a few technical items to keep an eye on. You have to have the latest version of the Windows Media Player installed. That's currently version 9 and you can download it here:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/9series/player.aspx>

Next, it won't work with the Fritz 7 generation of programs, sorry! If you have a very slow internet connection, slower than 40Kbps on a dial-up, for example, sound quality might suffer and video can be slow. Internet technology isn't as consistent as telephone and cable and some users, particularly those on dial-up connections instead of broadband, say that the sound occasionally goes out for short periods. And much like those shampoo instructions I'll point out the obvious: you need a sound card and speakers to hear the audio.

Trust me, it's worth it! Watching a Kasparov game live and getting audio commentary from Nigel Short or Susan Polgar is quite an experience. The other day I called Linares and got a live report from the press room during the round! We learned about the local weather, the look on Topalov's second's face (not worried), and what Kasparov's mother was up to in the front row watching her boy (fretting nervously).

So you've got all your software updated and you're ready to go. Now you just have to find the broadcast. This is where the designers and the public tend to part ways. "It's easy," the ChessBase guys tell me, sincerely. "How could we make it any easier? All you do is blah blah blah blah..." Then a few of my friends, several of them capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time, tell me they couldn't figure out how to find my daily Linares broadcasts.

I thought that maybe I was hanging out with fools and bumbler; it wouldn't be the first time. Remember college? But then I noticed that during the broadcasts I was bombarded with people asking how to start/hear/turn on the audio. Either it's not all that easy or it's not working perfectly for everyone, or both.

It does sound easy. You log in to Playchess.com and look in the bottom-right corner of the screen where you have list of rooms. One of these is named "Broadcasts." Click on that and the contents of the room will load. This is where I think some of the confusion comes. You need to click on one of the games or lessons that is being shown, but the default screen on the top left is the "Info" tab, which has a text title in English and German and no instructions. Ach nein!

You have to click on the "Games" tab to get a list of all the games being broadcast. You'll get a list, sometimes very long, of all the games by player, but how do you know which one that has an audio/video with it? Hmm, that's usability strike two for the boys in Hamburg. When I do my live Linares shows I start a separate broadcast board and instead of player names I put in something like "Live Radio Linares Analysis" or something like that so people can find it on the list. Otherwise you don't know.

So when you find the board with the live audio, things should get easier. If you already have the board open when the broadcast starts the Chess Media System window pane should open automatically when the A/V starts up. But now you still have to click the Play button, it doesn't start on its own. According to some users they have entered during a broadcast and their CMS pane hasn't opened automatically. I have no reason to suspect these people are lying. You can manually open the CMS pane by going to the Windows menu, then Panes, then Chess Media System.

NOW you should have sound and/or video. Easy, right?! Apart from the live and recorded lessons at Playchess.com there are also "canned" or recorded segments that use the CMS on ChessBase CD Magazine. It's just going to get better and we're working hard to produce loads of new content.

If you have the poor taste to not yet own a Fritz 8 program you should 1) atone for your sin by purchasing one immediately (there's a shop link around here somewhere!) and 2) check out the cool media stuff for free by downloading a free trial of the Playchess.com client at the site of that name. Give it a try and let me know how easy or difficult it was for you to get to the A/V. I'd love to hear your feedback, and so would ChessBase.

The E-mailbag

First some follow-up on a question from last month about getting Fritz to auto-annotate beginning at move one instead of giving opening references. I still think I'd rather have

GM games than Fritz's opinion on the initial moves of a game! If there were any terrible blunders in the opening it is unlikely to be in your reference database anyway.

From reader Sudeep Surender: *I found the right way for Fritz to annotate from move 1. Apparently, if you close the Opening book and try the analysis, Fritz does not get it. You will need to close Fritz and then open it again and make sure you have the icon "Load Opening Book" in your "Opening book" tab. Now if you do the analysis, Fritz will start annotating from Move 1. You may want to pass this bug to the ChessBase developers.*

In the finest Microsoft tradition I'll say I'm not sure that's really a bug. Closing the opening book does so for game play, not analysis. And since not using a reference database decreases the effectiveness of the auto-analysis I don't recommend this.

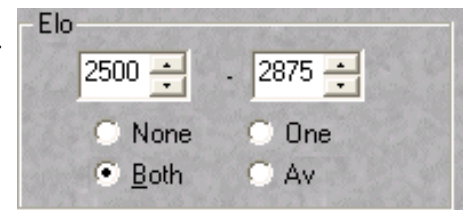
Several people have asked about auto-updating Fritz 7 and accessing the multimedia at Playchess.com. As mentioned above, this is not possible, sorry. You may get an error message if you go online with a Fritz 7 generation program and try to install the latest updates.

Question I note the question in the upgrade to Fritz 8 on installing the Tablebases. How does one do this if the tablebases were installed prior to Fritz 8? What is the name of the file? – Malcolm Loftus

Answer I'm not willing to sacrifice my own installation to try this out, but I imagine it's possible that a new Fritz 8 installation could overwrite the new tablebase controller file installed by the new Endgame Turbo DVDs. This dll file is necessary for Fritz and other new engines to use the massive new six-piece tablebases. The safest thing to do if you've already installed Fritz 8 after the Turbo is to run the Turbo setup program again. You shouldn't have to copy all the bases again. I won't be responsible for any fiddling around with tablebase dll files on your machine outside of the normal installation routine! Not recommended!

Question I would like to calculate my performance rating against different classes of players. I realize that the filters allow ratings to be entered. In other words, I would like to see how I score against players rated between 1800 and 2000 or 2000 and 2200. The problem seems to be that Chessbase does not seem to allow me to perform rating searches based upon my opponent's ratings only. Am I missing something here, or is this task difficult to accomplish with Chessbase? – Clint Prong

Answer This is one of my pet peeves with the search mask, along with not being able to search for a player's wins or losses (you have to do black then white and then merge). You can get close to what you want by keeping your own rating in mind when you search. If you are rated 2100 and you want to know how you do against players rated 1800-2000, set the Elo filter to 1800-2000 and check "One". For 2000-2200, check "Both".



If your rating fluctuates a lot this won't be as effective, but there's no reason you need to stick to round numbers. If your rating moves between 1970 and 2130, use that range for the "Both" and "One" for above it and below it and you'll still get close to what you are

looking for on a practical level.

Question On the Playchess.com site, when I seek a rated game I have no option to chose the color, it seems that it's up to my opponent. Is there anyway I can seek a rated game and say I want white? – Vito, Chicago USA

Answer No. This is intentional. To preserve the integrity of the rating system the color distribution of rated games is automatic. It's not up to your opponent either. The server balances them out so you play an equal number of whites and blacks in your rated games. When you play an unrated game you can send out a challenge for the color of your choice.

Question Is there a way to sort games by date more precisely than year? In other words, can Chessbase sort by month and day? – Tom Williams, USA

Answer It does this automatically when you sort by date, although it doesn't mention it. If the games have month and day data ChessBase will sort them using that data. The trick comes when you have a mix of games, some with and some without month and day info. Then the sort will put games without it at the top of that year. E.g. games from 2001 without month and day info will come before games played on January 1, 2001.

Question I used Fritz 7 to analyze a correspondence game I played. I used "Full Analysis." Afterwards, Fritz 7 put a square colored red and black by the opening code (A07). What do these colors mean? I'm just learning how to use Fritz 7. Sorry if this is a simple question. Thanks for your time and consideration. – Sincerely, Tom Langenbach

Answer Hey, I love simple questions. Sky=blue, grass=green, blunder=black! These colored squares are “medals” that Fritz awards when it thinks the game represents a certain category. Black means the full analysis mode found a serious blunder. The dark red means tactics. These are the only two that the analysis will add on its own. The blunder one is somewhat useful but since 90% of games include something Fritz defines at tactics, it tends to award that medal (well, both medals in my bullet games) to just about every game, making it redundant in my opinion.

The medals are part of the special annotation feature of ChessBase 8. It can give 16 different ones, including strategy and endgame and you can use them to categorize games in CB8. You can't give game “medals” in Fritz, only receive them!

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!**

 **TOP OF PAGE**

 **HOME**

 **COLUMNS**

 **LINKS**

 **ARCHIVES**

 **ABOUT THE
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[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)

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