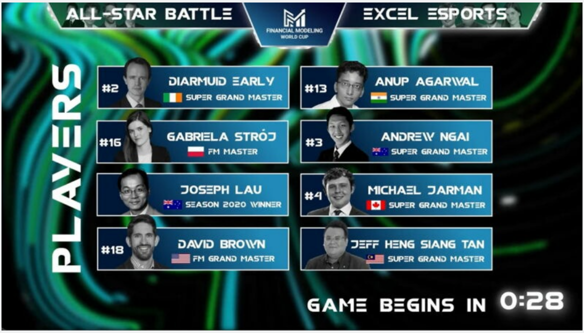
ALL FUNCTION NO FLASH —

Excel esports on ESPN show world the pain of format errors

Where one sheet link can be the difference between success or elimination.

KEVIN PURDY - 8/8/2022, 6:01 PM


ALL-STAR BATTLE
FINANCIAL MODELING WORLD CUP
EXCEL ESPORTS
PLAYERS
#2 DIARMUID EARLY SUPER GRAND MASTER
#13 ANUP AGARWAL SUPER GRAND MASTER
#16 GABRIELA STRÓJ FM MASTER
#3 ANDREW NGAI SUPER GRAND MASTER
JOSEPH LAU SEASON 2020 WINNER
#4 MICHAEL JARMAN SUPER GRAND MASTER
#18 DAVID BROWN FM GRAND MASTER
JEFF HENG SIANG TAN SUPER GRAND MASTER
GAME BEGINS IN 0:28

FMWC

Enlarge / Ladies and gentlemen, let's get ready to modellllllllll!

If you watched ESPN2 during its stint last weekend as "ESPN8: The Ocho," you may have seen some odd, meme-friendly competitions, including corgi racing, precision paper airplane tossing, and slippery stair climbing.

Or you might have seen "Excel Esports: All-Star Battle," a tournament in which an unexpected full-column Flash Fill is announced like a 50-yard Hail Mary. It's just the latest mainstream acknowledgment of Excel as a viable, if quirky, esport, complete with down-to-the-wire tension and surprising comebacks.

The full Excel Esports All-Star Battle.

The Financial Modeling World Cup (FMWC) hosts regular international competitions, both invitational and open to anyone, in which Excel pros strive to solve as many questions as possible from a complex task. You can download all three of the tasks used in last weekend's battle for free.

ESPN showed a 30-minute edited version of the full two-hour-and-48-minute all-star battle between previous champions. The ESPN broadcast showed one of the three rounds; it focused on calculating how many points different spins of a free, online slot-machine-like game would generate for players. There were many spins and some quirky scoring rules.

First problem in the Excel Esports All-Start Battle.

Featured in this all-star battle was 2021 FMWC World Cup winner Diarmuid Early, an FMWC grandmaster from Ireland who claims 10,000 hours in Excel. (He would be Lambda if he were a function, he said.) The winner of the first championship in 2020, Joseph Lau (28,600 hours, Isological), also competed, along with six other highly ranked function warriors.

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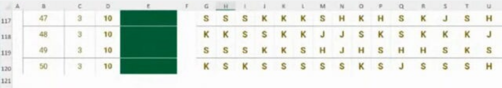
Diarmuid took a commanding lead in the first slot-like task, racking up more points more quickly in a first round than anyone has in an FMWC competition. Others faced the kinds of challenges that regular users see in less combative Excel work. Polish competitor Gabriela Strój told the hosts that "one stupid error"—leaving a formula linked to the wrong sheet—likely cost her hundreds of points. David Brown from the US said that his major problem was pasting from his 32-bit Windows-based Excel to the official online Excel answer sheets, which left his formulas treated as text.

The top four of the eight competitors moved on to round 2, simulating a yacht regatta in Excel. Diarmuid and third-ranked Andrew Ngai made it through. The two competed on creating a score-tracking mechanic for an entirely Excel-based retro-style 2D platformer, "Modelario." Ngai eked out the win, although with only 411 of a total 1,000 possible points. Ngai's reward for a more than two-hour cell-based marathon: a trip to Tucson, Arizona, for the FMWC finals.



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119		49	3	10	🟩		S	S	S	K	K	S	H	J	H	S	H	H	S	K	S
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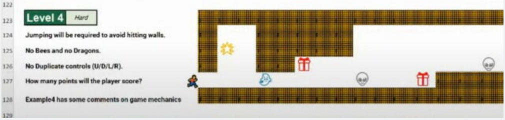

Level 4 Hard

Jumping will be required to avoid hitting walls.

No Bees and no Dragons.

No Duplicate controls (U/D/L/R).

How many points will the player score?

Example4 has some comments on game mechanics

FMWC

Enlarge / **Part of the fourth level of the Excel-based platformer "Modelario" that two FMWC competitors had to score based on controller input. Neither contestant made it to the fifth level.**

If you feel like you've found your sport after watching that kind of linked-sheet sprinting, consider the FMWC Open, which requires no invitation, ranking, or specific experience. Qualifiers and the competition take place in late October.

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Today "Quantum Leap" series creator Donald P. Bellisario joins Ars Technica to answer once and for all the lingering questions we have about his enduringly popular show. Was Dr. Sam Beckett really leaping between all those time periods and people or did he simply imagine it all? What do people in the waiting room do while Sam is in their bodies? What happens to Sam's loyal ally Al? 30 years following the series finale, answers to these mysteries and more await.

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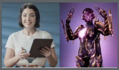

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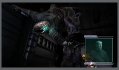

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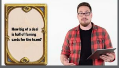
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