



HOME

BOOK
REVIEWSBULLETIN
BOARDENDGAME
STUDIESSKITTLES
ROOMBOOKSTORE
& EMPORIUM

ChessCafe.com

ChessBase Cafe Mig Greengard

**Orders? Inquiries? You can now
call toll-free:**

1-866-301-CAFE



Start Your Engines

In the early days of computing the literature was full of philosophy over the implications of thinking machines. For example, were they thinking machines or “thinking” machines? Chess computers made programmers start to wonder about the nature of cognition. If a machine could play chess as well as a human, was it thinking? Philosophers started to weigh in as well.

All of this reached its apotheosis when the mass media got into the act during the Kasparov – Deep Blue match in 1997. From columnist to cartoonist, everyone had something to say about intelligence, artificial and not. It’s always interesting when computers encourage us to think about ourselves. The differences in computer playing engines made me start to wonder about what makes up style in human chess.

Tradition has it that over-the-board style follows off-the-board temperament. Mellow people play positional games, while fiery personalities go for wild tactics. The next step was to anthropomorphize the chess programs, crediting them with styles. Kasparov even went so far as to say, only partly in jest, that the aggressive program Junior well-represented the fighting spirit of its native Israel. Programme steadfastly deny this sort of thing, although it’s easily demonstrable how different programs play. Not better or worse, necessarily, but different, and that means style.

Fifty years from now a computer will tell us the best move without any doubt. Objective truth will abolish style, at least in computer chess. Meanwhile, we get different opinions from our silicon pals and these can help us broaden our own chess understanding. What if human styles simply reflected a difference in calculation? We assume that players of the same Elo see more or less the same thing yet make different choices, but what if they just see different things?

Before we get too deep in the philosophy, it’s still true that strong moves are what matter. Style is secondary and 90% of the time the powerful ChessBase engines are all going to suggest the same move. Unless you do a lot of analysis work those stylistic differences aren’t going to be much of a factor.

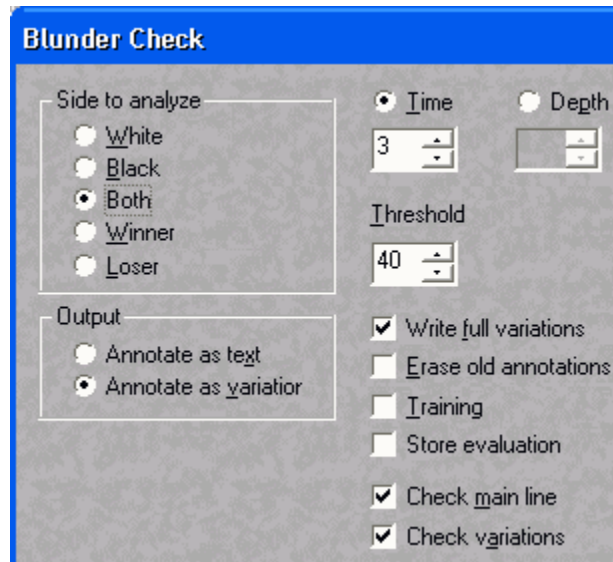
Still if you do care, here are a few thoughts. In my extensive experience the last few versions of Shredder are significantly better in the endgame than the other top engines. Junior finds many tactical motifs faster than its peers and in many cases will suggest sacrificial lines other engines undervalue and ignore. Fritz doesn’t have any weak spots, but its main advantage seems to be something more related to how it is attuned to the interface.

Most of the engines, particularly Junior, will occasionally spend a very long time between showing new lines in ChessBase. That is, after one second it will show +1.23 and then maybe sit there for forty seconds before showing you anything useful. The Fritz engine is much more consistent about publishing its thoughts. I don’t know or care why this is so, but it is so! It doesn’t make a difference for playing strength, but for manual analysis it’s a plus.

This month we're going to combine some of the tools we've looked at in past columns into a game analysis regimen that will also serve as a review. These techniques require a Fritz program, but some of the shuffling can be more easily done in ChessBase if you have both. The raw materials you need are your own games, either played against Fritz, played online at Playchess.com, or OTB games you enter manually. For convenience, move the games you're going to work with into a new database.

Don't start going all clicky-clicky with the magic powers just yet. If you want to improve your game you need to practice your own analytical abilities instead of just reading what Fritz churns out. Keep the engine off and add your own notes to the game. This doesn't necessarily mean lots of deep variations, but at least add text notes about what you were thinking and add the lines you were considering during the game. That's why it's so important to go over your game as soon as possible after you play it.

Apart from the training benefit of going over your games, adding variations gives Fritz something extra to work on. A nice feature, if a somewhat confusing one, is the Blunder Check under the Tools – Analysis menu. We've looked at the Full Analysis before, but the Blunder Check has an item that the Full Analysis inexplicably does not, the ability to analyze variations instead of just the main line



Fritz is somewhat inconsistent in this, but it works. Although it occasionally skips variation even when it's full of blunders, without any clear reason as to why. So when you check for blunders it will also look at the variations you've entered, which saves you the time of going over all your own variations by hand with the engine.

You can do this just to one game or select as many as you like from the database and run the tools on all of them, one after another. Depending on how long you set to think per move this can take a while.

Now you've got a game (or games) with analysis improvements in the main line and in the variations you've added. Now go back over it, taking careful note of all the suggested improvements. Where did you go wrong and why? Use the engine manually to answer your questions. To do that in Fritz, open the Window – Main Engine Pane and start the engine or Add Kibitzer under the Engine menu. Then you can scroll through the lines or add new variations you're curious about to see what

Fritz says.

If you want information on the game's opening from Fritz you'll have to run the Full Analysis. It will check for games with similar opening moves and add them to the annotated game. Remember to define the reference database first. Yes, this does mean you have to run both Blunder Check and Full Analysis if you want it to check your variations and the opening. These features should be merged into the same function in the next version of Fritz.

If you have ChessBase you might also add the game to your opening repertoire database for future study. This will keep you up to date on future developments in that opening every time you download or install a new set of games.

The E-mailbag

Question I play on playchess.com and they have a great feature where they automatically save your games, how many games do they put in your database before it blows up? Thanks, **Dominic**

Answer I have been personally assured by the ChessBase people in Hamburg that your hard drive will run out of space or our sun will cool to a cinder before that database hits a limit. I've seen databases with over four million games, so you'll have to play a lot of blitz before pushing the envelope!

Question Is there a way to bookmark where you are in a particular database or section? For instance, I am going through the *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* CD, and I am using notepad to keep track of the last position that I studied. Then I return and have to scroll down to the number and start again. Is there a way to highlight certain games that is/is not permanent? Thanks, **Jim**

Answer That would be handy, but no, not really. If you have the database installed on your hard drive instead of running it off the CD, it will always open again to the same spot on the list. So if your database window is showing games 400 to 430, and you close the window, it will open again with the same view (because it makes a note in that database's .ini file). Since it can't write to a CD it can't do this if you are running *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* from the CD.

If you want to mark a game you might consider adding a medal in ChessBase 8. Regardless of what it's supposed to mean, putting a yellow medal ("attack") in a game via the Special Annotation – Set Medal option and then saving the game will make a yellow rectangle appear next to that game in the database list. You can easily delete the medal later. You can't set medals in Fritz programs. Of course the database has to be installed on your hard drive to do this.

Question Do all the ChessBase CDs (and DVDs) include .CBR formatted databases for use with older software? Good Luck, **Herb Schulz**

Answer Not all, but the training CDs that don't include ChessBase Reader software can read the new format. ChessBase Magazine still has an "old.cbf" folder with the database in the old format. I don't think there has ever been a .CBR ChessBase file though. The extension .CBF (plus a few others) is the old ChessBase format. The latest giant databases, like the MegaBase 2004, do not include the old format files and cannot be read by the ChessBase Reader.

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
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2004 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.