



COLUMNISTS

ChessBase Cafe

Steve Lopez



Fritz 9 Game Analysis: Part Two

In [last month's](#) *ChessBase Café*, we learned how to make *Fritz9* perform overnight analysis of our games. This month we're going to examine how to use this computer-generated analysis to spot flaws in our play.

Occasionally I receive an e-mail from a user who “demands” to know how to get his chessplaying program to tell him in plain conversational English, and often with just one analyzed game, what's wrong with his play. Sorry, but it just doesn't work that way. For that sort of thing you'll need a human chess instructor – and it's not going to be possible for that person to look at only a single game and devise an instant course for your chess success. It'll take several sessions with a strong human player before he or she can tell you what you're doing wrong. Now I'm certainly not going to tell you that you shouldn't do this; live lessons with a human instructor are a valuable resource. But they can also be fairly expensive. Since you've already invested some cash in your purchase of *Fritz*, it makes sense to learn how to use its analytical tools to get started on your journey in chess improvement.

Unlike a human instructor, *Fritz* isn't going to give you “the big picture” by reviewing a batch of your games and devising an overall study plan. Instead *Fritz* will zero in on each game and show you exactly where and how you went wrong *in that individual game*. It's up to you to gather and review this information, and look at the “big picture” yourself to discover the areas that need improvement.

A word of warning before we proceed: you're not likely to be comfortable with this process because it will require you to critically and *honestly* examine your play. This is not a process for “know it alls” or people with easily-bruised egos (and those characteristics often go hand in glove, come to think of it). You have to go into this process with the right frame of mind: that your chess play could stand some improvement. You also need to realize that said improvement is typically a long, laborious process. If it were easy, if there was some kind of “quick fix” or “magic bullet,” we'd *all* be grandmasters – and the thing wouldn't even be worth the doing.

Your ego is likely to take a hammering at some point, but that's the only way by which we get better. And another warning: *Fritz* isn't a structured tutorial program. There are many tools within the software to help us improve, to point us down the right path, but we're still going to have to do

a bit of work ourselves.

The process of improving at chess is composed of three steps:

- **Practice**
- **Analysis**
- **Study**

Practice doesn't necessarily mean sitting at home behind closed doors playing games against a computer, although it certainly *can* be that. Practice refers to *every time you sit down at the board* to play a game of chess. We're referring to "practice" in its purest form here: being a *practitioner* of the game of chess. Every time you play a chess game, you're exercising your skills and practicing what you know.

Analysis is where *Fritz* excels. We examined this aspect in last month's [column](#). Unless we commit a *really* obvious blunder (like hanging a rook or queen), few of us possess the skill to determine where we went wrong. That's where *Fritz* comes in – it's a stronger player, designed to show us where and how we went wrong.

Study is admittedly the hardest step of the cycle – at least when you do it right. Humans traditionally abhor things we're not good at; unfortunately, those things are often what we should be studying with the greatest determination. Study is the least "fun" step of the process, but it's the most important – we study to correct our weaknesses and gain knowledge.

What we're going to examine in this column are the things you need to look for in the games that *Fritz* has analyzed, the clues which will ultimately tell you what you should be studying to become a better chessplayer. We're going to use *Fritz* to bridge the gap between Step Two (Analysis) and Step Three (Study).

You need to realize right away that you're going to need a whole big batch of analyzed games to derive benefit from this process; one game won't do. Ten or a dozen games won't do. It will require about twenty-five analyzed games before you can identify certain patterns and tendencies.

Many of us play chess nearly every day and we often play more than one game at a sitting. Since *Fritz* will probably be able to handle one to three games in an overnight analysis, we'll need to prioritize the games we play to determine which ones we should analyze. It's far better to have *Fritz* analyze one game well (by setting a "Time" level of sixty to ninety seconds) than to have it analyze a whole pile of games superficially (by setting the "Time" level to something ridiculously low, like five seconds).

If you must prioritize your games, your losses are obviously better to

analyze than your wins. You're trying to determine what you did wrong. While you certainly do make mistakes in games that you win, remember that we're prioritizing games here, so wins get excluded.

Skip your short losses (under 20 moves), unless that's all you have. If you're losing most of your games in less than twenty moves, you need to study general opening principles. You're making errors like forgetting to develop your pieces, ignoring your king's safety, or failing to control the center. Get a book on general opening principles, read, and study it.

In my own chess studies, I try to select games for *Fritz* in which I felt I played fairly well throughout much of the game but wasn't quite sure where I went wrong. It doesn't do me much good to have *Fritz* analyze games in which I spotted my mistake while the game was still in progress; I want to learn something *new* about my chess deficiencies.

My preferred analysis mode is "Blundercheck." The numerical evaluations provide a precision that "Full analysis" mode lacks. I not only see *where* I played inferior moves, but also exactly *how* inferior they were. This is *crucial* when trying to spot chronic recurring weaknesses in my play.

That's the main key to using *Fritz*' analysis features. After you've had *Fritz* analyze a whole bunch of your games, it's time to start reviewing them to see if you can spot recurring patterns of weaknesses. You're looking for two things here: *how* you're losing games and *where* you're losing them.

Using "Blundercheck" mode can give you a nice overview of the ebb and flow of a chess game. Here's a portion of one of the screen captures from last month's [column](#):

```
16.♖ad1 ♜e7 17.d5 exd5
[0.94 Fritz 9: 17...♙xc3 18.♜xc3 exd5 19.cxd5
♙d8 20.♙d4 ♜d6 21.♖c1 ♖a7 22.♜c4 0.44/13 ]
18.cxd5 ♙xc3 19.♜xc3
[0.59 Fritz 9: 19.dxc6 ♙f6 20.♖d7 ♜e8 21.♖xc7
♖c8 22.♖xc8 ♜xc8 23.♖c1 ♙f7 1.00/12 ]
```

The first number in each set of brackets (colored in dark blue) provides *Fritz*' analysis of *the positions that actually occurred in the game*. For example, after Black plays 17...exd5, *Fritz* judges the position to be almost a full pawn (94/100ths) in White's favor. Black could have improved his play with the variation beginning with 17...Bxc3; after *Fritz*' suggested line, White would be leading by less than half a pawn (0.44) – the evaluation of the position after *Fritz*' suggested improvement is given in bright blue.

Looking ahead to *Fritz*' next bit of analysis, we see that White played 19.Qxc3 which cut his lead to just over half a pawn (0.59), but had he played the variation starting with 19.dxc6 instead, he'd have come out a full

pawn ahead (1.00).

Now that we understand how to read the analysis, it's time to start looking at some games. If you're playing plenty of games in which you're cruising along with the normal "ebb and flow" for both players (say, swinging back and forth between -0.25 and 0.25) or in which one player keeps a small but steady advantage (say 0.30 or so move after move) but suddenly *wham!* – the evaluation takes a *drastic* swing in favor of your opponent – then you need to study tactics. Your opponent just played a crushing move that won material and swung the balance heavily in his favor; if this happens frequently, then you need to study tactics because you're giving your opponent tactical opportunities. Conversely, if *Fritz* repeatedly suggest variations that change the numerical evaluation drastically in your favor, you also need to study tactics; because you're missing those tactical opportunities.

But let's say that your position tends to get whittled away game after game. You're doing OK, but your opponent gains a third of a pawn here, a quarter of a pawn there, and slowly builds an advantage of more than 1.00 (even though the actual material balance is even as far as the pieces on the board go). In this case, you need to study chess strategy and positional play. Your opponent is putting the slow squeeze on you by "accumulating small advantages," as the great Wilhelm Steinitz described it. Conversely, if *Fritz* is spotting repeated opportunities for you to chip away at your opponent by gaining these small benefits of less than a pawn, then you still need to study positional chess and add these techniques to your arsenal.

Note that these cases aren't mutually exclusive: positional advantages often translate directly to tactical ones. You might see games in which your adversary chips away at you slowly and then suddenly drops the bomb by capturing material. Emanuel Lasker described this nearly a century ago: if you've accumulated enough positional advantages, then the tactical shot *must* be there.

That's the "how you lose" we mentioned earlier. *Fritz* can also tell you *where* you lose.

Chess games are divided roughly into three stages: the opening, the middlegame, and the ending. There are no hard and fast rules for determining where one stage starts and the other begins. In general, the opening ends after one or both players has developed his pieces and connected his rooks. The endgame is a bit trickier. Some people say it begins when the queens are exchanged. I use the following analytical rule of thumb: if I still have an even position, well past the point the queen and some other pieces have been exchanged, and I'm losing the game later, then I'm blowing it in the endgame.

Just about everybody seems to hate studying endgames, but it's the one

phase of the game where nearly every player could stand some improvement. One of the quickest ways to improve your overall results is to improve your endgame ability. I underwent a huge jump in my overall chess success several years ago just by studying a few chapters on simple king and pawn endings.

Middlegames are a bit tougher to diagnose. If you're seeing *Fritz*' evaluation of your position drop by 1.50 pawns or more in the middlegame, it doesn't matter if you manage to drag the game out for another forty or fifty moves before you're mated – it still qualifies as losing in the middlegame. We've already discussed the difference between losing tactically and losing positionally.

We also discussed openings. If you're routinely losing games in under twenty moves, no matter what chess openings you're playing, you need to learn standard opening principles. The kind that apply to all chess openings, not just the handful you're playing. If you're losing repeatedly in one particular opening, consider dropping it or at least getting a good general book (like Fine's *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings* or Horowitz' *Chess Openings: Theory and Practice*) that will verbally describe the ideas behind the opening you're playing.

And if you're going to study chess, *study it*. Don't buy software, books, DVDs, and other training materials and leave them lying around unused; otherwise you're just wasting your money.

Remember that if *Fritz* analyzes one of your games it can tell you what you did wrong – but only for that single game. It takes many analyzed games for *Fritz* to indicate your overall faults, and even then it won't just hand the information to you. You'll need to look at these games as a collection and try to spot the recurring mistakes. Finding these mistakes, and then acting to correct them by studying the areas in which you're weak, can go a long way toward improving your chess skills.

Until next time, 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](#).

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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