

Interview with Daniel Blackburn, Production Director at Caffeine Studios.

- 1. The first 'Football World Manager' received a mixed reaction from the press. Many people really liked it but some levelled criticisms at it. How was this taken at Caffeine?***

We knew that it was going to be an uphill struggle to win people over to a different way of doing things. Championship Manager had more or less set the format for what a football management game should be like, and we also knew that a lot of games reviewers were firm Champ Man fans. We knew therefore that as the new kid on the block, we were possibly in for a critical ride. However, with the exception of one or two reviews that we felt were somewhat OTT we were very pleased with the overall response. A lot of reviewers were prepared to come to the game with an open mind and ended up finding a lot in the game that they really liked. Of course there were areas of the game that were criticised, and where we felt the criticisms were justified these were taken on-board when developing FWM2000.

- 2. How successful was the game for UbiSoft at retail?***

UbiSoft were really pleased with the response to the first game, and so were we. We spent several weeks in the charts, including 2 weeks at No 6 and another 2 at No 10 in the UK, and that's pretty good for a first outing. Of course we are all after the Number One slot and we are very confident that we will achieve this with Football World Manager one day. As a company we spend time playing competitors games and we are more than happy with where we are now beginning to take the genre, and where they are not.

- 3. Championship Manager 3 is the clear leader in the marketplace. What does FWM2000 offer that CM3 doesn't?***

Make no mistake, we have fans of Champ Man in our office as well, but there was pretty much universal disappointment with CM3. Of course it's a huge hit at retail, but we feel that right now it has run out of fresh ideas. So where do I begin? How about over 70 countries actively playing football and also in which you can manage any of the clubs; a really user-friendly interface; more involved team training and tactics; a far superior match action feature; far quicker week by week updates (and not because there's less going on but because we handle it more quickly); Stadium improvement feature and an editor that allows the user to edit Players appearances.

4. *Clearly you are seeking to widen the marketplace for football management games. Do you think that's possible?*

Of course. Despite the numbers that the top selling game CM3 has sold if you look at the stats only a tiny fraction of potential customers are buying football management games right now. Many of these have never even played one and this is just because they assume that they are not for them. In testing we have given FWM2000 to game players who have never played, let alone bought, a football management game, and they were genuinely surprised to find out how much they enjoyed it and wanted to come back for more. FWM2000 is so accessible and is very easy to pick up and play. However, the depth is there as well and certainly if you are going to try and lead your team to cup and league success you are going to have to become a very good manager.

If you look outside the UK at the international marketplace then clearly we have huge potential. With 70 countries in the game no other game comes anywhere close and for many countries we are still the only game which features their domestic clubs and competitions. That's a huge marketplace to tap into.

5. *70 countries is a lot of data. How does Caffeine get its hands on all of this and keep it up to date?*

We source football data from all around the world on anything from competition structures to players. It's a full time job all year round for our team of researchers.

We make a lot of use of the internet of course and have our own leased line to the office to give us 24 hour ultra fast internet access. A lot of information is readily available on the net if you know where to find it, plus we make use of many direct contacts we know as well as UbiSoft's own staff in their thirteen company offices around the world.

Player data is the most subjective part of our research. It's all very well having bucket loads of stats on each player, as some games do but who decides how each player will be rated. Some of the famous players are quite easy but just imagine trying to get several fans of one club agreeing on the stats of just their own first team players and you can imagine how difficult this job can be! People forget that players don't really have ratings in real life and that managers have to pick players based on their assessment of them and not because their passing rating is 87.

We have also created an external data editor utility that we can e-mail to anyone in the world who wants to become one of our researchers. This is probably the best source of data as it comes from people who are passionate about their team or about football in their country.

We are also including a Data Editor with FWM2000 so if we miss anything, or a player wants to change something, they can do it themselves.

6. *The match day is obviously a key feature of any football management game. What is the 'Football World Manager 2000' approach?*

The key objective in our Match Action feature was - *'seamless feedback and interactivity'*.

Firstly, we didn't want the player to have to quit the game to make tactical changes, for example, and in FWM2000 they don't have to. They can of course pause the game if they want to, but once you get the hang of things it's easy to let the game flow from beginning to end without interruption.

We have designed a lot of feedback devices that can be viewed whilst the game is in progress. These show you how the team and each individual player are performing in the game, as well as giving you a variety of constantly updated match facts. You can also view the latest scores in other games that are relevant to you as the clock ticks by. It is also very easy to change the teams tactics, make substitutions, or try to motivate players during the game.

It was quite annoying when some elements of the Match action were criticised when they are in effect an extra feature if you like. Their function was to graphically complement the rest of the game not to be the main form of feedback. CM3 for example just has text based commentary for feedback. In FWM2000 we have tried to re-emphasise the importance of the commentary by making it more detailed. We feel that the commentary coupled with the other forms of feedback in FWM2000 make our match action system far better than our competitors.

We believe our match action feature is really innovative and ambitious and we have a lot more ideas on how to take it forwards in the future. We know there is still work to be done but once we are ahead of the game we intend to stay there.