Tablebases and Tables

Article

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TABLEBASES and TABLES
Guy Haworth

To restore something lost in translation as reported in EG136 p120, the first use of the word tablebase in connection with endgames can be traced to Edwards (1995) as acknowledged in Nalimov et al (1999).

Previously, computed endgame files had usually been referred to as databases (Herik et al, 1986). The words database and tablebase may be thought both cumbersome and inappropriate by some. The computed files are essentially no more than straight lists of tables of position values and depths in some metric. In contrast, a future database proper might contain a wide range of interesting information about chess endgames.

This contributor has a preference for the term Endgame Table (EGT).


We thank Guy Haworth for the above clarification. We think we now have a tentative EG editorial policy on the matter of terminology. It is this. A distinction worth preserving is one between a term that is meaningful to programmers (who as a group do not read EG) and a term that is meaningful to EG’s general readership. An EGT is of the former type, an oracle database (or odbr) is of the latter. A more technical distinction between EGT and odbr would be, we suggest, that an EGT, of great use though it might be, does not require independent verification: two or more EGTS for the same endgame are not required to agree. An odbr on the other hand, as befits the word ‘oracle’, will either have, or await, independent confirmation as the repository of immutable truth about its subject-matter endgame. Errors in an odbr must be corrected. An odbr will therefore be accepted, if not at once then eventually, as the last word on solution depths and numbers of distinct won and not-won positions as the latter are understood by chessplayers across the world. Although several ‘metrics’ are current, and discussion of metrics is of broad interest, such discussion does not belong in EG. We hope that for the sake of long-term clarity the ‘ultimate’ metric will be used whenever verification of an odbr is called for. AJR