

## **FIFA Soccer 08 on Next-gen Blog 4**

Release Date: Immediate

Topic: Be A Pro

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The evolution of our new Be A Pro feature comes from two things. First, we felt that the experience of playing FIFA 08 – both the view point and playing as the whole team – hasn't really changed since we went to 3D. At the same time there is this desire from our gamers to go to an 11 vs 11 online experience. These two things inspired us to begin experimenting with a new way to play FIFA 08.

In FIFA 08 on PS3 and Xbox 360 we have two things that will take us in this direction. The first is our new Be A Pro: Offline Training mode. This is a way of playing the game where you just focus on one player. You play the game as a single fixed player for the entire match.

You choose your team and the player you want to play as. You'll go back to the arena and get a chance to practice as that player as the game is loading. The first thing you'll see is this very unique camera that we've built for this feature called a Pro Cam. This camera is always framing the action between you, the ball and the goal. The further you are away from the goal the camera will pull back and the view will be further out to enable you to be more tactical. If you are sprinting in on goal the camera will zoom in to a tighter view that makes it feel more like you are sprinting in on goal and you are living the moment. It is really emotionally engaging, more so than we ever dreamed.

The second component of Be A Pro: Offline Training is the game is constantly giving you feedback on your performance because we are trying to mimic the experience of playing the real sport. The game is your coach so if you start to fall out of position, the game will alert and direct you where you need to be in terms of your positioning. In addition, every time you do something good or bad you receive positive or negative feedback through a performance meter at the bottom of the screen. It's just as if a coach is yelling at you from the sideline for every bad or good pass, shot, tackle, etc.

At the end of the game you receive a post match performance report which lists performance criteria and assigns percentages of what you did well and what you need to improve on. If you achieve certain levels you can unlock objectives and achievements inside the game.

The third component of Be A Pro: Offline Training is that you can influence your teammates in a similar way that you can when you play real football. If you want a pass you can shout at your teammates to give you the ball. Simply press the pass button and that puts an icon above your head to tell your teammates that you want a pass. If you want a through-pass you just press the through-pass button and the icon appears. Even if you want your teammates to take a shot on goal you just press the shoot button to direct them to take the shot. If the opposition has the ball you can hit the secondary press button to instruct your teammates to press the player with the ball. We are really trying to re-create that real-world experience on the pitch and create micro-challenges around off-the-ball situations.

We recently announced that we will be creating a free downloadable content update to FIFA 08. This feature is called Be A Pro: Online Team Play. We have this dream that by the year 2010 we will be able to create an 11 versus 11 online experience where every users plays as a single fixed player in a single match.

Our ambition is to create competitions or tournaments around this mode where we can have the best 11 players in each country to playing off against the best 11 players from other countries to determine the best FIFA-playing country in the world. Hopefully it will be England but we will have to wait and see.

Be A Pro: Online Team Play is our second step towards this dream and follows our Be A Pro: Offline training feature. This year in FIFA 08 we will have the ability to connect online ten different consoles for a five versus five game. Each player will be empowered to decide if he is going to play as a fixed player or free roaming players so there will be a lot of strategy to this decision. For example, on the team I play in at work, we have three players who play as fixed players – one as a striker, one as a midfielder and one

as a defender – and two players free roaming. I find this approach the most successful. Some teams in our studio use a diamond strategy where they have a central defender, an attacker and two wingers that are fixed and one free roaming player. Other teams have used two attackers and two midfielders as fixed players, some teams' use all five player fixed but in this last scenario, you risk possibly having AI controlled strikers scoring the goals and that is a very different feeling.

Be A Pro: Online Team Play is going to be downloaded content released in late October/early November. When you log-on through your console on that date the game will tell you this mode is now ready to download, and most importantly, it is going to be free.

In the office it feels like this feature is the dawn of something new. I've been playing FIFA a long time but to be able to play with a group of friends – and you have to organize yourself well – is a very different experience. The Offline Training helps you understand what your responsibilities are in the game but it is not until you get in that live situation where you have your teammate shouting at you that it really starts to replicate the pressure of a real-world game. It is really cool.

I played the game the other day where I was the defender. I was doing my job as a defender well and then we had a corner in the 80<sup>th</sup> minute of a 1-1 game. I went up for the corner, the ball came to me and I volleyed it into the net. It was so satisfying. I spent all my time doing my job on defense and then all of a sudden to be involved in the winning goal felt 10 times more rewarding than if I would have been playing all ten men as myself.

The other difference when playing Be A Pro is that you are not always in the action so the emotional investment in each touch of the ball is much greater. Say you are a winger and you may not touch the ball for a whole minute or so. You play your position and make sure you are doing your job but the moment the ball comes to you the sense of pressure rises dramatically because you might not see the ball for another minute so you have to make sure your touch matters. And then all of your teammates are focused on you so if you screw up they are going to be after you at the final whistle. It is quite an experience and I hope everyone will enjoy this new way to play FIFA 08.

- Joe