

ChessBase Cafe

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Something New, Something Improved

All mechanical things eventually fall apart. Some last longer than others but eventually entropy and the laws of thermodynamics prevail. (For those who didn't take physics in school, the second law of thermodynamics is "Always buy the extended warranty.") Things with lots of moving parts tend to break faster, which is why cars need more repair work than televisions and why televisions need more repairs than, say, books.

When something breaks you can get it repaired – often at a cost similar to getting a new one – or do what you really want to do anyway and run out and buy a new and better one. This is what Darwin called the cycle of life. Cars haven't changed much in the past 50 years, nor have televisions. If products didn't break half of us would still be driving Studebakers. Companies depend on their products breaking consistently or they'd be out of business.

Software manufacturers have a problem. Their products don't break. That doesn't mean they all work perfectly, or that they don't need occasional repairs in the form of patches and support. But in general a software program will continue to work exactly the same way for decades. So how can software companies get people to keep buying their products?

One way is to make something new and cool, a killer app that everyone has to have. It could be a great new game, a utility to make you more productive, anything original or with new features. This is a limited space. The other option is to keep releasing new and improved versions of your software. Macintosh begat Windows, Windows 3.1 begat Windows 95, Windows 95 begat the Blue Screen of Death, and so it goes.

Unless they are planning a name change, ChessBase isn't going to be releasing many new games. They are stuck with chess. Therefore they depend on producing new chess products and upgrades to current products that are compelling enough to get previous owners to buy them. (Obviously reaching new customers is also important.)

One of the ways software companies try to serve their customers is to package their products in different ways. This provides more choice in selection and price, but can also be confusing. The company needs to do a good job of explaining what the different products do and for whom they are intended. The good news is that ChessBase releases many different products to allow you to

decide what you need and how much you can spend. The bad news is that they often do a lousy job of explaining the products.

Many of the questions I receive start with “what’s the difference between...” but even explaining the exact differences doesn’t really tell inexperienced users what would best suit their needs. I just received a pile of new products and what follows is a combination buyer’s guide and tutorial for the latest and greatest. Remember, it’s never too late to give yourself a Christmas present!

The New Toys



Three of the top new items seem almost designed to confuse you. Encyclopedia, Database, Powerbook, Megabase... As the saying goes, what’s the difference? To over-generalize, these products overlap considerably with the more expensive ones incorporating the less expensive ones in several ways.



The Megabase 2004 (\$140) contains most of the raw material from which the Fritz Powerbook 2004 and the Opening Encyclopedia 2004 were made. The Megabase includes 2.6 million games, 55,000 of which are annotated. The annotated games are the biggest difference between the Mega and cheaper databases. Imagine how many books or magazines you’d have to buy in order to get even a tenth of that many annotated games.

Another item in the Megabase is an updated Playerbase (which comes with ChessBase 8), a massive repository of photos and data on thousands of players. In the 2004 edition that means 166,000 players and 16,000 photos. Used in ChessBase the Playerbase gives you instant access to a player’s rating history, age, and nationality.

Last name:	Mueller
First name:	Karsten
Born:	1970 (33)
Title:	GM
	2521 (10.2003) Trend: ++0
Nation:	Germany

Elo Profile

Dossier

I don't know how useful this is for the average chess fan or student, but it's essential for me and a lot of fun. It is also used in the cool ChessBase 'dossier' function that creates an entire player profile with career best results, favorite openings, etc. Note that the Playerbase is basically useless if you don't have ChessBase. Fritz programs can't access the player information or create dossiers. I suppose you could browse the photos but you wouldn't necessarily know who they were of!

The Megabase is not for any specific use but you can do just about anything with it. Fritz can use it to generate a huge opening book, the annotated games include a wealth of opening evaluation and analysis, and they are sorted into every theme you can imagine. Tactics, endgames, and of course a huge opening key. You can also browse by tournament, annotator, or player. These indexes are most under-utilized, even unknown, feature of the Megabase but they add a lot of value. They can quickly list blunders, brilliancies, rook vs minor piece endgames, and much more.

There are many opening surveys included in the Megabase, and with all the annotated games you can do a great deal of opening study with the Mega. It doesn't include all the surveys in the Opening Encyclopedia but there is significant overlap. I'd be hard pressed to recommend buying both.

Sicilian Velimirovic – 10...Nd4 11Bd4 Qa5
Sicilian Najdorf – 6.♗e3 ♘g4
Sicilian Najdorf – 6.♗e3 ♘g4/ 10.♖d2
Sicilian Najdorf – English Attack


The Opening Encyclopedia 2004 (\$100) also has a huge game database (1.8 million) and tens of thousands of annotated games. The concept of the product is contained in the over three thousand opening surveys included. These basically

take a half-dozen to dozen key games in a line, merge them into one game with evaluation symbols added to every variation by Grandmasters. Many also contain original analysis by GMs.

All of these are then put into order by ECO code and saved into the database with the English name and the first moves that distinguish the variation. This makes it much easier to browse through the material, especially if you don't have all the ECO codes memorized. (If you do, you really need to get out of the house more.)

Many of the surveys are a bit dated, almost all of them coming from the 90's. This is compensated for by the vast quantity of annotated games that reach to 2003. That means when you are reviewing a survey you can press shift+F6 (find novelty in the reference database) and merge the recent ones with the survey.

For convenience a second CD is included that contains a ChessBase tree of all the games on the first CD. This lets you browse through all the lines and see the statistics. You could create this book from the games yourself in Fritz or ChessBase, so this is more of a time saver than additional content. You can also use this tree as an opening book in Fritz.

	N
Power2004.ctg	997095
1.♘h3	11
1.♘f3	104220
1.c4	78508
1.d4	356528
1.g3	10151
1.h4	20
1.e4	438262
1.h3	3335

Speaking of Fritz opening books, the 2004 Powerbook (\$44) is also out. Like the new Mega it comes on a DVD. This allows for the inclusion of a million complete games in addition to the gigantic book/tree. At 1.4 gigabytes this isn't something you'd want to create on your own, but if you have the Megabase and a lot of free time that is possible.

None of the games on the Powerbook DVD are annotated. In order to keep the quality of the book as high as possible all the games are from Master-level players. There is also a much smaller book and database set called "Strong" that is made up only of games between players rated 2550 or higher. Again, this is something you could approximate doing yourself with the Megabase or the Opening Encyclopedia using the create book/tree function in Fritz and ChessBase and tuning it with the Fritz book editing functions. This is more of the overlap I mentioned above.

Let's sum up. The Megabase (DVD, \$140) has 2.6 million games current to November 2003, 55,000 annotated, indexed in many useful ways (openings, tactical themes, endgames, strategy). It includes the updated Playerbase for use with ChessBase. It contains a few hundred of the opening surveys in the Opening Encyclopedia.

The Opening Encyclopedia (2 CDs, \$100) has 1.8 million games current to September 2003, 68,000 annotated, indexed only for opening. 3,200 opening surveys with evaluations and annotations of key variations organized by English name and ECO code. Second CD contains a tree/book of all the games.

The Fritz Powerbook (DVD, \$44) has 1 million games current to November 2003, none annotated, not indexed at all. It includes a gigantic tree/book (18 million positions) made from the million games. This is three times larger than the book that comes with the Opening Encyclopedia, although you can make your own giant book from a big database with enough time in Fritz. (I admit this would take a long time.)

The Megabase is the catch-all. Reference, thematic training material, creating a repertoire, looking up your favorite player, going over games from three centuries. The Opening Encyclopedia is a cheaper choice if you're not interested in the Playerbase and the extensive game indexing. You'll also get 50% fewer total games. Probably the best part about the opening surveys is that they are organized so well. Plus, it's a lot cheaper and more convenient than a stack of Informants.

The Powerbook and accompanying unannotated database can be used for reference, not just to make Fritz play better openings. It's a comprehensive and easy to use snapshot of modern opening theory. At \$44 it's also in easier reach than the others.

One unmentioned bonus with the Megabase and the Encyclopedia is that their annotated games include around 1200 with training annotation, many with three or four questions each. (Mostly tactics.) You can search filter for these (annotations tab – training checkbox) and create an instant training session in Fritz or ChessBase.

A quick note about the Big Database. It has the same games as the Megabase as well as all the handy indexes and giant opening key. It does not include the Playerbase or any annotated games.

As usual, installed all the contents of these databases to your hard drive improves performance dramatically. This is even more the case with DVDs because the read speed is slower than with CDs.

The E-mailbag

First off to answer many readers, I don't know when ChessBase 9 is coming out. The upgrade prices are usually pretty good so if you get CB 8 and CB 9 comes out a few months later you won't be soaked for the full price.

Question *Regarding Big Database and the Opening Encyclopedia: Do I need CB to use these databases or are they stand-alone? If they are, what is the benefit of having CB? – Prof. Oren Gross, Minneapolis, MN*

Answer Many ChessBase products include the ChessBase Reader program. It's a limited version of the old ChessBase 6 program and it's good for most functions. But it won't work with giant databases like the ones you are interested in and so isn't included with them. You need ChessBase or a Fritz program to access the databases.

Question *Maybe a very stupid question. But you know what they say: there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers.*

Ever since I've been using Fritz for the analysis of my "masterpieces", I have always wondered if there is a possibility in Fritz 8 to preview the second (or the third or the fourth) best line in the main engine pane, without having to open the analysis board and actually playing the moves yourself. It would be a nice feature if you could just click the line that you are interested in, in order to make it appear on the engine board.

I hope I formulated it in a not too confusing manner. Looking forward to your answer. – Mathias

Answer Anyone who says there aren't any stupid questions needs to take a look through my inbox, and I mean that in the nicest way. I think the platitude is "the only stupid question is the one that goes unasked" so you're doing okay so far.

I hope I understood your question, but even if I didn't this is a handy tip. No matter how many lines your main engine is looking at you can right-click the engine pane and select "Copy all to notation." That will insert every line at its current depth into the notation. If you lock the engine first (right-click engine pane, "Lock Engine") it will keep thinking and you can click the newly inserted lines to preview them without stopping the analysis.

For other readers, the reason he doesn't mention the first line of analysis is because that can be replayed automatically by right-clicking the engine pane and clicking "Variation Board".

Question *Great work with your chess event coverage! I just bought ChessBase, largely because of your articles, and was wondering how to save games I've just completed from Playchess.com, to the ChessBase program without typing in a file name each time. Right now I am only a guest, but am looking to subscribe if this makes things more convenient. Thanks. – Jeff Davis*

Answer Thanks for the kind words. You must be using a Fritz-family playing program if you're entering Playchess since ChessBase doesn't have that capability. Or are you using the free 30-day trial? If you are logging in as a guest Fritz won't automatically save your online games. When you create an account

it will save them all to the "myinternetgames" database in the default ChessBase directory. If you are using a Fritz program it includes a year subscription to Playchess and you just need to set up your account.

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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