



# Insight & Strategy: The Everyday Tactician /

XBOX, SEGA, FOOTBALL MANAGER

How a games console brand and football management game partnered with a professional football club to give gamers the chance to land a real-life coaching role

20 DEC 2023

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-u2bnJcvH4>

Speak to any football fan that you pass on the street and you'll be hard-pressed to find one who doesn't have an opinion on what a certain manager got wrong during one of the weekend's fixtures. Behind every cry of 'you don't know what you're doing' that is bellowed from the stands is a supporter who truly believes they could change their teams' fortunes if they stepped into the dugout.

To put such fan opinion to the test, **Xbox** partnered with **Sega**-owned game **Football Manager 24**, to launch a competition that gives its gamers the chance to land a tactician role at professional football club Bromley FC.

**The Everyday Tactician** campaign, covered by [Contagious](#) recently, will hand the chosen candidate a five-month paid role as a support performance tactician at the National League club (the National league is the fifth division in English football). During this time, they will report to the Bromley FC first team manager and head of performance analysis, getting the chance to contribute to all first team analysis before, during, and after a game. It was created by **McCann**, London

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL1XGGR8UVg>

To enter the competition, Football Manager players have to prove their worth by completing the in-game Champion's achievement, on Xbox or PC, which requires them to win a domestic league title. To apply for the role, gamers need to complete an application form and film a one-minute video to explain why they are the ideal person for the job. Finally, shortlisted entrants will attend an interview with Bromley FC staff.

Once the position has been filled, Football Manager fans will be able to follow the winner's progress from January 2024 until the end of the season in a three-part documentary that will be filmed with TNT Sports (official broadcaster of the Vanarama National League). The tactician's journey will also be shared through regular updates posted online and on social media across the channels of Bromley FC, Football Manager, Xbox UK, and TNT Sports.



To promote the campaign, a 40-second ad was released online and across social media. The spot showed a bemused gamer being flung from his living room onto the pitch in his gaming chair before being welcomed to the club by Bromley FC players.

The competition launched on 14 November, following FM24's release on 6 November. Applications closed for the position on 4 December.

**Results /** It was announced that 23-year-old Nathan Owolabi, a Wembley Stadium tour guide, has taken on the role, having completed the achievement 'Championnes' in FM24 and passing a tough interview process that saw him being grilled by Bromley Manager, Andy Woodman.

Mohan Gehlot, Xbox's senior global product manager said in a statement: 'He brings a real level of understanding of FM24 to the pitch. He absolutely knows what's required of him and wants to learn and engage with new processes – it's fantastic.'

**Results Updated 9/5/24:** The campaign achieved **1.5 billion** impressions. It contributed to a **190%** increase in the number of Football Manager gamers on Xbox and Football Manager 24 became the most-played Football Manager game of all time

At the 2024 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, the campaign won the Grand Prix in the Entertainment for Gaming and Direct categories, a Gold in Brand Experience & Activation and Titanium.

It won a Grand Prix in Experience/Activation at the Clio Awards in 2025.



To learn more about the ideas behind the campaign, Contagious spoke to **Mohan Gehlot**, senior global product manager at Xbox, and at McCann, London, creative director **Jim Nilsson**, and senior strategist **Alex Passingham**. They told us that:

- Football Manager only returned to being playable on Xbox consoles in 2020, so Xbox is aiming to strengthen the association between its console and the game while also increasing subscriptions to its Game Pass service where the game is free to play
- There has been a growing appetite for stats and in-depth tactical analysis among football fans, which Football Manager players are particularly tuned into
- Football Manager hopes to tap into the insight that every football fan thinks that they know best, and connect with a younger football audience by providing them with the chance to kickstart their career in football
- Knowing that people often stop playing games once new titles come out later in the year, the documentary is pitched as a second phase of the campaign and a chance to re-engage people by tapping into a form of sports content that is a hot space right now

**We thought that by doing a fame-driving campaign to launch this particular edition of the game on Xbox, we'd really get people thinking Xbox-first**

## when they think of Football Manager

Alex Passingham, McCann, London

**Who was the key client behind the campaign? Could you give an overview of the Xbox and Football Manager brands?**

**Mohan Gehlot:** It's been a super collaborative approach between both parties, and from the Xbox side we're always looking to innovate within the sport space. We have a really clear sports and football strategy. We have key partners like Fifa/EA FC, Football Manager, and other key titles, and then we have our primary product, which is the Xbox Game Pass, which allows people to jump onto our service in a Netflix-style way to have a subscription to access over 100 great games. It gives us a great opportunity to create these campaigns which are aligned to amazing third-party content – like Football Manager.

From the Football Manager perspective, the game has been going from strength to strength year-on-year, it's becoming more lifelike and we can see the iterations between the game itself and real-world tactics and how they're implemented. We hear regularly that there are [professional football] scouts who use the Football Manager database in the background to get an understanding of certain players.

When this idea was propositioned by the team, we just thought it was the perfect synergy to come together and bring together the key groups, and actually the opportunity to speak to a slightly younger audience. When you look at EA FC and other franchises, they lean into that current culture really well. Football Manager maybe has some work to do in that space and I think campaigns like this really dial into that. That's why they were super keen to get on board. It was that perfect storm with all three or four parties coming together to be able to execute this.

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIcoor2K9fc>

**Could you tell us a bit about Football Manager's target audience?**

**Alex Passingham:** I think there's been a big transition in football over the past decade or so to more of a focus from an analytical standpoint. The eye test has been replaced with expected goals and other data-driven measures of performance. Football Manager's target audience is a lot more in tune with this. They live and breathe this new approach to analysing the game. They live this out through Football Manager, and managing their local Sunday League teams in some cases that we found through this campaign. On the other hand, with EA FC, I feel like they're more tapped into wider culture, a bit more light touch bringing in their favourite music artists, a lot more of a focus on legends from past games, and crossing over of generations. EA FC is more fantasy-based at times, whereas Football Manager tries to keep as close to the real thing as possible.

**Gehlot:** The bonus that we had here, which we don't have with other titles, is both versions of the game are different. The console version is a lighter version, which makes it a lot easier to play on the console, and the PC version is a lot more complex and has all that detail. So we've been talking to two different subsections of our target audience. You have the hardcore user base, which is maybe slightly older and prefers the PC version, and then we have this new audience that thinks, 'Actually yeah, let's go and try it out on console as well, I'll download it on my machine and make a career opportunity off the back of that.'

Speaking to Sega Sports Interactive, ideally, what they want to do is bring people in who are new to the franchise and maybe get them to dip their toe into the console version, the lighter version of it. Then over time, they'll think, 'Oh next year why don't I try the full-fat version on console with all that additional detail.' I think we're starting to see that migration. Some of the stats come through to us.

## We're looking to make splashes in bigger ways and create these kinds of campaigns that not only grab attention, but actually can engage the audience to go and do something

Mohan Gehlot, Xbox

**Could you give us some context around the games console market right now?**

**Gehlot:** We're going through a real evolution at the moment on the Xbox side. If you look at our business model, compared to some of the other main players in the business, we're really trying to diversify as well as shake up the industry a little bit. I don't feel that there's another platform that is putting their eggs into a lot of different baskets. We're going after cloud gaming so now you can go and play FM handheld on the cloud, on the go. And then there's Game Pass, bringing triple-A quality games onto the platform, at release – tearing up the rulebook of going into shops at Christmas and buying your £70 version of the game.

Now also with Football Manager, there are still ways to go out and buy the game but they're appearing on a bunch of subscription services, on Game Pass, on Apple Arcade, as well as Netflix. The way people consume their content and the way it's being released, we're just at the start of that journey. We're going to see a lot of changes.

## What makes this slightly different is that we're partnering with a club at a lower level and the reason for that also comes back to authenticity. We

## wanted to find a club where this person could make a difference, a club that would need a talent like this

Jim Nilsson, McCann, London

### What were the key business challenges that this campaign looked to address?

**Gehlot:** As Xbox, we've been looking at ways to align key intellectual property with our platform so that when someone thinks of Football Manager, they're automatically thinking, 'Oh, that's available on Game Pass'. So how do we bring those two elements together? The way to do that previously was via a standard mnemonic that comes at the end of a trailer, or something along those lines. Now with current media, it's difficult to have people stick around until the end of a trailer to watch what the mnemonic is and how it's related.

We're looking to make splashes in bigger ways and create these kinds of campaigns that not only grab attention, but actually can engage the audience to go and do something. Now someone who wants to engage with The Everyday Tactician actually has to physically go within the game and achieve the achievement and complete a domestic league win. That from point to point, creates a pathway for exactly what that generation is looking for where they want to go and create content release content and they can even make a series out of it. We've had a whole bunch of influencers, who've created content based on this without any direct communication with our group, they've just used it as a great opportunity to go out and create content.

**Passingham:** A big business challenge is just building that salience between Xbox and Football Manager as titles. This is only the third edition of Football Manager that has been on Xbox. Football Manager has traditionally been a PC game since Championship Manager around the mid-1990s. Even though there has been steady year-on-year growth of the FM user base on Xbox, there is still a big part of this audience that doesn't know yet that Xbox is the home of Football Manager like PC and mobile are. We thought that by doing a fame-driving campaign to launch this particular edition of the game on Xbox, we'd really get people thinking Xbox-first when they think of Football Manager moving forward.

### What was the key insight behind the campaign?

**Jim Nilsson:** There was a really key insight that every football fan can relate to, which is that we all believe we can do a better job than the actual manager. Anyone who's ever played Football Manager or watched football on TV, we all feel 'If I was the manager, I would do this and win the game.' What's unique about this campaign is for the first time we're putting somebody to the test to do that. The twist is that it's not just anyone, it's someone who has actually proved their skill, but in a different arena, in the world of Football Manager.

It was important that the insight was something that spoke to a wider football audience, something that we could all relate to. That goes back to attracting a bigger audience to the game itself. I think the potential Football Manager player is just somebody who loves the game.

## [Bromley] saw the potential of it from the get-go. To their credit, they only really had one concern, which was this can't be a gimmick... They want to find someone who will make a true impact on the club

Jim Nilsson, McCann, London

### Did you receive a brief for this campaign? What was the key objective for the brands involved?

**Passingham:** The briefing was an opportunity that grew off the back of the insight that we spoke about as a team. It was more of a proactive opportunity, and we identified the launch of the new Football Manager title as an opportunity to bring this to life. A moment in the calendar where we will be thinking and talking about Football Manager.

**Gehlot:** Speaking to Sega, one of the key things they found that EA FC do really well is they have a constant lifecycle of content. They have team of the year, they have team of the season, and they're always big moments at later points that they can bring people back in. A challenge that Sega has always had is at the start of the season everyone's really hyped for the season, getting into watching football and diving into Football Manager, and then as the season goes on, life gets in the way and people start getting distracted by other titles or other things.

When we looked at the brief we tried to address that challenge for Sega in the sense that when we start going into the next phase of the campaign and following the journey of our tactician, that really allows us to bring them along that journey and remind people, 'Oh, I need to dive back into this game. I need to continue my journey of what I was trying to do.' It'll be really interesting to see as we get into the later stages of the year how our performance in the game starts peaking around those moments where we start dropping the content.

### How important was it getting a professional football club on board? How did you land on which league to focus on?

**Nilsson:** It was absolutely essential. The idea very much hinged on this being a real job. What we thought about when choosing a partner and choosing a club is we've seen a lot of partnerships between big brands and big clubs. What makes this slightly



different is that we're partnering with a club at a lower level and the reason for that also comes back to authenticity. We wanted to find a club where this person could make a difference, a club that would need a talent like this.

If we'd gone to a huge club with huge resources they could already recruit top talent. So, what made this interesting to us was to find a club that operates at a professional level, where this person can learn and get an insight into the world of professional football, but at the same time, a place where they can make a true difference where they can have conversations with top management.

**Passingham:** I think when we first had the idea for the campaign. Everyone was wondering what level to pitch it at, from a club standpoint. You look at the top Premier League teams, they already have strong data science teams and full sports analytics departments in their backroom staff. We think at National League level there's an opportunity to really use the skills that have been developed by [playing] Football Manager, and there's passion for data in a way that these clubs might currently not be using to that same extent.

### How did you sign up Bromley FC?

**Nilsson:** We didn't know when we first had the idea how appealing it would be to football clubs. But the truth is that we didn't need to convince them at all. They actually loved the idea straight away. They saw the potential of it from the get-go. To their credit, they only really had one concern, which was this can't be a gimmick. This can't be a marketing stunt. They see this as a real way to find new talent.

I think Andy [Woodman] the coach has done an amazing job. He's been an amazing spokesperson for this initiative. His first reaction was, 'Love the idea, but it has to be real.' He wants to gain a competitive advantage over the competition. He sees this as a way to find talent in a new way. He's been at bigger clubs before where they've had these roles, but for a club like Bromley it's hard to compete with the Premier League clubs for talent, and he just sees this as an untapped talent pool. There are gamers who know so much about football, but they might not get recruited by clubs. So to their credit they saw the potential of the idea.



### What part will the documentary play in the campaign?

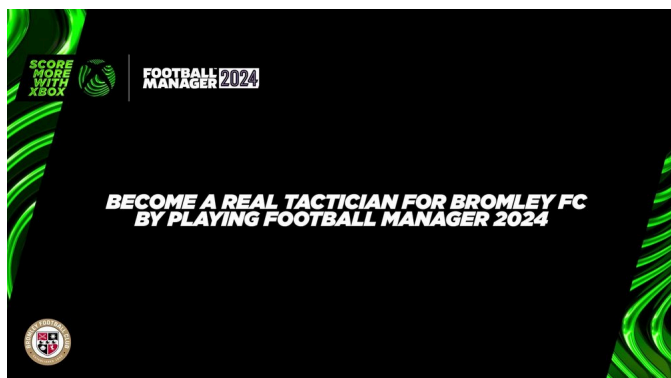
**Gehlot:** The team really looked into the fact that you couldn't get a more hot space in that field at the moment. There's *Welcome to Wrexham*, *Ted Lasso*, and then if we look at other other fields, *Drive to Survive* and the Ronnie O'Sullivan one that's just come out in the last couple of weeks – people have become super fans overnight which is amazing. We just feel that this hits perfectly in that sweet spot of content and actually takes a new twist on it where we're adding a gamer into that environment.

**Passingham:** You get the opportunity to see the story of both Bromley and the tactician. You see how they grow into the role, what might be similar to Football Manager and what might be completely different that they never imagined would be a challenge of the role. But also Bromley are having a really amazing season so far. They're currently second in the National League and really pushing for promotion. We're hoping that the documentary will be able to follow a potentially really successful season that the tactician can contribute to.

**Nilsson:** We also like that it just shines a light upon a level of football that might not get the same level of spotlight as the Premier League or the Champions League. A big brand like Xbox and Microsoft shining a light upon this level of football and all the amazing things that happen at this level, to us that felt like a really interesting thing to do.

### How is Football Manager viewed generally in the world of professional football, in terms of its accuracy and potential to be applied to real work in the sport?

**Gehlot:** We've noticed over the years that the game really is coming on leaps and bounds and we do see a lot of scouts using it as a tool. We've also seen real world examples of people landing jobs with football teams. People just use it as a real great database of information they can dive into. But even Sega themselves wouldn't say that it's like the Bible of how you should progress within a career [in football], but I think is a really great starting point for what people can do to jump into the game.



### **Tell us about the media plan in place – how did you ensure this would create noise?**

**Passingham:** We were really confident throughout this campaign that it would be picked up by press. There was very much an earned media focus to the media plan. The PR strategy was really detailed, we worked with assembly, the PR agency, who did a great job of speaking to various media publications. But outside of that, Xbox chose to partner with TNT Sports for the documentary series. This ensured that if it wasn't to be picked up by the press that there will be eyeballs on the campaign. Obviously, TNT is the official broadcaster of the of the National League, so this just ensured the authenticity and credibility that would come with the project.

**Nilsson:** Some of the best performing content so far in this campaign is the press conference that Bromley posted with their manager. They don't have a huge following on Twitter, but just that post had about 2 million views, which is obviously massive for for a club at that level. The fans and the football community responded really well to this campaign because it felt like it came from a sense of honesty from the club. That was really interesting to see, just the sheer impact that that single social media post had for Bromley and Xbox

### **What does success look like for this campaign?**

**Gehlot:** One of the early metrics that we always look at is playing the game within Game Pass, and also the fact that you have to go and physically achieve the achievement within Game Pass to be eligible. We've had a few key figures and data points come through and actually we've seen a significant increase in people playing FM 24 in Game Pass on PC and console, which is fantastic. So the first marker is already something that we've seen move the needle. We can't attribute it completely, but the fact that Football Manager has been in Game Pass for the past couple of years, and we're seeing bigger levels of increase now than we have previously, alludes to the fact that the campaign is making a really good impact.

We've also seen a huge volume of folks going to the microsite that we've created where people go and register. So we know that lots of people are seeing articles or seeing the social media posts and driving themselves into that. So that was another key indicator for us. But the great thing about this campaign is it's in several phases. Even as we move into creating and releasing the documentary series, those will be points where we see how much engagement we get on those channels and then potential peaks within the game as well.

### **How much of the decision around the appointment will be down to Bromley versus making sure that the person is a good fit for the documentary series and future content?**

**Nilsson:** Because this is a genuine job role and Bromley are the employer, they make the call on who this tactician will be. There will be a phase of interviews, where they will be picking some of the top candidates. That goes back to them wanting someone who they believe will make an impact in the club who fits their culture and who can deliver the right skill set that they need.

### **What challenges did you face along the way and how did you overcome them?**

**Nilsson:** There were definitely some challenges around creating this as a real job which we had to overcome. But I think what we realised was that the simplicity of the idea and the excitement that was built around the idea kept everyone really motivated. Even though there were some logistical challenges we had to overcome, in making this an official job and finding a real club, I've seen this happen loads of times when you have strong core idea – people just get on with it. So far, the stars have aligned and we're really happy with the launch.

### **What has been your single greatest learning from this campaign?**

**Passingham:** For me, it's the value in authenticity. I think from day one in this campaign, everyone involved from us to Bromley have really wanted this to be authentic, and not something that's seen as a marketing gimmick. The fact that this is a real life job opportunity at a club where the individual will be able to have a genuine impact on the club, but also on their career moving forward is just really exciting. The fans and Football Manager players have really resonated with that and see the value that we're actually bringing into the world of football.

**Gehlot:** From the Xbox side, there are a whole bunch of learnings. But, one of the key ones that we always talk about is that Xbox has its own intellectual property, with our own titles, such as Halo, Gears of War, and now we're moving into this world where we

are partnering with titles on our Game Pass. We're working really closely with our third party partners and trying to integrate their philosophies and their ways of thinking into our campaigns and making sure that they are along for the journey and feel comfortable. When we do that, we can actually move the needle for our organisation a lot more when it comes to Game Pass, when it looks like a joined up campaign, rather than just a pneumatic that's slapped on the end of an ad.

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