

ChessBase Cafe

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Playchess.com for the Tournament Player

What is a tournament player in the internet chess era? The expression goes back a long way and signified a more serious devotee than a club player or an amateur. 100 years ago there weren't many amateur tournaments worthy of the name and to play in one often meant you had won a qualifying event at a club.

If analyses of 19th-century newspapers are correct, chess re-introduced the word "tournament" into the English sports vocabulary. It was used in medieval times to describe jousting events and it seemed an accurate description of the first invitational chess events. More than the word, the first international chess tournaments were some of the first truly international sports events of any kind, predating the modern Olympics by almost half a century.

That's a lot of history to live up to, so are you doing your part? Playing in tournaments is a different sport in many ways. Event strategy is more important than game strategy. Do you have to play for a win in the final round? If so, what opening should you play? Do you take that gambit pawn if a draw seals a tie for first? How are the other players doing? It's easy to say you should ignore all that and just play the board, but it's a lot harder to do when there are prizes on the line.

It's much easier to be a tournament player today, even without the internet. There are clubs and amateur events all over the world, although depending on where you live it can still be a hassle. Still, at least they will let you play as long as you can pay the entry fee.

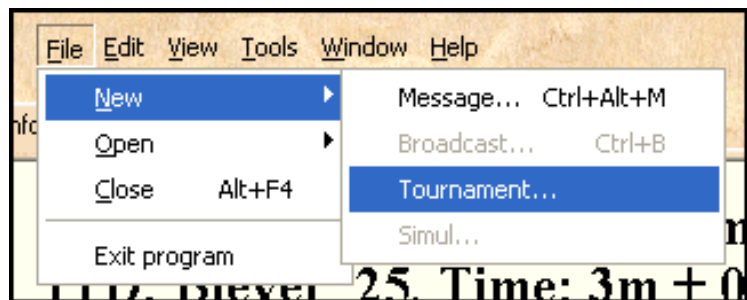
Ever since internet chess came about it has been a matter of contention whether or not it would lead to the death of OTB (over the board) chess. Would the millions of new players who started online then seek out clubs and events? Or would the convenience of online play siphon players away from those clubs and events? Of course the answer is "both," and the jury is still out on which side is winning.

Playing in tournaments ups the ante of your dedication and emotional investment in the game. That means it will improve your chess more as well because you will concentrate harder and study the games more. If you are looking to push your chess up to a new level, playing in tournaments is a great way to do it. Playchess.com makes this easy, although perhaps not as easy as it could be.

As a chess instructor my biggest problem with Playchess.com tournaments is the same problem I have with 99.9% of all internet chess games: they are too short. Blitz and bullet are the junk foods of the chess food pyramid. They are enjoyable and addictive, but not very healthy, at least not compared to longer games.

Not everyone has the time to play a serious game for an hour or two, but online play makes this easier too. You can save tournaments in progress and start them up again any time. (Close the tournament and later use the File – Open – Tournament command to restart it.) You can play in a tournament over several weeks or even several months, arranging game times that are convenient for you and your opponents. Playchess.com recently made this sort of organization very easy by adding an internal email system. In the main chat pane, there are four tabs: Chat, Channels, Inbox, and Sent. Those last two are where you manage your messages.

The best thing is that you don't have to wait for an online Goichberg to organize a tournament. You don't have to wait for Ilyumzhinov to find a dictator to provide sponsorship. You are your own tournament director at Playchess.com. All you do is enter one of the tournament rooms (the pane with list of rooms is in the bottom-right corner by default) and go to the File menu and select New – Tournament. Give it a file name (you can select the public title of the event later) and then a wizard walks you through the process of designing your tournament. You have to be in a tournament room first.



Wait, you say you don't have the ability to start an event? Playchess requires you to have a member rank of bishop before you can organize tournaments. The rank is represented by the icon that appears to the left of the player name on the player list. That requires a month of play and a rating of 1600. The month of play seems reasonable, but why have a minimum rating requirement to organize tournaments? 1300's are people too! Chess skill in no way indicates responsibility or organizational skills (perhaps the opposite in the latter case!). They should do away with that limitation, especially since over half of the players are rated under 1600. At least you keep your bishop rank if you go over 1600 and later fall below.

The tournament wizard walks you through the settings. You set the format of your event, the number of rounds, and whether or not the games will be rated. It can be a match, a round-robin (all-play-all), knock-out, or even a team event (Scheveningen). ChessBase seems to assume that everyone who knows how to push a pawn knows what a Swiss tournament is – which is far from the truth.

Type: Knock out

Rounds: [] Double rounds: ☐

☒ Match

☐ Wins needed

☒ Best of: 2 2nd round: 2

☐ Max games

☒ Fated

An aside: weak instructions and online help files continue to be the bane of CB products. I used to work with a software testing company and ease of use is by far the #1 factor in customer satisfaction. What good is a cool feature if nobody knows about it or if they can't figure out how to use it? To this I'll add that there is a serious lack of admins and helpers at Playchess.com. Someone with a question or a problem with his account rarely has anyone to ask for help, if they could figure out how to do so. I know this because they often ask me online or by email. Big, red HELP! buttons are often overused, but they are essential.

As it is you have to find the English Help (or Deutsch, et al) in the Channels tab. Then you have to right-click the channel and select Talk to set the chat window to speak to all those in the channel. People are friendly and helpful, but there isn't a formal schedule or training of helpers and there are few administrators. We now rejoin our regularly scheduled column.







On the second page you set the time control of the games. Since the tournament feature was first introduced, several small elements have been added but the online help file hasn't been updated. There's no explanation of the tweaks you can add to the knock-out and match events on the second page of the wizard.

You are most likely to prefer round-robin or Swiss events. They can be played with any number of players and everyone gets to play in every round, unless you have an odd number of players. In the third and final page of the wizard you title your event ("Freddy's Fabulous Fourteen-Minute Massacre!") and add note that will be broadcast to everyone online so people know about it. ("Come play in this spectacular tournament! 10 players wanted. Starting in five minutes!") The server will add the room location of your tournament to the announcement. Note that people who don't have the announcement channel turned on in the channels tab won't receive your broadcast. It is on by default.

When you click finish, it will announce your event and people will come to play. A new dialog box pops up so you can manage the participants. You have to do some work here. As the "Tournament Director" you have to select the players who want in and add them to the list. The players who enter the room have to click the "Join Event" button, something they might not know. Their status changes to "Wants In," and then you select and add them.

When you are done adding players you have to start the event. The game

pairings will appear under the Games tab. Then nothing happens. Ah, you have to click the button under the player list to start the first round. Only then will the game boards launch so people can start their games. The system keeps track of all the results. One very cool thing is that it also maintains a crosstable of the event under the Info tab. When all the games are done you have to click the green “start round 2” button. There is a “replay round 1” button there too, in case there were problems.

Mig's Bullet Test Tourney 2004 (TD: Mig, Time: 1m + 0s)									
1	Mig		2484	-68		1	1	2.0 / 2	
2	Schachquick		1539	+549	0		1	1.0 / 2	
3	Tatanka		1693	-481	0	0		0.0 / 2	

The system broadcasts the results of each round. When the tournament is over you click finish and it announces the results to everyone. The final crosstable is saved to your computer in the file you created at the start, but only your own games are saved locally.

There are also regular tournaments organized by the administrators. Some offer prizes in the Playchess.com online currency of ducats. On Friday nights you can play in the Friday night blitz tournament to win a subscription to my ChessNinja newsletters. Yes, I’m the one who was just saying you should play longer games, but attendance was low!

The E-mailbag

Not much space for questions this month, but don’t lose heart. I’ll get to the pile next month, so send them in. Please note that most of my ChessBase (not Fritz) tutorials and Q&A will now focus on CB 9.

Question I read your latest article at ChessCafé that mentioned the chess media system is being incorporated into Chessbase 9. I only have an older version of Fritz and being a fan of Jacob Aagaard’s work I wanted to get his Attacking Chess training program which states that it requires a Fritz 8 family product to run. Would I be able to run these training programs with Chessbase 9 without purchasing Fritz 8? Many thanks, **Jim Miller**

Answer Yes, you can. No Fritz program is required to run the Chess Media System if you have CB 9. Those trainer program requirements will have to be amended now that CB 9 is out.

Question I have a recurring problem that is driving me mad. On PlayChess when I start a game with black my opponents first move doesn’t show on my screen about 80% of the time. I have the latest version and the guys at chessbase

are struggling to help me. I am running virtual PC on my iMac and suspect this is the source of the problem. Any ideas? Cheers, **Tony Gleeson**

Answer www.dell.com.

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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