

Hit soccer video game adds mixed-gender teams, sheds FIFA name

September 27 2023, by Glenn CHAPMAN



Spain's midfielder Alexia Putellas is among the women athletes available for Ultimate Team play in the FC 24 video game, part of efforts to reflect modern soccer.

The blockbuster soccer video game franchise from Electronic Arts, no

longer linked to FIFA, will allow mixed-gender lineups in fantasy matches that have triggered sexist pushback even before the Friday release.

Early access to the game, now renamed FC 24, began last week with the novel feature of female soccer stars virtually taking to the pitch with male counterparts for fantasy squad matches in an "Ultimate Team" mode of online play.

A version of the game tailored for [mobile devices](#) powered by Apple or Android operating systems was released Tuesday.

Spotlights on female soccer stars such as Sam Kerr and Alexia Putellas reflect the reality of the sport today, something the franchise wants to capture, EA Sports FC vice president of brand David Jackson told AFP.

"It's not a moral thing; it's not a cause-related thing," Jackson said of fielding women soccer stars.

"It's a faithful replica representation of the real world of football."

Fans of the franchise offended by the idea of women and men athletes battling in mixed matches have bashed the game in online posts.

"This is like putting go-karts in F1 and racing them together," a critic groused in a chat forum on YouTube.

"Putellas is actually good though," a reply countered. "Don't be sexist."

Farewell FIFA

The launch of FC 24 marks the end of an alliance with world soccer governing body FIFA that spanned three decades.

Since kicking off the franchise in 1993 with FIFA International Soccer, the annually refreshed lineup has become a key part of EA's business, boasting some 150 million players last year alone.

The franchise has shed the FIFA name for the first time as the California-based video game giant pursues a vision of becoming a "global football platform" incorporating broadcast games, live match play and more.

"There are a number of different ways we can grow and expand and we intend to do that in the future," Jackson said.



While featuring soccer players such as Australia's forward Sam Kerr, the rebranded FC 24 video game will lose World Cup content since it is no longer linked with FIFA.

"While we were called FIFA, we weren't able to realize the potential due to limitations of the rights that we held."

Along with freeing EA from contractual constraints that came with carrying the FIFA name, the rebranding also enables the franchise to avoid being marred by scandals at the governing body.

"If we're going to carry the name of the organization as the name of our product, we've got to make sure that name carries the requisite level of quality, integrity and weight over time," Jackson said.

"Now that we own that name, it's all on us."

Likely top seller

EA designed FC 24 to be familiar to fans while adding novelty to make it fresh, according to Jackson.

EA uses motion-capture technology on real athletes and in-stadium cameras to capture action that translates into the gameplay, ramping up the amount of content it gets from games in top leagues, he said.

"Yes, the FIFA license is gone, and the game won't feature the World Cup, but other than that, the feature set is basically unchanged and arguably even improved," Circana video game analyst Mat Piscatella said of FC 24.

"It's been a huge part of the US gaming landscape over the past decade, and of course elsewhere in the world it's even bigger."

Piscatella expects FC 24 to be among the top 10 best selling video games

of this year in the United States.

The games have already been among the top 20 best selling titles annually in the United States for more than a decade, he added.

Wedbush Securities analyst Michael Pachter expects most players to see FC 24 as the game they have come to know, just with a different name.

As the franchise evolves, EA may explore incorporating advertising or real-time matches into its game engine, eventually allowing live-action viewers to play out matches their own way.

"You could be watching an English Premier League game," Jackson envisioned.

"If you don't like the score at halftime, then you jump out of that and into our [game](#) and kind of rewrite history."

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Citation: Hit soccer video game adds mixed-gender teams, sheds FIFA name (2023, September 27) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-09-soccer-video-game-mixed-gender-teams.html>

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