



Gordon Bellamy (Nov. 9, 1970 -)

“I had wanted all my life [...] to go out there and make the coolest games ever.”

Growing up in Virginia as a gay Black male, Gordon Bellamy learned early on that there was a different set of rules for him as there was for everyone else. But as the popularity of video games rose in the 80's and early 90's, Gordon saw a place where he wouldn't have to be constrained by those rules - where the rules were the same no matter who you were.

In 1990, *John Madden Football* was released for the Sega Genesis, took the world by storm, and utterly hooked Gordon Bellamy. “Madden was the first game to achieve the feeling that you were a part of it, that you were one of the 22 players in the game”, Gordon says in *High Score*, a 2020 Netflix documentary miniseries on the history of video games. He got so hooked on it, in fact, that it inspired him to chase a career in game development at Electronic Arts, *Madden's* developer.

Despite a bachelor's degree in engineering from Harvard, his resume was rejected. Undaunted, Gordon embarked on a quest to call every EA employee in the *Madden* credits until he was finally granted an entry-level interview. Once hired, he got his dream job working on *Madden '95*, and pushed the development team to make one of the most consequential changes to representation in gaming history.

Due to technical limitations of the Genesis console, the players in the early iterations of *Madden* all had to be depicted as being one race; and despite the majority of players in the NFL being African-American, all of the *Madden* players were white. But with Gordon on the dev team, all that changed.

“For marginalized people, a lot of energy is devoted to justifying your existence in spaces. So when you see yourself placed as default, it has real meaning. It matters.” And in 1995, with the default sprites switched to depicting African-American players, the meaning became a reality for Gordon and every other Black player from then on.

Gordon has since served as the Executive Director of both the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences and the International Game Developers Association. He continues to support racial and LBGTO equity in the video game industry.