

5 THINGS THE BIG ANT CRICKET GAMES GOT RIGHT

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For the longest time, the only cricket game of note was EA's Cricket 07. Recently, however, the cricket game market has belonged to Big Ant and Big Ant alone. Today we're going to look back at the features they pioneered or perfected, from Don Bradman Cricket 14 (DBC 14) to their latest effort, Cricket 19.

CRICKET ACADEMY: No, this isn't a place where you can train your players to be better. This is the name of the player creation tool Big Ant created for the original Don Bradman Cricket, way back in 2014. It's been updated since then for each iteration of the game, but at its core it's still one of the strongest character creation tools in sports.

It must be, otherwise the community couldn't have created every single international team from scratch and made them look so close to their living counterparts. Not only does the Academy offer an insane amount of customisability while making players, it was also an ingenious method of getting over the lack of licensed players in the base game, and for that I must give them props.

TEAR AND WEAR: In previous cricket games, everything was either pristine or horrible. If a pitch was flat and hard, it would continue to remain so, even if you were playing a test match. Even the ball



shifted almost instantly from a bright cherry to a battered lump of leather and cork with no in-between.

In Big Ant games, however, you'll see the bowlers' footmarks appear alongside cracks all along the length of the pitch. You can even follow the ball's wear, as one side slowly gets scuffed up in test matches until the half-shiny ball starts reversing. Even better, as you bat, you'll start to see marks appear on your player's once-pristine bat, matching your shots. Seeing red cherries

appear on your blade gives you a good indication of how well you're batting, as no one wants to see their edge littered with red.

FIRST PERSON MODE: DBC 14 was the first game to introduce first-person camera views into cricket, and I don't know how I ever played without them. Not only does the camera make it easy to gauge the line and flight of deliveries, but the way it follows the ball goes perfectly with cricket's golden rule: watch the ball.

Even missing the ball is fun. If your player misses a pull, for example, the camera shoots right and left as the player searches for where the ball has landed. Failure has never been so entertaining.

CAREER MODE: Another addition that came with DBC 14, this was the first time a career mode had existed in a cricket game. About time, you have to admit, because no other game would benefit from focusing on only one player than cricket. Choosing to only bat and ball when your player is called upon makes sure you can go through matches at a reasonable pace. Going up the ranks from club to international cricket feels appropriately momentous.

FOOTWORK: Some arcade-y cricket games did away with footwork entirely while others only had a front/back foot selection system. Big Ant, however, has a classic batting system where not only do you need to choose front/back foot positions, but you also need to follow the ball. If a wide delivery outside off is bowled, for example, you need to tilt your analog stick to the front and right to follow the line of the ball, otherwise you'll probably miss the ball. This makes sure your footwork matches the shots you want to play and makes batting as close to the real thing as possible.

Wasiq Hasan writes to distract himself from the impending climate crisis. Also because it pays. Contact him at fb.com/hasiqe.wasan

Sticking to FPL

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The football season is getting even closer, and with it, the time to set your Fantasy Premier League (FPL) teams.

FPL is one of the best ways for football fans to get invested in the season, and millions of players all over the world take the time out to create their own custom teams and work through each game week till the end of the season.

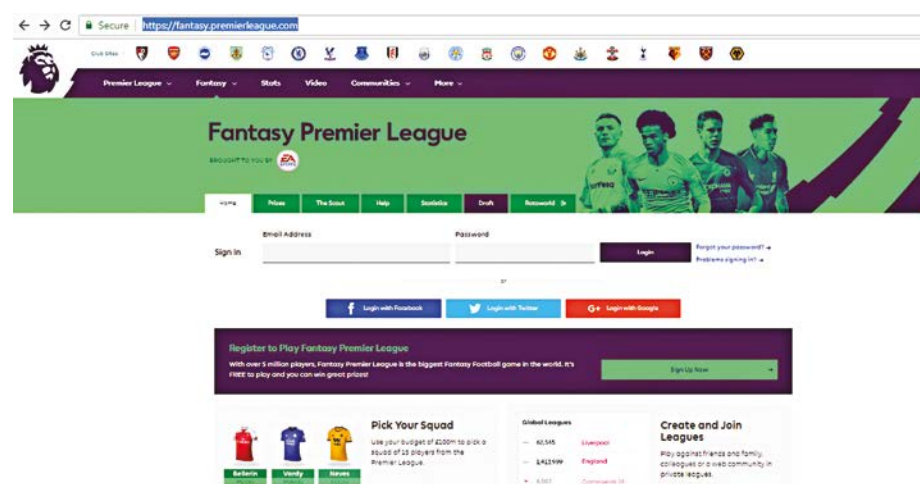
However, it isn't the easiest thing to commit to FPL, at times. You find yourself losing interest after the first two game weeks, either because your team completely bombed, or like me, you totally forgot to log in and update your team.

And that really is the hardest challenge, because sticking to FPL can be greatly rewarding, but people fall off the hype train, and once you're off, there's no getting back in.

That's why I came up with a few handy ideas to ensure you keep to FPL all the way through till the end.

MAKE YOUR OWN LEAGUES

Instead of simply playing in the country or community leagues, why not spice things up by making your very own league, ones which you can play between your friend groups. Play both the 'classic' and 'head-to-head' (H2H) formats,



that way you get a taste of the best of both worlds. Mostly with H2H, it gives you a little accomplishment each week, whenever you beat your opponent. Not to mention, it's fun to set your team according to how your line up of opponents make theirs.

FPL GROUP CHAT

Creating a thread where all of your friends – who are playing FPL together – can talk, discuss, strategise and trash talk is essential to the process. When you can have regular conversations about why your most expensive player fails to get

you any points, and why that one obscure Swansea player, *cough* Michu *cough*, is dominating the leaderboards, it gets you further into the FPL hype. It's almost like having a support group, but there's the added mix of football to make it fun.

FOLLOW YOUR PLAYERS

Since you are investing your FPL budget into these players, why not get involved in watching their games. Mostly when certain players from smaller teams start bringing you points. I mean, watching more football is always a brilliant way to spend your free time, and having a view-

ing party with your friends can definitely make for a great time. If not, you can at least download one of the many football apps that help you follow certain teams or players, so that you're always updated with the latest statistics and highlights. FotMob is a great app for this particular case.

GET FIFA INTO THE MIX

Who doesn't love FIFA? So why not recreate your FPL squads in FIFA, and then have an FPL FIFA sleepover right before the game week, preferably a Friday. That way you can test your team's true potential in a game, and have a great time while you do so. And if it's too much effort to recreate the squads, why not just play FIFA with the lesser-known teams, whose players you might have in your squad. I remember finding out how great Wolverhampton Wanderers F.C. were, only thanks to Raúl Jiménez.

FPL is a great way to keep up with the football season and learn more about the wonders of the premier league, which we don't get to witness. Waking up to find that Vardy has netted three goals and an assist for you, is a feeling you can't really emulate any other way.

So get started now, because you don't want to miss out on the first game week simply because you were too busy.