

ChessBase Cafe

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Video Training

Some purists say you have to study and analyze on a real board, at least part of the time. Computers are great, but for really beating those variations into your head you need wood, so the thinking goes, not flimsy pixels. Those purists must be horrified by the latest ChessBase product line of video lessons. The Fritz Trainer series, now with lessons by Garry Kasparov, introduces a level of passivity in the user that rivals anything HBO can produce.

This isn't to say the videos aren't great. There is little doubt most people retain more information faster when it is delivered in multimedia format. There's almost the feeling that you're improving just by osmosis as Kasparov tells you about the Queen's Gambit. (Trust me; if the osmosis method worked I'd be 2700 by now.)

But you don't just have to sit there like a lump of rapidly decaying carbon. Although the interface doesn't allow you to do all that much in the way of interaction, there are many ways you can use other ChessBase and Fritz tools to get more out of these cool new toys.



First of, what you *can* do while you watch. Despite the fact that last week I was told by ChessBase that you can't start Fritz or another "kibitzer" engine while a chess media file (CMF) is running unless you pause it first, it works fine for me in both ChessBase 9 and Fritz. If your computer isn't speedy it might slow both the video and the engine to run them both simultaneously, but I didn't

experience any negative effects. You can do everything you normally do with the engine pane once it's open, such as show threat or add more lines. In general I don't recommend watching the lessons with Fritz running; it's little more than a distraction and you can assume that the authors computer-checked their analysis.

The copy function is also active, so at any time you can ctrl+c to move the game notation to the Windows clipboard. Then you can paste it into a new board window and manipulate it, something you can't do while the CMF is running. Most of the Tools menu in ChessBase 9 is inactive while you are watching a CMF. So you can't find novelty or look up the opening in a key. This is true even after you close the Chess Media System (CMS) pane.

So if you want to search the Megabase for games that reached a position in the video, you need to pause it, run a search filter, and go to Position – Get Board and then search. In that new database window you can then do the usual stuff like make a book of the games or look at the statistics. You can also click around in the notation pane to see other positions.

The good news-bad news is that the moves are synchronized with the video and when the instructor adds new moves, it will jump to the new moves automatically. Of course this is also what is so great about the system. You can't get lost or out of sync. Sometimes the instructor will delete variations, so if you want to look at something later, or look up supplementary games, you should copy the notation to the clipboard or open a filter in a database and use the Get Board as mentioned above.

I need to insert a word of warning. The CMS has compatibility problems with Windows Media Player 10, which is the latest version. It can cause fatal crashes (not to you, your family or your entire computer, just to Fritz / ChessBase 9). If you've been seeing dialog boxes with nasty red X's in them when you play the videos, you aren't alone. They are working hard to figure out why, but for now the only solution is to uninstall Media Player 10. Windows XP should automatically roll you back to the earlier version and there's no trouble with that one. If not, you may need to install 9 again. You can download it here: <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/9series/player.aspx>

To uninstall 10, go to the Control Panel and Add/Remove Programs. Scroll down to the Windows section and you should see the entry for Windows Media Player 10. You'll probably have to reboot after it is removed.

Many people are seeing the CMS for the first time now that ChessBase is packaging them with a new product. Just when you thought the ChessBase catalog couldn't get any more confusing, out comes the Fritz 8 Champion Edition. Yes, it's a new edition, yes, it's still called 8. The interface is the same as Fritz 8, but there is an updated engine and a new 3D board, as well as a selection of six CMS lessons on a second CD-ROM. (Two Kasparov's, two Aagaard's, a Wells, a Martin, and a partridge in a pear tree.)

They usually only change the version number of Fritz when the interface has

been revamped and that's not the case here: so it's still Fritz 8. The engine is the "Bilbao Fritz," the engine that scored 3.5/4 against Topalov, Ponomarev, and Karjakin in the Basque capital in October. As I've said for years, all of these top engines can crush you like a grape so if you already have Fritz 8 it's not a must-have upgrade for anyone except true computer chess maniacs.

I find it very handy to use the Megabase to create supplementary databases of the variations being covered in the lessons. You can compare and contrast the lines given by the instructor with the latest games from ChessBase Magazine or from the internet. For some reason the DVDs don't include game databases with the material the instructor covered.

One very important thing you can do to get more out of these lessons is ask questions. No, they won't answer, but if you note down questions you have during the lessons you can then go back and figure out the answers yourself later. Wait till the second time you watch. You can use a word processor if you have a big monitor, but ye olde pencil and paper work pretty well. Scrawls like "why not 6...dxc4?" are enough. Later you can go through the games and see if you can find answers to your questions. Fritz is also handy for refuting bad ideas.

After you are familiar with the material, one good training step to complement the opening DVDs is to create a custom book for Fritz with all the lines you've been looking at. Then you can play against Fritz only in the opening you've been studying. If you've copy-pasted the instructor's notation into a board while you were watching and saved it to a database: this is easy. Create a new opening book, then edit opening book, import games. Choose the database where you saved the game with the variations and you're all set.

You might want to add more variations to the game manually before you do the import. For more variety, get a few thousand high-rated games from the starting point of the variation and make the book from that.

The E-mailbag

First, a correction: my workaround last month to add a variation at the end of the game in ChessBase 9 turns out to be as unnecessary as it was ingenious. As several people wrote in, if you hold down the ctrl button while making a move, it automatically enters it as a new variation. Why the good folks in Hamburg didn't share this with me when I asked, I don't know!

Question I'm new to ChessBase 9 – having just gotten the Mega package, and I love it. One annoying feature though, is the arrows and colored squares that some programs put in their training software – for example Renko's Tactics 2. I want to look at the problems and if I can't figure them out, *then* turn on the arrows/colors, etc. I figured out that right-clicking on the notation → delete → delete all commentary (shift-ctrl-y) will do it, but not globally. In the next problem, the lines and arrows are back again.

Answer You can delete all the annotations in a database by right-clicking its icon, going to Tools, and then “Unannotate DB.” Personally, I don’t think “unannotate” is a word, but it works! Just make sure you have a backup of the database or the CD around for when you want to see the variations and commentary.

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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