

Half-Time Orange

(June 2005)

The 2004/05 season is now behind us and already the 2005/06 is upon us. The football world never stops. In the brief interlude I thought it was about time for another of our (in frequent) newsletters.

New IOTP

For a number of years we've wanted to completely re-do the entire game but have been deterred by one major factor, i.e. our possible goliath-like competitors. With their huge resources, in both technical and marketing expertise, they could simply overwhelm a small niche operator such as In off the Post. So why spend years re-developing the game engine only to be trumped by the corporate hard-hitters? It was a non-starter. However as most of you are aware a certain major PC football management game launched a few months back and amazingly it's not very good at all, which was a very pleasant surprise. About the only thing that we couldn't compete on would be price. I took over Bastia to see what the game was like and if you thought the IOTP data/ratings weren't 100% then ouch! This game is awful! Top scorer in my division was Stefan Reuter! Yep, the retired veteran defensive midfielder, who didn't score a single league goal in his last seven seasons! He's currently notched 13! I've signed the Santos forward Deivid (Robinho's strike partner who bagged the same number of Brasileiro goals in 2004) who is rated 'average' while Julian Joachim who ended the season on loan at Walsall is 'fairly decent'! Anyway, the many failings of this game have finally given us enough confidence to press ahead with exploring the idea of completely re-doing the entire game.

If we did go ahead with re-doing the game what would this mean to IOTP managers? Well, probably not a lot for the PBM managers. The game itself (rules etc.) would not really change and the paperwork wouldn't either (perhaps just a little bit classier). We'd use the opportunity to move to 4-character codes thus enabling the whole database (of 50,000 players) to be available to IOTP rather than just a sub-set due to the limitations of 3-characters. We may introduce three subs, perhaps have other costs introduced such as signing-on fees, paying off contracts and so on. The UEFA Cup/Champions League would be played and reported in full. But generally pretty much the same old IOTP PBM game. This is because being a turn based game there's not a great deal that could be changed as it's impractical for example to allow in-match tactical changes (although as ever we will look into any practical solutions). We'd obviously also tinker with everything such as availability, contracts, wages, attendances, injuries, money, transfers etc. One thing that can't really change though is the rating system. There are potentially three different ways to do the ratings/player data: 1) have pretend club and player names, 2) have real club and player names but the ratings then change in the game or 3) have real club and player names and real-life ratings. IOTP has always used method 3 so if you move into a setup a few seasons old then David Beckham is still a decent player and not a Carlisle reserve. This method however makes training not an option. As there's no point with the ratings tracking real-life ability. Also I can't see us changing from the single rating either. It's hard enough keeping on top of a single rating never mind passing, shooting, heading, pace, dribbling and so on. But I welcome your opinions.

The scope for developing the online games is much greater. For example we can easily introduce simple concepts such as contract negotiations. However the main improvement would be the facility to view the match in real-time. With more importantly the facility to make changes as desired, e.g. a substitution, tactical change or a positional change etc. Obviously this would be the end result of the development so there's a lot to get through first but I'd guess this should be technically possible. We'd probably have to set a limit on the number of changes allowed, perhaps five, and also have some rule for the kick-off time of the game,

probably a set-time, say 8pm. Also any dodgy internet connections or whatever would have to be just tough.

Also the PBeM turns will be posted automatically and this will allow them to be sent after the live scores have finished. So nobody should be able to sabotage someone else's results. If we allow PBM managers to also have the ability to make in-match changes then obviously the PBeM turns will have to be posted after this anyway. Another idea would be to link up the IOTP player search with the SoccerAssociation data (for those who subscribe) and to use the SoccerAssociation career record data and current season's appearances/goals/league results to construct our own list of possible under-rated/over-rated players so we can keep on top of the ratings a bit better.

So this proposed new game design is mostly in the background and will essentially help us run the game better. I don't want to go into too much technical detail but the game was initially begun in 1993 when there was no mass market e-mail, internet or mobile communications. One of our first upgrades was a second floppy disc drive! So times have changed. Probably most importantly the customer has changed. Ten years ago we could have put a £400 advert in a football mag and received enough coupons to kick-off and maintain a new setup. Unfortunately with readership levels in steady decline and a changing technical environment we'd be lucky to get perhaps 5 customers from an advert! So no prizes for why we don't advertise too much. We've recently received a letter criticising us about dwindling manager levels in setups (although no solution was given) and suggesting that attitude and availability etc. were to blame and needed tweaking. Unfortunately managers leaving are down to the same old problems. Everyone likes to win, have the most money and the best players. A lot want to actually start with the best of everything which slightly defeats the game's pleasure. Hopefully the website re-design and new marketing approach should increase our manager levels and create an even more competitive game for everyone.

IOTP website

The IOTP website will be overhauled once we get a logo designed. Last spring we plumped for a professional web design company @ £60 an hour who designed a totally unacceptable home page of over 250k!! So we didn't pay, solicitor's letters etc. A few months ago we paid another company to just design the logo (after doing a good job with the fcBetting one). However their attempts weren't up to scratch either. So we're trying again with another logo design company and it'll hopefully be third time lucky. Once we have an acceptable logo we'll be re-designing the home page making it more attractive to potential new customers (i.e. actually telling them what we do and who we are), tidying up the menu structure so navigation is better and that kind of thing. We also want to improve our credit card facilities making the online payment automated, however the cost of this (over 5% per transaction!) is currently putting us off.

Payment

When sending payment separately from your turn please let us know who the payment is from and to what clubs the money is going to. We regularly just receive a cheque and have absolutely no idea who has sent it and what team it is for!

fcBetting

We have just launched a new website www.fc Betting.com featuring all the statistics and betting odds (from over 80 bookmakers and exchanges) you'll ever need. If you're interested please take a look and let us know what you think as we are struggling to get any hits at all!

So as usual let me have your comments about anything concerned with the game particularly if you think we'd be wasting our time with the re-development as the game is okay as it is. We do read all your comments and try to gain a **balanced view** of what the majority want and what is actually achievable.