

CHESSBASE 11

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A preview by Nick Murphy

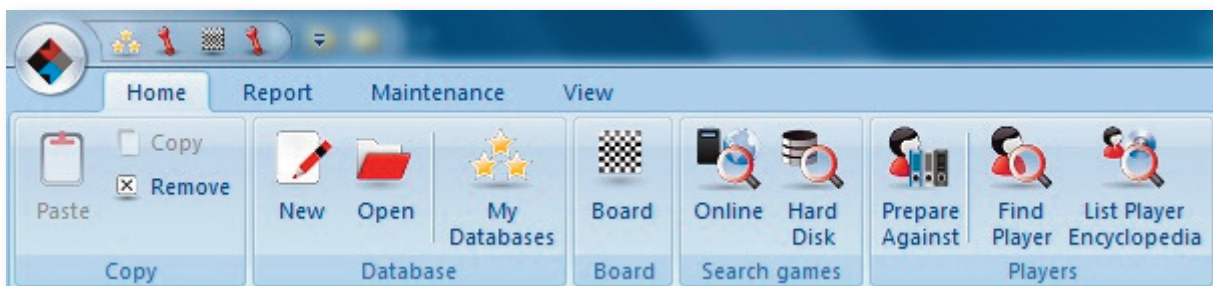
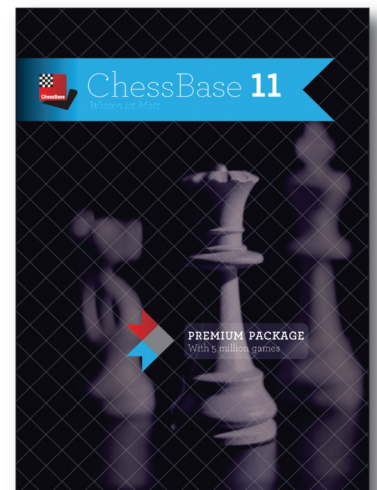
ChessBase is the chess database management software which has become the standard throughout the world. It is the program of choice for all those who love chess and who also hope to play successfully in the future.

Two long years after the last offering, ChessBase have released the latest version of their flagship software, with the new-look ChessBase 11. And your ChessBase software expert, Nick the Geek, was the first in the to put it through its paces in this preview:

The program installed painlessly even on the latest PC operating system - the 64bit version of Microsoft Windows 7. It's worth noting from the system requirements that ChessBase 11 is so advanced, that you will need a computer running AT LEAST the latest version of Microsoft Windows XP (with "service pack 3" installed – available as a free download from the Microsoft website) so it's no good if you want to install it on your old Windows 2000 computer (and if that's your best PC – it's time to upgrade!)

Also, and perhaps most importantly, I should note that so many of ChessBase 11's features REQUIRE an active internet connection that ChessBase have put that into the minimum requirements too. Without an active internet connection on the same computer, you just won't get the full benefit from ChessBase 11 – and that's why you bought it in the first place! I would add that you really need a good connection such as broadband; because "dial-up" or even a "3G" connection may seem just too slow to get the best from your new software.

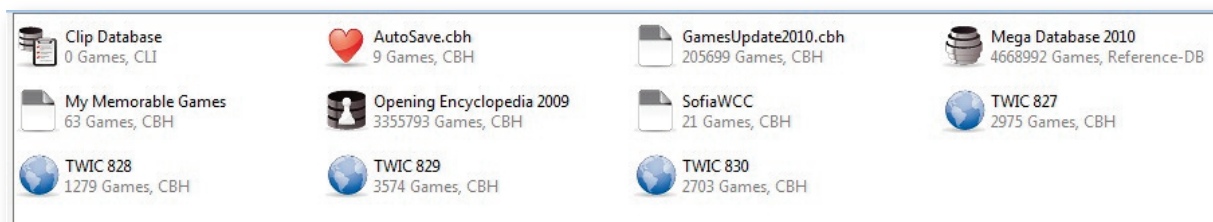
If you're familiar with previous versions of ChessBase, the first thing you'll notice about ChessBase 11 is the redesigned interface. They have moved away from the old "toolbar and drop down menu" interface and updated to what's called the "ribbon interface"; which may be familiar if you have used Fritz 12, Rybka 4, or any of the programs in Microsoft Office 2007 (like Word or Excel).



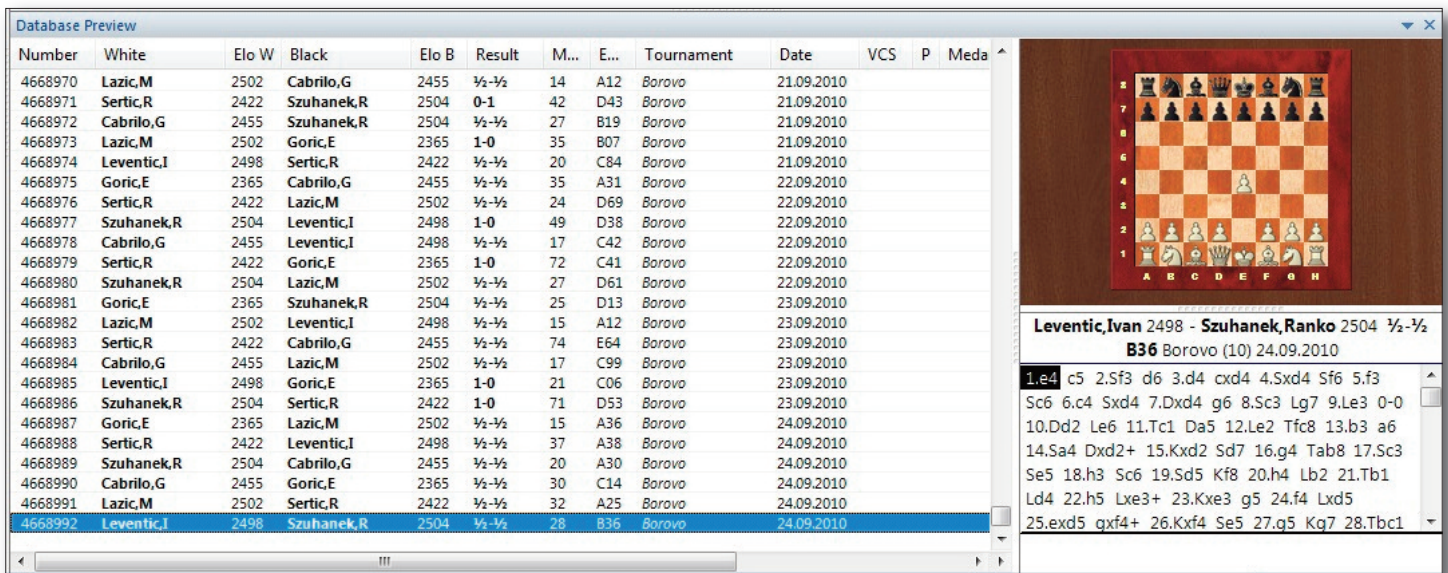
Above: The ChessBase 11 ribbon interface

The ribbon is an interface where the most commonly used and most useful commands appear in a large panel, in the form of icons. It organises commands as a set of tabs, each grouping relevant commands together; and consolidates the functionality previously found in menus, toolbars and many task panes into one area. All of which considerably improves the simplicity of use of the program, and really deals with one of the main criticisms of ChessBase in the past – that it isn't intuitive to use.

When you open up the main ChessBase 11 screen, you get the familiar database window as well as the folder window, and "database preview". The database symbols have been redesigned to be more intuitive; but the most obvious change is a playable game preview. When you click on a game in the database preview, you can play through it on a mini board without having to open a separate board window.



Above: The ChessBase 11 ribbon interface



Above: The new look Database Preview Window which now includes a play-through board which saves having to load games individually

Some of the innovations of ChessBase 11 include the ability to stay up-to-date with the latest opening theory by showing you which line of a particular variation is currently the main line being played by top players. And the novelty annotation feature highlights when the game moves away from known chess theory and can include the previous games into the notation.

Where ChessBase 10 excelled, ChessBase 11 has improved. Access to the online database is faster and simpler - even if you don't have a large database of games on your computer (such as the Big or Mega database from ChessBase), as long as you have access to the internet, you can have lightning fast access to the online database of over 5 million games. As if that wasn't enough, the ChessBase game-updating system has been improved and simplified. Now it just takes a few clicks to have all the latest games downloaded onto your PC, where you can play-through, analyse, or even add them to your reference database to keep it bang up to date. Access to TWIC has also improved, with one click of the "get TWIC" button downloading the most recent four issues in seconds.

One interesting feature that has been added to the board window is the "try out" feature. When you're playing through a game, you can click on a piece, and the program will indicate which square it thinks is the best square to move it to. The longer you hold it, the more accurate this suggestion will be. This is useful if you don't want to do a full analysis of the whole game, but you're interested in one position with several possibilities. And with repeated use, this feature will help you look more analytically at your own games and may even increase your ability over the board!

One of my favourite functions is the Opening Report (which will be covered in detail in a future article). This has been improved over previous versions of ChessBase, and is now a one-click light-weight function that gives you some of the most impressive training information available today - compressing what would have been weeks of work (just fifteen years ago) into literally seconds nowadays. Gone is the "tree" view of old, and in its place is the "reference" view which is quicker to create AND easier to read!

The functions of the Player Encyclopaedia have been improved too. The Dossier and ID card functions are simpler and easier to use and generate a wealth of information about a player. In fact, ChessBase 11 has a whole host of features to make it easier to prepare against a specific player. Now you're just one-click away from seeing every game your opponent has played by colour. And the statistics you can call up about your opponent are very impressive. Everything you could need to know to prepare to face your opponent over the board is right there at the touch of a button.

One of the highlights of ChessBase 11 for me as a chess writer is the ability to publish a chess game to the internet with one click - whether you have your own web space or not. Now it's a trivial matter to publish a game to the internet, where it is playable to anyone with the web address. In this way you can discuss games with friends or tutors wherever they are in the world - even if they don't have access to chess software themselves. Just recently a non-chess player asked me to design an endgame for them for a short story, and it was so much easier to just publish the game online, and then talk her through-it by phone as she played through-it from the comfort of her own web-connected PC!

Finally, one feature that could be of great impact in the future is the ability of ChessBase 11 to generate "ebooks" for devices such as the Amazon Kindle and the Sony eReader. With the price of these ebook readers dropping to a manageable amount, and the access to high-quality ebooks vastly improved with this ChessBase feature, we could see a whole new generation of chess ebooks that you can take with you on the train or on holiday etc. You could soon have literally thousands of chess books with you wherever you go...

It seems that ChessBase have really paid attention to what the people have been asking for. The old functions are better, and the new functions are highly impressive. The interface is simply, clean, and intuitive. Most importantly, ChessBase 11 is a program that no chess player should be without.