

ChessBase Cafe

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Training by Becoming a Tournament Organizer with Fritz

I've stumbled onto a good way to find tutorial subjects for my columns. I look at all the questions that come in and then write about something none of them mention! By this logic I figure that these are features people don't know about or they don't know what use they have.

In the past few weeks several major chess events have been cancelled. The FIDE world championship match between Ruslan Ponomarev and Garry Kasparov was the most prominent casualty. Inept organizers, shady funding, political wrangling, public statements by the players, everything but chess. If you are fed up with that sort of thing you can just organize your own match, or even a tournament, with grandmaster-level players.

Best of all, it's cheap. You can run a match or tournament even longer than Kasparov-Karpov I and you don't have to pay appearance fees, let alone put out for the playing hall, hotel, or even the board and pieces. You can do it by using the tournament and match features in Fritz to organize an event with computer and/or human players.

I used to think that only hardcore computer chess nuts ran engine matches, i.e. playing two engines against each other often for hundreds of games. They would do this to see which engine was stronger, or find out about weaknesses in an opening book. Personally I never cared whether it was Fritz or Shredder with bragging rights on my laptop. Computer vs computer play itself always seemed a bit like counting angels on the head of a pin. "If two entities play chess and are then rebooted, did they really play chess?"

Plus, we have various rating lists and test suites to mull over in the war for supremacy in the comp-comp chess world. But can these Fritz features be used for the benefit of humankind? It turns out that there are all sorts of interesting things to do with these tools and several of them are useful for helping you play better.

The details of the tournament and match features are fairly well documented in the online help (F1), so a complete step-by-step isn't required and we won't be looking at every single function and checkbox. It isn't necessary to own more than one Fritz-family program to use these techniques, although it adds an extra

dimension if you do.

Even if you only own one Fritz program (Junior, Shredder, HIARCS, Tiger) it also installs several free engines you can use for variety, usually Comet and Crafty. The free download ChessBase Light (aka ChessBase Reader) includes Fritz 5.32, which is quite strong. (To download: <http://www.chessbase.com/download/cblight/register.asp>) Usually you want the strongest possible chess machine, but for some of what we are looking at this week it can actually be helpful to include a weaker engine or two. You can download a large selection of free engines here: <http://www.chessbase.com/download/index.asp?cat=Engines>.

An Audience of One

Our project this month is getting personalized opening training material from Fritz using the Tournament function. Openings are empirical, and study and practice are required. It can also be very helpful to have sample games between strong opponents to study. If you have the Megabase this is easy enough. You just search for the position, review the games and make a book from them.

But what if you don't have a giant database, or what if the positions you want to look at aren't popular at the Master level? For opening basics and theory there are books and GM games; this technique is more specific. The best way to get a feel for an opening is to go over complete games. Seeing many of them bring out the tactical and strategic themes, which are just as important as memorizing the moves that got you there.

Basically what we are going to do is have our mighty engines play a thematic tournament amongst themselves. Just like how in the early 1900's millionaire Leopold Rice use to sponsor tournaments in which the Masters were all forced to play his ridiculous variant of the King's Gambit, we will have Fritz and pals play many games, even dozens or hundreds, starting from the positions we choose.

This is most instructive when you start more or less where mainline opening theory ends. Computers play with opening books for a reason, you can't expect them to create improvements in the early stages of main line openings.

This requires a little bit of preparation. Create a new database by going to the database list screen (F12) and pressing ctrl+x. Name it something like "match openings." Now go back to the board window and click new game. Switch off the engine (shift+ctrl+m). Now enter the moves of an opening variation you would like to work on. Enter the moves for both sides up until the point where your theoretical knowledge ends, or perhaps up to the point where you lost your way in a recent game. This final position is where all the tournament games will begin. Save the game into the new database.

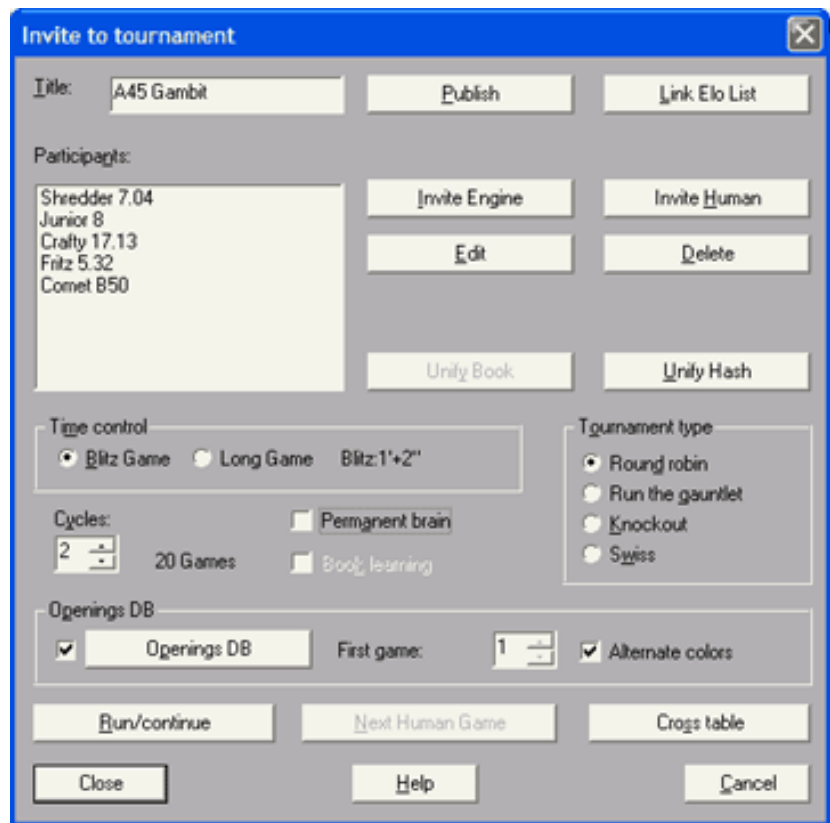


Go ahead and do this with as many positions as you'd like, saving them all into the new database. For example, let's say I'm interested in this gambit from my beloved Trompowsky: 1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 Ne4 3.Bf4 c5 4.f3 Nf6 5.d5 Qb6 6.Bc1 e6 7.c4 Qb4+ 8.Nc3 Qxc4 9.e4. (Actually I AM interested in it. I chickened out from playing it at the World Open this year when I had the chance, studied it for a bit with my opponent afterwards, and then won a nice miniature with it against an IM at Playchess.com a few months later.)

I want to make sure to get games with both of Black's possible replies, 9...Qb4 and 9...Qd4 and if my engines all like the same one all the time it's not going to be as helpful. So I save one game with each line into the new database, which I've named "A45 gambit" in my case. (Note that these aren't complete games; they are fragments that only go up to move nine.) It's simplest to have a separate database for each opening you want to work on. Of course this can be done with middlegame or even endgame positions. That's not as useful for training, although it's not a bad extended analysis technique.

The more games you have in the file, the longer your tournament will take to run. The good news is that you can stop and continue the tournament whenever you like, so you can use longer time controls to produce higher quality games without having to buy a separate computer. (You stop it by clicking the familiar red circle with an X. To continue a tournament you go to File --> Open Tournament and click the file. Then click "Run/continue" in the dialog box.)

So I have my database file with two games, one with the line with 9...Qb4 and one with 9...Qd4. I close the database list and in the board screen to File --> New Tournament. Pick a name related to the opening or position you're working on. In the "Invite to tournament" screen I "invite" five of my closest electronic friends to play in the First Annual Mig's Laptop Trompowsky Gambit Invitational. I set it so Shredder, Junior, Crafty, Fritz, and Comet will play a round-robin.



Now you click the checkbox next to the “Openings DB” button and click the button. Navigate to the database you created in the step above. Check the “alternate colors” box if you want each engine to play with black and white. In a round-robin you’ll have to play two cycles to achieve this.

Time equals quality, as you might expect. Most engines today are strong enough to produce high-quality play even at very fast time controls. If you can let the tournament run in the background or overnight, go for at least 25 minutes per side. Don’t bother with opening books, leave the engine settings (chosen when you click “Invite Engine”) at ‘no book’ since you’ll be using the database you created. Read the online help file about the tournament and match functions for all the details on the other functions. (Click the Help button on the tournament dialog box.)

Most of the latest engines allow you to change various parameters if you’d like to spice things up. For example you can set Junior for “random play” and Shredder has many style settings. As mentioned above, it’s the more the merrier where the engines are concerned. Having more engines in your tournament will give you more games and so a wider variety of play. No modern engine is so weak as to produce games of no interest in these thematic tournaments.

When you run your tournament the board window will maximize and the first game will begin. All of the games will be saved in a the tournament database (not the one you created with the opening lines), which should be “EngTourn.cbh” in the ChessBase\CompBase folder. When it’s over you can copy the games out to another new database reserved for that opening.

	1	2	3	4	5	
1 Junior 8	**	0 1	1 ½	½½	1 1	5.5 / 8
2 Fritz 5.32	1 0	**	1 0	1 1	½1	5.5 / 8
3 Shredder 7.04	0 ½	0 1	**	1 1	1 1	5.5 / 8
4 Crafty 17.13	½½	0 0	0 0	**	½½	2.0 / 8
5 Comet B50	0 0	½0	0 0	½½	**	1.5 / 8

In my little test tournament (played a bullet time controls, I was in a hurry) this is how things came out. Of course the results don't much matter, and for our purposes you probably don't need to see too far beyond the initial position, although on occasion you will encounter a thematic endgame. So now I have 20 good games all in this unusual Trompowsky gambit line. I can also add them to a book/tree to quickly find the main lines.

One thing to look for in the games you produced are more key positions. When you review the games you might find a few positions that you want to add to your database for your next tournament in order to investigate them more thoroughly. Do this a few times and you can be sure that your level of expertise and comfort in those lines will increase dramatically.

It's not perfect and there are bound to be various "computer moves" that you are unlikely to encounter against a human opponent. Some closed positions in particular are often handled very differently by machines. But the results are always interesting and that in itself is good. Plus, you'll find yourself watching the games and rooting for your favorite.

The E-mailbag

Question *Thanks for the great column. Just a small question. I have been trying to get Fritz 7 to produce an evaluation profile as described in your column by setting the blundercheck threshold to zero. It produces evaluations for every move as expected but I only seem to get the evaluation profile to work by stepping through each move in infinite analysis mode. Help??? – Pete Dawson (and others)*

Answer *Mea culpa on this one. I should have mentioned that you have to have "Store evaluations" checked before you start the Blunder Check feature. Then it will save the Fritz eval for each move, necessary for an evaluation profile. This info is there automatically if you played a regular game against Fritz. If you play a rated game, however, it doesn't. And of course if it's a game you played elsewhere or downloaded it won't have it either.*

Question *I have a question concerning CB 8. I would like to filter all games in which a new move was played and this new move was annotated by a commentator with "!!". I couldn't find an method with CB to do this directly. Perhaps you know how to do it. A similar question is how to filter games in which a novelty was played but not before, for example, the 30th move. – Ralf Meixner*

Answer In a word, no. You can easily search for !! moves and for novelties, but not combined in the same move. But there is something to watch for looking to find them separately: In the search mask, go to the Annotations tab and search for !! in the "Text1" field and you'll find all the games in which the annotator gave the double exclamation points in the text field. The problem? Search again with !! in the "Symbols" field and you will find *different* games! "!!" is usually entered as a symbol, but some annotators (and the game merge function) leave it as a text comment instead. Most games have it as a symbol, but in a big database like the Megabase 2003, you should try both searches separately.

You can search for novelties by putting "N" in the symbol field on the annotation tab, but there is no way to connect this to the move number that I can find. You can find novelties in games in which a certain opening or position was played. Put "N" in the symbol search and put the position you want on the position tab. The closest I could get to what you want is to search for !! in the text field and N in the symbol field. A better, but slower, alternative is to first filter for N and put those games in new database. Then run a search in those games for !! in symbols. (Symbol search doesn't seem to work in the clip database.) Then you have a database of games with !! and N moves and you can zip through them manually to find the ones in which that's the same move.

Question *Generally, I like to organize my files (e.g., I use lots of folders and subfolders when storing my e-mail, documents, etc.). For the life of me, I can't figure out an easy way to do that in ChessBase--that's strange, because ChessBase is a database management program. Shouldn't I be able to set up, easily, a folder structure to hold related databases--and move things around if I decide I want to revise that structure?*

I even experimented with Windows Explorer, but there are so many sub-files relating to any given game or database, I'm afraid I'll leave something behind if I try to move a database to a new folder.

Also, what's the relationship with the "database path" at the top left, and the "My databases" near the bottom? There are a lot of things that show up in the database path that don't show up in "My databases." – Thomas Dickerson

Answer ChessBase 8 doesn't really have any built-in Windows file management ability. (Other than deleting database files.) To create a folder structure you need to either do it in Window Explorer (best) or in a pinch you can create new folders in a dialog box when you create or open a new database in ChessBase.

All of the database files with the same name are essential except for the .ini file. The .cbh file is the only one that gets an icon, however. So if you move a database in Windows Explorer, get'em all. It's safer to first archive the database to turn it into one compact .cbv file. (Right-click, Tools, Backup database, or ctrl+z) Just remember that if you do move it that ChessBase won't know where it is and its icon will disappear until you open it again from its new location.

"My database path" is the set of folders that ChessBase software uses for all its

default actions. That's where it puts temporary files, databases, etc. unless you specify another location. "My databases" is just the virtual desktop inside ChessBase where it puts the icons of the databases you open and create, as well as the icons for your reference database and the clip database. This makes it easy to keep your most-used databases within easy reach so you don't have to dig through folders each time.

Question *I am having Fritz 7 do a full analysis of my old games, and it awards medals. But of the 100+ games I've analyzed so far, Fritz has only given me blunder (black) and tactical (red) medals. Can I add my own medals to Fritz's analysis? Not that I want to toot my own horn, but I just like colors!!! Thanks Mig! Love what you do for chess! – Tim Cutler*

Answer Thanks much, to you and everyone else who has sent in kind words. Sorry, but you cannot manually award medals in the Fritz programs. In ChessBase 8 they are part of the "special annotation" option, but these aren't available in Fritz. Look up "product differentiation" in a marketing textbook and you'll see why! Somewhere in Hamburg someone is reading this and cackling, "Ha ha, I told you, Heinrich! They will also buy ChessBase 8 when they find out they need it to give the pretty medals!" To be fair, other special annotations in ChessBase 8 include training questions, piece path, pawn structure, and other things that are genuinely useful and not just pretty!

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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