How to play correspondence chess with engines

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0. Introduction

I just began playing correspondence chess with engines, so see this text as a beginner's text – open source: please mail me improvements, additional ideas etc., and I will use them to make this PDF better. I think it will generally increase your fun of playing correspondence chess WITH engines.

1. Pitfalls...

One pitfall I find: comparing chess engines just for next move instead of whole analysis tree. This leads to computerish positions in which a human sees little cooperation betweens pieces and no strategic idea or plan.

A second pitfall I find: when receiving a move from an opponent, immediately and eagerly feeding it to the engines 'to see whether I am better or I am going to win'. I now, in my first experimental correspondence chess game against club mate and former Dutch correspondence champion Jeroen van Gool (game: https://dscdongen.nl/partijen/141-experiment-correspondentieschaak/1412-2018-05-13-dsc-experiment-correspondentieschaak) force myself, when I get oppononent's move, **to sit down 10-15 minutes at my wooden chess table and develop alternative candidate PLANS** (not: candidate moves). To my own surprise and pleasure, I find that that way I develop way faster a 'board vision' than immediately entering opponents' move in engines and playing around with variations. Lately I discovered 'I am now studying for hours with Fritz 15 and Komodo 10, but have little clue where the position is about'. That is where I improved and forced myself to set down to a wooden board first for at least 15 minutes and develop candidate plans.

To my great pleasure in above game I discovered a plan the engines did not come up with, but when I carry out my self found plan, the engines find my plan even better than their original ones. I gives satisfaction to 'beat' a machine in plan making, it gives me far more quickly a 'vision about the position', more fun, and I can use the engines as 'tools' to work out the tactics of my plan, instead of using the engines as the initiators of my thinking.

Furthermore I prefer Komodo 10 dynamic far over Fritz 15; Komodo 10 is from chessbase too, but it generates more human moves, I find it stronger, it quicklier says a endgame is 0,000 (useful info) and it is cheaper than Fritz 15.0 (Komodo 10 only 32 euro's om amazon.de). Houdini 6 PRO is even stronger – check http://www.computerchess.org.uk/ccrl/4040/ for ratings of engines. Do beware that programs as Komodo and Houdini really require a strong modern PC, in 2018 terms: at least 64 bits 4 CPU. An i3 is the minimum, i5 or i7 desktop even better

2. Variations

1. it is important to work out variations, at least 10 moves deep, instead of 1 move deep. Playing through a variation lets you lears what the position is about, and lets the engine learn
2. always end a variation with a conclusion, like '-0,09 and many moves for white to not worsten his position'
3. choose a variation that has a good evaluation, but furthermore:
a) makes human logic after having played through variations
b) leaves the minimum of candidate moves for the opponent not to worsten his position (so choice between variation I evaluation 0,00 but only one move for opponent saving the 0,00 is far better than variation II also 0,00 but leaving opponent 4 candidate moves that score 0,00)

Delete immediately all your candidate moves and variations that are inferior.

Try to ‘cross-fertilize’: pick the idea of one variation and try to find a totally new best line by applying that idea in another variation.

Think about ‘waiting moves’ that leave the opponents opportunity to ‘slip out’.

3. ‘I am new in correspondence chess. What should I do with engines when receiving opponents’ move?

When receiving move from opponent:

1) I first look minutes at the board without engine, so I get a feeling where the position is about (otherwise you are stockfishing for hours without knowing where the position is about).

2) I try out my few human ideas, and see whether there is any tactical objection

3) Then, in my super desktop with top processors and max CPU's, I choose they right engine mix (of course you must have all top engines mentioned http://www.computerchess.org.uk/ccrl/4040/ in chessbase/Fritz user interface) , cursor standing on the move of my opponent, I click 'correspondence analysis'

4) I save the pgn with produced variations

5) I look what new ideas the computer has I did not think of

6) I prolong the main variation, for example for 30 moves to see how the game MIGHT end (perpetual check, or pawn promotion, or mate, or whatever)

7) then I click on 'full analysis' to check the main line (this is backward-analysis instead of forward-analysis)

8) then I think: is it a computerish position requiring Stockfish, or can I use my human-like-me thinking Komodo?

9) I may redo the analysis tree with one engine only

10) I do next move.

Additions? Comments? Very welcome!

I am only new to ICCF.

4. Feedback on this pdf welcome!

Well, this is my PDF text in fact!

I am very open to suggestions, alternatives, improvements as I am far less experienced in correspondence chess than you. I was only a reasonable (1900+) board player.

I do not mind to share and make colleagues stronger as well, before through above my PLEASURE in correspondence chess playing with engines clearly increased.

Philippe Blankert – comments and additions very welcom on internetavenue@outlook.com

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