

ChessBase Cafe

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ChessBase9: Evolution or Revolution?

The word “revolution” was long ago dumped into that bin of words so overused and misused that it has become almost purely a marketing term. Is that new paper towel really revolutionary? Is it going to drag the aristocrats out of their palaces and lop their heads off on the guillotine? Is it going to lead an armed force against the cruel dictator and his minions? That’s a lot to ask of a paper towel. How about we go with “new” or “innovative” and leave revolutions to the revolutionaries?

The chess marketing world isn’t immune to such hyperbole, we’re just worse at it. Chess book titles are a good example. I believe it was GM Alexander Baburin who joked about the title of his own book, anointed *Winning Pawn Structures* by the publishers. It’s an excellent book mostly about the isolated queen’s pawn. But of course the title is a nonsense phrase unless your pawn structure is four connected passers on the 7th rank. Baburin commented that if he wrote a book about his favorite Alekhine’s Defense, an honest title would be “Surviving with the Alekhine’s” or “How Not to Get Killed in the Alekhine’s.”

It is to ChessBase’s credit that they haven’t gone this route with the first new version of their eponymous product since 2000. The marketing has been detailed lists of features instead of shouting from the rooftops. ChessBase 9 will start shipping in a few weeks; almost exactly four years after CB 8 came out. I still remember teasing poor ChessBase director Frederic Friedel about it in London during the Kasparov-Kramnik match. Chess writer John Henderson had just installed it on his (admittedly already unstable) laptop and was having all sorts of crashes. We immediately dubbed it “ChessBase 8... my hard drive!” and looked forward to “ChessBase... Nein!”



Ah, those were the days. Now I write for ChessBase and about their software, so I can’t be so cruel. Not out of favoritism, but I’ve learned that the CB team in Hamburg are pretty nice guys and that they are quite receptive to criticism and new ideas regarding their software.

There are many dozens of new and improved features in ChessBase 9, although not many of them can be categorized as new ideas. I’ve been fooling around

with a beta release of CB 9, and this isn't really a review of the product. But it's a good opportunity to address one of the most frequent questions I get: Who is ChessBase for? (i.e.: Should I get it if I already have Fritz? Do I need both?)

The one really big new thing to come out of ChessBase in the past year is the Fritz Chess Media System that adds audio and video, and that is now incorporated into ChessBase, which is great. Playchess.com access has also been added so you can play online. The gorgeous Fritz 8 interface and 3D board are also present, although I still think you can get more done faster in 2D any day. Your brain can make out the positions faster and on a smaller board, which leaves you with more screen real estate for all the other window panes like the notation, the Fritz engine, the opening tree, etc.

If it sounds like much of ChessBase 9 has been borrowed from Fritz 8, you are right. CB 9 has finally joined that interface family. In terms of functions ChessBase 9 is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Most of the work went in behind the scenes to make it faster and easier to use. Searches and other work can be done by the program in the background, often making it feel like they are done instantly. They went after small inconveniences, handy tweaks, and pet peeves with a vengeance.

A few highlights: Seeing the game list without opening a database in a new window, a big space and time saver. Better fonts (I think I complained about this until they broke down), faster navigation, a game history list, html support, auto-save, smarter searches, more complete indexes (including a multi-pane player index), manual game list reordering (yay!), resizable text windows, and board sounds.

Fortunately for those of us who make many diagrams, you can now save board layouts including the exact board size (yes, I complained about that in an old column). No more guessing the pixel size by lining up the board edge with a menu. Unfortunately for those of us who make many diagrams, there still isn't a keyboard shortcut for Copy Position, but this is probably their revenge on me for all the whining about the fonts. (For the sake of tradition I must note that at least in the beta 3, the font in the 'add text' window is still blurry under ClearType.)

All those improvements will mean a lot to ChessBase 8 users, but they are lacking the Cool Factor you want in a new product. The better usability and XP-friendly transitions and tool-tips are expected in this day and age. If someone already has a Fritz 8 family product (Junior or Shredder 8, HIARCS 9), the multimedia, Playchess, and 3D board aren't new. And of course the one thing you can't do with ChessBase is play chess against it (other than online). The included engines are for analysis only. You can also use any engine you already have under ChessBase. But if you can play other people, who wants to play against a machine anyway?

There is one cool feature that either stems from a suggestion of mine or proves great minds think alike. It's what ChessBase are calling threat animation. Fritz and ChessBase already had the ability to switch the engine to "show threat"

(shift+T), which simply passes the move to the other side so you can see what he would play if he could move again. It's a handy feature, but limited. Threat animation takes this a step further by integrating "find threat" into the board with arrows when you turn it on.



In the diagram you can see how the threat feature points out the royal knight fork on d5. It doesn't mention that after 1...Be5 2.Nd5+! still wins because of 2...exd5 3.Qxc7 and the bishop is pinned. That's okay, Karpov missed it too. Leaving the threat feature on works as a blunder-checker and gives you faster insight as you work through a game. This isn't just handy for people like me who go through dozens of games a day. It's also a great "constant coach" for improving players.

ChessBase remains what it was, the premier chess research, training, reference, and publishing tool. Version 9 hasn't started any revolutions, but it makes a tremendous number of improvements. It's a must for anyone who uses CB 8 every day. It's recommended for those who use CB 8 regularly or who don't have training software and want to kick their regimen into a higher gear.

Fritz 8 is still going to be the software of choice for most amateurs, who don't get much practical use out of multi-million-game databases and sophisticated opening dossiers. But the addition of Playchess.com and the media system make CB more of a temptation to that audience. Those are the two changes that make CB 9 an option for some people who weren't interested in CB 8.

The E-mailbag

HD wrote in to point out that you *can* fix the sort order of games in a database in ChessBase 8. After you run a sort you can go back to the sort menu and select "fix sort order" at the bottom of the list. The games will then be rewritten into the database in that order.

Question I have loads of databases where the same player is noted with his full first name, initials, or combinations of these. Is there any way of editing a list of games with, say, Nick Croad, to change them to N.Croad? I mean, currently I have to go into each single game and ‘replace’ with the name I want.

This leaves out the vexed problem of different spellings of last names, sadly, I don’t think *that* issue will ever be fixed to everyone’s satisfaction! Thanks,
Chris Benson

Answer This is easily done in ChessBase. I have to do it all the time because many tournament sites like to give each day’s games with the players’ names different from the day before. You open the database, go to the Players index, and select every version of that player while holding down the ctrl key. Then press F2 to edit the name as you want it. Click enter and all your Nick Croad, N. Croad, GM Croad, Nick Croad (UK), will be instantly merged into the name you entered. You can save a step by selecting your preferred version last. Then when you press F2 it will default to that version.

As for standardizing names, you’ll note that when you press F2 there is a question mark button next to the name. Click it and ChessBase will try to find that name in the Playerbase and suggest who it might be. Not helpful for your local club players, but it’s very handy for international players. That way you don’t end up with ten versions of “Korchnoi,” which would make it impossible to search through all his games.

There is no Player index in Fritz, but note that you can edit a game’s header information without opening it. Select it in the database list and press F2. That can save some time. If you don’t have ChessBase and need to change many games, a workaround is to export them to a PGN file and open that in your word processor. There you can run an automatic search-and-replace (ctrl+h in Word) to standardize the names. Save and close and convert it back to ChessBase format.

I still do that as a fast way of resetting move numbers to one when I make puzzles from games for my ChessNinja newsletters. Let’s say you want to turn a cool combination into a “white to play and win” puzzle. Chopping away the leading moves leaves you with a first move number of thirty or something else ungainly. So I export the positions as PGN and set the move numbers back to one in my word processor. You could do this in ChessBase by going to New Position from the board and setting the move number to one, but then you lose all the moves and any analysis you have. Hacks are still necessary sometimes!

Question Martin Sims of New Zealand here. What have I done by accident? I have a database on my main screen of CB8 for my completed turn-based games from GameKnot and ChessWorld. It contained over 500 games.

I was renaming the files in CB8 to make them more meaningful and I must have done something stupid because the icon in CB8 disappeared. The db is still there when I go into the Database folder inside Chessbase. I open this and I now see it

on my screen but when I shut down CB8 and reopen it the icon has again disappeared. I started a new database and copied all the games across but, like before, when I shut down the program and reopen it I see nothing. The database is there in the folder but no icon on my CB8 screen. What have I done please? Best wishes, **Martin Sims**

Answer Hmm, this could be several things. Unless you open a database from the main My Databases screen, it won't appear there when you close and reopen ChessBase. Databases you open from the Drives list or the Database path list on the left won't appear automatically. While on the My Databases screen, press ctrl+O to open the database you want and that should put the icon there to stay, or at least until you remove it or rename it.

If you were renaming the database files manually in Explorer, ChessBase won't be able to find them. It keeps a list of your files and their icons and saves it when you close and loads it when you open ChessBase. But that doesn't explain why your new database icon isn't staying around. Perhaps the file where ChessBase keeps that information has been confused by the file renaming, although I haven't been able to reproduce this. You can simply delete the file "DBItems.ini" in the ChessBase directory (probably under My Documents, or run a search for it). The next time you start ChessBase you'll get pop-up messages about loading databases from a CD, but you can ignore these. Then open your databases and close CB and a new DBItems.ini will be created.

A final possibility is that the icon directory has trouble and they aren't displaying correctly. I've seen (well, "seen") cases of invisible icons and blank icons. Only a ChessBase reinstallation will solve this.

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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