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## ChessBase Cafe Mig Greengard

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## Opening Sesame

The fraternity of chess instruction would seem to be in conflict with the chess publishing industry. Every primer from Lasker's to Kasparov's counsels against wasting time studying opening lines before reaching a competent level in tactics at the endgame. Then you click your way to your local online chess shop and find that a majority of the books are on the openings.

Opening study is addictive because it is concrete. Not to go all Zen on you, but knowing what you know is comforting. You can spend a month going over tactics books without feeling any stronger. You memorize a dozen moves in the Gonghoc Gambit and you immediately have tangible knowledge and a feeling of progress. It's mostly a false one, but false security sells millions of self-help and diet books every year.

Maybe chess publishers should try that angle: "The Sicilian is from Mars, the Petroff is from Venus," "The South Beach Defense," "Players Who Sacrifice Too Much," "Matzoh Ball Soup for the Chessplayer's Soul," or maybe not.

In a previous column we looked at quick and dirty opening preparation using the "games to book" function in ChessBase. This month we'll take a step-by-step tour of creating your own opening course with ChessBase and a large game database.

Let's say you have the courage of Anderssen and Spassky and have started playing the King's Gambit. (1.e4 e5 2.f4) You're ready to swash and to buckle, but many of your intended victims unsportingly turn the tables by playing the Falkbeer Countergambit with 2...d5. You've heard that White is theoretically in good shape against the Falkbeer, but many of the lines are quite sharp and need examination.

The first step is to make sure your biggest and best database is defined as your reference database. To do this right-click its icon and select "Properties," then in the dialogue box that launches – check "Reference database." This sets it as the default database for various automatic functions, including the one we're interested in now – the Opening Report.

Next open a new board and enter the moves of the Falkbeer. You want to go to the key position, not just where the opening starts. So make the moves 1.e4 e5 2.f4 d5 3.exd5 e4. If you have already decided a longer line is best, go ahead and make those moves, but too specific is usually worse than too general.

Now go to Tools – Opening report, or right-click the board to select it, and watch the magic. ChessBase will find the games in the opening and divine the best lines and typical plans. If your computer is a few years old and you have picked a popular opening with thousands of games this can mean slow magic, sort of like watching David Blaine starve in a box. This will just take a few minutes though, not a few weeks.

Our opening report on the Falkbeer finds 1144 games in the Megabase 2004. It gives us some trivia about the earliest example game, oddly enough actually played

by Falkbeer himself in 1851. There are other statistics about how often the opening is played and high-rated players who have played it. This last is misleading because it is based on Elo. Since Morphy and Spielmann didn't have ratings they aren't listed.

Then we have some database statistics about performance of the opening. People are fascinated by these but from a training perspective they are pretty much trivia. Performance rating is interesting, but a killer new move in a certain line can mean dozens of old wins, and only one or two recent losses, resulting in great statistics. Yet the line is still dead.

It's important to note that some of the data these reports generate is based on the side to move in your position. The useful part of the analysis, the "Moves and Plans" section, logically starts with the next move. In our example that means move four for White. The moves are given in order of how many games they represent.

4.d3 was played 758 times so that comes first. In most cases that's going to be the main line to focus on, but it's well worth noting the Elo performance of each variation. 4.d4 scores better than 4.d3, 65% of the points versus 60%, but then you notice that there are only 17 games with 4.d4, which is not much of a statistical sample.

The "Plans" section is a handy item. It lists the common sequences of moves for each side. This is less useful in a sharp opening with many exchanges than in closed openings with less early contact between the forces. In the Falkbeer, for example, there are few typical moves since the lines are so forcing. It is great to be able to review sets of games organized in this way. It will give you a firm understanding of the typical plans much faster than examining a random selection of Falkbeer games.

The rest of the report is more self-explanatory. You can click on variations and individual games. You can save the text report for future use and print it all or only selected pages. The report also generates a book tree window of all the games in your selected position. This is a convenient way to run through the variations quickly.

You can make as many of these reports as you like, perhaps even separate ones in the same opening if you develop an interest in a certain variation. I'd recommend accompanying these with small databases of high-rated games in your opening repertoire. Run a position search for, say, 2300+ rating and copy them over to a new database. Scrutinizing complete games is essential to really grasping an opening.

## The E-mailbag

Not much space for questions this week, but we'll get to the waiting pile next month – so send them in.

**Question** With ChessBase 8, I've created 5 different databases, each carrying about 500,000 games. Since I'm adding new games frequently, I do a "Search for Doubles" + "Physical deletion" on each of these databases every week. This is both time consuming and boring! Is there a way I could create a batch-file to do this unattended at night? – **Jos Heesen**

**Answer** No, at least not inside ChessBase. Windows scripting, the XP improvement on batch files, could probably manage it, but not trivially. You can select multiple database icons with the mouse and search them all at the same time. That's the only function that can work with multiple databases.

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

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***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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