

Chess Score Pad ... There's an app for that!

When I first started to play tournament chess, one of the tasks I initially thought was odd was the requirement to keep score. Outside of the tournament hall it's not something people do when they play chess. Once I started directing tournaments, I understood its usefulness in resolving disputes. Additionally, the better players at the tournaments stressed that analyzing your games afterward was a means toward improving your play. I started doing this and kept all of my score sheets indexed by opening and also had notes on how I could have done better.

This was before ChessBase made that process much easier. I remember my first discovery was that I had a rather dismal performance as Black against 1. e4. This discovery prompted my purchase of *Play The French* by John Watson. I started to see my results improve and by continued evaluation of my games I became a master and also won a state championship. Thus, I can enthusiastically pass on the recommendation to keep a record of your games and analyze them.

Given the strength of analysis engines I will add that you should first do this without the computer's help. Although ChessBase makes the process easier, it is still a chore to transfer the score to the computer. I try to be careful but I still make mistakes on my score sheet. The rise of fast time controls also means that many of these games are incomplete. If I fall behind this task by a few tournaments, it has the effect of multiplying the drudgery of entering the games.

A number of years ago a company called MonRoi came out with an electronic device that allows you to keep score digitally, making it even easier to import into ChessBase afterward. Unfortunately it costs \$359, which has always seemed way too high for a gizmo with only that one function. Now that many people, including myself, have smart phones or tablets with thousands of "apps" to choose from it is time to evaluate how you can use these products for keeping score.

This is a review of one such "app" called Chess Score Pad Tournament Edition. It is available on the iTunes Store and works on iPhone, iPod, iTouch, and iPad. Roger Carey, who happens to be one of the regulars at the Parma Chess Club, developed the product, so I am familiar with its history.

The Age-Old Problem: Incomplete Score Sheets

A couple of years ago, Roger came to me with an unusual request to record his games using a digital camera connected to his iPhone. The reason for this approach was his frustration over the trouble he was having reconstructing the games from the last five minutes after he stopped keeping score. I saw no problem with it but advised him to explain to his opponents what was going on. The running joke was that he was secretly recording a pilot for "World's Funniest Chess Bloopers" for his brother Drew Carey.

Starting last spring, Roger started to bring an iPad with a scorekeeping app he was writing in order to test it out. Since no one can get rich winning Parma quads, I once again saw no problem with this once he showed the app to his opponents. I didn't consider it controversial unless Roger (currently 1847) started to win the top section quad that often has masters in it. He continued working on the bugs and has now put it for sale for \$11.99. He also submitted it for USCF approval. I believe that they should approve it because of its excellent security measures that I describe below. I will also go over other useful features. I have used this in local tournaments, provided I remembered to bring my iPad with me, and I also used it in the 2013 Cardinal Open in Columbus.

Security Features

The first feature is that the app will not open unless "airplane mode" is on in the system preferences. This prevents any outside content mixing in with the task the app is performing. Someone with a smart phone should already be using this option so that the phone does not ring during the game. The second feature applies to ending the recording activity: the program will remind the user to enter a result before exiting the program. Once a result to the game is entered, the app considers the game to be over and stops recording more moves. This prevents the user from switching between the app and a chess-playing program. If you quit the app without entering a result and then re-enter, it will label that game as "abandoned" and will not allow more moves to be recorded. In order for someone to switch between this program and a chess-playing program, it would be necessary to reenter the entire game in ScorePad, a process that would be very noticeable, not to mention time-consuming.

A third security option exists for the very paranoid. The program supports something Apple calls "Guided Access," which limits a device to a single app. To enable this feature, the user gives the portable device (iPad or whatever) with the Chess Score Pad app running to the tournament director, who enters a 4-digit pin password. Once activated in this manner, the program will not exit unless the pin is reentered. In other words, the app will remain locked in this mode until the tournament director releases it after the game has ended.

Finally, the user can print out a user agreement form from the program that spells out the player's responsibility to use the device properly. I am certain there are tournament directors out there who would want this sort of thing, but I'm not one of them. A signed agreement isn't going to stop anyone who is determined to get away with cheating.

I have tried to think of a way to get around these features and have concluded that a player could not use this app and use a chess engine at the same time. Certainly a person could start up a chess engine and keep score on that program instead of using the app, but it would be obvious from the difference in programs that this is a blatant attempt at cheating.

For the record, Roger also points out that his program requires much less storage space than any of the available chess engines. One can always joke that there is a secret spot in the corner that will show the top line computer move when pressed and then disappear when you move your finger, but it's too small to have anything like that. If you use this program on your phone to record moves, I could understand

a wary opponent being suspicious since it is not at all easy to see the screen to make sure the Chess Score Pad app is running rather than a chess engine. You also might arouse suspicion by taking the phone with you if you left the playing hall to use the restroom. The iPad's larger screen renders the first suspicion moot as it can be seen from a distance.



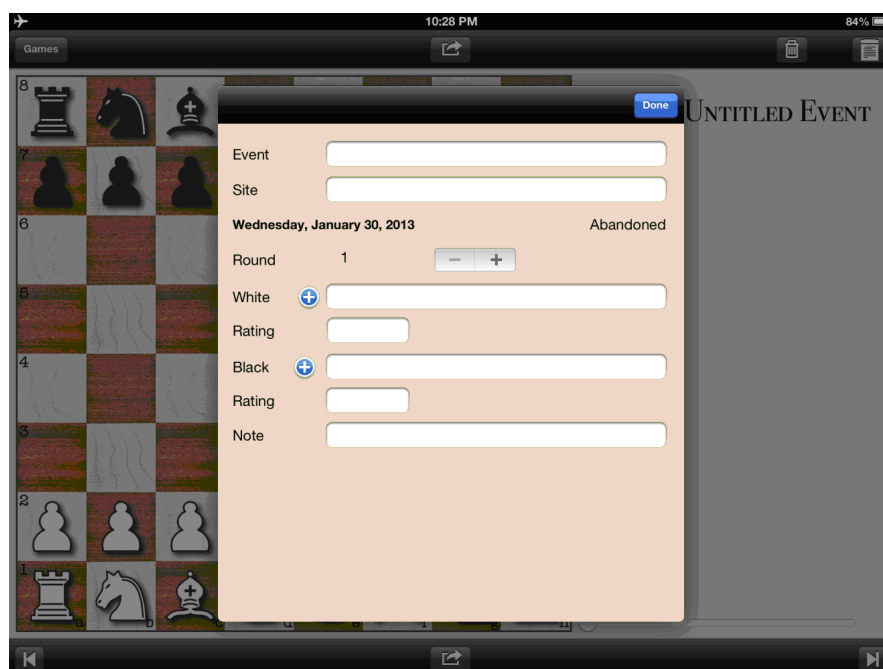
User Features

A screen shot of the board is shown above. Pieces are simply dragged from one spot to another with your finger. I have found that this makes it easier to continue my score sheet in time pressure long after I would have abandoned the process with pen and paper. The program does not check for legal moves by USCF rule. USCF would consider this "advice". If you record a move in error, you can go back and fix it. If you wanted to move pieces back and forth on the screen as you might during analysis, the program will allow it, although this is against USCF rules just as it would be if you moved pieces around on the actual board. There are four menus above the board. The first menu on the left has the list of previous games. The center menu has nine options: New Game, Next Game of Event, Email Game (text), Email Game (html), Print Game, Setup, Rate Chess Score Pad, Contact, and Web Site. The third icon at the top is a trash can. Clicking it deletes the current game after you confirm the delete. The last icon at the top is a notepad. It brings up a dialog box for you to enter tournament information, including the names of the two players. These boxes also link to your contacts folder so you can more easily call up information for opponents you already played if you added them to your contacts list. It will also automatically enter your name if you entered it under Setup. Pressing the bottom button brings up a second menu where you can record the result, rotate the board, record that a draw

has been offered, or to denote check and mate in the recorded notation. There are also two arrows at the bottom to advance forward or backward in the current game. Once you record the result, you can press the top button and select "Next Game of Event" to go on to the next game. Once the tournament is finished, you can e-mail the games to yourself. The email will send once you exit the program and turn off "airplane mode". I show screen shots of two of the drop-down menus below (see next page).

In conclusion, I think this is a very nice program for entering and recording games. If for some reason you don't keep a record of your games and just throw away your score sheets, then it might not be worthwhile. I can understand some concern by players and tournament directors at large money events. You may have to spend some time showing the security features to them in order to convince players that you aren't trying to cheat. At smaller events, the motivation is less. Even so, this product will not make you play better chess. If you claim to be using a program like this but are secretly using a chess engine, the real "tell" occurs when you start winning events you have no business winning.

If you are interested in this program, visit the iTunes store or visit Roger Carey's website at chessscorepad.com for more information.



In the next issue...

a look at ChessPad2 and Chessdiagrammer 8.2 for PC, and possibly an app or two for the Android devices. If you have been using something you like on a Mac, PC, or mobile device, let's hear about it. And don't forget to mention some missing feature you would put on your wish list.