

Title:	FIFA 2000
Developed by:	EA Sports (http://www.easports.com)
Published by:	EA Sports (http://www.easports.com)
Reviewed By:	Tim Maxwell
Official Site:	http://www.easports.com/00/fifa2000/
Overview:	Great graphics and loads of new features make the newest member of the <i>FIFA</i> series a must buy for soccer fans.
Genre:	Soccer
ESRB Rating:	Everyone
The Good Press:	Terrific graphics and sound effects; you can now play as your favorite MLS teams, nearly limitless gameplay options.
The Bad Press:	New commentators are a little drab; game skips an occasional frame of animation.
Ratings:	Graphics: 8/10 Sound: 8/10 Getting Started: 9/10 Documentation: 9/10 Value: 9/10
Tips:	Use the practice mode to learn the advanced control functions. If you try to perform them in-game, you're liable to get burned until you've got them down. Use the aggressive tackle only in desperate situations. They almost always result in a yellow or red card.

I often wonder if EA would be enjoying the remarkable success they are today if a) they had more competition and b) they didn't have a seemingly unlimited advertising budget. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy EA Sports games as much as the next guy, but lately it seems like they are more interested in luring big-name athletes to hock their games than in actually improving them. With this in mind, I sort of expected a similar situation with *FIFA 2000* – perhaps slight graphical improvement and maybe a shirtless Brandi Chastain plastered on the cover. Much to my delight, what I got was an excellent mix of tried-and-true gameplay and some truly innovative new features.

After playing *FIFA 2000* just briefly, you'll quickly notice a significant change in the overall makeup of the series. EA's goal is clear – to take advantage of soccer's newfound popularity (as a result of the thrilling US women's World Cup victory) here in the United States. They have achieved this by adding the ability to control your favorite MLS (Major League Soccer) teams, and by replacing the English commentators with Americans. The inclusion of the MLS teams is definitely a nice touch for us US soccer fans who aren't familiar with the international teams, but the commentators tend to be a bit boring and repetitive.

One thing that EA never gets wrong is graphics, and *FIFA 2000* continues this winning tradition with some highly impressive visual effects. The players and venues all look great and the crowd, although somewhat grainy, is animated and generally well done. Like many other of EA's games, there is a strong

emphasis put on facial expressions and reactions. This is all well and good, but soccer just isn't as well suited to this feature as other sports. The only time you'll ever see the players close enough to notice their features is after a goal or when they've been whistled for a foul. Luckily, the player graphics are good enough from a distance that you'll soon realize that the detailed facial expressions are merely icing on the cake.

On the sound side, *FIFA* does a splendid job of accentuating the exciting moments of the game with appropriate crowd reactions. A miraculous save will leave the crowd gasping in disbelief, while a goal causes a veritable eruption of cheers. Other EA Sports games should take note of the crowd here – I find the crowd to be somewhat subdued in their other games. As previously mentioned, the English commentators have been replaced with Americans' Phil Schoen and Julie Foudy. For the most part, they do an adequate job of calling the action, but they don't ever seem to be really excited about the game. This wouldn't be a problem if the crowd wasn't so enthusiastic, but since they are, I expect the commentators to follow suit.

If you've been a long-time follower of the *FIFA* series, you'll be quite familiar with the control scheme in the game this year. One of the greatest aspects of the series has always been the fact that the game can be as difficult or easy as you want it to be. If you prefer to stick to the basics (passing, heading and shooting), you can and if you're good enough, you can win with this simple strategy even on the harder difficulty settings. If you would prefer to wow your friends with your amazing aerial prowess by performing moves such as bicycle kicks and 360 degree spins, you can do that as well. Nothing is more exhilarating than completing a perfect lob pass and watching a teammate power the kick into the net with a bicycle kick. Granted, you'll have to practice a lot and do some impressive controller gymnastics to pull some of these moves off, but it's well worth it once you've got it down.

Tired of attempting passes blindly to off-screen teammates only to have the ball intercepted by a defender you didn't even know existed? Tired of your perfectly timed corner kick sailing out of bounds? Well, your problems have been solved with a couple of nifty new features in *FIFA 2000*. The first, termed the "pass potential indicator," is perhaps the most innovative new feature in the game. Basically, when you are moving around with possession of the ball, an arrow points to the nearest teammate based on which direction you're facing. If the arrow is green, your teammate is wide open and if you pass to him, there's a good chance he'll receive it. If the arrow is yellow, there are some defenders around so passing to that teammate might be a bit risky. If the arrow is red, your pass is almost sure to be intercepted. Similarly helpful is the ability to perform icon passing during throw-ins and corner kicks. Instead of the clunky arrow that was used to aim passes in previous games, you can now decide which player to aim for based on the icon above his head. Both of these features really make controlling the action a lot smoother, and soon, you'll start to wonder how you lived without them in past *FIFA* games.

Overall, I was pleased to see that EA put a significant effort into improving the series with *FIFA 2000* despite a lack of any real competition. They could have easily chosen to improve the graphics a bit and update the rosters (which not too many would notice anyway), and left it at that. Instead, you're really getting your money's worth with *FIFA 2000* – not only does it bring some great new features to the playing field, but it also builds a positive outlook for the series going into the new millennium.