Tablebases and Tables

Article

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TABLEBASES and TABLES

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To restore something lost in translation as reported in EG*136* 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 tp 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).

Edwards, S.J. and the Editorial Board (1995). An examination of the Endgame KBNKN. *ICCA Journal*, Vol.18, No.3, pp.160-168.
Herik, H.J. van den and Herschberg, I.S. (1986). A Data Base on Data Bases. *ICCA Journal*, Vol.9, No.1, pp.29-34.
Nalimov, E.V., Wirth, C., and Haworth, G.McC. (1999). KQQKQQ and the Kasparov-World Game. *ICCA Journal*, Vol.22, No.4, pp.195-212.

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 *odb*) is of the latter. A more technical distinction between EGT and *odb* would be, we suggest, that an EGT, of great use though it might be, does not require independent verification: two or more EGT's for the same endgame are not required to agree. An *odb* 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 *odb* must be corrected. An *odb* 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 *odb* is called for. AJR