

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa: Vuvuzelas Optional available for PS3 and XBOX 360

For soccer fans, the four year wait is over. The World Cup is finally here, and it really is a magical month. The best teams and players in the world are on display for all to see. This is the 19th World Cup, with South Africa as the first ever African host nation, and things are off to a great start. In spite of what some of the critics predicted, there has been little to complain about, and things have come off relatively glitch free. The same can not be said of the FIFA World Cup South Africa video game. Fortunately, much like the World Cup itself, while there may be much to complain about along the way (like the referee who botched the US-Slovenia game!), it has it where it counts.

Publisher Electronic Arts got the basics right by taking the FIFA 2010 game engine and updating it with each of the nearly two hundred teams who participated in World Cup qualifying. The developers paid great attention to detail when simulating the World Cup atmosphere. The rhythmic music is immediately familiar to even casual fans. Stadiums are virtual facsimiles of their real-world counterparts. Pre-game ceremonies are exquisitely detailed. You can't help but appreciate the fanatical fans, resplendent in their national colors and sporting all variety of ceremonial hair styles. The announcers commentary is updated in convincing detail, so convincing that at one point I tried unsuccessfully to unpaue the game with my controller, only to realize that the TV had been switched to the Spain-Honduras game. At a casual glance I couldn't discern whether the game was on television or my PS3. Even the managers are modeled in great detail, with the commentary referring to them each by name. Overall the game 'feels' like the World Cup, which is more-or-less the point.

As with many games that are timed for release with other media events, the game does suffer from typical 'get it to market' glitches that detract from the experience. I don't think I'm being nitpicky to expect that a starting defender on the US team, Steve Cherundolo, not have his name butchered by the announcers. And yes, there was a roster update to reflect the final selections for the World Cup, but they aren't fully accurate. When playing cooperatively with two of my friends, our updated US team ran up against Germany in the quarterfinals. We were quite surprised when Michael Ballack stepped on the field as a substitute in the 60th minute. This shouldn't have happened, as Ballack is out of the cup and off the Germany roster with an ankle injury. We were even more perplexed when, after a hard tackle that injured the virtual Ballack (my friends both love to tackle!) a cutaway animation showed another player, #10 Lukas Podolski, limping to the sidelines. Other obvious technical problems included long pauses between game action and added cutaway animations, a post-game scene of nothing but a blurred image with flashing cameras (a foreground subject was obviously missing), and game freezes during loading screens all gave Electronic Arts' version of the 2010 World Cup the glitchy feel that critics predicted for the real thing.

In terms of actual gameplay, don't be fooled, with the exception of new penalty kick system and a new player stat that accounts for form (how well someone is playing at a given time), this is more-or-less FIFA 2010 dressed up in World Cup clothes. That said, EA knows a winning combination when they see one. While I would have preferred to access the new teams and players via downloadable content, in the end the added stadiums, commentary, fans, and other touches helped take the sting out of the \$60 price tag. Ultimately the World Cup comes but once every four years, and for soccer fans like me, I couldn't say no. And last, but certainly not least, EA added a separate volume control just for the 'vuvuzelas,' and yes, you can turn them all the way off!