

FIFA Soccer 08 on Next-gen Blog 5

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Topic: Player Ratings

Joe Booth, Lead Producer

Creating and maintaining our FIFA 08 database is an enormous undertaking that requires coordinating researchers all over the world and organizing their information. This year FIFA 08 will have 30 leagues, more than 570 teams and more than 15,000 players – this represents more leagues, teams and players than all other EA SPORTS games combined.

In addition, a lot of player transfers happen during the first transfer window which is right when we are finalising our game so our database researchers work round the clock during this period to make sure we capture every move. Last year in FIFA 07 we provided two downloadable database updates: one in September and another one in February, following the closure of the transfer windows. This was the first time EA SPORTS has been able to update the content of one of its sports titles in the middle of the season and this new approach has enabled us to make a more realistic playing game. To give you some numbers: between September 2006 and February 2007, there were 75,000 player database updates and more than 4,300 transfers in the database.

Michael Müller-Möhring
Football Data Manager

The FIFA 08 database team is based in Vancouver, Canada where the FIFA franchise is developed for EA SPORTS but we have a community of database researchers stationed all over the world. The majority of the data is entered by these experts living in these countries. Our database researchers watch live football games to evaluate and rate the skills and abilities of each player. They also rely on television, internet, magazines and newspapers for information. As a team we then review all of the player ratings to make sure player attributes are as authentic and realistic as possible.

Every team and league in FIFA 08 is represented by at least one football expert working for EA SPORTS. Currently there are approximately 500 editors from Sweden, Argentina, Germany, Turkey, Czech Republic, Mexico, Switzerland, Scotland, South Africa, etc. working on collecting accurate data. We have about 20 researchers scouting and evaluating players just from the Spanish leagues. Our community of database researchers is constantly expanding and the database team is always looking for knowledgeable football supporters who would like to join our community. Anyone can apply by going to this website: www.eafootballtalentscout.com.

The data gets updated on a 24/7 basis throughout the year. Our editors are dedicated football supporters and they follow their teams and leagues every single day. We use an online database that they log in to and update the team and player data. This enables us to have constantly updated information and evaluations that reflect the real world. So when we notice that a player is performing better or worse than originally evaluated the database is edited to reflect the changing status of that player.

The same goes for the appearance of the players: if David Beckham gets a new look from his hairdresser, our editors go into the database and select his new hair style right away. All these changes happen frequently so the community of database researchers are always busy adjusting and tuning the ratings and rankings.

The database team works closely together with the producers, engineers and technical artists from the FIFA 08 game team. Together we decide which attributes and traits are added to the database, which attributes and traits are used by the AI of the game to determine decisions of the player or the CPU, which new data fields would be useful to support the manager mode part of the game and make it better

in general. We also work with the artists to create new hair styles and other assets the community can assign to the players later on.

The data plays an integral role in creating a dynamic and authentic gameplay experience. The data drives all of the decisions that are calculated by the game code. FIFA 08 features AI with a 35-point decision engine which enables players to process 1,000 potential options and reactions every second in real time - more than 60,000 options every minute. They combine this new level of intelligence with a dynamic 'Threat Map' system to capture the excitement and realism of football.

The database drives these types of decisions. This includes things like how successful the gamer or the CPU opponent is when shooting, passing, tackling, or heading the ball, how a player reacts in a challenge or after losing a ball, what the goalkeeper does during a one-on-one situation, etc. The database describes the playing style, behaviour and characteristics of each player and distinguishes him from all the others. For example, the database tells the game engine that Steven Gerrard has a very powerful shot from long distance when in a good position. Also, Cristiano Ronaldo will rely on his speed and dribbling to get past the defender and attempt to score from inside the penalty box.

The database sets the customized formation of each team and determines the role of every single player, his exact position on the pitch, the defensive effort and the attacking movement. Furthermore, the playing style of the team is driven from the attack and defense tactics and the build-up play options that are edited in the database.

We currently use 35 attributes, 70 traits and more than 65 additional data fields to describe the characteristics and the abilities of every single player. For the teams it is between 60 and 90, depending on the size of the team. We are constantly evolving our database and game engine to provide our fans with the most realistic playing football experience in the world and I would expect that the way we evaluate players will continue to be refined in the future.

One of the most important aspects of creating an authentic football gameplay experience is to create players that look, move and play like their real-life counterparts. That's why the database and the overall ability or rating of each player is so important. We use 35 attributes to calculate the overall ability of a player and every position has its own formula. Each attribute is weighted and its importance is based on the player's position. For example, attributes like "Marking", "Tackling" and "Heading" are more important to the overall make up of a centre back than a winger.

In most cases this calculation is a mix of **physical attributes** (Strength, Speed, Stamina, Agility etc.), **mental attributes** (Positioning, Vision, Tactical Awareness etc.) and the **skill attributes** (Crossing, Dribbling, Short Passing, Tackling etc.).

When it comes to rating the players, we of course need to set some guidelines for the community: a player from Premiership who is known to be "very good" in heading should have a higher rating than a player from the third division of Norway who is known as a "very good" header in his league.

These guidelines are very important to make sure that all editors from the different countries (and with different football philosophies) are on the same page when it comes to the final ratings of the players and the teams – this is where the multinational database team in Canada comes in. The database producers are constantly monitoring and managing the updates and changes made by the community and we act as a filter to make sure that players are accurately evaluated. We also can react immediately to correct a player rating if we spot an overrated or underrated player.

Hopefully this gives you some insight into how we develop our player ratings and its impact on the game.