

The half-time orange

(December 2001)

December is (again) already upon us, and the new football season is well under-way. It's looks like one of the most open Premiership's for years, with only Liverpool showing any true form, and Manchester United in amongst the chasing pack. In Italy little Chievo from Verona have just relinquished their position at the top of Serie A following a defeat at Milan, whose city rivals Inter move top. In France, champions Nantes are bottom although they progressed in the Champions League. Anderlecht are off the pace in Belgium. PSV are slightly adrift in the Dutch league, after running away with the title last season when enjoying a sixteen-point advantage. It's much of the same elsewhere, with Deportivo, Boavista and Bayern in good positions to retain their titles. At least Monaco managed a mid-table berth after winning the 1999/00 title. The World Cup draw as expected put England into the "Group of Death" alongside favourites Argentina, Sven's Sweden and Nigeria. Struggling Brazil have the easiest group with Turkey, China and Costa Rica.

IOTP website

The IOTP website has now been re-vamped and the new forum seems to be working well. The majority of managers will now have already registered, but for those who haven't the instructions are quite simple. Although it's amazing how many people don't read the instructions! To register for the forum:

- 1/ you must have a valid e-mail registered with IOTP (which will appear on your squadlist). If you haven't then simply inform us of your e-mail address on your next turnsheet and we'll add it (and you'll receive an e-mail when this has been done).
- 2/ go to the IOTP website at <http://www.iotp.co.uk> and click on the **register** link.
- 3/ enter your member code (PBM/PBeM in CAPITALS, online games in lower case), your registered e-mail address, you forum nickname and tick the box accepting the terms and conditions (after reading them of course).
- 4/ as long as the e-mail address given matches the registered e-mail address for the member code stated then you have registered successfully and will be sent an e-mail to the e-mail address given containing your password. Simple.
- 5/ to log in just enter your member code and password and click the blue **LOG IN** button. You'll then be able to post to the forum, use the player search etc.

The main problems people have had is typing in their member code in lower case even though it's a PBM member code, or giving IOTP an incorrect e-mail address and then successfully registering (using the wrong e-mail address) and then not receiving the password (as it's when to address they specified which was incorrect).

The new website contains:

- all the tables/latest results from all setups (click the **results** link and then select a setup)
- all the club codes separated into countries (click the **codes** link and select a country)
- a PDF version of the current rulebook (click the **rulebook** link then open the PDF and save it)
- the currently available clubs (click the **clubs** link and select a combination of club, setup or game)
- a player search facility (click the **search** link and enter a player's known name)
- the forum enabling users to discuss IOTP and anything fooball (click the **forum** link)

If you want to check a player's career statistics check out <http://www.soccerassociation.com> which uses the full IOTP database.

Changes

The youth team eligibility criteria has been changed slightly. Previously as long as a player was under-21 on the 1st September of the current season then he could be put in the youth squad. As setups are on different seasons this has been changed to the following:

- a player is eligible for the youth squad as long as he's under-21 on the date the turn is processed.
- a youth player will remain in the youth team at the end of the season as long as he's still under-21 on the date the close season turn is played.

Ratings compensation is now no longer given. The second club turn fee will be rising from £1.25 to £1.75 in 2002. This is the first time that the second club turn fee has ever increased. The PBeM turns have been re-designed and seem to be working well. If you have trouble with a PBeM turn we need to know as much information as possible, such as browser, version, OS etc. This really goes for all e-mail enquiries, please tell us who you are, what club your manage, in which setup/game and so on.

Proposed changes

Every manager has different ideas on how IOTP can be improved. However one of the most popular seems to be improved unmanaged/external bids. So Milan could bid say £30m for Beckham. There is a reason why this doesn't happen. At present you can basically buy any player you want from an unmanaged/external club as long as you bid enough, although sometimes the player may not want to join your club. So if Milan did bid £30m for Beckham and he joined Milan, what would happen? In twelve turns every managed club who could afford him would bid for Beckham and bring him back into the setup. Hardly realistic. A simple solution was found to this. Each player at an unmanaged/external club will have an availability flag, so he'll either be available or unavailable. So Beckham at Milan would be unavailable, why would they sell him when they've just bought him. This would also protect

unmanaged clubs who are indecently plundered of their best players by managed clubs. When a club became unmanaged the majority of their decent players would be made unavailable, thus retaining the strength of the club for next manager, which makes for a better setup all-round. A player's availability flag could change turn by turn, for example Beckham could become available again after he'd been at Milan for say seventy-four turns. A problem with this is that one turn a manager could bid for Beckham and it would be refused (player unavailable) but the following turn another manager could bid for Beckham and sign him (as he would then be unavailable). So to avoid this problem each manager would have a shortlist on their information sheet which basically listed the details of the last ten unmanaged/external players bid for. So if Beckham became available and you'd recently bid for him you'd be informed that he was now available and could bid accordingly. There are now over 33,000 players in the database thus restricting the number of players available is not a major problem. For example, 10,000 could be available at any one time (of all abilities). From IOTP's point of view this was well thought out. It would enable larger and more frequent unmanaged/external bids, it would protect the squads of unmanaged clubs from being plundered thus retaining the setups' competitiveness and the unmanaged club's attractiveness to a new manager and it would increase the strength of external clubs making European competitions more competitive. This idea was put forward to the forum on a couple of occasions and to our amazement received a rather lukewarm reception. Why? Perhaps managers want to be able to plunder unmanaged clubs and make the setup less attractive for new managers or they want to be able to buy Shevchenko no matter what. Wouldn't the fact that Milan don't want to sell be a viable response though?

Anyway, I hope the advantages are obvious to every one, and await your comments. Please inform us of your opinion whatever it may be. Previously it has only been the managers against an idea who respond, thus giving a false impression of opinions throughout the setups. If you like the idea then say so. It'll also make it easier to improve unmanaged clubs, an unmanaged Portsmouth can buy a decent player knowing that he won't be pinched by another club in the near future.

Another problem is player hogging. Over time the stronger clubs in the setups build up a massive squad of talented players, and makes lots of cash by player trading. In reality no club would be able to hold onto so many quality players who weren't regularly playing (e.g. Robbie Fowler -> Leeds). Our idea, and it is only an idea at this stage, is simple. Any player who has poor attitude (i.e. under 80%) will not sign a new contract and will leave on a Bosman. This includes youth players. If you have a youth player with poor attitude then he will not re-sign for the youth squad (even if he is eligible). Some clubs still have players such as Owen in the youth squad! This should only affect the most powerful clubs and should free up some of the decent players for the rest of the managers. Managers will have to juggle their squads more effectively or risk losing players for nothing. At present each club can only lose one out of contract player per season, and even then they receive 60% of the transfer fee. The new proposed idea would see all out of contract players released, some would become free agents, others would be signed by other managed clubs or unmanaged/external clubs. No fee would be received for players aged twenty-four or over, with 50% received for all others. For the overall good of the setups this is a welcome idea. It prevents the more successful clubs from becoming too strong and frees up quality players for the rest of the setups. Thus a more even distribution of quality players and a more competitive stronger setup, which is in turn more attractive to new managers and long term is less likely to close. But will managers accept this idea. Unfortunately I very much doubt it! Whereas all managers would be quite happy to sign a Bosman player from another club, they wouldn't be prepared to run the risk of losing their players on a Bosman. We are constantly battling between our wishes (that is strong competitive and well populated setups) and our customers wishes (a strong club for me!). Let me know your thoughts. Go on surprise us. Send any comments to "HTO" on a separate piece of paper. All will be read.

Closing setups

In the recent months we've had to close down a few setups due to shrinking numbers of managers participating. However we rarely close setups. Considering that IOTP started off in 1993/94 and currently have almost seventy setups we are not even into double figures yet. The main reason for closing setups is CHEATING. It doesn't take a genius to bend the rules but those who do are eventually only spoiling it for themselves. Firstly, we will always cancel any deals we regard as cheating, dishing out fines as appropriate. Secondly, if cheating is widespread then the respectable managers will leave the setup and it will close. If people are prepared to go to any lengths for a trophy, then simply send us a cheque for £20 and we'll order you one!

We are always requiring new managers. If any of your friends or colleagues are interested then please let us know on your turnsheet, especially if they are open-minded enough to see past the big guns that everyone wants. The more managers we can get a setup the more competitive it is and the better it is for everyone.

Trophies

We will shortly be ordering another batch of trophies, somewhere in the region of 150! So if you're waiting for a trophy it should be delivered sometime in January 2002. It all depends on how quickly the engraving is done. As it's a big order it may take some time.

Christmas 2001

As usual the Christmas post slows down the IOTP turns so it's vitally important that you send your turns off well in advance of the deadline date, ideally as soon as possible after you receive your turn. If you have access to a fax machine or receive PBeM turns then you won't be affected by the s-l-o-w Christmas post. Our last working day this year will be Tuesday December 18th 2001 and we'll return on Wednesday January 2nd 2002.

Have a great Christmas and jolly 2002. Best wishes to all managers from all at IOTP
- Jimmy G, Dan, Nick, Nathan, Willa, Richard.