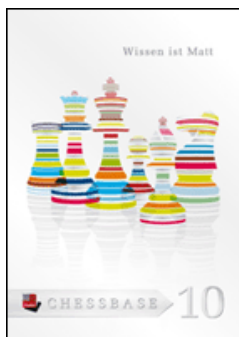




COLUMNISTS

ChessBase Cafe

Steve Lopez



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Automatic Opening Keys

An interesting e-mail regarding [ChessBase 10](#) hit my mailbox a couple of weeks ago. A *CB10* user was looking at the game list for one of his databases when he clicked on the “Openings tab” and was somewhat startled to see this unfamiliar view:



Instead of a list of chess openings, the user saw four buttons. What could this mean?

We’ll begin the answer by defining what we mean by a “key.” A key is an index file that is attached to a database. There are several different types of keys, but we’ll limit this discussion to *opening* keys. An opening key is simply an index of openings. I have numerous chess books that deal with the middlegame, and in the ones that contain complete games (and not just fragments) it’s quite common to see an index containing references to games sorted according to the chess opening used. For example, it might say “Ruy Lopez” followed by a list of page numbers or game numbers in which that opening was played. A database’s opening key works much the same way; you can double-click on the name of an opening and get either a list of games from the database in which that opening appears, or else get *subkeys* that are more specific subvariations of the opening on which you double-clicked.

If you have a recent [Big Database](#) or [Mega Database](#) (from the last three years or so) you can see an excellent example of an opening key: the *Superkey*, which is a huge and very detailed opening index.

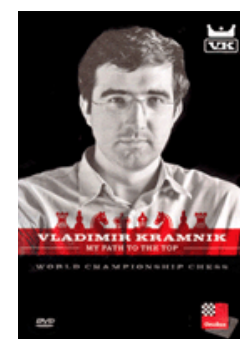
As a technical note, opening keys are stored in two separate files ending in the extensions *.cko* and *.cpo* (with the name before the dot being the filename of the database’s other files, i.e. *mygames.cbh* would have its opening keys contained in the files *mygames.cko* and *mygames.cpo*).

If you open the game list for a database that doesn’t already have an opening key attached to it, you’ll see the above illustration. The four buttons provide you with four separate choices. Two of them are fairly easily described. “Install empty key” merely creates *.cko* and *.cpo* files with nothing in them; this option should only be selected by advanced *ChessBase 10* users who are building their own opening keys from scratch. “Select key” brings up the standard Windows file select dialogue, which you can use to select an existing key that is already attached to another database (such as the *Superkey* from *Big* or *Mega Databases*). After you select an existing key, the files will be copied and attached to the database with which you’re currently working, and the database’s

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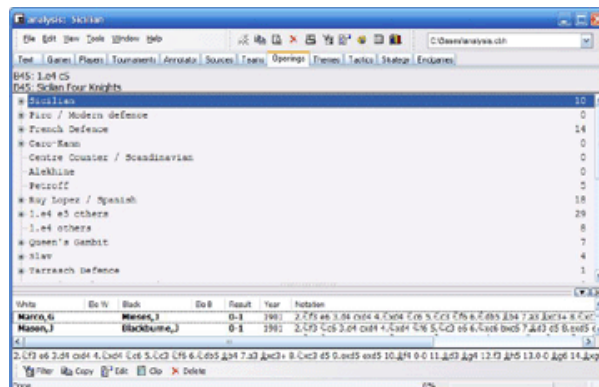


[My Path to the Top](#)
 by Vladimir Kramnik

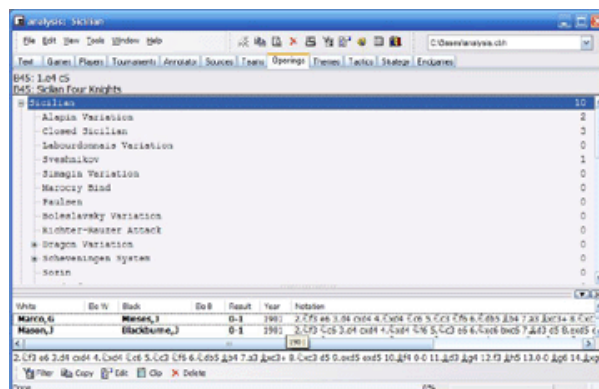
games will be sorted into the proper keys.

However, there are many cases in which you won't want to use the mammoth *Superkey*. The level of detail contained in that key is really only appropriate for databases containing hundreds of thousands of games. For databases of a less grandiose size, you'll want to use either the "Install Big Key" or the "Install Small Key" button.

If you have a typical database of your own games, with perhaps a few thousand games at best (and that's only if you've been a very busy chessplayer), you would want to click the "Install Small Key" button. After you've clicked it, *ChessBase 10* will attach a pre-generated opening key of a very general nature to your database and sort your games into the proper index keys. After a few moments, you'll see something like this:



This is a very general key that displays openings by name instead of by ECO (*Encyclopedia of Chess Openings*) alphanumeric codes. The number of games that are contained in a particular key is displayed on the right hand side of this window. In the illustration above, we see that there are ten Sicilian Defense games contained in the database. If we click on the "plus" sign to the left of "Sicilian," we can expand the view to display several subvariations of the Sicilian:

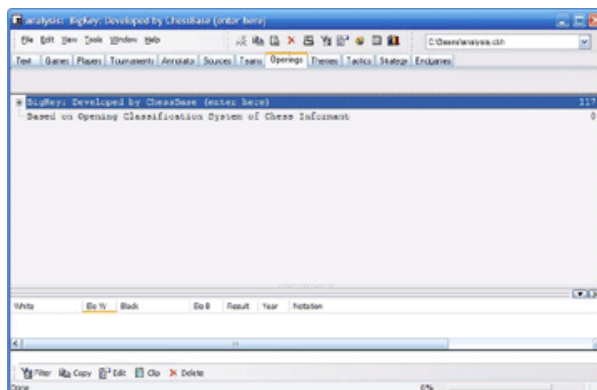


Here again, the number of games in each subvariation is displayed to the right. Some of these subvariations have further subvariations within *them*, and these can be identified by the plus sign to the left of the variation name; just click on a plus sign to expand the view (as we did above). Eventually you will reach a list of games; double-click on any of these games to open that game in a new window.

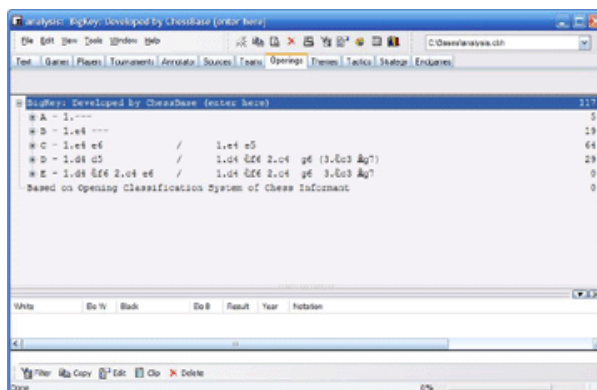
In this very general opening key, designed for small databases, some games won't fall into one of these pre-generated general classifications; these "loose" games will be displayed at the bottom of the screen, below any variation names; these too can be double-clicked upon to open them in a game window.

Our final option is to click "Install Big Key." This will attach a very large, very detailed opening key to the database and sort the games into

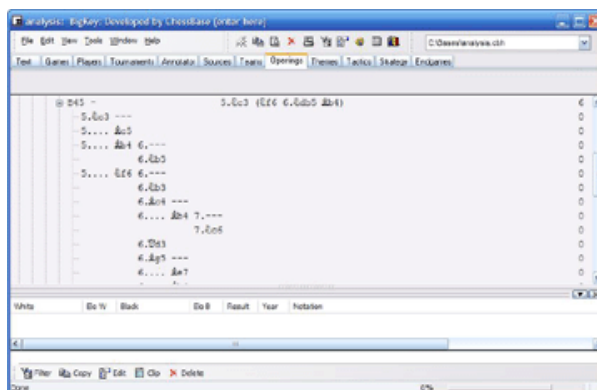
the proper indices:



As with the Small Key, clicking a plus sign in this window expands the view to display subclassifications:



You'll see that the "top" level of this key expands into five subkeys, each of which corresponds to one of the five volumes of ECO. Each of these five subclassifications ultimately expands into one hundred subclassifications (most of which have even more detailed subclassifications):



And, as with the Small Key, the number of games in any index will be displayed on the right-hand side of the window.

The major advantage of the Big Key is that you will *never* have a "loose" (unclassified) game; literally *every* game in your database will be filed away into an opening variation classification. So why would you not want to use this key on every database, no matter how small? It's because of the sheer size of the opening key files; attaching the Big Key to a small database of hundreds (or even a few thousand) games is more than a bit of overkill, as the size of the opening key files will be many times the size of all the other database files combined:

Openings	Size	Database
analysis.cba	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbc	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbe	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbg	10 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbh	6 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbj	10 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbm	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbp	2 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbs	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cbt	1 KB	CDispla
analysis.cbtt	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cib	4 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cit	1 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cko	4,527 KB	ChessB.
analysis.cpo	1,855 KB	ChessB.
analysis.ini	1 KB	Configu

You can see in the above illustration that we've attached more than six megabytes of opening keys to a 118 game database that is otherwise forty kilobytes in size. That's simply ridiculous; it's obvious that the Big Key isn't needed for this small database and that the Small Key would be a far better choice.

Should you change your mind regarding which key you've applied to a database, all you need to do is exit *ChessBase 10*, then use Windows Explorer or My Computer to open the folder in which that database is stored, and simply delete that database's .cko and .cpo files. Then you can relaunch *ChessBase 10*, return to that database's game list, click the "Openings" tab, and then make a new choice from among the four buttons provided.

We'll talk a bit more about opening classifications in the next *ChessBase Cafe*; until then, have fun!

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

ChessBase Cafe welcomes readers' questions. Send one 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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