



## COLUMNISTS

# ChessBase Cafe

Steve Lopez

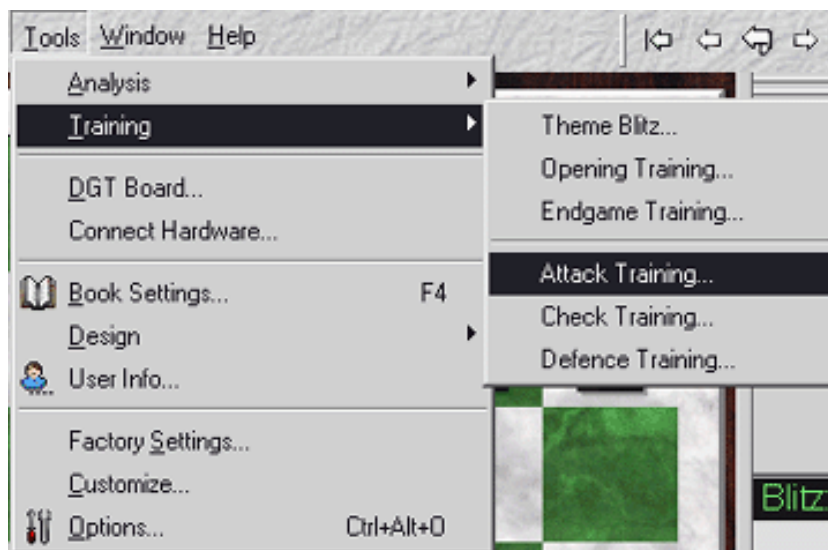


## New *Fritz 9* Training Modes

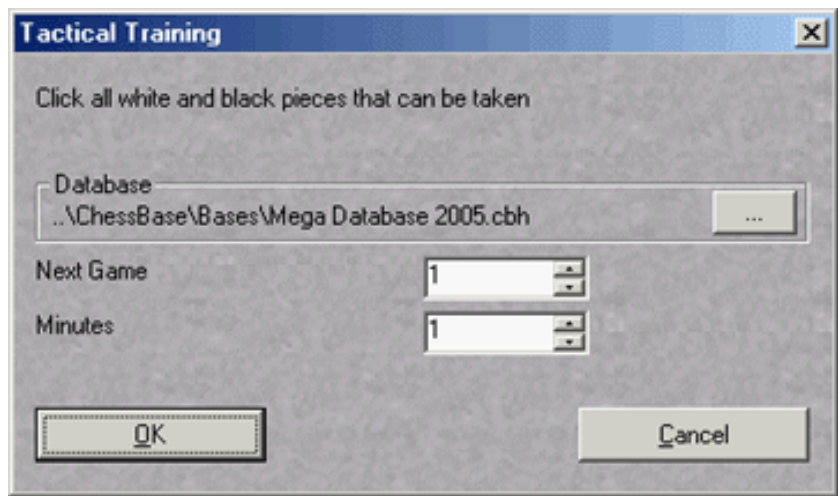
The release of *Fritz8* saw some interesting and useful training features added to the program: opening and endgame training. In the first of these modes you select an opening variation from a menu, load it, and then try to replay the pre-programmed correct “book” moves from memory. With endgame training you load a type of endgame from a menu and then play it out against your computer opponent; your goal here is to achieve checkmate.

While *Fritz9* still contains these training modes, they’ve been supplemented by the addition of three new middlegame training modes: attack, check, and defense. All three, while a bit different from each other, share a common purpose: they constitute a means of pattern recognition training designed to help you develop or increase your “chess vision” skills. They also differ slightly from the previous opening and endgame training in an important regard: while the two earlier training methods relied on the use of specialized (albeit user-modifiable) pre-programmed databases, the three new training modes can be used with **any** existing database.

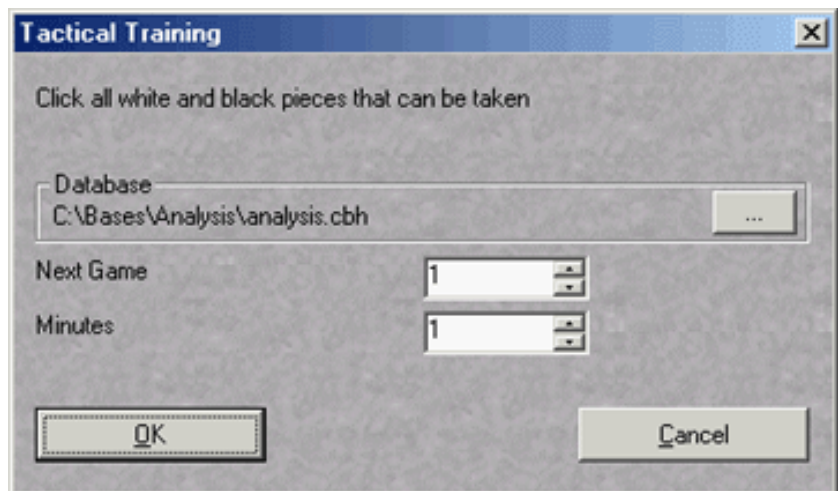
Let’s start with a look at how one of these training types works; then we’ll extend our discussion to include the others. We’ll begin with Attack training. To launch this feature, go to the Tools menu in *Fritz9*, select “Training,” and then “Attack training” from the submenu:



Selecting this command will open a new window, shown below:



Note that the choice of database defaults to a large ChessBase database. In my case, the program has selected *Mega Database 2005*; for most users, *Fritz* will likely select the database which comes with *Fritz9* by default. If you'd like to choose another database instead, click the button to the right which displays three dots (or an ellipsis, if we want to get technical about it); the standard *Windows File Select* dialogue will appear and will allow you to easily navigate to any folder on any drive in which you've opted to store another database. Double-click on the .cbh file for your chosen database and you'll see this dialogue change to reflect your new choice:



In the illustration above, I've selected a small database of games I've constructed for my personal study named *Analysis.cbh*.

A brief description near the top of the dialogue defines your training task; for Attack training you must click on every white and black piece and pawn on the board that can be captured. This task is always the same for Attack training and it requires that you not only look at each unit which you can capture but also be aware of each of your own pieces and pawns that are *en prise*.

There are two additional settings which require some explanation. "Next game" refers to the game number in the database at which you'd like to start the training. You can set this to any game number you like (with the obvious

caveat that it's silly to set a higher number than the number of games in the database). This setting is particularly useful for large databases; you can vary your starting point from session to session.

"Minutes" might not be quite what you think. The number you set here *doesn't* refer to the number of minutes allotted per position. Instead it refers to the length of time your whole training session will last. For example, if you set "Minutes" to "3," your challenge will be to correctly solve as many positions as you can in a three minute period.

When you're ready to begin, click "OK." *Fritz9* will then load a position taken from the game that you selected as your starting game number in the database. You'll see the clock running. You'll need to single-click on every piece or pawn on the board which can be captured. When you click on a piece or pawn it'll be highlighted in green; to unselect a piece – just click on it a second time.



After you've successfully selected every unit on the board that is in danger of being captured, *Fritz* will automatically load a position from the next game in the database. And here you just repeat the process, selecting all of the wood on the board that is in danger of being captured. The "moving side" doesn't matter (and, in fact, isn't even given) – you need to select all of the pieces/pawns for both players which are *en prise*. And be aware that *Fritz* will toss in an additional trick: it occasionally flips the board, so that you sometimes will be looking at the board from White's side and other times from Black's. It's **crucial** that you remain aware of which side of the board you're on, since this makes a world of difference when it comes to legal captures made by pawns. (And, on a related note, *en passant* captures aren't considered, since this

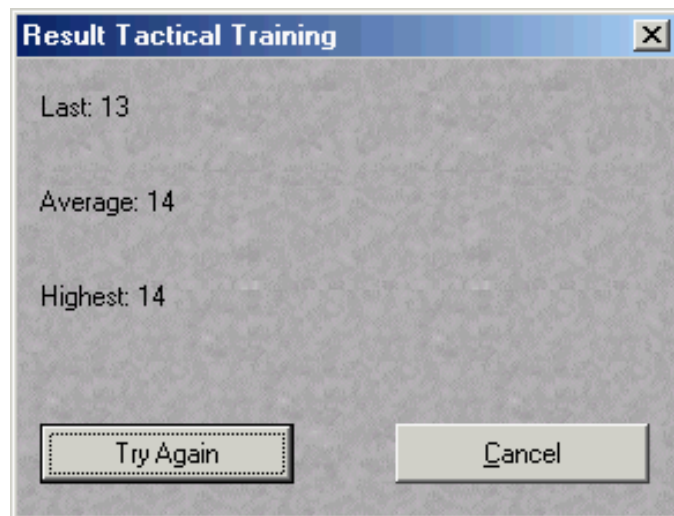


determination involves both the side to move and the previous move made by the opponent – neither are relevant in Attack training exercises).

As we've seen, you must successfully complete a position by clicking all of the *en prise* pieces before the program will load a new position. Obviously at some point your time will run out; *Fritz* will then highlight in yellow the squares of all of the pieces you missed.



You'll also get a new dialogue which displays your training scores:



There are two additional features of this dialogue: you can start a new training session (with the same "Minutes" value as you previously used) by clicking the "Try again" button, or you can exit Attack training by clicking "Cancel." Note

that you can exit a training session at any time by clicking the red “X” button at the upper left of your screen.

That’s pretty simple and straightforward, and all three of the new training types work the same way. But your specific task will vary depending on the training type you’ve selected:

- **Attack training** – click on every piece or pawn for both sides that can be captured by an opposing piece or pawn;
- **Defense training** – click on every piece or pawn on the board that isn’t defended by a friendly piece or pawn. Keep in mind that it doesn’t matter whether or not a piece or pawn is presently under attack; if it’s not defended by a friendly unit, it qualifies for the purpose of this exercise;
- **Check training** – click every piece or pawn on the board that can put the opposing king in check after moving. Note that this does **not** refer to pieces or pawns currently giving check (there shouldn’t be any in the positions loaded by *Fritz*), but to pieces or pawns that must first move to place the opponent’s king in check.

I’d like to stress again that these three training types can be used with *any* database; they don’t rely on special databases, as is the case with opening and endgame training. This provides you with a great deal of flexibility in how you use these training types. For example you can construct a database of games on a particular opening and then use it for all three types of “board vision” training. This is significant because you’re likely to see certain middlegame patterns repeated within those games, and this is good pattern recognition training for the middlegames that will typically arise from your chosen opening.

There’s an interesting thread that connects all of these new *Fritz9* training types, and which makes them somewhat different from orthodox tactics exercises: they’re all geared toward recognizing *threats* (even potential ones). Your challenges are to find which pieces are presently under attack, which pieces presently have no defenders, and which pieces can move to deliver a check. Moreover, the twist here is that you’re not just looking for one side’s moves, as with standard tactics problems, but are instead looking at the possibilities for **both** players. This forces you to consider not just what you can do to your opponent, but what he or she can potentially do to *you*.

When I first read about these new training features in the advance releases from ChessBase, I initially thought them to be beginner’s tools. But after trying out these training modes I’ve discovered that they’re much more challenging and much more *fun* than I’d suspected. It’s not nearly as easy to blow through these challenges as I’d thought – and I’m discovering that I’m missing some important things which are happening on the board.

That’s what these new training tools are all about: giving you the means to spot the deficiencies in your “board vision,” while simultaneously providing you

with a fun way to correct and improve them. I heartily encourage you to give them a try; they're much more challenging and more enjoyable than you might think (even for intermediate players like myself), and you may be surprised at what you'll discover along the way.

Until next month, have fun!

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

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***Steve 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 Steve!](#)***

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