

The half-time orange

(December 2003)

Crikey! December already. I've finally got round to another HTO and can't believe that it's the first (and last) one of this year. I think I'll have to delegate this task in future so that the HTO is a more regular offering.

Quite a few Ukrainian player names may have changed as we've tried to keep the Ukrainian translations, rather than the Russian or European ones. So Oleksandr Holovko rather than Aleksandr Golovko.

We received a suggestion about converting Euro Dream 1 into a Football Elite setup at the end of the current season which was put to the managers. However the majority of managers didn't respond and those that did were pretty much split. So it'll stay as it is for the forthcoming season.

Adding players to the PBM database

We have some 40,000+ players on the main database, however only a proportion of these are on the PBM database (limited by the codes AAA to ZZZ, so 17,000+). There's plenty of room on the PBM database for players to be added from the main database. You can do this by simple scouting the player on your turnsheet. However we only add players to the main database when they've played a first team game or at the very least got a first team squad number. If this is not the case then the player won't be added to the main database and won't be available to add to the PBM database. So you won't be able to snap up the latest 12 year-old sensation that Manchester United are hunting.

Also for online setups, you can only scout or bid for players who are on the PBM database when your setup is played. So if a player is added after this and you know his code from the main player search facility on the IOTP website we won't allow you to use the "Your questions/comments" to bid for the player. Nobody else in the setup will be able to bid for the player, as the code won't be accepted on the online turnsheet. So you'll effectively be gaining an unfair advantage. One manager brought this to our attention and we reversed the deal involved and then the complaining manager did exactly the same thing (which was previously a 'despicable incident of cheating') to improve his own team!

Third club

We now allow managers to have a third club in a setup as long as it meets the following conditions – the third club must be in the lowest division and the setup is not in it's first season. The cost for this is the same as a second club. If you require a third club then either use the 'clubs' search facility on the IOTP website, consult your results booklet or order the 'G' luxury to find out the lowest league clubs available in your setup (unfortunately there are usually quite a few to choose from).

The forum

Despite the constant warnings and abundant displays of the forum rules some people still persist in breaking these rules. The solution for IOTP is simple, if you're breaking the rules, causing offence, being a nuisance or just being a childish gimp then we'll simply suspend you from the forum (and from the player search facility). If you continue to abuse the forum then you'll just be kicked off. It's that simple those who can't abide by the rules lose their use of the forum.

SoccerAssociation.com Yearbook

Everyone should know that we also run the SoccerAssociation.com website that provides all the player data for IOTP. There's been a surge of people scouting Mexican players as we've recently added them to the website. I don't want to harp on about SoccerAssociation.com, if you like the information on offer (over 41,000 players with career records etc.) and are prepared to pay 50p a week for it then you subscribe, if you don't you don't. I've absolutely no problem with that. However SoccerAssociation.com also publish statistical yearbooks, which by all accounts are rather good. Certainly they have considerably more information than any other yearbook available be it the European Football Yearbook (no player info), Annuario (mainly Italy), Rothmans (mainly England) or Jorge Jimenez's A-Zs (pretty much out-of-date). So the 2003/04 yearbook was published and I e-mailed all the IOTP managers informing them of what I thought would be a product they would be very interested in (all the career records and line-ups of all the players/clubs from the most popular 18 countries – England, Spain, Italy, Germany, France etc.). I didn't see a major problem with this as it was only one e-mail and we bulk e-mail our customers extremely rarely. What kind of response did we get from about 1,500 e-mails? A big fat ZERO!! I couldn't believe it, thousands of people interested in football, players and player information and no sales. Perhaps another approach was required so I designed a little order form with information about the book and an order form. This would make it easier for people, maybe they don't want to order over the internet. So off the leaflets went in everyone's IOTP turn. Surely they'd be a better response. There was, but only SIX sales! Now I'm not at all saying go to <http://yearbook.soccerassociation.com> view the sample pages and order securely for Christmas. What I would like to ask and this is very

important to me. Why didn't you buy it? Everyone must have a reason, too expensive, not interested, get the info elsewhere, I'd rather buy the European Football Yearbook, I've already bought the Rothmans etc. If possible please let us know why. Hopefully with your help the next yearbook will be more successful! But really I'd just like to be able to solve this perplexing puzzle! Maybe everyone thought it was just a load of cack! Although the information is first rate and is used by everyone with UEFA to Eurosport to ProActive to Birmingham City.

The ideal setup

Over the years (we'll be celebrating our 10th year sometime in 2004) we've tried many ways to boost the number of managed clubs per setup. We've tried different price structures (so lower league clubs are cheaper), different league structures, giving clubs more money (thus more to spend) or less money (more competitive) and in the past perhaps fiddled with the game a bit too much. The end result in all situations – nothing. No noticeable changes! I always remember spending a good week or two completely re-designing and improving the match report and receiving just two responses to it. One liked it, one didn't! Our approach these days is "if it ain't broken don't fix it".

Anyway as the holiday season approaches what would be the ideal setup (from IOTP's point of view). Firstly all managers pay for an entire season and no changing of clubs allowed (unless offered to you by IOTP). You can quit your club but you'll then be given another (lesser) club to manage. You can't transfer any credit to other clubs or setups then the only way out of the setup is when your credit runs out. So we get say 80 managers (managing one club each) who've all paid for a full season (which could probably be discounted). Each manager is then given randomly one of the 92 league clubs, it could be Arsenal or Boston. Whatever you get you have to work with. You cannot transfer your credit out of the club, so your effectively stuck with them and have no choice but to work your magic. You can quit and be allocated another club (by IOTP) but only after you've actively managed the club for a several turns. There'll always be a few clubs in each division unmanaged (and probably further protected from losing their best players than usual). These clubs can be offered to managers doing well. So do well with Mansfield and you could be offered the Norwich job. Also these clubs will be given to managers who get sacked. If your managerial skills put Chelsea's stars in the bottom three then you could be sacked and given Rochdale to manage instead, while Chelsea will be offered another manager who's doing well. So it rewards managers who perform. If you don't perform then you'll be sacked and given a lesser team, which is basically just tough. If you went from Chelsea to Rochdale the only option would be to try and improve Rochdale and be offered a job further up the divisions. Or give up, let your credit run out and drop out!

With the above scenario (and it's only a dream, it's **not** an idea, proposal or impending change) all managers pay up front for a season irrelevant of their club. So it keeps all divisions competitive, reduces the turnover of managers and it's avoids the problems of 90% of managers wanting the biggest clubs with the most money. Unfortunately a lot of managers instead of starting from the bottom and working up want to start at the top and hopefully stay there.

I'm not saying for a moment that it would work in practice. I don't think there would be too many people who'd be prepared to pay up front for a season and accept the management of Carlisle. But from our point of view it would be fantastic if when a new manager wanted to play IOTP it was just a matter of sending out a club, any club. After all the game is about managing a football club. Which football club it is, which division they are in, players or cash they have shouldn't really matter. Should it?

Christmas post & strikes

Our last working day is Thursday 18th December 2002 and we'll return on Friday 2nd January 2003. Always try to post your turns a day or two early in December as the postal system quickly slows down, resulting in a deluge of late turn sheets. Every year the Royal Mail knows that Christmas is a time of heavy post but every year the post still almost grinds to halt. So make sure that you post it earlier than normal. Alternativley e-mail your PBeM turn or fax it.

We almost ran into difficulties with the recent postal strikes which were luckily just before the post totally ground to a stop. In the event of a postal strike we always continue working. So your turns will always be sent out. If we did wait for the post to return to normal service then we'd still have to pay wages and so on and it wouldn't be long before these costs coupled with no income threatened the continuation of IOTP. So we have no alternative but to continue playing the games and posting the turns. If you have an internet connection and an e-mail address then it's beneficial to receive your turns by e-mail as well. This costs only an extra 10p per club per turn. You'll have the benefit of receiving your match report, transfers, squad details etc. before you receive your postal turn and you always have the option of sending your turn sheet by e-mail if the postal service is disrupted again. There's also the option of faxing your turn sheet in as well. Both options increased significantly during the recent postal problems.

Merry Christmas and Happy 2004 from all the IOTP staff and thanks for your continued support