

TOP SOCCER USER MANUAL -

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- MSX1 with 16KB RAM and 16KB VRAM

- OBJECTIVE OF THE GAME -

Arcade-style soccer returns to the MSX pitch; TOP SOCCER gets straight to the point. There are no complex tactics, endless menus, or over-the-top simulations: the screen displays a field, two teams, a ball, and a CPU ready to put the player under pressure. It is a philosophy very much in line with 1980s arcade soccer games, where the absolute priority was getting the match started quickly and maintaining a continuous flow of action. It is a project that is far more ambitious than it might appear at first glance. The game simultaneously handles multiple players, the ball, the referee, the goals, the scrolling pitch, the match score, and a secondary numerical scoring system. All of this runs on the MSX1—a machine that inevitably imposes compromises, particularly regarding sprite handling—yet the match can be a hard-fought contest. The most impressive aspect of TOP SOCCER is the flow of the gameplay itself. The ball remains easy to track, and the action moves across the pitch in step with the game's developments. The player's team and the CPU-controlled team are distinguished by different colors, while a small indicator above the active player makes it easy to identify which athlete is currently being controlled. This is important, as there can be many elements on the screen at once. Furthermore, the CPU doesn't just sit back and wait for the player; it builds attacking plays, drives the ball toward the goal, and actually manages to score. The progression of the score is interesting: in the early stages, the CPU manages to take the lead and even build a substantial margin. Later on, the player claws their way back to turn the situation around. A particularly interesting feature is the HUD at the top of the screen. The following are displayed simultaneously: SCORE, with a progressive numerical score;



1UP – CPU, representing the actual football score; TIME, showing the remaining time. The SCORE counter increases during the match, independently of the goals scored. This is a distinctly arcade-style feature that gives TOP SOCCER an identity beyond that of a standard football simulation. You aren't just playing to win the match; there is also a high-score element, perfectly in keeping with the philosophy of arcade games. It is a great idea because it encourages players to replay the game, aiming not only to score more goals than the CPU but also to achieve a higher score. Graphics: simple, yet very clear.

Technically, the game employs a classic top-down perspective. Green inevitably dominates the scene, but the pitch isn't just a flat, uniform color; it features a texture that gives it the look of real turf. The white lines, center circle, penalty areas, and goalposts are instantly recognizable. As the action

moves across different zones of the field, the pitch's layout remains consistent, making it easy to gauge the ball's approximate location at all times. The result is particularly impressive given the graphical limitations of the MSX1. The player sprites are inevitably small. Don't expect players with intricate anatomical detail; here, the priority is clarity. And that is the right choice. In a top-down soccer game, it is far more important to be able to distinguish the following in a split second:

- your own team;
- the opponents;
- the player currently under your control;
- the ball;
- the referee.



TOP SOCCER generally succeeds in its aim. There are situations where various sprites overlap and the scene becomes a bit cluttered, especially during scrambles for the ball. While this is an aspect that could be further refined, the action remains easy to follow. The ball finally takes center stage. One of the most common issues in low-resolution soccer games is the ball itself: it is often too small, moves too fast, or blends in with the pitch markings. Here, however, the small white sprite remains visible for most of the match. As the ball moves between players, the direction of play is clearly perceptible; especially during attacking phases, you can visually track the play as it develops toward the penalty area. This detail greatly improves the perceived playability. Goalmouth situations are also easy to read: you can see the attacker approaching, the ball entering the box, and the action unfolding in front of the net.



he CPU manages to push forward, reach the attacking half, and finish its plays—doing so often enough to take an early lead. This is crucial. A soccer game might boast excellent graphics, but if the opponents can't attack, it instantly loses its appeal. The CPU doesn't feel unbeatable and naturally leaves gaps for the player to exploit, yet it manages to keep the match engaging. The shift from the CPU leading the play to the player winning back possession creates exactly the kind of simple tension an arcade soccer game needs. A very "8-bit" pace TOP SOCCER doesn't aim for

breakneck speed. The action unfolds at a rather measured pace. You have time to observe your teammates' positioning, close in on the ball, and build up the play. On one hand, this makes reading the game easier; on the other, during certain midfield phases, the game might benefit from more aggressive play or slightly faster transitions. Indeed, the match feels quite long.



For an arcade mode, it would be interesting to have shorter matches as well, making TOP SOCCER suitable for both long games and quick sessions. There is no continuous soundtrack playing throughout the match; audio cues appear mainly during specific events and effects, leaving several moments of silence. On an MSX1, this choice makes perfect sense, as it allows game effects to stand out clearly without creating a muddy soundscape. However, this is also an area where the title could benefit significantly from further polish. A short opening theme, brief jingles for goals and the end of the match, some audio variations for shots and passes, and perhaps a very subtle background accompaniment during certain moments could greatly enhance the arcade atmosphere. The player animations could use a few extra frames to make running and changing direction look more natural. In crowded scrums, it would also be helpful to further improve the visual distinction between the controlled player, teammates, and opponents. Greater visual variety around the pitch—such as advertising hoardings, stands, or small decorative elements—would add character to the match without necessarily altering the layout of the playing field. Finally, a richer soundscape would make scoring goals much more rewarding. But these are mostly matters of refinement. The most important element is already there: the game works well as a soccer match, generating credible situations involving attacking, defending, winning back possession, and scoring goals.



CONCLUSIONS:

TOP SOCCER is a compelling arcade-style soccer game for the MSX1 that prioritizes immediacy,

clarity, and fun over pure simulation. The pitch is clear, the ball is easily distinguishable, the 1-player vs. CPU system works well, and—most importantly—the computer opponent is genuinely capable of building plays and scoring goals. The dual scoring system (combining a raw score with the match result) adds a welcome arcade feel and represents one of the project's most interesting features. While it may not yet match the audiovisual richness of the most celebrated 8-bit soccer titles, the match shown in the video demonstrates something far more important: a game structure that is already solid and genuinely fun. With a bit more polish on the animations, enhanced sound design, and some additional graphic elements around the pitch, TOP SOCCER could become a truly remarkable little MSX1 homebrew title. Simple, immediate, arcade-style soccer: exactly the kind of game that makes you want to hit "FIRE" and immediately ask for a rematch.

- CONTROLS -
- DIRECTION: Player 1: Cursor keys or joystick in Port 1 Player 2: Joystick in Port 2
PLAYER 1: Space bar or Fire (A) on Joystick 1 to pass the ball Fire (B) to shoot or perform a sliding tackle
- PLAYER 2: Fire (A) on Joystick 2 to pass the ball Fire (B) to shoot or perform a sliding tackle
- SCORING
- 100 points for every pass.
- 200 points for every shot.
- 1,000 points for every goal.

This manual accompanies the TOP SOCCER ROM.

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