

Feudball – The Game

At a basic level, the game is quite simple. Two sides battle it out over a set period, and whoever scores the most points during that time wins.

Describing the game beyond that is a little trickier. The traditional Italian game of Calcio Fiorentino, once described by Henry III of France as “too small to be a real war, and too cruel to be a game”, comes close to the “no holds barred” nature of feudball, whilst more rule orientated ball games, such as American Football and Rugby, match the variations in playing styles. The ball, like in American Football, can be hurled forward to a receiver in an effort to score a point (seeing there is no such thing as being “offside” like in Soccer or Rugby), or the ball carrier could be surrounded by team-mates in a rolling maul, just like in Rugby, and by sheer force, barge their way through their opponents. Either way, getting the ball across the “goal-line” gets the same reward – one point.

The game, though created by humans, isn't limited to just being played by humans. Orcs quickly adapted to it after learning the basics. The undead, with some assistance from their necromancers, can play quite well. Most elven sides favour a passing and running game, with as little body contact as possible. Ratmen prefer to hit and run, though aren't afraid to get their paws dirty. Dwarves enjoy forming up in a defensive pocket and fighting their way down the pitch.

Military commanders see feudball as a good way to toughen up soldiers for battle, and to keep them entertained during the quieter periods. Prison wardens use it as a form of “rehabilitation” for convicted felons. Whatever the case, it's basic purpose is to entertain the masses, and, wherever possible, make money out of it.

General notes about the game

Feudball is played in two thirty minute halves, with a rest period in-between. Some variations of the game might have it divided into three twenty minute thirds, or four fifteen minute quarters, a popular variation in warmer climates. Generally, any break between playing periods is usually ten minutes, though some referees, due to the weather conditions, or even the general nature of the crowd watching the game, may allow more time, or less. The game is played using an oval ball, although in some competitions a round ball is used. The balls have a leather hide covering an inflated pig's bladder, and are commonly referred to as “pigskins”.

Two teams take the field. Each team can have sixteen players on their roster for a match, but can only field eleven players at any one time during the actual game. An optional rule in some areas does allow sides to have seventeen or eighteen players on their rosters, though they are still only allowed to have sixteen playing in the match.

It should be noted, that in a shortened version of the game, called Feudball Nines, or Sand Brawl (a beach version of the game), each side only has nine players on the field at any one time, and the game runs in two twenty minute halves. The match roster is reduced from sixteen, to fourteen players. Nines games though can, if both coaches agree to it, have thirty minute halves.

Regardless of whether it's a nine or eleven player game, three officials are required to properly manage a match. These are the referee, who stays on the pitch, and two assistants (commonly

known as linesmen) who patrol the boundaries of the field and observe play. Their responsibility is to assist the referee with his on-field adjudications, either by notifying him (or her) of an infringement that they've seen that the main official hasn't, or by offering input towards a decision that the senior official is about to make. Some leagues and tournaments take the added precaution of a reserve fourth official, just in case something happened to one of the other three, which could very well happen due to the nature of the game and it's spectators.

The Pitch

The playing area is oval in shape, with the average length of a pitch (at the furthest points, including the in-goal areas) being 110 paces long, whilst the width (in the centre) is 70 paces. (*Consider a pace to be roughly the size of a metre.*) At each end of the field, there is an "in-goal" area of at least 5 paces in length, which is included in the overall length of the field. When playing feudball nines, the pitch can be of a smaller size, however, to make the game more open, it is played on a full-sized pitch.

The line that divides the two halves of the field is the "halfway" line. The line that encloses the playing area is known as the "boundary" or "touch" line. On both sides of the field, the line is also referred to as the "side" line. The line that separates the in-goal area from the rest of half, is known as the "goal" line.

The area extending ten paces either side of the half-way line is commonly known as the "trench". The area ten paces from the side-line, on both sides of the field, is referred to as the "flanks", with the bottom flank sections of each half, near the goal-line, often being called "pockets".

Off the field, players who are currently not taking part in the game, along with coaching and medical staff, can sit in a reserved area a few paces from the side-line called a "dug-out". The area may indeed be a permanent structure in the arena in the form of a wide ditch with benches, and covered on three sides by a roof and walls, or it could be just a few chairs on the side-line.

Positions

Every side has five recognised positions. These are:

Strikers (max. of 4) – These are the senior players in the team, the go-to players when something needs to get done. They spend more time on the field than anybody else for they're always needed in either attack or defence.

Ruckmen (max. of 4) – Considered as senior trenchers. These players generally support every other player in the side, defending fielders as they carry the ball down the pitch or slingers as they prepare for a pass or a run, assisting strikers in punching their way through defensive lines, or even stepping into the trench to shore up the line.

Trenchers (max. of 16) – The backbone of any feudball side. These gents take a lot of punishment during a game, and are expected to dish it out as well.

Fielders (max. of 4) – They're fast, and generally do the bulk of the scoring. They're trained to catch, and to run, but they need protecting on the pitch so that they can get the ball across that line.

Slingers (max. of 2) – There's the hard way of getting the ball down to the other end of the pitch, or the easy way, by utilising someone who's trained to throw the ball long distances. Some have been trained to act like extra fielders and run with it, whilst others are like an extra ruckman, and are not afraid to get their hands dirty in order to get possession of the ball.

Your average human side generally has three strikers, three ruckmen, six trenchers, two fielders and two slingers. Of course, teams don't have to field any strikers, ruckmen, fielders or slingers in the side, they could just have sixteen trenchers. After all, any player is allowed to throw, catch, tackle or score. Slingers don't do all the passing in a team, they're just better at it, and fielders don't do all the catching, they're just specifically trained for it.

Of course, different races will have different team line-ups. Elven teams, for example, try to avoid doing much tackling during a game, and will opt for a pass and run approach, so will utilise the slinger and fielder positions to the fullest. Orc teams prefer to bash and run, and might not even have slingers or fielders. Human teams could follow either approach, or have a combination of both. It generally depends on what playing style the coach wants to achieve.

Teams are not allowed to go over the maximum limit of players in a position. Organisations, such as the Professional Players Registry in Brython, keep tabs on the number of players in each position each side has. It should be pointed out, players who start in one position, such as a trencher, may not finish their career as a trencher. Players can be promoted from trencher to ruckman, or even striker. Strikers and fielders, as they get older, may become ruckmen, even slingers may wind up there as well. However, some players may never ever play as a trencher, whilst others play that same position for their entire career. That's the way it goes. It is up to each club to comply with the rules and notify the governing bodies of any positional changes to their playing roster.

Deciding who kicks-off

Prior to the commencement of a game, the referee pulls aside the two captains for the toss of a coin, which has been the preferred method of deciding who will start the match by kicking off. Traditionally, the visiting side (often referred to as the "away" team) verbally announces their decision before the coin lands. The side favoured by the call, makes the decision as if they wish to receive the ball at the start of play, or if they would like to kick. The other side then is allowed the choice of which half of the field they would like to defend. The coin is not tossed again for the start of the second half. Both sides stay in their respective halves, and the team that kicked at the start of the match, receives at the start of the second half. However, if Extra Time is required, the coin is tossed again.

Setting Up

When play starts, or restarts, each side must set up with eleven players. If they can't field eleven players, then they must put as many able-bodied players that they can onto the field. (A "Mercy" Rule can be invoked if one side has five players or less when they re-start play.) Each side must have at least three players on their side of halfway line, and can then put the rest of the side anywhere they want, provided that they have no more than two players in each flank, and have no one in the in-goal area when play is commencing.

The side that is kicking off, must set up first. In the case of feudball nines, the side not starting with the ball sets up first.

The "Mercy" Rule

If one side can only field five able-bodied players, or less, upon the resumption of play, the referee can offer them the opportunity to cease play, in order to prevent any more injuries to their side,

and/or major embarrassment on the scoreboard. If they accept the offer, then they forfeit the game, regardless if they were in front, or drawn level at the time. The opposing side is awarded the game, and is given a two point win, unless, of course, they were two points (or more) ahead at the time. For example, Team B has accepted the Mercy Rule, and have forfeited the game to Team A. The scores, at the time, were locked at 1-all. With the Mercy Rule invoked, Team A wins 3-1.

Many teams though elect not to accept the offer, and play on regardless. If both sides have been somehow reduced to five players or less, then the referee can let play continue, seeing both sides are both at a disadvantage.

Kicking-off

The ball must be kicked into the opposing team's half at the start of each half, and for each re-start of play after a point has been scored. It doesn't matter if the ball lands just inside the opponent's half, or just inside the field of play, provided that it doesn't bounce, roll, or is dropped off the field of play, or into the kicking side's half from the kick-off, the kick-off is considered good, and play begins.

If the ball, for whatever reason, goes off the pitch or into the kicker's half off the kick-off, the receiving team gets a free ball, and is allowed to give it to any member of their side. (Some sides exploit this rule by having a player deliberately drop it over the side-line or into the opponent's half.)

The player selected to kick the ball off, must not be standing in the trench, the flanks, or the in-goal area. He (or she) can either place the ball on the turf or hold it in their hands before kicking it. Either method is acceptable. If players choose to place the ball on the turf, they can take the option of using a kicking tee, if one is available, or have another player on their side hold the ball in place by placing a finger on top of the ball.

In most feudball nines (or sand brawl) tournaments there isn't a kick-off. Instead, the side that wins the toss, receives the ball, with their opponent choosing a half to defend. Players then line up as per normal. The ball is then hiked back between the legs of a player on the halfway line to a receiver. Play then continues.

When the ball leaves the field of play

Apart from kick-offs, the ball may leave play when a player carrying the ball gets forced off the field, or it may accidentally (or deliberately) get knocked out of bounds by a stray boot or hand. In some competitions, the ball is thrown back in by the assistant referee, who simply faces the crowd and tosses the ball over a shoulder. More often than not, the ball is returned to the game by a security guard, or by any number of persons on the side-line (such as scrye operators or ball-boys) or even a member of the crowd, who simply throws or kicks it back on.

If a player is forced off the field

During the course of a game, a player may be forced off the field, and may face the daunting prospect of being targeted by the crowd. If the player is not seriously injured, or rendered unconscious, they can retake the field, but only at the end of the half, or when a point has been scored.

Scoring points

It sounds easy enough - all a team has to do is get the ball across the goal-line into the in-goal area. It can be carried across, or it could be thrown to a player already in the in-goal area. However, there are a couple of requirements. The first of them is that the player with the ball has to be vertical, it isn't just enough for the ball to be forced across the line or grounded in the in-goal area. Second is that a "two step" rule applies – the player must take two steps before the point (or goal) is scored. The variation of that being if a player picks up the ball in the in-goal area, they must be standing long enough to have taken two steps.

Infringements

Though the game may initially appear to be an unruly game played by thugs, players can, and will do things in a match, that will earn the ire of a referee (and his assistants) and will either see them cautioned, or sent from the field. Clubs may even try to flaunt the rules as well by fielding illegal line-ups, or supplying their players with illegal substances, and may risk the loss of competition points, fines, and even being removed from a competition.

Some infringements in the game might simply warrant an on-the-spot caution. Others, if the referee deems it severe enough, or if he is tired of giving cautions to unruly players, will be Yellow Carded, which generally signifies a severe caution. Referees though, if they deem the offence to be too serious, may go straight to giving a player a Red Card, which means an instant dismissal from the pitch, and the player cannot take any further part in the game. The same thing applies if a player receives a second yellow card. There have even been occasions in competitions (or tournaments) where a referee, in order to get players to respect their authority on the pitch, have taken to hitting players. Others have been known to carry truncheons onto the pitch for protection.

Yellow and red cards, in rare circumstances, can be given to players who aren't on the field at the time, or even to the coach of the team. If a coach gets double yellowed, or a straight red, then they are removed from the side-line, and are escorted to their dressing room where they have to stay for the rest of the match.

Referees and linesmen, if need be, are allowed to utilise the services of ground, team and competition officials to enforce their rulings. They can even call upon guards, and watchmen if a player (or players) refuse to obey a direct command by the referee. There have been many occasions where an unruly player has been forcibly removed from a game by security guards.

The following are a list of infringements that may occur before, during or after a game. The offences are explained in detail in a separate file.

- Assaulting the referee or linesman
- Attacking players after a half has been finished
- Attacking players that have already scored
- Carrying weapons onto the pitch
- Fielding more players than allowed for a position
- Fielding more than sixteen (or fourteen) players in a match
- Fouling prone players
- Having spikes on armour or clothing

- Having too many players on the field
- Illegal Procedures (which covers a variety of misdemeanour)
- Illicit Substances
- Kicking the ball in play
- Swearing at the referee or linesman
- Time Wasting

Medics

As vital to a team as their head coach or captain. Teams may employ a number of specialist staff to help keep their players on the pitch, but are restricted to two in the number of physicians that they can actually have on the side-line for a match. However, this rule is generally not strictly enforced, with sides being able to find creative methods to have another medic in the dug-out.

Away from the field, there are no restrictions. Some sides have an extensive support team of medical staff in the form of doctors, surgeons, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists, orthopaedic specialists and even psychologists.

Magic

In some countries, such as the Imperial States, the using of magic in a game is strictly forbidden, unless it is in the form of helping injured players recover quicker. However, in other places, such as Brython, offensive magic can still be used to gain a temporary advantage over a side. Rather than turning matches into sorcery showdowns, teams that hire a magical practitioner, are only allowed to use him (or her) **once** during the match, and are limited to a fire or lightning based attack. Their services, it should be noted, do not come cheap. Match wizards, like officials and players, have to be registered with a governing body, in order to be permitted to use their abilities during a game.

Other races though manage to use magic practitioners in different ways. Necromancers, for example, can raise from the dead, opposing players that have been killed during a game, so being killed on the pitch might not be the end of a player's career. For the right price, a team may allow a slain player to join an undead side as a zombie. Most sides, however, go to extraordinary lengths to avoid this from happening, by burying their fallen team-mates in consecrated areas, and by placing protective magic wards upon the tombstones (and coffins) of the deceased.

Coaching Staff

Any number of additional staff can be acquired to assist a team to succeed. If a club can afford it, they can have as many assistants as they like. Most clubs will have an assistant coach, some will even have an offensive and defensive coach. Specialist coaches may even be acquired, such as kicking coaches, tackling coaches, even fouling coaches. Some clubs even have spiritual advisors.

Auxiliary Staff

A club isn't limited to just acquiring medical staff and assistant coaches. Any number of professionals can be hired on a permanent, or temporary basis to assist a club. Talent scouts can be used to go on the hunt for talented players in lower divisions or playing in amateur competitions. Spies can be employed to check out the opposition, and find out dirt about opposing players that could be of use on and off the pitch. Librarians can even be used to compile dossiers on sides and players, by trawling through archived material, papers, magazines, even scrye footage. If a side gets truly desperate, they can even resort to an assassin, but the ramifications if

caught are often not worth the price paid to carry out the deed.

Injured Players on the Pitch

Players will get injured and incapacitated on the pitch. Getting them off it can be a little tricky. Some injured players may be able to make their own way off the field, but most generally need assistance. Ground assistants, or even medical staff from a side, generally have to wait until the play has passed by to get a player off the pitch, rather than risk getting injured themselves. The referee can halt play for seriously injured players to be removed from the pitch, especially those injured as a result of a foul. Injured players, if they make a sufficient recovery, can rejoin play, but only when a half ends, or a point has been scored.

Substituting Players

Players can be substituted during play. The only time this can be done, is when a half ends, or when a point has been scored. On rare occasions, the referee may allow substitutions when a fouled player is being stretchered off, or if the ball has left the field of play, or at his general discretion.

Extra Time and Breaking Deadlocks

Generally, it doesn't matter if the match ends in a draw. However, there are situations where there needs to be a winner of a game, such as the knock-out stages of a tournament where only one team can advance. To allow for this, a third period of play is permitted, which commences after each side has had an additional break. The referee calls upon the two captains again (or, if need be, two senior players), and once again the away team announces their choice. The winner elects to kick or receive, the loser which half they want to defend.

Under the current rules, the extra period of play lasts until one side breaks the deadlock by scoring a point, meaning the game could go on for hours. (In the past, the game was simply replayed, and kept on being replayed if need be until a winner was determined.) In some competitions and tournaments, the extra period of play is restricted to an additional thirty minutes. The full period however is played out, rather than stopping when the first side scores.

If the teams are still deadlocked at the end of that period, then, depending on the competition rules, the winner can be decided by any number of means, even if it's simply a toss of the coin. The preferred method in some competitions is a "pass off". Each side nominates three throwers, three receivers and two "blockers". The thrower stands near the half-way line, the receiver in the in-goal area. The blockers are placed in front of the thrower and receiver. The thrower then has to throw the ball to his receiver. If it's caught, they get a point. If it's dropped, they get nothing. Both sides have three attempts. Whichever side gets the most points wins. If it's even after three throws, then it cycles through the rest of the team until the deadlock is broken. As to which side throws first, a coin is tossed after the players have been nominated. The team that calls correctly, can elect to go first, or second. The match officials decide which end the throwers throw to.

Mixed teams and using players from a different race

Certain races have been allowed to, in recent years, to add some extra muscle in their ranks. This is generally done for two reasons – to hurt their opponents (even more) and get extra people through the turnstiles. However, getting other races to play for a side isn't cheap, and can cause a few problems on and off the field. For example, even though your average ogre is quite useful in

hitting (and hurting) opposing players, they're not exactly team players, and they're not always "switched on". Crucial plays can be botched by an ogre who suddenly thinks the clouds are more interesting than the game he's in, or if he takes a wild swing at an opponent and winds up falling on the turf instead. It takes a lot of hard work to get the "big guys" working properly for your team.

Human sides are permitted to have an ogre on their roster, and he (or she) must be designated as a trencher. Forest dwelling elves can have a treeman (if they can find one willing enough to) play in their side, but they have the same designation. Halfling teams, due to their size, may have two. Orc teams can have a troll, if they want to. Ratmen sides can field giant rats. Northern Brython teams (usually referred to as Northerners or Northmen) occasionally take an ogre as a trencher as well. The mutated Fomoroi teams are inclined to field a rather large mutated creature in their trench, despite already having a rather formidable side. Some undead teams can field up to four heavy hitting mummies, or flesh constructs, or a mixture of both. Dwarven sides, as a whole, prefer not to have big guys on their roster. They consider themselves tough enough and don't need the extra muscle.

There are certain teams that have a mixture of races in their sides. Orc teams, for example, are allowed to field up to four goblins, provided that they are designated as fielders. Vampiric teams can field humans who are willing to play along their vampiric team-mates, but are not permitted to play as strikers. Religious sect teams are an interesting mix. They are restricted like every other team in the number of people per position that they can have, but are allowed up to four elves, four ratmen, four goblins, and two ogres on the roster, along with any number of human players. This team may look good on paper, but on the field, they generally lack cohesion.

Crowd Interaction

The crowd is an essential part of the game. Sure, the game could be played to an empty stadium, and some games have, but where would be the fun in that? The crowd, apart from spending their hard-earned money on tickets, merchandise, and food, can get involved in a variety of ways. Naturally, they can provide atmosphere with chanting, cheering, and singing. Occasionally, the match ball might land in the crowd, and some lucky person gets a chance to throw it back onto the field.

But it doesn't stop there. A favourite past-time of the crowd is to throw stuff at players who have been forced from the field, if it isn't bad enough already for the player to be bundled out, and possibly hitting advertising boards, security guards, or even a scrye camera crew. Some go one step further and take it upon themselves to throw stuff, such as bottles, rocks, or half-bricks, at players on the field. Over zealous fans such as these, if caught, can be evicted from the stadium, and banned. They even run the risk of retribution from supporters of the opposing team.

Then there are those who want to be closer to the players, and invade the pitch. Security guards have been known to respond harshly to these interlopers. One step up from a pitch invasion, is a riot, which happens often enough to warrant stadiums (and cities) to have enough security present at a match just in case. There have been plenty of instances where military units have been called in to quell disturbances. Indeed, a ticket to a feudball match, could well be a ticket to a funeral.

Media Coverage of the Game

Feudball is well publicised, and there is no shortage of material available for purchase. It's a rare

paper indeed that doesn't have a page or two reporting on the game, and then there feudball dedicated magazines as well.

Those that can't get to the game, for whatever reason, might want to head to their local pub or club that provide a scrye broadcast of matches. The scrye being a magical device, utilising crystals, that can transmit images (and sound) over long distances. Obviously, it's not as good as being at the game, but it's the next best thing.

Merchandise

Not satisfied with just revenue from the turnstiles, clubs will produce a variety of official material for their supporters to purchase. At the bottom end of the scale, match programs, at the higher end, jewellery in the team's colours. The usual favourites include replica jerseys, T-shirts, hats, scarves, autographed pictures and books. Then there are tickets to business luncheons, supporters days, training sessions... some merchandising managers know no limits as to what they will sell to the fans in order to make money.

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