Sports Videogames

Mia Consalvo,
Konstantin Mitgutsch, and
Abe Stein

SPORTS VIDEOGAMES

From *Pong* to *Madden NFL* to *Wii Fit, Sports Videogames* argues for the multiple ways that sports videogames—alongside televised and physical sports—impact one another, and how players and viewers make sense of these multiple forms of play and information in their daily lives. Through case studies, ethnographic explorations, interviews and surveys, and by analyzing games, players, and the sports media industry, contributors from a wide variety of disciplines demonstrate the depth and complexity of games that were once considered simply sports simulations. Contributors also tackle key topics including the rise of online play and its implications for access to games, as well as how regulations surrounding player likenesses present challenges to the industry. Whether you're a scholar or a gamer, *Sports Videogames* offers a grounded, theory-building approach to how millions make sense of videogames today.

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FOREWORD

Three years ago, Matt Bilbey sought to measure the entire global audience for soccer videogaming. Football, fútbol, soccer, whatever it is called, wherever it is called, Bilbey hired a research firm and asked it to come back with the whole number of people who were both fans of that sport and also played videogames.

Bilbey, the general manager of EA Sports' football division, then presented this figure to his bosses. He had good news and bad news. With football the world's most popular sport, by far, the number was quite large: 351 million fans also played videogames. And in that year, EA Sports' *FIFA* series—in all its offerings—captured roughly a tenth of that.

"Matt, I don't know whether to hug you or to fire you," said John Riccitiello, the chief executive of Electronic Arts.

Culturally speaking, videogaming doesn't know what to do with sports, either. It's literally the medium's oldest genre. Video gaming began with sports variants, like *Tennis for Two* or *Pong* because, one supposes, sports came prepackaged as being well-designed, well-balanced, and well-understood games. More than any other class of videogame, sports videogames can call on ongoing, real-world events to create enthusiasm for playing them. As of this writing, four sports titles made the top 10 in retail disc sales for September 2012, sort of the Dow Jones of videogaming.

And yet sports, despite their muscle and undeniable presence, remain something of an outlier to the "core" of videogaming, the seat of judgment held by the repeat consumers of major PC and console games. The separation is popularly thought of as mutual jocks-versus-nerds alienation, i.e., sports fans are not interested in daydreaming about wizards and barbarians, and spacefarers who have saved a galaxy don't consider winning the World Series much of a consequential outcome, either.

Sports videogames still are in the same business as nearly all videogames: delivering a fantasy in which the player performs far beyond the physical talents he or she has or the expectations he or she would face in real life. Or they can redeem the losers with the hardest luck. I don't know how much history has been rewritten by the likes of *Total War.* I do know that *MLB The Show* is sold in Chicago.

The yearning underneath these vicarious acts is just as earnest as anyone tugging on a sword plunged into a stone. Sports videogames are where rivalries and a competitive spirit are nourished well after someone's competitive days have ended. They're where fans, increasingly, relate to other teams and to their players, absent the filtration of a box score, or a wire service report, or the orthodoxy imposed by a Top 25 ranking.

Others may consider sports videogames too rigid—most are played by rules more than a century old—or indistinct year-to-year, thanks to a publishing schedule mandated by the industry's most expensive licenses, and the burden of recovering that cost. For many years these problems were almost unique to sports videogames, and it's amusing to now see the non-sports titles pressed into an annual release schedule trying to justify themselves, without even the benefit of the worst thing you could call a sports game's latest edition—the roster update.

Sports videogames still are a cultural and economic bellwether for a larger multibillion-dollar industry. The highest barriers to entry in any genre can be found in sports, in the licensing and in the need to emulate something that appears on television each weekend in perfect high definition clarity. Those who have the means to even approach this task are the gaming industry's top performers, and managing any licensed sports videogame can be taken as a sign of vitality and influence.

No matter how much they sell, or how many millions they touch, because their rules are so old and their competitions so well understood, sports videogames may not be the face of videogaming. But they have formed its spine for more than 60 years.

Owen Good
Sports Columnist, Kotaku
September 2012

SPORTS VIDEOGAMES

Mapping the Field

Mia Consalvo, Abe Stein, and Konstantin Mitgutsch

We can learn quite a bit about the importance of game genres from the contested history of videogames' origins. According to some, the earliest videogame was developed in 1961 by model train hobbyists at MIT. The game was designed in part to demonstrate the power of the early PDP-1 computer, but it quickly became an entertaining diversion for students at the institute. *Spacewar!,* as they called their game, depicted two spaceships flying around, fighting against the gravitational pull of a central star and trying to shoot the other ship into oblivion. Through the lens of history, a videogame about spaceships seems cliché, though at the time it was certainly novel.

A few years earlier, William Higinbotham, a well-regarded physicist and himself a former employee of MIT, created a computer game diversion to entertain guests at his Brookhaven National Laboratory. *Tennis for Two* depicted a landscape scene of a game of tennis with invisible players; the ball, sporting a comet-like tail, flew back and forth across the screen based on the trajectory influenced by the controls of the players. Higinbotham's game is considered a predecessor to another tennis-like early game, this one more popular by far—Nolan Bushnell's Atari sensation *Pong.*

On the one hand we have a game about spaceships shooting each other. On the other we have a game inspired by an older physical competition, the sport of tennis. Looking at the relatively short history of digital videogames, threads can be drawn directly or indirectly to these two origin stories. Indeed, on a metaphorical level, the contestation over the origin of the medium, born either from a game of fantastic space battle or from a crude simulation of a popular sport, represents an ongoing rift in the culture around games and the subsequent study of the medium. This divide between the "gamer" culture of science-fiction, high fantasy-inspired videogames and sports-inspired games, in truth, is more imagined than real. More

and more evidence suggests that players of games enjoy a wide variety of genres and that the notion of a homogenous "gamer" identity is fallacious. The academic study of games is growing rapidly, though not nearly as quickly as the population of players from all walks of life.

Despite this remarkable growth in both player population and academic discourse, little ink has been spilled on the topic of sports videogames. The vibrant and active communities of sports videogame players and the genre itself, as many of the authors in this volume address, are hard to nail down and constrain. Vast and diverse cultures of sports fans exist throughout the world, members of which fix their attention on a wide variety of sports ranging from table tennis, to basketball, to skateboarding—to chess and to *Starcraft II*. Despite the profound influence of sports culture and the popularity of sports videogames, few scholars have bothered to study the phenomena. The pendulum of emphasis has, over the admittedly short duration of game studies as a field, hung over games such as *World of Warcraft, HALO,* and *Tetris.* The point of this volume is to swing the pendulum back by highlighting the understudied, largely ignored genre of sports videogames.

At the time of writing this introduction, very few works have been written with an eye toward the specificities of sports videogames. Many of the chapters in this book discuss this absence of scholarship on sports videogames in the field of game studies, and certainly this volume exists, in part, to address this lack. It is very important, however, to acknowledge the intrepid few who endeavored to look closely at the understudied genre, for it is on their shoulders that this volume finds its footing.

Garry Crawford deserves much credit for being one of the first scholars to study sports videogames. Though his early work focused on sports and television, he later turned his attention to sports videogames, starting with a look at gender, sports, and digital games (Crawford, 2005a). His focus on sports videogames and sports fandom continued with more work on soccer fans (2005b), on sports management simulations (2006), a comparison of sports films and sports videogames (2008), and sports videogames and player narratives (with Gosling, 2009). Although his more lengthy study of videogame players, *Video Gamers,* expands in scope beyond sports videogame players, he does spend some time in the book continuing the research initiated in many of his earlier papers. Given the breadth of Crawford's work on sports videogames, it is no surprise that much of the present scholarship of the genre builds on some of his ideas.

Mirroring similar work on fantasy-themed games, previous work on sports videogames has focused on notions of and enactment of identity. David Leonard was another pioneering scholar doing research on sports videogames, and his examination of *NFL Street* was one of the first to look at how race is represented in sports videogames (2003). Indeed, there has been little work on race with respect to videogames more broadly, and we acknowledge that continuing omission and the need for more work in this area within game studies.

Working with a different approach to the notion of identity, Darcy Plymire wrote that sports videogames, in remediating the televisual, contribute to a paradigmatic shift in ideology toward posthumanism (2009). Lauren Silberman in her Master's thesis directed her focus to athletes who play sports videogames, exploring how they relate their real-world play performance to their representation in a videogame (2009). Steven Conway also did some early research into players of sports videogames. His work presents detailed findings from a participant-observer case study of players of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* (2010, p. 351), finding that the "playing of the televisual genre is a highly social, intertextual and immersive experience for the user."

On a theoretical and a practical level, this volume is also born out of a previous study we (the editors) conducted on players of sports videogames. Intended as an introductory, largely exploratory survey of sports videogame players, the findings opened our eyes as editors to the tremendous range of topics and ideas yet to be explored on the genre of sports videogames (Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). Indeed, it was during discussions and meetings held working on that study that the idea for this book germinated.

What Is a Sports Videogame?

One of the great challenges in compiling a text of this nature is identifying the boundaries for content to fall within the scope of the book. We were often asked by fellow researchers, as well as by interested friends and players, what we meant when we talked about sports videogames. What counted as a sport, and how a sport might or could intersect with the videogame form, were constant questions that we confronted, discussed, and debated. Indeed, it is difficult to constrain the phenomena of sport itself, and subsequently even harder to locate adequate constraints or limits for what constitutes a sports videogame. Is online poker a sports videogame given that it is increasingly being constructed as a televised sport that requires endurance and control in order to achieve high levels of play? Can competitive *Starcraft* matches as well as other newly popular e-sports (such as *HALO* or Arena tournaments) be considered sports? Such a question reminds us that even if a videogame does not itself simulate a physical sport, the act of playing a game and competing seriously might constitute a sport for some people. Although writing before the emergence of professional competitions, Steve Poole believes that "the closest thing to sport in videogames is not necessarily a sports game. Reflexes, speedy pattern recognition, spatial imagination—these are what videogames demand" (2000, p. 80). In this sense Poole might believe that competitive gaming would qualify as a sport, but also that most sports videogames reduce the physical action that makes the game a "sport" to "simply . . . pressing buttons at the right time while observing 'power meters'" (p. 110).

And what about digitally mediated jogging, or other single-player fitness games such as *Wii Fit?* Such questions make us recall questions raised by Juul

when he tried to define the boundaries of a videogame, suggesting that games must have some goal or win condition to be considered games (2005). Ultimately, Juul revised his position on the necessity of goals for a definition, yet we are again confronted by such questions, particularly as some sports, such as Mixed Martial Arts, become popular in videogames, yet might be considered more as training programs than actual sporting competitions.

With many ways to go about trying to answer these questions, we left it to the authors of each chapter to set their own boundaries. Many of the authors do take up the challenge in depth, and these theories and arguments are essential to the development of discourse on this new focus in game studies research. We dedicate the first section of the book, "Defining the Game," to this question and assemble five chapters that are dedicated to exploration of multiple theoretical approaches and definitional arguments. Though some of the authors position sports videogames in the realm between simulations and variants of sports, others explore their attributes as games and their formal positioning in sports fan culture.

Indeed, it would be audacious of us at this point to attempt to narrow and constrain the genre of sports videogames with this collaborative volume, as though to offer a sweeping or totalizing formal argument for what games belong under the category of "sports" and what games do not. It is our genuine hope that this text will inspire more research on the subject of sports videogames, and in that pursuit we want to raise as many questions as we might try to answer. It is in this spirit that we wish to leave the question of "what is a sports videogame" open, and we invite readers to keep that thought in mind as they work through the excellent chapters that comprise this volume.

Sports Videogame Players

Even if we do leave partially open the question of defining what a 'sport videogame' is or could be, we can say more about those who play them. For example, game studies have taken, as a given, the idea that the player is active, and that he or she must engage in "non-trivial effort" in order to play (Aarseth, 1997). Such distinctions suggest that the player, as a subject position, is distinct from that of the audience member found consuming other media forms, even if sports fans do often watch televised sports and play digital versions of those sports as a regular practice. And although audiences of all types are 'active' in the many ways delineated by Fiske (1987), players—or perhaps the play position—is unique in that the player must work to (co)-construct the object of interest—the videogame. Perhaps this is what has led to less of a focus on players as fans by game studies scholars—although many players are very insistent fans of particular games, genres, and systems. Some of our own work has examined how players enact their fandom in both positive and negative ways when they feel their object of desire is being attacked by those who do not play games (Dutton, Consalvo, & Harper, 2011). A variety of fans of BioWare's first *Mass Effect* title sought not simply to

defend their interests or counter misinformation, but to retaliate in misogynist ways against those they viewed as hostile to videogames (2011). What such actions demonstrate is a belief in a community of sorts, and a sense of belonging achieved in part through the construction of boundaries between "us" and "them." We also highlighted the presence and importance of "alpha fans," who can lead fans in particular directions and construct various types of arguments that can ultimately be both beneficial and destructive.

Although the study of fandom in relation to videogame players is relatively new, there is a significant body of work within sport studies which has "an over 30-year long tradition of empirical analysis focusing on sport spectators and supporters" (Schimmel et al., 2007, p. 581). Despite a relatively large time frame compared to game studies, most of this work has focused on football (soccer) fans in the UK "and has been dominated by studies of fan deviance" (p. 581). Yet curiously there has been little overlap between studies of sports fans and of media fans. As Schimmel et al. relate, "those literatures rarely seem to engage one another beyond a superficial level" (2007, p. 580). But such studies can be useful for understanding players' relationships to sports videogames as well. For example, in her study of bleacher regulars at Wrigley Field, Swyers argues that the relationship between fans and Cubs management was too complex to be accounted for strictly within a producer–consumer model. Instead, due to images of the team as a public trust alongside its existence as a corporate concern, neither fans nor owners could "claim a monopoly on what sports can or should mean in America" (2007, p. 211). Taken to another level, we can see parallel tensions existing between the developers of sports videogames and those who play them. Thus, for example, the FIFA series of sports videogames is likely imagined by its players to be much more than a commodity for purchase—instead it (also) encapsulates or embodies a relationship they have built with particular teams and players over a period of years or decades.

Similarly, Williams reminds us that fans connect with sport "at the level of the imagination" (2007, p. 144) and we must account for that, even as we see new types of audiences, "new paymasters, growing national and international tensions and increasingly complex forms of 'connectedness' with their various fan bases to manage" (p. 144). Sports videogames are one more avenue in which connectedness can occur and an increasingly important site for shaping how players and fans imagine varied sports and their relations to them.

Garry Crawford argues that those broader relationships can be more and less successful based on the types of mediated forms with which sports fans engage. More specifically, he believes that "sports fans construct their own narratives and life stories around the teams and clubs they support, and often utilize a variety of resources such as mass media in doing this" (2008, p. 133). So films that focus on sports "provide a very restricted and potentially problematic narrative that may not fit into a fan's own personal 'readings' of the team/club they follow. In contrast, digital games, with their much more fluid narrative structure and their

wealth of information, can act more easily as a valuable resource and component in the narrative identities of fans" (p. 133).

Crawford also believes that sports videogames offer players a wealth of information related to teams, leagues, and sport-related strategies, which encourages their use as "a resource beyond conversations relating specifically to digital games and, in particular, will often cross-cut and merge with those relating to sport more generally" just as other forms of mass media "provide information and knowledge that individuals can draw on in their interactions, social performances and 'narrative identity'" (p. 140).

Just as sports videogames blur the line for where knowledge about sports may come from, the line between games and other forms of media is also blurring. Although many contributors in this volume deal with this issue, other scholars have started the conversation, in particular by exploring the relationship between videogames and film—and how each form influences the other. Crawford notes that many videogames are becoming more cinematic, "featuring filmatic styles and narratives," and interestingly that some films are becoming more gamelike, "based upon the visual and spectacular . . . often episodic, mimicking digital game levels and styles" (p. 141).

In addition to film, sports videogames are usually compared to televised broadcasts of live team events and have been conceptualized mainly as simulations of them. Arguing against dominant tropes that read games as offering mainly narratives and representations, Frasca felt that, instead, games should be approached from a ludological perspective, because "narrative may excel at taking snapshots at particular events but simulation provides us with a rhetorical tool for understanding the big picture" (2003, p. 6). Thus for Frasca, the rules that are part of the system of a game are what make games distinct from other types of media, and are also the key to successfully understanding them. Although Frasca doesn't directly address sports videogames, his argument is easily applied to such games, as they have few if any overt narratives structured within them.

Yet we now arrive at a contradiction—whereas Frasca suggests that seeing sports videogames as simulations rather than narratives gives us a stronger theoretical lens through which to study them, Crawford has made a convincing case that players will strive to create narratives with sports games—something that is endemic to sports fans writ large. What does this mean?

Sports videogames are not built with a central narrative core—but are instead remediated in interesting ways to resemble televised versions of sports, and are increasingly even more hyper-mediated than television producers could likely imagine (Plymire, 2009). But even so, players will then take the experience of gameplay and shape it in ways they desire, which often includes narratives, stories, and historical accounts of play, as we ourselves found in our earlier survey of players (Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). Certainly, game rules shape how events unfold for players, and also frame how they interpret videogame versions of sports relative to physical versions of the same. Some players may even, as Linderoth does in his

chapter in this volume, see sports videogames and physical games as completely different entities. But we cannot deny the relationship of stories to sports videogames, wherever they may emerge. And we must insist on understanding how digital games are envisioned as simulations, and how they part ways with their "original" throughout a series history or over the course of the larger game industry. Otherwise we can only see one piece of the complex puzzle of sports videogames.

What's Left Out?

Although we hoped to include as many perspectives as possible in this volume, we knew that we couldn't cover every topic that interested us. There would be subgenres, play styles, and industry segments we would miss, either through our inability to find contributors or our own blind spots that only cleared later on. One of the most glaring is race—one of us has done research on the racial makeup of playable characters in top-selling videogames, finding that racial minorities are underrepresented generally, with their presence mostly seen in sports videogames. We need more research that investigates not simply those representations, but also how players themselves interpret those images both racially and ethnically distinct from and similar to themselves.

Likewise, although researchers have started to investigate how players of fantasy sports understand the activity, we need to know more about how those players link the activity to videogame play, as well as fandom generally. Similarly, although we address the topic in this volume, much more work needs to be done to find women who play sports videogames and learn more about what draws them to the genre, as well as what is keeping many more of them away.

Moving from game content and players to the industry itself, we have included some analyses of major sports videogame publishers, but the diversity of the industry itself is in need of analysis. For example, there is a new trend in the indie videogame scene to develop and host competitive multiplayer sports-themed games, where sport is abstracted or the abstraction is sportified. Sports indie games such as *Hokra, BaraBariBall, Tennnes,* and *GIRP,* among others, challenge our traditional notions of what constitutes a sports themed videogame (cf. Stein, 2013). This is a novel approach to designing sports games, and likewise the reintroduction of competitive multiplayer exhibitions appears to be a trend worth mentioning. These are not our only omissions to be sure, but the ones we felt most important to address here. We hope that future volumes take up these challenges as well as build on the work presented here.

Structure of the Book

This edited volume seeks to unpack the phenomena of sports videogames from a game studies perspective that acknowledges a diversity of approaches and ways of understanding artifacts, individuals, industries, and cultures. In doing so, different

interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches are assembled that explore particular dimensions and aspects of this novel research field. Through different case studies and close readings focusing on sports such as American football, soccer, skating, Formula One racing, basketball, or tennis, but also e-sports and sports management games, a variety of sports videogames are explored. The 15 authors gathered here address topics such as sports fandom and sports culture, aesthetics and remediation of sports, gender and sports politics, online sports and social play, learning and exercise.

We contribute to the emerging field of sports videogames research with this collection of original papers authored by scholars tracing questions of how to map the field of sports videogames. We organized the papers into three sections. The first section, "Defining the Game," assembles five chapters that are dedicated to exploration of theoretical approaches and making definitional arguments. Thereby, questions related to what sports videogames are and how to map the field and its attributes are tackled. In the second section, "Remediating and Complicating," the convergence of different media forms including videogames, television, and the Internet is examined and the remediation of sports videogames is studied. Furthermore, the four chapters highlight and reflect different cultural, mediated, economic, and legal dimensions related to sports videogames. The five chapters in the final section, "Fans and Players," delve into the question of who sports videogame players are, how and where they play, and what those games mean to them. Different empirical approaches are outlined and insights into sport videogame culture are provided.

Jonas Linderoth opens the first section with his comparison between "Games, Sports, and Sport Videogames" by exploring "Designed Challenges in Racing Games." Linderoth offers a comparative analysis of a Formula 1 videogame, Formula 1 the "real" motorsport, and board games representing racing. Linderoth's point of departure is that games and sports can be described fruitfully within the same ecological framework in terms of exploratory and performatory challenges. In the second chapter, "A Tale of Two Games: Football and *FIFA 12*," Miguel Sicart offers a comparison between the game of football and the sports videogame *FIFA 12*. In his chapter he explores the simulational convergence and relations between these sports from a game theoretical point of view. He argues that *FIFA* is a different game than football, and in that difference new cultures of sport and leisure have a place to emerge. In the following chapter, Ian Bogost traces the question "What Are Sports Videogames?" from a historical and game theoretical perspective. He examines the origins of sport videogames and positions them in the broader ecosystem of sports history. He critically postulates that sports videogames are not simulations of sports, but variants of sports that allow us other ways to play sports.

A different perspective on digital sports and beautiful play is addressed by Henry Lowood in his chapter "Joga Bonito: Beautiful Play, Sports and Digital Games." He focuses on competitive play and sports performance on the level of an art form. The focus of the essay therefore is a comparison of beautiful play in electronic and embodied sports. Lowood provides us with close comparisons of

great plays in embodied sports such as basketball and online competitions such as the World Cyber Games. In the final chapter of this first section, Mia Consalvo explores the history of women in sports videogames. In her chapter "Women, Sports, and Videogames" she introduces this pivotal topic into sports videogames research and analyzes the role of females in top-selling sports videogames. Consalvo uncovers the potentially sexist nature of this commoditized audience for sports videogames.

The second section, "Remediating and Complicating Play," starts with Abe Stein's study of the development of a dominant televisual aesthetic in sports videogames. In his chapter "Playing the Game on Television," he explores how television broadcasts informed the early development of sports videogame aesthetics, and how the games have reflected back on the televisual, informing broadcast production. In the following chapter "It's in the Game? Shifting Scene with Online Play," Christopher Paul examines how online play in EA Sports games changes how players interact by pushing players to engage with other people, but only in ways deemed acceptable by the company. By using rhetorical analysis to assess the scene and channel of communication for sports videogames, he argues that online play alters what games are by transforming sports videogames from complete products to services maintained and supported by game publishers.

John Sharp decodes the subculture, craft, and practice of skateboarding in his chapter "The Slow Grind: Skateboarding Videogames and the Culture and Practice of Skateboarding." In his examination the author outlines ways skateboarding videogames do and do not reflect the practice and culture of skateboarding from the perspective of a once-practicing skater. He thereby offers insights into the subculture of skateboarding, with practical skills and challenges and recent skateboarding videogames.

The final chapter, "Likeness Licensing Litigation: Student Athletes and the Future of Sports Videogames" by Nina Huntemann, completes this section. In her chapter she explores the implications of lawsuits brought by former collegiate athletes against the makers of sports videogames, and similar complaints for the production, distribution, and consumption of sports videogames specifically, and digital entertainment generally. Huntemann introduces us into the legal history supporting the right of publicity and discusses the relationship among the media industries, professional and student athletes, and sports organizations over the purchasing of sports rights.

The final section focuses on the "Fans and Players" of sports videogames. Fares Kayali opens the exploration of how basketball videogames can become part of following professional basketball by extending and deepening fan experience. In his chapter "Playing Ball: Fan Experiences in Basketball Videogames," a series of different scenarios of basketball videogames are played and reflected upon as he argues that basketball videogames converge as a fan media channel.

A particular group of players, namely *World of Warcraft* Arena Tournament teams participating at the e-sport event, is analyzed by Emma Witkowski. In "Eventful

Masculinities: Negotiations of Hegemonic Sporting Masculinities at LANs" she focuses on male-dominated sporting-esque cultures and structures of high-end competition. Witkowski offers a different voice on how gender performances in modern networked competition are carried out. In the following chapter, Jeffrey Wimmer and Jana Nickol are also exploring a specific subgroup of fans and players. In their chapter "Sports Videogames in Everyday Life: A Meaning-Oriented Analysis of the Appropriation of the Online Soccer Manager Game *Hattrick*" they outline a qualitative case study that examines how a soccer management game is not only embedded into the daily routine activities of its users, but also how this sports videogame is intertwined with other aspects of everyday life.

The intersection between play, life, and sports is also the topic of the next chapter, "Why Sports Videogames Matter to Their Players: Exploring Meaningful Experiences in Playographies" by Konstantin Mitgutsch. In his chapter the author traces the question of how players attach meaningful contexts to their sports videogame play. Based on investigation of player biographies through narrative interviews and visualization tools, he argues that by tapping into a broader sports cultural sphere, sports videogames provide players with an exceptional environment for meaningful experiences.

In the final chapter, Cheryl Olson discusses if sports videogames might be useful tools for promoting adolescent health. In "Sports Videogames and Real-World Exercise: Using Sports Videogames to Promote Real-World Physical Activity Among Adolescents" she discusses results of a survey with a diverse sample of 1,254 U.S. middle-school students, which found that playing off-the-shelf sports videogames was significantly related to hours per week that boys spent on physical activity.

We hope this book will provide a constructive interdisciplinary framework for addressing questions related to sports videogames and their players. The field of sports videogames offers numerous valuable research questions and avenues for exploration, most of which remain untapped. It is our hope that this book will inspire more research on the subject of sports videogames and that the insights from this novel field fuel back into game, fan, and media studies.

The exploration of the field of sports videogames would not have been possible without the help of many passionate colleagues and collaborators who supported our process. We want to thank all our authors for their extraordinary pioneer work in this emerging field. We also want to express our gratitude to Michael Rapa who designed the cover of this book, the MIT Game Lab, and Concordia University for enabling us to pursue this research. Finally, we want to thank our publisher Routledge for publishing this volume and supporting sports videogames research.

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SECTION I

Defining the Game

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1

GAMES, SPORTS AND SPORT VIDEOGAMES

Designed Challenges in Racing Games

Jonas Linderoth

Games and Sports

In the field of games studies, sport videogames is an understudied genre. Sport videogames do not really fit into the existing frameworks that we use for understanding other digital games. They can hardly be seen as related to other screen-based media and it is hard to think of a sports videogame as related to film and literature. To use Wittgenstein's terminology (1953, pp. 65–71), sport video-games seem to escape the "family resemblances" we ascribe to different games.

That game studies seem to miss out on sports videogames is utterly ironic since a recurring question in sports philosophy is the relation between games and sports. Are sports actually games? Bernard Suits made the claim that sports basi-cally are skill-based athletic games, but then changed his position, saying that some sports are games whereas others are performances (such as gymnastics, diving, and other sports where the accomplishment is *judged*) (see Suits, 1988). The charac-teristic that seems to be the key for delimiting sports from games is physicality. Philosophers have argued that if something is to be called a sport, the outcome of the activity should have to do with exerting manual dexterity or other bodily skills (Suits, 1995; Meier, 1981). Yet as Hemphill (2005) points out, it becomes problematic to draw a line between gross motor skills and fine motor skills in order to determine what can be called a sport. Some activities, for example, like curling and darts, seem to be less physical and thus stir debates about whether or not they should achieve the status of being called sports. The issue becomes even trickier when considering digital games. If one is of the opinion that a sport is an activity in which the contestants should display gross motor skills, it is easy to oppose the idea that digital games with classical controllers ever could be called sports. The problem for such a position would of course arise when considering the rise of motion controls for digital games.

In the middle of this semantic confusion, we find the videogames that portray activities such as hockey, soccer, and motorsport. These sports videogames are mainly understood in relation to the sport they depict, that is, sports videogames are explored from the perspective of being representations of a sport (Fery and Ponserre, 2001; Rosenfeld Halverson and Halverson, 2008). Although such a viewpoint certainly is useful for cultural analysis (like understanding the role of sport games in fan cultures), some important aspects about sport games might also be overlooked when focusing on how they portray "real" sports. That is, we miss out on understanding them as independent game systems that demand specific situated skills of their players.

This chapter aims to supersede dichotomies between games and sports as well as between digital and nondigital games. By introducing the *ecological approach to perception and action,* my aim is to show how the activities we label board games, digital games, and sports all can be understood as *designed challenges* that test our ability to *perceive* affordances and/or *utilize* affordances. While most challenges call on both these modes of action, many games emphasize one or the other. As will be shown, this distinction is also fruitful for understanding skill and agency in relation to tools and other forms of support that can be found in many sports and games. The approach is illustrated by a comparative analysis of Formula 1 as a 'real' sport, a Formula 1 videogame, and two board games with Formula 1 as their theme. Instead of discussing how these games portray the sport, I will treat them all as *designed challenges* that can be understood within the same framework. The aim of this is to illustrate how the ecological approach to games can bridge the gap between sport studies and game studies.

Descriptions Instead of Definitions

The field of game studies has been rather occupied with defining games and gameplay (Juul, 2003; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). In another account in this tradition of theoretical arguments, I would like to point out some epistemological concerns.

The academic confusion surrounding digital games is not in any sense unique. Many phenomena are studied in different disciplines with different knowledge interests, and it is part of being a scholar to argue about definitions, theories, and methodological approaches. But what is noteworthy in some of the attempts to give digital games an appropriate definition, theory, and history is that the attempts build on a so-called *things-ontology* (Säljö, 2009). Scholars in the game studies field are trying to define the "true" nature of games (cf. Juul, 2003, pp. 19–51; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, pp. 70–91, for examples of game definitions).

This chapter offers yet another framework for approaching games, but attempts to do so without an essentialist epistemology. I do not see the value of theory in its relationship to an objective world of "things," but in how a theory can illuminate and describe something in a powerful way (Säljö, 2009, p. 204). In line

with Wittgenstein (1953), I do not seek to engage in conceptual analysis, defining games and sports by necessary and sufficient conditions. I do not seek to define games as much as describe them, pointing out some family resemblances. This idea holds that things we think are related by one common feature might be related by many overlapping similarities where no feature is shared by all. There will thus be deviant cases where my descriptions cannot be generalized. For example, some games of chance might not be obvious challenges since it is a trivial effort to engage with them. However, this does not mean that *roulette or spin the bottle* cannot be called games, just that they do not have one of the 'family traits' that some other games have.

Designed Challenges—Automobile Racing and Traffic Jams

A very rough distinction about human activity can be made between activities that are challenging and activities that are trivial. When we engage in a challenging activity we need to use skill, determination, energy, time, material resources, or other nontrivial means. Typically, an activity that we see as challenging will have an uncertain outcome. That is, we are uncertain whether or not the participants that engage in the activity will succeed with the tasks they have undertaken. Although life itself hands us numerous challenges that have to do with getting through everyday life, we are a species that specifically designs voluntary challenges.

Driving a car can, in some situations, be a challenge. If I am late for work and there is a traffic jam, driving will be challenging. It will not only test my patience but also my knowledge about alternative routes. Though the infrastructure of my city is designed and traffic certainly has rules, the *situation* is not designed to be a challenge. The infrastructure is designed with other goals in mind, hopefully to make driving as easy and smooth as possible. The layout of a racing circuit, even if it is a street circuit that only temporarily is used for racing, is designed in order to facilitate the challenge of an automobile race. In order to describe the challenge of the legendary circuit in Monaco, Formula 1 driver Nelson Piquet said that the Monaco grand prix was "like trying to cycle round your living room" (McAuley, 2008). Piquet's parable points to the artificial quality of the activity; automobile racing is not a challenge that we encounter in our attempt to reach some other goal. Driving at extreme speed in tight corners on the same course lap after lap is a designed challenge; it is made to put different aspects of human agency to a test.

The point I am making here is similar to but not the same as Bernard Suits' (2005[1978]) definition that playing a game "is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (p. 55). According to his argument, the rules of a game dictate conditions for an activity that are not optimal for achieving a certain goal. In a game we use less efficient means than what is possible to achieve our goals; it is easier to pick up a golf ball and simply place it in the hole than to use a putter. I agree that this is a fruitful description that captures something similar to pointing out that those games and sports are *designed challenges.* The problem with

Suits' definition is, as Juul (2003, p. 27) points out, that it becomes problematic to talk about 'less efficient means' in videogames where the rules of the game and the potential actions that are possible in the virtual environment often are the same.

Not all designed challenges are games and neither are all games designed challenges, but if we settle for "family resemblance" this can be a starting point for approaching the relation between board games, sports, and digital games, an approach that can be used for analyzing other aspects of sports videogames beyond how they simulate a sport. It should be stressed that in some games and sports, it might be misleading to talk about a single designed challenge. The same game can contain many designed challenges that are rather different in nature; for instance, a face-off in hockey can be seen as a mini-game within the game. In the same manner, digital games can vary fast-paced action scenes with puzzles, activities that are very different types of challenges. In order to come to making my case that games, board games, videogames, and sports can be seen as designed challenges, I will introduce the theory of ecological psychology. This approach sees human perception and action as closely related and reciprocal to our immediate environment. This approach has been used for both investigating sports (Fajen, Riley, and Turvey, 2008) and digital gaming (Linderoth, 2009, 2012).

An Ecological Approach to Perception and Action

The Affordance Concept

The theory of ecological psychology is mainly known from James Gibson's writings and the affordance concept that he coined (1986, p. 127). The affordance concept was picked up by traditions such as *human-computer interaction* and *interaction design,* where it came to take on a somewhat different meaning than it had originally (see Norman, 1998, 1999).

The main idea with the affordance concept, as it originally was developed, was to address the reciprocal relation between humans (as well as other animals; both humans and animals are regarded as perceiving and acting organisms in this theory) and the environment. The environment contains everything from buildings and plants to different objects, as well as other humans and animals. These things exist in relation to each other in a layout, a structure of the environment. This layout is constantly changing when events occur, things and people move, change, disappear, etc. At the same time animals and humans are active organisms interacting with the environment. The environment *offers* the individual different ways of acting. These offers are called affordances and an important part of the original formulation of the concept is that affordances are relative to an organism (relative between species as well as between individuals). For instance, a stone can afford being thrown for someone with a hand and an arm of certain strength. This affordance is thus relative to the physical constitution as well as the capabilities of the organism. Many humans and some apes could use a stone as a projectile, but this affordance is not an affordance for an infant or someone with a disability in his/her arms or hands.

For humans, the whole realm of social life is a flow of coming and going affordances depending on both permanent features and temporal states of people around us. Conversation, cooperation, competition, play, and all other forms of interaction are, from the ecological perspective, about perceiving and acting upon the affordances of others (Gibson, 1986, p. 42). Social affordances are thus extremely rich and the variations are probably endless. What one person sees in others will be highly dependent on how the individual is attuned to the social environment at hand. Differences in social norms and values are thus an issue about perceiving and acting upon different social affordances. Likely, misperception of what others afford plays a large part in many forms of social interaction.

Although many basic affordances are of such nature that they can be acted upon by a majority of the animals in a species, there are individual differences. As Gibson and Pick (2000) point out, affordances for humans are often an outcome of training. Experts in a certain domain have learned to utilize affordances that are not available to non-experts.

> Humans, at least, must learn to use affordances. Some affordances may be easily learned: others may require much exploration, practice, and time. [. . .] Further development of expertise may involve learning to realize affordances unavailable to non-experts. A three-inch-wide beam affords performing backflips for a gymnast, but the affordance is not realizable by others; rock climbers learn to use certain terrains for support that do not appear to others to provide a surface of support. (2000, pp. 16–17)

Some affordances are thus only realizable (can be utilized) by experts in a domain, even if they are recognizable (can be seen) by others, who lack the skill for acting on them. I can see that waves on a windy day afford surfing, even if I cannot stand on a surfboard. It is important to notice, though, that being knowledgeable in a domain also means having the ability of perceiving more affordances than a novice. While I can see that the waves afford surfing, I cannot identify properties of the waves for doing certain tricks or judge if the conditions are safe. Expertise is both about recognizing affordances and being able to realize them.

It should be pointed out that humans are experts at altering their environment (Reed, 1996, p. 188). This means that we are historically and geographically born into rather different living conditions and will be attuned to different sets of affordances. This is obvious in relation to new emerging technologies whose affordances previous generations could not learn, but also evident when you see children trying to interact with older technology such as tape recorders.

To Discover Affordances

The ecological approach rests on strong anti–cognitivist assumptions. It rejects the existence of mental schemata and the computer metaphor of an information-processing mind. Instead, an assumption in this theory is that learning and

perception is a process of *differentiating* and making distinctions. It rejects the idea of perception as a process of *enriching*. We do not add mental schemata to stimuli in order to make sense of the world; we make sense of the world by becoming attuned to our environment, being able to make finer distinctions (Gibson and Pick, 2000). The fundamental function of perception is to pick up information about possible ways of acting in the environment. In other words, we look for affordances.

Just as we must learn to utilize some affordances, we also must learn to discover affordances by cultivating our perception. Experts in different domains are able to perceive things in their surroundings that remain invisible to novices. A trained soccer player can see opportunities that someone who is not familiar with the rules of soccer would not see. For example, only a skilled player who is attuned to making the necessary distinctions can see the possibility of luring the opposing team into an offside trap. Gaining the ability to discover specific affordances is called *perceptual learning* in the ecological approach (Gibson and Pick, 2000). It should be stressed that perceptual learning is not about *constructing* meaning; the theory strongly rejects any ideas of the mind as enriching stimuli that reaches us. To perceive an affordance is to discover a property that is there, yet it is not objective in the sense that it is there to be seen or be used for all.

Perception and Action

The theory presumes that perception and action are closely related. We take actions to perceive what our world around us can afford, and we act on these affordances, sometimes in ways so that new possibilities open up for us (Gibson and Pick, 2000; Gibson, 1977, 1986).

It should also be made clear that according to this theory, perception is a kind of action. We actively look, listen, smell, hear, and touch. We turn our heads and adjust our bodies in order to gather information. We reach out and touch objects. We focus in order to hear better and listen. A point in this theory is to separate between two different aspects of actions. Actions have both an exploratory/information-gathering mode and a performatory/executive mode.

The *exploratory* mode of actions is to yield knowledge about the affordances of the specific situation. The *performatory* mode of action is about realizing affordances that are already discovered (Gibson and Pick, 2000, p. 21).

> Perceiving and acting go on in a cycle, each leading to the other. Perception occurs over time and is active. Action participates in perception. Active adjustments in the sensory system are essential. But action itself may be informative, too. . . . Actions have consequences that turn up new information about the environment. . . . All actions have this property; but it is useful to distinguish *executive* action from action that is *information-gathering*, (Gibson, 1991, p. 601)

Thus, in a sense, action always reveals information about affordances, but it is useful to make some distinctions. As Gibson (above) points out, it is important to recognize that some actions are made with the purpose of gathering information. Another important feature of action is that some actions change the affordances of a situation, that is, we must consider affordances for changing affordances. For example, most adult humans are able to carry a ladder. To carry a ladder to a certain place is to use one affordance the ladder has for an adult, its property of being movable. The goal of the activity is not carrying the ladder as such, but to place the ladder in order to then climb it and reach a certain spot. Thus, carrying is here an action made to change the affordances of the environment, making a specific elevated place reachable. We use some affordances in a situation in order for other affordances to emerge. Thus, the environment can be said to have affordances for gaining other affordances. We not only adapt to the environment, we also reveal information about affordances through action.

As Fajen, Riley, and Turvey (2008) point out, the theory of affordances and the idea of direct perception lend themselves well to understanding sport. The fluent and often fast-paced flow of coming and going opportunities calls for a theory that treats perception and action as closely intertwined. According to these authors, the adaption of our perception is of utmost importance to understand when approaching sports.

> Perceptual attunement is particularly relevant to the study of perception and action in sport because most sports-related activities are skills that require extensive practice to master. The notion of perceptual attunement implies that differences between experts and novices reflect, in part, differences in the informational variables upon which experts and novices rely. (2008, p. 85)

It is not such a far-fetched conclusion to say that digital gaming also is an activity that demands perceptual attunement to master. As I have previously argued (Linderoth, 2012), digital games seem to rely on different forms of highlighting that assist the player in perceiving relevant aspects of the game. This is discussed in more detail below.

Extension of Agency

Although adaption is one way of gaining new ways of interacting with the environment, we can extend our capability to interact with the environment through other more convenient ways. By using tools, some animals can extend their capabilities and realize new affordances (cf. Linderoth, 2009). Humans are superior to other species as tool users, and the whole history of technological development can be seen as a way of changing what the environment affords us. As Gibson (1986, p. 40) pointed out, when we use a tool we almost attach something to our bodies and thus extend our body. Fajen et al. (2008) point out that in many

sports we must learn to handle these implements, a process they call "calibration." In the same sense, a digital avatar and its connection to a controller can be seen as an implement that the player of a digital game attaches to his or her body. Just like a snorkel (or aqualungs) makes us able to breathe underwater and makes us transcend into an ecological niche not available to us with other means, an avatar extends our agency into digital environments (see Linderoth, 2012).

Exploratory and Performatory Challenges

The ecological approach is a theory about perception, action, and learning that has as its primary unit of analysis the opportunities and constraints that the environment has for humans and other animals. It makes a distinction between the capability of perceiving opportunities and the ability of using them. This distinction between the exploratory aspect and the performatory aspect of action opens up new ways of thinking about games and sports. Both games and sports contain different challenges that can be seen as having an emphasis on either the exploratory aspect of action or the performatory aspect of action. This is not a framework that makes a clear cut between two distinct forms of challenges; an activity is often challenging in both aspects but has an emphasis on one, making the other less demanding and sometimes even trivial.

What I suggest is a framework where the designed challenges can be seen as being about *perceiving suitable actions* or *performing suitable actions*. This is not to be understood as a simple physical versus intellectual dichotomy. Perception is, according to the ecological approach, embodied action.

Exploratory challenges test the players' ability to see and choose appropriate actions, but executing these actions is often something rather trivial. Clear examples of games with an emphasis on *exploratory challenges* would be most board and card games such as *chess* and *poker*. Under this category we can also place many digital simulation games and strategy games such as *SimCity* (Maxis, 2000) and *Civilization* (Meier, 1991), as well as digital and nondigital puzzle games. In these games the challenge for the player lies in perceiving rewarding affordances in a complex cluster of possibilities. The actions tied to these affordances, once they are perceived, are trivial to execute for the assumed player. To draw a card, roll a die, click on something in a menu, place a tile, etc. are all actions that can hardly be seen as challenging.

In *performatory challenges,* perceiving appropriate actions is often something straightforward and obvious, but performing these actions is challenging for the player.

Examples of games with an emphasis on *performatory challenges* would be most sports. In track and field events such as pole vault, high jump and hurdling*,* the challenge is not to know what to do, it is to do it better than all the other competitors. The same goes for many videogames in the multiplayer shooter genre such as *Counter-Strike* (Valve, 2000) or *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2007). The challenge

lies in being good at using the affordances in different situations, to be faster and aim better than the opponents. With this distinction let's now look at some racing games.

Designed Challenges in Four Racing Games

So far this chapter has suggested that by looking at what mode of human action a designed challenge is putting to the test, we can override dichotomies between both digital and nondigital games as well as between games and sports. Let's now see how this framework can be used in order to make a comparative analysis of four racing games. I will use the term "game" even about the real-life Formula 1 and gameplay about the activity of engaging in Formula 1. By racing game I here follow Gutschera (2009) and refer to how the gameplay is constructed. According to Gutschera, a race is a fundamental type of multiplayer game in which the game mechanics are designed to be "a number of copies of a one-player game" that are put together side by side. Typically, the outcome is determined by a "scaled performance: a point score, time or distance" and the players have no or rather little influence on the other players' progress.

The four games *Formula D* (Lavaur and Randall, 2008), *Pitch Car* (du Poël, 1995), *F1 2011* (Codemasters, 2011), and the "real" motorsport Formula 1 are in this sense all racing games, and this should not be confused with the fact that the two board games and the videogame have Formula 1 as their theme. As designed challenges these four games are instances of racing games, and they show rather large differences in what aspect of human agency they challenge, but also some surprising similarities.

Formula D

Formula D, originally published as Formula Dé, is a board game about automobile races with an emphasis on Formula 1. The game board represents a race circuit where the "drivable" area is divided into squares. Basically the players roll a die and move their plastic car as many squares as indicated by the die; the first player across the finishing line wins. The twist to the game is that there are six different dice (from a d4 to a d30) that can be used for determining how many steps a player can move. Each die represents a gear, and before moving a player must decide what gear (die) to use. One can only gear up (change to a die with higher numbers) one step at a time. It is possible to gear down more steps, but that means losing so-called *wear points* (WP), which represent how much wear and tear different parts of the car (tires, brakes, gearbox, engine, etc.) can take before the car is broken. Once all WP are gone the player is eliminated. On the game board the areas representing bends are marked out with a number from 1 to 3. This number indicates how many stops a car must make in the stop area. If a player skips two stops, s/he is eliminated from the game. Skipping one stop means losing WP.
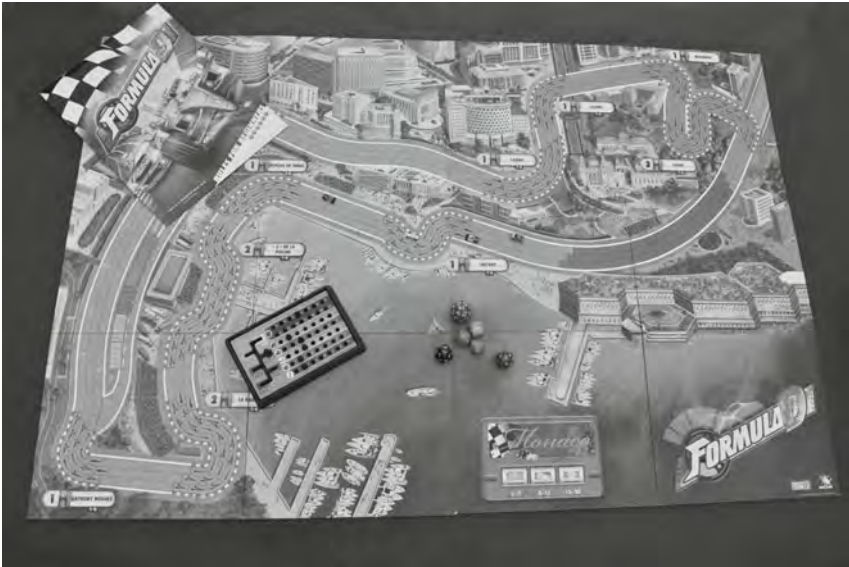
FIGURE 1.1   Formula D, the Monaco track

Gameplay is thus focused around this risk–reward mechanic, getting through the bend areas without gearing down too much since it will cost turns to gear up again.

What aspect of human agency is this game then designed to challenge? Just like with most of the artifacts we label board games, the challenge is supposed to be completely exploratory. In each turn, the player must perceive the most appropriate affordance for increasing her or his chances of winning. What is optimal will be relative to the position of the player's car in relation to bends, other players' cars, the current gear (dice) that the player's car is in, and the status of the car (its WP). A novice player will focus on how to stop exactly in the stop area, having as high a gear as possible (dice with highest numbers), whereas a skilled player will look ahead on the track and see when the next stop is and consider the current gear in relation to future turns. It is this kind of challenge that is captured in Sid Meier's classic statement that a game *is a series of interesting choices* (Rollings and Morris, 2000, p. 38). For a choice to be *interesting* it cannot be a trivial thing to make a decision about, in terms of the ecological approach; it is a challenge to perceive what affordance to act on.

Once the player has decided what die to roll, executing this action is trivial. Now this is a truth with some exceptions. Clearly something that is trivial for one individual can be challenging for someone else. If we consider players with some disability, we can easily see how rolling a die might be a challenge. In order to use the distinction between exploratory and performatory challenges, one must keep in mind that it is a distinction about what mode of action a game or part of a game was *designed* to challenge. An affordance is, as mentioned earlier, relative to

the capabilities of the agent. Designed challenges are made with some idea about who will use them, and it is in accordance to these ideal players that the game is made to be challenging.

Pitch Car

Pitch Car is a game where a track is built up with wooden puzzle-like pieces. Each player receives a wooden puck with an image of a Formula 1 car. The puck is moved by finger-flicking (pitching). Players take turns moving their puck, and the aim of the game is to finish three laps before the other players. There are some game variants about how to handle interaction between cars. In the basic rules pushing another car off the track is punished by losing a turn (the game state is reset so that all cars move back where they were and then it is the next player's turn).

Compared to *Formula D,* the challenge in *Pitch Car* can be said to almost be on the opposite side of an exploratory/performatory scale. Of course there will be some challenges that have to do with deciding where to aim and how hard the puck should be flicked. Still, if flicking is too hard, the puck will go off the track. If aiming too close to other pucks, one might risk knocking these off the course. The optimal affordance to utilize will be to make a finger-flick that makes the puck go as far as possible without going off the track or knocking out another player's "car" (puck). While some tricky situations might occur where the decision about where to aim is not obvious, the main challenge of this game is not to perceive affordances for successful finger-flicks; it is to execute the finger-flick.
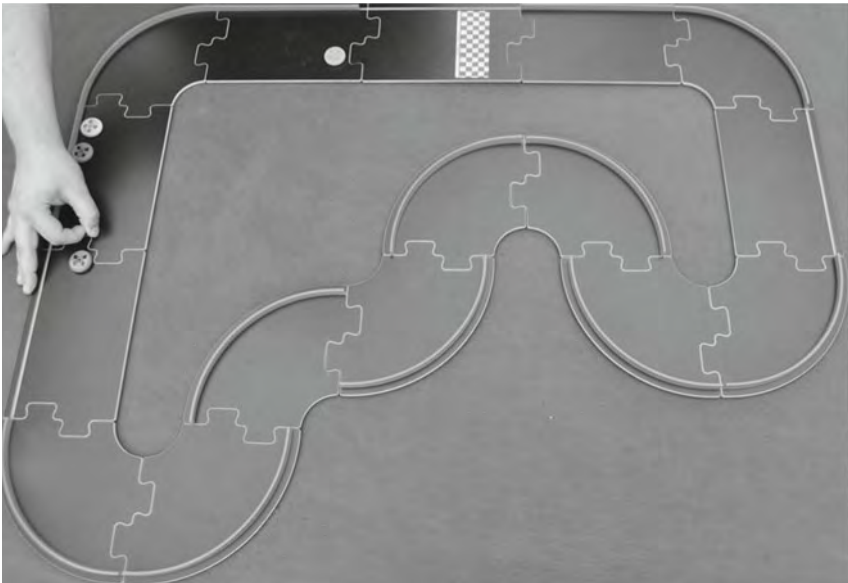

FIGURE 1.2 Executing a finger–flick in *Pitch car*

This kind of board game is sometimes called a dexterity game. Other examples would be *Jenga* (Scott, 2006) and *Jack Straws* (ca. 1888), but typical game room games such as table soccer, rod hockey, and air hockey can also be seen as being rather straightforward when it comes to perceiving what to do, but challenging in the performatory mode of action.

F1 2011

F1 2011 is one game in the F1 videogame series made by Codemasters. Like many sports videogames, the F1 series is thematically very close to the sport it portrays. The game has the real F1 teams and drivers and tries to model the differences between different cars (good cars in the sport should be good cars in the videogame). The game has different modes and can be played as split-screen races, online multiplayer races, and as a single-player game against AI opponents. In career mode, the player gets to create his or her own driver and follow them through some racing seasons, earning a reputation and signing up with different teams. Depending on the platform the game is played on, it utilizes different controls such as game controllers or keyboard/mouse, but the game also allows you to connect to a game steering wheel and pedals.

Compared to *Formula D* and *Pitch Car, F1 2011* does not place itself on either extreme on a scale between exploratory and performatory challenges. To be able to take a bend in as high speed as possible is very much an exploratory challenge of knowing when to gear down, when to brake, and when to turn. When playing in career mode, the player gets to practice on the circuit before each race. Typically each and every bend has to be practiced so that the player in advance can know which gear to select and how fast s/he can drive. A piece of advice on the F1 forums is to choose a landmark in the virtual environment that can be used as a sign for knowing when to start to take a bend. In terms of ecological psychology, the player needs to become visually attuned to make distinctions in the perceptual field that holds information about affordances. Each bend on a track thus presents the player with unique information the player must use for the affordance of successfully taking a corner. Still, it is not enough to know the optimal speed, gear, and when to start taking a corner. One has to be able to execute these maneuvers without spinning or colliding with other cars; that is, controlling the simulated vehicle is very much a performatory challenge.

What is striking about *F1 2011* is that the challenge can be adjusted with different so-called driving assists. From an ecological perspective, these assists alter the designed challenge both in terms of the exploratory and performatory modes of action.

Instead of learning when to brake and how to steer in each bend and corner, the player can put on a so-called dynamic racing line. This assist displays a green line on the track that shows the optimal position for the car. The line also turns red when it is time to press the brakes. This assist makes the perceptual work of

FIGURE 1.3 *F1 2011* the green racing line shows the optimal path for the car

the player much easier. Put in terms from the ecological approach, the player uses the same invariant information, green turning red, in all bends and corners instead of learning to differentiate the unique information in every bend. The racing line shows the player information about affordances that otherwise would have taken a great deal of perceptual attunement to see. This kind of highlighting of affordances is a rather common thing in digital games. Being screen-based activities, the designer is in control of the information that is presented to the player with almost limitless possibilities to help the player with their perceptual work (see Linderoth, 2012).

Other driving assists help the player with his/her performance and offload the player from having to control some aspects of driving the simulated vehicle. Like many car racing games, one can have automatic transmission that takes care of gearing up and down. The game also has a feature called braking assist. When this feature is on, the car will brake automatically and slow down in time before a bend or corner. With automatic transmission and braking assists on, it is possible to play the game without varying the pressure on the button or pedal that controls the speed of the car. Combined with the dynamic racing line, the challenge becomes a very one-dimensional performatory task of following the green line closely.

It is not only the driving assist that alters the performatory challenge. The simulated cars are different in terms of handling, speed, acceleration, etc. This means that some cars have an edge over other cars in the race. In ecological terms, the tool extends the player's agency in the game space so that the same performance can have a better outcome than with other tools (simulated cars). This means that depending on the car the player drives, the performatory challenge

will differ. This is a rather common way to design digital games, by making the avatar more powerful during gameplay so new affordances open up for the player. A design approach can give the player a sense of accomplishment without forcing the player to actually adapt their perception-action systems (see Linderoth, 2009, 2012). Still, increasing the player's performance by enhancing the tool that extends the player's agency is nothing unique for digital games. Formula 1, the sport, is here a very good example of how nondigital designed challenges sometimes are not solely a matter of the competitors' skill.

Formula 1

Since the turn of the twentieth century, automobile races have been organized, but it was in 1950 that individual Grand Prixs were first linked to each other in order to form a championship. The FIA, the Féderation Internationale de l'Automobile, had standardized the rules for how competing cars could be built, a "formula." The name "Formula 1" made clear that this was supposed to be seen as the definitive competition in automobile racing (Hill, 2011).

The challenge of driving a Formula 1 grand prix is utterly demanding both in terms of exploratory and performatory aspects. Driving skill is very much about being able to see affordances for safely steering the car in the environment. Being in a vehicle that moves at high speed, there is time pressure on the exploratory work (choices have to be made decisively). Formula 1 also puts a great deal of pressure on the driver's stamina and endurance, making both exploratory and performatory work more difficult. A driver is exposed to high g-forces as well as extreme heat in the cockpit (Formula 1 Official site, 2012).

Unlike many other sports and forms of racing, Formula 1 is not only a competition between the drivers; it is also a race between the cars and can be seen as a struggle for supreme technology. Any sport utilizing equipment of some sort risks becoming subject to a discussion about what technologies are allowed and in ecological terms what extensions of agency are allowed (see, for example, Wertsch, Rio, and Alvarez, 1995, p. 65, for their discussion about pole vaulting). Being a sport that embraces technological innovations, there has been a great deal of discussion and controversy in Formula 1 about what kind of technology should be allowed. The rules for how to build the cars are constantly updated. To just mention a couple of technologies that were first allowed and then banned: so-called two-way telemetry, a kind of technology that makes it possible for engineers to calibrate the car in real time from the pit, was banned in 2003 and, unlike the video game *F1 2011,* fully automatic transmission was banned in 2004.

Although most regulations in Formula 1 have to do with safety issues, regulations have also been made to decrease the cost for a Formula 1 team. From an ecological approach it is noteworthy that part of the challenge in Formula 1 has to do with funding; to be a high achiever in the sport requires monetary resources. Here the sport is similar to trading card games such as *Magic: The Gathering*

(Garfield, 1993), tabletop miniature games such as *Warhammer 40,000* (Priestley, 1987), or digital games with micro-transaction systems. The designed challenge is tied to the economic strength of the competitor since the games' system allows buying new affordances (see Linderoth, 2009, 2012, for a discussion).

Sports Videogames—Designed Challenges Portraying Designed Challenges

By treating games as designed challenges, the dichotomy between games and sports falls to the background. From an ecological point of view, the conceptual discussion is not as interesting as understanding what aspect of the human perception-action system is put to a test. It is here we can raise questions about what kind of skills the activity will force us to develop, that is, what kind of adaptation of behavior the competitor will have to undergo in order to excel. A game such as *Formula D* will challenge our exploratory ability to perceive relations between stop areas (bends), the dice that are available to us, and how high a penalty we can take before being eliminated, a highly situated risk management skill. The challenge of a game like *F1 2011* will vary depending on the driving assists we use and how much performance can be offloaded from our own agency into the system. As illustrated in this chapter, the same kind of analytical questions can be raised in relation to all designed challenges no matter if the challenge is digital or nondigital, has to do with gross or fine physical skills, or the social status the challenge has in a broader context. Our ecological systems and how they adapt to the conditions of the environment do not really care if a challenge has the status of being called a sport, is part of the Olympic games, or is a videogame.

What does this perspective then say about sports videogames? Sports videogames are designed challenges that thematically represent other designed challenges. They are games about games, something that gives them a family resemblance with board games that build on videogames. A number of modern board games portray videogames; for example, titles such as *World of Warcraft: The boardgame* (Lang and Petersen, 2005), *Doom: The boardgame* (Petersen and Wilson, 2004), and *Starcraft: The boardgame* (Konieczka and Petersen, 2007), are board games that originally were well-known digital games. Since designed challenges can be transformations of "natural" (nondesigned) challenges, this observation opens up an analysis of layered frames of meaning based on Goffman's frame theory (Goffman, 1961, 1986; Fine, 1983; Consalvo, 2009). To illustrate this, fencing as a sport is in a sense a portrayal of real fighting. The fencing game in Nintendo's classical *Track & field* (Konami, 1983) is a portrayal of fencing as a sport. Sports videogames as well as other games about games can be analyzed like Matryoshka dolls, as frames of meaning within frames of meaning, but one has to keep in mind that the human perception-action system does not have to deconstruct these layers in order to make sense of the designed challenge. To perceive and act on affordances is from the perspective I suggest here a direct process; we do not need to take any

"semiotic detour of unpacking representations" when playing sport games. Whatever perceptual similarities there may be between a real sport and the portrayal of this sport in a videogame, these are similarities that afford imagination. Still, for humans, almost anything seems to afford imagination, and there is no obvious causality between the portrait and the portrayed. For instance, think of a Formula 1 spectator imagining the cars as *Pitch Car* pucks. The ecological approach saves us from yet another spin in the philosophical hamster wheel. Sports videogames, whatever else they may be, are challenges that are designed to test the human perception–action system.

Acknowledgments

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2

A TALE OF TWO GAMES

Football and *FIFA 12*

Miguel Sicart

Who hasn't been a sports star, at least once in their lifetime, even if it's only in their own mind? In the playground, in the backyard, in suburban sports halls, we've all been a star, feeling the cheering of the crowds, the rush of adrenaline of knowing we're the best, and any challenge out there against us will be just too easy. Playing sports casually, and playing sports videogames, are about performing the impossibilities of professional sports, letting us dream the possibilities of being our heroes.

For a long time, computer games have attempted to extend our imagined experiences as sports stars. Sports games promise not only that we will be able to be a star, but also that we can manage the teams we root for, raising them from anonymity to the ranks of history. Sports games are about the promise of living the narratives of professional, commercialized sports.

In this chapter I want to explore the relations between one of these sports, football,[1] and the currently most popular computer game franchise based on that sport, EA's *FIFA* series. My intent is to analyze and question how the digital game simulates the sport, and why that simulating process affects not only the nature of both games, but also the cultures developed around them.

The comparison between the sport of football and the computer game *FIFA* (specifically, the FIFA 12 edition) will be limited to three points: the rules, the tactics, and the individual player. There are obvious differences in the spaces where these games are performed, as well as in the influence of the different cultures around each game. Obviously, attending a football match in F.C. Barcelona's Nou Camp is not the same as playing, or even spectating, a match in the simulated version of that pitch in *FIFA*. However, in this chapter I want to take a closer look at the game itself, and therefore I am sidelining some important observations that could be made with regard to the cultures and spaces of these two games.

I believe, however, that the more formalist approach I am taking here will allow for an explanation of some of the divergences we might observe between

these games, without necessarily resorting to the obvious fact that one is a sport played in the physical world, whereas the other one is a game, or e-sport, played in and thanks to a computing machine. At stake here, with this formal approach, is a deeper understanding of the questions of simulation, and the nature of sports videogames in the way they relate to their real life references.

Furthermore, in this article I want to suggest a way to approach sports from the multi-disciplinarity of game studies.[2] Even though game studies has ambitions to be the field that studies games on their own, we have seldom focused on sports as interesting manifestations of games.[3] My purpose with this article is not to right this wrong, but to show that in a humanities-based game studies approach, the study of sports is not only fruitful, but also fundamental for broadening, and questioning, what we consider games to be and how they work.[4]

The method I will use to understand the relations between the games is based on the critical and reflective observation and experience of the games.[5] Since I am not a professional football player, my observations on professional football will be based on my own experience and insights as a spectator. I have striven to become an informed spectator, following blogs on football training and tactics, reading specialized books and magazines on both the sport and the processes of elite sportsmanship. I have watched matches of every major league regularly, trying to understand how the game varies across cultures. As for *FIFA*, my observations will be based on extensive play sessions, focusing on the 2012 iteration of the franchise.

This method has limits, mainly those derived from the lack of empirical data outside the humanistic approach taken here. That is an inherent risk in this type of study, and thus my conclusions ought to be read within the tradition of humanistic game studies. Also, the fact that some of my examples are taken from my personal experience watching F.C. Barcelona play, both live and on television is problematic, as I am not only a supporter but also a member of the club. However, the recent and historical successes of the club, and the importance of the tactical innovations it is introducing to modern football, makes F.C. Barcelona a perfect example for some of the reflections on tactics and the importance of individual players.[6]

This chapter will bring together game studies and sports philosophy, with the purpose of questioning how the simulational convergence between the sport of football and the videogame *FIFA* is not only utopian, but also extremely productive: *FIFA* is a different game than football, and in that difference new cultures of sport and leisure have a place to emerge. By trying to simulate the game of football, *FIFA* has created a new game, one that can not only illustrate the nature and evolution of games and sports, but can also cast interesting new light on the questions of the importance of computing for games, and the emergence of cultures around the activity of play. I will pay attention to these questions in this article.

Football, Simulated

One of the most fascinating outcomes of the commercial pressures on contemporary computer games franchises is the compulsive need to annually renew their

products, adding more features with each iteration. In the *FIFA* franchise, as in most products under the EA sports label, the drive is to make the games *even closer to the actual game,* that is, to make the computer game converge with the sport. For instance, the 2012 update to the game includes not only improved graphics and updated team rosters, but also two fairly interesting technical innovations: "tactical defense," which makes the defensive phase of the game interesting and more coherent with the rest of the game, and the "impact engine," an improved physics system that focuses on simulating with detail individual players' physical attributes.

These two innovations are examples of how *FIFA* wants to converge through computational simulation with the reference sport of football. *FIFA* wants to be a *realistic* simulation of the real-life game. In this chapter I briefly frame what I mean by simulation, and delineate the difference between sport and games. For delving into the relation between *FIFA* and football, the ontology of these two games needs to be clearly stated. Only by doing so it will be possible to make statements about *realism,* or about how the divergence between the two games is significant for game studies.

This is my starting assumption: both *FIFA* and football are games. In fact, *FIFA* is a simulation of the sport of football, that is, a game that simulates a sport, a "sports game."[7] What does this mean? Aren't all sports games? Defining sports has a long tradition in academic theory, from philosophy to sociology and game studies. It is interesting to reflect on the nature of sports, and how that nature explains the relation between football and *FIFA*.

Following classic works in play theory (Schmitz, 1988; Suits and Morgan, 1988), I will consider that all sports are games, but not all games are sports (see also Sutton-Smith and Avedon, 1971, pp. 239–248). Bernard Suits addressed this issue in his philosophical work on sports and games.[8] For Suits, games can be said to have a number of elements that are particular to their being, that is, that define them. All games, according to Suits, have a goal, means for achieving the goal, rules, and encourage a lusory attitude, that is, a playful attitude of "staying in the game" toward their experience. Football, both in physical life and via the computer, fulfills these criteria. Thus, *FIFA* and football are both games. Even in the most comprehensive formal approach to the nature of games, we would not have any problem considering these two as "games."

However, it is also true that football is a sport. What is a sport, then? According to Suits, a sport can be defined as a type of game that presents specific characteristics, some inherent to the game (competitiveness), some culturally and socially determined (the game must have a stable following). Suits provides an interesting framework for defining sports, suggesting that any game that meets four concrete requirements can be considered a sport, too. These requirements are that the game is a game of skill, that the skill is physical, that the game has a wide following, and that the following can reach a certain stability (Suits and Morgan, 1988, p. 43).

Although all these criteria seem appropriate, Suits' interpretation of "skill" is a highly embodied one, disqualifying games such as chess from being considered sports. And whereas Suits' interpretation is appropriate for understanding Olympic games, the notion of physicality is limited when trying to understand phenomena such as e-sports. Suits' notion of physicality needs to be expanded beyond the classic bodily performance feats. Playing *Starcraft* or *Counter Strike* at the highest professional level is as physically demanding as playing many classic sports. The physical and mental training required for performing in the top ranks of these sports is equivalent to that required for driving Formula 1 cars—again, a case in which the body *endures* more than *performs* physicality (Connor, 2011). Physicality is appropriate also in the case of digital games, as they require training and performance of bodily abilities in order to excel at top competitive levels.

One of the most interesting aspects of Suits' definition is its demand for steady and stable support for the sport to exist. In fact, this acknowledges that games become sports not only because of their form, their appropriate *design* for agonistic competition, but also because people find them interesting. That is, sports are culturally defined as much as they are formally defined by the nature of the game.

Every sport has cultures that help define it. The culture of football, particularly the European, media-driven culture around contemporary professional football, explains a number of rituals and rule changes that are transforming the game. Two of the most definitive changes in modern football rules were suggested for audience reasons, with the intention of creating a more thrilling game. All European leagues now award 3 points for a victory, and 1 for a draw, encouraging offensive football.[9] And goalkeepers can no longer hold the ball in their hands when it voluntarily comes from a teammate, forcing keepers to play with their feet and be more of a field player.[10]

Other elements of football culture also shape it as a sport. The importance of audiences in the configuration of club discourses and politics is fundamental for understanding modern football (Goldblatt, 2006). In fact, one of the world's most important clubs, F.C. Barcelona, prides itself in being "more than a club," voluntarily embodying the national identity of Catalonia.[11] Football thrives as a sport in Europe because it acts as an embodiment of local and national politics, as a source of identity that is projected toward teams and players, even in these days of corporately commercialized sports (Kuper and Szymanski, 2009).

Football is then both a game and a sport. It has all the elements that make it a game, but it also has competitiveness and a sustained culture around it that impacts its development and experience. The next question is: is *FIFA* a sport? This can only be answered with what may be a cop-out: *FIFA* is a sport in the relatively limited world of e-sports, and even there is not one of the most popular fixtures (sports games are still shadowed by other competitive games). The key difference is that the culture around the game is still not strong enough in creating the cultural markers that distinguish a game from a sport. There are no stars, no following of players or teams, and no evident spectatorship, aside from its relatively marginal

position in e-sports. This does not mean that the game is played less competitively online or in tournaments, but that it is still played as a game. There are traces of it becoming more of a sport, particularly with certain support from EA in the shape of prizes and competitions. But as of now, *FIFA* is a (computer) game based on a sport.

FIFA is based on football, but what does that mean? The answer is deceptively simple: *FIFA* is a *simulation* of football. The topic of simulations is rather old in game studies (Frasca, Perron, and Wolf, 2003; Aarseth and Harrigan, 2004). Paraphrasing Frasca et al. (2003), a simulation is the replication of the crucial elements of a system in a different system, constraining the properties and behaviors of the simulated system to the specificities of the simulating system. Even though simulations predate computers, the capacity of computers to recreate any kind of system via software has conceptually fused computers and simulations.

Computers excel at translating the analog world into digital versions that can replicate to a certain extent the behaviors of the world (Frasca, Perron, and Wolf, 2003, p. 223). To create a simulation in and with a computer is to translate the world into formalized systems that a computer can quickly process, producing results. What sports games do, then, is translate the elements of the game into what a computer can process. Sports games are procedural takes on sports via the constraints and abilities of the computer system.[12]

Sports games are then simulations of games, that is, translations of analog games into digital systems, which are computable and processed by a machine. Of course, computers excel at the simulation of complex systems such as physics, or at performing high-speed probability and statistics calculations. This makes some sports easy to adapt to computers, even moreso given the increased trend in quantizing sports and sports performances.

What is interesting in the process of simulating is what is lost in the transition from the human domain to the computer-controlled universe of sports games simulations. A computer excels at performing fast calculations, which makes it possible to recreate not only the complex physics required for football to *feel right* as a computer game, but also the statistical interpretation of the game (Swink, 2009). In *FIFA*, players have stats, and so do teams. Competition between players is often reduced to comparing numbers and determining, with a degree of randomness, what the result of a specific clash in the pitch will be.

It is not my intention to bring attention to the increasingly quantized understanding of professional sports, and how sports computer games might be contributing to that process. What I am interested in highlighting here are the implications of simulation in the process of transformation from analog sport to digital game, and how that might affect the way these games are played.

A computer deals very well with data and processes. It is capable of simulating the rules of a game and to a certain extent the physical environment where that game takes place. One can watch the computer play *FIFA*, and it will be only

marginally distinguishable from watching a proper football match. But those margins matter, especially when interacting with the game.

A computer cannot deal very well with ambiguity and interpretation. It can be programmed to replicate these, but they are often programmed to be artifacts that follow reasonably predictable patterns. And in the case of a sport like football, human judgment is actually a very important factor in many levels of the game, from rules to individual decisions. What the simulation cannot do is to replicate the human judgment that happens when players and referees interpret the game. The computer game cannot adapt to the whimsical readings of the game that a referee might have,[13] or to the talent-driven intuitions that characterize star players (Inglis and Hughson, 2000). To referee, and to play football, is as much an act of knowing the rules as it is an act of embodied exploration of these rules, a process difficult, if not impossible, to simulate.

FIFA is a *computerized* football *simulation,* and that is precisely where the divergence between the two games occurs. Football has been designed over time to adapt to human interpretation, whereas *FIFA* is designed to replicate the physical and quantifiable conditions for the game to be played, within the computational constraints. *FIFA* aspires to become a more *realistic* physical, tactical, and statistical simulation of the game, as well as a simulation of the game *as being broadcast.* Far from being a critique, this should be read as the source of the divergence between games: the search for realism constrained by what computers can do leads to a game that resembles football, but diverges in notable and interesting ways. Most interestingly, it substitutes the game's embodied knowledge and interpretation with procedural literacy (Bogost, 2006).

I will now explore the three domain areas in which the divergence between these two games is most interesting, and what it tells us about the nature of sports games compared to their simulated references.

A Tale of Two Games

In this section I will explore the divergences between *FIFA* and football, in an attempt to specify how and why the translation from real world to computer simulation has affected the core of the game so much that they are arguably different games. To perform such analysis, I will formally approach the game of football from the perspective of three of its core elements: the rules, the tactics, and the individual star players. My purpose with this formal analysis is to be able to isolate how these elements are translated into computing simulation, and how the constraints of the computer have led to a divergence between the two games.

Each of these elements will be defined and illustrated using examples both from my experience playing *FIFA,* and my observations of contemporary football, particularly of F.C. Barcelona. Again, aside from my own personal inclination

toward this team, evidence suggests that its tactical and individual prowess is most likely affecting the culture of the game, the way teams are organized, and what fans expect and understand as the beautiful game (Hunter, 2011).

Rules

The issue of what rules are has preoccupied game studies throughout its history (Juul, 2005). Describing the rules of the game might mean describing the game itself, since a game is, at least from a certain level of abstraction, the collection of rules that create a possibility space (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004; Juul, 2005). All games have rules that act as frames for the actions, as well as defining the motivations and even duration of the play experience (Suits, 2005). All games are described, but not defined, by their rules, either as objects (prior to play), or as experiences (rules interpreted during play).

The rules of football are deceptively simple, and well described by regulatory boards (FIFA, 2011). Of course, in this chapter I am referring to professional football, which is also the frame of reference of EA's *FIFA*. Even though football is a comparatively underregulated game (Olaya, Lammoglia, Zarama, 2010), professional football still has a large number of rules defined by the International Federation of Football Associations. FIFA is a remarkably conservative institution when it comes to preserving the purity of the game (Goldblatt, 2006; Wilson, 2008), particularly with regard to the use of modern technology. The laws of the game are seldom changed, and when changes are considered, they are often tested in lesser international competitions before they are implemented in any of the major leagues, or in the top international tournaments.

In practice, most of the rules of the game are implemented and upheld during play by a referee. Exceptions to a certain extent are those concerning the size of the pitch, the distance between poles, and other technicalities. However, a keen observer of the game knows that before any match begins the referee needs to approve the pitch for playing the game, so even in that case the referee has discretionary power over the game itself.

Referees uphold the rules by interpreting the situations of the game according to the FIFA rules. Most of those rules are open for interpretation, making some referees popular figures depending on the ways they interpret actions in the game. From strict referees to more lenient ones, football culture is creating a controversial stardom around the figure of the referee.

For this chapter, the fact that referees have to interpret the rules of the game in order to take decisions that affect the result of the game is important. Let's examine some of these situations, starting with the booking system, the cards used to punish players for actions against the rules of the game. In football, the yellow and red cards punish particular behaviors on the pitch, particularly aggressive behavior or play with the hands. A referee must interpret not only a situation, but also the general mood of the game and the ways players have been behaving throughout the game in order to

issue cards. Some games are played respectfully, and no cards are awarded, while others are brutal and end up with teams getting players expelled with red cards.

Booking is then one of the areas of the rules of the game that is discretionary to the referee's interpretation. The way a referee decides to interpret specific actions of players starts in the FIFA description of possible actions, but it is always the referee who ultimately has to make a choice based on the situation at hand.

Another significant rule open for interpretation is the offside rule, more specifically, the positional offside. A player can be in offside position,[14] but if he or she does not show interest in following play, the position does not stop the game, hence allowing other players to continue playing. Positional offside depends on a human interpretation of the intentions of a player, and like other interpretational rules, its application might vary depending on the referee appointed to the game.

Though other rules are open for interpretation, and FIFA issues guidelines for the interpretation of the rules, it is ultimately the referee who decides when to book a player, and if a player is in positional offside. How have these rules been translated to EA's *FIFA?*

As mentioned previously, one of the core problems that computers face is the simulation of ambiguity. Significant advances in AI programming hint at a future where computers will be able to do subtle interpretations of human and non-human behavior. However, *FIFA,* like most other computer games, uses computing power mostly to simulate the physical conditions of the game environment, rather than using CPU cycles on the AI. This is not to say that the game's AI is flawed; quite to the contrary, one of the most important aspects of the *FIFA* games is the way in which AI is used not only to control the rules of the game, but also to give teams and players behaviors modeled in real life. Procedurally speaking, *FIFA* excels at applying AI techniques to the simulation of tactical moves.

FIFA does not excel at the interpretation of the rules of the game. The referee simulator, though greatly improved in the latest iterations of the game, is still relatively poor. As far as my own experience and observations of the game goes, the offline rule is applied without any ambiguity. If it is offside, it will be refereed as such, with no margin for error, or interpretation of positional offside. When a player is offside, the rule is applied, regardless of intentionality or not.

This leads to an interesting experience of the game. As a player of *FIFA,* I never question the offside rule. When I instruct my simulated team to make an offside-based defense, I know that in the case that a rival breaks my defense, the move will be legal. The system is not built around ambiguity or interpretation, but on simulating binary conditions: if a player is offside, then it is offside and so will the referee mark it.[15] Otherwise, play will continue. This means that there is a total trust in the referee and the way the rule is applied. This trust in turn affects my play style.

Looking at my own experience, I can see that even though F.C. Barcelona arguably uses offside on occasions to shorten the pitch and make their high-pitch pressure more effective, I seldom use this strategy when playing *FIFA,* since I know that the way the rule will be interpreted penalizes this approach to play.

When playing with the offside rule, a real-life team is also playing with the limits of cognition and perception, trusting that sometimes the referee will rule as off-side a player that is actually onside, just because the play sequence goes too fast. But in *FIFA,* that ambiguity does not exist, and therefore the offside trap is not as useful as its counterpart in real life.

The unambiguous interpretation of the offside rule by the computer leads not only to different play styles, but also to a different experience of the game, one that requires learning not just the rules of the game, but also how those rules have been implemented, and simulated, by the computer system. A serious player of *FIFA* learns not only the rules of the game, but also the laws of the game as simulated by the computer. A FIFA player learns to read the procedures, rather than the personalities that rule the game.

Similarly, the booking system is a rigid interpretation of the rules of the game. In *FIFA 12,* any imprecise tackling will yield a card, and on occasions, using the improved physics engine to block an opponent's progression will be deemed a fault, an action that seldom happens in real-life football. When playing *FIFA,* players learn to understand not how referees think, but how the computer upholds the norms and gives out bookings and faults.

Interestingly, the simulated referee can act on actions outside of the player's control, in what feels like a most unfair act. In *FIFA 12* the defense system has been revamped to make defending tactical, that is, a matter of upholding the tactical shape of the team while pressing the rivals to retrieve possession. This means that players can directly control one avatar, while command another to provide support, in order to press the opponent with the ball. However, it might happen that the AI-controlled avatar commits a foul, even a penalty, under the indirect control of the player. In fact, in Legendary difficulty mode this situation happens relatively often.

When the referee awards a foul or books a player that is only indirectly con-trolled, the game player feels it is unjust. However, it is a fact that is soon learned and understood: the lack of interpretational abilities of the algorithms that run the refereeing predictably affect the game, its experience, and how it is played.

Thus, the rules of the real-life game of football, though in themselves unam-biguous, are enforced via human interpretation of contextual situations. In the process of simulating the game, that interpretation disappears, and instead a set of procedural rules is set in place that replicates the rules, not their contextual inter-pretation. In order to become a good EA *FIFA* player, one needs to learn not the rules and their ambiguities, but the rules and their certainties. This is not a nega-tive comment, but an illustration of the fact that these two games, even though they are based on the same set of rules, diverge dramatically in the way the rules are interpreted, implemented, and enforced.

Tactics

Rules are only one of the formal elements of a game. Tactics are, in the case of some games, formal elements of the game object that are just as important as rules,

and they help shape the gameplay sequence as much as, if not even more than, the rules themselves.

So what are tactics? This section defines tactics as the formal interpretation of the rules as playable by different players, with the intention of optimizing results and skills for achieving the goals of the game. Tactics are formulated prior to the beginning of the gameplay sequence, and part of the thrill of some games, particularly multiplayer games, is to preserve the formal values of the tactic during game play.

Using football as an example, the most popular football tactics are interpretations of the rules of the game that adapt both to the physical constraints of the game (size of the pitch, duration of the match) and to the specific skills of players (FIFA, 2011). Most top tier professional football teams play a 4–4-2, a 4–3-3, or the increasingly popular 4–2-3–1[16] (Zauli, 2002). These dispositions allow for a rational occupation of the space, facilitating defense and allowing for different offensive strategies (Wilson, 2008).

Even though tactics and strategies are deeply intertwined, since strategies are trained set pieces that exploit advantages of particular tactics (Zauli, 2002), I will only focus on the former. Though strategies are interesting for this research, having actual access to the trained strategies of professional teams is only a bit less than impossible. Therefore, given the lack of proper data, I have decided to leave aside strategies and focus exclusively on tactics.

I will look at tactics as a dynamic interpretation of the game, rather than as a passive instance—tactics not as the display on paper before the game starts, but as the form on the pitch that teams struggle to keep while playing the game. I will look not only at a formation, but also at the efforts to keep that shape while playing, and what types of play sequences players struggle to create.

In modern football, training has given a special importance to positional play, that is, to the rehearsing of tactical play, keeping position while applying different strategies to open the opponent's defense (Zauli, 2002). From young ages, players are trained to keep position as well as to move in coordinated ways to break a defense apart. Positional play is important as it maximizes a team's strengths while occupying the space in a rational way.

FIFA has gone to great lengths to simulate the importance of tactics in the game. In fact, accomplished players can take hours setting up and testing the tactics of their teams. Tactics in *FIFA* imply a classic understanding of tactics: Players can choose a disposition among a large number of variations. Each tactic can then be individually modified, changing the placing of each player as well as their workload and attack/defense balance. I, for instance, play with Barcelona a modified 3–4-3 with a fake striker[17] that falls deep, and two very open wingmen, copying the tactical disposition of some Barcelona matches in the 2011–2012 season. This is not a premade tactic, but one developed over time, adjusting to both my intention of playing like the real Barcelona, and the constraints of the game (playing with a 3-back is extremely dangerous, particularly in online play, as it leaves open counter–attack strategies).

FIFA also allows for a deeper modification of tactics, from the speed of passing to the defense patterns. As praise for *FIFA,* tactics can balance games in which players of different skills meet, since it is possible to stall an excellent player using defensive tactics, much as in real life. *FIFA* seems to have managed to procedurally simulate the importance of tactics. In this aspect, the simulation almost totally converges with the real-life game. However, football, like any other game, is in constant evolution, and perhaps the most interesting evolution witnessed in the beginning of the twenty-first century is the reinterpretation of positional play performed by F.C. Barcelona.

According to the lineup for the 2011 Champions League final match played in Wembley Stadium in London, on May 28th, 2011, Barcelona played a classic 4–3-3. However, in the pitch, things looked very different. In the offensive phase, the players were disposed closer to a 3–5-2, with Alves running up to the midfield and Mascherano taking a slight bend to the right. In the top, Messi played with absolute freedom, often falling deep into midfield, facilitating inner spaces for the two offensive wingmen, Villa and Pedro, to take the spaces he created by displacing Manchester United's defenders. In other words, Messi was not fixed in any position in the pitch, which made him difficult to defend. By moving with freedom, he broke the defensive order of Manchester United, allowing his teammates to create scoring chances.

Seeing Barcelona play that match gave me a glimpse of what some matches in the otherwise not so brilliant 2011–2012 season had proven: that Barcelona is evolving tactical gameplay and positional play thanks to their youth training (Hunter, 2011). Barcelona's players are seldom limited to one position, or one function. Or better, Barcelona's players only function is to touch and go, to pass the ball as fast as possible to the best positioned teammate, while running to position themselves to receive the return pass. When played at full speed, as in Wembley, the ball moves at the speed of a hockey puck, and players seem to know beforehand how and where to move. There are no fixed positions, just moving around and hypnotizing the rivals. I have no doubt that the future of the game, at least the future of professional football, will go in that direction.

FIFA can, as of now, not replicate this evolution of the positional game. It would require AI routines that are still computationally too expensive. When playing with Barcelona, it is possible to imitate the fast-paced passing style of the actual team, but only if a player learns to read the tells of the AI, the way the computer procedurally simulates the moves of the players. That is, there is currently no space for the spontaneous, creative expression through technique that makes Barcelona's side exciting to see.

One of the extraordinary characteristics of contemporary Barcelona is how the three midfielders constantly change position in order to create superiority for passing. That requires, again, spontaneous and contextual reading of the rival, the situation, and the estate of the game. *FIFA* has simulated the speed and precision of Barcelona's passing with stunning accuracy, but the AI-controlled players still

play in predictable patterns, incapable of reading the game and taking true advantage of that speed of passing.

Much like in the case of the rules, playing this kind of modern football in *FIFA* requires the player to understand how the computer has been programmed to replicate the moves of players, and to interpret those AI routines as a way of developing tactics and ways of playing the game. Unlike the game of football, where learning the ways of the ball, technique, and how to play with others is crucial, learning the game of *FIFA* requires procedural thinking (Bogost, 2006), understanding more than football, the way the computer understands football tactics and implements them adjusting to players' behaviors and actions. Playing *FIFA* is playing (with) a computer system.

Stars

What makes a football player a *star,* a defining athlete in the team, for the game? Football is a game that requires excellence in a number of skills, from reflexes and foot-eye coordination, to sense of space and balance. Star players are often those top-level players who, besides the natural and trained qualities required to reach the top of their profession, excel at particular skills (Inglis and Hughson, 2000; Hughson and Inglis, 2002). A goalkeeper with cat-like reflexes, a striker who can score goals anywhere, or a defender who leads a team all qualify as being stars, and examples abound in football.[18]

There are, however, special kinds of stars, players that define teams, players so virtuous in their command of the game that excellence is not enough. The athletic and scoring prowess of Cristiano Ronaldo is unparalleled in modern times, much like Pelé's ballet-like play with Brazil, Beckembauer's understanding of defensive play as the first step in attack, or Johann Cruyff's interpretations of (Rinus Michel's idea of) total football. These are all examples of star players who took the game beyond what was thought possible in their prime time as athletes.

One reason why football simulations are so popular is not just the possibility of playing with the team you root for, but a chance for you to right the wrongs of real life that keep you from being the star. What we want with these simulations is to score goals and win, by controlling/being Cristiano, Rooney, Totti, Messi. Trying out what we can do with these simulated stars is a step in fandom for which computing simulations are offering new degrees of depth and engagement to our fantasies.

But what is lost in the simulation, and what is adapted? Let's start by stating a different question: What is it that makes Messi a star player? Even though he is a top-level professional player, he does not have a privileged physique, at least compared to the athleticism of Cristiano Ronaldo. To understand Messi, you almost need to see him play live. His passing and shooting technique are outstanding, as well as his speed without and with the ball. Still, other players have a similar and even better skill set.

What makes Messi a star player is both his understanding of the game, and the ways he inhabits the football field (Hughson and Inglis, 2002). In the 2011 Wembley Champions League final, Messi excelled, helping Barcelona win their 4th Champions League title. While he did score a goal and generate a number of dangerous situations against Manchester United, what was more astonishing was his deep understanding of the game.

The first Barcelona goal may serve as an example. After Xavi receives the ball some 30 meters away from the goal, Messi notices Pedro running the right wing, so he runs in the opposite direction, leaving Pedro alone and ready to receive Xavi's pass. Messi not only read the situation immediately, but also read his teammate's intentions and created a goal without even touching the ball. Essentially, what Messi did was fool the defenders into moving toward him, thus opening the space for a teammate to take his position and shoot free of mark.

Similarly, in the first 10 minutes of the game, when Barcelona was suffering the aggressive Manchester defense, Messi dropped from his striker position and started playing in the midfield, giving Barcelona a temporary superiority in the midfield that allowed his teammates to get their trademark passing game started. In this position of fake striker, or "lying" striker, Messi has become a football player that will go down in history.

Messi is not only an athlete with outstanding technical qualities, but also a player who can read and experience the game in ways that are creative interpretations of the situations around the game, with or without the ball being in play. Messi, like every star player, understands the totality of the game, as a collective and individual effort.

But the simulated Messi is something different. Thanks to the impressive physics engine underlying *FIFA 12*'s simulation, controlling the Argentinian superstar *feels* like being able to reproduce the moves the player performs in the pitch (Swink, 2009). The low gravity point and the explosive speed are coupled with the compact physique, making the player difficult to tackle. Unlike in previous iterations of the game, playing with a superstar player is no longer a matter of learning to use the controller to perform the so-called "skill movements." It's more a combination of the skills and ability to read, once again, the way the simulation processes the characteristics of the actual player.

Controlling Messi in *FIFA 12* feels like controlling a superpowered avatar that can just plow through the pitch, almost without anyone being able to stop him. However, when playing the game, it does not feel like you are playing with Messi, or at least with the player that can be seen in a stadium, or on television. When the player gains agency of the avatar, it feels like controlling a *better* player than others. But when Messi is steered by the CPU, the avatar's performance has many limits. Individually, it is excellent, but it does not have any influence in the collective game, it does not show any understanding of the game as a collective experience. In this sense, even the adequate simulation of the physical conditions and skills of this player makes it just a *different player*. It is named after Messi, and it bears a

resemblance, but again, playing *with* Messi means understanding a particular simulation system that refers to a reality, but departs from it in critical ways that make the activity of playing with the simulation a different game.

In the case of individual stars, *FIFA* focuses on simulating what is possible to simulate, that is, the physical characteristics of the player rather than the way a player interprets the game. In this sense, again, playing *FIFA* implies understanding a procedural system on different domains. The system controls individual players, and the sense of a team is noticed by the way tactics are implemented, rather than by the way an individual player interprets and plays the game. There is no sense of players *playing* the game, but of a complex set of behaviors decided on a tactical level in which individual players' simulations are operating as modifiers of the tactical situation.

Football and *FIFA* are obviously different things. *FIFA* refers to the football game, and they are therefore related. But the way computing constrains and expands the possibilities of interpretation and implementation force a new type of experience, a different understanding of the game of football on all its main domains that makes *FIFA* a game important and relevant on its own, but one that is different from football. And that is due to the procedural nature of *FIFA*.

Conclusion: Procedural Football

With this chapter I intended to explore the common elements and the divergences between the sport of football and the computer game *FIFA*. The purpose of this research was to trace a genealogy between both games, inquiring into their ontology and the ways in which they create cultures and practices of play.

It is fairly obvious that both football and *FIFA* are games, and that *FIFA* intends to simulate the former using computational techniques. It is precisely in the computational/procedural nature of *FIFA* where we can find the divergence between the games, and where looking at that divergence might be interesting for game studies.

FIFA attempts to *realistically* simulate the game of football. Its designers and developers have looked closely at the beautiful game, the ways it is played, the importance of rules, tactics, and skills, and they have done a phenomenal process of simulating them. For the casual player, *FIFA* feels like a realistic take on football. However, a closer look shows interesting divergences that not only deviate one game from the other, but also impact what playing the game implies, and incidentally what kinds of cultures will derive and can be fostered by *FIFA*.

The main divergences between football and *FIFA* have to do with what computers can do, given the requirements of the audience of the game.[19] In their interpretation of the rules, *FIFA* developers have done away with referee interpretation and the ambiguity of the rules, making the experience of playing more of an understanding of how that translation was made. Tactically speaking, *FIFA* is close to the sport, even though it does not allow for the fluid, flexible touch-and-go football that some modern teams advocate for. And finally, in its simulation of

star players, *FIFA* focuses on individual characteristics rather than on the ways star players interpret the game.

All of these divergences are based on what computer systems excel at. This makes it possible to claim that the simulative divergence between *FIFA* and football is, at heart, a procedural one. Football is a game created and evolved around physicality and interpretation of the rules while playing. *FIFA* is a game created and evolved around the limits of modern computation, around the necessity of translating an interpreted, physical game into a game processed by a computer. The lack of ambiguity makes it a more rigid game, a more consequent interpretation of an ideal game of football.

This has an interesting implication for the play experience. The game of football is played by learning to read other people, including the referee, and by developing technique to control a ball in different pitches, weather conditions, and even with different ball models. *FIFA* players, on the other hand, need to learn how to think procedurally, how to decode the technical implementation of a known set of rules, tactics, and player characteristics, and apply this way of thinking to ways of playing the game.

FIFA is football played procedurally, a game related to football, but with enough divergences from it to claim that these are actually two different games. Interestingly, the procedural nature of *FIFA* play will also have strong implications in the culture and "sportification" of *FIFA*. Excellent players of *FIFA* will be those who can better express themselves creatively through the understanding and manipulation of the procedures of the game. Technique, tactics, and even style will be manifestations of particular understandings of how a computer interprets a set of rules and tactics. What the *FIFA* player does is play with processes, and that will be at the core of the future of *FIFA* as both a spectator game, and an e-sport.

Given that the divergence between *FIFA* and football is due to the procedural nature of play in the computer game, it might be possible to question whether that argument can be extended to other sports computer games, like those that simulate the more formalized American football, or even to other non-sport computer games. Proceduralist studies have focused on narrative and serious games; it might be worthwhile to think about the ways procedural play takes place in sports games.

I am particularly interested in the expression of play given procedural constraints; that is, in the process of appropriating a computer system for expression through play. Even with *FIFA,* it is impossible to *be* Messi, but it is possible to impersonate him through a computer system, and achieve the beauty through play that Messi can achieve in another game. The performative possibilities of procedural play shine when resting at the feet of simulated football stars.

Notes

1. By "football" I refer here to the sport known as soccer by those in a number of countries in which the game is less important than autochthonous games also

known as football. Football in this article is the game played by Leo Messi, not by Tom Brady.

2. By game studies I am referring to the discipline described in Aarseth (2001).

3. A brief reference list of sports- and videogames-related literature can be found here: *http://tltaylor.com/teaching/e-sports-and-pro-gaming-literature/* (accessed 11/3/2012).

4. Of course, the question of the nature of sports has been addressed by the philosophy of sports and even by sports sociology. Sports are, however, largely absent from the domain of game studies, particularly if compared to topics such as narrative or politics.

5. See Aarseth (2003).

6. Even though it is a journalistic text, Hunter (2011) is a reference text for understanding the culture and importance of F.C. Barcelona in modern football.

7. It is possible to find examples of sports games that do not simulate actual sports. Ramiro Corbetta's *Hokra* is an example.

8. Other work on sports and games can be found in the tradition of the sociology of sports. However, this paper takes a more classical humanistic approach to the question of the ontology of games, and therefore Suits will be the initial reference point.

9. Introduced in 1981 in England and popularized by the 1994 World Cup. For a mathematical analysis of some of the implications of this rule, see Bernholt, Gülich, Hofmeister, and Schmitt (1999).

10. The back-pass rule was introduced in 1992.

11. The notion of Barcelona being more than a club was born during the Franco dictatorship, as a way of expressing nationalist sentiment under the "protected" discourse of play. In these corporate times, Barcelona has exploited that notion by associating its brand with Unicef (Hunter, 2011).

12. For an understanding of procedurality, see Bogost (2006) and Aarseth and Harrigan (2004). Incidentally, it could be argued that simulated football is an egordic adaptation of the game of football, following concepts coined by Aarseth (1997). Incidentally, it could be argued that much of the aesthetics of sports games are procedural simulations of both the game and the media broadcasting of these events.

13. Even though FIFA has introduced different referees with different personalities, personalizing the interaction with them. However, in my experience, few players online ever discuss the referee, or even blame him for the results.

14. The offside position is any in which an active player is situated behind the opposing team's defensive line at the moment of a pass directed to him. It is specified in FIFA's rules of the game under Law 11 (FIFA, 2011, p. 33).

15. Even though the temptation of technology lurks in modern soccer (by introducing a chip inside the ball to trace its movement), FIFA is a notoriously conservative ruler of the laws of the game, often dismissing technical helps in favor of human refereeing (as with the introduction of two extra referees on the end lines to check for goals and fouls in the box).

16. These arcane numbers refer to the tactical disposition of players in the pitch, starting from the goalkeeper onward. So 4–4–2 means 4 defenders, 4 midfielders, and 2 attackers.

17. A fake striker, fake 9, or false forward defines the goal-scoring player who takes an untraditional position in the attacking front, not staying static but running from the midfield into the box.

18. For the philosophical importance of performance in soccer and sports see Eylon and Horowits (2010), or more generally Gumbrecht (2006) or Schmitz (1988).

19. Incidentally, the field of robotic football has addressed many of these formalizing questions before. See Dylla, Ferrein, Lakemeyer et al. (2008) and Stone, Quinlan and Hester (2010).

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3

WHAT ARE SPORTS VIDEOGAMES?

Ian Bogost

Imagine: millennia hence, after our civilization has long been destroyed and sentient extraterrestrials arrive by happenstance on our planet, will we have left them adequate relics to explain our culture without us? It's a test you can run to zero the scales of your cultural research—the alien archaeology test, we might call it. Passing this test, even hypothetically, is a good sign of a healthy historical program on a particular subject. Likewise, failing it is a signal that we could do a better job of evaluating and explaining that subject.

When it comes to sports videogames, we've probably failed the alien archaeology test. Sports videogames still sit on the sidelines, so to speak, of more elaborate study in both game studies and sports studies. Little ink has been spilled on the subject—a fact this volume seeks to correct, in part. It's a counterintuitive failing, since sports games' popularity should inspire deep interest. After all, both Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) in the early 2000s and Social Games in the early 2010s spurred a boost in scholarly and popular discussion, interest partly justified by the realization that so many people were playing such games, and for that reason alone we ought to give them greater attention.[1] Yet, the fact that so many people play sports videogames—85 million copies of *Madden NFL* alone were sold as of 2010, raking in over $3 billion (Hruby, 2010)—doesn't seem to have inspired similar urgency.

It's an ironic failing, since such a large part of videogames' origins are rooted in sports. The electronic tennis game Willy Higinbotham improvised at Brookhaven Lab's Instrumentation Division in 1958 (generally known as "Tennis for Two") is often called "the first videogame" (http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/history/higinbotham.asp). Ralph Baer's 1969 Brown Box prototype, eventually commercialized as the first home console system, the Magnavox Odyssey, was designed to play simple adaptations of popular sports, including ping–pong, volleyball, and

football. Nolan Bushnell and Al Alcorn's 1972 coin-op *Pong* made arcade play popular with a similar version of table tennis. And likewise, early coin-op games such as *Gran Trak 10* (Atari, 1974) and *Sprint 2* (Kee Games, 1976) brought renditions of competitive driving into bars and bowling alleys. These weren't the only early videogames, but they were influential and appealing partly because they adapted popular sports—subjects players already knew and loved.

Where scholarly research or popular coverage of sports videogames has taken place, it often deals with the usage of sports games in relation to "real" sports—that is, physical play in formal or informal settings. In 2010 the French business school ESSEC published a study suggesting that 38% of youth boys who play sports videogames also practice a sport "in real life." [2] An MIT Comparative Media Studies thesis by Lauren Silberman (2009) argues that elite athletes play sports videogames to help stimulate the pursuit of greater athletic performance in such competitors. Athletes seem to agree: U.S. Major League Soccer forward Conor Chinn has said that playing EA's *FIFA Soccer* "gets your soccer brain started that day" (Brescia, 2010). And after its association banned drivers from test runs on real tracks, NASCAR drivers like Joey Logano began using the simulation *iRacing.com* to learn new tracks.

Since the release of Nintendo Wii in 2006, innumerable accounts of the health benefits of simulated sports games have appeared, many arguing that videogames with physical interfaces make children more active, fit, and healthy (Graf et al., 2009)—or that they don't (Baranowski et al., 2012). Such accounts of the value of sports videogames are welcome even if they are also instrumental: They assume that the purpose of sports games rests in getting players to stop playing them, so they can play "for real." If sports videogames have any value, that value must come from their service to actual sports. The question typically posed of sports games is not *how do you play?* or *how do you improve?* or even *are they beautiful?* but rather, *what are they good for*?

What Is a Sports Videogame?

Here's a different question: what is a sports videogame, anyway?

One answer—popular among scholars and critics who paradoxically despise both sports and television even as they celebrate videogames—is that sports games are simulations of televised sports, simulacra of broadcast TV.[3] This is clearly the case for some games, including the most popular sports franchise annuals like *FIFA* and *Madden*. And there's no doubt that earlier games such as *Tecmo Bowl* (1988) and *Intellivision World Series Baseball* (1983) referenced the grammars of televised sports in their respective eras. But it's not always true—nor was it necessarily ever true. Players were enjoying sports videogames long before games even came close to matching the then-current quality of broadcast sports. *Intellivision PGA Golf* (1981), *California Games* (1987), and *Sensible Soccer* (1992) didn't resemble television in the way *FIFA* and *Madden* do today, but they were all

well-loved nevertheless. To claim that sports videogames strive for the ideal of television broadcast is to forget the historical chasm between televised sports and computer-simulated sports. For example, when Mattel published *Intellivision World Series Baseball* in 1983, they hoped to mimic ABC or ESPN less than they hoped to best Atari, whose home console hardware made it difficult for programmers to recreate team sports realistically. To highlight the difference, Mattel ran television ads featuring George Plimpton, who showed the two systems side by side, explaining how much "more like the real thing" Intellivision's titles were. Even if some sports games aim for television-style spectatorship, such an account is insufficient to explain all such games.

Instead, sports videogames could be seen as computational translations of sports—as an adaptation of a sport for play inside a computer. That's former *Madden* producer Ernest Adams' answer, which he offers definitively in one of his game design textbooks (2006): "A sports game simulates some aspect of a real or imaginary athletic sport, whether it is playing in matches, managing a team or career, or both. Match play uses physical and strategic challenges; the management challenges are chiefly economic" (p. 482).

As Intellivision's example suggests and as common sense confirms, many sports games do strive to simulate sports. But as with the appeal to television broadcast, things become slippery very quickly. We can see it in Adams' definition: sports games simulate some aspect of a sport. Which aspects do designers choose to simulate, and which do they chose to omit? Do designers make such choices willingly, or are their choices limited by technical constraints, or league licensor rules, or even the laws of physics? Certainly the creators of *Madden* made different choices when creating a football game for the Apple II in 1988 than they did when creating one for the PlayStation 3 in 2012. All told, even if we were to accept that sports videogames simulate some aspect of a real or imaginary athletic sport, that conclusion doesn't tell us very much about sports videogames. It's not quite a tautology, but it's close: A sports videogame is a videogame based on a sport.

What's a Sport, For That Matter?

There's a reason it's not enough just to say that sports games simulate some aspect of sports: sports are weird and hard to pin down even before videogames enter the picture. Consider an obscure and unusual example: Sport Stacking, a sport in which competitors rapidly stack and unstack plastic cups in predetermined sequences. Absurd though it may sound at first, Sport Stacking is serious. It has its own governing body, the World Sport Stacking Association, and has "verified" over 400,000 cup stackers of all ages worldwide (http://www.thewssa.com/stackup/2011_stackup/). I can hear you laughing, but take a break and watch a few web videos of its most accomplished competitors (most of whom are kids), and you'll find all the drama, prowess, and intrigue of far less esoteric sports.[4]

Few would argue that Sport Stacking is as popular or appealing a sport as gymnastics or water polo, but it shows how thin the membrane between an arbitrary activity and a sport really is. Soccer, football, basketball, baseball, cricket, and ice hockey might be the world's top sports, but so many others exist too—ultimate frisbee, jai alai, roller derby, chess boxing, ferret legging, Quidditch—just about anything can be taken seriously as a mental, social, or physical contest, that is, taken as a sport.

The definition and typology of sports themselves are hardly a matter of agreement. Among the many ontologies of sport is that of folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand, whose influence is broad thanks to his popular folklore textbook. Brunvand distinguishes (1998) between folk games and institutional games. Folk games are a form of structured play with objectives and rules, but are variable and generally need no special equipment or playing area. By contrast, institutional games are highly organized with codified rules, and played in a regulation area with specialty equipment. A typical illustration of Brunvand's typology compares the game of H–O–R–S–E with NBA basketball.[5] It's possible to play H–O–R–S–E without a regulation basketball, court, or net.

Insightful though Brunvand's categories may be, like most formal distinctions they quickly bleed into one another in complicated ways. Basketball, for example, was invented in 1891 by the Canadian physician James Naismith as a folk game meant to give youth something to do to keep them out of trouble in the winter. It "folksified" institutionalized games like soccer, football, and hockey in just the ways Brunvand's categories suggest—in fact, the original version of basketball used a soccer ball. Over time, of course, basketball became institutionalized itself, eventually accreting into leagues like the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). But after this institutionalization, folk versions of basketball arose, like H–O–R–S–E. The relationship between folk and institutional games is not nearly so cut and dried as Brunvand would have it. In fact, from 2009 to 2011, there was even an NBA All-Star H–O–R–S–E Competition during the league's all-star weekend. All sports are folk games, really. Institutional games are just local maxima in the trajectory of folk games. Folk games become institutional games, and institutional games erupt into folk games, and on and on.

Examples like these show how folk and institutional games intertwine with one another over time, making it hard to pin them down definitively. When we take this perspective, it becomes increasingly difficult to talk about sports as stable, well-known things that we could just "simulate" in the first place, as if "basketball" or "football" were eternal, unchanging forms. If someone asked you to make a videogame version of basketball, an NBA-style professional league game might come to mind first. But certainly a game like *One on One: Dr. J vs. Larry Bird* (1983) or even *Candystand.com H.O.R.S.E.* (http://www.candystand.com/play/horse) would also qualify.

Sports and Variation

Let's indulge in a quick tour through a familiar example to drive home just how difficult it is to pin down the origins of sports. Consider sports played by manipulating a ball with nonpreferred parts of the body. We call it soccer (or football), and we take it as a stable, certain thing, a sport that could be simulated in a computer game. But is it? As it turns out, humans have been playing versions of this game for millennia.

By 3000 BC, ancient Mesoamericans played a foot and ball game called Pok-A-Tok. Players scored by hitting round discs projected from straight, narrow walls, or by passing the ball with the knees, hips, or elbows through a suspended ring, small and very high off the ground. Scoring usually ended the game, it was so impossible.

Half a millennium later in ancient China, a game called Tsu Chu asked players to kick a ball into a small net set atop bamboo canes high above the ground.

From the second century BC, the Greeks and Romans played a kicking and throwing game variously called Episkuros or Pheninda or Harpastum, played with an inflated ball (we'll return to this example soon).

By AD 300, the Japanese had developed Kemari, a team game played with a stuffed deerskin ball. Players juggled the ball and passed it to one another.

During the European Middle Ages, whole villages would sometimes kick an inflated pig bladder toward a specific landmark. Historians now call the game Mob Football, not only thanks to its large numbers of players, but also because of its carnivalesque violence.

During the same era, the French played La Choule: a kind of anything-goes version of football in which players sought to get a ball into a goal by any means necessary. Both Mob Football and La Choule were banned by the fourteenth century over concerns for their violent impropriety.

In renaissance Italy, large teams of aristocrats played Calcio, a game in which players moved a ball to a particular spot on the pitch (usually a town square) with either feet or hands.

In the seventeenth century, Native Americans played Pasuckuakohowog, a ceremonial foot and ball match played on beaches or clearings over many days, with as many as 500 players.

Indeed, it wasn't until 1862 that a lawyer called Cobb Morley suggested creating a governing body to regulate the various forms of football being played at English schools. The Laws of the Game were drafted, and the Football Association formed.

Given this brief (and incomplete) account of five millennia of foot and ball games, if we ask the seemingly naive question "What is football?" it becomes clear that answers are far less obvious than they may seem. Are we asking about the origins of Association Football? Similar games that may or may not have had an impact on that sport's development? Games with similar structures or rules? Played in a similar manner? With a common lineage? Can we ever know the

answers to those questions anyway, due to the imprecision of historical evidence? Is "football" meant only to refer to a sport of the present? And even if so, when the International Football Association Board (IFAB) hands down rule changes like the 1992 ban on goalkeepers handling back-passes, is football still football? For that matter, is American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) soccer the same as an alley match in a Brazilian favela? A Premiere League match? Is "football" even the same as "soccer"?

Even in the present moment, the game we call football or soccer is no less contingent than are any of its precedents. Pok-A-Tok seems to have carried on for four millennia, which makes it more than just a curious "precursor" to soccer. Perhaps in another few thousand years, the aliens who take over our planet will note the quaint and weird sport of Association Football, an ancient precursor to whatever becomes their modern foot –and ball game. Perhaps it will be played with the heads of vanquished humans.

Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested (1953) the idea of "family resemblance" to describe things that are connected by a number of loosely overlapping similarities rather than a few common features. Games serve as his example of the concept: "for if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that" (p. 66). At first this strategy seems like it might be helpful in explaining what sports are, but Wittgenstein's purpose is to clarify the philosophical concept of family resemblance, not to offer much insight on games themselves. To say that games have affinities or "overlapping fibers" does help dampen the cold fixity of formalism, but it doesn't help us understand the relationship between various specific kinds of games, or sports, or types of football. Take doughnuts instead of games. Old fashioneds, crullers, jelly-filleds, and doughnut holes may only share a family resemblance, but what makes them all "doughnuts" is that they are sold at a doughnut shop and transported to the office kitchen in a doughnut box. "I brought doughnuts."

On the one hand, it's insufficient to distinguish between just two kinds of sports, as Brunvand does. But on the other hand, it's equally insufficient to assume that sports are all part of an indistinguishable field of differently related entities. Something more than just institutionalization or affinity is needed to explain the origins and evolution of sports.

A Lesson in Variation: Pheninda

Rather than chunking the domain of sports into a finite number of categories, we might instead reflect on the chains of influences and revisions that seem so common to sport. Among the many insights of philosopher Jacques Derrida is the concept of iterability. When someone utters a word or concept, it is comprehensible because it has the capacity to be repeated. If I say "soccer" or "football" or "doughnut," you know what I mean thanks to the prior uses of such terms. Iterability allows signs to be repeated in different situations and contexts.

Like many poststructuralists, Derrida was first concerned with language and texts. But iterability also applies to other sorts of things, like pastries and games.[6] Iteration doesn't just repeat something, but also alters it (Derrida, 1988, p. 62). Sports evolve and change through iteration, and the name "trace," which Derrida gives to the "absent present" that an iteration iterates, does a better job of capturing the weird relationships at work in sport. Specific sports trace some absent arche-sport that never really existed.

Instead of focusing on essence, then, what if we looked to the ways different sports vary as a means to understanding them. Take pheninda—the foot and ball game played in ancient Greece and Rome. It teaches a lesson in just how unexamined the features that make a sport a sport really are, and how great a role variation really plays in comprehending sport.

In 1890, *Classical Review* published an article by G.E. Marinden on the game—known as harpastum in Latin or pheninda in Greek. These names are mostly modern conveniences, titles contrived so nineteenth-century philologists could refer to ancient sports in the way they referred to modern ones. But the Greeks and Romans didn't call their games by convenient titles like we do today, which is part of the problem. Instead, the shorthand "pheninda" refers to a variety of foot – and ball games played in the ancient world, games played "περί τῆς σμικρᾶς σφαίρας," or "with a small ball." Marinden takes up a set of gripes with the prevailing theories of ancient ball games among classicists of the nineteenth century.

Specifically, he points out that although ancient games are often compared to modern sports such as tennis or golf or rugby or football, there is scarce evidence to support these claims. For example, the listing for the greco-roman ball game episkyros (ἐπίσκυρος) in the canonical Liddell & Scott Greek-English Lexicon reads, "A ball-game resembling Rugby football." But there's really no way to know that episkyros resembled rugby. For one thing, the historical record makes it quite difficult to discern the rules, manner, and context of play—the Greeks didn't have leagues like post-Victorian sports do. For another thing, the game seems to have varied by Greek city-state; it was reportedly much more violent in Sparta, for example. And for another thing, what's enough similarity to constitute "resemblance," anyway? Once more, imagine our future alien overlords, performing a history of contemporary sport. An account claiming that baseball, basketball, and football are similar sorts of ball games played on teams might offer a satisfactory starting point, but it's the details of each of these sports that make them meaningfully different for today's players and fans. Really, the most we can say accurately about episkyros is something like "episkyros was a sport like rugby is a sport," but that's hardly an informative observation.

In this vein, Marinden argues that his predecessors are wrong when they identify episkyros (ἐπίσκυρος), pheninda (φενίνδα), and harpaston (ἁρπάστον) as different games. Rather, he suggests that they are not different games at all, but just variants of the same game.

Here's his evidence: one of the primary sources for then-contemporary discussion of ancient sport comes from Galen of Pergamon, a second-century AD physician and philosopher. Galen had identified that the use of plurals in identifying the names of the games ("games played with small round balls") were used to describe different degrees of exertion for different abilities or contexts. But Marinden points out the absurdity of this distinction, noting that specific games are played in various ways at different times, even within a single match: "Have we never heard in the modern game of football of a man playing 'goals' because accident or age has made him a less active runner than he once was?" (p. 146). Marinden also rightly observes that the same game can be played in different ways within a single session for reasons of tactics: "The player may take up a position far from the centre, where he will have chiefly to exercise his arms in throwing, or he may have a great deal of running and few long throws" (p. 146). Finally, Marinden presents evidence from a statement of Athenaeus that he believes ends any doubt that pheninda is not merely a synonym of harpastum. Athenaeus writes, "one [played] with a ball was called harpaston/phaininda (διὰ τῆς σφαίρας ἁρπάστον φαινίνδα ἐκαλεῖτο)" (p. 146), the two names refered to as one in the singular. Marinden clarifies that Athenaeus calls the sport in question "his favourite game" (p. 146), again in the singular, which the former takes as evidence that the doubled name really refers to a single sport.

Marinden concludes that the various terms modern critics have taken for different sports are really just different ways that the Greeks referred to variations on a common sport. It's hard to reconstruct their thought completely, but we can make some educated guesses. Episkyros seems to have something to do with the number of players in a game—the word means *common*, or *brought together*. Perhaps we can imagine that the difference is one like we might draw between a game of one-on-one and a full game of basketball. Ephenakize (ἐφενάκιζε), from which pheninda is derived, means feigning a throw, while harpaze (ἥρπαζε) refers to an interception. In a similar case, where previous critics had assumed that three different games are described in the Latin citation "tatatim, expulsim, raptim ludere" ("to play catch, hit, and snatch"), Marinden observes that "they have confused methods of playing with games" (p. 148). He continues:

> Tatatim means to play by catching, expulsim means to strike the ball without holding it, and raptim describes interception. Here would come in the manœuvres from which the names of the game arose: his intercepting the ball is expressed by ἁρπάστον [harpaston], the feint of throwing in order to make his opponents rush in a wrong direction suggested the name φενίνδα [pheninda].

Marinden concludes that "These methods are not games, but strokes, which might be employed in various games" (pp. 148–149).

Today, we would probably call them "plays" instead of "strokes." Essentially, Marinden's exception to his predecessors is that they make a mistake akin to taking "passing" and "rushing" as two different games, instead of understanding them as different tactics in the same game, American football. Actually, we sometimes refer to these maneuvers with the word game, too ("the Redskins' rushing game")—confusing things in just the way the ancients had done with harpastum and pheninda. It's completely reasonable to imagine the aliens unearthing sports news broadcasts and wrongly concluding that there are two kinds of American football, passing and rushing.

There's a lesson we ought to learn from Marinden's account of ancient foot-and-ball games, and it's the same one we learn from Derrida's more abstract concept of iterability: if there's one thing sports share in common, it's a lack of origins. There's clearly a strong evolutionary aspect to sport, and sports more often evolve than they invent themselves. Variation seems to be the only thing that holds a sport together. Indeed, even the successful invented sports (like basketball) then evolve away from their common origins.

Sports Videogames as Sports Variants

It's useful to study antiquity because the ancient world reminds us that distance amplifies ambiguity. Given only broken historical evidence, it's not quite clear what a game like EA *FIFA Soccer 2013* would suggest about the game of soccer. Imagine that three millennia hence, our descendents rediscover the idea of studying games—a novel scholarly pursuit indeed—and strive to understand the various nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of football based on the visual evidence. Given side-by-side screen captures from a PlayStation 3 match of EA *FIFA* and an HDTV airing of a FIFA World Cup match, could you tell which one is "real" and which one is "simulated?" I doubt it.

The ways we play sports should make it clear that even within an era, there is a strong measure of variation and convenience that drives our activity, and we're able to blend these variants with great flexibility. Some have proper names and rules (H-O-R-S-E), while others don't (shooting hoops). Some are more playful (juggling a soccer ball), while others are more competitive (competing in a Championship League match). Some are contingent and local (when a child says, "let's go play football"), while others are autarkic and global (the FIFA World Cup).

When it comes to sports videogames, we've been making the harpastum/pheninda mistake. There's no doubt that videogames often simulate aspects of professional play, but that's not what defines them, not entirely, anyway. Sports videogames are not simulations of sports, but variants of sports. Or put differently, sports videogames are just another way to play sports.

Sensible Soccer is just a kind of soccer. EA *Madden NFL 2012* is just a kind of American football. Wii Sports includes a kind of bowling and boxing and baseball. Just as H-O-R-S-E and the NBA give us different ways to play basketball,

so games like *One on One: Dr. J vs. Larry Bird* and *NFL Street* also give us different ways to play basketball.

I want you to take this claim very literally. Even if a videogame, as a work of software, has to simulate aspects of the world rather than carrying play out in nature or in an arena, it is no less "football" or "hockey" or whatever than a game played on a pitch or a court. A sports videogame is just another variant of the imaginary, mythical arche-game it interprets, even though it is played on a couch and a computer and a television. Apart from being delightfully strange and provocative, this interpretation also explains two curious facts about sports videogames.

First, why so many players of sports videogames are also—and perhaps primarily—sports fans, spectators, and players (Stein et al., 2012). For a lot of people, the Playstation is just an appliance for *FIFA* or *Madden*—as an EA producer put it (Constantine 2009), "you're either a sports gamer, or you're a gamer." Their interest is not in videogames really, but in sports. Videogames are just one way of partaking of sport. For them it's like buying a basketball hoop.

And second, why videogame researchers have posed so few questions about sports videogames. Among the downsides of area studies, its participants tend to obsess over their own object of study, forcing it to center stage unnaturally at times. But the most interesting observations about sports videogames are contained as much or more in the world of sport as in the world of videogames.[7]

Startling though it may be to realize that sports videogames are just sports variants, there are some precedents more obviously germane to videogames that make it somewhat less so. After all, variation is at the center of my argument. All that sports have in common is variation, and no particular variation is any more or less valid than any other—even if some are clearly far more popular. Variation is common to games, and there are many videogames that already benefit from the more liberal understanding of variation I want to apply to sports games.

For example, in the early days of home videogame consoles, publishers packed variations of the same game onto the small space of a cartridge in order to make the product seem more valuable. *Combat* (1977), the pack-in title for the Atari Video Computer System, boasted "27 video games" on its box, of the types "Tank, Tank Pong, Biplane, Invisible Tank, and Jet Fighter." In some cases, the individual games looked and played very differently; for example, the airplane variants allowed the vehicle to wrap around the screen, while the tank variants bounded the playing field on all sides. In other cases, the variants were quite similar to one another; for example, some of the tank games feature bouncing projectiles, while others make the tank invisible except while it shoots. The rationale for these variants was primarily technical—In 1977, Atari VCS games had to fit on a 2k ROM, and variants offered an easy way to maximize the amount of play possible from a minimal code base. In today's games, variation exhibits itself somewhat differently: in game modes, for one, like the multiplayer death match common in linear first-person shooters, or the ability to play an action game in story mode or in arcade mode.

Likewise, videogames themselves are often variants of other games. A digital version of a tabletop game such as chess or backgammon might emulate the physical tokens and boards of the original, or it might interpret its presentation or rules in a different way, like *Battle Chess* (1988). Because chess is closer to a pure formal system, we seem much more willing to allow that the "gameness" of chess is more or less equivalent when it takes place inside a computer, even though the computational version is really a variant.

We could say the same thing of Windows *Solitaire*. It doesn't seem to bother anyone that *Solitaire* doesn't require the player to perform the para-athletic act of shuffling cards, for example, even though such a gesture is fundamental to playing solitaire effectively with real cards. And by the same token, Windows *Solitaire* regulates the dealing of cards from the stack, making it impossible to cheat at the game.

Finally, individual videogames are often variants of themselves, translations or adaptations of previous editions on other platforms. Atari VCS *Pac-Man* (1982) may have been scorned for failing to reproduce the arcade experience of the original, but the fact that such disappointment could surface in the first place requires a playership capable of understanding the one as an attempt to recreate the other. Likewise, a more successful platform-to-platform adaptation such as the influential 3D-translation of the Mario franchise in *Super Mario 64* (1996) can become so influential as to set standards and conventions for a genre (the 3D action–adventure).

These precedents are all internal to games, in the sense that where variation does occur, it varies within the same overall domain—systems of formal rules at a minimum, but more frequently digital expressions of formal rules: understanding *Solitaire* (the Windows program) as a variant of Klondike (the card game), which is itself one variant of a larger set of solitaire card games.

Examples of Sport Variation in Videogames

It may take some squinting to see the shift from a physical, global, competitive sport to a piece of software run in a living room, but when we choose to see sports videogames as sports variants, some productive observations emerge.

Super Mario Strikers (2005) is a simplified, five-on-five soccer game with Mario universe characters and some magical upgrades and additions. Play is cartoon-like and overtly aggressive in a way that association football would not allow. Moreover, players can secure Mario-themed power-ups like turtle shells and banana peels, much like in *Mario Kart*, which they can unleash on the field, wreaking havoc. Additionally, the pitch is protected on all sides by a force field, which deflects the ball when contacted, eliminating corner kicks, throw-ins, and other set pieces from the game.

While no "real-world" soccer variant I know of allows players to hurl magical shells at one another, *Super Mario Strikers* shares much in common with indoor

soccer, which is played on a smaller field or court (usually indoors), and which allows for the ball to be struck off the walls without penalty. Indoor soccer also reduces the size of the team to six, eliminates the offside rule, and reduces the duration of matches. All told, these changes make indoor soccer a more informal and ad-hoc game.

I don't mean to suggest that *Super Mario Strikers* is an adaptation of indoor soccer, or even that the videogame is similar to indoor soccer. Clearly there are numerous fundamental differences between the two, not the least of which is that *Super Mario Strikers* requires no physical exertion and allows temporary invincibility thanks to star power-ups. Rather, *Super Mario Strikers* is a kind of soccer just as indoor soccer is a kind of soccer. They are two variants similar along some axes and different along others.

Take another example: the bowling game in *Wii Sports* (2006), which comes packed-in with every North American Wii console. The game is crude and rudimentary in its graphics, hardly matching the visual realism possible in videogames today, even on the modestly powered Wii. But by focusing less on on-screen presentation and more on a physical abstraction of the act of winding up and releasing the ball, the game offers a different take on a sport than we are accustomed to finding in videogames.

That said, despite marketing messages claiming *Wii Sports* feels "just like the real thing," nobody would mistake *Wii Sports* bowling for ordinary bowling. But since it uses the light, portable, and inexpensive Wii remote, it's possible to play a variation of bowling that doesn't demand the physical strength of ordinary bowling. Some might decry such sloth, lamenting that players don't get up and play "for real." But the physical facility of Wii play has helped make the game popular among elderly populations, particularly those in nursing homes and other care facilities who might have bowled during the heyday of leagues in the last century, but who no longer have the strength or mobility to do so.

Another seemingly minor aspect of *Wii Sports* bowling makes it a particularly unique videogame variant of the sport. Most videogames focus all attention on the screen and on play; turning away to do something else isn't desirable. But thanks to the small speaker built into the Wii remotes, *Wii Sports* bowling sends an audible notification to a player when his or her turn has come. Since the game is best played in groups, and since players often collect in groups larger than four (the maximum number of simultaneous players in *Wii Sports*), it's common for players to converse and visit with one another while they await their turn. The Wii remote audio cues not only help move play along, but also support the informal social environment in which the game is played. And as it happens, that pattern of play bears much in common with traditional bowling: It's a sport that's most often played for social reasons, in which the act of play is a distraction from the socialization rather than the other way around. Seen in this light, *Wii Sports* bowling offers a variation of bowling that is more like the traditional, physical version of that sport than it is like another kind of computer game.

Returning to the sports videogames that seem most similar to professional sports, we can safely admit that those games do bear considerable similarity to televised sport, for now we can see that such a perspective is not a necessary one. The spectatorship that professional and amateur sports alike provide can also become a register on which videogames carry out their variation of a particular sport. Some games, such as *FIFA* and *Madden*, do this partly by recreating the familiar visual style and technique of television broadcast. But in so doing, those games also produce their own spectatorship, as friends watch one another operate a familiar league, season, team, or player rather than seeing outcomes emerge from afar.

Beyond pro ball sims, we also find games that have very little to do with traditional sports becoming spectator affairs in their own right—games like *Starcraft* (1998), *Street Fighter* (1987–2008), and *Half-Life Counter-Strike* (1999–2003), all of which have underwritten large and sophisticated competition and spectatorship cultures while bearing next to no similarity in theme and operation to more familiar sports such as football and baseball (Taylor, 2011). These games intersect with sports the same way that chess, poker, and other competitive versions of non-athletic pastimes do.

And beyond spectacle, *FIFA* and *Madden* offer much more than just a simulated television viewership experience. Thanks to annual updates and detailed renderings of league rosters, team playbooks, and player abilities, players of these games can geek out over the subtlest details of tiny nooks and crannies within a favorite sport. Just as players of fantasy football rely on deep knowledge to assemble and manage a custom team, so players of *Madden* can customize, adjust, and respond to large or small details within the current snapshot of a professional league. In *Madden NFL 13* (2012), for example, players can play an interconnected career mode as a coach or as a player. The *Madden* series both supports and encourages an exploration of the dynamics of football in depth and over time.

Design and Experience

In his textbook on game design, Ernest Adams argues for realism and accuracy in sports videogames: "for dedicated fans, the game must be a reasonably accurate depiction of the real thing, and fans will see any deviation as a flaw" (2006, p. 482). But if we start seeing sports videogames as variants of sports rather than just as simulations or adaptations of them, then opportunities for new interpretations of sport in videogames present themselves as much as do new videogame renditions of familiar ways of playing sports. It's a technique that can benefit players and critics as much as designers. The latter might want to explore the unexplored space in videogame variations of sports for creative or commercial opportunities, but players and critics can benefit from such study by discovering new ways to envision and play familiar games.

One way to find such white space is simply to pick two properties of videogames or of sport and to render a quadrant-chart that maps both traditional sports variants and videogame sports variants. For example, Figure 1 charts competitiveness against spectacle, two properties often associated with traditional sports, but sometimes thought to be optional categories in videogames.

For the purposes of this illustration, I made educated assessments of each game's relative intensity of spectacle and competition, choosing values between zero and one to represent the degree to which a particular game matched a selection criterion. Naturally, more rigorous qualitative methods could also be used to establish the various properties of individual games.

Though this chart hardly depicts an exhaustive account of sports or sports videogames, given just two dozen results, we can already see that spectacular, highly competitive games exist in both traditional and videogame sports variants, but that these games (*NBA*, *Starcraft*, and *World Series Poker*, for example) are highly
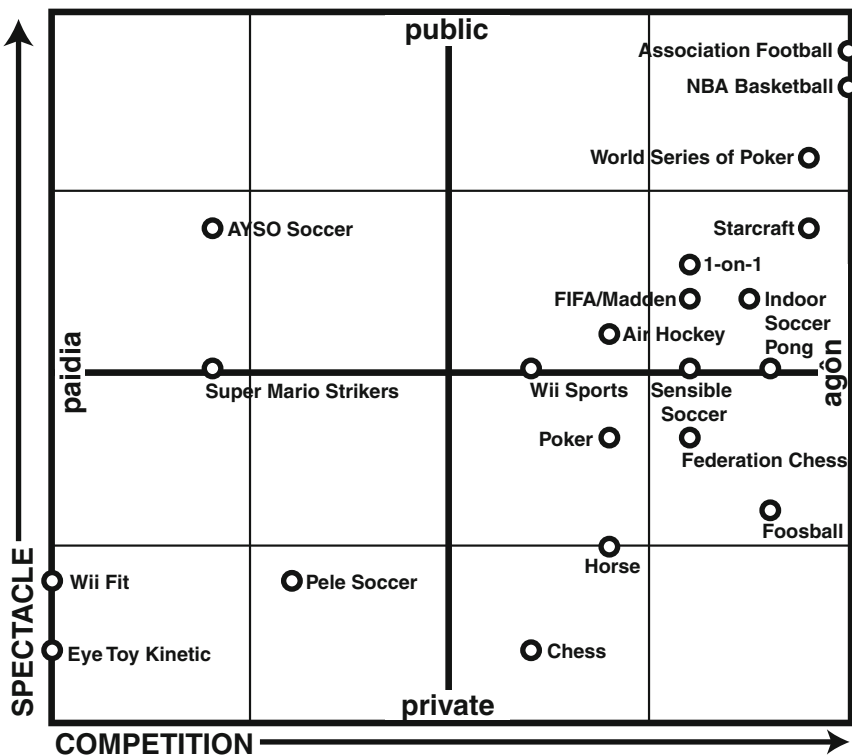
FIGURE 3.1 A quadrant chart mapping spectacle against competitiveness. The 24 games chosen represent a sample meant to maximize variety rather than a complete account of the design space.

demanding, require deep knowledge and/or ability, and tend to be somewhat exclusionary. By contrast, in their commonest form, popular, widely played sports variants such as *Wii Sports*, poker, H–O–R–S–E, and air hockey tend to offer a moderate level of both spectacle and competitiveness, striking an interesting balance between public and private play, and free play and competition. Finally, the relative emptiness of the top right quadrant of the graph suggests that few sports variants offer lower competition matched with higher spectacle. AYSO soccer is popular partly because of these traits—it allows young kids to participate in a public setting without the intense pressure of serious competition. Given the appeal of such a formula, it would be interesting to find (or create) a videogame that could capture those properties at home, or on the go.

Figure 2 shows another view of the sports variant landscape, this time charting tradition against athleticism. This chart is somewhat different from the last, since it assumes that there is a more and less "traditional" account of different sports, with something like chess offering very limited variation overall, and games like *Pele Soccer* (1981) or *Super Mario Strikers* varying considerably from the currently
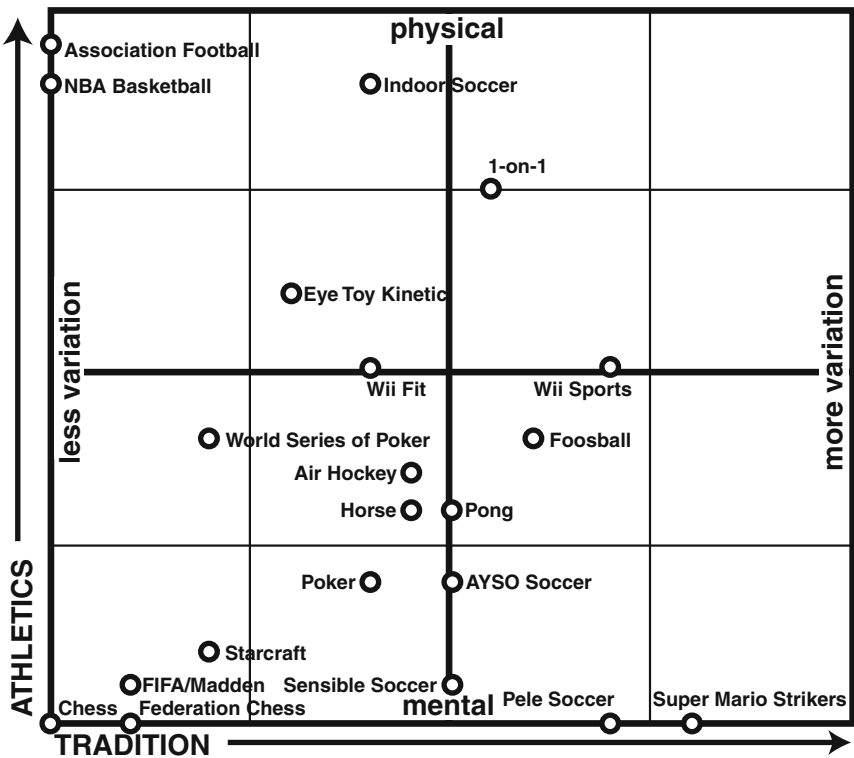
FIGURE 3.2 A quadrant chart mapping tradition against athleticism in traditional and videogame sport variants.

canonical versions of soccer writ large. The vertical axis accounts for the level of physical exertion each sport variant demands. Not surprisingly, most of the videogames fall at or near the bottom of the chart, since they don't require much athletic effort.

At the center of the athleticism axis (near the middle of the chart), things get more interesting: There we find *Wii Sports*, the Nintendo balance board fitness game *Wii Fit* (2008), air hockey, and foosball all grouped near one another. Given the studies cited above that question the physical impact of console games using the Wii and Kinect hardware, it is perhaps not surprising to note that *Wii Sports* might share more in common with foosball than it does with aerobic exercise. At the same time, the empty upper right quadrant again suggests opportunity for invention. Most popular physical exertion videogames attempt to closely match the real activities that inspire them. But new sports that offer significant variation along with higher exertion might represent unmet opportunities.

If we see sports videogames as nothing more than copies of or homages to the court and the pitch, then we don't know what we miss out on. After all, from football to *Sensible Soccer*, from pheninda to *Starcraft*, sports evolved out of randomness and obscurity as much as deliberation and planning. By allowing sports videogames to participate in the ecosystem of sports writ large, we free them from the arbitrary shackles of their computational, simulated, televisual existence and allow them to interact with the long history and wide variety of sports of all kinds. Allowing sports videogames to become a kind of sport rather than a type of media about sport treats both sports and videogames with humility and respect: It reminds us that the domain of sport is far bigger, longer, and weirder than that of videogames, while still allowing that videogames have something new to bring to the table. What are sports videogames? They're just computerized variants of sports.

Notes

1. Admittedly, this is more true of MMOGs than it has been of social games, but the commercial rise of MMOGs also corresponded with the rise of game studies. And likewise, the enormous public interest in social games of the *Farmville* variety came at a time when videogames were expanding in demographic influence. Nevertheless, all throughout the 2000s the public and scholarly conversation about these two genres far exceeded that of sports games.

2. Cf. *http://www.essec.edu/news-knowledge/detail-knowledge/article/les-liens-entre-les-jeux-videos-et-la-veritable-pratique-sportive.html*. This research was funded by a UK games industry group called TIGA, and it's unclear if this research was ever peer reviewed and published, but my purpose here is not to cite the research itself but to underscore the kinds of questions sports games research has posed. Still, the fact that such studies would not rise to the ranks of "proper" scholarly vetting is suggestive of the backroads required to conduct such research.

3. So uninterested are many critics and scholars in sports games that the popularity of this sentiment becomes difficult to substantiate. It's a claim more often made at the bar or coffee shop than in books and journals. One example—although it's hardly as

derogatory in tone as some game critics might like—can be found in Kayali and Pur-gathofer (2008).

4. For example, see *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3khTcg0nKDw* and *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOtQ2IAsoQk&feature=fvwrel*.

5. Just in case the reader is not familiar, the rules of H-O-R-S-E can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horse_or_pig_stipulations_in_basketball#H-O-R-S-E

6. Admittedly, Derrida and his kindred would argue that "text" is meant to be under-stood in a very general way, but poststructuralism became so obsessed with signs and language that some work is required to extract Derrida's principles from that confusion.

7. Much more could and should be written about both of these claims, but for now I mention them for the sake of spurring questions rather than proving answers.

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4

JOGA BONITO

Beautiful Play, Sports and Digital Games

Henry Lowood

In spring 2006, Nike launched a marketing campaign ahead of the FIFA World Cup competition, which would be taking place in Germany during June and July. The campaign was called "Joga bonito" (Portuguese for "play beautifully"), a term appropriated from the description of a free-flowing style of football (soccer) made popular in Brazil as the "beautiful game." The creative team at the advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy and director, Ulf Johansson, delivered a series of television spots hosted by former French footballer Eric Cantona, a top player for Manchester United during the 1990s.

The first spot introduced the campaign and set the tone for it. Titled "Cause," it begins with Cantona breaking into a German television studio. He interrupts a conventional sports show in progress called "Fussball Dossier," takes over the studio, and sets up his own "JogaTV." Now in front of the camera, Cantona proclaims his own revolutionary message about the nature of soccer "from the heart of Germany." This spot introduced Joga Bonito as a passionate attack on the "liars and cheaters" who made a "fool of this game" by faking penalties, killing the clock, or playing brutally without any display of skill. Painful examples were depicted on the screen. "Enough!" he proclaims, "I am here to remind the world that this game is about skills, heart, honor, joy, team spirit." The spot ended with a passionate appeal for the help of fans— "Together, me and you, we can make it beautiful again." After a few brief clips of inspirational play by Brazilian footballers, Cantona concludes, "Play Beautiful!" (Wieden + Kennedy, 2006).

Of course, this was neither the first nor the last Nike marketing campaign to extol the virtues of graceful or exceptional play in team sports. The unusual aspect of the "Cause" spot was that it portrayed Beautiful Play as a revolutionary, grassroots movement, not as the dominant soccer culture. As the campaign continued, the series of eight "Joga bonito" episodes focused on particular aspects of the

FIGURE 4.1 Joga Bonito's "Manifesto Futebolista"

beautiful game. In spots with titles such as "Joy," "Honor," "Heart," and "Skills," great players such as Ronaldinho, Thierry Henry, Wayne Rooney, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Zlatan Ibrahimovic were shown playing beautifully. The spots did not present traditional moments of success in competitive games such as scoring winning goals so much as examples of creativity and personal expression: free-styling on the practice field, busting moves on the street, or riffing on the standard game by exhibiting skills in futsal (indoor football). The qualities of play were bold, individual, and spontaneous. The message of JogaTV was that playing this way is not so much about winning a rules-bounded game on the playing field as about graceful movement, creativity, improvisation and joy.

Joga bonito then is about the *player* as artist. In competitive sports, players are artists and their gameplay is art. Of course, the artistic expression of athletes is intimately connected with bodily performance. As Weiss (1969) points out, the athlete "centers himself in a well-coordinated and functioning body" (p. 73). The aesthetics of embodied sports clearly deserves careful and detailed discussion.[1] The central focus of this essay will be the application of thinking about the player as artist to a different, emerging realm of sporting competition: videogames. I will attempt to address the surprising fact that we have not devoted more attention to player performance and spectatorship in digital game studies. Specifically, I hope to begin a conversation about the possibility of beautiful play in digital games. Before starting my end of the conversation, I will make two comments about what this essay will try to cover, and two about what it will leave aside.

The first goal is to consider what it means to play beautifully as a step toward deciding whether we can play digital games in this way. The second goal is perhaps implicit in the first: thinking about digital games in terms taken from competitive sports. One way to talk about beautiful play would be to look at traditionally "artistic" forms of performance in which players are already accepted as artists, such as music or theater. This would mean comparing game performance to acting or playing a musical instrument. But to paraphrase American football coach Jim Harbaugh, that's not my deal. The rhetoric of beautiful play has been developed as an ideal for athletic competition and understood in terms of competitive play, and therefore I will take my analogies from sports. Moreover, athletic sports evoke experiences that are frequently described as artistic or aesthetic, even if—like games generally—they are rarely included in historical discussions of the arts. The goal of redressing this absence provides a common cause that reinforces the transfer of concepts from sports to digital games.

Two things this essay is not: First, it is not about game design; it is about game-*play*. The implications of this distinction for the beautiful game are several, and they will be discussed below. Second, this essay will not reveal much about a form of gameplay that might be called *expressive* player performance, meaning gameplay as an element in the production of what Matteo Bittanti has called Game Art. He defines the term in its capitalized form as "any art in which digital games played a significant role in the creation, production and/or display of the artwork"[2]

(Bittanti, 2006, p. 9). Expressive play thus involves the use of play to express an argument, idea, or story, but the message is not in the play itself. Machinima provides a good example. It is based on gameplay, but it does not require spectators to interpret this gameplay per se in aesthetic or artistic terms. Though this form of expressive play can certainly produce beautifully expressive work, making a movie is not joga bonito.

This essay will focus therefore on the player as performer and on the beautiful game as exhibited through play. Most writing on games as art and most exhibitions in galleries and museums of game-based art expose game design as the basis for artistic expression, so that it is game designers who are the medium's auteurs. Authorship, vision, and art in most discussion of art games is about crafting stories or creating experiences, rather than using games as a performance platform. It's not just the game art discussion; most game research has depicted the game designer as auteur. The primary creative impulse of games is found in their design, so the argument might go. This argument offers an incomplete picture of the aesthetic possibilities of games. However, when I look instead to the creativity of players, it is not my intention to minimize the accomplishments of game designers. This paper is not a manifesto. I just happen to find the creativity of players at least as interesting as making a game. Critical game studies as a field should be able to say more about players as performers. In this essay, I will focus this discussion on play performance as expressed in the arenas provided by multiplayer, competitive digital games. Analogies to competitive sports are a good place to start.

Athletic Beauty

Consider the game of basketball. Few people today would consider James Naismith as a preeminent artist, even though he designed the game by creating its "source code," the original 13 rules of basketball, in 1891. Another option might be a player, say, Michael Jordan. Sam Smith, the historian of the Chicago Bulls' 1991 season, enunciates a typical reaction to Jordan's highlight play in the second game of the NBA final series (which the Bulls went on to win): "The crowd first gasped, for this was art, poetry without words, an instant for eternity" (Smith, 1993, p. 333). Visual evidence of Jordan's beautiful play abounds. The reviewer of a compilation of footage from Jordan's early career described an essential characteristic of Jordan's artistry as his capacity for using the game as a platform for individual expression: "Footage of the slam-dunk contest alone—where Jordan captured *his own goal* of taking off at the free-throw line and dunking at the hoop (complete with legs bent back in air flight)—will leave viewers grinning and shaking their heads. His energy is endless, his creativity self-renewing, and his athleticism graceful and magical" (Karleski, 2006, italics mine). This is the player pursuing his own goals to create a moment of graceful performance.

In his rumination on the nature of athletic beauty, Gumbrecht (2006) considers our "fascinations" with athletic performances as aesthetic experiences. Under

the rubric of "form," he writes about the tension between rules personified by the judge in sports such as gymnastics or figure skating and the creative impulses of the athlete. He concludes that a reason for our "discontent with judges is that they interfere with the ability of great athletes to let new and interesting things happen in their sport. Achieving the impossible, letting loose, being in the zone—these phrases capture our desire to see athletic performances that are unencumbered by restrictions and controls" (p. 180). In other words, the artistry of the athlete involves wresting control of the game from the forces that constrain play, whether we think of them as rules, referees, or the intentions of the designer. We the spectators are compelled to watch by exactly this prospect of capturing a liberating (and fleeting) moment as an aesthetic experience.

Gumbrecht reveals more about this moment in terms of the spectator's fascination with "the play." Form and image are important elements. Gumbrecht tells us about the importance of these elements as part of what he calls the "epiphany of form." This occurs when "a beautiful play is produced by the sudden, surprising convergence of several athletes' bodies in time and space" (p. 190). Of course, we recognize this artistic moment in other performance disciplines, as well. The convergence of bodies in ballet or the spontaneous movements of musicians on stage might provide examples. The important point with respect to athletic performance is that these moments are unpredictable, even to the players who produce them. They are delightful surprises that happen suddenly in a moment of convergence between effort and resistance. Competition is thus a favorable condition for this convergence, an aspect of beautiful play to which we will return below. The moment of a beautiful play is not only surprising, it is also ephemeral and historical. Gumbrecht captures these characteristics when he writes that a beautiful play assumes what he calls a "temporalized form." This means that as soon as the play unfolds, it has begun to disappear, only to be reconfigured in memory, imagination, and re-telling. "Depending on whether my team or the opposing team produces it, I will be profoundly happy or profoundly sad by the time it vanishes. But looking back later, after hours, days, or years, I often realize that a beautiful play produced even by the opposing team has turned into a happy memory." Echoing the Nike commercial's emphasis on spontaneous, exuberant creativity as the basis for beautiful play, rather than winning or losing, Gumbrecht admits that "after hours, days, or years," even plays produced by an opponent against one's team are transformed into delightful memories (pp. 190–91). Mumford (2012) argues further that this independence of rooting interest from perceiving the beautiful play can be distilled as a particular way of being a sports fan, one that separates the partisan from the purist; the "partisan and the purist see a different game, even when they are present at the same event." Mumford constructs the figure of the purist in a way that raises the value of appreciation of play itself, as something different from partisan enthusiasm for players or teams. Pure appreciation of play offers the possibility of an "aesthetic mode of sports watching" (pp. 9–10).

FIGURE 4.2 An epiphany of form: The Carrier Classic, 2011

In considering sports performance as potentially beautiful, is it necessary to insist that players take control of the game from rules designers, referees, and judges? Is ownership or perhaps something like authorship of the game at stake? When considering this question, it is important again to recognize that moments of exquisite performance are unpredictable. They depend on physical convergences, tactical ripostes, and momentary capabilities that players often find difficult to describe, let alone explain, in their totality. When we acknowledge that the player is an artist, it is not necessary to see this as a matter of who controls the game. We do not really have to decide between Naismith and Jordan, or between designers and players. They all can be artists. Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about game designers working in any medium is that they are ever able to deliver games with the right balance of constraint and freedom. When the best players find mechanisms that even the designer did not fully comprehend, working out how to perform in unexpected and delightful ways, somehow the game does not fall apart, but supports the player's innovation. Like Michael Jordan painting on James Naismith's canvas, players are the experts on using athletic competitions as performance spaces, creating and showing off their own moves and plays. Certainly, Jordan is as much an auteur as the inventor of basketball, but we add little value to that observation by setting the player-enactor against the designer-author.

Play As an Art Form

Are digital games capable of producing players who can stake the same claim to artistry as, say, Pelé, Ali, or Jordan? Do beautiful plays in e-sports and athletic sports at all draw upon similar skills and situations? Before understanding the aesthetic experiences that digital games can provide, we will need to delve a bit more into the status of athletic competitions as an art form. Sports, of course, are often competitive, multiplayer games. The agonistic nature of sports gives us some confidence in our use of analogy to understand more about corresponding digital gameplay as an art form expressed through competition. Generally speaking, recent philosophical discussions about the aesthetics of sports comment on a particular separation of two kinds of performance. In an important essay called "The Aesthetic in Sport," first published in 1974 and since then often reprinted, David Best (1995) called attention to what he identified as a conceptual gap between "purposive" and "aesthetic" sports. According to Best, most sports (and we might add, games) are purposive. Their aim or objective is achieved "independently of the manner of achieving it as long as it conforms to the limits set by the rules or norms—for example, scoring a goal and climbing the Eiger" (p. 380). In other words, style points don't count toward winning these kinds of games. Best insists that even if some aspects of purposive sports are artistic or beautiful, these aspects are irrelevant in the context of competition. In a purposive sport, scoring a goal—even winning—is a matter separate from aesthetic expression through athletic play, much as the valuation of a painting as an investment is not intrinsically tied to considering its artistic value. Best identifies another class of sports as "aesthetic." In these sports—as in the arts generally—the goals and the manner of achieving these goals cannot be considered separately. The athlete's intention is different in these activities, because the satisfaction of an aesthetic requirement is built into the evaluation of performance (p. 380). Ice hockey is a purposive sport; figure skating is an aesthetic sport. Michael Jordan's leap may be a thing of beauty, but if the ball does not end up in the hoop, it is a thing apart from success in the game. Without knowledge of the rules, my appreciation of his form only interprets an external aspect of his performance; it does not tell me if he and his team are winning the game. The manner in which Kerri Strug accomplished her vault in the 1996 Olympics did matter.[3]

In the conversation about sports as an art form, Best's separation of purposive and aesthetic sports established terms for a debate that has continued for over 30 years, with both supporters and critics of his position (cf. Cordner, 1984, 1988; Roberts, 1986; Wertz, 1979, 1984). The crux of the discussion has been a second division he makes between the "aesthetic" and the "artistic," a distinction that Best applies to other realms besides sports (Best, 1982 (1983). Roughly speaking, art that produces an *aesthetic* experience involves a perception of beauty or grace on the part of the spectator. We know already that Best agrees that there are aesthetic sports, in which there is an identity between means of achieving the ends of the

sport and the ends themselves. He considers an art form as *artistic,* however, only when it offers the possibility of "a close involvement with life situations." Best argues then that "the arts characteristically concern themselves with contemporary moral, social, political and emotional themes." In this sense they involve a more specific form of expression than aesthetic works. He insists that appreciation of any work of art—not just sports—can occur entirely on aesthetic grounds, without any artistic element as defined above. This distinction of aesthetic and artistic is important for athletic sports. Best concludes that they are quite capable of providing aesthetic, but never artistic experiences. The conclusion of Best's argument is that "at their best these [aesthetic] sports are undoubtedly superb aesthetically, but they are not, in my view, art" (Best, 1995, pp. 384–86).

Note that activities around sporting events do not qualify as exceptions to this statement. For example, the Black Power salute by Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the medals podium of the 1968 Olympics was "clearly extrinsic to, not made from within, the conventions of sport as such" (Best, 1995, p. 387). One may disagree with his conclusions, but even if this is the case, Best gives us a consistent and interesting set of conceptual categories for analysis of beautiful play. His separation of beauty and grace from purpose encourages further thinking about the differences among an embodied aesthetic performance through form, style, and movement, an aesthetic solution to the completion of goals, and a conceptual or emotional theme that might be expressed through sports. In the Joga Bonita campaign, perhaps Eric Cantona is pleading after all for a connection to "life situations" when he exclaims, "Mes amis. I need your help, your hearts and your feet. Together, me and you, we can make it beautiful again." It strikes me as more likely, however, that he is calling for a return to beautifully creative play inside the game itself, that is, for finding beautiful means to achieve the ends of the game. Where do we find that sort of play?

Impressive Play

What is an impressive play? It is a play that fascinates and leaves a mark on the spectator. Wins and losses are important, but player performance becomes transcendent when it makes an impression on us. The memorably spectacular play is at the heart of the culture of game performance and spectatorship. When we bring the spectator into the equation, we must consider how moments of exceptional play make an impression from the player to the viewer. Gumbrecht asks, "What is it that fascinates sport spectators, beyond victories, defeats, and broken records?" (Gumbrecht, 2006, p. 150). Again, the role played by the spectator is crucial. A highlight or spectacular play is meaningless without the realization that the phenomena of athletic performance are body movements "shaped by the expectations and appreciations that spectators bring with them to the game" (p. 151). Movements and "plays" are complex and difficult to break down; every spectator's reading of these plays is different. The impression is created by the player, but

depends equally on the knowledge, gaze, and engagement of the viewer. Gumbrecht argues that moments of impressive play do not simply produce pleasure; they also fulfill an expectation. That the moment, circumstances, and nature of this expectation are unknown is beside the point. As Gumbrecht reminds us, "watching sports is a way of waiting for that which may occasionally happen but is never guaranteed to happen, because it lies beyond the precalculated limits of human performance" (p. 231). Thus, we might say that there is the impressive moment itself and there is also the idea that spectators celebrate something specific in those moments. The moment passes, of course, but the beautiful play that is the object of that celebration lives again as it is re-told and re-configured with the passing of time. This idea that there may be an idea or narrative that is opened up by an impressive play may provide the basis for a challenge to Best's notion of the impossibility of artistic play.

One of the best examples of this transformation from play to idea is provided by art historian Dave Hickey's essay, "The Heresy of Zone Defense" (Hickey, 1997). Hickey focuses on a key aspect of impressive play: the creative tension between the improvisational art of the player and the constraints of game rules. He takes off from one of the legendary plays in basketball history, Julius Erving's spectacular "Baseline Move" in game 4 of the 1980 NBA Finals against the Los Angeles Lakers.[4] Erving, better known as Dr. J, drove down the right side of the lane and past a Lakers' defender to the baseline. He leaped and soared toward the basket, only to have his direct path to the basket blocked by the outstretched arms of 7'2" Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Caught in the air, Erving brings the ball back down, and as Hickey recounts, "He looks like he is flying out of bounds. But no! Somehow, Erving turns his body in the air, reaches *back* under the backboard

FIGURE 4.3 Dr. J's Baseline Move

from behind; and lays the ball into the basket from the *left* side." As he watched Erving complete this play, Hickey screamed and leaped in the air, taken by the moment.[5] As he watched the replay, his thoughts turned to the implications of this play. "Jesus, what an amazing play! Just the celestial athleticism of it is stunning, but the tenacity and purposefulness of it, the fluid stream of instantaneous micro-decisions that go into Erving's completing it. . . . Well, it just breaks your heart. It's everything you want to do by way of finishing under pressure, beyond the point of no return, faced with adversity, and I am still amazed when I think of it" (Hickey, 1997, p. 155). This reflection takes the moment beyond epiphany; the impressive play assumes what Gumbrecht has called a "temporalized form."

Hickey's contemplation of an impressive play takes him to a narrative about basketball as an art form and its implications, largely—and I would argue, exactly—in terms of what Best would describe as a game's "close involvement with life situations." In other words, the Baseline Move delivers more than a momentary epiphany; it can also be re-told in a way that makes a statement about life. The adaptability, creativity, improvisation, and fluidity of Dr. J's play shows basketball's emergence from Dr. Naismith's game as an activity for pedagogical control into a form of public spectacle. This wonderful play is a triumph of player performance over the constraints of rules, coaches, and systems. That is Hickey's message. He concludes that "in the complexity of the game, there is the promise of solutions as daring as Doctor J's" (Hickey, 1997, p. 161). Indeed, it turns out that this take on basketball as a space for the beautiful solution of problems is also something that compels the insider—a coach, player, or acute observer of the game. The great NBA coach Phil Jackson described exactly this aspect of basketball in terms of another sports analogy: "I love . . . being thrust into a situation where a person has to survive by making intuitive decisions, sort of riding on the edge like a surfer." For Jackson, riding the "decision-making wave" by responding to competition with "the right decisions at the right time" takes the game, as he put it, "out of the mundane space of life" (Smith, 1993, pp. 86–87). It turns sports into an art form. Life statements made by beautiful play have also been drawn out from other athletic sports, most frequently from soccer (e.g., Hemphill, 2005; Hughson & Inglis, 2002; Inglis & Hughson, 2000).

Impressive Plays and Digital Games

Many elements of the structure for high-level play that we find in professional athletic sports are now in place for digital games, such as competitive leagues, international competitions, professional teams, sponsors, and media coverage (Christophers & Scholz, 2010; Kane, 2008; Taylor, 2012; Yin, 2010). These resources exist because there is an expectation that fans and commercial interests are ready to watch and support the best players of digital games, in much the same way they behave with respect to athletic sports. Can players of digital games produce impressive plays that resonate as deeply with spectators as Dr. J's move? I will

FIGURE 4.4 Competition floor, *Warcraft III* tournament, WCG 2004

answer this question with my own example of an impressive play from a competitive digital game. Blizzard's real-time strategy (RTS) game *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002) is one of a few dozen games that have created a basis for high-level "cyberathletic" competitions, even professional e-sports, especially in Korea and Europe. It is a multiplayer, competitive game with an enthusiastic player community. In 2003, *Warcraft III* was selected as one of the game titles for the annual World Cyber Games (WCG), becoming in effect an "Olympic Sport" of digital games. In October 2004, San Francisco hosted the 4th annual WCG, with *Warcraft III* therefore as one of the featured events. I was there as a participant, having been selected as head referee for the *Warcraft III* tournament.

After three days of competition, the final best-of-three championship round matched two of the best *Warcraft* players in the world. The favored player, WelcomeTo (aka Zacard; realname: Hwang Tae-Min), represented Korea, a country that had become a hot-bed for this game. Korean *Starcraft* and *Warcraft III* players honed their skills by playing against the best competition in the world, with professional leagues, star players, and television coverage, and WelcomeTo was one of his country's best players. His opponent was [4k]Grubby (realname: Manuel Schenkhuizen) from the Netherlands. Grubby was the underdog. The decisive moment of the series came in the second head-to-head game. The result was determined by an impressive and memorable play by Grubby that shared significant qualities with Dr. J's Baseline Move.

FIGURE 4.5 Grubby at work, *Warcraft III* tournament, WCG 2004

In order to understand the impression made by Grubby's play, it is necessary to set the scene. The match was played before a live crowd of perhaps 200 spectators. They looked down from their seats in San Francisco's Bill Graham Civic Auditorium into an area of the WCG dedicated to *Warcraft III* matches; other spectators watched on screens scattered around the venue (Lowood, 2009). A larger community of *Warcraft* players simultaneously viewed a webcast online with shoutcast commentary. Later, many more spectators downloaded the replay or streamed a video capture. During the match, in-house spectators had several viewing choices. They might watch the neutral observer view of the game map, piped to a large overhead screen, in which case their view was identical to that of anyone watching the webcast. Another option was to watch the players in the auditorium, nearly as close to them as if they had courtside seats at a basketball game. Alternatively, in-house spectators might have chosen to marvel at the mastery of hands furiously clicking away at keyboards and mice, or with young eyes and a favorable viewing angle perhaps even followed the action on one of the players' own screens. Probably, most of them glued their eyes to the overhead video display. In Dr. J's day, spectators watched players mostly without the distraction of such screens. Of course, this is not true today. Fans and even players report not being able to take their eyes off the $40 million, 48-foot video screens in the new Dallas Cowboys stadium, for example. Spectators whose eyes were focused on the big screen at the

FIGURE 4.6 The big screen at the *Warcraft III* tournament, WCG 2004

WCG all saw roughly the same action, not the case for basketball fans viewing the Baseline Move from completely different angles in a basketball arena.

As we have seen, Gumbrecht emphasizes "the play" as the basis for our fascination especially with ball sports. Indeed, Grubby's stunning victory at the San Francisco WCG depended on just such a play made during a few pivotal seconds in the second match. A close reading of this pivotal play will help us to understand the nature of impressive play in digital games. Here is what the spectators saw. About 6 1/2 minutes into this match, the two players were skirmishing with their opposing armies—composed of fantasy soldiers and heroes depicted as on-screen characters—around Grubby's main base. After some fighting, WelcomeTo's army fell back. His main hero, called a "Farseer," was about to die, so WelcomeTo sensibly decided to withdraw. The plan was decisive; he would teleport his army back to their home base and heal up to fight again later. The spectators could see that the move was perfectly executed, and yet a second or two after landing in camp, the farseer nevertheless toppled over, having lost his last few health points. With his best champion out of action during a key phase of the game, WelcomeTo's fate was sealed. He conceded the game a few minutes later. How did the spectators react? The death of WelcomeTo's Farseer was obviously a dramatic turning point.[6] It set off an outburst of loud cheers and Dutch football club songs. The outburst even briefly distracted WelcomeTo from his screen, a rare occurrence in such competitions. Yet, I suspect that only a few of the most knowledgeable players immediately understood Grubby's move. Most fans needed to study replays later or have the move explained to them in order to translate a rapid sequence of events (game

states, character movements, keystrokes, mouse-clicks, thoughts) into player actions. Here then is how a savvy fan of the game would re-tell what happened: Grubby's own Farseer hero had earlier in the game taken a "wand of lightning" from a gnoll assassin while "creeping" (attacking AI-controlled "creeps" placed around the game map). It sat in his inventory. This item, when activated, casts a spell that is used to protect a *friendly* unit by damaging enemies that come close to it. In the crucial moment, when WelcomeTo activated his damaged Farseer's teleport scroll to return to base, it became invulnerable as a property of using that scroll. This was the beauty of WelcomeTo's splendid move; his Farseer would retreat *and* be invulnerable while doing it. Grubby could not hurt the Farseer—or could he? In an instant, Grubby responded. He hit a key selecting the wand of lightning; moused over WelcomeTo's relatively healthy secondary hero, a Firelord; clicked and cast the lightning shield on it. This shield would now damage any of WelcomeTo's forces standing next to their own Firelord. As Grubby knew, WelcomeTo's heroes would land together in their home base; instead of finding safety, the wounded Farseer was doomed. He would die simply from taking damage by standing next to his charged teammate. GG. Good game, match over. Grubby proceeded to win the *Warcraft III* championship two games to one, establishing his career (which continues as of this writing) as one of the most creative RTS players in the world.

FIGURE 4.7   The moment of truth, Grubby v. Welcome To, WCG 2004

Reading Grubby's creativity, improvisation, and skill in that play may not be as easy for most of us as appreciating the beauty in Dr. J's airborne move. It is instructive to break down two similar aspects of these plays. First, like Dr. J's airborne improvisation, Grubby's move was unexpected, novel, and to a certain degree, transgressive. It is one thing that few players could match Grubby's tactics and twitch skills, but entirely something else that by making the play, Grubby expanded the possibility space of the game. Dr. J's Baseline Move was distinctive in two ways. First, it was triggered by the resistance of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's impenetrable defense. Against a less-skilled defender, Erving could have glided to the basket for an unremarkable lay-up. Second, the impossibly athletic move was impressive, but hardly surprising for the Doctor. The new and imaginative thing about this particular move was that it literally stretched the boundaries of the game by making use of the space *behind* the backboard. Nobody watching the play had until then witnessed a player put that area of the court—out-of-bounds for practical purposes—into play, and with such spontaneous, creative flair. This is why players like Magic Johnson were awestruck and spectators at the arena went "into a frenzy" (Hetrick, 2011). Grubby's *Warcraft III* move shares these qualities. He also reacted to his opponent's skilful play, recognized in that moment by the shoutcaster as an excellent move. Indeed, WelcomeTo's tactics and execution prodded Grubby to take *advantage* of his opponent's resistance. And just like Dr. J's airborne redefinition of the dead zone behind the basket into an area for offensive innovation, Grubby redefined an element of his game on the fly. In a moment defined by the problem of countering his opponents' skill, he redefined a defensive spell by attacking his opponent with it and extended his reach into an otherwise useless area of the map (WelcomeTo's base move that later became routine for even modestly skilled *Warcraft III* players).

A beautiful play is impressive, of course, but it holds the potential of being more than that. Best would argue that aesthetically pleasing play is not necessarily artistic. Aesthetic play is an accomplishment that is required by an intrinsic identity of means and ends in "aesthetic" sports, but only achieved accidentally in "purposive" sports, perhaps no more often than in any other human activity. Even so, it is less than artistic. Best insists that the artistic requires "involvement with life situations." I would revise Best's appraisal, both with respect to athletic sports, which he considers, and e-sports, which he does not. There is certainly an important difference between the surface characteristics of a play that most any spectator can appreciate and the statement that a play makes in terms of a deeper understanding of the game. This may be a different kind of statement than the connection with live situations. Most plays do not make such statements, but the most memorable plays usually do. In athletic sports, the aesthetic sense is usually awakened by a particularly graceful, athletic, or powerful play; it does not take an expert to perceive the forms that are exhibited during such plays as beautiful. We usually think about football (meaning soccer, the Brazilian variety especially) as the beautiful game, and Pelé is of course the player most frequently associated

with this concept, into which we mix several elements of his play and personality. His beautiful play was stylish and acrobatic, brilliant and creative. At the same time, he displayed enthusiasm for the sport, and indeed for life, through his play, an aspect of his game that he emphasized by calling his autobiography, *My Life and the Beautiful Game* (Pelé, 1977). Any spectator, whether knowledgeable about football or not, saw the beauty in his game. It was right there on the surface of his play and in what you saw when you watched him at play.

Yet, the beauty of sports is more complicated even than the multiple elements of Pelé's beautiful game. In a short piece in which he called basketball "the most balletic of games," the sportswriter Frank Deford noted that, "As lovely as those great players [Lebron James and Kobe Bryant] move on the court, though, basketball remains foremost an ensemble game—which is why teams that are unglamorous but more unselfish usually win in the end. Teamwork is still the real beauty of the sport" (Deford, 2006). This theme is further explored in Peg and Myles Brand's "The Beauty of the Game," an essay in the collection *Basketball and Philosophy* (Brand and Brand, 2007). This essay sets up a philosophical debate about athletic beauty by staging a fictional argument between Dick Vitale and Billy Packer that interrupts their broadcast of an NCAA championship game. Vitale extols a successful shot as beautiful, and Packer challenges him, arguing "why not just admit it was a successful shot, satisfactorily executed, and leave it at that?" A thorough, if colloquial argument around the competing aesthetics of Plato and Hume ensues, after which the basketball experts agree that their game can be appreciated in two different ways. First, subjectively, even casual spectators recognize beauty in the game's movements, its "improvised and practiced dance." Second, and differently, knowledgeable coaches, players, and fans perceive an inner beauty to the game, comprising the strategy and execution of plays that creatively solve problems defined by the game's objectives. These solutions to the game's problems are the Platonic forms of the game; fans rely on "acumen and insight" to recognize and understand "what's going on in the players' heads, not just their bodies" (Brand and Brand, 2007).

Subjective, external athletic beauty has been given to us by Jesse Owens, or Pelé, or Peggy Fleming, or Muhammad Ali, or Michael Jordan. Their beautiful play is universally appreciated. Beautiful execution and decision making is more difficult to locate and recognize. In basketball, for example, we find it in players like Magic Johnson or Tim Duncan, whose nickname, "The Big Fundamental," tells us that he delivers a different sort of beautiful play. In baseball, Derek Jeter is a player who reveals an inner, objective beauty in his game; knowledgeable fans get the sublime decision making and split-second execution of Jeter's decisive "flip play" in the 1991 American League playoffs. Many spectators appreciated the results, but were not sure what they had just seen. Indeed, it is generally the case that with famous players such as Duncan and Jeter, it is difficult to say what is beautiful about their play without delving into finer points and reading their plays closely. David Robinson of the San Antonio Spurs, Duncan's teammate for

FIGURE 4.8 Derek Jeter's "Flip Play," 1991 American League playoffs

several years, contrasted this kind of beautiful play to the external perception of beauty in basketball terms: "Michael [Jordan] is more of a non-basketball-fan type of player," he admitted, "but if you know a lot about the game, you appreciate what I do" (Smith, 1993, p. 178).

We now can say a bit more about beautiful play in digital games. Grubby's use of the lightning shield is beautiful in the same sense David Robinson represents for spectator sports. A casual spectator simply cannot read this player's statement just by staring at a screen; Grubby's mastery of the syntax and tactics of *Warcraft III* is simply not there on the surface of play for all to see. A replay movie tells us nothing about what Grubby was thinking as he worked out his strategy, or even what keys he pressed. If he had clicked on the wrong unit or accidentally cast the spell, everything might even have looked exactly the same. Sitting in the Civic Auditorium or listening to the shoutcast, we would have realized that something special had just happened as the shoutcaster yelled "the Farseer has fallen" and "good work by Grubby," from the sudden applause and singing in the audience, or the pained expression on Zacard's face. A knowledgeable player needed no cues. He *knew* that Grubby had performed beautifully, even without previously ever having seen such a play. The Dutch player had grasped an instant opportunity, made a preposterously rapid decision in the real-time heat of battle, and applied masterful knowledge of game syntax and controls to carry out a game-winning performance.

It is important to recall here what Gumbrecht has to say about another aspect of beautiful plays in athletic sports: their "temporalized form." The statement made by a beautiful play is necessarily reconfigured in memory and narrative, after the exquisite moment passes, and perhaps also made more accessible to those who did

not immediately grasp the creativity in the original play. Grubby's victory meets this criterion. It was translated into several stories about this match and re-told in new ways. As I have argued elsewhere, this moment of beautiful gameplay became a narrative form through such re-telling (Lowood, 2009). It is not true that we can only describe this game's meaning – paraphrasing Beethoven regarding one of his musical performances—by simply replaying the game. Websites and forums delivered chronicles of Grubby's victory as emplotments of the events. They told of the amazing comeback, the startling defeat of the suddenly demoralized Korean favorite, payback for the arrogance and hubris of WelcomeTo's choice of the inferior Firelord as a hero, or the superiority of quick tactical thinking over high "actions-per-minute" count, that is, of mind over body. This possibility of re-telling a beautiful *Warcraft III* play resonates with better-known moments from athletic games, such as Michael Jordan's personification of the modern athletic warrior, rising from his sick-bed to lead the Chicago Bulls in the decisive game of the 1997 NBA championships. Or maybe Joe Montana defining coolness at the start of the decisive drive in the 1989 Super Bowl when he winked to his teammates in the huddle, pointing to a spectator and instead of giving them a play, said, "Isn't that John Candy?" The wrapping of such stories around moments of beautiful play takes them beyond the moment.

Conclusion: Sports and E-Sports

In conclusion, Grubby's moment of beautiful play in *Warcraft III* and its comparison with Dr. J's Baseline Move reveal important similarities and differences of digital gameplay and athletic competition. As we have seen, the external beauty of embodied play is visible on the surface of forms and movements and accessible to most any spectator. The internal beauty of the play is a statement about the creative solution of a problem that must be read by the insider and expert. Looking back at the games and game cultures of the first nearly half-century of digital games, it is difficult for me to cite a single example of external, universally accessible *graceful* play without bodies.[7] We have no Pelé or Michael Jordan whose moves any spectator can appreciate as distinctively graceful and beautiful. Digital games do not yet offer players the control and freedom to create movements and forms that strike the eye as beautiful, individual, and affecting in this way. Yet, beautiful play in digital games is deeply exciting to spectators who can read the statement below the surface, those who discern "purpose and reason" (Brand and Brand, 2007, p. 102) through knowledge of the game and intuition of the player's intentions. I am a glass half full, not a glass half empty kind of guy. Therefore, I am not troubled by a limitation on beautiful play in digital games to that which can be read and analyzed. At this early stage in the historical development of real-time digital games, players are learning how to use digital games to develop new practices for expressing their creativity through and with the machine. Insanely creative, spontaneous, play-based performances like Grubby's masterful improvisation are impressive and, indeed, beautiful.

Notes

1. A good place to begin reading the modern discussion of this topic is Best (1974).
2. Bittanti (2006) differentiates Game Art from lowercase game art, which comprises game graphics and other assets that players experience as the surface characteristics of a published game.
3. Interestingly, Best identifies gymnastics as an aesthetic sport, implying that aesthetic norms are implicit in successful performance. One might argue that the judging of the sport requires breaking form down into a scoring scheme that creates an extrinsic standard of success. As the father of a competitive gymnast, I can usually tell when my son's routine is appealing to the eye, even discern if his form is good, but I am horrible at predicting his event score, due to my weak knowledge of this sport's complex judging rules.
4. This play is listed under the heading "NBA's Greatest Moments" in the *NBA Encyclopedia: Playoff Edition,* "Doctor's Shot Stuns Lakers," www.nba.com/history/erving_moment.html
5. The great Lakers player, Earvin "Magic" Johnson played in this game. Then a rookie, Johnson says that his "mouth just dropped open" as the play unfolded. After Erving's basket, Johnson wondered, "What should we do? Should we take the ball out or should we ask him to do it again?" Even opponents sensed that the play had risen above the game. (http://www.nba.com/history/legends/julius-erving/index.html)
6. Even more so than Dr. J's dramatic play, as the 76ers would win that playoff game, but ultimately lose the series.
7. By "without bodies," I mean distinctively graceful movement that can be perceived on the surface of the game itself, that is, on the screen.

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5

WOMEN, SPORTS AND VIDEOGAMES

Mia Consalvo

The current market for franchise-based sports videogames featuring professional sports stars and teams is linked in multiple, important ways to the broader mediated consumption of sports. Women's sports are said to be no different from men's sports in this regard, in that they must demonstrate evidence of or potential for a market—usually meaning a sustained, heavy television viewership—before they can appear as licensed, serialized videogame titles. So if such television viewership were achieved and maintained over time, the result should logically be the development of corresponding franchise-based videogames. As EA Sports executive Peter Moore explains, the company must look at factors such as market size and how many fans have indicated they would play the game, since "we're not in the business of doing the sport just because we like it, we're in the business of creating capital" (Sheffield, 2010).

Women's sporting events have allegedly not drawn attendance or viewership numbers to trigger the interests of game developers. Yet attendance at the women's World Cup final in Los Angeles set a record in 1999 when more than 90,000 people saw the United States beat China; television viewership was similarly high, with 17.9 million viewers tuning in to ABC (Collett, 2012a; Deitsch, 2011). At the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the women's final between the United States and Japan drew more than 80,000 fans and 4.35 million television viewers on NBC Sports (Collett, 2012b; Yahoo! Sports, 2012). Based on such interest, Fernanda Schabarum launched a petition, asking EA and FIFA to include women's teams in its next iteration of the popular *FIFA* series of videogames, that gathered more than 5,000 signatures (Yahoo! Sports, 2012).

In response, EA Sports answered that they didn't have any immediate plans "to include female players in the game," going on to explain that they hoped to "one day" include female players in a meaningful way, but did not feel the time was yet

right to do so (Maguire, 2012). Shortly afterward, the company made the surprise announcement that two well-known female hockey stars would be included in *NHL 13,* following the addition of the ability to create user-generated female players in its *NHL 12* title. Such statements can be interpreted as good news, and as recognition of female athletes' contributions to various sports. Yet we should still ask tough questions about the inclusion of women athletes in sports titles, as many game companies have a problematic history with the overall representation of women in any games, not just those that happen to play sports.

More specifically, we need to consider that such exclusions can't always be blamed on the presence or absence of profitable markets. In an article examining the sexist construction of the commodity audience, Eileen Meehan takes to task the long-held belief that television producers and advertisers simply seek out the most profitable demographic groups for which to target their products (2002). Meehan demonstrates how female viewers have historically been both disparaged and ignored, in favor of audiences of young men who have been deemed "more valuable" by advertisers, despite their lighter viewing habits and smaller influence over household purchasing decisions. She argues that female audiences were constructed as the "wrong" type of audience, and their interests have been passed over in pursuit of men's interests, despite women's real market power. Such decisions are not, she argues, based on the logic of capitalism, but instead on sexist beliefs and practices. Similar logic may also be at work in the marketplace for sports videogames featuring women, although we need first to tell the history of women in sports, and mediated presentations of women in sports, before considering this question more fully.

As long as game studies scholars have been discussing (and promoting) women's varied interests in videogames, women have been interested in and participating in sports for far longer. Yet when surveying the landscape of contemporary sports videogames, women vanish from sight. Women's faces and bodies do appear in titles such as *Wii Fit*, *Kinect Move*, and *Zumba Dance Party*, but women's competitive sports are much harder to find. Women play soccer, football (both versions), basketball, tennis, golf, and hockey. In running, women now dominate the number of competitors in the half-marathon, comprising 59% of all finishers (Running USA, 2012). They also shoot, climb, skate, and swim both professionally and in amateur events. Yet a quick glance at the top sellers for sports games at Amazon or GameStop reveals titles such as *Madden NFL, FIFA 2012, NBA Street,* and *MLB 2K12*. Look hard at the box for *Grand Slam* and you might see Anna Kournikova off to the side, or the Williams sisters in *Top Spin 4.* But when considering the major AAA games that are sport-focused, female athletes are far from center stage.

To begin to answer why so few sports videogames feature women, we need to step outside of videogame history to consider some related, key events. To do that this chapter covers important ground: It briefly traces the evolution of women's participation in sports as well as media coverage of those sporting events. Historically, women and girls have had to fight for the opportunity to participate in sports,

and that battle is still ongoing. Tied to that struggle is media coverage of those events, limited and sometimes sexist in nature. The chapter highlights research on how important sports news outlets such as *Sports Illustrated* or SportsCenter treat women's sports—coverage that is driven by perceived popularity and expectations for revenue for interested parties. And it surveys the contemporary landscape of games, showing how although early sports videogames featured nameless 8-bit players on nearly blank screens, today's console games are franchise-driven empires that rely on name brands and celebrity players in order to sell units. It makes the case that ongoing limitations in the coverage of women's sports have led to the deficits we now see in women's sports videogames titles.

History of Women and Sports

Women and girls have a long history of participation in professional and amateur sports, organized athletic events, and physical exercise. That participation has persisted despite continued discrimination against them in the form of restrictive laws and regulations as well as general attitudes and funding allocations. Over the years they have continued to practice, play, and fight for the opportunity to participate equally in sports, seeing sports as more than physical activity. For many women, sports and athletics also meant freedom, strength, teamwork, and achievement—many of the same things that men and boys have found in sports. But for women and girls, sports could be even more—it could be a way to demonstrate their equality, their independence, and their individuality. Susan B. Anthony perhaps summed it up best in remarking that the act of riding a bicycle "has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride on a wheel. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance" ("History of women in sports timeline," 2012).

Yet the same year that Anthony praised the bicycle—1896—the first modern Olympic games were held and there were no female contestants, as it was felt their participation would be "impractical, uninteresting, un-aesthetic, and incorrect" ("Women at the Olympic Games," 2012). But women slowly made headway—four years later at the 1900 Paris Games, women were officially allowed to compete in golf and lawn tennis, and some women also took part in croquet and as part of a sailing crew. Eventually they went on to officially compete in all other sports, and with women's boxing being added for the 2012 games there are now no sports left where women do not participate ("Women at the Olympic Games," 2012).

Access to high-profile elite events such as the Olympics is symbolic and important to note as benchmarks for progress, yet much more practical is legislation and funding that guarantees amateur women and girls the right to play sports and compete if they wish to do so. Although it was not originally developed to address the issue of access to sports, Title IX, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972, was ultimately instrumental in opening the doors to greater participation by girls and young women in sports. The legislation states that "no person in the United States

shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Title 20 USC Sections 1681–1688). Essentially, any school or institution that receives federal funding must ensure that its sports programs offer equal opportunities based on sex.

Programs are required to perform constant self-evaluations and there has been continued debate about the criteria used to judge programs. Critics have feared that men's sports programs would be cut in order to pay for women's sports, while supporters point to huge increases in the participation of women and girls in sports after the passage of Title IX. For example, the AAUW shows that between the years 1971–72 and 2007–08 there was a 940% increase in the number of female athletes in high school, compared to a 19% increase in male athletes. Similarly, in the NCAA for the same years, female athletes increased by 456% and male athletes by 31% (AAUW, 2012). Funding and the number of team sports has not yet reached parity for women and girls in school-based athletics, but fights to equalize opportunities are still ongoing.

In the world of professional sports, women are active but still lagging their male counterparts in pay, media attention, opportunities to play, and endorsements. High-profile sports continue to be male dominated, with female players of the same sport receiving less media and fan attention and the athletes themselves less pay, or quite often relegated to amateur play because of a lack of professional female leagues. With regard to salaries for professional basketball players, in the 2008–2009 season the minimum salary cap for NBA players was $442,114 and the maximum salary was $13,758,000. For the WNBA 2009 season, the minimum salary was just $35,190 and the top salary was $99,500 (Coon, 2012; WNBPA, 2012). In soccer, each team member on the U.S. women's national team was awarded $25,000 for finishing in third place in the 2003 Women's World Cup, and would have received $58,000 each if they had won. Yet the U.S. men's national soccer team members were each given $200,000 simply for reaching the quarter-final of the 2002 World Cup (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009).

Of course it could be argued these are sports where male teams are more established and so "naturally" receive greater media and popular attention. Yet even in sports where women are popular and established competitors with histories equal to or surpassing male counterparts, they continue to receive less attention and money than men. For example, *Forbes* magazine regularly reports on the highest paid male and female athletes each year, factoring in prize winnings, endorsements, fees for appearances, and licensing income. For their 2011 list, tennis players were seven of the top ten female earners, with Maria Sharapova in first place with $25 million earned, "double the amount of any other female athlete in the world" (Badenhausen, 2011a). Other top female earners included Caroline Wozniacki (tennis, $12.5 million), Danica Patrick (racing, $12 million), Venus Williams (tennis, $11.5 million), Kim Clijsters (tennis, $11 million), and Serena Williams (tennis, $10.5 million). Yet "by comparison the 10 highest-paid

men earned a collective $449 million" (Badenhausen, 2011b), from a much wider representation of sporting activities. The top male earners included Tiger Woods ($75 million), Kobe Bryant ($53 million), LeBron James ($38 million), and Roger Federer ($37 million) (Badenhausen, 2011b). So if compensation is taken as a guide of worth and a signifier for attention, female athletes are far less valued and attended to than male athletes in the world of professional sports, even when the same sport is being played.

Coverage of Women's Sports

Just as women and girls have had to fight for the right to play sports, they have also faced barriers in media coverage of their events. Consistently over the years, female athletes and teams have received less attention from major media outlets, both in terms of news coverage and broadcasting of sporting events. Such omissions work to keep those events less popular, arguably denying those sports the opportunity to build a fan base needed for future potential videogame licensing and creation. Coverage did not increase in response to Title IX, and in fact has decreased recently in some areas such as cable television news coverage. When female athletes do appear in the media their appearance is often referenced in relation to their physical attractiveness and sexual orientation rather than their athletic ability. In terms of the business of sports news, there remain fewer female reporters and sports anchors than their male counterparts, and even when female sports do appear they are not given prime positioning in news line-ups. Finally, there remain a number of news editors and writers who still believe female athletes are 'naturally' less capable than male athletes and that women as a group are 'naturally' less interested in sports.

Coverage History in Major Media Outlets

One benchmark for measuring media coverage of women and sports over time is examination of *Sports Illustrated* (SI) magazine. SI has historically been recognized as a popular source for coverage of major sporting events. In that regard it has been widely studied to examine what types of sports and players have been featured in both articles and on the cover of the magazine, and how gender parity has or has not been reached. In one study of the cover images of *Sports Illustrated* between 1997 and 2008, for example, researchers found that of the 676 issues, only 5.62% (38 total) had a woman on the cover. Of those 38 covers, 12 were models for the yearly swimsuit edition of the magazine, and 6 were part of a larger story such as the cost of college sports (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009). Since the early 2000s *Sports Illustrated* has started to supplement the professional models used in its swimsuit issue with popular female athletes. As Cooky and Lavoi report, "the [swimsuit] issue has boasted top female athletes such as Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova, Danica Patrick, and Amanda Beard (and far more often than they've

appeared in any other issue of Sports Illustrated)" but such images do little to "legitimize and promote female athleticism" (2012, p. 44).

Television is little better in its coverage of women's sports. The popular show SportsCenter on ESPN regularly draws nearly 115 million monthly viewers (ESPN Inc, Fact Sheet, 2012) and is another standard for mainstream coverage of sports. Adams and Tuggle analyzed the program for the prevalence of stories about male and female athletes and teams. In a 30-day period, 778 stories featured male athletes, 16 stories were about female athletes, and 13 were about both men and women (2004). Another study of the program examined episodes from 1999 and 2004, and found that the show devoted approximately 2% of its time to women's sports (Messner, Duncan & Willms, 2005).

Messner and Cooky also conducted a broader survey encompassing SportsCenter and ESPN as well as network affiliate television stations and their coverage of men's and women's sports, as part of a project that has traced representations—including both frequency and type of mention—over time (2010). Their findings were equally dismal for coverage of women's sports. On network affiliate evening news shows "men's sports received 96.3% of the airtime, women's sports 1.6%, and gender neutral topics 2.1%" and furthermore "100% of the SportsCenter programs and 100% of the sports news shows in the sample led with a men's sports story" (2010, p. 4). When considering college basketball in March, when playoffs for both women's and men's teams occur, "the three network affiliate news shows devoted zero time, and SportsCenter gave token attention to women's college basketball, while lavishing huge amounts of air time to men's college basketball" (p. 5). Media outlets outside of North America are little better at promoting women's sports. A study of coverage by Belgian, French, Danish, and Italian newspapers of the 2000 Olympic Games found that only 29.3% of articles and 38% of photographs were of women athletes (Capranica, Minganti, Billat, Hanghoj, Piacentini, Cumps & Meeusen, 2005).

And it is not simply the amount of coverage that is at issue—many researchers have found that the ways female athletes are discussed are equally if not more problematic. Angelini, MacArthur, and Billings found in coverage of the Vancouver Olympics that "gender influences what sports will be shown, who is shown, the amount that they are shown, and the language that will be used to set the terms of this mediated debate" (2012, p. 275). The authors conclude that such divisions did not necessarily result in stereotypes, but differences did persist. In an analysis of one year's men's and women's NCAA basketball Final Four Championships, the authors found that "male athletes were evaluated as being significantly more physical and athletic in nature. Conversely, female athletes were accounted for primarily with respect to (a) where they come from, (b) having a good night, (c) having a good personality, and (d) what they look like" (Billings, Halone & Denham, 2002, p. 313). Likewise, Wanneberg found that media representations of Swedish elite sports showed an increase in the sexualization of both male and female athletes from 1967 to the 2000s, but while for men there "is a greater focus

on phenomena linked to sporting performance, muscles, strength, will, etc. . . . the descriptions of women focus largely on irrelevant things—like hairstyles, lips, clothes, etc." (2011, p. 275).

Why do we see such differences? One survey of newspaper editors found that 24% of editors agreed with the statement "women are naturally less athletic than are men" and 31% agreed that "women are naturally less interested in sports than are men" (Hardin, 2005, p. 71). And more generally, Cooky and Lavoi suggest that "the ways in which male and female athletes are represented in the media maintain existing gendered hierarchies, uphold sport as a male preserve, and reaffirm the masculine norms and values that are dominant in the wider society" (2012, p. 44).

Such limited coverage does more than deny traditional media audiences the chance to view or follow women's sports—it also influences decisions about which sports are popular and might gain a following as a sports videogame. As Peter Moore, president of EA Sports explains, companies such as EA Sports will look at the "addressable market size; how many players, how many fans who have indicated through research that they would buy a game" (Sheffield, 2010). If a sport isn't broadcast or streamed, or its results disseminated in the wider media, it will obviously have a harder time building a fan base, from which a company like EA Sports will draw as it makes decisions about what is profitable for the company. As Moore argues, "we're not in the business of doing the sport just because we like it, we're in the business of creating capital so we can invest the following year and do more sports and do . . . them better" (Sheffield, 2010). For a large company like EA Sports to invest in making such a game, a sport must prove its revenue potential not just for a one-off title, but as a potential franchise over time. Because of limited coverage of women's sports in traditional media, other industries are also less likely to value them.

History of Women and Videogames

Just as the history of sports includes women who wanted to play despite obstacles, so too the history of videogames has featured girls and women overcoming barriers to play, and eventually becoming a dominant force in the marketplace. The earliest studies of videogame content paint a picture of a digital world devoid of female figures, particularly in the role of the protagonists. Whether because of that lack or for other reasons, fewer girls compared to boys played digital games in the 1980s. In response, early champions of greater gender parity created a 'games for girls' movement that asked "how can we get more girls to play games," in part because they felt such involvement would lead to a greater ease with technology and potentially more women in STEM careers in the forthcoming decades. Pioneers such as Brenda Laurel created games intended to appeal to girls' interests, which were felt to diverge from the killing and violence in most contemporary games. Her Rockett series did well enough that its company, Purple Moon, was acquired by Mattel and then shut down (so as not to compete with its Barbie Fashion Designer titles).

Researchers have continued to document the varied circumstances in which women and girls *did* play games, including in MMOGs and via puzzle and adventure games (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Taylor, 2006). Yet until roughly the mid-2000s gaming has been portrayed as a masculine space, where few girls and women seemed to spend their time. This persisted until the arrival of new Nintendo systems that began to draw girls and women players in larger numbers. First the Nintendo DS with games such as *Nintendogs* released in 2005, and the Wii system with *Wii Play* in 2006, drove not only larger numbers of female players to try gameplay, but also (and perhaps more importantly) to change cultural perceptions about female players. Following that, the rise of casual games and then social games, and the explosion of mobile games thanks to the iPhone demonstrated that female players could actually be in the majority, depending on the platform or genre of the game or system in question. And in some spaces, such as MMOGs, women were actually the hardest of the hardcore players, playing for more hours than male players (Williams, Consalvo, Caplan, & Yee, 2009).

Statistics bear these statements out. The Entertainment Software Association of Canada claims that 38% of all gamers are now women, and recent reports show that 60% of the mobile game market is female (ESAC, 2012; Williams, 2012). Nintendo has reported that more than 50% of all Nintendo DS and Wii users are female (Jones & Thiruvathukal, 2012). In a study of *EverQuest 2,* Williams, Consalvo, et al. found that the top 10% of male players played an average of 48.86 hours a week, while the top 10% of female players played an average of 56.64 hours a week (Williams, Consalvo et al., 2009), and women were less likely than male players to have plans to quit the game. Finally, in a study of players of the (now defunct) casual MMOG *Faunasphere,* researchers found that 93% of players were female, and despite the casual design of the game, 51% played for more than 2 hours per session, and 78% reported playing every day (Begy & Consalvo, 2010).

Studies have also begun to counter earlier findings that women and girls have different interests and styles of gameplay than men and boys. Yee found that early reported differences could be accounted for when researchers controlled for a player's experience level in gameplay (2008). In other words, early studies that purported to show what *women or girls* liked were actually reports of what *new players* liked or how they played. When women started playing more, those differences disappeared. Jenson and de Castell have reported much the same, arguing that there are no essential differences between male and female players, and that researcher expectations have influenced results just as much as social expectations for gender performances by individual players (2009).

We are now at a point where it makes more sense to talk about individuals as players rather than gamers, as it has become somewhat of a ubiquitous activity in contemporary western society. Though some individuals still claim 'gamer' as part of their identity, for many more people games are something they play during the day or evening, on whatever platform they find handy, for varying amounts of time and effort. But while female players are now commonplace, their

representations still lag in the world of best-selling console games, particularly when one investigates playable characters, or the characters that drive the action in games (Williams, Consalvo et al., 2009).

In a study of the top-selling videogames of 2005–2006, Williams et al. found that playable female characters were a rarity—only 10.45% of games had such an option for players. The study also found that minorities were also quite rare, although ironically the place they had the best chance of appearing was in sports videogames—as basketball and football games tend to feature a more diverse cast than most shooter, action, and RPG-style games due to their reliance on real-life rosters (Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009). Those findings raise key questions about women's interest (or potential for interest) in sports videogames, as Olson points out later in this volume, where she reports few girls interested in sports videogames, in part because of the lack of female playable characters. Other studies have also documented that women players want to have the choice of a female avatar when playing a game (Consalvo & Harper, 2009). If sports videogames do not offer such choices, it may be little surprise that fewer women play them, despite their interests in sports overall.

Getting Active! The Rise of Fitness and Dance Titles

There is one area where the female audience is now catered to quite attentively in the console videogame industry, one that is somewhat close to athletics and sports: dance and fitness games. Although a few such titles existed before the current generation of consoles, it was with the success of Nintendo's Wii system and its gestural-based control scheme that fitness and exercise titles really came into their own. Western versions of the Wii were accompanied by *Wii Sports,* which simulated simplified versions of popular sports such as golf, bowling, and tennis. In part a promotional device intended to showcase the functionality of the Wiimote and motion control games, the title and system were also part of a strategy to bring new and lapsed game players into the Nintendo player base. Nintendo saw adult women as one of those key groups. In order to effectively reach them, one of Nintendo's strategies prior to the release of its console was to try and create a game system that "moms" would want to buy (Jones & Thiruvathukal, 2012). Such strategies worked, and along with Nintendo's wider advertising campaign, the launch and subsequent sales of the Wii have been wildly successful, with 96 million systems having now been sold globally and almost 80 million copies of *Wii Sports* distributed or sold (Nintendo, 2012a, 2012b).

The popularity of *Wii Sports* was obviously driven by its inclusion with the console, and some groups and families likely use the system for nothing else, but the popularity of the type of gameplay it offered wasn't a fluke—similar titles have followed, taking advantage of the Wii's control system (and later the Wii Balance Board) as well as the Xbox's more recent Kinect interface and the PlayStation Move motion controller to allow for novel interactions between players and their

games. Fitness games have been supplemented by more dance-oriented titles with the release of *Dance Central* in 2009, such that

> U.S. sales of dancing titles rose 326% during the 12 months that ended Oct. 31, [2011] compared with the prior year, making it the fifth-largest video game genre—after shooter, action, adventure and role-playing games—according to NPD. (Pham, 2011)

The range of games that use bodily movements to simulation action continues to expand, and games in this genre include *Wii Sports Resort, Wii Play, Kinect Sports, MotionSports Adrenaline, Zumba Fitness, Sports Champions, Gold's Gym Cardio Workout, The Biggest Loser Challenge,* and *Exerbeat* among many others. Such games have become a profitable part of the world of console gaming, with marketing efforts promoting such titles as appropriate for families, friends, and party situations. Sales figures for the top-selling games in January 2011 listed *Just Dance 2* in second place, *Zumba Fitness: Join the Party* at #5, *Dance Central* at #8, and *Michael Jackson: The Experience* at #9 (DVDGuy, 2011). A year later those trends continued: Gamasutra reported that for the week of January 12, 2012, the top-selling multiplatform games in North America included three fitness and dance titles (Cowan, 2012).

Rank	Title (publisher, platform)
1	Just Dance 3 (Ubisoft, Wii)
2	Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012 (Ubisoft, X360)
3	Sid Meiers Civilization V- Download Edition (2K Games, PC)
4	Zumba Fitness (Majesco, Wii)
5	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (Activision, X360)

Developers are focused on reaching new audiences with such fitness and dance titles. In an interview, Ubisoft's Tony Key claimed that

> We think that *Just Dance* is a huge game changer for the Kinect system in terms of bringing more females into the Kinect space. Microsoft is spending a lot of time, resources and strategy around bringing more families in, bringing more females in. Because they have the male, they've got him nailed. So to really really grow they know they've got to get those people in there. I think *Just Dance 3* is an awesome opportunity where we could have a Kinect game with more females playing than males. And that would be a first for Kinect as far as we know. (Cifaldi, 2011)

Although Ubisoft is a dominant publisher in the motion-controlled game space, other developers are likewise intent on cashing in on this trend and trying

to reach new audiences. According to NPD, "nearly 8 out of every 10 players of dance games are female" and "the majority of players are teens or younger" (Pham, 2011).

Although it's easy to laud such announcements as confirmation that girls and women will play videogames, it's key to note that such titles sometimes appear to be interactive extensions of more traditional fitness videos and DVDs that go back to the days of Jane Fonda doing aerobics on VHS tapes in the 1980s. And such games are not really presented as games per se, but rather as fitness tools for those interested in exercise or (more likely) weight loss. They aren't marketed as being for hardcore sports fans, even if they do happen to model themselves on a particular sport. More often, however, the focus is on exercise for the sake of burning calories and improved fitness.

Consider the market forerunner Nintendo and its release of the *Wii Fit* in 2008 in North America. Packaged with a balance board, the title featured sets of activities the player could engage in, ways to track fitness levels and weight over time, and a "Mii" that expanded and contracted visually to track the progress of its owner. Targeted squarely at women, *Wii Fit* (and now *Wii Fit Plus*) includes aerobics, yoga, muscle stretches and strength training, and balance-oriented games. On its current promotional website *Wii Fit Plus* is described as combining "fun and fitness into one product. It can change how you exercise, how you balance and even how you move" (Nintendo, 2012c). Similarly, Ubisoft's *Your Shape Fitness Evolved* lists under its game features the ability to "choose from over 90 hours of activities to design your perfect workout! Fitness classes like Boot Camp, Cardio Boxing, Jump rope and Yoga, along with a new suite of Dance classes" (Ubisoft, 2012). More dance-themed titles market themselves in similar ways. Majesco's *Zumba Fitness Video Game* implores potential players to "feel the rush," "dance your way to a sexy six pack with Zumba fitness core," and "party your abs off" via its game, which is also part of a larger marketing universe where interested exercisers can find local Zumba classes, more traditional DVDs, and train to become instructors themselves (Majesco Entertainment Company, 2012).

Such titles take as a basic assumption that women and girls wish to be in shape, to gain fitness levels, and to lose weight through some kind of exercise that their products can provide. Yet as Shira Chess has argued in relation to ads for such fitness games, "most of the exergames advertisements suggest that it is worthwhile to play if one is focusing their efforts on productively improving one's body. . . . Rather than breaking the hegemony of play, these exergames help to fortify gender roles and expectations" for women instead of being the liberating tool imagined by Susan B. Anthony (Chess, 2011, p. 250). On the surface, such titles encourage women to compete (against oneself) and excel in order to gain strength and stay healthy, but such games also rely on older tropes about body image and weight control—losing pounds and gaining flat abs—rather than about being athletic for its own sake. Although such exhortations in a climate of increasing obesity and other weight-related health issues should not be dismissed lightly, it remains

the case that such types of games are quite different from more traditional sports games, and their marketing is largely designed to implore women (and girls) to use their products in order to stay in shape—and thus fulfill heterosexual norms of attractiveness by doing so.

Certainly the choices for women and girls interested in playing videogames are broader than ever before. And if they desire fitness or dance-centric titles, there is no shortage of offerings from which to choose. Yet although such choices are sports-focused in one broad sense—they could lead to fitness if used regularly—most do not revolve around the practice or performance of a particular professional sport, and most could only be called 'games' in the broadest sense of the term. A few offerings do invite individuals to become more proficient in the practice of a particular sport—such as boxing or mixed-martial arts—but their focus is qualitatively different from AAA sports videogames such as *Madden* or *FIFA*.

And here is where we come to the root of the problem. Despite women's demonstrated history of playing sports and renewed interest in videogames, there remains a dearth of titles for them to simulate the professional sports they might also follow via other means. The history of sports videogames targeted to women, or that feature professional female athletes, is quite small relative to the numbers of women who play such sports. We will revisit the reasons why momentarily (they echo media coverage of women's sports), but first it's important to survey the landscape of console games that provide another sort of sporting simulation—games that feature professional female athletes.

Women in Sports Videogames: Tennis, Golf, Figure Skating, and Beyond

It's important to point out that this examination is not intended to be an exhaustive account of women's presence in sports videogames over the history of the medium. On a practical level it would be difficult (if not impossible) to identify all potential games and characters, particularly if we wanted to investigate the full spectrum of playable games platforms, including arcade games, multiple generations of console systems, PC and Mac titles, as well as mobile, social, and online-only games. Additionally, many early games were developed in Japan and never released globally, and the same occurred in North America and Europe. And although some sports videogames feature licensed playable characters, others use fictional athletes or the option for players to create their own avatar, with some offering gender as one customization choice. Rather than taking a broader census, this discussion focuses on highlights, trends over time in a few game series, and specific categories of analysis. Later studies should focus on the details within each piece of this larger puzzle.

When examining the top-selling sports videogames on a site such as Amazon, Wal-Mart, or GameStop (and it should be noted that there is a discursive element at work by large retail operations in defining what counts as a sports game as

opposed to a fitness game or another genre of game), we can easily see that female athletes and female sports teams are not present on that list. Indeed, such spots are reserved for games that feature licensed, professional male sports teams that have well-established leagues, fandoms, and a history of extensive media attention. Often comprising yearly releases, titles such as those in the *Madden NFL, FIFA,* and *Major League Baseball 2K12* series market themselves on their fidelity to actual players and venues, innovative ways to control teams across games and entire seasons, and constant roster updates to preserve the feeling that one is controlling actual professional players and their gameplay.

In many ways, such games simulate mediated presentations of their target sports just as much as the actual play of the games, making them part of a larger sports-media industrial complex rather than simple sporting simulations (see Stein for more discussion of this topic, this volume). Given the development budgets involved in creating that kind of title as well as the increasing prevalence of exclusivity deals, the sports genre (at least in terms of simulations of well-known sporting franchises) is now dominated by a few franchises created by even fewer development houses. Companies such as EA Sports, 2K Sports, and Microsoft now set the terms for what a major sports videogame release should look and play like. For example, on June 29, 2012, the titles listed in Figure 5.1 were the top 10 best-selling sports games at EB Games/Game Stop, Amazon and Wal-Mart for the Xbox 360.

As the list demonstrates, top-selling sports videogames that rely on professional franchises as a draw are limited to major league male-only sports such as football and baseball, with sports such as soccer and basketball also centering on male

Rank	Wal-Mart	Amazon	EB Games/Game Stop
1	NBA 2K12 (2K Sports)	NCAA Football 13 (EA)	NCAA Football 13 (EA)
2	NCAA Football 13 (EA)	Kinect Sports Ultimate (Microsoft)	Madden NFL 13 (EA)
3	Kinect Sports (Microsoft)	Kinect Sports (Microsoft)	NBA 2K12 (2K Sports)
4	Madden NFL13 (EA)	FIFA Soccer 12 (EA)	NBA 2K13 (2K Sports)
5	2K Sports MLB®2K12/ NBA®2K12 Combo Pack (2K Sports)	Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012 (Ubisoft)	Forza Motorsport 2 (Microsoft)
6	FIFA Soccer 12 (EA)	Major League Baseball 2K12 (2K Sports)	Madden NFL10 (EA)
7	Kinect 2 Value Game Bundle	Zumba Fitness Rush (Majesco)	Nascar 2011 (Activision)
8	Major League Baseball 2K12 (2K Sports)	Madden NFL 12 (EA)	2K Sports MLB®2K12/ NBA®2K12 Combo Pack (2K Sports)
9	MLB 2K9 (2K Sports)	NBA 2K12 (2K Sports)	FIFA Soccer 13 (EA)
10	Kinect Big League Sports (Activision)	Kinect Sports Season 2 (Microsoft)	WWE 13 (THQ)

FIGURE 5.1 Top ten best-selling videogames for the Xbox 360 in the sports genre

leagues and teams and ignoring female franchises such as FIFA women's teams and the WNBA.

Yet beyond the initial top 10 or 20 games in sales rankings, what counts as a sports videogame and who is a star player starts to shift in subtle ways, away from the hegemony of mainstream major league teams. Videogames that simulate sports such as tennis, golf, professional wrestling, and skateboarding begin to appear, and contain some professional female athletes' licensed images as part of a wider roster of stars. Tennis is one of the few professional sports where female players receive regular, popular media attention and earn (relatively) high levels of compensation for their efforts. It therefore makes sense that tennis videogame titles should feature female players.

Most popular tennis videogames don't concentrate on a particular sports star or event, but instead offer individuals the opportunity to play as a variety of famous tennis stars across a number of courts and competitions, such as Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. At least three such series have been successful, and have negotiated licenses with a wide variety of tennis stars to use in their games: *Virtua Tennis* (Sega), *Grand Slam Tennis* (EA Canada), and *Top Spin* (PAM Development). Each has employed both male and female tennis stars, although over the years the number of male and female players has varied, with some year's titles at parity but most now featuring greater numbers of male tennis stars. Sales for the games are strong but vary widely by the series. For example, *Virtua Tennis 2009* sold nearly 800,000 copies following its initial release, and *Virtua Tennis 4* has sold about 1 million copies, and apart from one year—2001—has consistently featured more male tennis stars than female stars (Justin, 2009; Various sales figures from SEGA, 2012).

Other tennis titles are no different. The more recently created *Grand Slam Tennis* series featured similarly disproportionate numbers of male and female stars: the

Title	Release Year	Male Stars	Female Stars
Virtua Tennis	1999	8 male players	0 female players
Virtua Tennis 2	2001	8 male players	9 female players
Virtua Tennis 3	2007	13 male players	9 female players
Virtua Tennis 2009	2009	14 male players	9 female players
Virtua Tennis 4	2011	15 male players	7 female players

FIGURE 5.2 *Virtua Tennis* series, 1999–2011

Title	Release Year	Male Stars	Female Stars
Top Spin	2003	10 male players	10 female players
Top Spin 2	2006	12 male players	12 female players
Top Spin 3	2008	13 male players	7 female players
Top Spin 4	2011	18 male players	7 female players

FIGURE 5.3 *Top Spin* series, 2003–2011

2009 version had 16 male players and 9 female players, while the 2012 version (selling only 80,000 copies) offered 15 male and 8 female stars. Finally, the *Top Spin* franchise started out with impressive levels of gender parity but has shifted over time to feature more male stars, particularly as playable "legends" or past tennis stars, with its most recent title (*Top Spin 4*) selling approximately 780,000 units (VGChartz, 2012):

Golf is another sport where female athletes have been successful, although stars of the game don't command the same levels of media attention (or prize winnings) as do tennis players. The golf videogame landscape in terms of licensed products is currently dominated by the *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* series, which has sold more than 30 million copies of its various titles (VGChartz, 2012). Running from 1999 to 2012, the series is published by EA Sports and features Tiger Woods along with a changing roster of playable golfers and an extensive number of golf courses on which to compete. Complete player lists aren't available for a few early titles, but enough data exist to show a similar level of exclusion of female golfers over the years.

Although such numbers are hardly at parity, they seem generous when compared to the numbers of female playable characters in other sports videogames. The *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* series and related branded titles (such as *Tony Hawk Underground* and *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*) is another long-running franchise (1999–2012) that offers players a wide range of characters from which to play. Yet of the 51 characters featured across 12 games, only 6 were female, and of that group, one was a non-playable character and another was actually a snowboarder. Professional wrestling also employs female playable characters in its videogame titles, with the *WWE* franchise regularly including the female "Divas." Yet including representations can sometimes be more problematic than simple exclusion: the 2006 *WWE Day of Reckoning* title offered players a special feature for Diva characters: to participate in "Bra and Panties" matches.

Year of Release	Male Golfers	Female Golfers
2003	11 playable	0 playable
2005	22 playable	1 playable
2006	22 playable	1 playable
2007	19 playable	2 playable
2008	18 playable	5 playable
2009	18 playable	6 playable
2010	18 playable	6 playable
2011	22 playable	5 playable
2012	19 playable	3 playable
2013	20 playable	2 playable

FIGURE 5.4 *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* series 2003–2013 (note that 2003 also had an additional 7 male and 4 female 'fantasy' or fictional golfers from which to choose)

Title	Year	Total # of Events	Male-only Events	Female-only Events
Beijing Olympics	2008	36	16	7
Vancouver 2010	2010	14	8	6
London 2012	2012	31	15	1 (beach volleyball)

FIGURE 5.5 Olympic Game titles 2008–2012

Sports videogames that focus on the Olympic Games are notorious for being poorly designed games, in part due to the need for coverage of so many sports, as well as time pressures for development (Wigmore, 2012). They also feature few representations of female athletes. Most such titles use fictional athletes rather than known stars, allowing the player to choose a country affiliation and compete in various sporting events of their choosing. But despite the near gender parity of the actual Olympic Games, the digital versions are much more gender stratified. Early titles from the 1980s such as those from Epyx had a few sports with female avatars, such as gymnastics for its 1984 *Summer Games* and figure skating in its 1986 *Winter Games*. More recent titles have boasted a wider array of sports and individual events, but gender disparities continue as seen in the figure above.

Professional sports that attract enough media attention can create interest in a related videogame, with both male and female players if the sport allows for that. Yet in most cases it is male sports stars that either receive top billing—such as in the case of Tiger Woods—or are most often licensed as playable athletes. The few exceptions have proved this to be the rule rather than the exception. The games in Figure 5.6 were created featuring female athletes, yet none sold well enough (for whatever reason) to merit similar future titles, either by other female athletes or to create a series such as the Tiger Woods franchise.

It may be the case that sales of *Shawn Johnson Gymnastics* are strong enough to rate a future release, but that remains uncertain at the time of this writing. One star that has reappeared in a subsequent game is Mia Hamm—most recently being featured in Ubisoft's DS title *Imagine: Soccer Captain* (*Coached by Gold Medalist Mia Hamm*), which appeared in 2009 and sold 100,000 units (VGChartz, 2012). Yet such numbers are not strong enough to serve as the base for a franchise.

A few sports games offer players the ability to create all-female teams or utilize fictional female characters in gameplay. In the case of games with female teams, I could find no titles that featured the WNBA, Women's Professional Soccer (now on hiatus or perhaps folded completely), or NCAA Basketball, despite their histories and levels of success. FIFA and EA Sports have yet to create a women's version (or selected female teams) in their popular series. What remains are largely games that promote fictional women's teams that trade more on female attractiveness than athleticism. Perhaps the most (in)famous is *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*,

Title	Platform	Year	Sales	Description
Jennifer Capriati Tennis	Genesis Mega Drive	1992	n/a	Customize your own tennis player
Kristi Yamaguchi Fantasy Ice Skating	Windows	~1992-1995	n/a	Create skating routines, outfits, and more for Kristi
Anna Kournikova's Smash Court Tennis	PS1	1999	n/a	Learn and play on multiple courts with a variety of players
Mia Hamm Soccer 64	N64	2000	70,000	Ported version of Michael Owen's World League Soccer
Shawn Johnson Gymnastics	Wii & DS	2010	130,000	Play as Shawn and develop your career and skills

FIGURE 5.6 Female sport star lead titles; sales figures from VGChartz (2012)

released in 2003 for the Xbox by Team Ninja. The game was actually preceded by the Gamecube title *Beach Spikers* from Sega in 2002, and spawned a sequel for the latest generation console as well as some imitators. Sales figures indicate that although the initial DoA title attracted a great deal of attention, it was somewhat of an outlier. However it's important to note that in the current Olympics-themed game *London 2012,* one of the sports offered is beach volleyball, and it is women-only, despite being a competition for both men and women in the actual Games.

Beach volleyball is not alone among sports videogame titles offering female teams that also trade on the spectacle of female bodies rather than athletic skill. For example, *Rumble Roses* (2004, Konami) and *Rumble Roses XX* (2006, Konami) both feature female wrestlers and between the two have sold a half-million copies (VGChartz, 2012). But most such games offer as features clothing options such as bikinis alongside promises of a "wider variety of moves and combinations [that] offer a more realistic wrestling experience" (Amazon, 2012).

One new development that will be interesting to follow is renewed interest in roller derby, a sport that is more strongly associated with female teams than male teams. In 2011 the developer Frozen Codebase released *Jam City Rollergirls* as a Wiiware download, with teams based on actual regional teams such as the Madison "Dairyland Dolls" and the Austin "Texecutioners" and characters modeled after real WFTDA skaters "incorporating elements of the athletes' personal style—even down to the level of their unique tattoos" (WFTDA, 2012). Such teams are part of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, which claims roller derby is "one of

Title	Release Year	Platform	Sales
Beach Spikers	2002	Gamecube	100,000
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	2003	Xbox	590,000
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	2003	PS2	280,000
Dead or Alive Xtreme 2	2006	X360	210,000

FIGURE 5.7 Volleyball-themed videogames with female characters

the fastest-growing sports in the US right now" (Wahlgren, 2011). Sales "have been coming in pretty well" and the game has received positive reviews. A few months after the game's release, sales were reported to be strong enough in North and South America to bring the game into 19 more countries, including many in Europe as well as Australia and New Zealand (Anonymous, 2011). However, as of June 2012, the company's website was dead, and MobyGames reports that the company was merged into ZyQuest (MobyGames, 2012). ZyQuest lists game production as one area of competence, but is more focused on IT, suggesting that no new roller derby games will be forthcoming from that team. It's also an open question whether other companies will attempt to build that market, or if it will remain a one-off success.

One last area that deserves attention is the ability to create one's own female avatar even in a game that features all male players. The option to design one's own avatar is a central feature in many types of games, beyond just sports videogames. Indeed, it is likely far more central in the MMOG genre than elsewhere, although the option is increasing in prevalence as developers wish to give players greater freedom in their play. Many sports videogames let players create their own avatars and develop them as potential stars alongside established teams. Yet most major franchise games limit the option to create male playable characters only. However, in 2011 EA Sports made headlines when it responded to the request of a 14-year-old girl who wanted to create a female character in *NHL 12*. Lexi Peters wrote to the company that "she was tired of never being able to virtually impersonate herself when playing against her brother" and that the lack of female avatars was "unfair to women and girl hockey players around the world" (Hadusek, 2011). In response, EA Sports decided to allow users to put female faces on their avatars, although the same article notes that "*Madden NFL* and *NCAA Football* currently lack any on-field representation and the *FIFA* series still hasn't implemented women's teams. We have male-dominated sports, do we really need male-dominated sports video games?" (Hadusek, 2011) Whether this one change will lead to more options for female players—whether to recreate their own likeness or to choose from professional female athletes—is an open question.

Summing Things Up: Women in Sports Videogames

This investigation of how female athletes and female sports teams have appeared in sports videogames has made a few themes apparent. One growing sub-genre has been gaining great speed in attracting female players: fitness and dance-focused titles, which although successful are not necessarily sports, instead targeting those who wish to exercise or lose weight. In contrast, top selling AAA console sports videogames remain in the grip of licensed professional male sports franchises such as FIFA, NHL, MLB, NBA, and the NFL. Despite the presence of the WNBA and women's NCAA tournaments as well as performances in the Olympics and other elite-level competitions, female sports teams do not have associated sports videogames. Looking beyond such major sporting franchises, some diversity becomes evident when considering sports such as golf, tennis, wrestling, and skateboarding. Yet even though a few such games over the years have featured a female athlete as the star of the game, the majority that do have women present include them as part of a roster of athletes featuring a larger number of male compared to female stars. Finally, in addition to games that allow for non-franchise-related sports play that gives individuals the ability to create a female player, only one major franchise-related title—*NHL 12*—has let players create female avatars that can play alongside their digital brothers.

Why should we care? It's not a bad question to ask. There are many critiques of professional sports, including their pursuit of profits over hometown loyalties, scandals involving players taking illegal substances to enhance their performances, and the reduction of most sport followers into fans rather than participants. Why should we care if women do not get the same opportunities to be commodified and turned into spectacle?

But if we can celebrate the accomplishments of elite men's sporting abilities and activities through attendance at events, television viewing, and taking control of simulated teams and events, why should elite women not have the same chances and opportunities to offer inspiration and display the beauty of sport? Fans of women's soccer or golf are likely to want much the same as fans of other sporting teams—to be able to view their favorite teams and players, analyze gameplay, and perhaps simulate it over individual matches or seasons. The athletes that provide such performances should be compensated and given chances to widen their audiences as well.

And for the players of such games, that gameplay can be meaningful in different ways. In a prior study of sports videogames and those who play them, two colleagues and myself (Stein et al., 2012) asked players about meaningful gameplay experiences they had had with such games. Individuals reported back an astonishing number and variety of such events that centered on a couple of themes. First, players felt that such games gave them a deeper appreciation of a sport they loved, allowing them to learn the rules, discern finer points of strategies, and engage in performances they would not be able to replicate in the physical sport itself.

Second, in terms of the social aspect of such games, players recounted memories of past games played with brothers, fathers, uncles, and friends that were important parts of their histories together. Such games served as social cement bonding them together, giving them shared experiences that clearly meant a great deal to them. Despite being "only" virtual sports games, those memories were part of a shared fabric of family and friendship that endured. Yet the vast majority of those who responded to the survey were male—either there were very few female players of such games or they did not participate in the study. Why not?

In part we surmised that we missed some female players who did not frequent the sites where we advertised our survey. Likewise, we knew from industry data that the predominant player base for such games was male. Although some women are demanding the ability to create their own likenesses in such titles, many more probably don't see themselves or their interests represented in sports that remain male dominated. Relatedly, in studies of MMOG players, women have consistently stated their preference for playing female avatars or at least having the opportunity to do so. Male-focused sports titles deny such choices, and limit the possibilities that female players will want to engage those options. Female players are also interested in mastery and control, and want to excel in competitions and accrue gaming capital (Royse et al., 2007). Yet there are very few ways for them to do so in the current system of sports videogames.

Perhaps women would be interested in more sports-focused titles if they didn't have to work so hard to find the female talent within them. There is no logical reason to assume there are female golfers in a title such as *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* or female skaters in *Tony Hawk Pro Skater.* Of course the videogame industry is not a charity, and AAA titles in particular are multi-million dollar enterprises. It seems unlikely that EA Sports or Visual Concepts would invest tens of millions in a FIFA-themed title that featured women's teams, unless they knew a ready audience was there and waiting. It actually has been at certain points—when the U.S. women beat China in the 1999 World Cup final, nearly 18 million viewers watched on ABC, and almost 40 million tuned in at some point during the match (Deitsch, 2011). In 2011, 14 million German viewers watched the German women defeat Canada in the World Cup opener, "shattering the women's soccer record when 10.48 million watched Germany beat Sweden in the 2003 final" (Deitsch, 2011). Likewise, nearly "13.5 million people in the U.S. tuned in to watch Japan's shoot-out victory over the USA in the final of the Women's World Cup" (The Neilsen Company, 2011). Although the Women's Professional Soccer league has struggled to draw attendees to matches, high-profile events like the World Cup do apparently draw interest from viewers in high numbers.

Yet with production costs for AAA console titles continuing to rise, it seems unlikely that EA Sports or a similar corporation will be interested in funding such a game any time soon. Yet as EA Sport's Peter Moore himself admits "one of the things that we typically have always prided ourselves upon in the last decade and a half of EA Sports brand is creating sports fans. Creating interest early on, when in

some instances people are really too young to go out and play the game … there is a very strong linkage between playing the virtual game and playing the real game" (Sheffield, 2010). So could creating such games help to build a base of sports fans that the industry could then address with even more videogames? Clearly more women than ever before now play games, and their interest in sports continues to rise both as players and viewers. Likewise, not all viewers of women's sports are female—there is likely a potential audience of male players of games featuring female sports stars and teams as well. If Moore is correct that playing videogames can increase one's interest in a sport and build a loyal following, then women players in particular are a logical group to target—yet perhaps the sexist beliefs and practices that Meehan raised in relation to the television industry really are at work in the game industry as well.

Perhaps another option to investigate is the rise in and attention to indie games. New distribution channels and platforms as well as pricing models and marketing opportunities have come together to allow for a much wider variety of games than have ever been available. Yet there are very few indie games that center on sports. Two that come to mind are *Nidhogg,* a fencing style game, and *Hokra,* a two-player game played with minimalist dots, yet described by Kill Screen magazine as "NBA Jam for minimalist junkies" (Sanders, 2011). Both games were created by male developers and seem to draw mostly male audiences of players. So where are the women's indie sports games? Could these be a more viable alternative to seeing the Women's World Cup played on a game console?

Another final alternative would be for more mods of current sports games—allowing for more than the creation of a single female character; instead letting players create teams and franchises of players they are interested in following, such as allowing players of *NCAA Football 13* to create teams of female players rather than the Texas Cheerleaders and the USC Song Girls. Some fans have already attempted such efforts, although they remain incomplete. One unrealized example was the WNBA mod featured at BTeam sports, which was never finished. If players can create and post more than 8,000 mods for a fantasy-themed RPG such as *Skyrim* to the Steam network, perhaps they can also create interesting alternatives to MLB and NHL current offerings. And such mods would force us to ask the question—beyond a re-skinning of avatars from male to female, what would such mods entail? How are women's sports different, if at all? Sports experts can argue the finer points of those questions, but if the tools were available, perhaps more fans of women's sports could start experimenting with those answers on their own.

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SECTION II

Remediating and Complicating

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6

PLAYING THE GAME ON TELEVISION

Abe Stein

The graphical pop-up startled me at first. I had grown accustomed to varying camera moves in my sports videogame play, so seeing a wide-angle shot of the arena during a time-out was normal. But this teaser was new. In the lower left-hand corner of my *NBA 2K12* screen a small, animated Dwight Howard, star player for the Orlando Magic, sauntered onto the screen. He was followed by Derrick Rose, all-star point guard for the Chicago Bulls. They were pantomiming an aggressive conversation; Howard shoving a basketball into Rose's chest, egging him on. Then the commentator's voice announced that Rose's Chicago Bulls would be squaring off against Howard and the Orlando Magic at seven o'clock on Thursday night. What kind of promo was this? What exactly was the game advertising to me with this overlay? The two NBA stars casually walked off the bottom corner of my screen and the basketball game I was playing resumed.

Just such a promo, though somewhat surprising in my videogame, is familiar from many hours of watching televised sports. Networks spend large amounts of money to secure broadcasting rights for sports, and often advertise upcoming contests during those broadcasts. Forthcoming basketball games are advertised during the broadcast of basketball games, baseball during baseball broadcasts, and so on. Using full-motion graphical overlays, or "mattes," the networks display advertisements of upcoming games to capture the attention of viewers during breaks in the action. What is especially interesting about the example from *NBA 2K12* is that the information about a fictionalized contest had no operational bearing on the videogame simulation I was playing. The game being advertised would not exist beyond the advertisement. The in-game advertisement for a fictional contest was a wholly aesthetic feature, designed to reinforce the televisual aesthetic that is familiar to the audience of players who also watch basketball on television.

Many sports videogames look and sound like televised sports. The marketing rhetoric around these games reinforces the comparison, with new features often billed as improving on an already immersive televisual presentation. In the marketing push for *Madden NFL 13,* Electronic Arts [EA] advertises that the game "has the feel of a nationally televised broadcast, with CBS Sports commentators Jim Nantz and Phil Simms calling the action from the virtual 3D booth" (easports. com, 2012). Videogame critics will often laud a sports game for appearing real, for example, extolling that "[NBA] 2K12 treats every game like a televised matchup, with intros, animated roster lineups, and commercials for upcoming games . . . " and remarking "The only way this could be more like an actual NBA broadcast would be if it locked the players out and canceled itself" (DeVries, 2011). The "televisual" design of sports videogames reinforces a notion of "simulation" that for designers depends largely on familiarity for game players, specifically the experience of watching televised sports. The above promo example is just one of many aesthetic design choices that are made in the creation of sports videogames to reinforce a relationship to the televised version of the games.

In general, the sub-genre of sports videogames commercially referred to as "sports simulations" is highly representational, modeling not only the rules of the given sport, but also the broad sports context that defines a given sport culture. For example, *Madden NFL Football*, one of the largest selling sports simulations of the past decade, is a videogame representation of not just the rules of American football, but specifically the National Football League. The design attempts to accurately model the teams, the players, the stadiums, the officials, and every other property of the league that informs play. Furthermore, the designers include representative models of cultural aspects of the phenomenon of the NFL, including but not limited to fans, tailgating, advertisements, and of course, the televisual production of broadcast football. Fans of football, a large subset of whom comprise the majority of the *Madden* player base, primarily consume NFL football on television. Sports videogame designers, appealing to the sensibilities of the sports fans who are their primary audience, have developed an aesthetic that is highly referential to the broadcast experience with which game players are so familiar.

But how do designers of sports videogames conceive of the games they create? What do they make of their role in helping to shape the relationship between a sports fan and the televised game, and between their digital simulation and the televised sport? Do developers use direct references from sports broadcasts to influence their design? Are the sports game developers in conversation with the producers of televised sports? This chapter, in beginning to unpack the complicated relationship between televised sports and sports videogames, focuses on the developers of the videogames. Through analysis of qualitative interviews with developers, I hope to identify not only what they do to create a televisual sports game, but also how they understand and make sense of their process. A close look at the language of the developers I spoke with, articulating their understanding of the relationship between the two media forms, shows a highly nuanced approach

to designing sports videogames for an audience primed for reading the games in relation to their experience of sports on television.

And sports videogame players *do* watch sports on television. Previous work showed that a vast majority of sports videogame players watched mostly sports on television, and also self-identified as sports fans (Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). The majority of sports videogame players will likely be familiar with the myriad televisual conventions that are employed by producers of broadcast sports simply because they see them routinely. Beyond merely the televisual, sports videogames, for the majority of the audience that plays them, are highly contextual experiences; meaningful in relation to the complex array of mediated sports experiences. Steven Conway and Mark Finn articulate this point, writing, "It is clear that the contemporary audience's consumption of sport is now largely a mediated consumption, influenced by various formats . . . all of which can impact the reception and comprehension of the sport in an intertextual manner" (Conway & Finn, forthcoming). Sports videogames have become a significant form in the sports media landscape, and are experienced in relation to other sports media. Conway and Finn expand on this point:

> The follower of sport, whether she chooses it or not, is figuratively bombarded from all sides by networks of media distribution pushing sports-related content to their mobile phones, tablet, television, radio, magazine, and of course their personal computer or game console; to say 'sport-media' is becoming a redundancy in the modern era where to many fans sport *is* media. (Conway & Finn, forthcoming)

Sports videogames borrow and build on, and reference, many of the established conventions of mediated sports, not least of which is the televisual.

However, sports videogames are doing more than just borrowing design from and referencing the televised medium. In fact, sports videogames may best be understood as a remediation of the televised form—building on the established medium and offering new affordances to players (Crawford, 2012; Conway, 2010). Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, in their foundational text *Remediation,* identify the titular phenomenon as "a complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium" (1999, p. 45). This convergence is a fundamental marker of so-called new media. Remediation is not a devaluation of the source. Rather it "ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways" (Bolter & Gruisin, 1999, p. 47). It is important to recognize, however, that television and televised sports are not being replaced by the newer medium of videogames. The relationship between sports videogames and television is not that of "new" borrowing from and obsolescing "old." It's a far more nuanced and bi-directional affair. As Conway and Finn point out, the relationship is intertextual (forthcoming). Sports videogames

undoubtedly refer to the televisual, while television borrows from and refers back to the popular genre of games. As two primary modes of sports consumption, television and sports videogames are bound in a feedback loop of reference, each building on the advances and innovations of the other.

Building on this notion of intertextuality, I turn to Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin when suggesting that the relationship between sports television broadcasts and sports videogames is dialogic. A form of intertextuality predicated on a sense of textual interdependence, dialogism offers another useful framing for understanding the relationship of remediation between televised sports and sports videogames. The metaphor of a "dialog," an exchange, suggests a kind of mutual borrowing, a free flow of ideas and design, in both directions (Holquist, 2002). Although Bakhtin conceptualized the dialogic with reference to the intertextuality of literature specifically, and language more generally, the notion of media in communication with each other has been re-articulated over the past decades with the explosion of transmedia theorization born out of Jenkins' work on convergence (Jenkins, 2008). Dialogism is useful in understanding the relationship between the differing forms of sports production explored in this chapter. The producers of videogames borrow and remediate the televisual, while producers of sports broadcasts keep an eye on sports videogames, looking for opportunities to reinvigorate their medium with a game-like aesthetic. In some instances, as I will explain later, the communication between the producers of the two media is direct.

Brett Hutchins and David Rowe, in their book *Sport Beyond Television: The Internet, Digital Media, and the Rise of Networked Media Sport* (2012), take a close look at the commercial ecology of remediated sports texts, with a focus on videogames. They point out that sports videogames "produce a remediating effect that is manifest in representational, economic, and material ways" (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p. 152). The authors nod to the televisual aesthetic of sports videogames, but the focus of their argument is on the economic effect of convergence on the sports media ecology, arguing that "digital games are an integral part of an overall media strategy that interlocks with broadcast, print, online and mobile media, with each medium used to promote and direct attention towards the other" (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p. 154). Building on interviews with media strategists from professional sports, Hutchins and Rowe rightly demonstrate the impact that digital gaming has had on traditional sport revenue streams. "Their [games'] commercial appeal lies in their capture and stimulation of concentrated fan and gamer attention and the additional exposure that they offer to sponsors, advertisers, teams and athletes" (2012, p. 156).

It is important to clarify my use of the term "televisual." Steven Conway and Mark Finn use the term to denote a sub-genre of sports videogames, those marked by a sports broadcast-inspired design, and differing from management simulations, and what they call "extreme" sports titles like *NBA Jam* or *Need for Speed* (forthcoming). I focus here on aesthetics, and specifically the visual and auditory production of televised sports and sports videogames. Looking at production, on one level we might say that televised sports and sports videogames are, at least

superficially, intertwined media. Upon closer inspection, however, I argue that the aesthetic design choices represent the external layer of a deeper relationship for sports fans, involving interactivity, social identity formation, and myriad fan practice and productivity. The depth of sports cultures, and the role of videogames therein, is profound and complex. This chapter merely scratches the surface of a complex sports media ecology, and more work needs to be done on the topic. As a starting point, in analyzing the practice and experiences of videogame developers with a focus on aesthetics, we can discover that the two forms, sports television and sports videogame, are engaged in a nuanced and complex dialogic relationship, the sum of which comprises a new transmedia engagement opportunity for sports fans.

Methods

This chapter builds on previous theoretical grounding of remediated sports texts (Crawford, 2012; Conway & Finn, forthcoming; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012), and on a theory of dialogic relationships between texts, offering a close reading of various instances of televisual design in sports videogames. Through this technique, with specific instances of the inclusion of videogame aesthetics in broadcast sports, I intend to discern some of the meaning behind the relationship between the two media. In this chapter I want to move beyond acknowledgment of the phenomenon of televisual remediation in sports videogames, toward reflection on the techniques and approaches that have evolved out of that relationship. Analysis of detailed examples of the remediated, dialogic relationship in practice will demonstrate not only *that* television and sports videogames inform one another, but more importantly *how* that relationship has developed and what meaning that may have for the community of players.

To dig into the relationship between the two media, I formally interviewed five developers of sports videogames about their experiences working on sports videogames, and one television creative director about his experience with the relationship between the two media forms. All of the developers I interviewed have worked for or currently work for Electronic Arts, one of the two major publishers of big-budget sports videogames along with 2K Sports. Current developers worked at Tiburon, an Orlando, Florida-based studio where American football videogames are developed for EA Sports. The sports television producer is a creative director at ESPN, the world's largest sports media conglomerate, including a sports cable television network. Respondents were recruited through a combination of professional and personal networks, and all of the interviewees were made aware of my research goals in advance of our discussions. My conversations took place in the spring of 2012, and interviews with current EA Sports developers were arranged and scheduled by a public relations employee of Tiburon.[1] Interviews were conducted either by phone or through Skype, and were audio-recorded when possible, and otherwise personally transcribed during conversation. Occasionally, interviews were followed up with e-mail correspondence to clarify some key points.

Embracing an ideology of important vernacular theorization existing outside of the academy, as espoused by Thomas McLaughlin and exemplified in Henry Jenkins' work, my goal is to let the voices of the designers, those very practitioners engaged in the production of the media under investigation, support the argument of televisual remediation in sports videogames (McLaughlin, 1996; Jenkins, 1992, 2008). Specifically, the idea of *vernacular theorization,* that "individuals who *do not* come out of a tradition of philosophical critique are capable of raising questions about the dominant cultural assumptions" proves especially useful when analyzing the discourse and language of practitioners and producers, in this case, the makers of sports videogames (McLaughlin, 1996). For example, accuracy, realism, and simulation, concepts that have been a persistent preoccupation for scholars in game studies for years, take on new meaning in the vernacular of developers of sports games, and are essential to understanding how the sports games relate to the televisual. My hope in working with qualitative interviews with designers is to ground textual readings of sports videogame aesthetics in a cultural context. This chapter, therefore, is not just about the games, but also about the people around the games, and specifically the developers who make meaning from their experiences designing them. In building a theory through interviews, and drawing on the voices of developers, I follow the lead of many excellent videogame cultural anthropologists such as Taylor, Pearce, and Consalvo, each of whom, though looking at widely differing communities ranging from online worlds, to casual games, and e-sports, locate the foci of their studies on the communities engaging the games (Consalvo, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Taylor, 2006, 2012).

This chapter explores, by way of qualitative interviews with the designers of sports videogames, development of a theory of the genre. In excluding from this study interviews with the players of these videogames, it is not my intention to support an intentional fallacy of authorship that privileges the aims of designers over the experiences of an audience. It is, in fact, very important to consider the reception and interpretation of the sports videogame by its audience, and that work demands further investigation. This chapter builds on previous work that looked at sports game player behavior and motivation, and that data is incorporated into this analysis (Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). However, to do appropriate service to the voices of a broad and diverse community of sports videogame players, and conduct meaningful analysis of their experiences, would demand a larger study that falls outside the scope of this chapter. It is my hope that by starting with an examination of the developers of the games I might begin an exploration of the domain that will beget a thorough study of player responses to, and readings of, the televisual in sports videogames in the future.

Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball

Over the nearly 40-year history of sports videogames there are many examples of the remediation of the televisual. A good place to begin our investigation is with the lead designer of one of the first graphical sports videogames, *Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball,* Don Daglow. Daglow worked on the game alongside

Eddie Dombrower between 1980 and 1982, and the title was published by Mattel. Developed for the Intellivision home computer system, the baseball game featured, among other vantages, an isometric camera angle overlooking the pitcher that was reminiscent of some television baseball views. The game presented a "3D" perspective of baseball, which was innovative in digital games at the time. The origins of Daglow's game predate the initial release for the Intellivision by almost a decade, and the story about the inspiration for design of the game, a Saturday morning Game of the Week baseball broadcast, provides a good launching point for our analysis of sports videogames and the televisual.

As an undergraduate at Pomona College in 1971, Daglow was introduced to the PDP-10, an early mainframe computer, and specifically the ELIZA program, a model of a Rogerian psychotherapist developed by Joseph Weizenbaum. Impressed by the technology, Daglow, a playwriting and English major, began to wonder how he might design games for the massive computer (Rogers, 2009). Daglow, an avid baseball fan, knew immediately that he wanted to make a modern, computerized version of an old baseball simulation he had tinkered with as a teen.

As youths, Daglow and a close childhood friend frequently played a popular Cadaco-Ellis baseball board game, *All Star Baseball,* logging "literally thousands of games" keeping all the box scores and statistics by hand. As a teenager, he changed the rules to include a mathematical simulation of pitching that was excluded from the board game. The board game served as inspiration for his digital simulation. Daglow, a self-proclaimed "huge baseball nut," described to me in conversation the early simulation, saying "we had only text, and it was printed on paper . . ." to provide feedback to the player. In Daglow's mind, the textual feedback for the simulation was related to the radio broadcasts of baseball with which he was familiar: "I had Russ Hodges and Lon Simmons ringing in my ears as play by play" as the verbose printout spat from the machine.

Daglow's work on baseball videogames would not end working on the PDP-10 in 1971. As the computational technology rapidly advanced through the 1970s and into the 1980s, and with the advent of home computing, Daglow continued to iterate on and improve his baseball simulation. By 1982, then working on the popular Intellivision home computer, he added an important feature that resonated with the game development trends of the period: graphics. Adding a visual component to the simulation changed how players approached the experience, transitioning from a strictly text-based simulation that had more in common with the statistically based *All Star Baseball* or *Strat-O-Matic* board games, to a system that operated with visual feedback informing the player as to the state of the game.

The inclusion of visuals in his baseball simulation was a breakthrough moment for Daglow, and his motivation was tied directly to experiencing baseball televisually. In conversation he remarked about the beginnings of *Intellivision World Series Baseball,* and aspirations for a "realistic" televisual presentation:

> I was watching, I think it was just the regular Saturday morning broadcast, and there was a runner on first, they were showing the inset of the runner

taking his lead off first, and the batter and the pitcher, and I looked at it, and I thought, "oh wait a second, oh I know how to make the Intellivision do that . . . the second thought I had was the animation is going to be non-trivial . . . getting the running man to look right was going to be non-trivial . . . we did a mockup of the game, which is basically no brains, just the visual display, and a pitcher throwing a pitch, and I think there was a lead runner on first leading off in the inset, recreating the style that people were used to seeing on TV. And this is something we had talked about for a long time in the community, you know, talking about" well one day we will be able to have graphics that look better than this, we'll be able to look like real life. (Interview with Author, May 3, 2012)

The televisual influence on Daglow and Dombrower's baseball game is immediately apparent. Not only the camera angles in the game, looking in from left field, or tracking the ball from behind home plate, but also the audio commentary all suggest televised baseball. The game utilized the Intellivision's "Intellivoice" voice synthesis module to provide audio commentary reminiscent of baseball broadcasters' play-by-play to support the action in the videogame and provide feedback to the player. With lines like "Long Fly . . . going . . . gone!" "he's in at first," "it's a hard grounder" or simple exclamations after a double play or an out, the innovative audio commentary positions the videogame in relation to televised

FIGURE 6.1 *Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball* (1982)

baseball. Although audio commentary and broadcast voiceover have become an expected norm in contemporary sports titles, with *Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball* this feature was innovative. Other features, such as the picture-in-picture window of a base runner, or the statistical overlay for upcoming batters, also invoke the aesthetics of televised baseball that would necessarily be familiar to viewers of the televised version of the sport.

Daglow's work, integrating a televisual aesthetic into sports games, was pioneering in sports videogame development. His contemporaries in sports game development, some working on early versions of *John Madden Football* or *Larry Bird and Dr. J. Go One on One,* were pushing innovation in sports games in similar directions, incorporating graphics and sound that specifically referred to the televisual experience of the sport. As we will see, the precedent set by Daglow and other developers in the early 1980s is still a standard sought by designers working on more current sports simulations.

Reality and Accuracy

Conversations with current EA employees working on the *Madden NFL* and *NCAA Football* franchises raise interesting questions about how developers of mainstream sports titles think of the games on which they work. I spoke with developers at length about their work as developers, about their thoughts on the role of sports videogames in the broader sports media ecology, and about their experiences as a sports fan working on sports games. Their thoughts, exhibited through language about "accuracy," "realism," "presentation pods," and "broadcast plus" design approaches, provide a useful frame for considering the perspectives of contemporary sports game developers, as they work through their understanding of the relationship between sports videogames and sports television.

One such developer I spoke with was producer Ben Haumiller. Ben's enthusiasm for college football spilled out over the phone. He is a graduate of Florida State University, a school with a big-budget men's football program, and a dedicated, ebullient student and alumni fan base. Though his loyalties will always remain with his alma mater (he is a season ticket holder), his fandom extends beyond the boundaries of his favorite team to college football in general. "It's a personal goal of mine to see as many college football stadiums as I can," he told me. Haumiller is a producer working at Tiburon, an Orlando, Florida division of Electronic Arts that develops both the *Madden NFL* and *NCAA Football* franchises. By videogame industry standards Ben is fairly experienced. He got started at Tiburon in 2001 doing quality assurance work on titles like *NASCAR Thunder 2003,* and *NFL Street,* though over the past few years he has returned to working on the simulations of the sport he loves, college football.

Focusing on the televisual, our conversation naturally turned to a landmark relationship between EA Sports and the massive sports media conglomerate

Entertainment and Sports Programming Network [ESPN]. In 2005 Electronic Arts and ESPN signed a 15-year "integrated marketing agreement" that ensured that the two brands would become increasingly intertwined for their already highly convergent audience base (Rovell, 2005). Prior to the arrangement, ESPN had been branded and used in many of SEGA's *2K Sports* titles such as *ESPN Major League Baseball 2K4,* and *ESPN College Hoops 2K5,* a union that ended with the new agreement with EA. The collaboration would ensure that EA could include not only ESPN logos, images, and music in their games, but also their on-air sports personalities. The agreement also laid groundwork for increased integration of videogame elements and branding in the ESPN television broadcasts. Eight years after the signing, in the wake of a successful cross-promoted *Madden NFL* cover athlete voting campaign, Raphael Poplock, the Vice President of Games and Partnerships for ESPN, commented on the partnership, saying, ". . . our relationship continues to produce successful integrations and activations that engage fans in new and innovative ways" (Electronic Arts, 2012). The agreement symbolically marked the convergence of two of the major players in sports entertainment. One great example of the early designs stemming from the landmark licensing agreement is the digital rendering of famous ESPN college football commentators in *NCAA Football* games.

During pre-game broadcasts, Lee Corso, a popular college football commentator, would routinely put on the costumed head of the mascot for the team he was predicting would win the game he was covering. Shooting in front of a typically raucous college crowd, the mascot head gag would incite loud cheers or boos from the students, depending on which team Corso chose to win. In the videogame *NCAA Football 06,* a digitally modeled Corso, sitting at the ESPN coverage desk, performs a similar shtick, donning the mascot head of the team he endorses. A recording of Corso's voice predicting a winner, as he does on television, reinforces the simulation of the sports broadcast event. Haumiller remembered this feature with some fondness, and he pointed out that newer features in recent titles incorporating ESPN personalities build on the legacy of Corso's inclusion in *NCAA Football 06.*

This design element, though early in the ESPN/EA integration arrangement, serves as an excellent example of the convergence of the two brands, and of how the televisual experiences of sports broadcasting can be found in sports videogames. Players familiar with Corso's gag during college football broadcasts would find its replication in the videogame a novel reminder of their experiences watching football on television. The inclusion of an ESPN personality, and of the context and setting for a broadcast feature, ties the two forms together. The feature represents a single instance of the remediation of the televisual, incorporating a familiar element of the old medium into the new.

Commentary and sports personalities have been at the heart of the convergence of televised sports and videogames since the very beginning. As Daglow pointed out in his interview, even as text spit forth from the PDP-10 simulation,

the voices of famous radio commentators were in his head. Sports broadcasters and journalists are a major part of mediated sports, and it is no surprise that they play a key role in the remediation of the televisual in sports videogames. As Hutchins and Rowe point out, *Madden NFL* emerged out of a strategy to attach sports stars to videogame titles, and the star they chose was a broadcaster. "Highlighting a long-term relationship between television aesthetics and game play, the icon of this series [*Madden NFL*] is NFL television commentator of almost 30 years standing, John Madden" (2012). The attachment of former coach turned famous commentator John Madden to a football videogame franchise reinforces the connection of the televisual to sports videogames, and specifically the role of commentary. Some of the earliest *Madden NFL* titles featured limited audio commentary from the game's namesake. Ernest Adams, a former employee of EA who wrote commentary for *Madden NFL* games, reinforces the design push toward the televisual when he writes, "While I was working on *Madden* we didn't try to do radio-style, partly because John Madden was a TV broadcaster and we didn't feel it would be appropriate . . . " (2009). Adams adds that at the time he wanted to include an animated telestrator, a technology for drawing explicatory diagrams on video footage, for John Madden to comment over, as that was one well-known aspect of his broadcast style. Unfortunately, the feature was not included for reasons of priority. He summarizes his piece, writing, "Interesting, accurate sports commentary is an integral part of the experience for serious sports simulations. Although it's necessarily less important than gameplay, a modern game would feel wrong without it" (Adams, 2009). While he suggests that commentary takes a backseat to the mechanics of simulation, he does articulate the importance of the televisual remediation in the form of commentary to a "modern" sports title. As exemplified by the aforementioned marketing push behind the inclusion of Jim Nantz and Phil Simms, the *Madden NFL* franchise still emphasizes the importance of audio commentary in affording an immersive televisual experience for players. Indeed, audio commentary, a part of the design even in Daglow's text-based sports game, has become a ubiquitous and expected feature in modern televisual sports videogames. Most sports titles incorporate professional commentators in the design of their games, and the licensing agreement between EA and ESPN cleared the way for more seamless and creative integrations of the ESPN on-air personalities into the EA Sports videogames.

And Haumiller points out that they are still finding new ways to incorporate sports television personalities into the game. When I spoke with him, he told me the designers at Tiburon were working on a feature called "Studio Updates with Rece Davis," centered around another famous ESPN sportscaster. Throughout the football game being played, updates from events occurring in other simulated games would be relayed to players in a manner directly copied from the broadcast updates found in the television broadcast of college football. For example, during a break in the action, the game will cut away to Davis to report on a score from another fictional football game outside of the player's control. Rece Davis,

modeled in the game, will programmatically deliver a coherent sports update of events occurring at the "same time" in the college football universe of the game. This is a common broadcast sport element, as the events of a game being covered are routinely contextualized as part of the broader sports milieu. As Haumiller suggests, this feature would reinforce a sense of "reality" for the players engaging in this fictional, simulative football universe. The emergence and persistence of the college football world, as relayed by the generated updates, and delivered televisually, reminds players of the experience of watching a game on television, receiving tangentially relevant information about the football world as the events of a specific game unfold in front of them.

A similar example of this persistent world and immersive contextualization can be found in the adoption of a "BottomLine" ticker, a popular feature in sports broadcasts, especially on ESPN. The news ticker, usually displayed across the bottom portion of the screen, displays continuously, running information from the sports world, ranging from scores of recent games to news events that involve sports teams and players. The ticker has become a ubiquitous part of television sports broadcasts on all networks, and can also be found on many non-sports news broadcasts. The ticker now appears frequently in sports videogames as well. Occasionally the ticker will display information about real-time scores from sports games played in real life, though often the scores are from simulated games inside the videogame universe. The in-game ticker is a direct reference to the televisual experience of sports, and presents a unique form of remediation, as the information displayed may cross the threshold of the game and be pertinent to the happenings of the sports world in real life.

Haumiller and I agreed that features like these are important to maintaining a sense of "reality" and accuracy" for the players of the game. Throughout the course of my conversation with Haumiller about the televisual aesthetic design of sports videogames, language related to "accuracy" and "realism," indeed often those two specific words, repeatedly arose. I wanted to tease out what Haumiller meant by "reality" and "accuracy," as I believed his conception of the terms was fundamental to the experience the developers of sports simulations were trying to offer players through their use of the televisual in their designs. As mentioned earlier, Conway and Finn argue that a sports fan's conceptualization of reality has shifted to reference an experience "which is not sport-as-played but sport-as-mediated" (forthcoming). His application of the terms "reality" and "accuracy" suggested to me an example of vernacular theorization taking place within the community of developers at EA.

He continuously mentioned the pursuit of a "realistic experience" or an "accurate depiction" when talking about design features in the games that attempted to replicate production techniques characteristic of a televised sports broadcast. In recent years, he tells me, a greater push has been made to collaborate with corporate sponsors ESPN, the 24-hour sports entertainment network conglomerate. In the past, ESPN-branded elements have been incorporated into the games design

in a limited way, with some televisual elements carrying the network logo. In recent years, Haumiller explains, the design team at Tiburon has had meetings with production staff at ESPN to discuss new ways that the game developers could incorporate ESPN material into the games, and vice versa. Convergence can be found in game features that have little to do with the mechanics of the simulated sport. For example, remediation of the televisual has been designed even into menu screens and broad user interface presentation. The fruits of these collaborations can be seen quite clearly in *NCAA Football 12,* with a set of in-game menus designed to be experienced as an interactive version of the ESPN "College Gameday" broadcast graphics. These steps taken to coordinate with ESPN are all designed to reinforce the sense of the televisual for the player, targeting the familiar in the name of "accuracy" and "realism."

I do not want to understate the significance of this language, attaching the notion of accuracy and realism to a form of mediated sport, specifically television. That developers are thinking of the "real" in terms of mediated experiences tells us that the experience sport designers are targeting for simulation is in part a mediated one, not necessarily just the experience of players on the field. A look at the carefully designed menus in *NCAA Football 12* reinforces this point.

Kyle Wolfe is a 3D artist at Tiburon, and the designer largely responsible for many of the "College Gameday" elements found in *NCAA Football 12.* Kyle had been at Tiburon since 2007, and he had started doing work designing stadiums for the *Madden NFL* game franchise. In 2009 he started working on "broadcast elements," as he referred to them, and was later put on the *NCAA Football* team to do similar work. Specifically, he designed a revamped menu sequence in *NCAA Football 12* to resemble the "College Gameday" graphics found in the televised broadcast. Wolfe worked closely with the footage from the ESPN broadcast to design 3D elements that matched the feel and experience of the televised sport coverage. He and other members of his team watched ESPN broadcasts of college football to identify specific camera movements and on-screen elements that he would later incorporate into his designs. Wolfe, a sports fan himself, would find that when he recreationally watched sports on television he would often "make a mental note" of specific elements that he would later try to include in his designs. In addition to a library of videos and images that Wolfe personally collected for reference, he also worked with a collection of elements, provided by ESPN, that the network uses in their television broadcasts.

Wolfe's responses echo much of what Haumiller suggested regarding realism and familiarity with the televisual for sports fans. He pointed out that the team actively read forum posts by players, looking for suggestions about how to improve the broadcast elements of the videogame. Repeatedly, for the community voicing an opinion on the forums, authenticity was tied to how closely the game resembled the televisual, and Wolfe and his team took great effort to strengthen those representational ties.

FIGURES 6.2–6.3 A comparison of the *ESPN College Gameday* intro sequence (right) and the title menu sequence in *NCAA Football 12* (left) shows the strong, intentionally designed resemblance. Courtesy of ESPN.

I also spoke with Greg Heddlestein, a senior designer at Tiburon and a product owner for the "presentation pod" working on broadcast elements in the *NCAA Football* games. He recounted a specific episode that exemplifies the influence of the televisual on sports videogame design. At one point a few members of the team at Tiburon were invited by ESPN to watch the production of a college football game between West Virginia and the University of Southern Florida from inside the broadcast truck. There, inside the metaphorical heart of a sports broadcast, the Tiburon team could see how the producers of the broadcast went about pulling together the myriad images and sounds that comprise a live sports program. As Heddlestein pointed out, many of the camera and shot edits that are used in the football television broadcasts are replicated in the *NCAA Football* and *Madden* games. He points out that, for television, the production is "reactive" whereas for games the designers have the advantage of being predictive in designing how the edits and camera cuts will play out in-game.

Heddlestein told me the presentation pod had a mantra, "broadcast plus," that was articulated throughout the development process. The notion of "broadcast plus" was to design an experience for players that carried all the signification and representation of the televisual while affording players an additional experience of engagement through interactivity. Heddlestein said that "consumers expect to see what is on TV" but also pointed out that the game was designed to be a mix of the experience of playing the game with watching it on television—hence the "plus" in the mantra. He pointed out that designers have the freedom to "put a camera anywhere on the field," a luxury that television producers would no doubt relish, but would be realistically unattainable. The "broadcast plus" ethos reinforces the concept of sports videogames as remediation of the televisual; incorporating the medium of television, absorbing its affordances, while adding a new dimension only made available by the new medium of videogames.

In each of my conversations with developers with EA, the recurrent theme of familiarity was raised in relation to the televisual. The developers design for familiarity, looking for points of intersection with televised sports. They understand that their audience watches sports on television, and the aesthetics of the game are purposefully designed to reflect the production of sports broadcasts. It is important to note that the developers position their sports titles in relation to televised sports for their presumed audience. Notions of the accurate, the real, and the simulative are wrapped up in presentational aesthetic choices that strive to remind players of their experiences of televised sports.

At the same time, the developers recognize the unique affordances of the interactive media of videogames, and design for experiences that, while reflecting the televisual, offer a different kind of engagement with the sport. The designers offer a "broadcast plus" experience with the games, a melding of the familiar with the new in the form of a videogame. This practice reflects the remediation of the televisual through videogames. The new medium borrows and reconfigures the old,

by way of reference and integration. Though the specific language of remediation may not be in use at Tiburon, the developers are certainly aware of the principles and are producing videogames with them in mind.

The Feedback Loop

Nick Laing, a researcher and developer also with EA Sports told me that he has a laundry list of production elements in televised sports over the past decade that he feels are a direct result of design innovations occurring first in sports videogames. Ranging from the evolution of the FoxBox (a scoreboard overlay including extra information), to the inclusion of graphical overlays to highlight certain players or moments, for Laing the myriad examples indicate that television producers are, in fact, keeping a close eye on sports videogames for aesthetic inspiration.

Beyond merely anecdotal examples suggesting a relationship, clear instances of a direct communication between videogame developers and sports producers have lead to the inclusion of game elements in sports television coverage. The television producers are meeting regularly with the game developers to find points of intersection. More than one EA Sports developer told me the story of just such a meeting with ESPN production staff. At this meeting, the question of camera positioning was raised by one of the EA Sports developers. The developer asked the ESPN producers how they make decisions about where to place the cameras in their broadcast. The answer from the ESPN team surprised the delegation from EA. The ESPN producers were taking cues from videogames in identifying new and compelling camera angles for their coverage. This anecdote paints an excellent picture of the landscape of cooperation that has formed between the two sets of media producers—a feedback loop of design.

The most stunning example of this recursive loop is the "Virtual Playbook," The Emmy award-winning technology started as a collaboration between producers at ESPN and EA after their exclusive licensing agreement was set in place. Using now-commonplace green-screen technology, ESPN commentators would interact with virtual characters on a digital playing field. The digital models are taken directly from EA videogame franchises such as *Madden* or *NBA Live*. The commentators would use the space as a life-sized telestrator, or as a kind of Holodeck of sorts for diagramming a play or making a point about a given player or situation. For example, a commentator on ESPN might use the "Virtual Playbook" to demonstrate how a receiver on a football team runs passing routes in a given situation. The technology allows the television production team to use videogame models as replacements for standard static image overlays or superimpositions that are common in sports coverage.

Seeing commentators interact with digital athletes seems uncanny at first. Keeping in mind that many ESPN commentators are former athletes themselves, the "Virtual Playbook" allows the commentators to demonstrate technique with their bodies in an illustrative way, making clearer references to the player or team

FIGURE 6.4 Digital 3D models from *Madden NFL 12* superimposed during a broadcast of the ESPN2 sports variety show *SportsNation* aired on March 21, 2011. Courtesy of ESPN.

being discussed. Furthermore, the integration of digitized models of professional athletes speaks to the convergence of televised sports and sports videogames. On a marketing level, it showcases graphical technology that players can expect to find in the latest game. On a deeper level, it signifies the dialogic relationship between sports videogames and the televisual that is already at play in the minds of the sports fan audience. For an audience that increasingly experiences the digital models in-game, the appearance of digitized versions of superstar athletes on their sports television broadcasts does not seem out of place at all.

Other more subtle examples of the effect of videogame aesthetics on broadcast sports can be seen regularly. One such example is the use of a graphical icon to indicate a player on a field or court. An early convention in sports videogames that has persisted, the use of a star, or a circle underneath the feet of a character, is often used to indicate to the game player who they are controlling, or what team each character is on. These player marker icons have become ubiquitous, especially in team sport videogames such as soccer, basketball, or hockey. In a recent trend, television producers have begun using similar player marker icons to indicate specific players of note in a replay highlight, or to display additional information such as direction of movement, or who the player might be defending. The icons are very similar to those found in a videogame, and are no doubt familiar to an audience with a literacy in sports videogames.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of televisual innovations were incorporated into baseball broadcasts on a handful of networks, exhibiting visual design that had previously only been seen in baseball videogames. Fox introduced graphical simulations such as *Ball Tracer,* which tracked the path of a ball from the hand of the

pitcher to the catcher's mitt, and *Strike Zone,* which displayed where the ball passed through an imaginary plane on the front edge of a strike zone. ESPN would in 2001 follow up on these technologies with the popular *K Zone,* which displayed an independently calibrated strike zone plane, accommodating for the unique height and stance of each batter, to indicate whether a pitch was in fact a ball or strike (Guéziec, 2002). Pitch tracking technology had a profound effect on the televised game of baseball, giving viewers access to strike zone information unavailable to players and spectators at the park. These pitch tracking and strike zone technologies are very reminiscent of similar designs found in preceding baseball videogames such as *All-Star Baseball 99* or 1994's *World Series Baseball* for the Sega Genesis.

My conversation with Chris Mantzaris, a senior creative director at ESPN, corroborates the notion of a dialogic relationship between the media forms. His role at ESPN has him working closely with EA on integrating the two brands, and he was heavily involved in delivering assets to the developers at EA to help them incorporate aspects of the ESPN broadcasts into the videogames. Just like the developers with whom I spoke, Chris used the language of "authenticity" to justify the relationship between the two media forms. When I asked him to clarify what his understanding of authentic experience was for game players, he stated,

> . . . before, EA's coverage, they had generic animations, generic brand that surrounded the college game . . . or, for example now *Madden, Madden* has its own unique look, but it's inspired by a couple maybe networks' coverage, but its their own brand, so, I think what EA's enjoyed, what we've enjoyed doing, why we got to this place, is that we've given them elements for FIFA. . . . for NBA, for college football, and a little bit of golf and tennis, we're giving them the elements so it feels like it's authentic to the broadcast of ESPN . . . that's what you see on TV, that's what people watch, so it's authentic because it feels like, it makes the experience real to them. . . .

Chris' language is very similar to that of the developers in framing a notion of authenticity relative to the experience of televisual sport. This reinforces the notion of sports videogames being designed to simulate the experience of the televisual, a "broadcast plus" experience as the EA developers refer to it.

But Chris expands on this more, and supports the idea that the videogames do, in fact, feed back into the design of the television broadcasts. He asserts that creative professionals in sports television do draw inspiration from sports video-games, and consider new ways to design their elements, and even their camera perspectives and movements based on innovations from videogames. He states, "it has been inspired the other way, and I can think of a few examples that I've been a part of where we've been able to push that into the conversation, and somehow that has found its way on to the air." His examples include the way information technology is incorporated into sports broadcasts, displaying relevant statistics and data about players and teams or the game being played; technology like the display

FIGURES 6.5–6.6 Similar strike zone displays found in *World Series Baseball* (1994) (left) and an ESPN broadcast using the *K Zone* technology (right). Courtesy of ESPN.

of a game score in a box on the screen. He also suggests the influence can be seen ranging from the broadcast titles introducing the games, down to the way the game itself is covered as it is being played. Chris' description of the creative production of sports broadcasts supports the notion that the relationship between sports videogames and sports broadcasts is necessarily dialogic, and bi-directional.

Ranging from the subtle influence to direct integration, features and designs from sports videogames are incorporated into sports broadcasts with increasing frequency. As evidenced by the example of the "Virtual Playbook" and the licensing agreement between EA and ESPN, television producers are working hand-in-hand with sports videogame designers to collaborate, integrating game assets in production, and borrowing ideas for expanding the experience for the sports viewer. This convergence suggests a heightened awareness on the part of the television producers to the fact that their audience is increasingly familiar with sports videogames and that they situate their play of sports videogames in the context of their other mediated sports consumption. By alluding to, or in some instances, directly referencing the familiar sports videogames, television producers are strengthening their connection to their sports audience and participating in the creation of a broad, transmedia experience for the sports fan.

Conclusions

The remediation of the televisual in sports videogames exemplifies an era of media convergence, and represents a push for integrated sports experiences across forms, reconfiguring the entire domain. Convergence, Henry Jenkins suggests, is not just a technological process. rather, it "represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 3). Convergence does offer an elegant physical metaphor for understanding the dialogic relationship that has developed between televised sports and sports videogames. As television and game producers work closely together, integrating the properties and aesthetics of their forms, the boundaries between the two media blur. Looking at player data for team selection in *Madden NFL 11,* writers at *The New York Times* identified that trends in team selection could be mapped to successes and events in the football season (Quealy, 2011). Studies conducted by EA have shown that leading up to and after the premier of Thursday Night Football broadcasts in 2011, there was increased activity online of people playing *Madden NFL 11*. When the game aired, there was a dramatic decrease in play on both the Xbox Live and the Playstation Network servers. Players are not only understanding their sports videogame play in relation to televised sports broadcasts, they are arranging their schedules to accommodate both, and using consumption of each medium to propel and inspire consumption of the other.

This chapter has taken a close look at the rhetoric and practice of sports videogame designers, with focus on the televisual aesthetic of sports videogames. The developers at Tiburon with whom I spoke, and even Don Daglow who

helped pioneer the genre of sports videogames, each in their own way contribute to a vernacular theory of remediation and the televisual. Notions of "accuracy," "realism," and "familiarity" are wrapped up in a perception of the televised sports broadcast that has become the ubiquitous and dominant form of sports consumption in America. The developers each spoke about working on the borders of the familiar, designing experiences that at once reference the televisual while affording new levels of engagement for the player. The developers are creating games that they hope will expand and build on the televisual, operating in concert with the sports broadcasts to create new ways of performing sports fandom.

And sports fandom is at the heart of this theorizing and discussion. Each developer with whom I spoke declared a level of personal sports fandom, ranging from casual observation to touring stadiums. The assumed audience for the games they create, no doubt corroborated by market data and research conducted by the publisher, are sports fans, too. The developers are designers for an audience of which they are examples. As these developers work to create an increasingly televisual experience with each yearly iteration, they create with the self-portrait of a sports fan in mind. The rhetoric of familiarity and accuracy espoused by the developers assumes an audience for *Madden NFL* that watches NFL football on television, or an audience for *NCAA Football* that watches college football on ESPN.

This culturally situated play of sports videogames is in many ways unique. The dialogic relationship between iterative sports videogames and sports television broadcasts depends on the perpetual nature of sports on television, and the rhythmic annual cycles of professional sports. Games are released in anticipation of a televised sports season, and sales can be mapped to the sports season specifically, with the bulk of purchasing occurring leading into, and at the start of a season, with a slight bump as playoffs begin. Furthermore, sports videogames are situated into a broad and far-reaching culture of sports, predicated in large part by way of the televisual. While other videogame genres such as first-person shooters, or fantasy role-playing games, also have fan communities with strong cultural group identification, the community of sports fans, whether passionate about football, basketball, baseball, hockey, or any other sport, has a deep cultural tradition, and more to the point, an established cultural history of televisual consumption against and into which sports videogames are positioned.

The evidence of the dialogic relationship between sports videogames and television broadcasts is immediately apparent upon observation of the two media. The significance of the relationship to the design of the genre, and to the experience of sports fans at large should not be overlooked, however. Sports videogames are becoming an increasingly popular mode of engagement for sports fans, and many long-standing traditions and practices of sports fandom are reinvigorated and reconfigured through engagement with sports videogames. One such practice is the experience of televised sports, which is on a path of convergence with sports videogames. The future of televised sports will undoubtedly include an expanding relation to the interactive medium of games, and the experience of videogames

will continue to evolve with reference to the televisual. As this chapter pointed out, over a matter of a few decades, television overtook radio and live attendance as the primary mode of consumption for sports, and though videogames will not likely overtake television in the near future, the intersection of the two forms presents an interesting case for continued research and investigation.

Note

1. The interviews were set up with the understanding that I was looking for informa-
   tion related to the televisual aesthetic of sports videogames, so the interviewees were
   somewhat prepared in advance of our discussion.

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7

IT'S IN THE GAME?

Shifting Scene with Online Play

Christopher A. Paul

Occasionally something comes along that offers an evolutionary leap in what videogames are and can be. In the arena of sports videogames, one of those jumps dates to the launches of *Madden NFL 2003* (EA Sports, 2002) and *FIFA Soccer 2004* (EA Sports, 2003), which were the first two EA Sports games to include the ability to play online. Suddenly a defining aspect of sports, the ability to prove one's mettle in competition against others, ceased to be bounded by space. Sports gamers playing two of the most popular videogame franchises could join each other on a virtual field of play from the comfort of their own couch without having to share said couch with an obnoxious, controller-flinging opponent.

Online communication can have profound impacts on communities of people. No longer cloistered into geographically bound subgroups, online interaction can expose players to a broader group of people and new norms or expectations. Before playing online, I thought I was pretty decent at *Madden*. I beat most of the people I played offline and I could easily beat the computer on the higher difficulty settings. That said, my introduction to online play with *Madden NFL 2003* was an awakening. I was routinely trounced. The people online were better than those I had been playing offline. They were also far less predictable than any friends or the computer, as my regular opponents' weaknesses and strengths had become quite predictable to me based on the hours I had invested in playing against them. I was rapidly introduced to different strategies and the holes in my game plan were made quite clear.

I vividly remember one of my first online games, where the only thing I could do effectively was punt. Punting is the football play that often marks the transition from offense to defense. When an offense fails to get a first down in the requisite number of plays, they can opt to kick the ball to their opponents in order to make the opposition cover more ground before scoring. My opponent was better

at both offense and defense, but he had clearly not spent as much time in the punting mini-game as I had. My offense would stall, but my magnificent punting would regularly trap him inside of his 5-yard line, which was my only real shot at making something good happen for my team. As his advantage grew, he got increasingly frustrated that I would deign to punt, particularly given that I was so good at it. Using the troublesome and inefficient chat system included with that version of the game, he used some choice words to communicate that I was breaking a socially constructed norm of the game, as many people in online play believe teams should not punt, and to emphasize that I was wasting my time practicing punting when I should really be improving my skills at offense and defense.

This small example highlights some of the ways in which online play transforms the experience, structure, and content of sports videogames. Improvements and changes to aspects of online play are now regularly promoted as primary additions to the value of new releases, as they are said to expand the surfaces on which players can engage their games of choice. To this end, integration of online play shifted how sports videogames work. Initially included as a means by which players could play in more dynamic ways, the build-out of online components changes what sports videogames are. In the process of evolving from a buggy, slow, and often frustrating chance to play against people from far-flung locales to a smoothly integrated way to play in a wealth of new ways, online play is a way for game publishers to redefine the scene for sports videogames, altering what their product is and on what terms these games are played. Online play has become a lever developers can pull to hasten the transition from one edition of a game to the next, one that is increasingly central to both the experience of gamers and the game development and marketing efforts of game companies.

Using tools from rhetorical analysis, the promotion of online elements of sports videogames can be seen as a mechanism with which to change the scene for and context of gaming. Predicated on the already embedded expectation that sports videogames are subject to annual release schedules, online play can be described as a rhetorical appeal to change what is "in the game." Focusing on the design choices of industry leader EA Sports and applying tools of rhetoric introduced to assess elements of persuasion and rhetorical context or "scene," critical analysis demonstrates how the increasing focus on online interaction is transforming sports videogames from products to services, and the costs and benefits of that trend to gamers and game developers.

Understanding the rhetorical dimensions of online sports videogames requires a base in rhetorical analysis. So we will start with an overview of how rhetorical analysis works and then move to a deeper discussion of the importance of scene in communication, which will enable an analysis of specific choices made by game publishers. Given the methodological background, it becomes possible to shift to analyzing the dynamics of sports videogames. Analysis of sports videogames requires a discussion of their key dynamics, such as their annual development cycles and the crucial role of licensing relationships. This broad overview of sports

videogames enables a transition into an analysis of the impacts of integrating online features by focusing on examples of how these new policies work in practice. Rhetorical criticism makes it possible to address why a shifting scene and context for sports videogames, one predicated on online integration, matters so much in transforming the production and consumption of sports videogames from products to be purchased into services to be used.

Rhetoric and Scene

The starting point for understanding how online elements change sports videogames hinges on a brief overview of how rhetoric works as an analytical approach. As a critical approach, rhetoric is generally focused on "the study of what is persuasive" (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 5) and is founded on examining "the symbolic dimensions of human behavior in order to offer the most complete explanations of human influence . . . rhetoric is the study of the art of using symbols" (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 14). Analyzing symbol systems is at the heart of rhetorical analysis. Prominent scholars began to develop a perspective on rhetorical analysis that presupposes that "the whole overall 'picture' [of reality] is but a construct of our symbol system" (Burke, 1966, p. 5). Originally focused on the role of language in the construction of those symbol systems, contemporary rhetoricians have moved beyond a straightforward focus on language. Instead, in the wake of a rhetorical turn, critics contend that "everything, or virtually everything, can be described as rhetorical" (Schiappa, 2001, p. 260). This broad notion of rhetoric is well suited to the analysis of sports videogames because it facilitates a critical focus on how systems, messages, and ideas can work to rhetorical effect. These broad processes of meaning-making can often seem innocuous, but regularly function to shape how we perceive the world around us. In the case of this chapter, rhetorical analysis helps develop a critique of how the changes in how sports videogames are played restructures the processes of play, consumption, and production of videogames by emphasizing the role of online play as a service, rather than a product.

This broader approach to what can be studied is founded on a set of beliefs about how symbol systems work to rhetorical effect. Basic holdings of rhetoric include the belief that there are no neutral choices from a rhetorical standpoint, but "there is a choice that appears neutral. . . . What term is neutral clearly depends on the environment" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 149) and the understanding that "rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth" (Scott, 1967, p. 13). These underpinnings result in an approach to criticism that recognizes rhetoric as "a way of knowing; it is epistemic" (Scott, 1967, p. 17). As these ideas have been expanded by subsequent scholars, rhetoric is at a point where "one of the assumptions implicit in much of contemporary rhetorical theory is that there is no way to ground representations of reality (rhetoric) in a reality independent of discourse" (Cherwitz & Darwin,

1995, p. 192). As rhetoricians expanded their focus to address the rhetorical implications of virtually everything, rhetoric became "a unique culture practice" based on "locating the substance of rhetorical knowledge in the creation of a situational truth" (Greene, 1998, p. 6). Contemporary rhetorical analysis sought to shift from examining "how one resides in a framework of meaning and interests" to analyzing "how one articulates and uses these" (Lyne, 1998, p. 14). Instead of focusing solely on speeches, anything could be subjected to rhetorical analysis by examining what makes that text interesting and noteworthy. In addition to explicating strategies of persuasion, rhetorical critics address how symbols create meaning, foster identification and/or division, and can circulate particular ideas.

In the wake of a turn toward big rhetoric (Gunn, 2008), rhetorical approaches ceased being identified by a focus on the textual analysis of speech and became "a mode or perspective of analysis. Rhetorical critics bring to any object the focus of making arguments about how symbols influence people" (Zarefsky, 2008, p. 634). Focused on exploring what goes on within certain cases of strategic symbol use, useful rhetorical criticism "offers another perspective, one that accounts for the production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of messages" (Zarefsky, 2008, p. 635). To this end, a broader understanding of rhetorical analysis is well suited to examine how the strategic use of online components functions as a symbol to rearticulate what sports videogames are. By shifting the context for play and the way in which players engage videogames, developers gain an opportunity to alter expectations. When deployed over a period of years, subtle changes become taken for granted and, when paired with clever marketing, can be sold as beneficent contributions that enhance a customer's purchase. However, fully pressing an analysis of how online gaming changes the context for sports videogames requires a deeper exploration of the Burkean concept of scene.

In the midst of producing a wealth of tools for rhetorical critics, Kenneth Burke developed a concept of dramatism, which held that human actions consisted of five elements: act, agent, scene, agency, and purpose (Burke, 1969). For Burke, the elements of this pentad provided "a universal heuristic growing out of the very concept of action recognized by writers on human motives for over two millennia" (Rountree, 1998). For critics, "the pentad itself does not reveal substance so much as it provides a schema for directing the critic's attention to the points of transformation in the narrative. The critic then is responsible for the fresh interpretations of the text" (Birdsell, 1987, p. 277). The tools of the pentad provide a means by which to analyze particular events and understand how an emphasis on one element over others is meaningful and why the relationships among various pieces matter. In the case of sports videogames, the proliferation of online components is an act undertaken by game companies (agents) with the purpose of providing gamers a motive for buying their games each year. The agency of the actors is determined in large part by a company's market share and the overwhelming dominance of a few publishers within the marketplace, as few sports videogames face open competition among multiple companies. However,

the most important element within the context of this analysis is how the integration of online play works to change the context or scene in which gamers play sports videogames. Gamers, by continuing to purchase games, participate in the redefinition of scene and the seemingly subtle year-to-year changes can lead to the development of a context for the consumption of sports videogames that is quite different from what it once was.

Given the broad dynamics of Burke's pentad, a handful of specific details aid in the analysis of why online play has been so important for sports videogames. First, there is the basic premise that "the 'scene' contains the act" (Rountree, 1998). The easiest way to think about this is to consider the different ways to understand the same acts in different cultural contexts. For gamers, genres of games with annual release schedules, like shooters and sports videogames, provide a very different scene in which publishers develop games than do large-scale franchise titles that are released less often. Further, the way in which a given scene is characterized "prescribes the range of acts that will seem reasonable, implicit, or necessary in that situation" (Burke, 1968, p. 450). Effectively, "the scene functions to *define* the agents and, in turn, the act" (Tonn, Endress, & Diamond, 1993, p. 170). Part of developing a particular scene can be to establish perceptions about the ways in which things are done, as "expected relations create rhetorical constraints for those who would sever presumptive ties between particular scenes and particular acts" (Rountree, 1998). In so doing, established patterns create an inertia that is hard to break. In the case of the rollout of online elements in sports videogames, part of the reason for incremental change is related to the technical elements and real-world constraints in which the games are designed and shipped. However, they are also subject to broader rhetorical limitations that are shaped by how much a given scene can be altered in any given period of time. The benefit to game publishers is that a long-term strategy can "try to fix our understandings of scenes, acts, agents, agencies, purposes, and attitudes to set the stage for their rhetorical purposes" (Rountree, 2001, p. 22). The slow play makes it harder to identify or disrupt the alterations in the various pentadic relationships because they feel natural and normal. As we become immersed in an annual release schedule, it is much harder to note the small, meaningful shifts that set the stage to radically redefine the scene for the production and consumption of sports videogames.

A specific, remaining element of this form of rhetorical analysis is how a particular scene can shape the actions taken by people within that scene. In assessing the reaction to the shooting of a woman in her backyard and the subsequent acquittal of the hunter who did the shooting, one group of scholars argues that

> Individuals who comprise a peculiar community may explain their own behavior as motion because it is controlled by communal traditions or "laws," norms that they as "agents" nonetheless have devised. Conversely, the behavior of those individuals in conflict with a community is often

> construed as action—the conscious or willful violation of rules and physical boundaries. (Tonn et al., 1993, p. 166)

Clever development of a particular scene can lead to situations where certain acts are conceived of as motion, something that is simply happening, rather than as action, something that is a deliberate choice. If one is able to depict a given action as motion, an inevitable event caused by larger forces or trends, then an act can be redescribed as a non-choice, something that simply occurred. Setting a scene is about crafting a terrain in which appeals will be made and texts are developed. In the case of sports videogames, the introduction of online play marked a chance to succumb to the motion of larger technological trends, while giving publishers the chance to assert control over their games and increase the perceived, or real, need for annual consumption of sports videogames by transitioning from developing games as products to providing online play as a service.

With this basic primer in rhetorical analysis and the ways in which the scene for communication can be especially powerful in mind, we now to turn to a discussion of the broader dynamics of sports videogames with a focus on EA Sports' contribution to setting the scene that defines what is left in the game and what has been cut out. In redefining the scene for sports videogames, EA Sports encourages serial consumption of their games through both active measures designed to limit or cut off features after a certain amount of time and through more passive measures, such as the development of an active community of players in which each one moving to a new version of a game makes the value of the old edition's online community less valuable and the new one more enticing. In so doing, EA Sports' actions emphasize the importance of looking to scene as a means by which to understand the videogame industry.

The Dynamics of AAA Sports Videogames

Sports videogames are special within the videogames industry for a number of reasons, but the most prominent difference between AAA sports videogames, such as those produced by EA Sports and 2K Sports, and the broader videogame sector is that big-budget sports videogames are released annually. Although large-scale shooter franchises have adopted a similar launch schedule, it is widely understood that licensed sports titles will release a version each year, likely with a handful of changes or additions to give game companies a hook with which to market their games as new and improved. EA Sports is the leading developer of AAA sports videogames and the *Madden* and *FIFA* franchises are the company's cornerstones. Both have been released under a variety of titles and for a number of different platforms over the years, with the first version of *Madden* being released in 1988 (EA Sports, 1988) and *FIFA* debuting in 1993 (EA Sports, 1993). Currently established as the biggest sellers among sports videogames, *Madden* is generally targeted to the U.S. market, whereas *FIFA* reigns worldwide. In recent years, *FIFA* has sold

about twice as many copies as *Madden* (the 2012 versions have sold 10 million and 5 million copies respectively as of this writing), but both of them remain among the most popular console games and significantly more successful than other AAA sports videogames (Zox, 2012). What is included in or excluded from EA Sports games is a frequent topic of discussion given the company's slogan "It's in the Game." From questions about the level of realism in their game engines (Baerg, 2008) to the designed obsolescence of their games (Paul, 2012), often what is most interesting about EA Sports games is what the company's decisions leave out.

Several dynamics define sports videogames. Sports videogames attempting to provide a simulation-style experience, like Madden and FIFA, need to procure a license from real-world sports organizations to use team logos, uniforms, and player likenesses. Games have to be launched within a tight window to match the start of the season for the sport on which they are based. Sales of sports videogames are driven by real-world events, some of which can spur purchases, in the case of a playoff or major tournament, and others of which can prompt far fewer sales than expected, as in the case of owner lockouts or player strikes. Licensed sports videogames are generally based on a simulation-style approach that attempts to replicate their real-world counterparts, which gives publishers a chance to pursue annual editions in a way that seems driven by forces beyond the control of the game industry. These factors are the basis for three key dynamics of sports videogames: roster updates, risk, and consumer purchasing patterns.

The primary charge against annually iterated sports videogames is that they are merely "roster updates." Generally, new versions of an annual sports title will reuse the same game engine as the previous year, with a handful of modest alterations to the game's graphics or game play in order to warrant a purchase. Recent additions to the games are increasingly based on online play, like the online team play that debuted in *Madden NFL 11* and *FIFA 09*'s "Be a Pro" online matches, but the history of annual upgrades includes debacles such as the passing cone that debuted in *Madden NFL 06* and was removed due to player unhappiness three years later (Hruby, 2010), and modest updates to career mode options in *FIFA 10* and *11.* However, each year these games undergo a full revision of the rosters, so that players are represented on the proper team and with a skill set adjusted to match their on-field/court/pitch performance. A prevailing belief that annual releases merely iterate, rather than innovate, leads to a perception that gamers need not upgrade every year, a notion that game publishers actively seek to dispel. This perception can become even more established when one considers that many AAA sports videogames, with *Madden* as a notable exclusion, enable players to share user-generated roster updates to eliminate the need for a new copy. To combat this notion, the president of EA Sports contends that "our games have become more complicated and complex, and we often get dogged for one of the biggest misconceptions in the entire industry—a lack of innovation year in and year out on annually iterated titles. I bristle . . . when I hear this because nothing could be further from the truth" (Chalk, 2007). Should the preconception that annual

releases of sports videogames are solely roster updates get to be too established in the discourse surrounding a franchise, gamers could quickly turn from regular to intermittent purchasing. Fighting against this notion and rooting it out of the scene for consumption of sports videogames is a key part of how online interaction plays into the current context for sports videogames.

The second key dynamic that shapes sports videogames is that, given the annual release schedule and the tight launch windows, risk is a tricky thing for game companies to balance. It would be straightforward to fight the idea that sports videogames are mere roster updates by engaging in substantial overhauls every year. Other kinds of game franchises do this, although they often eschew an annual release schedule under the belief that rushing titles out each year will negatively impact series quality in the long run (Orland, 2011). However, wholesale revisions stand the risk of not working out the way they were planned, a situation borne out by EA Sports' work on *NBA Elite 11* (EA Sports, Never Released). Should unexpected bugs or problems arise there may be precious little time to fix them, which means the game publisher would need to either release a poorly designed game that is likely to get panned in reviews and frustrate consumers or to launch late and lose out on most of the sales for the given sport. Further, extending the development time has the collateral damage of stepping on the development cycle for the next version of the game, raising the risk of either having more problems next year or not being able to add enough to the future edition to avoid becoming labeled a mere 'roster update.' This kind of problem was realized in EA Sports' *NBA Elite 11,* which was marred by bugs identified in a playable beta, ranging from glitches with certain circumstances where players could make almost every shot from long range, to the "Andrew Bynum Jesus Glitch" where the Lakers center would inexplicably run to center court, spread his arms, and stand motionless. The problems with and community reaction to the game led to the eventual cancellation of its release. The lesson the company took from the game's failure was that "people admire game companies that take risks but in retrospect they only seem to admire game companies that take risks when the risks work" (Totilo, 2010). This kind of lesson further defines the scene for sports videogames, as large-scale innovation risks led to a massive write-off and no functional game to sell. Sports game developers must exhibit some care in their design plans because changing too much too soon risks needing to scrap the game altogether.

The final piece of the overarching scene for sports videogames is the buying patterns of consumers. Although a large subsection of the player base for a given game may fall into a category of hardcore users who buy the title annually, a substantial number of gamers fall into a category of irregular buyers who upgrade periodically. There are enough of the latter category of players that industry analysts feared that an NFL lockout in 2011 would substantially impact the sales of *Madden* (Morris, 2011). Turning irregular buyers into annual customers offers a huge growth opportunity for game publishers. In addition to seeking to expand the base of players for the games as a whole, designing sports videogames in a way

to convert more periodic buyers into annual customers offers publishers growth, stability, and security for their sales.

These three elements of the scene of sports videogames set the tone for how online play functions rhetorically. Online play gives game companies the ability to confront the claim that new editions are merely roster updates, while providing relative safety and security in hitting a launch window. Online options can also be added over time, delaying the need to hit the same launch window that companies must hit to ship a physical disc. Finally, online play helps convert irregular buyers into regular customers by changing sports videogames from product to service. The full implications of context on the development and design of sports videogames requires looking more deeply into the practices of EA Sports, with a particular look at online play, downloadable content, Season Ticket, and server shutdowns.

Defining Context

Although attempting to divine EA Sports' intent in adding online elements to games would be a fool's errand, examining the impacts is far more straightforward. Online play has become an increasingly prominent feature since its debut. EA Sports games now routinely include online versions where players can run a franchise, play against off-site opponents, or use the player they have created and developed within the offline game against other players' personal incarnations. *FIFA Soccer* (EA Sports, 2011a) also includes a mode in which players can take over individual players and end up playing 11 versus 11, as they might in a soccer match based on kicking a ball, rather than pushing buttons. Playing online is quite easy, as long as players have an internet connection, an Online Pass that comes with new versions of the games, and either a PlayStation Network or Xbox Live Gold account. The emphasis on online play can be seen in the features being added to the new versions of the games, which are increasingly tilted toward enhancing the options available for playing online. The online components of EA Sports games define how these games work and what they can be. Analyzing how online elements transform sports videogames requires addressing the growing role of online play in EA Sports' games, then moving to an examination of how specific policies are changing sports videogames from product to service.

The clearest starting point for a discussion of online play is to look at discourse produced by both EA and gamers about what they value in sports videogames and how they conceive of the future of the industry. In the lead up to the launch of *Madden NFL 12* (EA Sports, 2011b), the head of EA Sports offered a sweeping statement about the future of sports videogames, contending that the videogame business is "clearly becoming an industry that's taking massive franchises and then spreading that experiences [sic] across multiple platforms and multiple geographies, anytime, anywhere. There will be no offline games, and it's very pleasing to see how our industry has embraced connectivity, has changed our business model

to react to consumer demands" (Alexander, 2011). This belief system positions online interaction at the heart of videogames. In an attempt to wring maximum value out of the "massive franchises," EA is charting a path where the ability to connect online allows what was the product to become a means of creating a service. Instead of placing the game at the heart of play, EA seeks to position online interaction and connectivity at the center of an experience intended to exploit the value of a massive, established franchise. By emphasizing online interaction, connectivity, and playing on multiple platforms, the scene for gaming shifts away from a dedicated interaction with a game and toward one that is available "across multiple platforms and multiple geographies, anytime, anywhere." The final element to draw from the quote is the last line about how this entire process is driven by a reaction to consumer demands. Developing the perception that consumers requested the changes and interactivity puts EA in a position where they are merely executing what gamers already want, rather than cynically developing online play to increase their control over their franchises. In Burkean terms, EA Sports' choices are portrayed as motion, that which would happen inevitably, rather than action, or choices where the company altered the natural order of things. Although many of their actions do not appear nearly as consumer focused as alluded to in this quote, maintaining the guise of a deep relationship with consumers has immense rhetorical value for EA.

Evaluations of sports videogames are also now routinely shaped by a player's experience with online aspects of sports videogames. When exposed to the broader online community of gamers, some found, as I did, that they were "no match for the [high] caliber players, who have the time to play online" (Freeberg, 2007). This could negatively impact their desire to continue buying new versions of sports videogames. Industry reviews, especially those targeted at active sports game communities, are often far more effusive in their praise of online play, with an evaluation of *Madden NFL 12* stating that "all of my online games so far have been immensely enjoyable and in many cases incredibly dramatic. The offensive/defensive balance, pacing, and reward for playing smart football is just about as ideal as can be. It's the most fun I've had with Madden online since 04" (Wiedey, 2011). Emphasizing the role of game design in the joy of his experience, Wiedey contends that a combination of good infrastructure investment that enables the game to play smoothly and a well-crafted game that rewards playing "smart football" makes for a good time. Other reviews of sports videogames offer different elements of emphasis, such as reviews of *FIFA Soccer* that stress the fact that "there are a number of ways to bring your game online and they're all wonderfully varied" (Ahearn, 2009) or that "with finely-tuned gameplay and a plethora of different modes and online features, you'll be playing FIFA 12 all season long" (Krupa, 2011). Online interaction offers a chance to extend the game and, as game companies increase the number of features included for online play, the game potentially offers additional value for those who play online. As long as there is a sufficient community of online players with whom to play and active servers

on which to interact, gamers get a chance to play in a dynamic way that reaches beyond potentially repetitive play against a computer opponent. Recent editions of EA Sports games have tried to help players find others of similar skill levels by instituting ranking and matchmaking systems. The introduction of Online Communities in *Madden NFL 12* offers players the chance to set "house rules" and game play expectations for a group of up to 2,000 players. These kinds of interactions mark the biggest change in scene for sports videogames, as they transition from a product on a disc to a service mediating online interactions among those using the disc.

Gamers certainly appreciate a good game and, for a sports game to be successful, a well-designed product is important. However, online play shifts the dynamics of play, changing sports videogames from product to service as the online elements redefine what the game is. EA has been incredibly open about this process in both their words and their deeds, which emphasizes just how important this transition is in redefining what is "in the game." In the run up to the release of *Madden NFL 12,* EA Sports' Peter Moore contended that the company was seeking to introduce a hallmark of online games, persistence, to *Madden* with the goal of making "our games less discrete, standalone experiences and more like services. *Madden* shouldn't be a place you buy, it should be a place you go" (Alexander, 2011). This notion of service was also stressed in the press reports surrounding *FIFA Soccer 12,* with a company official arguing that gamers can use the size and scope of EA Sports games to develop an identity where gamers "can build a status around that single identity, and once you can use that as your compete and compare point with your friends, then you've got a consumer and a gamer experience that's truly compelling, where nothing you do in a world is wasted" (Ditum, 2011). The end goal of this process is to create "an experience where everything they do in a world contributes to who they are, and they want to get to a point where everything they do is social" (Ditum, 2011). EA Sports is leveraging online interaction to shift sports videogames from something people buy once to something people participate in building over multiple years. How they will go about establishing this, beyond enhancing the value of a player's gamer name or increasing their bonds to other players through online communities and franchise play, is unclear. However, these kinds of attempts shift the dynamics of the game from a disc to an online world predicated on competition and engagement with a game of choice. Seeking to develop a player's investment into identities they build online, EA changes the scene of sports videogames to a realm in which users become increasingly tied to the investments they make in playing EA's games over time. Of course, continuing to capitalize on prior investments requires procuring a new edition of a game of choice annually.

Beyond the words uttered in press promotions, EA Sports' commitment to games as a service can also be seen in the company's actions. One of the first and clearest moves in recognizing the role of online play as a service can be found in the company's development and expansion of Online Pass. Debuting with *Tiger*

Woods PGA Tour 11 and now fully integrated with all of EA Sports' games, Online Pass is "a game-specific, single-use registration code included in new copies—and in new copies *only . . .* that will grant Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 owners access to online content" (McWhertor, 2010). Each new game sold by EA Sports comes with an Online Pass code. When first playing the game, players are prompted to enter the code in order to access any of the online content. Should they not have a code, which is likely if they are playing on a used, rented, or borrowed game, then they cannot access any of the online content, including the ability to play online. However, for $10 USD players can buy a pass to enable access to EA's online services. EA has not released information about how much revenue is generated by the program, but they have said that they have "been very happy with Online Pass. Online Pass for us was all about an acknowledgement of the value of the service we want to provide online" (Ditum, 2011). In partial response to player backlash, the company placed a justification for the program on their web site, arguing that "we've made a significant investment to offer the most immersive online experience available. We want to reserve EA SPORTS online services for people who pay EA to access them" (EA Sports, 2010). Specifically addressing concerns about their intentions with regard to the secondary games market, the company contended that "we think it's fair to get paid for the services we provide and to reserve those online services for people who pay EA to access them. In return, we'll continue to invest in creating great games and offer industry-leading online services to extend the game experience to everyone. I don't think even the harshest cynic can argue with that" (EA Sports, 2010).

The Online Pass program is a recognition of the divide between the game, or product, and online play, or service. Online Pass shifts the scene for gaming and redefines the terms on which players purchase and play their games of choice. By dividing out part of the playing experience from the game itself, EA Sports gains the rhetorical ground on which to charge that not even cynics would be able to critique the logic of their position. Similar kinds of programs have been integrated into EA games that are not sports titles via a program their CEO dubbed "Project Ten Dollar" (Edwards & Satariano, 2010), but the version included in games such as *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010) contains additional content, not just the ability to play the same game in a different way. Instead of focusing on the content that would be added through Online Pass, EA Sports discusses how the program "allows us to accelerate our commitment to enhance premium online content services" (Alexander, 2010). Although gamers blasted the program for assessing a charge for something that had previously been included in the purchase price of the game, industry analysts were thrilled, with one contending that Online Pass "is a service that simply says, 'If you plan on taking advantage of features not included on the disc, we ask that you pay a small fee.' To me, that sounds perfectly reasonable. I say bravo to Electronic Arts" (Brightman, 2010). The Online Pass program was the first fundamental shift toward changing what sports videogames are. Breaking from the notion of games as a product that can be consumed, EA Sports

sought to make play a service that is offered. Of course part of the dynamics of a service is that it is offered on specific terms, which EA Sports also integrates into their efforts to redescribe the scene for sports videogames, potentially aligning the company more firmly with fee structures for other sorts of online games.

Expanding on opportunities to 'offer' more options for their games, EA Sports has increased the role of downloadable content in their titles. In addition to the complementary patching and occasional roster updates that are included for all, the company has leveraged contemporary console technology to change what is included in the game and split out other content into premium downloads. One gamer complains, "the biggest change with this new *Madden* is the fact that it arrives like a [sic] economy car that EA wants you to pay to fix up. . . . If you pick up this rehashed title, you'll see many many MANY more examples of ways EA Sports is willing to take you money [sic]" (Aires, 2010). Linking the game to a car is telling, as that is a product that is typically sold with a variety of options available. Certain people can get a base model, while others pursue the option packages that best suit their desires and budgets. Policies of price differentiation allow companies to offer each person the specific package for which they are willing to pay. By stripping down the initial offering and then turning features that used to be complementary into premium options, the publisher can transform what was once a static product into a series of choices in an attempt to maximize revenue. In a blog reviewing his experience with EA Sports games, another gamer extends this argument, focusing on the exclusive licenses EA Sports hold for football titles, arguing that the additional charges built into EA Sports titles work "like tribute. . . . It's what EA does. You will pay and you will like it, because EA also holds the sole license to the NCAA and there are no other college football videogames out there" (Humphreys, 2009). By breaking up their products and pushing out competitors, EA Sports stands in a position where it can control certain elements of sports gaming. Building online options into their games lets EA Sports control access to who gets to play, via programs like Online Pass, and also break up their games into parts and charge a premium for key pieces. By expanding the use and integration of downloadable content, EA Sports can reconstruct what sports videogames actually *are.*

As of this writing, EA Sports' most recent outgrowth in this direction is the development of their Season Ticket program, which debuted with *Madden NFL 12.* For $24.99, players can purchase a membership in "an all-new program that offers subscribers full digital access to five EA Sports games three days before launch, 20% discount on downloadable content, free premium web content and membership recognition displayed in-game and online" (EA Sports, 2012). The company contends that the program "creates a better gaming experience for our consumers and benefits the EA SPORTS fan who wants to play early, play more and play better" (EA Sports, 2012). For less than half of the retail cost of a game, players get early access to practice and develop their skills, something that is likely targeted at the most serious players for whom early access would matter most,

as players still need to buy the game to play it after the three-day window. At the same time, purchasing access grants access to at least five different games, potentially introducing a player to the full version of a game they may not have purchased without an extended experience more complete than demo versions that often only feature two teams. The impetus behind the program is again the development of EA Sports' output as a service, rather than as a product. The shift in scene is tied to how "plans like this are an inevitable part of the industry's switch to digital content" (Schreier, 2011), because access to the game can be divorced from access to the disc. Gamers had less kind things to say about the program, deeming it "Project 25 Dollar" (Sliwinski, 2011) and referring to it as the company's "latest get-rich-quick scheme" (Sterling, 2011). Criticizing both the price of the program and what was offered, gamers argued that the program was flawed, and initial response was muted at best (Good, 2011). However, gamers did not argue against the idea of the service on its face. Accepting the role of EA Sports and granting that early access had value, gamers were more focused on terms and whether or not the service was a good buy, rather than expressing that they were being charged tribute or ripped off. Likely in part because the service was new and complementary to what existed before, rather than competitive with it or subtracting from what was once included, Season Ticket was a better received way in which EA Sports rearticulated just what it is that they are selling.

The last major part of the changing of scene concerns the terms of play. Videogames that are a wholly offline experience can be played as long as one has the game and it stays in a playable state. Online games are somewhat different. If players can host servers for games, they can continue to play as long as there are other people who want to play with them. However, in cases where the games are hosted on servers either supplied or heavily supported by game companies, the producer can pull the plug on the service whenever they wish, rendering the online version of the game unplayable. Electronic Arts maintains a web page with a list of the games they have shut down for online play and those that are soon to be closed. As of this writing, EA Sports has shut down online service for most versions of *FIFA* and *Madden* up through the 2010 release, leaving only two editions of each game playable online. The page leads with the following:

> The decisions to retire older EA games are never easy. The development teams and operational stuff pour their hearts into these games almost as much as the customers playing them and it is hard to see one retired. But as games get replaced with newer titles, the number of players still enjoying the older games dwindles to a level—fewer than 1% of all peak online players across all EA titles—where it's no longer feasible to continue the behind-the-scenes work involved with keeping these games up and running. We would rather our hard-working engineering and IT staff focus on keeping a positive experience for the other 99% of customers playing our more popular games. (Electronic Arts, 2011)

In presenting the ongoing consequences of keeping an online game up and running, EA stresses the amount of peak online play and the desire to keep the most popular games up and running. At the same time, the list of games that get closed prompts the concern that "with titles as recent as 14 months old [being closed down], it does ask some serious questions about what you're actually paying for" (Walker, 2011). The ability to shut down servers and online access has a substantial impact on how play works for sports videogames. The increasing focus on online elements means that a shutdown substantially limits how long the game lasts and what it will become. Especially with franchise sport titles, shutting down a server means that EA Sports can move players from one edition of a game to the next. EA's control over the servers ensures the impact of passive transitions of gamers from one version to the next is magnified by active decisions on the part of EA that render the online play of older games impossible. As a result, online elements and their increasing importance give EA new options about how to sell and market their games. By emphasizing the service elements of games, EA Sports gains a level of control that stretches far beyond what they could reach in a scene where they produce products instead of services.

Conclusion: EA Sports: Game Service Provider

The scene for communication enables and constrains the kinds of appeals that can be made within it. In the case of sports videogames, EA Sports demonstrates how shifting a scene can provoke hostile responses from gamers and enthusiastic support from business analysts who are ultimately interested in expanding EA's bottom line. Most importantly, EA's actions show how scene can impact the construction of games themselves by increasing the role of online play. EA Sports has shifted from a producer of products to a provider of services, which lets them better differentiate customers by selling downloadable content and enforcing movement from one version of a game to the next through the promotion of online play that effectively requires the newest version of the game

Beyond the elements explored in this chapter, EA Sports is pursuing plenty of other means by which to pursue their transition to a service model. In striking a deal with Virgin Gaming, the company announced the debut of the EA Sports Arena, which offers players a chance to wager on games and play in sanctioned cash tournaments (Virgin Gaming, 2012). However, likely the largest benefit of transitioning toward providing a compelling online service is in building an online community to purchase the newest version of the sports game franchise. Prior to the advent of large-scale online play, users need not upgrade to the latest product in the chain, as many of the options likely replicated what the user already had. In shifting the scene of gaming and increasing the role of online play, EA Sports retains the ability to shut servers down and can require players to upgrade to play with other people. Situating more and more of the value players get from the game in online elements means that players must have the most recent

version of the game to play against other people and recognize all the benefits of online interaction. Beyond the Online Pass-driven restrictions placed on players, emphasizing the services tied to online play puts a firmer expiration date on any purchase, as players are buying a product, but EA Sports is increasingly investing in the service that comes along with it, and they have the sole power to set the terms for accessing that service. In the case of sports videogames, EA Sports' efforts to redefine the scene for gaming shift the range of acts available to consumers by encouraging them to play online and upgrade more often. Transitioning toward a service consolidates power in the hands of EA Sports and encourages players to spend more with EA Sports because what is included in the game keeps changing as the scene for gaming is rearticulated.

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8

THE SLOW GRIND

Skateboarding Videogames and the Culture and Practice of Skateboarding

John Sharp

Why I Am Writing about Skateboarding Videogames

I was a skater[1] once, but let me be clear: I was not very good. When I say I was not very good I mean I never really mastered airs, I could not ollie[2] a foot in the air, and I never did get very good at rail slides and grinds on ramps. This is not to say I did not try nor that I did not enjoy skating immensely. I first started skating in the mid-70s on a cheap plastic board that kept me happily slaloming down the hill in front of my parent's house. Skating really took hold of me around 1983 when a high school friend introduced me to the skating subculture inside the American hardcore music scene. For the next three years, few days passed that I did not skate in Atlanta or Athens, Georgia, on my homemade quarter pipe, at the innumerable office parks and strip malls, or on the half pipes in the area. I also haunted skate shops, hung with skaters, and went to hardcore shows where we skated before and after the bands played. In other words, I was a diehard skater.

In the years since, I have occasionally gotten back on my last skateboard[3] but not as often (or as well) as I might like. When I have a chance, I watch skaters, flip through skate magazines, and watch the occasional video. All to say, I am no longer part of skateboarding culture, but I still follow it and feel a connection to it.

I should also mention my relationship to skateboarding videogames during my skating years. Atari's 1986 arcade game *720°* was *the* skateboarding videogame during my skating years. It did not reflect my skater world at all. My friends and I skated ramps built out of stolen wood, on the street and at office parks and other places where we were decidedly unwelcome. *720°* on the other hand was a sanitized world of timed skating events; antiseptic skateparks; empty streets, and a dorky, over-padded skater who was chased by a swarm of bees if he did not hurry from event to event. Just as off-putting were the goals of the game—earn tickets

to skateparks and successfully complete four skating challenges (ramp, downhill, slalom and jump). If the player was just skating around, and either not taking on one of the challenges or in a skatepark, the swarm of bees was going to come after him. Why was it not OK to just skate around? Why did the skater have to do those silly old-school challenges? Needless to say, though I played *720°* on occasion, it did not really represent skating for me—no Dickies cutoffs, no flannels, no ShoeGoo, no cursing, no snaking nor people singing along with Minor Threat or Wattie and the Exploited. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing to see here but a well-protected skater and a pesky swarm of bees.[4]

It is from this perspective, that of an ex-skateboard diehard turned game scholar and game designer, that I look at three contemporary skateboard videogames—*Skate 3* (EA, 2010), *Shaun White Skateboarding* (Ubisoft, 2010), and *Tony Hawk: Shred* (Activision, 2010).[5] Skateboarding subculture is encoded through fashion, behavior, language, and music, but most importantly through the practice of skateboarding.[6] Skaters are keenly tuned into three key aspects of their subculture—the act of skating, the practice of skating, and the material and social culture around skating. It is on these three levels that I will look at skateboarding and skateboarding videogames.

The Act of Skating

Regardless of the era or skate population, the core mechanics of skating are the same—balance on a skateboard while using the skater's own effort or gravity to move through an environment. For skaters, that is just the beginning. Skating really begins when the skater navigates the urban or suburban environment with purpose and style and, more pointedly, attempts tricks. This can be as basic as a wheelie (balancing on the two rear wheels with the front of the board angled up) and as complicated as the skater can make it—doing flips in the air with the board still against their feet, jumping over staircases, sliding down handrails on the skateboard, etc.

Skateboarding truly is a peculiar, post-industrial activity that is more like golf than cycling, and has more in common with gymnastics than rollerskating. Though skateboarding can be a mode of transportation, it has greater affinity with golf in its preference for landscapes against which the skater pits him or herself and not as a means of transportation as we typically think with cycling.[7] And though skateboarding shares some equipment and the basic self-propelled mechanics of rollerskating, skating is much more like gymnastics in terms of the intricate multi-part tricks performed by the skaters.

Skating is essentially a sport of grace, style, and innovation within a tightly confined tradition. There are only a handful of trick types: grinds, slides, flip tricks, ollies, airs, jumps, lip tricks, and freestyle tricks. The big ideas of skating are generally understood to have already happened, leaving skaters to concoct increasingly more nuanced variations on existing tricks. This should not suggest that skating is

simply about pulling off increasingly noodly tricks in baroque sequences. Skating is also characterized by a love of being on the board, moving fast, trying hard, and committing to doing one's best for oneself and no one else.

One of the ways that skating culture separates the poser[8] from the legitimate skater is through dedication to the practice of skating. Watch most any skating video[9] and you will see more failed attempts at a trick than successes. The willingness to try, fail, try again, fall, try again, and fail again is a big part of the culture. For skaters, to not fail on a regular basis is to not have really tried, or to have tried something easier than you should have. There are not instruction manuals for tricks, and skaters are notoriously unhelpful when it comes to teaching one another the subtleties of even the simplest of tricks.[10] The fact is that learning how to skate is like learning to do most anything physical in nature: lots of repetition, failure, incremental progress, and (hopefully) eventual success, followed by still more practice and repetition.

Take the most basic of skating tricks, the grind. Grinds are when the skater slides the trucks of his board (the metal devices that attach to the bottom of the board and house the axle on which the wheels are mounted) along an edge like a curb or handrail or lip of a ramp. Mastering the basic curb grind requires a number of basic abilities:

- Shift balance from parallel to the deck with the forward momentum to perpendicular to the direction in which the skater is propelling forward;
- Through one means or another get one or both trucks onto the edge to be grinded while moving at a fast enough pace to keep the board from altogether stopping forward momentum;
- Maintain balance throughout;
- Disengage the trucks from the curb by shifting weight up and to the side;
- Rebalance weight across the board once the wheels touch the street.

Mastering this takes a good deal of time, practice, and patience.

Skating is more than a grueling practice; it is ultimately about that experience of being up a few inches off the ground, on a board propelled by four wheels through the environment. The feeling of seamlessly interacting with your board while moving over terrain and obstacles is something skaters relish. Skaters describe being in the zone, or flowing, and many similar phrases for describing what it feels like when things are going well. Certainly, Csikszentmihalyi's ideas of flow (1990) fit the skateboarding experience. One important detail about flow in skating is the way it is parceled into short bursts. Most skating runs are measured in seconds, and are often separated by large chunks of time while other skaters take their turn, or the skater simply returns to the starting point to re-attempt the run. For skaters, flow is therefore understood to be rare, highly sought, but seldom obtained. Though skaters would never use the term, flow is in many ways the quasi-spiritual quest of dedicated skaters, and is at the heart of the practice.

For diehard skaters, skateboarding is a meritocracy. You cannot buy status—fancy equipment is more likely to earn a skater ridicule than respect. Only a skater's skills and dedication to skating matter. Skating skills are evaluated in two ways: the difficulty and precision of trick execution, and the style the skater brings to their tricks in particular and their skating in general. More important for diehard skaters is the dedication to skateboarding. This speaks to the amount of time and energy spent living and breathing skating. Skaters who seem to have devoted their lives to the pursuit, whether they are good at it or not, are deemed just as important as those who are successful.[11] What tends to be the case is those who are good are also incredibly focused on skateboarding, and have formed a lifestyle around it. This is not truly sustainable for most, particularly that middle group of skaters who have been doing it for a while, but are not highly skilled, but it is the degree of focus expected within the practice of skateboarding at the pro and diehard levels.

Whether it be on a ramp, at a park, or a street spot, for many skaters, skating is as much a communal activity as it is an individual practice. For skaters, this takes the form of session skating.[12] The dynamics of a skate session are difficult to pin down to a set of variables, but who is there, how well the group knows one another, whether or not locals are present, the number of people, the kind of spot, and any number of other factors impact the tone of a session. For some, a session is a time to socialize through skating. For others, it is time to learn new tricks, while for others, it is a place to showcase new tricks or establish an identity. It can be a place where rival skaters challenge one another through their skating. What is almost always the case at a skate session is the peculiar mix of the individual and communal. Although most locations have a one-at-a-time tradition, there are times when more than one skater will skate at once. Even when only one skater is skating at a time, the other skaters and bystanders alike become integral to the experience through their banter, commentary, cheers and jeers. Skating becomes performance, whether the skater intends it as such or not.

The Culture of Skating

To understand skateboarding culture, a glimpse at its history is necessary.[13] Skating as it exists today began to take shape in the early 1970s. Surfing-inspired skateboarding in California led to the quick spread of the sport. Skateparks began to pop up across the country, and more and more people flocked to the sport. This unfortunate confluence of throngs of inexperienced skaters, concrete skateparks, and shoddy equipment catalyzed a veritable plague of skateboarding injuries. Skateparks had trouble securing insurance, and parents began to pull their children off their skateboards. By the late 70s, skating had died out for the general population, though it remained alive through a small subculture of dedicated skaters.

During the underground period in the late 70s and early 80s, surf culture mixed with the early American hardcore punk ethos to produce not a skating subculture. Tight micro-communities popped up around the country, sharing the

trait of a deep commitment to skating best captured in the saying, "skate or die." To fill the void left in the wake of the closed skateparks, the remaining skaters began to build ramps; sought out pools to drain and skate; and scouted out office parks, strip malls, and other public spaces with skateable terrain.

By the mid-to-late 80s, skating began to rise in popularity again, though with an emphasis on street and ramp skating rather than skateparks. In 1990, skating fell into decline again. The dedicated subculture of hardcore skaters remained through this downturn, but when skating bounced back in the early 90s, the culture was radically transformed. It was no longer a punk-tinged fringe subculture; it was (and continues to be) a widely accepted athletic pursuit. Since the 90s, skating operates in three different groups: the pros seen in the magazines, videos, and at competitions; the small nucleus of hardcore skaters; and the vast majority of skaters, who view the sport more as a hobby or one of many viable athletic activities.

The collapse of skating in the late 70s played a big part in shaping the sport, practice, and culture of skateboarding. The concerns about insurance risk and injury led to a "suck it up" attitude that assumed and expected scrapes, cuts, sprains, and the occasional broken bone as part of the experience. Skaters were unwelcome at office parks, public grounds, the streets, or pretty much anywhere insurance policies and laws explicitly forbade skateboarding. This only managed to reinforce the outsider identification of skater culture. As skating went underground in the early 80s, connections formed to the early American hardcore punk scene that was popping up in cities across the United States. Most skate sessions were scored by hardcore blasting out of someone's boom box. The lack of popularity, the sense being unwelcome and unwanted, and the punk rock connections cemented the outsider diehard skater mindset.

Skaters gravitated toward a functional variation of punk fashion. The standard uniform of the mid-80s was a band t-shirt for the likes of Black Flag, the Dead Kennedys, or occasionally Black Sabbath; jeans, Dickies work pants, or ugly plaid shorts; and shoes that only came in three varieties—low- and high-top Vans, and a little later, Air Jordans. This was about the extent of skater apparel. As hip hop became more popular, it too fueled skating, leading to a punk rock/hip hop hybrid soundtrack and fashion sensibility. The punk connection remained stronger for half-pipe skating, while hip hop was more often the soundtrack to street skating.

After the rebirth of skating in the 90s, things remained more or less the same fashion-wise. Band shirts were sometimes replaced with skate company logo t-shirts, the pants got really baggy, and a bewildering variety of skate sneakers flooded the market. What changed the most was the skater mindset. Though the "skate or die" ethos stayed alive with the diehards, the music and fashion are about as deep as the old ways go for the vast majority of skaters.

Skating culture is created and disseminated in a few ways—through the diverse idiosyncrasies of local micro-scenes of diehards, and through the homogenizing national magazines and professional videos that lionize the pros, and more recently, skater-produced videos (that often imitate the mags and promo videos).

The importance of magazines and videos on skating's culture and practice cannot be overlooked. The modern era of skate media starts with the 1981 debut of *Thrasher* magazine, and two years later, *Transworld Skateboarding*. Where *Thrasher* was the embodiment of the skater as punk-tinged outsider with its embrace of an all-in skater lifestyle, *Transworld Skateboarding* placed emphasis on skating as a more reputable, sophisticated sport. Between the two, everything a young skater needed to know about the latest tricks and the skater way of life were laid out in print. When a new trick was developed, it would receive a spread in one (or both) of the magazines that provided some insight into how the trick could be reproduced. The slang, music, as well as the sense of humor pervaded the magazines, more so in *Thrasher* than *Transworld Skateboarding*. The two magazines continue to fulfill these niche roles today, some 30 years later.

Video was even more important to spreading the sport and culture of skateboarding. Hoping to increase sales, Powell Peralta, one of the few board and wheel manufacturers around in the early 1980s, began producing videos of their sponsored pro skaters. Word got back to the company that the videos were a huge hit with skaters, and so the videos were made available for sale. Where the magazines could show particular moments in a trick, at best a Muybridge-like sequence of shots, video could show the full trick, which could be rewound and watched over and over until it was understood. By the late 80s, all the skate equipment companies were producing videos, making them the primary vehicle for spreading the minutia of the ever-growing repertoire of tricks. Skaters could now glean the technique and style of the pros, and attempt to replicate them in their own skating. Skaters could also be privy to the pros' skate sessions and hear how they joked around, talked to one another about their skating, and just as important, see what they wore. The culture and practice of skating was now available on VHS. Video codified skater culture—the fashion, the slang, the music, and the attitude.

The promotional videos and skate magazines remained the standard until the early 2000s, when the combination of inexpensive digital video equipment and high-speed internet connections allowed amateurs to produce their own videos. It was then possible for pretty much any skater with a little skill and the right equipment to post their skating feats.[14] Now skaters could perform their own prowess and allegiance to skating for the world to see.

Through these methods of dissemination—local communities, magazines, videos, and skater-created documentation—skating culture is spread and shared. Everything from fashion to music to skate gear to tricks to style is captured, studied, and emulated.

Skateboarding and Skateboarding Videogames

All this brings us back around to the subject at hand, the transposition of skateboarding and its culture into videogames. Like golf videogames, skateboarding videogames focus on translating the specific mechanics of the individual athlete.

Where golf allows customization of equipment, while largely abstracting the act of swinging into a fairly straightforward mechanic, skateboarding focuses on the mechanics of skating and glosses on the equipment.[15] Generally, skateboarding videogames abstract the sport into seven component parts: steering, propelling, ollieing, slides and grinds, in-air board grips, in-air body rotation, and in-air board rotation. Different games accurately model or drastically simplify these to varying degrees, depending on which aspects of skating they wish to represent.

Though skating is similar to gymnastics in some ways, it lacks the precise evaluation rubrics used to score a skater's performance. Outside of contests and televised events, skating also lacks structured competition. These create core challenges for skateboard videogame design: How do you measure a player's performance? And what form of structured competitions can be used that won't feel artificial?

Just as important is faithfully recreating the viewing experience of a sport. Simulating skateboarding differs greatly from the typical spectator-centric sport in which the game is played through the filter of the fan's perspective. For one, skateboarding lacks the tradition of live play-by-play packaging found in most other sports.[16] So instead of framing the bulk of the play experience with a simulation of professionally shot television, most skateboarding simulations fold in post-session photography and/or video clips that are presented as skater-shot instead of professionally shot. And because skating is a solo activity, the camera tends to take a first- or third-person perspective.

As with any sport, the primary challenge is transposing the essential qualities of the activity and culture into an enjoyable game that is authentic to the sport's subculture. With skating, though, there was an additional wrinkle; as Jocko Weyland puts it in the introduction to *The Answer is Never,*

> '*traduttore traditore*' (translator = traitor) is the saying in Italian, and there is the worry that any attempt to represent and translate something that has been such an inexpressibly important part of my and other's lives is a betrayal. (2002)

The representation of skating by televised contests, skating magazines and promotional videos is constantly under scrutiny by skaters. At least the pros and the diehard skaters have finely tuned radars for skating authenticity. So how can a group of outsiders, the videogame industry, authentically represent the sport, practice, and culture of skateboarding? Like most sports, skating is in large part understood through media. But where sports such as football and baseball are slickly produced, skating media is much looser. Still, it has to capture the humor, language, attitude, fashion, music, and all the other cues of the subculture. Hardest of all is capturing the commitment of skating at the heart of the diehard skater ethos. Distilling and transposing the pain, frustration, and boredom of all the

falling and waiting and looking that resolve in euphoric moments is the real challenge for game developers.

Ultimately, these questions about skateboard videogames and their relationship to skateboarding as an athletic pursuit, as a practice and a culture boil down to one core inquiry—how do the most recent round of games released in 2010 (EA's *Skate3,* Ubisoft's *Shaun White Skateboarding,* and Activision's *Tony Hawk: Shred)* address the experience, practice, and culture of skateboarding?

Skate 3

Skate 3 is the best place to start, as it is the most accurate in its depiction of skating and the current state of skating culture. The player is cast as an up-and-coming skater in the skate-friendly town of Port Carverton. Most everything in the town seems to have been designed for skating—smooth benches, planters, banked walls and ramps all over the place, skate parks scattered about town, etc. With its dozens and dozens of prime skate spots, a small army of professional skaters has descended on the town, ready to chat up and skate with the player. Though the customizable player character is an unknown at the game's start, the pros all seem to have met and accepted him or her as one of their own.

The best indication of the subcultural positioning of *Skate 3* is Coach Frank, who is at once the game's host, mascot, and help. Coach Frank is a caricature of an early 80s gym coach, with a headband, tight gym-coach shorts, a tight gym-coach shirt, and tall socks. Voiced by and physically modeled on the actor and ex-pro skater Jason Lee, Coach Frank is most visible in the tutorial levels that take place at his skating school,[11] though he pops up throughout the game to give the player tips. With a heavy dose of PG-13 skater humor, he teaches the player the basics of skating via the controller—starting, stopping, pushing, ollieing, grinds, flip tricks, and airs.

Once the player leaves the confines of the schoolyard, set free in Port Carverton, the loose story arc of the game begins—the player character is looking to start up a new skate equipment company. To do this, the player earns money and status by skating for photo and video shoots and by winning competitions against other skaters. All this allows the player to rise in status and begin gaining the trappings of a pro skater's life. The premise models in a basic way the means by which skaters in fact do become pro and eventually end up running their own company. This is an intentionally aspirational fantasy-driven storyline that allows the player to imagine being a rising skate star, something likely to appeal to the average skater.

The narrative feels inauthentic for those who know how the business works; the player character has jumped over the earlier steps in the process of going pro and becoming a skateboard industry business person—receiving flow (t-shirts, stickers, maybe some equipment) from the local shop, joining a company's team and receiving equipment and possibly a small salary, getting a signature pro model

and royalties from the sales, eventually attracting a financial backer to start a company—and gone straight to the entrepreneur stage.

What is most implausible about the story arc is that the player character cannot really skate at the beginning of the game—the challenge to start up the business happens almost as soon as the player is done with the training levels in Coach Frank's skatepark. Yet known professional skaters approach the player character as if they know her or him for skating prowess, even though the player is likely still struggling with basic skating skills. Even more unusual are the pros' encouraging words whenever the player fails a challenge. No matter how many times the player fails, the pros remain supportive and chipper, which certainly would not happen in real life (unless it was the pro's mother doing all that falling). With the narrative focus on the rise of a skater to marketing and business prominence in the world of skating, all the hard parts of learning to skate are glossed over in *Skate 3's* skateboard industry fantasy.

Given the narrative through line of using the player's ambitions to start a skate company, it is no surprise that photography and video play an important part in the game. A number of challenges are specifically cast as photo and video shoots that require the player to perform certain kinds of tricks for the camera. After successfully completing these challenges, the player has the option of selecting the photo they would like to use for a magazine cover or advertisement. The player enters an image viewer that allows them to pan through a series of sequential still images in order to pick that perfect skate photo. The in-engine camera "snapping" these photos is of course positioned in the perfect spot to highlight the move and simulate a magazine spread or advertisement photo. The player also has control over the depth-of-field and other settings that allow them to get the picture looking just right. Video simulations are so deeply embedded in the game that all the player has to do is press the Select button on the game controller. Clicking this will give the player an instant replay of their last trick. The game really is framed by the young skater's fantasy of being in the magazines, featured in video, and hanging out with other pros. Given the overwhelming amount of amateur skateboarding footage on Youtube[18] and photographs on Flickr,[19] the obsession with documenting skater performance is deeply entwined with the culture of skating; indeed, it is rare to see a group of skaters not equipped with a smartphone or video camera or photography camera. *Skate 3* recognizes the importance of documentation and dissemination in contemporary skater culture, particularly at the consumer level.

Skate 3 takes the mechanics of skating seriously, though not necessarily in the ways skaters might expect. Take, for example, the simple act of pushing the board. In real life, skaters quickly learn the rhythm of pushing in order to maintain balance and speed. It becomes second nature for a right-footed skater to swing her weight to the front of the board while balanced on her left leg as the right leg swings forward, until the right foot touches the ground. The right leg then presses down on the street and pushes back. Once the desired amount of push is achieved,

the skater lifts her right leg and shifts balance back toward the center of both the body and the skateboard. This becomes as natural as breathing. In *Skate 3,* this process is finicky and hard to master. In order to push off, the left stick must be pushed forward, and the X button pressed. To keep pushing, the player has to time presses of the X button to a fairly precise moment in the animation cycle to begin the push. Pushing too early will short-leg the push, and have the effect of slowing the skater down. Pressing too late will miss the push, also slowing the skater down. Eventually, the player learns to push smoothly, but it takes an inordinate amount of time, far longer than it does to learn to push a skateboard in real life.

Paradoxically, it is easier to learn to ollie in *Skate* 3—a rather challenging (though basic) trick in real life. To ollie in the game, the player quickly flicks the right stick up and down. That the designers made the ollie such a basic gesture is not a surprise, as it is a fundamental trick on which most all street skating is based. Not being able to ollie is a real limitation, so this inversion of the difficulty of these two skating basics makes a lot of sense in the context of the game.

Other similar difficulty inversions exist. In real life, flip tricks and in-air rotations are both incredibly hard to master. Flip tricks typically start with modifications of the basic ollie whereby the skater kicks the tail of the board off the ground at an angle so that the board flips while in the air. The skater then uses his or her feet to stop the board's rotation when the wheels are parallel to the ground, and the trick is then landed like a typical ollie. This all takes much practice and patience and a strong tolerance for failure. In *Skate 3,* you simply flick the right stick side to side.

These difficulty inversions do allow an accurate overall simulation of the challenges of skateboarding even though the challenges lie in different mechanical gestures. Like real-life skating, *Skate 3* emphasizes the need to master the mechanical process to the point that it becomes instinctual and embedded in muscle memory.

Something noteworthy about *Skate 3* and its relation to the practice and culture of skating is the degree to which it plays failed tricks to grotesque comic effect. Even on the easiest difficulty setting, it is not unusual for the player to hit a small bump and go flying into a wall or sliding across the ground with the player character's body becoming a rag doll to maximize the carnage. The game deeply embraces the difficulties of skating by wrapping them up in a macho, irreverent take on the sport's painful practice. Even after the skater has fallen, the player can continue to control the body to exaggerate the spill for comedic effect, and to see how long they can keep the spill going.

The Hall of Meat challenges[20] scattered throughout the game illustrate the degree to which *Skate 3* plays with falling. Hall of Meat challenges are not about skating, but about falling. Players are encouraged to fall in the most stylish and dramatic ways. Upon impact, the bones broken in the fall are highlighted as a measure of the fall's success. The way *Skate 3* transposes the diehard pain–be-damned ethos is telling. The game at once valorizes an important aspect of skating and plays it for comic effect without really grounding it in the practice of skating from which it is derived.

Skate 3 embraces a post-1990s vision of skating that still retains the surface grit of the subculture, but in a period when skating is not the outlaw activity that parents fear will corrupt or wound their children, and that authorities do not instinctually ban. The hyper-masculine "boys' club" feel is there, the goofball humor is there, but all the angst is gone. The closest to outlaw things get is when NPCs wandering around town appear startled when the player skates too close to them. To use a punk rock analogy, *Skate 3* is the Vandals or Beastie Boys[21] of skateboard videogames; both groups were part of their respective scenes, but they tended toward humor and generally left to the side the politics and anger of the subculture. *Skate 3* has a similarly "fuck politics, let's skate" attitude. It retains the skater culture vibe through fashion and dialog, but focuses on the fun to be had in the skate utopia of Port Carverton, and on the surface-level business concerns of starting up a brand without dwelling on the realities of being a diehard skater or skate industry professional.

Shaun White Skateboarding

Next is *Shaun White Skateboarding.* White is a popular professional snowboarder[22] who took up skateboarding, and ended up as successful on a skateboard as at his original sport. Set in a dystopian fictional world in the spirit of *Half-Life,* his eponymous game is the most story-bound of the three games. An organization called the Ministry controls all facets of life in the city of New Harmony, with skateboarding particularly frowned upon as a subversive tool of nonconformists. It then comes as no surprise that Shaun has been arrested for skating. The player character goes to visit Shaun in prison, where she or he is given the task of liberating Shaun and all of New Harmony from the control of the Ministry.[23] Right before being taken off to his cell, Shaun sends the player to meet Jonah, the leader of the resistance, who becomes the player's mentor and help.

The Ministry suppresses skateboarding because it produces an energy known as "Flow." From a gameplay perspective, Flow is essentially the player's performance status and a resource that unlocks gated content. Within the story, Flow "frees" NPCs from the bonds of the Ministry and allows them to return to their normal selves. So, for example, a subway employee becomes a hipster, and a fellow in a gray suit turns into a punk-esque dude with tattoos. Flow also brings the city of New Harmony back to life. As you skate through and do tricks, the grayscale world springs into full color, and previously hidden skate spots appear. A subway booth is suddenly marked up with graffiti, and an immensely skateable concrete oval emerges from the sidewalk. It is through Flow that the storyworld engages with the gameplay. Flow has to be earned to open gates to move from one part of New Harmony to the next. To do this, players must string together sequences of tricks without falling. There are three levels of flow in the game, which means the player must pull off increasingly long strings of tricks and longer sessions without falling.

New Harmony has some rather fantastic skateable elements: magic rails, paths, and ramps. The magic rails are like graffiti painted over and extending beyond hand-rails, planters, and other skateable architectural elements. If the player manages to ollie and balance on the magic rails, he or she will be transported as if on a magic carpet/rollercoaster, up in the air around the environment. Sometimes, these magic rails end on rooftops and other high-up ledges. Other times, the player simply ends back on the street in another part of the environment. The magic paths are similar to the magic rails, with the exception that they are used as launch ramps to allow the player to jump over or onto something otherwise out of reach. The magic paths are steered by the player to connect them to otherwise unreachable areas. The magic ramps are translucent quarter-pipes scattered around the environment. Skating up onto them reveals the rest of the transition and the vert, which the skater can skate on.

Even though they have little to do with the realities of skating, the magic rails, paths, and ramps are the most exhilarating aspects of the skating simulation. *Shaun White Skateboarding* excels at creating a sense of skater fantasy using these devices. Skaters find themselves flying through the air in ways that simply are not possible in real life. They create a sense of discovery and movement that comes close to the way real-life skating feels. These ramps, and the first-person camera perspective when the player is on the rails in particular, create a sense of exhilaration not so different from actual skating.

The subculture of skating is paper-thin in *Shaun White Skateboarding*. The game mixes an 80s punk-meets-*1984* perspective into a post–90s skating world through its heavy-handed narrative conceit of skaters being suppressed by the evil govern-ment. It also manifests the goofball humor of skating through a number of characters encountered by the player moving through New Harmony. A good example is Bob, a skater who owns a skate shop shut down by the Ministry. Bob is a skater version of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*'s Jeff Spicoli—a clownish pastiche of skater-speak (he has a propensity to call everyone dude, including my female avatar) clad in the standard-issue skater togs of baggy jeans, a work shirt, and skate shoes.

It is through characters like Bob that the player receives her or his challenges—Bob asks the player to break his skate shop from the control of the Ministry. To do this, the player has to skate around the surprisingly skate-friendly courtyard beside his shackled store until enough Flow is earned to break the Ministry's control of the shop. This is how the storyline plods along as a means of stringing together the game's levels.

The mechanical representation of skating in *Shaun White Skateboarding* is extremely simplistic in some ways, while challenging in others. It is simplistic in that it makes certain gestures like propelling the board forward as simple as pushing the left stick forward, and pulling off complicated airs as easy as rotat-ing the right stick. When skating around New Harmony, it is incredibly easy to snap off sequences of flip tricks, airs, mid-grind ollies, and all sorts of feats nearly impossible in real skating. All the player has to do is essentially button-mash and stick-jiggle and the tricks will happen.

Developing skating prowess is almost too easy in *Shaun White Skateboarding*. Tricks are purchased rather than learned. In addition to earning Flow, tricks earn the player points that are spent on unlocking new tricks. The idea that a skater could or would buy prowess is laughable to both the pros and diehards. This is completely foreign to real life skating, but certainly has its analog in the tech trees of shooters and RPGs.

The two places the game is surprisingly challenging are maintaining balance on the magic rails and shaping the magic paths. With the rails, the player has to use the left stick to keep the avatar balanced on the deck. In real life skating, maintaining balance is certainly part of the challenge, but it is a more intuitive response related to instinctual balance reflexes. This seems like it would be easy, given the degree to which most everything else is simplified, but it is surprisingly difficult. Shaping the magic paths is also difficult, largely because of the modal change of the right stick from navigating the board left to right to directing the path up and down. This of course is completely alien to real-life skating, and so has no meaningful analog. In the areas that require the player to do a lot of magic rail sliding, it quickly becomes a chore. Where in real life the skater could just go try something else, *Shaun White Skateboarding* forces the player to complete the challenge and gain Flow in order to unlock the next neighborhood (which is the next level) and to get a step closer to freeing Shaun White.

In the end, *Shaun White Skateboarding* feels like a story-driven first-person shooter that has substituted skateboarding for gunplay. The game does give glimpses of the exhilaration of skating, but it fails to model the reality of the practice of skating, and forces the player to move through a sequence of challenges to progress the simple-minded story.

Tony Hawk: Shred

Tony Hawk: Shred positions the player as an up-and-coming skater who has somehow managed to get Tony Hawk's attention. The game begins with a video cut-scene in which the player visits Hawk and a gaggle of teenage pro skateboarding and snowboarding pals. After introducing the player to all the other pros, Hawk hands the player a skateboard, and points at the large TV screen in the room on which the game's logo appears. Hawk is not inviting the player to skate with the group; he is inviting the player to play *Tony Hawk: Shred*.

From the start, *Shred* takes a very different approach than *Skate 3* and *Shaun White Skateboarding*. Instead of an immersive story-driven world, *Shred* presents the player with a series of short set-piece challenges. Environments modeled on cities around the world are juxtaposed against more fantastic spaces that look like they are based on theme park rides like Space Mountain. The amusement park feel of the level design goes further to distance *Shred* from the gritty fantasy of skating.

The experience of *Shred* differs from the other two in a number of ways, but the most obvious is the controller. Instead of using a standard console controller,

the player stands on a skateboard deck embedded with sensors that detect tilt, angle, and motion. Given this, *Shred* ought to be the most realistic of the three games. In practice, however, this is not the case. Though some basic movements like leaning to turn are the same as riding a real board, very little else is. Take the ollie—in order to ollie in real life, the skater must kick down hard on the tail of their board, then jump in the air while gently pushing down on the nose of the board in order to keep the deck in the air and parallel to the ground. With the *Shred* controller, the player leans the board back until the sensor on the tail touches the ground. This leads the on-screen avatar to ollie. In real life, this would simply be a wheelie or tail stop.

More advanced tricks such as air grabs and kick flips are done by manipulating the board and its sensors in other ways. To do a grab while in the air, the player puts a hand over one of the four sensors along the top, bottom and sides of the deck. To do a flip trick, the player does the ollie gesture followed by a quick 45-degree turn of the board. On a real board, this would only be a spastic-looking wheelie.[24] *Shred* abstracts skating in ways that are harder to accept than if the game was played with a standard controller. Skaters who play *Shred* will find the manipulation of the board as alien as musicians do the instrument-shaped controllers of *Rock Band*.[25]

In the normal and easy modes of the game, the player does not have to even steer except at key moments when instructed by the game. Otherwise, the board automatically follows a translucent trail. This design decision reduces the play experience to something akin to playing *Guitar Hero*—a fancied-up alternative to Simon Sez in which you move in certain ways on the skateboard controller in response to the provided cues. Players simply have to make the correct ollie, grind (tap tail to the ground and then watch the avatar grind on an edge), and slide (tap tail to the ground and then watch the avatar slide on an edge) at the appropriate moment when confronted with gaps, rails, and other obstacles.

Further distancing *Shred* from skating is the way the gameplay is portioned out. Instead of skating around with the illusion of an open world like *Shaun White Skateboarding* and *Skate 3,* the challenges are short set pieces in mostly unconnected environments. One challenge might be in New Orleans, while the next is set in a nondescript shopping mall. The locations themselves matter little in terms of game play, as similar environmental obstacles (rails, ramps, jumps, etc.) are integrated into most of the environments. Of the three games, *Shred* is the most game-like, and least simulation-oriented, despite its authentic-looking custom controller. The challenges themselves often involve late 60s to early 70s competitions in which the player tries to score points by hitting targets while moving through the course as quickly as possible. There is no analog to these activities in contemporary skating, further distancing the game from real-life skating. *Shred* ends up falling into an awkward middle ground between a party game, an arcade game, and a skateboarding simulation.

It is hard to connect the dots between *Shred* and skating culture. Though he came to prominence during the mid 80s, a period steeped in the punk-infused skater ethos, Tony Hawk has always been fairly clean-cut. This reputation gave him trouble during the 80s, but when skating bounced back in the early 90s, the punk, underground flavor of skater culture was watered down and Hawk emerged as a skateboard god, and no longer a dorky master of clinically executed skate tricks. *Tony Hawk: Shred* embodies Hawk's post-90 persona. It is clean, free of the unsightly rough edges of skating's past. Hawk represents the ever-clean skate pro that casts skating as fun, not dangerous or quasi-illegal. Hawk and the other pros he surrounds himself with—all in their teens or very early twenties—have the expected skater look about them, but their fashion is mall accessible (like all skate fashion of the current era) and their attitudes upbeat. The game is clearly targeting the younger skate audience. These skaters, born after the collapse of 1990, know only the current popularized and commercialized world of skateboarding.

Conclusions

Much of the spirit, swagger, and style of skateboarding, its practice and culture are missing from *Skate 3*, *Shaun White Skateboarding,* and *Tony Hawk: Shred*. There are a number of reasons for this, some obvious, some not so.

First is the ways the games represent the experience of pulling off tricks. Real-life skaters spend far more time failing to pull off tricks than they do making them. And for most skaters, a clear skill ceiling is encountered when it comes to learning new tricks. Many skaters reach this limit after a year or two, yet they continue to skate for the enjoyment of the experience. Skating videogames, on the other hand, require players to continue to evolve and develop in order to progress through the increasing challenges of the games' campaigns. This is a disconnect from reality, though it does undoubtedly fuel skater skill fantasies.

In real-life skating, tricks are more often than not executed imperfectly—a sketchy landing, a not-quite-perfect slide, a last-minute bail, a 360 that is really a 347, etc. But all three skating videogames make executing moves rote and routine, and therefore less meaningful, by abstracting the mechanical aspects of real-life skating into button presses and stick gestures. Instead of embedding the challenge in skating, the challenge lies in standard-issue game design techniques. *Tony Hawk: Shred* tries to overcome this by using a skateboard-shaped controller, but instead creates a dissonant experience for actual skaters.

All the games share the limitation of pulling off known tricks only. *Shaun White Skateboarding* illustrates this point best. Any time a trick is executed, its name appears on the screen. If the skater were to pull off something new, the game would not know, and the moment that would in real life be celebrated passes without acknowledgement. This lack of addressing the slow but constant progression of tricks separates the skating videogames from real skating. New tricks are often created accidentally when a skater attempts one trick but ends up

doing something unexpected instead. Tommy Guerrero, an early street skater, said of trick development:

> It's not like you suddenly announce, 'I'm going to pioneer the ollie' or some shit. Most of it is accidental. Tricks evolve from bailing, or getting sketchy and barely pulling something and then trying to re-create it. (Mortimer, 2008, p. 36)

Most skaters will provide similar assessments of how new tricks are invented, and how refinements are made to existing tricks. This spontaneous creativity is not recognized by these videogames.

The importance of commitment to the sport, and the swagger that comes with it, is the basis of pro and diehard skating. But these videogames at best mimic surface elements of this attitude and behavior, but do not embody them within the gameplay.

Part and parcel is the rhythm of skating—take a run, pull off a trick, step off the board to allow someone else a run, skate again, fall, wait again, etc. Skating videogames edit out all the dull parts, placing the emphasis on action and the movement through the level design challenges. But this just is not how skating happens.

Skating is at once a solitary activity and a collective experience. Most skaters spend more time skating in groups of two, three, even up to dozens. All three videogames looked at here largely isolate the skater, or put him or her in the position of competing against other skaters. Although competition happens in session skating, it is not codified or even spoken to in most cases. In skateboarding videogames, the competition feels artificially explicit.

Skating style—the manner in which skaters hold their arms while on the board, posture, the way they hold the board to their feet during an air, even the way they coast along on the street—is a meaningful part of real-life skating that is lacking from these games. Christian Hosoi, a popular skater during the 80s that is still at it today, is the living embodiment of style. He did not do a lot of tricks, but those he did, he did with style. His airs were a little higher, his poses while in the air were a little more exaggerated, and his posture as he moved across the flat of a ramp had a little more flair. He was often contrasted with Tony Hawk, who had a limitless repertoire of tricks that he executed with precision but little style. Skating games for the most part are closer to Hawk's skating. For most skaters, style is easier to develop than precision. For videogames, precision is easier to deliver than nuance. And so the ways in which skaters can make the practice their own are largely ignored in these videogames.

Finding ways to transpose the practice and act of skating into videogame form is quite a challenge. The tropes of AAA console games—storyworlds, macro and micro goals, continuous increases in difficulty, etc.—all push against the practice and culture of skating. And the abstraction of the nuanced physical actions of

skating into console-controller gestures leaves out a good deal of the thrill of skating.

What I find fascinating about these games is how they pursue a fantasy of skateboarding that glosses over many of the actual experiences of skating and its cultural practices. At the same time, all three games push against the practice of skating as a quasi-sport (which lacks the objective, quantifiable goals of many sports) by wrapping it in sports videogame tropes for measuring player performance. Even those adopted by skating, such as high airs, do not find a meaningful place in these games. The games end up modeling elements of skater subculture practice—the fashion, music, and language—along with artificial elements of skating competitions to create an uncanny valley of skater culture.

I dare say that few pros and diehard skaters play these skateboard videogames. Much of the spirit, swagger, and pleasure of skateboarding is left out, leaving them as something more akin to games based on skateboarding than authentic representations of the skating experience. But then these games are not created for or marketed to these two small audiences. They are designed for that enormous middle sphere of skaters—the thousands and thousands of kids and teens that enjoy skating, but have not dedicated their lives to its practice.

Skating videogames have not come that far since *720°*. They still wrap the practice and culture of skating in a game structure that feels inauthentic to the experience of the most dedicated skaters. In real-life skating, there are no challenges forced upon skaters beyond those they assign themselves. The world is not entirely composed of awesomely skateable terrain. Tricks are what you make them. Good-natured snickering about a friend's bail is just as much a part of skating as anything else.

Maybe *720°* and those pesky bees were not so bad after all.

Notes

1. For those in the culture, skating is the common term instead of skateboarding. It follows that a practitioner is then a skater, and not a skateboarder.
2. An ollie is a trick in which the skater pops the board into the air using only her or his feet.
3. A Schmitt Stix ATV with rails and a tail guard, Independent Trucks on risers and Santa Cruz 92 mm Bullets. It rests against a bookshelf in my office.
4. But then videogames back then did not really try to authentically represent the thing depicted. If we think about *Paper Boy,* it was about as real as things got back then—a kid on a bike delivering papers to almost every house on one side of a really, really long street.
5. I played all three on a Sony PS 3.
6. I am drawing here on Dick Hebdige's seminal semiotic study of underground culture.
7. Though skaters use their boards for transportation on occasion, they are not generally thought of as a means to get from point A to point B.
8. "Poser" is the term used by skaters to describe someone who acts and looks like a skater without actually being a skater.

9. A good sampler from around the time of the games discussed in the essay is Thrasher's Skate Rock 2010: *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Snlh3p7Da6w.* Accessed April 22, 2012.

10. For example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHFGYNDr7Qk. Accessed April 28, 2012. There are hundreds of similar well-intentioned instructional videos and descriptions available online.

11. That was me—dedicated, but not so good.

12. A session is a group skating event. With ramp skating and some street skating, only one skater skates at a time. This is called a run.

13. More complete histories are available in Cole Louison and Sean Mortimer. A more academic take is found in Ian Borden.

14. A quick search on YouTube for "skateboard" yields around 340,000 results: *http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=skateboard&oq=skateboard&aq=f&aqi=g10&aql=&gs_l=youtube-psuggest.3.0l10.138.380.0.594.4.3.0.0.0.0.62.62.1.1.0.* Accessed August 30, 2012.

15. In part, this is due to the lack of meaningful variation in skating equipment. Skateboard decks, for example, are all manufactured by three companies, and are almost indistinguishable from one another other than the decoration and branding.

16. Most skaters discount broadcast events like ESPN's *X Games* as for non-skaters and posers. It is misleading to base an understanding of skateboarding on what is seen on ESPN's *X Games.* The poised polish of the vert runs is more like gymnastic routines honed over months and months than a typical skating session. The closest televised skating gets to normal skating is the "big air" and best trick competitions where pros take turns trying to land outlandish tricks. Even this is not quite right, given all the cameras and adoring, cheering fans.

17. The whole idea of a skateboarding coach is an inside joke for pros and diehards—why would there need to be a coach? Who would listen to him? Who made him coach? And who would go to skating school in the first place?

18. A search for "skateboarding tricks" returned 84,600 clips (June 29, 2012).

19. The skateboarding group on Flickr has 9,064 members and 75,813 photos as of June 29, 2012.

20. These are in-game sponsorships of sorts by *Thrasher* magazine, which has a feature in the magazine and on their website that captures the worst falls of skaters.

21. Pre-*License to Ill*, pre-*Cookie Puss* era Beastie Boys when they were a hardcore band.

22. Though skateboarding was an influence on snowboarding, the two have distinct practices, cultures, and practitioners. There are skaters who snowboard, and snowboarders who skate, but on the whole, they are two separate worlds. White is the exception to prove this rule.

23. As most game reviews noted, this creates the strange situation in which a game that bears a pro athlete's name does not allow the player to inhabit that person until the end of the game.

24. I have not spent time on this, but this wiggling relates to an 80s skating phenomenon called freestyle skating that was dominated by one skater from the beginning until the end of the splinter trend: Rodney Mullen, who won all but one freestyle competition he entered during the 80s and early 90s.

25. The relationship between games based on real-life activities and simulations of those same activities is just outside the purview of this essay, but suffice to say this is one of the key challenges of designing a game using real-world mechanical actions—finding the sweet spot between accurate mechanical representation and the demands of game structures and play experiences.

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9

LIKENESS LICENSING LITIGATION

Student Athletes and the Future of Sports Videogames

Nina Huntemann

On June 27, 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a 2005 California law[1] that criminalized the sale of violent videogames to minors without parental supervision. The Supreme Court's landmark opinion in *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association* affirmed what the videogame industry had been arguing for decades: Videogames are forms of expressive speech protected by the First Amendment. Writing for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia proclaimed:

> Like the protected books, plays, and movies that preceded them, videogames communicate ideas—even social messages—through many familiar literary devices (such as characters, dialog, plot, and music) and through features distinctive to the medium (such as the player's interaction with the virtual world). That suffices to confer First Amendment protection (p. 2).

This decision was a significant victory for an industry frequently mired by claims that its products are harmful to minors, and thus require government regulation. Over the past 20 years, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) and the Entertainment Merchants Association (EMA) battled and defeated eight other state legislative attempts to restrict the sale of videogames containing violent content. Advocates of the proposed laws failed to convincingly link videogame playing with aggressive behavior, or, if any potential harm was demonstrated, attempts to regulate were trumped by First Amendment protections. Though the industry will likely continue to face challenges from legislators and consumers about the content of their products in the court of public opinion, a wholly different free speech battle has been at play in courts across the United States. In the center field of this battle are sports videogames, student athletes, and a multi-billion dollar licensing industry. What is at stake considerably determines the future of

videogame design and development, the economics of the industry, and the consumption and production practices of players.

On September 9, 2011, Judge Freda Wolfson of the U.S. District Court in New Jersey issued a summary judgment in favor of Electronic Arts (EA), dismissing a right of publicity suit brought by former Rutgers University quarterback Ryan Hart. Hart's complaint claimed that EA used his likeness in a series of *NCAA Football* videogames without permission. In her judgment, Judge Wolfson cited the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that videogames were expressive, not commercial, speech, and thus First Amendment protections trumped Hart's right of publicity. In her summary judgment, Wolfson specifically applied the transformativeness test to conclude that the mechanics of *NCAA Football* games sufficiently changed the raw material (Hart's likeness) to qualify for fair use exemptions.

Similar suits brought against EA and the National Collegiate Athletic Association by former students athletes Ed O'Bannon (UCLA basketball) and Sam Keller (Arizona State University and University of Nebraska football), were consolidated into a class action suit in 2010, and later joined by Bill Russell (University of San Francisco basketball and NBA Boston Celtics legend) and several other plaintiffs.[2] Like the Hart case, the plaintiffs in *Keller v. EA* claim EA used their likenesses without authorization, but also argue that the NCAA does not have the right to negotiate licensing deals on behalf of student athletes who no longer play for an NCAA team. The outcome of this case will have a profound influence on controversial NCAA policies regarding student athlete contracts and the commercial use of their likeness, as well as on the application of intellectual property rights for avatars based on real people. If the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately hears the class action suit, the ruling will provide much-needed clarification on the balance between right of publicity and free speech.

This chapter considers the implications of legal decisions on the cases mentioned above and similar complaints for the production, distribution, and consumption of sports videogames specifically, and digital entertainment generally. First, the relationship among the videogame industry, athletes, and sports organizations over the purchasing of sports rights is discussed, paying particular attention to EA's licensing strategy. Second, this chapter reviews the legal history that defines right of publicity and considers the challenges digital technologies have posed in likeness licensing litigations. Given Judge Wolfson's invocation of the transformativeness test in the Hart case and the pending hearing in the Keller class action suit, this chapter concludes by exploring the strength of the transformation defense employed by EA and other videogame companies, and the likely future for sports videogames.

EA Sports and Sport Licensing

EA Sports was established in 1991 as EASN (the Electronic Arts Sports Network), a brand division within Electronics Arts, the third-largest producer and distributor of videogames in the world. EA's revenue for fiscal year 2012 was over $4 billion,

which, according to the company's annual report, was driven by three videogame franchises: *Battlefield 3, FIFA 12,* and *Madden NFL 12,* the latter two of which are published under the EA Sports brand. One EA Sports title alone, *FIFA 12,* represented 13% of the company's net revenue in 2012 (Electronic Arts, 2012). The games created for the EA Sports label are produced at the EA Tiburon studios in Maitland, Florida, or at EA Sports headquarters in Burnaby, British Columbia, which houses one of the world's largest motion capture studios.

EA Sports' games, such as *FIFA, Madden NFL, NCAA Football, NCAA Basketball, NHL Hockey* and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour,* are published annually at the start of a sports league's season. For example, every year since 1990, a new *Madden NFL* game is released in July to coincide with the August start of the U.S. National Football League's pre-season schedule. Throughout the season, new content is created for the next sequel based on player statistics, roster adjustments, and any league rules changes. This development cycle fits well with an industry driven by hits, where the largest portion of sales is generated by a handful of the most popular titles, the majority of which are sequels. This approach reflects the "cornerstone of [EA's] brand strategy," which relies on "products that can be iterated, or sequeled, and that can be integrated across multiple game-playing devices" (Electronic Arts, 2012, p. 4). The emphasis on previous successes has also influenced EA's decision to refocus the company's development resources toward online content and services, and reduce the number of "packaged good"[3] titles released each year (p. 30). One division within EA that will continue to produce the majority of packaged goods while also expanding into digital content is EA Sports, as long as it can continue to acquire intellectual property rights to their most popular sports franchises (p. 8).

Since the early 1990s, EA has built its dominance in the videogame sports genre by securing licensing contracts with international and national professional sports leagues around the world. These licensing deals grant EA the right to use real league and team names, player and coach names and likenesses, and official logos and mascots in EA Sports games. Similar to broadcast rights granted to television networks, the contracts for videogame licensing rights cover a period of years, are renegotiated near expiration, and cost EA millions of dollars annually. For example, EA reportedly pays the National Football League $30–40 million a year, which is the NFL's second most valuable contract behind the league's television rights contracts (Meer, 2011).

EA pursues licensing contracts in order to take the field as the only publisher of "official" league games. These licenses allow EA to include real-world elements such as the unique end zone celebration dance of an NFL player, the home team cheer of college sports fans, accessories adorning NBA players, and also third-party brands that advertise during league games. These touches of reality satisfy players' desire for authentic experiences that "deliver personal access to the emotion of sports through industry-leading sports simulation" ("EA Sports to produce UFC videogames," 2012), as well as provide additional revenue streams

from third-party advertisers. The success of this strategy is evident in many of EA's top-selling sport franchises. For example, in 1993 the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) penned its first-ever licensing agreement for the *FIFA International Soccer* game. Since then, the annual *FIFA* title has become the highest-grossing sports videogame franchise of all time, selling over 100 million copies worldwide (Crookes, 2012).

In 1993, EA also acquired a non-exclusive NFL license for its *John Madden Football* series. Competition among American football videogames was fierce for about a dozen years while several videogame publishers held NFL licensing contracts. Most notably, the *Madden* series shared shelf space from 1995 to 2004 with *NFL GameDay* (developed and published by 989 Sports, a division of Sony), and from 1999 to 2004 with *NFL 2K* (developed by Visual Concepts and published by Sega/Take-Two Interactive). Both competitors were forced out of the market when, in December of 2004, EA signed an exclusive deal with the NFL and the NFL Players Association. This aggressive tactic by EA followed "one of the greatest, most insidious guerrilla-warfare moves in the history of video game competition" (Bissell, 2012). Earlier that year, Take-Two Interactive released its American football game, *ESPN NFL 2K5,* for $19.99, less than half the cost of a *Madden* title. The game featured NFL teams and players, as well as commentary from ESPN television anchors, analysts, and sideline reporters. In response, EA dropped the price of its game to $29.99 and, over the course of six months, secured an exclusive, five-year NFL contract, a 15-year ESPN exclusive deal, a four-year exclusive license with the Arena Football League (indoor American football), and a six-year exclusive rights contract with the NCAA.

The importance of licenses to EA's bottom-line is highlighted in the company's 2012 annual report: "If we are unable to maintain or acquire licenses to include intellectual property owned by others in our games, or to maintain or acquire the rights to publish or distribute games developed by others, we will sell fewer hit titles and our revenue, profitability and cash flows will decline" (Electronic Arts, 2012, p. 18). The fate of nonlicensed sports games underscores the critical value of licensed IP. After EA secured the exclusive NFL deal, Visual Concepts, developers of the *NFL 2K* series, created *All-Pro Football 2K8.* Released in 2007, the game was organized around 24 fictional teams such as the Boston Minutemen and the Dallas Gunslingers (veiled references to the NFL's New England Patriots and Dallas Cowboys), and had a division and schedule structure similar to the NFL. Avatars in the game were based on 240 real-life retired NFL players, each of whom signed individual publicity rights deals with publisher 2K Sports. The game received poor reviews from critics and players, and brought disappointing sales for Take-Two Interactive, the parent company of 2K Sports (Kollar, 2007). A follow-up game was never developed, and 2K Sports left American football videogames behind to concentrate on its licensed *NBA 2K* basketball and *MLB 2K* franchises.

When EA launched its exclusive deal assault on the existing videogame sports market, industry analysts, competitors, and players cried foul over the monopoly

EA was amassing. Take-Two Interactive issued a statement following the NFL deal: "We believe that the decisions of the National Football League and Players Inc. to grant an exclusive license for videogames do a tremendous disservice to the consumers and sports fans whose funds ultimately support the NFL, by limiting their choices, curbing creativity, and almost certainly leading to higher game prices" (Surette and Feldman, 2004, np).[4] Since 2004, players have frequently complained that the *Madden* series is stale (Good, 2012) and that EA Sports has never innovated the game as significantly as when the franchise was competing with *NFL GameDay* and *NLF 2K* (Miller, 2006).

The criticism that EA's exclusive licensing strategy created a monopolistic, anticompetitive environment that limited consumer choice was the basis of a class action antitrust lawsuit brought against the company in 2008 by two *Madden NFL* consumers. The plaintiffs claimed that when EA entered into exclusive rights contracts with the NFL, NCAA, and AFL, the company violated the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts, which prohibit price fixing and exclusive dealings that substantially lessen competition. The lawsuit was resolved in July 2012 by a $27 million settlement that also imposes restrictions on EA's licensing strategy. Although EA was able to protect the exclusive relationship with its most lucrative American football trademark, the NFL, the company agreed to sign non-exclusive contracts with the AFL and NCAA for five years once its current exclusive contracts expire (Weber, 2012). This concession by EA is significant because the settlement was reached at a critical moment in the development of likeness licensing litigation for videogames. It may be that EA's agreement to let go of exclusive deals with the NCAA, in particular, is an indication of the company's concern that it will lose the pending Keller and O'Bannon cases. If the courts rule in favor of Keller and O'Bannon, the videogame industry's ability to secure college sports licensing rights will be greatly stymied, if not completely prohibited. On the other hand, if Keller and O'Bannon lose and licensing contracts for college sports continue much the same, EA may be encouraged to negotiate a less expensive, non-exclusive deal with the NCAA. Comparatively, *NCAA Football* is significantly less profitable than *Madden NFL*.[5] Furthermore, other sports videogames, such as the tennis games *Virtua Tennis* by Sega, *Grand Slam Tennis* by EA Sports, and *Top Spin* by 2K Sports, have proven that non-exclusive licensed games can survive, though with much less market share than more popular and profitable sports. Since EA is already well established in the NCAA sports videogames market, the company is unlikely to face significant competition.

Likeness Licensing Litigation

Litigation around likeness licensing, or granting permission to a third party to use a person's likeness for commercial gain, is based primarily on common law regarding the right of publicity. There is no federal law protecting one's publicity rights, per say, and only 19 states recognize the right via statute. As a result, decisions on

likeness licensing cases often vary state-by-state and district-by-district. In order to understand the contemporary legal environment in the United States for likeness licensing, especially as it pertains to the future of videogames, it is instructive to start at the beginning; a story that originates with sport.

Legal scholars reference the 1953 Second Circuit Appellate Court decision in *Haelan Laboratories, Inc. v. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc.* as the first legal opinion on the right of publicity. The Bowman Gum Company, owned by Haelan, sued Topps Chewing Gum for infringing on exclusive contracts Bowman had signed with professional baseball players for the use of players' images on cards packaged with chewing gum. At the time of the lawsuit, the right of privacy was well established and, upon such right, individuals could bring suit against others for unauthorized use of their name or image. However, this right was not articulated as a property right from which an individual could profit or choose to transfer to a third party, who could then seek legal action for infringement of those transferred rights. The precedent-setting decision in favor of Haelan established an important legal distinction between a right of privacy and, what the author of the majority opinion in the case, Judge Jerome Frank, wrote "might be called a 'right of publicity'" (*Haelen v. Topps,* 1953, para. 11). Noting that celebrities, such as professional baseball players and other public figures, may seek promotion of their name or image for commercial gain, Judge Frank stated that "a man has a right in the publicity value of his photograph" and furthermore, "has a right to grant exclusive privilege of publishing his picture" to another (para. 1). In recognizing the value of publicity, the Court provided a foundation upon which future civil cases could seek compensatory damages for infringement of that right. It is largely on these lawsuits that contemporary likeness licensing litigation rests. Although there have been dozens of right of publicity cases since *Haelan v. Topps,* only a handful of the most relevant likeness licensing cases for the future of videogames are discussed below.

To date, the only U.S. Supreme Court case to remark on publicity rights was brought to the Court in 1977 by human cannonball performer Hugo Zacchini against the Scripps-Howard Broadcasting Company. In his original complaint, Zacchini stated that a reporter with a movie camera filmed the performer's entire human cannonball act without permission and then aired that performance on television, which Zacchini claimed was an "unlawful appropriation of plaintiff's professional property" (*Zacchini v. Scripps-Howard,* 1977, para. 1). Zacchini sought compensatory damages on the grounds that, by broadcasting the entire act, Scripps-Howard had threatened the value of Zacchini's professional property because seeing the act was the sole source of the economic value of the performance. Scripps-Howard contended that, as a news organization, the First and Fourteenth Amendments exempted the company from civil liability: The broadcasting of Zacchini's act was news and thus protected speech, and the imposition of right of publicity damages on Scripps-Howard by the state (on behalf of Zacchini) would abridge the defendant's Constitutional rights.

In a 5–4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that Zacchini's rights of publicity had been violated, and that the First and Fourteenth Amendment did not necessarily shield the press from liability. Citing legal precedent protecting copyright and patent holders, the Court noted that the economic incentive required to produce the human cannonball performance had been undermined by Scripps-Howard's unauthorized appropriation. And thus, the Court's majority opinion concluded that Zacchini was due compensation for those efforts. The minority opinion, authored by Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr., warned that the majority decision could have a chilling effect on the freedom of the press by discouraging the use of filmed footage of newsworthy events. Heeding Powell's warning, courts since 1977 have attempted to balance the right of publicity and the First Amendment. Resolving this tension has defined much of the subsequent likeness licensing litigations.

Baseball returns in another landmark right of publicity judgment made in 2006 by the U.S. District Court of Missouri and affirmed in 2007 by the U.S. Court of Appeals. In *C.B.C Distribution and Marketing, Inc. v. Major League Baseball Advanced Media,* the issue before the Court was whether a fantasy sports operator could use the names and player statistics of professional athletes without a license from individual players, a players' association, or the relevant sport league. Fantasy sport, which started as a paper and pencil hobby, is a game built on the real-life performance of professional sports teams and players whereby participants create fantasy teams based on actual players and track the performance of their team over the course of a real sport league's season. Many free-to-play and subscription-based services exist to help participants organize leagues, track and record statistics, and compare the success of their teams against others. These services blossomed with the popularization of the Internet in the mid-1990s, dramatically increasing participation in fantasy sports leagues. An estimated 36 million people in the United States and Canada play fantasy sports ("Fantasy football's $1 billion-a-year business," 2011).

The plaintiff in the case, C.B.C Distribution and Marketing, Inc., was the parent company of CDM Fantasy Sports, an online pay-to-play fantasy sports service. CBC, and many other fantasy sports companies, entered into licensing agreements with professional sports leagues and players associations, assuming that rights of publicity barred fantasy sports services from using player names and statistics without consent. Major League Baseball and the MLB Players Association (MLBPA) first granted CBC licensing rights in 1995 and renewed the deal in 2002, the terms of which granted the company permission to use "the names, nicknames, likenesses, signatures, pictures, playing records and/or biographical data" for each of the players represented by the MLBPA (*CBC v. MLBAM,* 2006, p. 2). When the contract was set to expire in 2005, the MLB and MLBPA did not renew with CBC. Instead, MLBPA signed a five-year, $50 million interactive rights deal with MLB Advanced Media (MLBAM), a limited partnership of MLB owners founded in 2000 to manage the interactive media properties of the

League. Once the interactive rights deal was signed, MLBAM presented CBC with a revenue-sharing agreement whereby the company would receive 10% of the revenue generated from fantasy sports hosted on MLB.com by partnering with and promoting the MLBAM-managed games (p. 3). This deal would, essentially, take creative control of fantasy baseball away from CBC and all third-party providers.

In 2006, CBC filed a complaint for a declaratory judgment, fearing that if the company continued to offer fantasy baseball games without agreeing to the terms offered by MLBAM, they would be sued by the MLB and MLBPA. The company sought legal clarity on the potential action and, in doing so, prompted the courts to consider the boundaries of right of publicity once again.

One question common in right of publicity cases is whether or not the unauthorized appropriation of a name or likeness is used to gain commercial advantage. This is of particular concern to celebrities and other public figures. The use of a celebrity's name with a product or service without permission may imply that the person infringed has endorsed the product or service. This confusion may further lead to the dilution of the celebrity's trademark and a decrease in the economic value of his or her celebrity status. On the issue of commercial advantage, the District Court found that the inclusion of MLB players' names, statistics, or nicknames in CBC fantasy sports games did not imply an endorsement of the games or the company. To this point, the District Court stated that there was no evidence to support a claim that "a reasonable person would be under the impression that the baseball players are associated with CBC's fantasy games any more than the players are associated with a newspaper boxscore" (*CBC v. MLBAM,* 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, the Appellate Court affirmed that there was no danger of the public being mislead because "fantasy baseball games depend on the inclusion of all players and thus cannot create a false impression that some particular player with 'star power' is endorsing CBC's products" (*CBC v. MLBAM,* 2007, p. 8).

Relating CBC's use of professional sports players' names and statistics to newspaper boxscores is a critical point in this case. First Amendment rights may trump right of publicity claims if the material in question is determined to constitute speech and/or the expression of ideas. MLBAM argued that fantasy sports games were not a matter of speech, and thus the First Amendment did not apply. The District Court disagreed. The Court referred to the press's freedom to publish factual data, report on historical events, and disseminate information about the accomplishments of noted public figures, such as professional athletes (*CBC v. MLBAM,* 2006, p. 12). Fantasy sports games are based on information not only protected by the First Amendment, but also widely available in the public domain. The use of factual data by CBC for interactive entertainment and profit did not preclude First Amendment protection. On this point, the Appellate Court wrote, ". . . it would be a strange law that a person would not have first amendment right to use information that is available to everyone" (p. 7). The MLBAM issued an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the appeal was denied.

This judgment not only affirmed the right of fantasy sports game providers to use professional players' names and statistics, it eliminated the need for costly licensing contracts with professional sports leagues and players associations. This ruling factors significantly in the Keller likeness licensing litigation class action suit since the use of player names and statistics as identifying information is central to the former student athletes' right of publicity claim. But also at issue is the use of visual representations of real-life players, not just names and statistics. Celebrities and other public figures have successfully won legal claims and have been awarded compensatory damages over the unauthorized use of their image. However, new media technologies are challenging traditional definitions of "likeness," as representations of real people can be easily created and manipulated in digital environments.

Likeness Licensing Litigation in Videogames

Previous to the Hart and O'Bannon cases, U.S. courts had heard legal claims on the unauthorized use of a real person's likeness in a video game. Decisions in these cases offer insight into the potential outcome of pending litigation against EA, and the future of sports videogames and digital entertainment, generally. The first relevant case involves a 1999 videogame made by United Game Artists and published by Sega, called *Space Channel 5.* In this single-player music videogame, a player must copy dance steps synchronized to the rhythm of music performed by the computer. The player controls an avatar named Ulala, a female space reporter with pink hair, an orange miniskirt, and knee-high platform boots.

In 2003, Kierin Kirby, better know as Lady Miss Kier, a member of the dance-pop group Deee-Lite, filed a lawsuit against Sega of America, Inc., claiming that the company had misappropriated and exploited her likeness and identity as depicted in *Space Channel 5* by the character Ulala (*Kirby v. Sega,* 2006, p. 3–4). In addition to referencing the similar clothing and "groovy, retro look" of Kirby and Ulala, she claimed that the name "Ulala" was a phonetic variant of Kirby's signature lyrical expression, "ooh la la," which she uses to introduce herself in several music videos, including Deee-Lite's best-known song "Groove Is in the Heart" (p. 2). Sega responded that the game was not a misappropriation of Kirby's likeness and that, even if Ulala was found to resemble Kirby, the First Amendment provided a complete defense against the plaintiff's claims. The trial and appellate courts in California ruled in favor of Sega, stating that although Ulala was similar in some respects to Kirby's public identity, the avatar was not a "mere imitation of Kirby" and that Ulala contained "sufficient expressive content to constitute a 'transformative work'" (p. 7).

The U.S. Supreme Court encourages the use of a transformativeness test when adjudicating copyright infringement and right of publicity cases, as articulated in *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music* (1994).[6] Since there is no "bright-line" determination of fair use under the Copyright Act of 1976, the Supreme Court Justices advised

the courts to ask if the material in question is transformative "add[ing] something new, with a further purpose or different character, altering the first with new expression, meaning or message" (p. 579). This test is not only a subjective measure applied by judges on a case-by-case basis, the more transformative a work, "the less will be the significance of other factors, like commercialism, that may weigh against a finding of fair use" (p. 579). And thus, the producer of the new work is encouraged to defend against claims of infringement by demonstrating multiple changes and manipulations to the original material.

In another music videogame dispute, members of the rock group No Doubt filed suit in 2009 against Activision, claiming that the publisher of *Band Hero* had used computer-generated images of the band beyond the scope of the issued licensing agreement. Players in *Band Hero* simulate performing in a rock band using videogame controllers that resemble guitars and drums, and garner a high score by keeping in rhythm with popular songs. Players may choose avatars from fictional characters and digital representations of real-life musicians, or use tools provided in the game to make their own characters. Members of No Doubt licensed Activision to include three No Doubt songs in the game, and to use the band members' likenesses as avatars. The band participated in a day of game production services including scanning the band members' likenesses and gathering motion-capture data (*No Doubt v. Activision,* 2011, p. 4).

Just two weeks prior to release of the game, No Doubt discovered that *Band Hero* allowed players who reached a particular level in the game to "unlock" the No Doubt avatars to perform any song, to perform solo without their band members, or to perform with avatars from other groups. Furthermore, No Doubt learned that Activision had employed actors to impersonate the band in order to create digital representations of the band members for performances of additional songs. No Doubt requested that Activision remove the unlocking feature for their avatars, but Activision refused, claiming that it was too late; the game had been finalized. Alleging breach of contract and violation of right of publicity, No Doubt filed a complaint in California Superior Court seeking compensatory damages for "unauthorized exploitation of No Doubt's name, performances and likeness" (p. 6).[7] In response to No Doubt's complaint, Activision filed a special motion to dismiss. The appellate court's ruling on that motion illustrates the capriciousness of the transformativeness test defense for digitally manipulated representations, and complicates the legal ground upon which designers and publishers may stand when incorporating real people into videogames.

Activision attempted to rebuff No Doubt's claim of violation of its right of publicity by counter-claiming that the use of No Doubt's likeness was protected by the First Amendment, as the courts had ruled in the *Kirby v. Sega, CDC v. MLBMA,* and *Hart v. Electronic Arts* cases discussed previously. While acknowledging that previous courts recognize that videogames constitute free speech, California's Second District Court of Appeals[8] was compelled to weigh No Doubt's right of publicity with Activision's First Amendment rights in its ruling

on the motion to dismiss (p. 12). Citing *Comedy III v. Saderup* (2001) for direction on how to resolve the right of free speech versus right of publicity tension,[9] the appellate court applied a transformativeness test to determine "whether the work in question adds significant creative elements so as to be transformed into something more than a mere celebrity likeness or imitation" (p. 1).

Activision lost the motion to dismiss because the Court did not find that the depictions of the No Doubt band members in *Band Hero* were substantially transformative. In fact, appellate Judge Kenji Machida referenced use of the motion-capture technology that enabled Activision to "reproduce [No Doubt's] likenesses, movements, and sounds with precision" as evidence that "Activision intentionally used these literal reproductions" for commercial gain. Maintaining the life-like depictions of the band "so that players could choose to 'be' the No Doubt rock stars" is a key selling point of the product (*No Doubt v. Activision,* 2011, p. 18). To significantly transform these depictions would threaten the core commercial value of the game. Indeed, videogame publishers of simulation-type games often boast about the realism of their games in marketing material and at promotional events. This is no more evident than in EA Sports videogames such as its *NCAA* franchises. From EA Sports' website:

> Revel in the pageantry of college football game days with *NCAA Football 13*. With new trophy presentations, motion blur rendering, progressive lighting and an expanded broadcast presentation, *NCAA Football 13* brings a defined sense of realism to light up game days ("Feature: Sights and Sounds").

Student Athletes and NCAA-Licensed Videogames

Although college teams are represented in EA's *NCAA Football* and *NCAA Basketball* games by name, logo, team uniforms, and mascot, virtual team players are identified by their home state, hometown, team uniform, and year in college only. The real names of NCAA athletes do not appear on jerseys or in the game unless a videogame player edits the game data to give the avatars surnames, which will then appear on the virtual players' jerseys.[10] EA does not provide real players' names in these franchises because of the rules governing NCAA student athletes. NCAA's bylaws prohibit student athletes from receiving compensation for their status as student athletes, including receiving any profit from the use of their name or image on, or in promotion of, a product or service. This restriction follows the NCAA general principles on amateurism (NCAA, 2011, p. 61–78). In order to participate in Division I collegiate sports, student athletes must sign NCAA Form 08–3a, the "Student-Athlete Statement," which authorizes the NCAA or a third-party working on behalf of the NCAA to use a student athlete's "name or picture to generally promote NCAA championships or other NCAA events, activities or programs" (Farr, 2012, p. 477). This authorization is used by the NCAA in

perpetuity, essentially maintaining the right of publicity of student athletes even after their career with an NCAA team ends.

As the NCAA and its college and university members have negotiated billions of dollars in licensing fees from broadcasters, apparel manufacturers, and digital entertainment companies, the association's principle of amateurism and Form 08–3a have come under increasing criticism. Writing in *The Atlantic,* civil rights historian Taylor Branch contends "the noble principles on which the NCAA justifies its existence—'amateurism' and the 'student athlete'—are cynical hoaxes, legalistic confections propagated by the universities so they can exploit the skills and fame of young athletes" (Branch, 2011, np). Branch references the O'Bannon class action suit against EA and NCAA as an example of the amateurism sham supposedly meant to protect student athletes from external exploitation, only to be exploited by their protector, the NCAA.

In separate complaints made in 2009, Ed O'Bannon and Sam Keller filed suits against the NCAA and Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), the licensing arm of the NCAA. O'Bannon claimed that the NCAA and CLC unfairly profited from the use and license of the former student athlete's likenesses, including the broadcasting of old games, commemorative DVDs of championship seasons, and EA sports videogames. The plaintiff accused the defendants of unreasonable restraint of trade—a violation of antitrust law—by requiring student athletes to sign Form 08–3a, which is purposefully vague about the length of NCAA's contractual conditions. The Keller complaint also named EA for conspiring with the NCAA and CLC in order to circumvent the principles of amateurism by not using student athletes' names, while also maintaining the commercial value of NCAA-licensed videogame titles by including obvious representations of student athletes, a violation of an athlete's right of publicity. As consolidated in a class action, the details of the O'Bannon complaint represent the antitrust concerns of the suit, and the Keller complaint represents the right of publicity issues.

The NCAA and CLC responded to the antitrust complaint by stating that it does not license student athlete likenesses, only the logos, mascots, team uniforms, college names, and stadiums of NCAA teams. If players in NCAA-licensed videogames resemble real-life players, that is not by permission or collusion of the NCAA and CLC. Scholars of sports law see this defense as quite weak and a potential ruling against it will precipitate groundbreaking change in NCAA policy, particularly as it pertains to the future earnings of student athletes once they leave NCAA sports (Alesia, 2009).

In the right of publicity complaint outlined by Keller, images of real-life players are compared with likenesses in *NCAA Football* and *NCAA Basketball.* For example, Kent State Golden Flashes number six footballer Eugene Jarvis (2006–2010) was an unusually short college football player. He is an African-American running back from Pittsburgh who weighs 170 pounds and is five foot, five inches tall. EA claims that virtual players in its *NCAA Football* games are randomly generated from a multitude of attributes. However, the Keller complaint demonstrates

that in *NCAA Football 2009,* the number six player for Kent State is more often than not short, 170 pounds, African–American, and from Pennsylvania (*Keller v. EA,* 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, Keller claims that if the likeness of the collegiate player used by EA is not that of the actual player, then when the college athlete enters professional sports, one might expect the likeness of that player in each game to differ. However, the case states "the likeness of NCAA players who later enter a professional league remains virtually identical across titles" (p. 6).

To the right of publicity claim, Electronic Arts responded that, even if virtual player avatars do resemble real-life former NCAA players, videogames are protected speech, the player representations are sufficiently transformative, and thus EA's First Amendment rights trump NCAA players' right of publicity. Ultimately, the right of publicity determination will require a judicial assessment of the imitation or transformation of the real-life players' likenesses. The ruling by Judge Wolfson's in the *Hart v. EA* case provides some reference for how this matter may be decided.

In October of 2010, Hart amended his original 2009 complaint against EA to make specific right of publicity allegations about *NCAA Football 2004–2006* and *NCAA Football 2009.* Like Keller, he compared visual representations in the games with real-life images. Hart included screenshots taken from the games and copies of his image from the 2004 Rutgers University Football Media Guide. He compared the description of a virtual Rutgers player from *NCAA Football* with Hart's information as listed in the guide, both of which describe a quarterback player from Florida, weighing 197 pounds, and standing six feet, two inches tall. He claimed that the *NCAA Football* avatar wore a wristband on its left arm, a helmet visor, and Rutgers jersey number 13, all of which also describe Hart when he played on the Rutgers University football team. Furthermore, an image of Hart "throwing a pass during a Bowl Game against Arizona State University" appeared in an *NCAA Football 2009* photo montage "when a user selects Rutgers as his or her favorite team" (p. 8). These visual elements, Hart argued, were clear evidence of his likeness being used "with full intent of increasing the sales and profit [of the EA game, since] heightened realism in *NCAA Football* videogames translates directly into increased sales and revenues for EA" (p. 8). The Hart complaint also referenced the game's edit feature that allows players to change virtual players' names manually or by uploading rosters of NCAA players' names. These "courses of action . . . effectively heighten the authenticity and realism of a true NCAA football experience," something that is economically beneficial to EA's sales (p. 9).

On September 8, 2011, Judge Wolfson issued a summary judgment against Hart in favor of EA. In a 67-page opinion, Wolfson cited many of the cases discussed herein, including the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. EMA* that videogames are expressive forms of speech. That conclusion required Wolfson to weigh the right of publicity claim made by Hart against EA's First Amendment rights. She turned to the transformativeness test to make a determination, stating in her judgment that the test best "capture(s) the intricacies involved in

deciphering whether a challenged work is a 'new' work entitled to First Amendment protection or merely a blanket attempt to profit from another's property without due compensation" (p. 34).

In her judgment she wrote, "Viewed as a whole, there are sufficient elements of EA's own expression found in the game that justify the conclusion that its use of Hart's image is transformative and, therefore, entitled to First Amendment protection" (p. 48). Interestingly, she referenced the same avatar editing tool that Hart claimed underscored EA's culpability by allowing greater exploitation of his likeness when players linked his likeness to his real name. In contrast to Hart's interpretation, Wolfson focused on the game feature that allowed players to alter the avatar's complexion, weight and height, face and body shape, and hairstyle. "In my view" Wolfson wrote, "the creation of these varied potential formulations of each virtual player alone makes the game a transformative use of Hart's image" (p. 50).

Sports Videogames and Beyond

As in *Hart v. EA* and *Kirby v. Sega,* the argument by Keller, detailing the similarities between real-life players and virtual players, is a dubious one. Even in California, where right of publicity claims are often favorably ruled, the courts have recognized that videogames provide players with unique interactive experiences inside of expressive virtual worlds. Although some virtual worlds, such as sports and military first-person shooters, are more desirable the more they simulate reality, this does not preclude the transformative potential of the medium. If other courts follow Judge Wolfson's interpretation of transformation, the more in-game editing tools that developers provide players to manipulate the original content of a videogame, the more likely a court may be to rule against right of publicity claims. However, as the *No Doubt v. Activision* case demonstrates, judges may favor right of publicity if the technical methods employed to create realism are not deemed transformative enough. Motion capture and 3D imaging technologies can recreate life-like digital versions of real people. The use of these techniques in *Band Hero* compelled Judge Machida to rule against Activision's motion to dismiss. Before the case was set to begin jury trial in October 2012, No Doubt and Activision reached a settlement agreement, the details of which were not disclosed. The lack of a trail over the *Band Hero* dispute means the likeness licensing issues discussed above remain unresolved, and underscores the importance of a clear legal decision in *Keller v. EA*.

This inconsistent application of the transformativeness test by the courts concerns not only the videogame industry, but also the larger community of media producers, who increasingly use digital imaging tools to recreate real places, real objects, and real people in their productions.[11] Dozens of media organizations have signed amicus briefs on behalf of EA in the Keller and Hart cases, including the Motion Picture Association of America, Viacom, cable television networks, associations of print, television, and online news outlets, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, and videogame publishers, including former NFL licensing rival,

Take–Two Interactive.[12] These constituents recognize a common threat to the production of news and entertainment if celebrities and other well-known figures can widely apply right of publicity claims to block the use of their names, lives, and likenesses. For example, the MPAA cites the film *Forrest Gump,* which included digitally altered archival news footage placing the main character in historic moments alongside John F. Kennedy and John Lennon (MPAA, 2010, p. 14). Under a broad interpretation of right of publicity, the estates of JFK and Lennon could block the use of these images if the ruling judge determined the footage was not sufficiently transformative.

Interestingly, advocacy organizations such as the First Amendment Coalition, the First Amendment Project, and the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) also filed amicus curiae briefs on behalf of EA. These groups are often at odds with the media organizations listed above because their interpretation of fair use, freedom of expression, and transformative use extends to the works of videogame modders, machinima creators, remix artists, and fan-fiction writers. For these media makers, the copyright and trademarked assets of Viacom, EA, members of the MPAA, and other intellectual property rights holders, are the raw materials of their transformative works.[13] But on the issue of right of publicity, common ground exists among so-called professional and amateur cultural producers, and their representatives.

A central perspective these groups share is that the courts have wrongfully applied the transformativeness test; instead, the courts should avoid making content evaluations and focus on the purpose of the work as a whole. In an amicus curiae filed on behalf of EA in the *Hart v. EA* litigation, lawyers representing the OTW and Harvard University's Digital Media Law Project among others wrote, "If anything, the transformativeness test has the potential to cause substantial First Amendment harm by forcing courts into the role of critic . . . the only metric of 'transformation' comes from what the court thinks is artistic, or not" (p. 24–25). Cultural producers, professional or otherwise, largely agree that leaving artistic determinations to the court system encourages a "chilling effect" on expressive activity, discouraging media makers from engaging with real-life events and people in their work (p. 11). Even if the inclusion of the names or likenesses of celebrities, rock stars, and famous athletes is a key selling point for a film, book, television program, comic book, song, or videogame, cultural producers claim that the work as a whole is more than a commercial or advertisement for itself or another product. What is needed is a clear and reliable standard that determines if the total work in question is expressive and thus protected speech, or commercial speech and thus subject to right of publicity restrictions.[14]

This unlikely community of media corporations, free speech advocates, and popular culture hackers is advocating for limited intellectual property rights in order to allow artistic expression to flourish from media technologies readily available to both industry and individual producers. If Electronic Arts prevails in its defense against Keller, the videogame industry would gain legal security to

continue producing games based on real people and, potentially, avoid expensive licensing fees to individuals, such as retired professional and former student athletes. This would likely not affect the current practice of licensing league rights for the use of logos and team jerseys, and the commercial benefit of being affiliated with a professional sports club. For fans of college sports videogames in particular, the need to create team rosters may disappear since EA could link names and likenesses with or without an NCAA agreement. At the very least, the legal gray area in which player-created rosters currently exists would be clarified in favor of players.

If EA should lose and publicity rights prevail, the videogame industry would have to expand its licensing practices, pursuing agreements for the inclusion of any real person's name, life, or likeness. As stated above, licensing is an expensive piece of development budgets and is generally spent only on games likely to make a large return, like popular sports games. Games based on historical events featuring historical figures, which are not currently a large portion of games produced, could become altogether unprofitable. Machinima creators and videogame modders could be more susceptible to cease and desist action if their digital creations included references to celebrities, athletes, politicians, or other public figures.

Laws recognizing identity as property in other countries are significantly limited in comparison to the United States. For example, celebrities in the United Kingdom have been unable to win claims of exploitation of their personalities, but new cases brought by public figures in the U.K. and Europe are attempting to expand publicity rights (Leaffer, 2007). The outcome of a high-profile action like *Keller v. EA* could have an important influence on pending litigation and on the licensing practices of the global entertainment industry. Looking back at the 60-year U.S. history of publicity case law beginning with baseball cards and packaged gum, it is perhaps fitting that sports entertainment is once again at the center of this debate. It is, however, ironic that the medium most recently recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court as a platform for expressive speech may provide the test case upon which the expansion or restriction of right of publicity in the digital era is determined.

Notes

1. In 2005, California State Senator Leland Yee introduced bill AB 1179, which would ban the sale of violent videogames to minors. The bill was passed and signed into law by then-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in October. The law was set to go into effect January 2006, but an injunction was issued on AB 1179 when the Entertainment Software Association and the Video Software Dealers Association (later to be renamed the EMA) filed suit against the state of California. In 2007, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California found the law violated the First Amendment. Governor Schwarzenegger decided to appeal the case, but in 2009 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision. The Governor sought further appeal. Finally in 2011, under the governorship of Edmund "Jerry" Brown, AB 1179 was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.
2. In addition to the plaintiffs named above, the O'Bannon class action suit also names the following former collegiate athletes: Michael Anderson (University of Tulsa

basketball), Byron Bishop (University of North Carolina football), Samuel Jacobson (University of Minnesota basketball), Craig Newsome (Arizona State University football), Damien Rhodes (Syracuse University football), and Danny Wimprine (University of Memphis football).

3. EA, and the videogame industry generally, delineates between revenue gained from "packaged goods" sold in retail stores for console and PC platforms and other revenue-generating products, such as additional features available after a game is released, add-on content purchased separately, and ongoing services such as subscription-based games. Overall, EA has shifted its annual release schedule away from a large and diverse inventory of unique game titles for sale in retail stores, and toward creating additional content for a smaller number of primary titles as well as releasing digital-only titles for mobile and tablet gaming.

4. Shortly after EA signed the exclusive NFL deal, 2K Sports' parent company, Take-Two Interactive, retaliated by signing an exclusive contract with the MLB to publish licensed baseball games from 2006 to 2012. In 2012, the company did not seek to renew its license with the MLB because, despite the popularity of televised MLB baseball games and fantasy MLB baseball products, the videogame franchise was a consistent money loser (Kato, 2012).

5. During the first week of sales in North American, *NCAA Football* sold 414,560 units while *Madden NFL* sold 1.65 million units. Overall, *NCAA Football* sales are declining, while *Madden NFL* sales are increasing (Rodriguez, 2012).

6. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc., which held the copyright to Roy Orbison's song "Oh, Pretty Woman," filed suit against members of the rap group 2 Live Crew for its song "Pretty Woman." The 2 Live Crew defendants claimed the song was a parody, and thus a fair use of copyrighted material allowed under the Copyright Act of 1976. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of 2 Live Crew, noting that the rap group's song was sufficiently transformative.

7. While Courtney Love, widow of Kurt Cobain, has not filed a complaint, she publically threatened Activision with legal action for the misappropriation of Kurt Cobain's likeness in *Guitar Hero 5*. Similar to the No Doubt avatars in *Band Hero,* Cobain's *Guitar Hero* avatar will perform songs other than those by Nirvana (Michaels, 2009, np).

8. Due to the concentration of celebrities in the state, more right of publicity cases have been heard in California courts than any other district in the United States. California courts, particular in districts in and around Hollywood, tend to rule in favor of right of publicity claims. Not only is there substantially more state common law upon which to arbitrate these cases, California is also one of the 19 states in the United States to have enacted right of publicity statutes.

9. *Comedy III v. Saderup* (2001) involves the unauthorized reproduction of charcoal drawing-style images depicting the Three Stooges on lithographic prints and silkscreened t-shirts. Comedy III, the registered owner of the rights to The Three Stooges, successfully sued the producer of the reproductions, Gary Saderup, for violating section 990 of California's Civil Code, which concerns the right of publicity. The court ruled in favor of Comedy III on grounds that the images were not sufficiently transformative to claim fair use.

10. With every iteration of *NCAA Football*, an active community of users spend hours editing game data to match the real names of NCAA football players with their videogame avatars. These downloadable user-created rosters are available free online, for a fee from roster services companies such as GameRosters.com, and for sale on eBay. The popularity of game rosters for NCAA-licensed football and basketball videogames suggests that many players do play with real names appearing in the game.

When EA added the file-sharing feature "EA Locker" to its line of EA Sports titles, acquiring user-created rosters became even easier for players.

11. In addition to litigation involving representations of real people, the videogame industry has employed the transformativeness test and/or First Amendment defense in trademark infringement complaints involving the use of sound-alike music (*The Romantics v. Activision,* 2008), and in the depiction of strip clubs (*E.S.S. Entertainment vs. Rock Star Videos,* 2006), military helicopters (*EA v. Textron,* 2012), and machine guns (*Dillinger, L.L.C. v. EA,* 2009).

12. On behalf of Keller, those with a substantial stake in maintaining publicity and licensing rights have filed their support, including the Screen Actors Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the heirs of John Steinbeck, and professional players associations for baseball, basketball, football, hockey, and soccer, including the NFL Players Association, which holds a multimillion dollar licensing contract for *Madden NFL* videogames with Keller's opposition, EA.

13. While IP holders tend to leave so-called amateur cultural producers alone, end user license agreements and digital rights management protections often explicitly prohibit consumers from altering media content (Au, 2009). A test case resolving EULA or DRM content and the application of fair use for derivative works has yet to appear in court, and thus remains legally gray. In the meantime, the Center for Social Media at American University (*http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org*) has published several "best practices" documents to guide cultural producers who use copyrighted material.

14. To properly adjudicate the balance between right of publicity and First Amendment protections in likeness licensing cases, media industry and fair use advocates have urged the court to apply the "Rogers test." The Rogers test refers to the decision in *Rogers v. Grimaldi* (1989), a trademark infringement suit brought by Ginger Rogers against the makers of the film *Ginger and Fred* (1986). In the film, directed by Federico Fellini, two Italian cabaret singers who had a career imitating the famous dancing duo Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, reunite on television. Rogers sued the producers under the Lanham Trademark Act of 1946, which prohibits the unauthorized use of a registered trademark for the purpose of selling goods or services, including unauthorized use in advertising that suggests a false endorsement of a product by the trademark registrant. Under this Act, Ginger Rogers can trademark her name and likeness, and thus sue Danskin, for example, if the dance apparel manufacturer made a line of Ginger Rogers' leotards without consent from Rogers. What is important about the Rogers test as compared to the transformativeness test, is the complainant must show how the infringement was for *commercial* purposes. Rogers lost the case because the court determined the film was an artistic use of Rogers' persona, not commercial speech, and did not confuse the public into thinking that Rogers endorsed or was necessarily part of the production. The principles outlined by the court in the Rogers ruling were underscored in the Restatement (Third) of Unfair Competition §§ 46–47, which provides judges with guidelines for adjudicating Lanham Act cases.

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SECTION III

Fans and Players

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10

PLAYING BALL

Fan Experiences in Basketball Videogames

Fares Kayali

Videogaming has become a part of ordinary life for many people. This has to do with the rising popularity and increasing demographic breadth of the medium, as well as the games becoming more deeply enmeshed in people's lives due to factors such as the constant updates of social media, online features, and being able to play on the go. Many games have also started to blur the line between real sports and the closed fictional circle of a videogame. Sports videogames have long been regarded as either fun, exaggerated, and abstracted transformations of a real sport or as close and realistic simulations. This chapter argues that although sports videogames can still be both or a mix of the two, basketball videogames in particular lend themselves to being extensions of the sport of basketball. Sports fans are informed about what is happening in professional basketball through various channels, among them attending live games, watching live games, recaps, and analysis on television, reading newspapers and magazines, both online and offline, discussions with other fans locally and over social media, playing basketball themselves, and purchasing basketball gear and apparel as well as merchandise such as trading cards. This chapter will show that basketball videogames cover many aspects of the aforementioned fan media channels and also bring in new aspects particular to the medium of videogames. For this purpose the central research question "In what ways can playing basketball videogames function as a fan experience?" is the focus of the chapter. The common strength of videogames, especially contemporary basketball videogames, is their function to extend and deepen individual parts of the fan experience. For this purpose I played, documented, and analyzed a series of gameplay scenarios, relying mostly on basketball videogames from the *NBA 2K* series (Visual Concepts, 1999–2011). All of the scenarios are designed to tie-in with real-world basketball games and events and also feature both a simulation and an individual game from the 2012 NBA Playoffs.

Playing sports videogames such as *NBA 2K* has much more in common with playing other simulations like flight simulators than with traditional videogames like platformers or puzzle games. When you play a simulation, the main purpose is to trigger or recreate real experiences through a game. These experiences do not necessarily have to be accurate emulations of the real thing as a whole or as Frasca (2003, p. 223) says "to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system." Instead, very specific experiences can form strong mechanics for sports videogames. For example, experiencing the sensation of sinking a high-flying dunk, understanding the difficulty of building a winning team within tight salary constraints, playing together as a team in co-op game modes, or following how a basketball franchise develops over the course of a decade gives a very differentiated perspective on how a successful championship team is constructed. This chapter is an exploration of how basketball videogames can also be fan experiences. Rather than being a structural analysis of basketball videogames, this chapter sheds light on what kinds of meaningful experiences relating to the actual sport can be experienced in basketball videogames.

Situating Basketball Videogames

This chapter first gives an overview of different definitions of sports videogames and then discusses the relation of sports videogames with other media before detailing specifics of basketball videogames.

Sports Videogames

Different views apply to defining sports videogames. They could just be seen as games, regarded as simulations of a *real* sport, or one could argue that playing a sports videogame constitutes a sport in itself, like e-sports,[1] for example.

Sports videogames can be regarded as games no different than other games. Following Juul's (2005) cumulative definition of what makes a game, sports videogames fulfill all six criteria: they are based on rules, have a variable outcome which is almost always quantified by a score, there usually is the possibility to either win or lose and effort by the player is needed to record a win, it can be assumed that players would rather win, and consequences are negotiable as, for example, injuries don't carry over into real life.

Sports videogames also can be seen as commensurate simulations of real sports, although not without concessions to gameplay. As Wolf (2003) notes in his essay on *abstraction,* representational games that try to simulate every little detail will find it harder to succeed than those games that provide a reasonable level of abstraction on which players can act (Juul, 2007). Compared to other games, sports videogames are based on two different sets of rules; those of the sport and those rules that make it a game that can be played and enjoyed. Not only does

abstraction render a game playable, it also ensures that the players' *willing suspension of disbelief* (Coleridge, 1817) is not broken by the unavoidable shortcomings of a pure simulation. Thus sports videogames structurally can be seen as playable models of a real sport or as Grünvogel (2005, p. 1) puts it:

> Models are idealisations of a system, in which certain aspects of the system are captured and other aspects are ignored. . . . Good models are those who are simple yet still manage to reproduce even quite roughly a large number of features of a particular system . . . the main difficulty to construct a model is to identify the important aspects of the system.

It can be argued that sports videogames achieve different degrees of simulation on different layers. From the above, it can be concluded that their gameplay has to be abstracted to make them playable and enjoyable, but contemporary sports videogames also succeed as simulations in terms of representational quality and statistical accuracy due to more processing power and extensive licensing agreements. While Jenson & Castell (2009) primarily see the shift of sports videogames from simulation to imitation shaped by motion controllers that allow the actual reproduction of moves, it can also be argued that the increased statistical complexity of games combined with daily online updates of statistics, attributes and roster moves leads to players being able to imitate how coaches handle team chemistry issues, cope with injuries, and strategize against teams with whom have matchup problems.

Sports videogames can also be seen as a sport in themselves. By being competitive, skill-based, having scores, and attracting an audience, they fulfill basic criteria of what makes a sport. This is especially apparent in e-sports, where it was observed that fan communities evolve around the e-sports game *Counter-Strike* (Valve Corporation, 2000) the same way as they do for other sports (Rambusch et al., 2007). Relating to e-sports, Hutchins (2008) also described a shift in the relation between sports and media from a directional information flow to sports becoming media themselves. An in-depth analysis of the current state of e-sports, which has well-paid professional players, teams with owners, mass audiences, and television broadcasts with play-by-play commentary, can be found in Taylor (2012).

Structurally, Squire & Jenkins (2002) regard videogames as spatial media who have inherited their focus on space from sports (e.g., goals or field position) and spatial stories (think of road movies for example). In Kayali & Purgathofer (2008), a classification of sports games into the following sub-genres has been made: The extreme sports game, which puts action and spectacle above realism; the fun sports game, which puts a focus on accessibility and easy control schemes, the sports simulation, which is a realistic representation of a sport experience from the perspective of a single athlete; the team sports simulation, which gives the player control of a whole team in a realistic setting; and the deep sports simulation, which

involves additional aspects such as managing finances, team chemistry, equipment configurations, and the like. The analyzed games of the *NBA 2K* series have elements of both team and deep sports simulations.

For the purpose of this chapter, all of the above assumptions about what constitutes a sports videogame are valid. Sports videogames are regarded as digital games but playing them might become a sport in itself at the same time. In this chapter, basketball videogames are not regarded as basketball simulations but rather as part of the sport of basketball and its fan culture.

Sports Videogames and Media

A fan can generally be seen as a passionate individual who shows very high interest in a certain celebrity, band, sports team, etc. (Hills, 2002). Although the term "sports fan" most likely brings to mind images of shouting and sweaty men, contemporary sports have expanded what it can mean to be a fan, and have extended their audiences. Many contemporary sports leagues also strive to offer a kind of family entertainment (Crawford, 2004). The National Basketball Association (NBA) is a good example of that development. Technology has also brought new media channels, aside from visits to the stadium, to engage fan communities, among them sports videogames.

Though some of the traditional channels of following a sport, such as reading results in a newspaper or on the web or collecting trading cards, are passive, more active channels include going to the stadium, playing the sport yourself, watching a game on television with others, or discussing news in web forums, chats, and social media. Games have become just another of these channels, but one with interesting new perspectives for sports fans.

McLuhan (1964) acknowledged both games and sports as important social elements of society. He talked about staged situations and spectacles that allow many people to actively participate in communal life and stated that both have to be regarded as *mass media*. Although playing games undoubtedly requires an active role, being a sports fan also means taking part in something meaningful—the quest of your team for a title, for example. Fans actively support their teams not only by bringing in money but also by their presence. In basketball, the audience often is referred to as the sixth man for that reason (on basketball teams, the sixth woman or man is the first player to come off the bench to bring energy when the starters start to fatigue). What sports videogames can do is bring immediacy to the role of a sports fan. While playing a sports videogame usually does not have a direct impact on a team, it empowers fans to experience the sensation of winning a hard-fought game from a different perspective. This perspective also can be gained by competitively engaging yourself in the same sport you like to follow. And the experience could be equaled by professionally playing a videogame based on that sport. For example, *FIFA* soccer has been part of both the World Cyber Games' (WCG) and E-Sports World Cup's (ESWC) line-ups of games.

It has been observed that due to technical advances, and due to their maturing and expanding as a medium, videogames have become more integrated with their players' real lives (Crawford 2012), often to a point where the border between game and real life becomes blurry.[2] Also, the reception of sports has changed as people check live scores on devices on the go and sports events are streamed to mobile phones. Sports videogames often receive daily roster updates and have tie-ins with real sports events. Both following a sport and playing sports videogames have gotten more immediate and also more related to each other over the last few years.

Henry Jenkins (2006) defined media convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms." For many years, Internet fan communities have provided roster patches to update games with current rosters.[3] Most notably, Michael Jordan was missing from most 1990s and 2000s basketball videogames[4] and has been recreated in patches for a long time. He made his most notable official videogame appearance as the cover athlete of *NBA 2K11*. But patches were not only used to overcome licensing issues, they also provided up-to-date player ratings reflecting player performance during the season, and weekly or even daily actualizations enabling the incorporation of injuries and starting lineup changes. Over the last few years, online distribution platforms such as the Sony Entertainment Network (SEN) and the XBox Live Arcade (XBLA) enabled basketball videogames to include these kinds of updates officially. Roster updates thus are one way to enable content flow to basketball videogames. Other examples include *NBA 2K12's* Visual Concept "NBA Today" feature, which allows players to play games scheduled for the same day with the in-game commentators talking about up-to-date facts and the teams' recent performance.

> The modern sports game is no longer a re-creation of an actual sport so much as it is a re-creation of viewing that sport on television. (Poole, 2000, p. 39)

Steven Poole argues that sports videogames, due to their increased realism brought by higher representational quality (this not only includes audio and visual quality but also the use of player as well as league licenses), have transcended being just games and have *defected* to another medium. Twelve years later, the quality of presentation is even higher. In the context of this chapter it is argued that sports videogames, basketball videogames in particular, are still games but have also become a media channel for fans to follow the sport of basketball just like TV, magazines, or websites.

Basketball Videogames

The first basketball videogame was just called *Basketball* (Atari, 1978) and was released on the Atari 2600. Gameplay was simple, featuring very abstract one-on-one gameplay. The first basketball videogame with player licenses, *One on One:*

Dr. J vs. Larry Bird (Hammond, 1983) was published by Electronic Arts in 1983 and as the title implies still only allowed one-on-one gameplay. One of the first full court five-on-five basketball videogames enabled by the higher performance of arcade machines and the Nintendo Entertainment System was *Double Dribble* (Konami, 1986). Electronic Arts (1989) also started to publish five-on-five basketball videogames with *Lakers versus Celtics and the NBA Playoffs*. The game worked toward a television-style presentation with 10 licensed teams and was the first game to feature commentary, although just as scrolling text at the bottom of the screen. The game and its sequels were the starting point for what later would become the *NBA Live* series (EA Canada, 1995–2009). *NBA Jam* (Midway, 1993) was the basketball videogame that most notably deviated from the trend toward a realistic basketball experience, featuring cartoon-style players who could jump through the roof in a fun game that focused on dunking in the most spectacular ways possible.

   NBA 2K is the focus of this chapter's research and it is the longest still-running series of basketball videogames with yearly installments. The first game, *NBA 2K* (released in 1999), and all following games have been developed by Visual Concepts. The series was first published by Sega before being taken up by 2K Games. Only the *NBA Live* series has been running longer, from 1995 to 2009, but development of the then-called *NBA Elite 2011* was stopped due to quality issues (McWhertor, 2010). Both *2K* and *Live* are full-fledged team basketball games with licensing and a (configurable) high degree of realism. Within that frame, *NBA 2K* has always been positioned to be more of a simulation than *NBA Live*, which was oriented toward a broader audience.

Playing Ball

This chapter's research revolves around an explorative analysis of basketball videogames and their function as fan media, what kinds of fan experience they enable, and which references to other media these games contain. To answer the core research question "In what ways can playing basketball videogames function as a fan experience?" this chapter draws on an explorative and analytical method approach. Following Espen Aarseth's (2003) chapter on *Playing Research,* the author both played basketball videogames freely and reflected on the experience later and did documented analytical play sessions, which also were interrupted for taking notes. "Playing research" is not the only method relevant to this kind of approach; it should also accommodate regarding sports videogames in relation to fan culture. The anthropological method of participant observation (Boellstorff, 2006) also influences the research approach of this paper and ensures that unexpected details about the researched games and their gameplay are not lost. That a combination of Aarseth's and Boellstorff's approaches makes sense for a reflective analysis of games has been documented in Lammes "Approaching game-studies: towards a reflexive methodology of games as situated cultures"

(2007). Also relevant to the described research approach is the logging of game-play as described in Consalvo & Dutton (2006) to make emergent aspects of gameplay visible and to track the intertextual references to other media, which are at the core of this paper's research.

The empirical approach taken toward analyzing and reflecting fan experiences in basketball videogames is shaped by the assumption that aside from just enjoy-ing the gameplay there are three different possible ways to relate to professional basketball; to follow what's currently happening in professional basketball, to re-live great moments in professional basketball history, and to explore make-believe and fantasy settings.

With *NBA 2K* a contemporary and representative series of basketball video-games was identified. The analysis was done through reflective play sessions where scenarios tied to real basketball games were created, played, and the experiences of the author were documented for analysis. It has been decided to use four sce-narios: a simulation scenario without actual gameplay, playing a 2012 NBA Playoff game in advance and watching that same game later on television, a historic matchup played in both a current and past videogame, and a long-term fantasy scenario where a team is guided through several seasons.

Most of the research was done by playing the game *NBA 2K12,* though one part of the research dates back to one of its (still rather similar) predecessors *NBA 2K8* (Visual Concepts, 2007). For a comparative analysis a game was also played in *NBA Live 95* (EA Canada, 1994). I decided to use the *NBA 2K* series because at the moment it is the only running series of simulation-oriented basketball videogames, and the current *NBA 2K12,* with a Metacritic[5] score of 90, has been very well received by the press. There are no basketball videogames featuring women's basketball, with the absence of a new *NBA Live/Elite* there also is no game featuring international teams, and both Electronic Arts and 2K Games have cancelled their college basketball videogames series. Thus the presented research focuses on the U.S. National Basketball Association (NBA). In this chapter, the four conceived scenarios are described, documented, and analyzed. The qualitative insights gained from this analysis build on the reflection and contextualization of personal insights. The perspective of a qualified observer (Lammes 2007) allows for a certain degree of objectification, but other players still might have different experiences and deviating learnings. This limits the generalization of results in the approach taken here but allows for more flexible and exploratory insights, which can form the basis for further studies on the subject.

Scenario 1: Playing Along

A current game of the 2012 NBA Playoffs is played using *NBA 2K12*'s NBA Today feature, which allows a game happening on the same day to be played with updated rosters and commentary that relate to real events in the NBA. Later, the same game is watched on television and both experiences are described.

The author chose the third game[6] of the first-round series between the Memphis Grizzlies with their core of star players Rudy Gay, Zach Randolph, and Marc Gasol, versus the Los Angeles Clippers with their duo of young athletic forward Blake Griffin and the newly acquired point guard Chris Paul. The real series started with two games in Memphis (seeded 4th). In game 1 the fifth-seeded Clippers came back from a 24 point deficit in the fourth quarter for an historic playoff victory. An intense game two went to the Grizzlies, to tie the series. Game three shifts the series to the Clippers' home court. When a best of seven (the first team to take four games wins) series is tied, games are always pivotal, although it's still early in the series. Game 3 decides if the Clippers can retain home court advantage or if Memphis manages to reclaim it.

Although the author did play just that one game its importance was not lost on him. Having watched many playoff games it was easy to dive into the "hard fought, every game is important atmosphere." In-game commentators did their part by emphasizing the importance in such a game of picking up momentum that could decide the whole series. The game was played with NBA Today's rosters on the All-Star skill level, playing 12-minute quarters and using simulation settings. Injuries have been turned on. Existing injuries, such as the real one to veteran Chauncey Billups, are also enforced by the NBA Today mode. The author took control of the Clippers and the game started out defensively, with the lead changing on almost every basket (14 lead changes and 6 ties in the first quarter alone). The Clippers were carried by good three-point shooting early (which was lucky because the author usually takes too many three-point shots), and by center DeAndre Jordan's superb offensive rebounding skills, while Blake Griffin struggled with early foul trouble. Fouls continued to be a problem as the Clippers gave up 20 first-half free throws and trailed by 4 at the half. The game stayed very close until the end of the third quarter when the Clippers took the lead for good with a run of three-point shots. They won the game 113 to 97. During the game, scores of real games, played the same day, were shown and the commentators related the game to the real NBA playoff picture. These things made the experience feel very connected to the real game. A lot of statistical information was obtained about the two teams, including that they match up evenly at most positions. Therefore it also became clear why all of the games of the real series thus far had been very close. On the other hand, in the course of playing many new story lines unfolded. Although the Clippers won the real game, too, they won in different fashion. Sports are about individual story lines, and the virtual game had its own (Blake Griffin's foul trouble throughout the game; Chris Paul fouling out but still receiving player of the game honors with 24 points, 9 assists, 6 rebounds and 3 steals; the game's many ties and lead changes and the excellent bench play, with 7 players scoring in double figures). Parallels were good three-point shooting and the absence of veteran guard Chauncey Billups, which was felt in the virtual game, too. The author sympathizes with the Clippers team and this did carry over well to provide context and suspense to the virtual game. The many initial lead changes

intensified this atmosphere and also showed the author that this is a very close and competitive matchup (the real series later needed the full length of seven games).

The real game (played on May 5th, 2012) was very close, with the Clippers winning it 87 to 86. The atmosphere immediately felt familiar, with the Clippers crowd all dressed in red just like in *NBA 2K12*. It felt a little like they survived to win the game, because despite playing excellent offense, they missed 17 of their 30 free throws including 5 misses in the game's last 12 seconds, making it a lot closer than it could have been. The virtual win definitely felt more deserved. This might be related to player agency and thus the strong feeling of having willed your virtual team to success. In the "real" game, Rudy Gay used the free throw misses to hit two three-pointers in the game's last 13 seconds to close to within one point and had the chance to win the game with another attempt at the buzzer, which he missed. Thus the real-life game was much more spectacular in the end, whereas the virtual game had its turning point earlier. Having played before watching also brought some deeper insights during the game. The author better understood defensive substitutions (for example, the Clippers keeping center DeAndre Jordan in the game to match up with Memphis' big frontline). The importance of bench players was much more appreciated and their skill set known better through having actually played them before. Playing before watching primarily deepened the understanding of the teams and made things more interesting because many of the real coaching decisions could not only be understood but directly related to as the player had to make the same or similar decisions, too.

Although the insights on deepening one's understanding of basketball through playing a videogame are subjective, it can be safely assumed that other players will

FIGURE 10.1 Point guard Chris Paul crossing it over *(NBA 2K12)*

receive the same amount of statistical information and will face similar decisions in the game. This also means that other players at least have the same potential for learning about the sport.

Scenario 2: Prediction

In this scenario the 2012 NBA Playoffs were simulated from the perspective of a user-controlled team. Simulating means that the games are not actually played but that the game calculates the result based on ratings, chance, and lineup decisions as well as strategy choices made by the player. To potentially advance to a later round the author chose one of the title favorites, the Oklahoma City Thunder, built around young superstar forward Kevin Durant and guard Russell Westbrook. In this scenario, the gamer takes control of player roles and rotations as well as coaching strategies. The games are then simulated based on these settings, with the player only refining them between games.

Injuries were switched on, as in this year's NBA Playoffs injuries unfortunately were playing a great role (e.g., Chicago's superstar Derrick Rose's torn ACL). A minor back injury to Thunder starting center Kendrick Perkins made the Thunder lose one game in the simulation and thus the team could not achieve a first-round sweep of the Dallas Mavericks as the real Thunder did. Kevin Durant averaged over 41 points per game in the 4–1 series win.

The author also felt the urge to start sixth man of the year award-winner James Harden. The award is given to the player who performs best in a non-starting role and provides energy off the bench. Starting such a player is tempting but also weakens the impact of the reserves because the best bench player would be taken away. The author did so in the Western Conference Semi Finals against the Los Angeles

FIGURE 10.2 The playoff tree after finishing the simulation *(NBA 2K12)*

Lakers to great success, winning the series 4–1. Harden averaged close to 20 points per game for that series but the depth of the rotation suffered by this move. After game 2 the author noticed that Kevin Durant beat Michael Jordan's playoff record and scored 68 points in a 40-point Thunder win, further increasing the perception of a great and unique playoff run. The Thunder continued to dominate in their 4–1 Conference Finals win over the Los Angeles Clippers behind Russell Westbrook averaging over 30 points, 5 rebounds, and 5 assists. All these statistical values are way above average and make the game more spectacular, but at the same time they feel unrealistic at times. The finals were a different story than the rounds before, as the Heat proved insurmountable and the author could not prevent the Thunder from losing in five games despite shuffling lineups and defensive matchups. This felt disappointing and the author, favoring the young spectacular Thunder team, feared a similar fate in reality (this became true when the Thunder later lost just the same finals series in five games, too). The Heat in general are very hard to beat as computer opponents. Especially in simulations, which appear to be mostly based on player ratings, there is no better duo than the two Miami Heat players LeBron James and Dwayne Wade.

There were other interesting analogies, too (the Clippers playing strong without veteran guard Chauncey Billups and eighth-seeded Philadelphia upsetting Chicago in seven games). These analogies not only show that *NBA 2K12* can really be used to simulate the game of basketball, but they also increase the credibility of gameplay. Given that sports gameplay often is fictional but based on real players and attributes, these analogies help make the game world believable.

The simulation not only eased comparisons, it also showed the volatility of playoff games, where a single player or an injury can make the difference between advancing or not. It also helped in understanding the Thunder team from a coaching perspective. Having allocated their rotation and strategies their run to the 2012 finals came as no surprise. Playing *NBA 2K12* helped the author to understand the great potential of that particular team, and it can be assumed that it can help other players judge other teams better, too.

Scenario 3: Fantasy

In this scenario, association mode was played for eight seasons, simulating most of the games and playing only interesting matchups and crucial games. Association mode uses real schedules and teams and gives the player full management responsibility. The author mostly acted as a general manager and coach in this scenario. This test is made to explore a make-believe scenario.

The author used the game *NBA 2K8* to start this association and documented all roster moves, player awards, and memorable moments from the start. Gameplay carried on over a few years in real life, with longer intermissions, and was recently brought to a close to support this chapter's research. The author chose the real 2007–08 Memphis Grizzlies roster as a starting point. The degree of realism and

whether a player wants to simulate more or play more is configurable. The author used a higher degree of realism, which included financial decisions, worrying about team chemistry and coaching styles.

During gameplay the Memphis Grizzlies missed the playoffs in their first season. As part of the experiment I decided that the team needed to rebuild and thus I simulated most games in anticipation of next season's promising draft. The team later won the third pick in the NBA Draft Lottery and I selected forward Michael Beasley, who had won both the Rookie of the Year and 6th Man of the Year awards in his first season. Michael Beasley in reality has become quite a good player but in the simulated version he went on to be a perennial all star. The team developed their first rivalry against the New Orleans Hornets, who won two championships, eliminating the Grizzlies in the Western Conference Finals twice (2008–09 and 2010–11). The Grizzlies went on to win their first championship after the 2009–10 season, and won four more consecutive championships between 2011–12 and 2014–15. I usually played crucial playoff games and most of the finals while simulating most of the season and the rest of the playoffs. As each season took a lot of playing time, the stakes in the playoffs felt high each year and my tension increased. The core of the Grizzlies stayed the same, including current players Rudy Gay and Michael Conley as well as the aforementioned Michael Beasley; additional players included veteran stars Shaquille O'Neal and Ray Allen joining the team in their last year before retirement to win a championship. The author kept the core intact for several reasons: The team had good chemistry, Gay and Conley were still on the real Grizzlies team and formed a bridge to what was happening in reality, and the author liked the idea of building a franchise around a couple of players rather than shaking things up too often.

For the yearly NBA Draft the author relied on user-generated draft classes that could easily be downloaded from 2K Games' servers. These no longer were available after the 2012–13 season, when the author decided that the team needed to start building around younger players and traded up for a higher draft pick to select fictional young Hungarian player S. Marai (who according to the game's scouting report drew comparisons to Kobe Bryant). Marai went on to be a star player, the team's starting shooting guard and future centerpiece of the franchise before the team went over the hard salary cap (contrary to the real NBA, *NBA 2K* also features a hard cap) after the 2014–15 season. This prompted the author to stop, as this was as close to a *game over* as possible because it meant releasing most of the team's star players and starting to rebuild.

Great pleasure was taken in the mixture of using real teams' rosters as a starting point and watching them change over time, deviate from reality, and become something new. Many story lines developed while playing this mode. From the stories of individual players to the team having its own rivalries and success stories, everything that occurred felt very personal and unique. It felt so unique that the author at first documented everything in detail just for the sake of preserving these memories and only later started to think of it as research.

A lot of things about what it takes to have a successful team were learned, at the same time deepening the understanding of real life management decisions in basketball. For example, for a good team to become a champion it takes more than star players, also involving chemistry, team effort, and careful financial planning. The author previously knew about all those things, and the game did a great job in including all these aspects and requiring them for success. The perception still changed, as the author not only experienced these aspects first hand but also had to make decisions based on them. Many insights were also gained about how players can contribute to a team beyond what can be measured through statistics.

Scenario 4: Re-Living Sports Memories

A historic NBA matchup is played in a game from its time and relived through *NBA 2K12*'s "Greatest Mode." The author selected one of *NBA 2K12*'s "Greatest Mode" matchups. Greatest Mode is built around 15 different star players from the NBA's history. It features a classic matchup which, if won, unlocks both teams. The matchup of the 94–95 New York Knicks and Orlando Magic was chosen by the author because the matchup at the center position between old-school center Patrick Ewing and then-emerging young star Shaquille O'Neal marked a generational shift in basketball history. The teams did not face each other in the playoffs that season but both teams were contenders, with New York reaching the Finals the year before and the Magic making their way to the NBA Finals that season. Also, the game's year is ideal to be replayed in *NBA Live 95,* the oldest game of the NBA Live series. In *NBA 2K12* the author had to take

FIGURE 10.3 Patrick Ewing versus Shaquille O'Neal *(NBA 2K12)*

the side of the New York Knicks, so the Orlando Magic were later selected as the player-controlled team in *NBA Live 95*.

In *NBA 2K12* the game mode locked settings to 12 minutes per quarter and simulation rules. The presentation of the game has been adapted, using 90s television inserts, and the wooden floor of the Madison Square Garden arena looks distinctly different from how it does now. Older matchups in "Greatest Mode" are even displayed in black and white only.

Commentators framed the matchup as youth and athleticism versus veteran players and experience. They reminisced on Ewing's career and about the Magic's draft success with Penny Hardaway and Shaquille O'Neal. They also commentated from a contemporary perspective though, discussing Ewing's final year when he played for the Orlando Magic and later became their assistant coach. The Knicks were carried by Ewing while Orlando's Penny Hardaway proved too much to handle for Knicks starting point guard Derek Harper, and different matchups were explored. The Knicks fell behind quickly and trailed by 26 during the second quarter. Then the author remembered what the Knicks of that time were best at, slowing the pace and focusing on defense. Playing half-court offense, trying to score in the paint (the zone close to the basket), and drawing fouls proved to be more successful. The author also learned to appreciate the versatility of the Knicks roster, with several players being able to play multiple positions, especially Anthony Mason who was one of the NBA's first point forwards (a forward who does a lot of ball handling). Remembering the 93–94 Final, and John Starks' streaky play (in basketball streaky shooters are able to hit many shots in a row but also are prone to longer streaks of misses), the author half-consciously also kept hoisting up three pointers to mixed success. But at one point early in the fourth quarter John Starks hit three consecutive three-point shots to cut the Magic's lead to 10 and got the Knicks back in the game. Yet in the end the Knicks lost by a large margin, 123 to 94. The high score does not befit a matchup between two 1990s teams built around strong centers but was a result of the author's fast-paced offensive play style, which may be partly a matter of preference but is also triggered by *NBA 2K12's* defenses, which prompt you to score early because it takes some time for all players to find their proper defensive positions. Although Penny Hardaway netted player of the game honors due to a performance featuring 29 points and 9 assists, the center duel proved to be the game's highpoint, with Ewing scoring 39 points along with 9 rebounds and Shaq recording 24 points. *NBA 2K12* framed the center duel before (by spotlighting both centers in the intro) and during the game (emphasis by the commentators), thus the author may also have been driven into scoring a lot with Ewing because of that.

Although *NBA 2K* is very simulation-oriented, it is still a little easier to play offense-minded fast-paced basketball, a challenging feat with this defense-first New York Knicks team. It was a lot of fun to bring the old Knicks back to life, though, and a lot of historic facts were learned through listening to the commentary alone.

The *NBA Live 95* scenario was played on Starter (Normal) difficulty using the standard 5-minute quarter length. All rule options were switched on to make the game as realistic as possible. The first thing noticeable was the incredibly high pace and simple three-button controls (turbo, pass, and shoot). The second immediately obvious component was a sense of disappointment because the game's graphics and gameplay were of lesser quality than expected[7].

The connection to the 1990s interestingly was made easier, as the author also played *NBA Live 95* and watched NBA games in 1995. Thus nostalgia was not just tied to a realistic representation, but was facilitated by playing a game from that particular time. The roughness of the game, due to bad refereeing and a focus on arcade-style basketball, felt appropriate for a matchup against the tough New York Knicks because the 90s Knicks teams were known for their hard-nosed physical play. The importance of the center matchup between Shaq and Patrick Ewing was also clearly present in the game, with each scoring 15 points. After trailing throughout the first half, the author-led Orlando Magic came back to win the game 70 to 56, relying on three pointers and rough play. Anfernee Hardaway again had a good game, scoring 12 points along with 5 assists and leading the Magic to their second win. The author mostly won because he quickly recalled how the game had to be played. Compared to *NBA 2K12*, agency felt rather low as players did not differ that much from each other in their skill sets and because gameplay was rather monotonous.

In the end, both matchups helped me reminisce about the past. Playing *NBA 2K12* additionally created some drama by facing off Patrick Ewing and Shaquille O'Neal and framing the matchup as an old school versus new school showdown. Although nostalgia and historic facts were conveyed well, gameplay felt wrong in

FIGURE 10.4 Player introduction before the game (*NBA Live 95*)

both cases. In *NBA Live* it felt too unpolished compared to contemporary games and in *NBA 2K12* it felt like contemporary basketball and not like a match from the 1990s.

Discussion

Basketball videogames contribute to a better understanding of the sport of basketball. Just like watching a game in a stadium furthers the understanding of team momentum and, contrary to television broadcasts, gives a full court overview, which helps understand play calls and the teams' strategies, basketball videogames enable entirely new insights about individual players' strengths and weaknesses, substitution patterns, issues arising from the schedule, and injuries or team chemistry issues. Actually playing the game emphasizes things that might be more under the radar when just passively watching a game. Some fans often do not understand why certain players are traded for seemingly lesser valued players, but playing association mode taught the author about the financial reality of teams and about the necessity to balance team chemistry. One of the key aspects here is distributing minutes as well as player roles (e.g., star player, role player, or bench warmer). By managing team chemistry the player learns the hard way that building a good team often is not as easy as signing a number of stars, but that they also need to get along both chemistry-wise and in actual gameplay. One of the reasons playing the Memphis Grizzlies was so satisfying was the lack of a superstar like LeBron James and so a need to rely on a well-balanced team of very good players.

Fans can use basketball videogames to deepen their knowledge about the sport and to dive into statistics. Using the NBA Today mode in *NBA 2K12,* players play actual matchups of that particular day with up-to-date rosters reflecting injuries as well as current statistical trends. In the same manner, playing in online basketball fantasy leagues (Farquhar & Meeds 2007) keeps players up to date on athletes who have hot streaks or are injured, and gives them a general overview on statistics, often on a daily basis.

The most unexpected result of the scenarios was how nostalgic experiences were triggered by playing older basketball videogames. Although gameplay in *NBA Live 95* was disappointing, the experience of reminiscing was genuine and playing a game adequate to its time felt much more appropriate than using *NBA 2K*'s Greatest Mode.

Although a strong relation to real basketball is a very important part of the experience, it was also noticed that this *real* aspect is just a starting point for what mostly becomes its own story from then on. It might be important for sports videogame fiction to have this real starting point, though. As a next step, the topic of basketball videogames and fan experiences would be well-suited for a quantitative research approach that evaluates opinions and stories from a broader player-centered perspective. Also, multiplayer aspects have not been considered in this chapter and provide an interesting opportunity for further research.

Many of the insights relating to following the sport of basketball and deepening one's understanding of management, player skills, and coaching might translate well to other sports and sports videogames, too, and could also be subject to further analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter followed the core research question of "In what ways can playing basketball videogames function as a fan experience?" To answer this question, four different scenarios were played, mostly from the *NBA 2K* basketball videogame series. The evaluation of the scenarios resulted in the following insights:

- Playing basketball videogames as simulations and along with real events still results in fictional story lines that are as detailed as the real thing. These story lines unfold in both short- and long-term scenarios.
- The make-believe aspect of the story lines is enriched by using real players and teams as a starting point.
- Playing with up-to-date rosters furthers a deeper understanding of the sport, including the importance of role players, minute distributions, reacting to injuries, team chemistry, and coaching.
- These insights transfer in both ways. Things learned in the game transfer to a better understanding when watching real games, and watching games helps to be able to play better because it is easier to judge individual players' strengths and weaknesses.
- Basketball videogames offer a great deal of immediacy in relating to professional basketball. Roster updates have not only become very accurate but also are released on a daily basis. Also, news about professional basketball is spread through videogames. Playing a game in *NBA 2K's* NBA Today game mode gives a complete update on results and what else is going on in NBA basketball.
- Basketball videogames can also offer the opportunity to re-live past matchups and to learn about historic facts. The test scenarios allowed the researcher to directly experience the makeup of past teams. A very interesting but also subjective insight was that the author could reminisce better while playing an old otherwise disappointing videogame.

In summary, basketball videogames are not just simulations of professional basketball but could be considered as part of the sport of basketball, which among other things consists of athletes, fans, and various media channels such as television, websites, magazines, and basketball videogames. To regard basketball videogames as a media channel also enables their study from other perspectives than game studies. Fan studies may find an interesting group of fans to observe; being a fan in many cases also means being active and basketball videogames have a lot to offer in terms of agency and enriching the fan experience through interactivity and by empowering fans to experience the sport from a very immediate perspective.

This immediacy is very apparent in contemporary basketball videogames, which deliberately try to blur the line between videogames and sports broadcasts. For fans this means they not only have a channel to receive sports but one that allows for creativity, participation, and self-expression within a large community. Analyzing the communities that form around and within basketball videogames could be an interesting perspective for fan studies. At the same time, playing a basketball videogame also is a very personal experience for players and fans. It can act as a means of fantasy play but also complement one's identity construction as a fan.

Basketball videogames augment professional basketball and form a point of media convergence where play takes place at the intersection of realism and professional sports news with fiction and make-believe gameplay. For games studies this means that sports videogames, or basketball videogames in particular, need to be analyzed from a series of perspectives. The games can be seen as simulations because they are comprehensive (and often also very accurate) models of the real sport. Gameplay has many interesting facets, which include simulations paralleling what is happening in real sports, fantasy make-believe gameplay where players can create their own personal sports story lines, and collaborative as well as competitive multiplayer gameplay. The design of sports videogames can build on one or more of these aspects. The study of sports videogames can be built on play, but the role of their players as fans also has to be taken into account. When we regard sports videogames, we have to take a broad perspective that not only regards sports videogames as games but also as part of sports.

Notes

1. E-sports is the competitive and often professional play of videogames, e.g., in tournaments or online leagues.
2. See Castronova (2005) for a discussion of this aspect in online games and Kayali et al. (2012) for alternate reality games.
3. The biggest community of patches for *NBA Live*, the NBA Live Series Center (NLSC), is still active and offers current rosters for many vintage *NBA Live* versions. http://www.nba-live.com/ [last accessed May 10, 2012]
4. Michael Jordan was the only NBA player not included in a group licensing agreement between the NBA and the players' union. Therefore all rights had to be negotiated separately, and due to exclusive deals his appearance in basketball videogames of that time was limited.
5. http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/nba-2k12 [last accessed May 10th, 2012]
6. http://www.nba.com/games/20120505/MEMLAC/gameinfo.html [last accessed May 10th, 2012]
7. The disparity between how we remember "retro" games and how they actually look and play is described in Kayali & Schuh, 2011.

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11

EVENTFUL MASCULINITIES

Negotiations of Hegemonic Sporting Masculinities at LANs

Emma Witkowski

A certain type of young male is staged as the archetype of the high-performance computer game player: He is tough and competitive; he is heterosexual (and typically white); he is lean; he performs with bravado and shows zero tolerance for flaws. He is the image of the North American digital sporting hero marketed to young male gamers engaging with electronic sports (e-sports). However, not all players or high-performance gaming scenes fit this flawless model of gender production, nor do all embrace it. This chapter explores the expert gaming scene of *World of Warcraft* "*Arena Tournament,*" one of the high-performance e-sports (competitive and organized computer gaming tournaments) situated in 2010 on the North American Major League Gaming Pro Circuit (MLG). Looking at player performances as well as the organizational structure of the MLG draws attention to the tensions surrounding the production of masculinities within one e-sports scene and the nuances of gender relations therein.

This exploration renders the MLG as a tournament made of *eventful masculinities,* that is, diverse gender performances made in relation to the situated event space and event-goers (players, sponsors, organizers, spectators) participating at this top level of modern networked competition. A very specific flavor of sporting masculinity is endorsed by the MLG and reified on the Pro Circuit as acceptable and desirable. By following the practices of location-based Arena players (Arena) at MLG tournaments, this chapter explores how these participants engage with, orient themselves to, and challenge the impression of "hegemonic sporting masculinity," a particular performance of masculinity that is locally dominant, associated to traditional sports and athleticism, aligned to male body skill superiority, aggressive competition, heterosexual virility, the veneration of winning, and a "'survival of the fittest' model of hierarchy" (T.L. Taylor, 2012, p. 114; Messner, 2007). By looking at such arrangements and experiences of e-sports, the

FIGURE 11.1 A vision of the North American digital sporting hero (*Counter-Strike*) – World Cyber Games, 2010.

conditions under which players are more resistant or reproductive in their agency within the scaffolding of hegemonic masculinity can be considered (Messner and Dworkin, 2002).

Arena Tournament (Arena) is a part of Blizzard Entertainment's massively multiplayer online (MMO) game *World of Warcraft* (WoW; Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), released with the expansion *The Burning Crusade* (2007). Approximately 10.3 million players subscribe to WoW (Cifaldi, 2011), taking on the diverse game content in a variety of ways; roleplaying in guilds, planning 25-player raids against environmental challenges, participating in fishing tournaments, or as in the case of Arena Tournament, engaging in Player versus Player (PvP) competitions.

Arena Tournament matches take place within an "instanced" gladiatorial-like combat zone involving three-player teams.[1] Each team tries to eliminate the opponents by use of tactical expertise, player-character abilities, game mechanics knowledge, movement decisions, and teamwork. E-sports events extend the competitive space of online play, through organized tournaments in face-to-face (location-based) settings of the networked game. Competition here is tense; add-ons are disallowed (Blizzard has banned add-ons at location-based tournaments in order to emphasize "skilled" corporeally intense play—see T.L. Taylor, 2012),[2] and the LAN setting has its own added pressures including lights, cameras, and

spectators (Sirlin, 2006; T.L. Taylor, 2012). Teams that get to top-level tournaments make their mark by excelling in online competitions, through marketing themselves via multiple media channels,[3] and by consistently gaining (official) rankings online as top-tier players (Witkowski, 2012). Several Arena e-sports tournaments were held during 2010, though the MLG stands out as the leading pro/am seasonal event for Arena, with four tournaments placed throughout the year at various North American locations.

A compelling panorama of computer game sportisation is presented through the organization of mediated e-sports tournaments such as the MLG (sportisation being the process by which a pastime is transformed into a recognizable modern sport) (Maguire et al., 2002). E-sports reportage and public player discussions (forum debates, blog entries, and podcasts featuring prominent players and commentators) have voiced skepticism regarding Arena's legitimacy as an e-sports discipline. These layers of expert discourse have assisted in the steady sidelining of Arena competitors as being disconnected from "real sporting skill."[4] Game patches are framed as "game changing" (as class balance is constantly altered and, consequently, a transitory "re-tuning" period of practice is needed for some teams), and rhetorically spun to emphasize that physical skill—steeped in movement, dexterity, and timing—isn't required. Rather, skills in number crunching and a gamesmanship attitude are voiced as the skill(-less) pathway to wins (see Heinseich, 2010). Such discourses found on the North American e-sports scene put Arena players' legitimacy as bearers of expert gaming skill into question on a daily basis; ultimately situating them as e-sports outsiders. Sportisation and the notion of a "genuine" e-sports player are central to the following discussion on sporting masculinities shored up at expert LANs (local area networks), as it is within this positionality involving notions of "real" and "other" and the tensions therein that compelling accounts from players on the margins of "real" sports are articulated.

Here I examine three core areas: (1) hegemonic masculinities at the MLG; (2) counter-hegemonic practices of Arena players; and (3) Arena player complicity toward hegemonic sporting masculinity. The fieldwork draws on qualitative research undertaken from the MLG Washington D.C. 2010 (attended) and Raleigh 2010 event (live-streamed), as well as from BlizzCon 2009 (live-streamed) and 2010 (attended).[5] The Arena events I followed were made up of a group of around 30 to 50 young men who were in regular attendance on the various Arena e-sports scenes. At the attended events, I was on the scene for the duration of the tournament weekend, and conducted semi-formal interviews and observations on-site followed by formal post-tournament interviews with key players. The live-streamed events were observed with the additional benefit of "shoutcasters" (game commentators) covering the plays, as well as the availability of team live-audio feeds, which offered access to rich and contextual team communications.[6] All players and teams are placed under pseudonyms throughout the text (unless stated otherwise).[7]

A Glimpse of the Scene: Entering My First MLG

The first player remark that sticks out as I move through the MLG event hall in Washington, D.C., is "rape." A young man of 19 or 20 yells it out at an opponent facing him not two meters away. He weasels again dominantly, "I'm raping this idiot!" On taking in the panorama of expert play scenes,[8] I find that all the players, enthusiasts, and administrators are ensconced in a space projecting a very specific commercial flavor of professional sporting masculinity. Young women hanging around the FPS console scenes are branded with t-shirts bearing their partner's name across their back; players bear status items, such as keyboard quivers and hoodies that have been picked up throughout a career of play with diverse franchise teams. Sponsor booths supporting the Pro Circuit are sprawled across the event hall entrance, where hipness and technological mastery is embodied by "cool guys" in their late 20s. As employees (of the MLG and various sponsors), they promote and express their familiarity with the latest gaming technologies, re-texturing the geek gamer image. Hired as decoration, slender teenage girls in mini-skirts distribute sponsored products, adding to the familiarity of this space as one sleekly marketed toward heterosexual male achievement. Raised platforms showcase the best teams, where young white men are foremost among the competitors. The highly visible players offer a visual confirmation of who has full access to the networks, experiences, technologies, and exposure to the expert

FIGURE 11.2 (Left) Talent's girl—another marker of *Halo* player "Talent's" achievements. (Right) One of the raised platforms for *Halo* competition

competition needed to progress to the top level of tournament play (see also N. Taylor, 2009). And in what Wood (1984) suggests is a sign of "groping towards sexism" in young men's sex talk, the dominance bonding language of "rape" is barked out over and again here, there, everywhere.[9]

These were the things that stuck out to me on entering the MLG for the first time in late 2010. However, this unsettling panorama was also at times observed as full of contradictions. At the PC scene, heated conflict both on screen and off was followed by opponents self-initiating hand-shakes and hugs. Players posted to forums about the "gg"—good game—they all played. *Halo 3* (Microsoft Game Studios, 2007) and one of the fighting games had women playing in the amateur rounds. Nonetheless, arriving on the scene and noticing such strikingly gendered structures and performances were marks of what was already established as a part of the MLG as a competitive sporting institution.

The sportisation of computer gaming tournaments as entertainment products (played and spectated) is a central theme to follow in terms of gender production.[10] Since its formative years, the MLG has emulated its brand on North American *media sports* events (where the continued existence of the event rests on profit maximization from media investments—see Maguire et al., 2002, pp. 52–53), so the institution itself logically rests on a foundation of, as well as embraces the overall toning of, established hegemonic sporting masculinities.

MLG co-founder and chief brand officer Sundance DiGiovanni referred to two particular male-dominated media sports as widespread, competitive, and thus advantageous models. DiGiovanni (ESPN Sports Nation, n.d.) explains,

> The goal with MLG has always been to create a new platform of competition for guys who like video games. When we started our goal was to rival traditional stick and ball sports. . . . Our goal is to become as widespread as other tradtional [sic] sports. Our goal isn't to stop, but to be on par with the NFL and NASCAR. A lot of guys play video games worldwide and that's who this is for.

Stating that the MLG wanted to rival these traditional sports is noteworthy, as one thing is clear—the "pageantry" of media sports masculinities produced by such models (Sabo and Jansen, 1992) and the impacts of such structures are uncritically used as a foundation for modern networked competition.

Established in 2002, the MLG has developed two distinct branches. The first caters to amateur online tournaments through a credit-to-play membership system run across the MLG website *GameBattles*;[11] the second is the slickly produced Pro Circuit, staged at live venues. Held in several different locations annually, the Pro Circuit projects a detailed gloss of professionalized male sports, what Nick Taylor in his study of a Canadian-held MLG event calls "masculinised techno-culture" (2009, p. 159). This suggests that engaging in this space of competition means meeting a very specific hi-tech sporting masculinity head-on.

The production of the Pro Circuit generates a hierachy of game-scenes; at the top of the ladder is the *Halo* franchise (referring to both *Halo 3* and *Halo Reach* scenes) on the Xbox 360 console. *Halo*, a fast-paced, FPS console game with a large player base, has been the flagship game of the MLG since the league's launch.[12] The multiplayer game was suited for live competitions with its quick action and "easy" to grasp team play (via split-screen monitor views), and it translated well in terms of the production of an online spectator sport. As the established community on the scene, *Halo* is distinguishable as the "flag-bearer" of masculinity via its long-term visibility as the dominant e-sport (Bryson, 1990, p. 174). As the largest, best sponsored, and most visibly represented discipline at the MLG, *Halo* is clearly marked as a game with a legitimized career path, and the structural advantages that come with such legitimization are evident. Apart from the online/LAN competitions and a large *Halo* player-membership, the MLG offers an amateur to professional track on the *Halo* scene.[13] The best position and most space in the event room is allotted to the Xbox 360 area, and finals are played on an extravagant event stage (by contrast, Arena was positioned at the back corner of the Washington, D.C., event—no stages— where the most flamboyant aspect was the length of mustard-colored velour tablecloth that covered the fold-out tables supporting the PCs). The Xbox 360 controller is even on all MLG products as the central icon on the official MLG logo.[14] In this last unassuming branding move, PCs, mice and keyboards, arcade sticks, Wii controllers, and the players of them are all positioned as secondary actors or, in more concrete terms, expendable on the scene.

FIGURE 11.3 First impressions of MLG. (Top left and moving clockwise) *Halo 3/Halo Reach* (Xbox 360); *Tekken 6* (PS3); *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (Nintendo Wii), and *Arena Tournament* (PC).

The MLG and *Halo* are just two of the many things projecting gendered norms around these tournaments. Nevertheless, they are powerful stages of production (discursive and performative), engaged in projecting a look and feel of hegemonic sporting masculinity across this particular e-sports tournament scene, both locally and delivered online, gruffly framed as media sports for "real men."

Hegemonic Sporting Masculinities

Originally conceptualized by R.W. Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinities are framed as follows:

> The concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 77)

The concept has been widely used in explorations of masculinity in sports, but also more recently critiqued within sports sociology for its dependence on an overly structural foundation (Pringle and Hickey, 2010). Current renderings of the term have integrated gender elasticity (drawing on Butler's work on gender performativity), historicity, and intersectionality, and have extended from thinking in terms of masculinity to *masculinities* (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinity as such is not one thing, or one way of being for one person, but rather encompasses many variations of gender performances throughout a person's everyday life and life history (Butler, 1990, 1993). Likewise, hegemonic sporting masculinities are accordingly not static or essential, nor reducible to simple framings of structural determinism or one-way power formulations, but rather, are configurations of practice and have historic and contextual contingencies.

Halberstam (1998) calls for us to look away from the white, middle-class male body for a legible reading of masculinity. As the majority of the Arena scene is exactly that, I looked to the actions of those acting in resistance or in complex ways with and against the ascendant forms of local masculinities. The negotiations are what make Arena players compelling actors and as Halberstam suggests, players "on the margins" speak directly to how dominant masculinities are experienced, produced, and sustained in that particular context through their brush with and against it. In the following, Arena players bring their resistant, though also at times reproductive practice, right into that "inner sanctum of male privilege" (Kane and Disch, 1993), the MLG media sports setting.

Counter-Hegemonic Practices of the Location-Based Arena Community

A Finesse Foundation

Perhaps the best place to start is with Arena players' impressions of what is means to be sporty. Sporting masculinity, as tied to the MLG look and as projected by the *Halo* scene, is something immediately framed as "other" by Arena players. Veteran player "Popsie" makes a clear statement on what it is that "they do." He spindles his fingers through the air and does an elaborate movement mimicking the character animation of the female blood elf priest—his main character. We're finesse, he says, smiling. They're the jocks—nodding to the *Halo* scene not twenty meters away. Arena players generally embraced this perception of finesse. They saw themselves as sophisticated teams: carefully thought out line-ups of players who were practiced in the execution of intricate details. Finesse is certainly a term found in traditional sports (think of the cadence and the fine touch evoked in a tennis player's stroke), though in many team-oriented media sports, finesse is never left alone or held onto as the central characteristic in such competitive male-dominated sports. The term is often found heavily anchored to other "masculine role balancing attributes" such as power, agility, aggressiveness, or strength.[15] As tied to sporting masculinity, a term like finesse is a complex concept, and I'd like to tread carefully here and note that sporting finesse is complicated by among other things culture, expertise, and sport specificity.

In Arena players' embrace of finesse, they align themselves not with the jock projection of self, but with a more traditional geek image (cf. T.L. Taylor, 2012). Players talk of the finesse involved in putting such domain knowledge into action: having to deal with the nuances of major patch changes, class line-up challenges, and the overall capability of balancing, planning, and practicing (in an MMO), as well as theorycrafting as weighed up against the interplay on the scene.[16] These issues are certainly parceled out in other e-sports disciplines in various ways, but these issues are marked as the everyday minutiae that high-performance Arena players encounter, and they acknowledge as well as embrace such fine details as a part of their central skill-set. "Zeke" offers an account of how refined actions matter on the playing field:

> When you're playing at the highest level, well, you can't really just have one strategy . . . you have to make your decisions based on where the other team is, what abilities they've used . . . knowing where the other team is and knowing where your team is dictates where you can go. You're basically trying to absorb as much information as possible and make your decisions based on that on the fly. You know what *cooldowns* they've used [the time before a spell, ability, or item power can be used], what things they still have available, so you can predict what they can do in reaction to what you're going to do. And you just try to force them into a situation

that they don't want to be in. . . . It's all about getting to that moment I guess.

Finesse is a foundational characteristic of the Arena scene. Though, perhaps one of the most salient features in this Arena community's approach toward e-sports competition is their identification of the scene as fragile. The location-based tournament stage is not set in stone. And while no e-sports scene stakes itself out as permanent, there are several games that have a feeling of longevity or player or community power, such as the *Halo* scene at the MLG (with ten years of competition) or the *Counter-Strike 1.6* (Valve Corporation, 2003) e-sports scene more broadly.[17] One outcome brought about by the instability of Arena as an e-sport is that the players place value on alternative aspects of the scene other than purely achieving, winning, or dominating the competition (these are persistent characteristics in achievement-oriented media sports, best summarized as "winning is the only thing"—Kretchmar, 1994, p. 98). Recognizing the tournament scene as fragile brings an alternate reading on which long-term gains from this type of competition can be positively harnessed. As numerous players expressed, this includes new experiences (travel and mastery), testing a team's consistency, friendships and respect of peers, finding ways to enhance team synergy, and a chance to play; not just an opportunity to win, to be seen, or to gain financially. A chance to engage with and against the top players in an optimal setting is recognized as the most salient reward. In a veteran Arena player's admiration of a consistent team on the circuit, he expresses that they are,

> . . . a truly great team and will be around as long as they want to keep playing because they will be able to be entertaining and create good games no matter the imbalances—win or lose they're always fun to watch. (Fnatic Team, 2010)

The key phrase here is that great teams can *create good games,* not necessarily dominate or win consistently through instrumental play. At the MLG Arena scene, this sentiment toward the game and the competitors' play was deeply entrenched in what "their" game should be: namely, mastery created together (see Harper, 2010, 2012). Winning is certainly a goal, but it is voiced jointly with an aspiration for a "gg." However, creating good games does not mean that aggressive flair ups don't come about.

Trash-Talking

During the MLG Raleigh event there were touches of trash-talking and aggressive challenges both during play and at the conclusion of a match, some of which were smeared as derogatory insults signaling a failure of masculinity. Notably, these gendered (mostly homophobic) slurs were not only audible in the MLG space, but

also filtered out to the thousands of spectators via the online audio/video feed. Despite attempts (most often by teammates) to shut down the use of derogatory and unsporting language, these hostile outbursts flared up from time to time. In the following scene where trash-talking erupted, in-team tensions were made audible with "Grolitz" yelling across the tournament floor (and the live-stream) after defeating their rivals:

GROLITZ: I'm about to scream like "nice spell-lock faggot".
MADNER: Don't do that; don't do that!
GROLITZ (YELLING): Hey, Hey! Lourk (rival player)! Fuck You!

On the transmitted feed of this event, the actions seemingly ended there—hanging silently on a "Fuck You." No retaliation was heard in the room. Aggressive Arena players were notably in the absolute minority. Nick Taylor's (2009) exploration of the MLG *Halo* scene offers a compelling breakdown that counter-poses the broader Arena community stance against such aggressiveness. In his analysis, aggressive conduct in *Halo* is both embraced as and appendaged onto "real" play: "players engage in and reproduce a discourse around 'professional' *Halo 3* play: mastery of a highly-codified lingo, and an ability to 'trash-talk', is as important as one's 'shot', and silence is associated with incompetence and/or inexperience" (p. 168).

FIGURE 11.4 Arena live-stream: emptied of on-site spectators, though an intimate setting where trash-talking is managed.

In contrast, Arena players' general disregard of antagonistic trash-talking speaks clearly to the disparity between what signifies legitimate behavior for these separate (though spatially near-by) scenes at the MLG. For the Arena players engaging in trash-talk, their actions were recognized by other players as performance for the cameras (to gain a reputation as a fun-to-love/fun-to-hate player). However, the scarcity of Arena players actively engaging with trash-talkers also speaks to the lack of purchase toward "manliness" that such actions are allotted. Where silence was configured on the *Halo 3* scene as weakness, the unanswered taunt on the Arena scene feeds into their positionality as finesse players—as able to handle the little details of high-performance play. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that "one of the most effective ways of 'being a man' in certain local contexts may be to demonstrate one's distance from a regional hegemonic masculinity" (p. 840). Divergent performances of masculinities literally back onto each other at the MLG. In such intimate settings these performances are in regard of one another and strengthen the position and understanding of what masculinity is on each separate though co-located scene.

Women Players, Female Avatars, and Gender Relations on the Arena Scene

The MLG, as presented so far, has been one without female bodies in active roles. Let it be known: Women are "gaming" at e-sports events. The Washington, D.C., event saw a handful of women at the various console scenes engaging in competition; some played in the amateur tournaments (with male and female friends), and others jumped into an empty seat in front of a console for a few rounds of play. Although no women were playing Arena during my research, Arena is historically the only MLG scene where a woman has risen to the top as a high-performance player/teammate. In 2008, "Heroe" was hailed as the first woman to ever win a prestigious non-segregated major e-sports event. Heroe's repeat achievements in Arena (two major championships and e-sports franchise/sponsorship affiliations), and her prolonged existence as a player on the scene works to collapse any idea of leaky hegemony in Arena, where,

> ... sport is seen historically to be a long-standing project to reinforce dominant modes of masculinity and male privilege while at the same time allowing "just enough" and "just the right kind" of female physical activity so as not to rock the boat. (Ritchie, 2004, p. 148)

During the early years of location-based competitions in 2008–2009, Heroe toned the Arena scene. She was not only a player (in this male dominated e-sports domain), she was also a multiple championship series winner and lead tactician. Around other e-sports (LAN) scenes, players have commented that women lack the "testosterone" for competitive gaming (N. Taylor, 2009, p. 146) and, more commonly, that women are just "inherently" not ever going to be as good as male

players (T.L. Taylor, 2012, p. 117). Such talk is certainly more difficult to negotiate in Arena, especially with the specter of Heroe at hand. As a former Arena player, there were still over a dozen competitors at the MLG events that had either played with or against her (one team bitterly recalled a championship loss, which I found out later to be to her team). Her interviews are strewn across e-sports websites where she projects herself as the competent and confident player. In her newest e-sports undertaking (another Arena-style e-sports discipline), she specifies, "I feel like I am the best theorycrafter on our team as I originally came up with the composition, and I can pick apart why we lose when we do." And perhaps it is precisely in such active performances made by Heroe, where she is visible as a player and a vocal expert (as well as performing in two high-performance e-sports disciplines), that some of the most significant work on gender relations inside e-sports has recently been done. She doesn't wave the "women's flag," but rather she has been constant in just putting herself out there as an expert. And by means of the not-so-simple work of becoming that expert player, Heroe's history has toned the scene. Hegemonic masculinity is a constant and situated process, it will look different depending on the nuances of gender relations in a social setting (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). I suggest that Heroe's presence as a top-level player is an additional contributing layer to the character of gender relations and expression of masculinity on the Arena scene. Her successes dissipate the practice of essentializing game skill, where Arena players themselves don't talk so much of male or female players, but rather of experts like Heroe, Zeke, or Popsie.

While Heroe's activity has marked the scene in a particular way, there still remains very little presence of women on the Arena scene. And this makes one particular aspect of Arena—the frequent use of female characters—most intriguing. The pervasive use of female characters added a layer of performativity within this space as something different from the ways things were getting done across the MLG scene more broadly.

Much work has been done on the practice of character selection and "gender-bending" in MMOs, from identity exploration, to individual aesthetic pleasures and experienced in-game functional advantages (Eklund, 2011; MacCallum-Stewart, 2008; Yee, 2003). Arena players present a different purpose for gender-bending. As one player acknowledged, the qualities located in the female characters work to augment the Arena scene identity as more sophisticated. In Yee et al.'s (2011) work using big data sets taken from Blizzard on PvP play and character selection, they found " . . . we [gender-bending players] conform to the roles that are expected of our avatars, independent of who we are in the physical world" (p. 4). They argue that players were found to choose female characters as healers, for example, as that is the stereotype of the gendered performance of that class. At Arena's, the much smaller sample of situated players offers a different analysis.

Of the many players gender-bending in-game, Popsie explains that he didn't choose a female character to represent his Priest to conform to the gender stereotype made around that role, he chose a female body for the finesse of the

animation that it projects back out into the world. He draws from the character those qualities that can fold back into the local significance of their game culture. The fairly stereotypical character designs are thus reinvented locally with different meanings of power—feminine/slender versus masculine/strapping is rewritten, in Popsie's words, as finesse versus crude (perhaps re-emphasizing his stance on Arena as "brains" contra *Halo* as "brawn"). Even in Popsie's last act here of "ideological recycling" of gender dichotomies (Laberge and Albert, 2000, p. 212), he steers clear of remaking the choice of finesse as fixed to moral strength (having the courage to gender-bend in the MLG space), or physical prowess (that the high-performance game is only for well-trained e-sports "athletes"). Gender-bending at Arena's is at times purposefully employed as a distinct move away from local hegemonic "jock" masculinity. Rather than a reification of women's bodies as healers, female bodies are chosen to show off the best side of their, the Arena players, masculinity.

Other small but significant instances that embraced the queering practices of the young male Arena players crop up throughout the tournaments and interviews.[18] One player sporting a crew-cut brings a hairdryer to matches—a traditionally gendered technology he draws into his pre-game routine to warm up his hands. Another player carries a fluffy white pillow around to use during and between play for increased comfort. And there are the instances where players display their camaraderie through BFF moments across the various mega-screens, such as naming an alternative (alt) character after their good mate from another team who is sitting in the crowd (Alt 1:"Dewey"; Alt 2:"Dewzie"; Alt 3:"Dewyee!").

FIGURE 11.5 One of many Arena players customizing a female character

The players on the Arena scene were oriented toward one another, not as fixed antagonists, but as a collective of gamers where room for queering the dominant expression of e-sports and the local production of hegemonic masculinity was embraced. Ahmed (2006) offers some consideration on the social orientations and lines created in such actions relating to both bodies and space:

> The social also has its skin, as a border that feels and that is shaped by the 'impressions' left by others. The skin of the social might be affected by the comings and goings of different bodies, creating new lines and textures in the ways in which things are arranged. (p. 9)

Tying the skin of the social to Arena performances, these players actively chose a specific embodiment as a significant way to highlight their performance of masculinity.[19] As gendered bodies they considered their visibility, the roles presented to them, and how to play with the bricolage of materials available. Intended or not, impressions were left—re-texturing the look and feel of sporting masculinity at the highly visible e-sports event.

Though, despite such transgressive actions, Arena players are also always already measured up against culturally recognizable masculinity more broadly (Butler, 1993). As such, Arena players were not just negotiating against the hegemonic sporting masculinity of the MLG, they were also engaged in complicit (often grudgingly accomplished) and reifying actions.

Reproducing Hegemonic Sporting Masculinities

In terms of the complicity of the Arena players, Pringle and Hickey (2010) offer some consideration of the complex challenges surrounding the competing discourses produced across various sports and games that can produce "identity tensions." The most provocative identity tension is perhaps that in which young men are judged on the sidelines. That is, even if young men are not interested in participating in the hyper-masculine sport on display, they are nonetheless likely to have their identities "measured against" the masculinities that such a game or sport articulates (pp. 116–17). Arena players were expected to jog up on stage "athletically" and perform a sleek ESPN show-reel (like seasoned NBA stars). Taking a different stance, one Arena player wore a homemade t-shirt mimicking a sponsor-jersey over his official team-gear, displaying himself as the anti-professional despite his role as a sponsored e-sports "pro athlete." Even taking the expression "rape" into competition, then hugging and hanging out with players when a game is over, as happened on the Arena scene. These are just a few of the many awkward examples of young men "doing" or brushing up against the ascendant model of masculinity.

Nick Taylor et al. (2009) suggest that the overt heterosexual gloss and performances within the MLG scene are more than just media sports mimicry. Rather,

they safeguard "an intensely 'homosocial' space from homosexual desire" (p. 248). Complicity to the ascendant masculinity on the scene might thus work like a safety net for the Arena players performing as less culturally recognizable athletes/ e-sports competitors, and thus less "like men." Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) identify this flexibility, stating,

> Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments. Consequently, 'masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices. (p. 841)

Acting complicity toward the heterosexual gloss of the scene via culturally recognizable cues on viable masculine performances thus can work as a stabilizer for the players. And ultimately, the young male players on the scene cautiously position themselves as always already identifiable as "(straight) men." As such, Arena players' complicity, in reference to the ascendant masculinity at the MLG, is desperately tricky to map out given that participation not only sits with community relations and local performances (voluntary as well as involuntary), but gender performances are also calculated against broader understandings and "expectations" around heterosexuality, "manliness," and formulations of geeks and (or in contrast to) jocks.

Conclusion

The various practices of e-sports competitors "on the margins" offer an alternate version of gendered performance in this media sports space, what I call eventful masculinities. These masculinities are specifically made "on site" with a high-performance community of players who brush up against other event-specific e-sports scenes, as well as against the production of the organization itself. Gender and leisure theorist Betsy Wearing (1998) explains that sport, in all of its forms, "creates spaces for the transmission and confrontation of cultural values, especially with regard to gender" (p. 80). Indeed, the MLG is not some all-encompassing framework that simply drives players to comply with their production of sporting masculinity; as it is a form which few, if any, of the participants on the scene could fully attain or indeed desired to embody (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Of the MLG it can be said that multiple masculinities are being formed, not in isolation, but confronted in intimate contact with other gendered performances on the scene and certainly toned by culturally recognizable masculinity more broadly (cf. Messner, 2007; McKay et al., 2000); this includes orientations toward and against other men on the scene, as well as in reference to those women who engage in performances of emphasized femininity, in addition to those women at work as expert players. The nuanced performances of Arena players and their re-texturing

of masculinities on a specific e-sports tournament scene charts out a somewhat different experience of what it means to be involved in high-performance sports-like competition. They deliver an alternate practice of what high-performance competition can also involve, namely; finesse alongside of mastery, geekdom lifted by competitive "good games," and a "co–ed" game space, where a little trash-talking on the side happens (though it is often reeled in). As such, the North American Arena tournament teams have not only played for the various goals and pleasures of high-performance play, but they have also played with sporting masculinities, offering a different expression and experience of gender as performed in the situation of not only media sports but also modern networked e-sports competition.

Notes

1. A sectioned-off "instance" of the MMO, offering a private arena of play for the teams that is devoid of other non-pertinent WoW players intruding on the battlefield.
2. Add-ons are user-interface modifications that can provide extra data to the player. For Arena tournament specifically, add-ons might be installed to perform a wide variety of tasks pertaining to efficiency or data off-loading, such as visualizing on the user-interface the spell that is the most effective to use in a player's spell-rotation.
3. Such as *YouTube* streams, producing instructional videos of their game play, or through good play tied to proficient blogging.
4. Though to state that the Arena players are sidelined on the e-sports scene must be taken with a grain of salt. The game is on a tournament circuit (the prize-winnings of Arena in 2010 alone topped a quarter of a million U.S. dollars), and there are outlets to high-performance competitions and various perks available as a result of such visibility as expert players.
5. BlizzCon is a convention held by Blizzard Entertainment that showcases their franchise games. Since 2008, BlizzCon has held an e-sports tournament in Arena (where online qualifiers were the official route to an invitation to the BlizzCon finals).
6. I had planned to attend the MLG 2010 championship event to be held in Dallas; however the Arena finals were unexpectedly postponed, and were never rescheduled. Arena was cut altogether from the MLG Pro Circuit in 2011.
7. All photographs were taken by the author during fieldwork at e-sports tournaments.
8. Which during most of 2010 consisted of *Arena Tournament, Tekken 6* (Namco Bandai, 2009*), Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (Nintendo, 2008)*, StarCraft 2* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010), *Halo 3* (Microsoft Game Studios, 2007), *Halo Reach* (Microsoft Game Studios, 2010) and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Activision, 2007).
9. During my conversations with Arena players, the use of such language was brushed off time and again as being "just gamer lingo"—yet another verb used to emphasize dominance. Very little to no reflection was given to the exclusionary and gendered power of such language. See Hernandez' (2012) compelling account on gaming and "rape culture" as expressed from the experiences of her own competitive networked play.
10. MLG co-founder Mike Sepso has invested heavily into the MLG, which is targeted at "digital mavericks": young, male, "first wave digital natives." Alongside the MLG, Sepso is the founder of a startup fund aimed toward "creating things" for young men aged between 16 and 24 (Zitron, 2011).

11. A player who wishes to compete in online amateur ladder competitions requires a *GameBattles* membership (a "Gold MLG membership" running US$29.99/year), followed by buying "MLG Online Credits" (10 *GameBattles* credits cost US$7.00). A one-day tournament in, for example, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4v4* would cost around 25 credits per player. The winning team would be rewarded with a cash prize and *GameBattles* credits (for example, this particular tournament announced in May 2012 awarded the winners US$980.00/team and 25/credits per player)(GameBattles n.d.).

12. *Halo: Combat Evolved* (Microsoft Game Studios, 2001) and *Halo 2* (Microsoft Game Studios, 2004) were two of the best-selling first-generation Xbox games.

13. Approximately 140 players participated in the amateur and pro *Halo* events during the MLG Washington, D.C., 2010 tournament. And across online tournaments, the MLG website hosts various gaming competitions for hundreds of thousands of players each month (MLG, n.d.).

14. The MLG logo (See Figure 4—MLG logo is placed in upper left-hand corner) is a direct knock-off of media sports logo designs such as the NBA and the MLB—a white silhouette on a red and blue background. Though, with the individual player represented in the NBA logo, it is compelling to read that the NBA has in the past actively rejected that this is a particular player (Jerry West). The logo designer has suggested that the NBA wanted to move away from an individual player to an institutional understanding of the NBA (Crowe, 2010). The MLG seems to make the opposite move in establishing the Xbox controller in the logo; it situates that particular technology as the primus motor of the scene itself.

15. A sensitizing frame here might be the status and dealings of kickers on American football teams. A position that is steeped in finesse, though combined with and rhetorically delivered as engaging extreme mental "toughness."

16. In terms of PvP, theorycrafting "works the numbers," looking for the most powerful or versatile group composition in the code.

17. See T.L. Taylor (2012) for an overview of game community work in maintaining *Counter-Strike 1.6* as the preferred game for competitive tournament play.

18. Where queering on the Arena scene refers not to different expressions of sexuality, but rather to different expressions of (sporting) masculinity that transgress gendered norms more broadly. Ultimately, Arena players queer the dominant sporting masculinity of the MLG/e-sports scene to include different "relations and meanings" within sporting competition and between competitors (cf. Sundén and Svenigsson, 2012, p. 3).

19. The choice of Arena characters is even more distinctive when compared to the standard male military bodies that are offered in the *Halo* software.

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12

SPORTS VIDEOGAMES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A Meaning-Oriented Analysis of the Appropriation of the Online Soccer Manager Game *Hattrick*

Jeffrey Wimmer & Jana Nickol

In this analysis, we regard a popular variant of sports videogames, the so-called *online management games*. The distinctive sociological feature of these games is that they provide various communication tools and thus constitute a new form of media-based communication. Online games are in general distinguished by the fact that they are played on or via the Internet. A relevant genre of online games is *massively multiplayer online games* (MMOGs). In these, the user maneuvers an avatar within a complex, virtual world and interacts with numerous other users. In contrast to MMOGs, the genre of *browser games* does not require any download or installation of files. These games can also be considered as "casual games" (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 120), as this genre often includes simple and somewhat easily playable computer games There are also more complicated types of games intended for long-term gameplay. For example, a game world that continues to exist and is subject to change and development even after a user exits the game by going offline is considered a persistent world. This feature entices gamers to persistently follow the game's progression and integrate new media practices into their gaming behavior. Persistent worlds are available in MMOGs as well as browser games. Despite its large audience reach—especially in regard to so-called "social games" such as *FarmVille* (Zynga, 2009)—the genre of browser games has hardly been explored, whereas MMOGs are frequently subject to research (e.g. Wohn et al., 2011).

The use of online games in general has strongly increased in recent years. Representative studies show that, second to watching television, online gaming is among the most time-consuming leisure activities, with online gamers spending an average of more than 20 hours per week in their virtual gaming environments (Quandt & Wimmer, 2009). This finding implies that online games can generally be characterized as social games with specific interactive features concerning both communication and gaming action. Certainly, this results in an increasingly

binding commitment that goes beyond gaming sessions and leads to growing involvement in the game environment. In many aspects, this kind of user involvement creates a stronger bond than other forms of media consumption.

Analyzing the appropriation of an online sports videogame does certainly not refer to discussing the relevance of an apparently pointless activity with no relation to reality. Rather, the game incorporates something that goes beyond the immediate drive for self-affirmation and makes life more meaningful (Huizinga, 1955). Bearing this in mind, it is worth focusing on the subjective meaning of a sports videogame in everyday life. Consequently, the main research question of this study is: How is an online sports videogame—using the example of *HT*—appropriated in the context of everyday life?

As a research object, the sports browser game *Hattrick* (*HT*) (Hattrick Limited, 1997), a strategic soccer management game released by the Swede Björn Holmér in 1997, was chosen. Holmer had originally developed the game for a small group of friends, but *HT* currently has more than 700,000 active users, including 55,000 German users. The main goal of the game is to develop strategies and tactics that will lead the players' own soccer club to "honor and glory" within the league system. *HT* follows the same principle as real-world soccer, with seasons lasting for 16 weeks: Every week there is one league and one friendly match against other teams. Additionally a cup is played. But other than that, the online game only corresponds weakly to reality—for example, in contrast to other soccer management games or the "fantasy football" games, *HT* does not base its characters on protagonists of real soccer leagues.

Sports Videogames in Mediatized Everyday Life

Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (2006) specify that videogaming does not take place in a detached space far from reality, but rather is deeply embedded in true-to-life contexts:

> Gameplay does not exist in a vacuum, any more than games do as a whole. It is situated instead, within a matrix of potential meaning-creating frameworks. These can operate both at a local level, in the specific associations generated by a particular episode of gameplay and in the context of broader social, cultural and ideological resonances. (p. 38)

This context can be exemplified through the flows of information and communication within the sports videogame *HT*. In the virtual communities of the game, so-called federations, the discussion forums are in one case used by German federation members stationed as soldiers in Afghanistan to talk about their military deployment. In this manner, confidential information is given to other federation members for whom access to this information through traditional media would have been more complicated. These in-game processes of

information and communication go beyond a mere human-computer interaction and contribute to the perception of computer gaming as social communication media in everyday life. Consequently, the question arises, what social, cultural, and thus meaningful significance do sports videogames—like all genres of videogames—possess and how is this induced? Similar to this is Malaby's (2007) proposal that "rather than focusing on the game as something outside of life, we should understand games as meaning-generating spaces within life." Examining the culture of computer games, especially concerning the emotional quality of experience and everyday use, can only contribute to a better understanding of these complex processes, even though our knowledge of the extremely diverse computer game cultures currently remains rather limited.

Including the "everyday life" of the users into the analytic scope of our analysis requires a precise definition of the term, as its scientific use varies. Taking the roots of the *domestication theory* into account, a crucial field of analysis becomes apparent: the home (Silverstone et al., 1992; Hartmann, 2009). As early as 1984, the ethnologist Hermann Bausinger put the main focus of his studies on the home of Family Meier in his fundamental article "Media, technology and daily life." In great detail, he describes the relation of Mr. Meier's daily life to his television habits of the weekend sport coverage and draws general conclusions from his observations. His key finding is that media is integrated into the regular routines of everyday life (cp. Lull, 1988). Not only are media-related and nonmedia-related activities interlaced (Bausinger, 1984), but also the naturally accepted everyday world and other spheres of reality, such as fantasy and dream worlds (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973).

Based on this, we should consider into which contexts the appropriation of an online sports videogame such as *HT* advances and which shifting of boundaries accompanies this process. Adopting the basic understanding of the relevant issue, the main interest is to examine how a medium merges with daily routines and on which levels this process occurs. For a long time, the common understanding of the gaming experience in game studies was coined by Johan Huizinga's concept of the "Magic Circle." The standard work of game design by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmermann (2004) presents the following, rather static and formalistic approach that makes a clear distinction between game reality and everyday reality:

> To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins. . . . The term magic circle is appropriate because there is in fact something genuinely magical that happens when a game begins. . . . Within the magic circle, special meanings accrue and cluster around objects and behaviors. In effect, a new reality is created, defined by the rules of the game and inhabited by its players. (pp. 95f.)

Current media ethnographic-oriented analyses make the integration of gaming experiences into daily routines and the sometimes quite dynamic or abrupt shifts of boundaries of game world and everyday life more graspable (e.g. Copier,

2009; Taylor, 2006). For example, Daniel Pargman and Peter Jakobsson (2008) used participatory observation to clearly identify the ability of computer gamers to engage in rapid, transboundary gameplay and communication, respectively:

> There is nothing magical about switching between roles. It is something we do all the time and can literally be done at the blink of an eye. It is analogous to 'code-switching,' i.e. the way that a bilingual person can switch between languages unproblematically if the situation so demands it. . . . Thus a player, Alan, can be deeply involved in a discussion about game-related issues ('I need to understand how spawn points work') and then say that he 'needs to go to the bathroom' without confusion breaking out among the other players. They all understand that Alan switched frame and the comment about the spawn point was uttered by Alan-the-player while the comment about the bathroom was uttered by Alan-the-person. On top of this, Alan juggles yet another frame, that of Lohar-the-mighty-warrior (played by Alan-the-player). Lohar has yet other needs. . . . (p. 238)

Before this media-ethnographic turn in game studies (Boellstorf, 2006), the matter of converging virtuality and reality was mainly considered in studies about the effects of gaming and the formation of virtual communities (for an overview see Taylor, 2011). For example, Götzenbrucker (2001) coined the term "spill over" in his study of the communities within three so-called "Multi User Dungeons" (MUDs), the predecessors of online role-playing games from the 1980s. The "spill over" describes a shift of virtual communities into the real-world environment, in the form of group meetings. It is also possible that these shiftings proceed in reverse, because people have a tendency of replicating things online that previously aroused their interest in the real world. In doing so they connect themselves and their biographical background to the different offers of mediatized game worlds. For example, a preference for real-world soccer in general or a specific team could easily lead to a preference for sports management games in general or creating team avatars according to the real model. However, a differentiation between the virtual and the real-life sphere of action should be maintained. The objective of this article is to determine how one sphere can become part of the other, or how the game world is intertwined with the everyday world.

Method: Expedition into the Virtual World of a Sports Videogame

Throughout the entire research period of this study, the main idea was to comprehend alternative concepts of life by using a "policy of recognition." A prerequisite for this is a general openness toward the object of knowledge, which is provided by an inductive approach. The study is implemented with a multi-method design: To adequately include the game attributes of *HT* into the research process, a

field phase was first conducted to eradicate the distance to the object. Playing this sports videogame was considered an important preparatory measure before beginning the process of data collection. The researchers' involvement in the game world as literal federation gamers serves as the ethnographic section of this study.

The exploration of the virtual world allows a detailed description of *HT*. It features a *limited persistent world* that only changes on predetermined dates in accordance with the game's own schedule of playing times (e.g., the "training update" each Friday). The game is distinctly designed to satisfy the conditions of so-called "social gaming." Players can communicate with each other using a game-internal mailing system and numerous forums. Purchasing the optional premium "Hattrick Supporter" service (current asking price €34.80 per year) unlocks a number of additional communication features. This includes the option of joining or founding federations. These groups vary in size (with a minimum of five members) and the nature of their establishment is manifold. They can range from nonsense federations such as the "Beer Drinking *Hattrick* Managers" to politically motivated federations such as "Politics meet *Hattrick.*" Some federations hold regular group meetings that help establish and transfer the community into the real world. A critical point of this methodical approach, however, is that the data do not reflect the complete game culture of *HT*. The study only includes the more active and thus more communicative users, as all participants of the study are registered "supporters" of the game. Casual gamers who usually assume a more passive role in *HT* were not taken into consideration.

TABLE 12.1 Case study participants

	Marc[1]	*Thorsten*	*Klaus*	*Sabine*[2]	*Benjamin*
Age	30	31	40	27	16
Education	Higher secondary education, college	Higher secondary education, college, postgraduate	Secondary education, apprenticeship	Secondary education, apprenticeship	Lower secondary education
Vocation	Computer scientist	Consultant	Civil servant	Housewife	Intern
Current incidence	Job-seeking	Relocation	—	Relocation	Seeking apprenticeship
HT Membership	3 years Supporter	4 years Supporter	5 years Supporter	3 years Supporter	3 years Supporter
Family status	Girlfriend	Girlfriend	Single	2 children, divorced, boyfriend	Girlfriend

[1] All names are anonymized.

[2] The overwhelming majority of HT players are male.

TABLE 12.2 Categories of the structured interviews

Category	Definition
C1 Social relationships	C1 describes the integrative role of HT in social relationships.
C2 Integration into daily routines	C2 records how and in which way HT is used: Who logs into the game when and where? In this context, we also consider the areas of everyday life that are outside the reach of HT (taboo zones).
C3 Thoughts and emotions	C3 describes HTs presence in everyday life in the form of game-related thoughts and emotions.
C4 Commitment and obligations	C4 comprises additional activities within or outside the game world that have no relation to mere game play and are justified by commitment or an obligation
C5 Self-assessment	C5 records the participants self-assessment regarding their gaming behavior.
C6 Spill in	C6 captures how strongly the individual traits of the participants influence their gaming behavior.
C7 Real investments	C7 determines if the investment of real resources can reflect the meaning of HT in the users everyday life (e.g. time, work, money).
C8 Turning points	C8 refers to situations in which either the participants living environment or the gaming environment changed and in turn induced changes in their gaming behavior.
C9 Microcosm of societal processes	C9 summarizes all processes that occur in HT and can also be observed on a societal level in reality.
C10 Gaming focus	CK10 is a combination of the prior categories and has the purpose of classifying the participants into different types of gamers.

To get an insight into the daily use of *HT* and its accompanying communication and interaction, structured interviews were used to capture the subjective perspective of the gamers in case-by-case analyses (Hepp, 2008). The applied type of structured interview was a combination of topical and semi-standardized interview elements. From the first type, we included the procedure of formally categorizing the participants prior to the interviews based on answers to a short questionnaire. The "Hattrick Press" section, a quasi-journalistic platform accessible to all users, was used as a data source to ensure that the interview guidelines were not entirely based on theoretical considerations. A *qualitative content analysis* of 30 articles (following Mayring, 2000), in which users describe the browser game's role in their everyday lives, was used to establish the traits of a typical gaming career, with different phases associated to the current life circumstances of the user (initiation, further development or breaking off, identification with the game/club, fading into routine). The different gaming phases were included in the

guidelines for the interviews and associated with the contexts of the participant's particular everyday life.

The recruitment of the interviewees was realized through in-game contacts and personal networks. The final selection was based on their age, gender, and formal education. By distinguishing between these criteria, different constellations of everyday life could be included. Since examining the connection of changes in the way of life with the gaming behavior was also part of the issue, participants with several years of *HT* experience were surveyed. For pragmatic reasons, the sample was limited to five cases, as the entire analytical process was designed to reconstruct the complexity of mediated and nonmediated everyday practices in order to obtain holistic and multifaceted results.

The collected data were firstly transliterated and then evaluated by using *inductive categorization*. The structured interviews were interpreted by means of case analysis. This approach was chosen with the intention of not disrupting the structures of meaning and instead obtaining a holistic view. Following the principle of Grounded Theory, conclusions were carefully drawn from the individual results to allow theoretical generalization. A total of ten categories were identified.

A summary of the results is disclosed in the description of two key dimensions (see Chapter 4) and in the fourfold sports videogame players typology (see Chapter 5).

Empirical Results: Social Relationships and Managing Daily Life

Communicative Construction of Social Relationships

The main finding of this study is that social relationships are formed through mutual gaming activity in *HT*. Already existent relationships such as friends, partnerships, and family can be distinguished from relationships that were newly formed through the sports browser game. Although some use the game as a reference point among already existing circles of relatives and friends, others use it to establish new contacts. In this context, *HT* takes over the following functions: It acts as an interface that facilitates web-based entertainment and, if the user is registered as a supporter, indicates the presence of others in the game world. This function is sometimes used as a controlling mechanism to gain certainty of the other users' state and communicational availability. Hence, *HT* is a meeting place that indicates what the other person is currently doing. This certainty is used as a starting point to launch communication. Because the online game only features a limited persistent world, it is mainly the unpredictability of communicative events that keeps enticing the user to log in.

> Well, there are certain times when you know that something will happen, such as every Tuesday evening, every Saturday evening, but you never know

if, when you had sent a message to someone, he replied, or will do so later, or whatever. (Marc)

In most cases, *HT* is used as a communication platform, as an additional electronic mailbox that calls for frequent checks of its status. Because of this, the online game adopts a social function in the users' everyday lives. In consideration of these findings, the game is used as an "instrument for managing relationships," just as well as social software is.

Outside the game world, *HT* remains present in the specific form of a topic of conversation. The users compare their developments, report their progress, and discuss strategies and tactics. At parties or other events, *HT* is often included in small talk and is one of many topics that are routinely mentioned.

> When you meet other people or sometimes talk on the phone, you talk about all kinds of things and almost always [. . .] also about Hattrick. Say you mention four, five different topics, most times Hattrick is one of them. (Klaus)

Real-life and virtual, simulated events are then mixed together and stored in the same "box" of conversational topics. Naturally, references can easily be drawn from a strategic soccer management game to real-life soccer. In combination with the major topic soccer, *HT* can become a very dominant topic of conversation.

> The topics of our conversations are mainly about the game, well mostly around soccer. As to myself, well I'm still rather young and so I don't know that much about it yet. So I do ask him what kind of tactical team line-ups I should use and which players I should buy, if I see something on the transfer market. (Benjamin)

When establishing new social relationships, the topic of *HT* initially assumes a specific function as a *connecting factor* that facilitates establishing contacts between two people. It provides a noncommittal topic that does not invade anyone's privacy and can thus be used for testing purposes when new contacts are made, for example, at a meeting. Hence, it acts as a superficial topic that helps avoid matters that are more serious, and is well suited for "breaking the ice" between people.

> But when you first get to know new people at group meetings and such, then really, you do get to know each other through HT, well basically that really is all it's about at first, HT – which players did you just purchase, what is your goal for the season, and stuff. And then sometime later you reach more personal topics, but at first it's like that for everyone, well that is how I have experienced it so far, always HT. (Sabine)

In addition, *HT* provides a *venue for competition* in the scope of social relationships. An interesting insight obtained from the interviews is that the virtual performance of other users is observed and commented on. The comments range from playful taunts to serious criticism that can turn into bullying. In return, these reactions find their echoes in conversations via telephone, at meetings, or via the communication tools provided by the game. The evaluation of the gameplay through others is a phenomenon that disrupts the game's original intention of playing for the sake of fun. This puts the emphasis of both the game world and the social network on striving for success. Whether these reactions have a serious nature or are intended as jokes varies and depends on a user's attitude toward the game.

As a bonding hobby, *HT* must ultimately be considered as an activity that triggers mutual support within the game. For example, *HT* players notify each other via SMS about in-game events and thus expand their range of reachability. Another form of mutual assistance is "account-sitting," which is the actually forbidden practice of letting a substitute handle the gameplay. This practice indicates that keeping certain appointments is considered as so significant within the game world that they should be attended by someone else rather than be missed.

When someone from the personal environment or from the game world expresses interest in *HT* and wants to learn the game, some users feel obligated to pass on their knowledge and gently introduce the other person into the *HT* world. This emphasizes the sports browser game's connectivity, which is also the source of commitment to the game world. Benjamin's search for an apprenticeship proved exemplarily that today, commitment within the gaming community can even serve as a reference in the real world. Together with his father, he not only attended the annual national German *HT* meeting as a guest, but also helped organize it. This positive reference helped him obtain an internship, which he will begin soon, with a promising outlook for future employment. His future supervisor knew *HT* and valued his commitment positively: "[. . .] they really liked it a lot that I helped there." (Benjamin) In his case, *HT* projects a positive image toward other people. There is no longer a border between the game and real life at this point, as the game-related activity obtains an actual value in reality. With these functions of social relationships in mind, it becomes apparent that an abrupt abortion of the gaming career can have associated social consequences. After all, the user must conquer his everyday life without this point of reference.

> Yes, that would probably be like taking away soccer from all the Germans . . . it's simply a topic that we can talk about . . . if I voluntarily give that up, then I bring myself down and then I don't have to talk about it with other people. But if it's just taken away like that it would be as if a soccer fan has his soccer club taken away from him. (Marc)

Depending on how strongly this sports videogame is intertwined in relationships, if the game were discontinued a cohesive and integrating factor would

get lost, which can create a feeling of abandonment. In conclusion, the social relationships constitute a dominant level of bonding between the game world and the everyday world. *HT* provides an interface for communicative processes, generating topics of conversation for everyday life—of course benefitting from the overwhelming popularity of real-world soccer in Germany, serving as a connecting factor for new contacts and acting as a location for successful, but also for unsuccessful, efforts. Based on the interviews we can draw the following conclusion: The more *HT* is intertwined with social contexts, the higher its meaning in everyday life and consequently the time and effort its use can require. The persistence of in-game sports events like matches and training *and* the communicational infrastructure are two specific videogame attributes that contribute to these developments.

Game Schedule in Everyday Life: Integration Strategies

From the empirical data the "integration into everyday life" can be derived as the second key dimension. The players use different prevailing strategies to incorporate everything involving *HT* into their daily routines. A curious statement was that the sports browser game is often treated as a "background program," running continuously on the computer while a different activity receives primary attention—similar to the phenomenon of television constantly running in the background of some households. Being continuously online, the users react when something occurs within the game world. This type of usage is strongly aligned to the user's living and/or working environment. Sabine, for example, has the role of a mother and housewife and turns on her computer in the morning, logs in to the game, and lets it run continuously in the background throughout the day. She isn't permanently active, though the action occurring in the gaming world is an always-available option. Marc, who is currently seeking employment, is also at home most of the day and has *HT* running in the background while he's job hunting. The distraction potential of the game can be spontaneously utilized to get some distance from the main activity. Complications can arise when returning to the original activity causes difficulty and when the investment of time into this sports videogame increases even though this time resource is required elsewhere. One participant described a turning point in his life, at which he became aware of exactly this aspect. He experienced his gaming activity as part of an entire pattern of problems.

> There once was a phase . . . during which I had . . . rather private, personal problems [. . .] my life was at the crossroads . . . of course I decided back then that Hattrick had taken up too much space in my life and that I could find a 'more meaningful' use for my time, so to speak. (Klaus)

The mediatized gaming world, as an area of the living environment, can sort of expand and then consume time that would usually be used for other activities, thus

replacing those activities. If the gaming activity assumes too much importance in everyday life, a difficult life situation can surely become even more complicated. The described examples show that consideration of the overall context is of great importance. If another sphere, such as one's career, consumes a tremendous measure of space in everyday life, it can in turn interfere with the gaming activity. Even a balanced condition is possible if *HT* assumes a fixed, time-limited position in the everyday structures. For example, this can be the case when it is explicitly used to relax after work. A balanced condition can be provided for younger players by parents setting time limits.

All these observations relate to the issue of coordinating different time schedules in everyday life. To integrate the time schedule of *HT* as closely as possible into the everyday structure, some users actively interfere with their natural, biological rhythm of time. They wake up early or stay up late so they can follow the game's changes. Some even interrupt their sleep so they can witness the transfer of a virtual soccer player from team to team, for example. The impending consequences are long-term coordination conflicts of different activities in everyday life. If interferences with the biological rhythm get out of hand, other spheres of everyday life can sustain damage. A possible consequence could be fatigue during work or negligence of other duties.

All participants emphasize that real-life appointments, occurring simultaneously to an event in the game world, have priority. However, this statement is limited by the fact that certain strategies can be applied that maintain *HT*'s presence in situations considered more important than the game. This includes the already mentioned use of SMS notifications or the habit of retreating briefly from a situation so the game's score can be kept.

> Like, I'm at a birthday party on a Saturday evening, and there are about 20 people present, having a barbeque and it's a rather good friend of mine, so I might say to him: Hey, can I use your computer quickly to log in? Then I'll retreat for five minutes. (Klaus)

HT is not considered an absolute taboo in such situations. This only occurs when time is spent with people who do not participate in this gaming world or take no interest in it. After all, *HT* is not only present as the formal act of logging in, but also mentally and emotionally. This aspect emphasizes the amplitude of the appropriation process. Certain game-immanent factors such as the seasonality of the gaming world and unexpected game events can influence the player's thoughts.

In summary, *HT* is used at home, at the workplace, during vacation, and while visiting friends and relatives, and consequently has infiltrated many different spheres of everyday life. This specific sports browser game can take up a major role or only fill in existing gaps of time in the daily routine. Adjustment strategies ensure that *HT* acquires a larger range of accessibility and is increasingly integrated into everyday life through changes of the natural daily rhythm. This refers

to a process that probably all successful browser games are connected with. Potential conflicts with the coordination of other activities become evident. Overall, the chosen integration strategy depends on the conditions of everyday life, which is why structural changes (turning points) of the daily routine can influence the gaming behavior.

An Explanatory Player Typology: Types of Everyday Use of Social Sports Videogames

A summary of the results finally provides an empirically based description of the different types of gamers. It is grounded on Richard Bartle's "interest graph" (1996, p. 6). The typology is based on two vital traits (gaming focus and transfer processes) and can be understood as ideal types that have to be further investigated. Following the classic approach by the sociologist Max Weber, the traits of the different types should not be considered as sharply separated from each other, but rather as idealized characteristics that are not necessarily present in reality in exactly this compilation (ideal types).

The Socially Secured Gamer

The first type of gamer has a steady circle of social relationships in real life in which he is fully integrated.[1] The gamer is thus "secured," meaning tightly involved in a social network that he has already established. Hence, the focus of his gaming motivation is not the establishment of new acquaintances through *HT.* Rather, he transfers the already existing relationships into the virtual game world. This sports videogame serves as an extension of the social sphere, as it provides a virtual meeting point. In the gaming world, the socially secured also acts "committed*,"*

TABLE 12.3 Sports videogame players' typology

Type of gamer	Gaming focus	Transfer process
Socially secured	Intensify relationships (existing relationships)	• Broaden the social environment in the virtual sphere • HT as a topic of conversation
Ambitious strategist	Gaming success (selfishness)	• Mental presence of HT in everyday life
Extrovert networker	Communication (new relationships)	• *Spill over* – extension of the virtual environment into reality • HT as a connecting factor for contacts
Dedicated helper	Commitment (community-related)	• Skills in the • Reference in the real-world CV

for example by founding federations for his friends. In response, *HT* is often the topic of conversation in telephone calls or meetings, thus transferring the game into real-life situations. The intention of his game registration could be to prove sympathy toward someone he is personally attached to and better integration into a group, respectively. Consequently, *HT* can assume an intensifying function on relationships. For this type of gamer, the game assumes a social function in his circle of friends that should not be underestimated. This includes rivalry in *HT*, which is playfully resolved and generates a certain ambition when the socially secured gamer competes with his friends and acquaintances.

The Ambitious Strategist

He is ambitious and mentally strongly involved in the online game. The ambitious strategist has no interest in the social aspects of the game, and is not seeking any new acquaintances. If he contacts other users, it is merely to serve the purpose of extending knowledge of the game. Communication is a means to an end; the main objective is gaming success. Gaming victories help gain recognition and assist a climb up the social ladder thanks to gaming skills. Permanent mental presence of *HT* is typical for this gamer. Strategic trains of thoughts that are later executed in the game continuously accompany everyday life. Because this type of gamer focuses particularly on success, "fiddling" with tactics can be transferred from the game into reality if the player uses his own calculations to review the game's development. This activity is a form of "committed" action, which in this case is distinguished by a high level of self-centeredness. The dominant level of interlacing between gaming world and everyday life appears in the sphere of the gamer's thoughts. However, the ambitious strategist cannot fully control his game, as emotional ties to his virtual soccer club can obstruct his actions. The effort involved with his gaming success automatically triggers the development of an emotional relationship with the virtual soccer club and failure can distort the real-world balance (in the short term).

The Extrovert Networker

He is frequently on the go and is an open, sociable type of gamer. His main motivation for gaming is to communicate with other *HT* users. In this case, this does not refer to people from the extrovert networker's personal environment, but rather entirely new people because their common interest in *HT* makes them seem likeable. He can be described as "ambitious" if his objective is to establish as many (casual) contacts as possible, considered by him as an asset in the gaming world. Because *HT* provides the basis for these relationships, it initially assumes the essential function of a connecting link. However, the extrovert networker expands his networks on a more personal level of communication, if necessary. This includes telephone conversations, e-mails, and real-world encounters. Thus,

originally virtual relationships transform into social relationships that are culti-vated in the real world. For this type of gamer, elements from the virtual game world transfer into the real-life environment. A "spill over" occurs in the original sense as specified by Götzenbrucker. After a certain point, long-term and intensive contacts of the extrovert networker no longer depend on the game, and mani-fest themselves autonomously. In this case, the extrovert networker can transform himself into the socially secured type. The closer contact to his co-players estab-lishes an emotional connection to *HT* and brings forth committed behavior in regard to community-building activities. Overall, the virtual soccer manager is more than a game to this type, as part of his social network originates from it and interrelates with more and more areas of his life.

The Dedicated Helper

The dedicated helper converts his interests and attitude into the game. His behav-ior within *HT* is creative and socially motivated, as he aspires to contribute to the gaming community. His inner belief or personal attitude is transcribed into the virtual game world. His involvement can assume different forms and can be limited to a federation or expand to the levels of game organization. In the latter case, he acts committed, as he can achieve success within the game that does not relate to his soccer team, but rather to his dedication. In this case, the dedicated helper attains a celebrity status within the gaming world and actually becomes well-known as a person since his manager name in *HT* starts becoming familiar to other players. His dedication can also reflect positively in real life if used as a qualifying reference that helps him advance professionally, for example. If the dedicated helper takes his gaming role seriously, it can result in a commitment that has influence on his daily routine. This type of dedication can be time-consuming and assume a status similar to a job.

Conclusion: Online Games as Laboratories of Mediatization

What conclusions can be drawn from the insights that the sports videogame *HT* provides social functions for the everyday life of its users, that the forms of its integration are diversified, and that it can heavily influence lines of thought and emotions? The social interaction in this virtual sports world—which tran-scends weekly in-game events such as matches—seems to be a general incentive for games that provides profit to the producers. According to the results of this explorative study, the concept of social gaming, which is concealed in *HT*, seems to work. Communication among users is an aspect that can ensure long-term commitment of the players—more than the specific sports content of the game. As in the case of *HT*, people are willing to pay money for additional social func-tions. None of the study's participants mentioned anything negative regarding their financial investment in the *HT* supporter membership. *HT* is rather deemed

a comparably low-priced and satisfying service and can thus be considered as a regular element of consumption-oriented media practice in general.

Examining the issue of how the virtual world of this sports videogame is intertwined with the spheres of everyday life lets a number of interesting follow-up questions arise. Some participants of the study can be considered extreme cases concerning the significance of *HT* in their everyday lives, because they show a remarkable commitment to their game. For some, a sports videogame such as *HT* may constitute a trivial activity of secondary relevance to their daily routine or have no significance at all. This study proved that for others, however, it is more than just a sports game.

Studying the appropriation of sport videogames in the context of the research perspectives described here is a promising subject in regard to both theory and methodology. The trend of diminishing traditional borders between mass media and individual communication in conjunction with their interactive traits make online games a research object that allows a glimpse into the future of the mediatized society. The specific example of *HT* is especially well suited to demonstrate that the appropriation of online games changes the forms of social interaction and the associated concepts of meaning. It can thus be considered a prime example for the mediatization of our everyday life.

Note

1. Wherever we use masculine pronouns only, it is solely for reasons of readability.

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13

WHY SPORTS VIDEOGAMES MATTER TO THEIR PLAYERS

Exploring Meaningful Experiences in Playographies

Konstantin Mitgutsch

In 1993 the German Football Club SV Werder Bremen won the prestigious football tournament "UEFA Cup"[1] in a dramatic final against AC Milan. I remember jumping from my seat when the final whistle blew—not in the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza where the final was taking place, but in my dad's computer room. The team achieved the second highest possible trophy in European Club football – and so did I. After hundreds of hours of playing "Bundesliga Manager Professional"[2] (Software 2000, 1991) and accompanying the club as their manager and trainer for 5 virtual years, I finally made it. A few months before starting to play the videogame (a successful German sports management simulation game) I did not know much about football. There was no specific team I supported and I was a terrible football player. To be honest, the only reason I even got that far in this sports videogame was because a classmate told me about a cheat to get unlimited financial resources. Without its central challenge (limited amount of money) the game was straightforward and easy: you could trade players, form a squad, scout for new players, send the team to training camps, and improve the stadium. I could choose one out of 64 teams from the German 1st to 3rd league and my only competitor was the computer. I was hooked! The passion I developed for this game tapped into something greater than my enjoyment for the game itself. It was my entry point to a whole new world: football culture. A year later my new favorite hometown Club SV Austria Salzburg also made it to the UEFA Cup Final, this time not simulated but in the real Stadio Giuseppe Meazza, and lost against Inter Milan. For me, my videogames, my hometown team, and my passion for the sport and my physical engagement with football were all connected.

While my personal introductory story shows how my passion for football[3] was shaped by a videogame, other people have different entry points or experiences that fueled their own interest in sports. Through watching, playing, discussing, remembering, and sharing memories, observers can be transformed into passionate fans of specific sports, teams, or players. In most cases sports fandom is enriched

by significant sports events, outstanding performances by sports stars, and unique competitive happenings and personal experiences that frame the players' or viewer's love for the game. People have subjective reasons why they favor one team and dislike or even hate another competitor. Often these reasons are connected to places where someone grew up, acquaintances who introduced them to the sport, or outstanding performances by athletes that they watched as spectators in a stadium or on TV or even listened to on the radio. A few decades ago, when sports videogames were introduced as a new media form, a novel field of sport participation was created that influenced the observation of the physical sport and allowed the audience to participate virtually as simulated players (cf. Pool, 2000; Jenkins, 2008; Conway, 2009, 2010). In sports videogames different media forms collide with sports fandom and particular biographical events and unique personal experiences (Crawford, 2004, 2005; Crawford & Gosling, 2009; Plymire, 2009). Thereby, the experience of playing the digital game reaches beyond its screen to a broader history and culture of the sport.

At present we know little about the general motivations, interests, and enthusiasm of sports videogame players. In particular we lack an understanding of how sports videogame players frame and contextualize their passion. This chapter traces the question of how players attach meaningful contexts to their sports videogame play. It explores why particular games are important to their players and why sports videogames matter to them. To tap into this unexplored territory, a unique method of investigating players' biographies through narrative interviews and visualization tools is used. Based on the outcomes of a recent empirical study on 1,718 sports videogame players (cf. Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012), this chapter deepens these quantitative findings through in-depth biographic-narrative interviews with nine participants. Thereby, case-centered analyses of narrative structures and sequences of the interviews of sports gamers' biographies will be discussed and playful media biographies—so-called *playographies* (cf. Mitgutsch, 2011; Tan & Mitgutsch, 2013)—will be visualized. I argue that by tapping into a broader sports cultural sphere, sports videogames provide players with an exceptional environment for meaningful experiences. This chapter provides novel insights into how players develop meaningful experiences through their play activities and what elements facilitate their passion.

Meaningful Experiences through Playing Videogames?

A pivotal question that needs to be addressed when researching meaningful experiences in videogames is what constitutes a "meaningful" experience. Throughout history different models, theories, and concepts defining "meaningfulness" have been developed. Yet, the question of what meaningful experiences are remains puzzling. Nevertheless, a common denominator within the different approaches from philosophy (Wittgenstein, 1953; Bateson, 1972; Montague, 1974), cognitivism (Piaget, 1974; Novak & Gowin, 1984), constructivism (Glasersfeld, 1997),

and linguistics and semiotics (Chomsky, 2000; Chandler, 2007) is that humans attach meaning to events by relating subjective, situative, cultural, emotional, and biographical context to them.[4] By attaching contextual meaning to an incident, this experience appears significant, meaningful, and important to the person and it differs from other ordinary dealings. But what if the context of the experience is playful and happens within a virtual and simulated environment? Can playful experiences be meaningful?

Playfulness is mainly conceived as a creative, joyful, lively, or even childish state of being and thinking. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, playfulness is often defined as a non-purposive activity (cf. Gadamer, 1998), which is free of necessities (cf. Caillois, 2001; Suits, 2005) and in opposition to work and serious pursuit (cf. Huizinga, 1956). In games we detach ourselves from the pressures and limitations of reality to perform within the restraints of the game—in the "oases of play" (Fink, 1979). However, games are taken seriously by their players as they attach contextual meaning and values to their play. Games provide players with possibility spaces for experiences. As Ian Bogost (2011, p. 5) claims: "Games are models of experiences rather than textual descriptions or visual depictions of them. When we play games, we operate those models, our actions constrained by their rules . . . The players' interactions within the system, governed by the game's rules, limitations, and affordances "prohibit players from performing actions and this affords players meaningful actions that were not otherwise available" (Juul, 2005, p. 58). Nevertheless, as Jason Begy (2011, p. 9) argues in reference to Juul's and Bogost's work, "different people will attach different meanings to what the simulation includes and excludes." Playing a game is a process of making meaning, of decoding the system and exploring the possibility space provided by the game. Yet, even if players attach meaning to their actions in games, they do not necessarily experience these games as "meaningful." A play experience becomes meaningful—as I will outline in this chapter—when players recontextualize the playful experience and situate it in their everyday lives within a specific meaningful frame.

In terms of game design, the creation of meaningfulness can even be seen as the "holy grail of game design" (Winn & Heeter, 2006). In a similar way Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman point out "the goal of successful game design is creation of meaningful play" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 33). Games are created as systems "to support meaningful kinds of choice-making" (p. 33) and their meaningfulness can be separated as "descriptive"—in forms of in-game choices—or "evaluative"—as the "critical evaluation between actions and outcomes" (p. 34). But the meaningfulness players attach to their play goes beyond the design of the game system. Games are significant and valuable to players because of the biographic and situative context that they connect to their playful experiences. Furthermore, games always take part in a cultural and social context that can add a further meaningful dimension to the games we play. As Crawford and Gosling (2009, p. 147) assert, our games and the narratives we create through them "are

physically embedded within the everyday life." On an empirical level, however, Reed et al. (2008, p. 63) claim that a "different kind of 'transfer' between what we call in-game and in-world" takes place. The transfer from in-game experiences to our everyday lives is not something that "happens to a person's mind," rather the player "does" create a transfer. A recent study by Gee and Hayes (2010) on female players and their engagement with the *Sims* (EA Games, 2000), shows how the interaction with the game, its affinity group, and its space for cultural production impact players on a transformative level. They argue that playing gets meaningful when the game offers something different and significant to the players' everyday lives. In the field of game studies, meaningful games are mostly explored in relation to meaningful narratives, semiotics, or aesthetics (Begy, 2011; Crawford, 2011; Gee, 2003). From this perspective, sports videogames that are often categorized as sport simulations (Kayali & Purgathofer, 2008)[5] appear to be an inconvenient venue to search for meaningful experiences. As this chapter will show, however, sports videogames are a fruitful resource if one is searching for meaningful experiences.

This chapter is based on findings from an empirical quantitative study on sports videogame players conducted in 2011 (cf. Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). Through an online survey with 1,718 participants, we searched for insights into who sport videogame players are and what their games mean to them. From a more exploratory than confirmatory perspective we attached a final optional question to our survey that asked the participants: "Please describe a meaningful or memorable sports videogame experience you have had." We expected a very small number of replies, but to our surprise 56% of all respondents answered the question. In many cases the answers were outlined in great detail. These replies ranged from short statements to detailed reports, and included very private and emotional stories. None of the 882 stories were identical and therefore the subjective, biographical, and contextual framing of these experiences was important to capture. Importantly, we did not make explicit any definition of "meaningfulness" in the survey and so it was up to the respondents to define what "meaningful play experiences" meant to them. By examining the different answers in our survey, we analyzed the different stories and memories and determined patterns that were mentioned repeatedly. The responses about meaningful experiences implied the following 11, non-exclusive categories and patterns:

- "Social experiences," when relations to other players, friends, families (online and offline) were essential;
- "Single Player," when the experience focused on the single-player mode;
- "Victory," if winning was the core of the activity;
- "Narrative," when the response included a specific narrative explaining a situation in the sport game;
- "Mastery," when the player mentioned his/her skills developed in the game as specifically meaningful;

- "Online," if the gameplay focused on online usage;
- "Passion," if the players mentioned their passion for a particular game;
- "Personal connection," if the reported story included a particular subjective framing of the play experience;
- "User-generated content," if the significance of the experience was related to user-generated content, such as character design and development or creating new teams;
- "Mix real & virtual," when the connection to real sport events or players was central;
- "Lack of meaningfulness," if the response neglected the answer or criticized the question.

Although most reported meaningful events framed by social experiences (41%) or extraordinary victories (35%), every report appeared unique and highly subjective. Often, in-game narratives were remembered and interesting convergences between simulated and actual sports events were drawn. To exemplify one of the 882 answers in the survey, the following story can be highlighted (cf. Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012):

> The most meaningful memory I have of sports video gaming has to be how I got my start. It was 1993; I was 10 years old and I remember going to my grandmother's house for Sunday dinner every week. After dinner; my uncles, cousins and family friends would all huddle around the upstairs TV with the Sega Genesis connected and take turns playing *John Madden Football '93*. I was a little kid amongst the older kids and adults; so no one ever took me seriously. I got beat at the game, sometimes badly, because I was young and the older kids and adults were all much better than me. I started to play solo at home; at first to get better to be able to beat them, but then I started to enjoy it myself. I had always casually played sports games but before this point other genres had piqued my interests more. After training to beat the older kids and the adults; I became hooked on sports games. Even though the Sunday dinners and games around the TV have stopped, I still play fanatically. I still play fanatically..
>
> Participant #1104: Male, 28, USA

This reported memory highlights how a meaningful play experience is re-contextualized by the player's social interactions, biographic events, related to locations and emotions, and can trigger a lifelong passion for sports videogames. It is also worth mentioning that the player here is describing an experience that happened 18 years ago, and he still vividly recalls playing that game and what it meant to him. Although a game might just take a few minutes, the memories can last decades. Answers like this one show that sports videogame players develop unique, deep, and meaningful experiences through their game play. But through the design of the empirical study we are missing the subjective contextual aspects

of these experiences. When did the player start to engage with sports videogames? What does American football mean to him, and is competition his driving factor to play these games? To deepen our understanding of meaningful experiences in sports videogames I interviewed nine participants from our survey.

Research Method – Playographies

Although a number of qualitative empirical investigations have been carried out that demonstrate the potential of digital games to foster meaningful experiences in players' lives (cf. Pearce, 2008; Silberman, 2009; Gee & Hayes, 2010; Herlyn & Meister, 2010; Mitgutsch, 2011; Crawford, 2012; Taylor, 2012), the exploration of players' biographies is still in its early stages. Therefore the study at hand uses an innovative methodological approach to provide novel insights into biographical reflections on meaningful sports videogame experiences. The following insights are not intended to represent "objective" data or to give empirical foundations on what makes a sport videogame meaningful. In contrast, the study aims to explore how players attach meaning to their gameplay and to generate important leads for future investigations.

In the period from June to August 2012 I carried out qualitative interviews with a limited number of participants from the aforementioned quantitative study on sports videogame players (cf. Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012). I contacted 30 randomly chosen participants in the primary study and interviewed 9 respondents with the help of a qualitative method-mix, analyzing their play biographies and their reflections on meaningful play experiences. The applied methodology was centered around semi-structured life history interviews based on sociolinguistic methods and narrative analysis (cf. Mishler, 1986, 2004; Gee, 1991). In addition, biographical sketches of timelines and game preferences—so-called *playographies* (Mitgutsch, 2011; Tan & Mitgutsch, 2013)—were used as door openers and analytic tools for the conversation about players' experiences.

As a preparation for the interview the interviewees were asked to draw a straight line on a paper and put "bubbles" representing particular videogames that are meaningful to them on the time line. The more important and meaningful a game was, the bigger the bubble around the game should be (see figure 13.1).[6]

The narrative interview focused on the drawing of playful biographies of each interviewee. To verify the interviewer's understanding of the described experiences, the technique of "paraphrasing"—of summarizing and restating the respondent's answers—was applied in certain stages of the interview. Paraphrasing central statements allows the interviewees to correct their statements and the interviewer to verify whether his/her understanding of the intended meaning was correct (cf. Pace et al., 1979). The interviews involved three steps: the drawing of the playography, the exploration of meaningful videogames in general and sports videogames in particular. Finally, a most meaningful game was chosen and the interviewees outlined the contextual dimensions of their experiences. The interviews took between 45 and 80 minutes, were taken in person or via Skype, and followed the same semi-structured pathway.

FIGURE 13.1 Playography Ike (m, 37)

The number of participants of the study was reduced to nine players to allow in-depth insights into the interviewees' narratives while still providing contrast with different viewpoints. This small sample size provides adequate data on the characteristic of the players' experiences (cf. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) and allows for the exploratory examination of repeated intra-personal patterns (cf. Wolcott, 1994). It is not the goal of this study to reach a certain quantity or representational number of players, but to deepen our understanding of the quality and distinctiveness of players' experiences. The results do not aim to generalize standardized factors for meaningfulness in sports videogames, but to explore the quality of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the collected data allows the research group to draw interesting findings on similarities that evoke further investigations.

To provide insights into the findings of the interview, the chapter will outline one randomly chosen interview in greater detail and also add different repetitive and unique patterns from the eight other interviews. In reference to Elliot Mishler's work (2004, p. 11) the aim of this study is "not to refer to measures of variables aggregated across groups of individuals but to similarities and differences among intra-individual and intra-case patterns of change." As the following study shows, meaningful experiences are personal and enriched by particular stories and circumstances—however, some intra-case patterns are repeated throughout the interviews. Yet, every interview always implies a performative dimension as the interviewees attempt to create coherence in their "stories." Personal narratives and playful life stories are therefore always also "socially situated actions; identity performances; fusion of form and content" (Mishler, 2004, p. 19). These situated actions and performances are not neglected, but an essential part of this research study. Instead of coding the responses (Glaser & Corbin, 1990) or matching keywords, case-centered analyses of narrative structures and sequences of the interviews are highlighted and outlined. To understand how meaningful experiences in sports videogames are remembered, the created "story" is essential.

A further constraint to the study is its limitation to male players. From the source of 1,718 players from our previous quantitative study (Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012), only 21 respondents indicated they were female and only 6 of them reported meaningful experiences. All of these 6 respondents were invited to participate in the study, but none of them replied to the invitation. I want to emphasize how important it is to conduct further research on female sports videogame players—this audience represents a key gap in a well-established and popular game genre.[7] Finally, all interviewees are in the age range of 14–44 and come mainly from western cultures. We also lack knowledge of intercultural differences between sports videogame players in particular.

Adam, m, 27

The following interview took place in August 2012 via Skype and lasted about 1.5 hours. About 45 minutes were spent on drawing the playography (cf. Figure 13.2) while the actual interview took about 45 minutes. Adam, a 27-year-old American male, included 41 games in his playography that he decided to create digitally, from which 16 titles were sports videogames. Later in this chapter central patterns of the other eight interviews are highlighted and discussed. However, Adam's playography is outlined in greater detail to provide a better understanding of a complete timeline.

In the beginning of the conversation Adam mentioned that the creation of meaningful game bubbles in preparation for the interview was an easy task for him as he could easily recall their context: "The games that really mattered to me I had memories tied to them and they just kind of came and I just threw them out there. It was actually pretty easy." Throughout the interview he provided details explaining why particular games were meaningful to him, who he played them with, and which memories he connected to them. In his case, his initiation to videogames was one of the most important aspects of his videogame play in general.

"Okay, That Was the First One . . ."

The first meaningful episode in Adam's videogame biography started with his memories of playing the popular sports videogame *Punch-Out!!* (Nintendo, 1987). His older brother introduced the game to him and he played the boxing videogame on a Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). In *Punch-Out!!* a boxer called "Little Mac" works his way up the pro-boxing circuits. After facing a series of boxers the final reveal was the World Heavyweight Champion Mike Tyson. Adam recalls this game as his first contact with a videogame in general:

> Okay that was the first one. I was 4 years old when I played that. My older brother had showed it to me. I think he was 12 or 13 at the time and I can vividly remember him sitting behind me and just being like you know left, right, left, right, telling me the patterns on how to hit those guys and that was the first game I ever beat. I beat it when I was 4 years old and I was hooked. I was totally hooked.

Later in the interview I asked Adam which of the games he played in his life appeared most meaningful to him. Looking back, he chose his initial game *Punch-Out!!:* "That was the catalyst, that's what set me off. I still play that game to this day. I have it memorized." As he revealed later in the interview, *Punch-Out!!* served not only as a catalyst for his passion for videogames, but also established an important relationship with his older brother. The social component of playing videogames and in particular sports videogames is a repeating pattern in his playography interview. Later his friends would take the place of his brother. Who Adam plays with deeply impacts what he plays. For similar reasons the second game he highlights as most meaningful is *Halo* (2001, Microsoft Studios), a strategy shooter he played with his friends in a fraternity at college.

"We Started Playing Those Games Together . . ."

A recurrent theme throughout the interview with Adam was how social interaction made videogames more meaningful for him. After playing games with his older brother as a child, he would later play games with his friends in high school and in college at his fraternity. Often he would start to play the games in single-player mode at home and later play them with his friends:

> The games on the lower end [of the playography, figure 13.2] I guess just happened to work out like *Age of Empires* and *Tony Hawk*, . . . those were games that started out just with me playing and as I met people who were into them we started playing those games together and those were games I played a lot with my friends. . . . We would be at somebody's house like on the PlayStation playing *Tony Hawk* and pass the controller around for hours . . . and stuff . . . so those were much more I guess sociable games for me.

Years later, sociable games played an even bigger role for Adam when he joined a fraternity as a freshman. Although competitiveness played an important role in his game play, his first games in the fraternity were less competitive and more casual, such as his first golf game *Tiger Woods* (1998–2012, PlayStation):

> We'd go out, we'd have fun, we'd come back from the bar, we'd play Tiger Woods, we'd wake up, we'd play Tiger Woods, we'd eat lunch, we'd play Tiger Woods. That was just something we did and that was a lot of these games kind of fall into that . . . a lot of it was just community like us just being together and just playing these games"

Even if playing *Tiger Woods* implied a competitive element, he would also play it as a socializing agent and as part of a daily routine within his social group. Other games that were mentioned as meaningful for him during that period of time were *Madden 2004* (2003, EA Sports), *EA Fight Night Round 2* (2005, Electronic Arts), *NCAA Football 2006* (2005, EA Sports), *Guitar Hero 2* (2006 RedOctane,
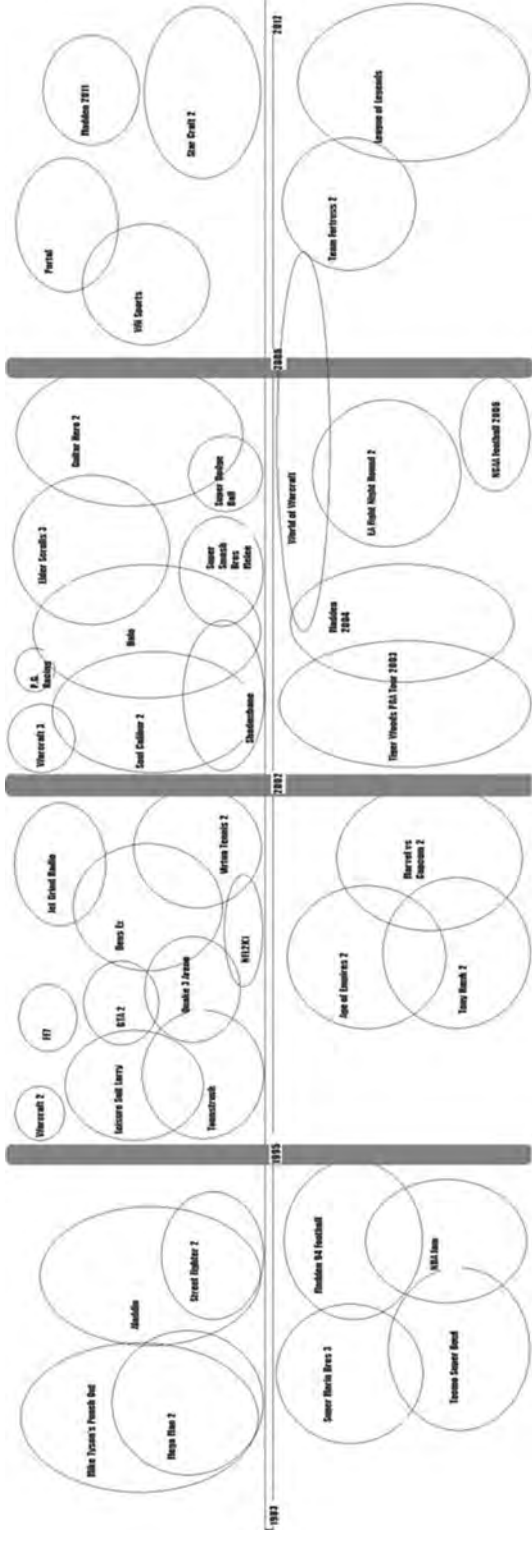
FIGURE 13.2 Adam's (m, 27) Playography

Activision), *Super Smash Bros* (1999, Nintendo), and *World of Warcraft* (2004, Blizzard Entertainment). After moving out of his college town in 2006 he found less time for intensive games such as *World of Warcraft* but the social dimension remained the driving factor for his engagement with videogames: "I feel like I want to play more games socially than I wanted to kind of in my own bubble. I want to play with people whether it's online or in person and that's why some of these games just kind of stick." In addition, the games were tools to stay in contact with old friends:

> A lot of my friends from college, a lot of those fraternity guys we're a little bit more spread out so we communicate primarily through these games. We have our headsets on and we're on Skype while we're playing with each other and we're talking and we're talking about the game but we're talking about life and catching up and how is something, how's everything going type thing so that's where a lot of those games came in.

Besides the social component, the competitive dimension of sports video-games was a further component that motivated Adam's play.

I'm a Really Competitive Person . . .

Playing sports videogames and shooters with his friends also implied playing "against" his acquaintances in a competitive way. While living at his fraternity, competition was an unquestioned component of Adam's videogame experience. "I lived in a house with 5 other guys and everybody played something . . . so you kind of built your own tier system . . . well this guy is really good and this guy is so-so and you kind of already know where you stand or you figure it out just by being in proximity." While he enjoyed the competitive experience of playing sports videogames like *Madden, Tiger Woods,* or *EA Fight Night Round 2,* he has missed this dimension in more recent online sports videogame titles. Today he enjoys playing *Star Craft II* (2010, Blizzard Entertainment) and *League of Legends* (2009, Riot Games), both of which offer ranking and ladder systems to balance your skill levels. Interestingly, he still plays sports videogames but due to lack of competition they have recently lost their meaningfulness to him.

> If you ask me I have every *Tiger Woods* since 2003, I have every *Madden* since 2004 but those games stopped making big impacts. I play those games because I like those games and they're fun games and I want to see the new features and new things that they bring out but I'm not playing those games for the same reasons I'm playing some of these other games. They're more impactful currently.

The reason Adam finds sports videogames meaningful and the way he engages with them is also related to his biographical context. Earlier in his life he played

sports videogames to experience social and competitive stimulation; later they became leisure activities with which to relax or talk to friends. A fourth pattern that kept recurring in the interview was the relation between virtual sports, physical sports, and sports fandom.

"I'm Probably Bigger into the Videogame Format than I Am in Real Life"

The sports videogames Adam plays are all connected to the sports he follows as a fan and engages in physically. While his first sport passion—American football—went hand in hand with his interest in sports videogames such as *Tecmo Super Bowl* (1995, Tecmo) and *Madden,* in later years videogames would often introduce him to a new sport. He would often try out sports he enjoyed as videogames, like skating or golf, but when he realized that he could not compete with his peers, he would stop playing the sport actively. "He [his older brother] taught me how to do it [skate] and I did that for about 5 or 6 years but I wasn't that good at it so when the game came out I was a lot better at the game than I was in real life so I stuck with that." But the games also deepened his understanding of the physical sports and changed the way he engaged in them.

> What I found interesting was the game actually helped me learn more about the sport because I didn't really, at age 10 or 11 I didn't really understand all the formations [in American Football] and how they move together but I could visualize it on the screen and I could see how it worked and then later on in especially in high school when I did play football it kind of already made sense because I already kind of knew how the makeup was supposed to be and I kind of knew well this is how I fit in this formation and I know where I'm supposed to be already so that was definitely, it helped a little bit surprisingly more than you'd think it would especially in the beginning.

The visualization of the tactics and positioning on the football field Adam experienced in the videogame helped him understand the physical sport better. The virtual sport impacted the real sport and vice versa. Although Adam's physical football playing was strongly related to his videogame playing, the more seriously he took the sport in real life as a teenager the less he would play it in its virtual version. Later in life this relationship flipped and he became more interested in playing the digital game version of a sport than the actual physical activity.

> Pretty much every sport that I follow or play I've played in video game format or I'm probably bigger into the video game format than I am in real life. . . . Yeah I would say it's more the game influenced me following the sport more so than me getting into the sport and then wanting to play the game based on it.

Sports videogames have been a catalyst for Adam to engage with others and to explore sports and the sport culture around them. These games are meaningful to him as he connects people and competitive challenges to them, and they are essential parts of his life. His interest in sports grew out of his videogame play, and many social interactions were part of the games he played. In consequence, today sports videogames are not as meaningful to him any more, as the social and competitive dimension of his play habits have changed over the years. The interview shows how Adam's interest in videogames connects to his biographical context and how particular patterns—like sociability, competition, and convergence between virtual and physical—can be identified that shape his passion for sports videogames.

Patterns of Meaningful Experiences in Sports Videogame Players' Lives

Through the personal context and the biographical events that shaped Adam's playography the characteristics of what he gets out of sports videogames differs from others. Although millions of players are passionate about similar games and might share his passion for particular titles, each playography is different. Nevertheless, throughout the different interviews specific intra-personal patterns (Mishler, 2004) were repeated that indicated interesting similarities. In the following section, central narratives, patterns, and findings of the other eight remaining interviews will be introduced and discussed, but not outlined as complete playographies. To give some further examples of how players contextualize their sports videogame play, the next section highlights five patterns that were found in all of the interviews: The importance of (a) the first contact with sports videogames, (b) the social dimension of play, (c) competition as a driving factor, (d) fandom and the intersection between virtual and real sports, and (e) learning impacts of sports games.

(a) First Contact

Every interview started by asking each participant to identify their first meaningful experience with videogames. In Adam's example the first meaningful videogame was already a sports videogame, but in the other interviews other genres were mentioned:

- Ike (m, 45), maze game: *Pac Man* (1980, Namco)
- Gustav (m, 30), role-playing video: *Moonstone* (1991, Mindscape)
- Jim (m, 23), educational game: *Reader Rabbit* (1986, The Learning Company)
- Ben (m, 29), arcade game: *Burger Time* (1982, Data East)
- Niels (m, 38), flight simulation: *Flight Simulation* (1982, Sinclair Research)
- Philip (m, 24), platformer: *Super Mario World* (Nintendo, 1990)
- Steve (m, 29), platformer: *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Nintendo, 1999)
- Tim (m, 14), party game collection: *Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll* (Sega, 2006)

Each of these first encounters with videogames is framed through a rich subjective and personal story that impacted not only the players' interest in videogames, but also their future passion for particular game genres. The first contact with sports videogames was in Ike's (m, 45) case *Madden 93;* for Gustav (m, 30) it was the *California Games* (1987, Epyx); for Jim (m, 23) *Football Pro* (2005, Sierra Online); for Ben (m, 29) it was *NHL 96* (1995, EA Sports); for Niels (m, 38) it was *Formula One Grand Prix* (1992, Microprose); for Philip (m, 24) it was *Tommy Lasorda Baseball* (Sega, 1989); for Steve (m, 29) *Ice Hockey* (1981, Activision); and for Tim (m, 14) it was *MLB Power Pros 2008* (2008, 2K Sports). To contextualize these first impactful experiences, two different reported experiences will be outlined briefly.

In the beginning of his videogame playing, Jim (m, 23) enjoyed adventure games and would play them frequently with his friends. His introduction to sports videogames was initiated through watching his friend playing an American football videogame—a sport more or less unknown to him.

> The other thing I just remembered was *Football Pro*, I think it was '95 might have been the one I originally played. And I used to play this at a friend, . . . and I couldn't care less about football prior to that but my friend was into it so I would watch him play and kind of like learned the rules of football through playing this game . . . *Football Pro* was more of a manager simulator and I liked the numbers. Even back then I was a nerd so I liked changing around the stats for your team and trading players and then would sort of simulate the game and do more of that while it's going . . .

Although Jim was not interested in the sport of American football, the management side of it caught his interest and through playing the game he learned about the rules, the teams, and the players. His interest in mathematics and strategies opened the door to the videogame and the game introduced him to the sport it referenced. Later he realized that characters in the game were actually players in real teams.

> In *Football Pro 95* they didn't have the rights to the NFL so they were using . . . other ones. So it wasn't players you had heard of but as a result there were two or three players which were our favorites, like the quarterback and receiver which we always had on our team whenever we made a team. And a couple of years later one of the guys got into the NFL and I saw him on a game and I'm like 'I know him, like he actually plays, like he's a real person' because no one follows that other league so you never hear about people on it. It was a weird connection that this guy who I idolized in this game was actually a real person and was actually playing football and wasn't that great.

In Jim's case a sports videogame introduced him to American football, and it would take years to relate his gameplay to the actual physical sport. Another interviewee, Philip (m, 24; cf. Fig. 3), was already interested in sports before playing his first sports videogame. "I'm from the Cleveland area . . . so I grew up around the time where we had the big Cleveland Indians team of the 90s. . . . It was a really big deal to be a sports fan and more importantly to be an Indians fan. . . ." While Jim (m, 23) engaged with the simulation aspect of his American football game, Philip (m, 24) enjoyed playing wih the sports heroes he knew from TV.

> *Tommy Lasorda Baseball.* I remember that game so well and it was such a terrible game. I mean, it didn't even have the real teams, CLE was Cleveland. You had CWS for Chicago. You didn't have any of the logos. You didn't have any of the teams. It was just the players. . .But that was for the Sega Genesis and that was the very first sports videogame that I ever personally owned. So that one will always hold a special spot in my heart.

Philip stated that he played every baseball videogame "from 2000 onwards . . . because that's my expertise". Yet, other sports videogame series, like *WWF Wrestling,* would become more important to him because he searched for venues "to be creative." He played his first sports videogame more or less on his own, because his friends did not show a lot of interest in his Sega Genesis. But in the years to follow the social aspect became one of the driving factors of his sports videogame play.

In general, all interviewees could vividly recall their initiation to sports videogames and even now the games they played, good or bad, remained meaningful and emotionally attached to them. Some of the players were already sports fans and used games to accompany their passion, but others were introduced to sports
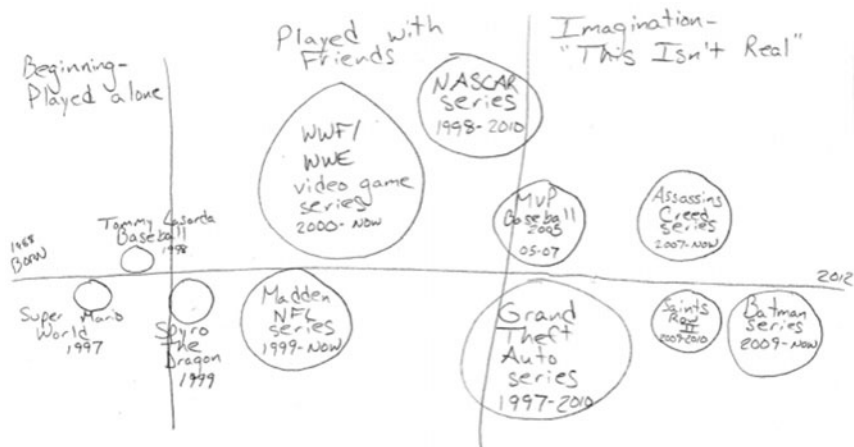
FIGURE 13.3 Philip's (m, 23) Playography

through the games. They could still recall the teams and players they played with, and their choices were already related to a broader sports culture that they intentionally (as in Philip's case) or unintentionally (as in Jim's case) related to. A further important dimension that could be found as an intra-personal pattern in the interviews was the social dimension of their videogame play.

(b) "The Social Aspect More Than Anything"

Throughout all nine interviews the social component of sports videogame play was mentioned on several occasions. Games became meaningful to their players through the connection players made to other players and peers and through the discourse that happened around the game. Thereby, the games play different roles in the way the players use them to make contact with others. In many stories the bigger brother, the older cousin, or even the sports passionate dad played an essential role, but in others, neighbors, friends, and classmates were the motivating reason to play these games. And while for some playing with others came easily, for others, like Ben (m, 29), it was challenging.

> Until about when I got to high school. . . . Uh, I was rather unpopular as a person so a lot of it . . . is things that I was actually able to play with my brother. . . . He was kind of in a different place because of that age difference. But this was one thing that . . . I actually had some kind of social interaction . . . since we both really like hockey; he does, I do. We both played at some point, so it was at that point we shared interest so . . . that was something that both of us could actually get into. . . . Uhm, just get behind and enjoy, even though he was significantly older than me.

For Ben (m, 29), playing *NHL 94* evolved into an important and meaningful way to interact with his brother and with his brother's friends. Throughout the entire playography the importance of his brother and his difficulties engaging with peers his own age was mentioned several times. Games as a socializing agent were a useful catalyst to make contact with others and to overcome his shyness. For example, he recalled being introduced to *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1989) years later and finding friends in college through playing this game.

> *Dance Dance Revolution,* now. . . . That one was fairly significant again for the same reason as everything else pretty much; more of the social aspect. When I . . . when I started into college my freshman year I kind of – even though I didn't have as much issues with being really reserved and being shy and everything, I still had a hard time getting to know a lot of people and there were a couple of friends that I did get to know that did play DDR so, that was something that I got into. . . . Like I said that's kind of a general trend through most of them, the social aspect more than anything.

FIGURE 13.4 Steve's (m, 29) Playography

While Ben (m, 29) used videogames as a tool to get into contact with others through his entire youth, other players would instrumentalize games as socializing agents at particular phases in their lives. For example, Steve (m, 29; Figure 13.4), recalls studying abroad in Cameroon while the African Cup of Nations was taking place. Though he was not especially interested in football he was amazed at how the "entire country was obsessed with it". He would start to watch games, and later started following Eto'o and his matches for the Spanish soccer club F.C. Barcelona. While he felt disconnected with American sports (NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB) at that time of his life, he became more and more interested in soccer and realized the multi-cultural implication of this sport.

> So I got really into it then and some of the people that I had met there, Cameroonians, had *FIFA* and I played with them. Some of my friends, and I ended up really getting into it, really liking it. I think the things that really stick out to me with *FIFA* . . . number one it's so much kind of richer in a way than the American sports games because you have all these different teams from all these different countries and all these different leagues. . . . The other great thing about *FIFA* is that the games are shorter and you can play a game in half an hour rather than like an hour usually is what it takes to do like baseball or football or something like that the way sports games are structured. . . . So I think I responded really well to that.

For Steve (m, 29) the sport of football (soccer) and the videogame based on it, *FIFA,* was a tool to interact with other people in a different culture, and he has found the intercultural dimension of *FIFA* fascinating ever since. While players like Steve

(m, 29) and Ben (m, 29) used games to find friends, others like Niels (m, 38), Jim (m, 29), and Ike (m, 45) used games to engage with their established group of friends or with family members. All interviewees related most of their meaningful gameplay experiences to other people they played the games with or the community they shared their experiences with. As most sports videogames offer a multiplayer component and also allow a discourse about broader sports cultural context, they appear particularly useful for social interactions between peers. A further component that appears significant in sports videogames is their competitive character.

(c) "I Need Something More Than Just the Casual Gaming"

In Adam's (m, 27) previously mentioned playography, the importance of competition was already highlighted. Players such as Ben (m, 29), Tim (m, 14), Steve (m, 29), and Gustav (m, 30) also mention the social aspect as the driving factor, but for Ike (m, 45), Philip (24), Steve (m 29), Jim (23), and Niels (m, 38) competition against their friends appears to be the key aspect to the meaningfulness of their sports videogame play. In the case of Niels (m, 38) the tension between competitive play with friends and serious competitiveness became particularly obvious.

Niels (m, 38) started playing the videogame version of *NHL* in the 90s with his friends from his hometown. Since he was not interested in ice hockey as a sport, he mentioned that it was "probably due more to my friends' interests combined with mine of course, but no one was into hockey or anything else." They played together in multiplayer mode and started following the NHL on TV. Over fifteen years later, after moving to a different city, Niels started to reconnect with his old and new friends via the newly introduced online multiplayer mode. They also started to play together in small leagues on a more competitive level, as Niels recalls:

> *NHL* 09 had, for the first time in NHL history gaming-wise, and other sports games as well, had a massive sort of multiplayer aspect to it. It's called the VASHL—VA Sports Hockey League, where basically you can have only guys that are human-controlled. So it's six-person-six games. . . . First it started with real-life friends but obviously it spread out as—not everyone had the time or the interest to actively play, so you had to recruit new people and they didn't necessarily have to be your friends in real life. But very cool game. It still is.

But the transition from playing for fun with his friends, to getting more and more competitive, had a strong impact on his relationship with his friends.

> It was actually really difficult making the transition of playing with your real friends who might not be good enough online into realizing that I need something more than just the casual gaming. I want to win, and that forced me to find outsiders, make new friends you could say. But the winning itself is so rewarding that—I still play casual with, you know, my real friends

but definitely have to be able to compete. I like winning. I've got to admit I've rarely been as stressed out due to work or anything as I was because of that, when I realized the fact that I could never have as much fun with my friends as I could potentially have. It was hard; it took me months to gather the courage to leave the team and, you know, go look for something else.

Niels' (m, 38) realization that he has more fun playing with players that have his skill level instead of his friends was upsetting. However, he also recalled the relief of finding a space and new friends in the online mode that shared his passion. This transition gave him the possibility to play with people that were on his level "with these new guys it was easy, it was fun. No need to shout to anyone because they were doing bad, you know. I hated that aspect of myself, that I became too verbal about them not performing well enough. I didn't want to be that guy. So it's all good."

As Niels (m, 38) outlines in the interview, the game and the sport it references can not only be used as a socializing agent with peers, but (as most of the interviews show) it also connects to new people. There are different forms of competition and in different life phases players engage on different levels competitively with their peers.

(d) "I Had No Interest in Playing Any Other Team. It Wasn't an Issue"

A further intra-case pattern that could be found in most of the playographies is the convergence between the physical and the virtual sport, between fandom for a team and player-created content. For example, Steve (m, 29) recalls how the newly introduced feature for creating players allowed him to mix himself and his friends into actual NHL rosters.

Like the big exciting thing about that it [*NHL 96*] was for Sega and that was the first time I had ever encountered a videogame that allowed you to create a player. And you know you could create a bunch of different players and you could modify the team. . . . And so that was the first time that I had ever encountered that, I mean literally the first time. And I responded really strongly to that. I can't remember exactly why but it was really fun to create myself as a player and I created a bunch of my friends as players, you know like when they came over that was one of the things that we did together was have them create their own guy and then play it in the game . . . You know you could imagine yourself being the one scoring a goal, whatever.

Imagining participating in a sport and being part of the sports culture appears to be a vivid component of many meaningful memories.[8] Videogames give their players the opportunity to engage with their favorite sports stars and play games on a skill level they could never reach in the physical activity. In comparison to Steve (m, 29), Jim (m, 23) was less interested in creating himself as a player, but he

played *NBA Jam* (EA Sports, 1993) to engage with the basketball team he favored, the Chicago Bulls.

> Well the big thing with *NBA Jam*, actually I guess that was fairly significant because it wasn't just, it wasn't even the game itself . . . because the game was fun . . . I grew up in Chicago and playing *NBA Jam* I was always the Chicago Bulls. I had no interest in playing any other team. It wasn't an issue. I would play as the Chicago Bulls because . . . I don't know how much you knew about basketball in the 90s but it was back when the Bulls won six championships in eight years. It's Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen and all those guys and despite not caring that much about basketball I always watched the Bulls play. And I was being able to play as real players . . . although it was strange because Michael Jordan wasn't in the game. They couldn't get his license. . . . But, yeah I played a lot of that, that was pretty fun. And it was cooperative, it wasn't competitive because you could play two, we used to play together as the Bulls. I think I played against people occasionally but that never seemed as interesting.

Although some people, even some sports videogames fans, criticize how some sports titles have hardly changed over the years in terms of their core mechanics and game play, Jim's (m, 23) playography shows why a roster update and "real" player names matter to him. He played NBA Jam not because he liked basketball, but because he felt attached to his hometown team and its greatest heroes— Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. For players like him, who attach meaning to their games by referencing their favorite sports teams, the slightest incorrect information in the roster setup is irritating. All interviewees mentioned particular sports stars and teams that they are fans of and that provide the sports cultural context to the games they play.

How narrow the gap between the real and the virtual sports experience can be was highlighted in Philip's (m, 24) playography when he described his passion for *Madden*. He started to explain the circumstances for liking the game by contextualizing his fandom for the Cleveland Browns, an American football team that left his hometown Cleveland in 1995 and was reinstalled in 1999.

> It started off slow. I wasn't a big fan of the game. I respected the teams that were in our division and I respected the Cleveland Browns because growing up in Cleveland, you've only got the Indians and the Browns. The Cavaliers don't come up on that list at all really because this is a football town first and foremost. . . . When the Brown's left, we didn't have anything. Everybody was like well, who am I going to root for now . . . And at that point, when we didn't have a team – basically, when you don't have a horse, a racer, you're going to lose interest in her. When you get to the playoffs, any sport, you don't have a horse in the race, you're not going to watch.

When the Cleveland Browns returned in 1999, his passion for his hometown team, his interest in the new players and the new stadium was channeled through his passion for the Madden videogame: "I remember that I made it to the championship game and that when I made to the Super Bowl, my controller screwed up midway through the game and this was one those where you go up, down, up, down, left, right, left, right. So midway through my running back stops dead in the water. I'm like 'oh crap. I can run left and I can run right, but I can't run forward and that means they're not going to make any points." Why this loss in the simulated Super Bowl final was terrible for him becomes understandable when the historical context of the Cleveland Browns is taken into account. This was not just a player losing in any sports videogame—this was Philip leading "his" hometown team, after years of being absent in the NFL, to the finals of the competition. And he lost, not because he didn't play well, but because the controller was broken. One needs to understand the context to understand the tragedy behind this loss.

(e) Sports Videogames as Learning Tools

The final pattern that was mentioned in all of the interviews was how the games involved the players in different learning experiences. Learning is an essential part of playing videogames and sports videogames not only introduce the players to the mechanics of the game, but also require an understanding of the rules and the knowledge about the physical sport to play the game. For example, Ike (m, 37) remembers vividly how the videogames helped him understand the sport they referenced.

> I can specifically say I learnt the rules of baseball and several other rules of football by playing videogames that were fairly realistic towards those sports. And then of course once I was able to do that I would appreciate the sports more. A lot of people are huge football fans and I developed into a huge football fan. A big part of the reason I like football people like the hits and this and that. To me I am hugely into the strategy. Football is such a deeply strategic game. . . . What drew me into playing the football games was using this deep strategy. Trying to figure out the right call, the right play, the right reaction all at the same time. I love watching it.

In many cases the experience that something someone has learned in the game is exploitable in real-life circumstances enriched the meaningfulness of the game. In some cases the learning was more informational (rules), or analytical (strategies), but for others it helped them understand the culture behind a sport, the passion for a team or player, or the historical context of a sport. However, what players learn from the games and why these experiences are meaningful to them still stays highly subjective and related to the biographical context of a player. As mentioned before, Steve (m, 29) learned about new cultures through *FIFA,* Tim (m, 14) learned the rules of baseball, and Adam (m, 27) learned how to position

himself in American football. But sports videogames can also provide highly sub-jective and private learning experiences—Ben (m, 29) recalls while playing *NHL,* he learned how to play music!

> . . . I don't even know the tune but like organ grinders used to play at like hockey games and stuff. I actually . . . and this was in some time in middle school, I don't know exactly. I actually sat down and while my brother and his friends were playing, I actually figured out the tune by ear, just sitting there with the keyboard . . . I made that little music connection there, and going a long with the whole hockey aspect. . . . It's the first time that I really sat down and really tried to . . . you know beyond just clunking on a keyboard, it was the first time I really tried to sit down and really made a concerned effort to learn how to play something on the piano.

To provide an "accurate" atmosphere in the virtual stadium in EA's *NHL* the organ grinders were played in the breaks—and Ben (m, 29) would explore his keyboard while watching his brother play. He played *NHL* to connect to his older brother and his friends, but even today the musical dimension of the game stays most meaningful to him. Today Ben (m, 29) is a music teacher and this game is still the most meaningful game to him.

Conclusions

Sports videogames can be a rich resource for meaningful experiences to their players. As the different playographies highlight, players are attaching situative, bio-graphical, social, and cultural context to particular in-game experiences in particular phases of their lives. The reasons why a player experiences a game as meaningful depend on different factors that match the player's needs and interests with the game's exploration space and the sport it references or creates. Through the rich cultural and historical background that sports games provide, the players tap into something deeper than the passion for the game and the play community itself. Although some of the players were introduced to sports videogames through a par-ticular physical sport, others became interested in a sport by playing the videogame first. The fandom for a team or player was often echoed in the virtual space and vice versa, fueling the passion for the sport itself. Players engaged with their sports games because they used them as socializing agents with their peers and to experi-ence different forms of competitiveness within their social affinity group. But sports games, at times, can also be tools to engage with new people or compete with play-ers that share similar skill levels or interests. All interviewees highlighted the social dimension of play as a key factor and sports videogames as a potential catalyst for engaging with others and exploring sports and the sport culture around them. But besides these intra-case patterns, every playography showed subjective and unique facets that lead to unique meaningful experiences that only make sense within the

biographic and cultural frame of each player. What games players like, what teams they favor or dislike is highly related to the social, cultural, and biographic framing of the experience itself. In this sense, the initiation to sports videogames appears to be pivotal and impacts the players' future preferences. Finally, the study shows how the physical and virtual play spaces converge and how players use videogames to learn about sports on an informational and transformational level.

However, the different playographies also show how sport videogame play is impacted by the sport and media culture that surrounds it. It is no coincidence that particular sports videogames are mainly played in particular cultures and why popular sport stars are on the covers of those games. The sports videogame culture is deeply interrelated with the broader sports and media culture it references, but the videogames also influence the reception of those sports. In addition, the games have different meaning and relevance at different stages of the players' lives. The playography of Adam (m, 27) shows how different games appear meaningful in different phases of his life. Even if players use sports games as socializing agents or competitive spaces, the form of socialization and competitive interaction changes throughout the players' lives. However, a game becomes significantly meaningful to a player when specific contextual facilitators collide with interesting play activities and social engagement.

These insights into sports videogame players' biographies show the importance of the contextual dimension of videogame play. It can be argued that players do not only experience a game as "good" or "bad," but engage with it on the basis of different influencing factors. In this sense the idea of a uniform "sports videogame culture" is challenged by individual subjective differences between the players. In scholarly and journalistic discussions of the history of videogames, great emphasis is placed on particular qualities of design, fiction, and aesthetics of games as a monolithic medium. Though such factors may influence the inclusion of games in personal histories, they are only significant because of the context that each individual finds for him- or herself at specific moments of his or her life. The biographical situation and developmental state of a player have a profound impact on whether one appreciates and chooses to engage in any given game. Sports videogame histories are shaped through the impact of numerous personal, cultural, and technical influences. It matters where one grows up, and on which console or computer one plays.

The reasons why and how players attach meaning to their games are complex and diverse. Despite the presence of patterns, our individual experiences remain unique. Three important limitations of this study that can lead over to future research questions need to be mentioned. The participants of the study were chosen based on the fact that they had already reported meaningful experiences in a prior quantitative study (cf. Stein, Consalvo, & Mitgutsch, 2012)—therefore only those interested in exploring "how" players are expressing meaningful experiences was examined. Furthermore, the focus of the study lies on the quality and contextual framing of these experiences, not on statistical significance or correlation. In this sense, it would be interesting to also include players in future studies who play sports videogames but do not experience them as meaningful. Furthermore,

it would be important to compare sports playographies from different cultures and also to include female participants in the study. The interviews made obvious how strongly sports videogames are contextualized by a "male" sports culture, and more insights into this aspect from a female perspective appear necessary. It would also be interesting to compare how different players contextualize their experiences of one particular sports game from their different perspectives.

I introduced this chapter with one anecdote of my own playography that deeply impacts me to this day. Every weekend since I was a child I look up the results of the German Bundesliga to see how Werder Bremen played. I have never seen Werder Bremen play live, I hardly ever watch them on TV, and I don't know most of their recent players. But I care about this particular club because it is part of my playography—it's part of my life. Compared to today's standards, *Bundesliga Manager* was a terrible game, but for me at that time it was the best thing I could imagine. I hope this study shows how rich and fascinating the experiences surrounding play experiences can be and that we need to learn more about the contextual framing of how players attach meaning to their games. Sports videogames matter!

Acknowledgment

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Notes

1. This cup has been organized by the Union of European Football Associations since 1971 and is today called UEFA Euro League.
2. *Football Limited* is a football (soccer) videogame developed for PC by Software 2000.
3. Like Miguel Sicart, in this book I refer to "football" as association football, more commonly known as just "football" or "soccer."
4. cf. Dewey, 1933 and Vygotsky, 1978.
5. Ian Bogost and Miguel Sicart both discuss in depth the issue of whether games are simulations of sports or not in their respective chapters in this volume.
6. All the playographies in this chapter were hand drawn (Figures 13.1, 13.3, 13.4) or created digitally (Figure 13.2) by the interviewer.
7. See Mia Consalvo's and Emma Witkowski's chapters in this book.
8. In Fares Kayali's chapter in this book, he explores this issue in a similar manner.

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14

SPORTS VIDEOGAMES AND REAL-WORLD EXERCISE

Using Sports Videogames to Promote Real-World Physical Activity among Adolescents

Cheryl K. Olson

> "The kids today . . . they sit around in the house a lot just playing videogames."
> "When I was a kid, everyone was out in the street playing. . . . They've just become lazy—my son—and overweight, and zombie-like."
> —*Comments from parents in a Boston-area focus group*

Parents, researchers, and doctors alike increasingly worry about our children spending too much time sitting, about the health implications of those hours slouched on the sofa, and school success. A study that surveyed almost 13,000 American children and teens three times over two years (Kahn et al., 2008) found a worrisome pattern: an upward trend in physical activity until the early teen years, then a decline after age 13. The latest Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance report on the health of U.S. high school students (Eaton et al., 2010) shows that for both boys and girls, participation in team sports and involvement in physical education classes drops steadily from ninth to twelfth grade. Why do so many teens seem to give up on sports? One reason may be that as children get older, the focus shifts from teamwork and fun to competing and winning. Average players are left sitting on the bench.

Whatever the causes, reversing this decline is a public health priority for multiple reasons. One is the alarming rise in the proportion of children carrying excess pounds. Roughly 17% of school-age children and adolescents are now obese (i.e., with a body mass index at or above the 95th percentile, based on Centers for Disease Control BMI-for-age-and-gender growth charts from 2000); this is three times as many as in 1980 (Ogden et al., 2010). Type 2 diabetes, which is strongly linked to obesity, is no longer rare among children and adolescents; the majority of obese youth also show risk factors for future heart disease such as hypertension

and high cholesterol levels (Bell et al., 2011). These statistics drive health research-ers to focus on the potential of physical activity to prevent or reverse obesity, although research findings are mixed on whether exercise by itself can make a substantial difference (Waters et al., 2011).

However, it's increasingly clear that lack of exercise in itself is a major risk factor for many modern causes of disability and death, from cancer, stroke, and dementia to falls, heart attacks, and fractures (Weiler, Stamatakis, & Blair, 2010). Exercise offers myriad benefits, and can improve health and reduce mortality even if no weight is lost.

Exercise: What's in it for Kids?

A review of 850 articles by Strong et al. (2005) found multiple short-term pluses for children from exercise, ranging from reduced risk factors for cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes and healthier bones, to higher school grades and test scores. In a national survey of college students (Taliaferro et al., 2008), weekly exer-cise was linked to a lower risk of depression, hopelessness, and suicidal behavior.

Another non-obvious benefit of moderate to vigorous exercise is its effects on what's called "executive function": basically, the thought processes that organize and control goal-directed actions (Best, 2010). Executive function is linked to measures of academic achievement as well as to factors known to affect school success, such as the ability to pay attention and to manage emotions. There seem to be additional benefits from game-oriented exercise (such as team sports) that challenges players physically and mentally; they involve strategy, coordinating play with others, com-plex physical movements, and adapting to constantly changing demands.

In sum, finding ways to create and maintain the habit of physical activity has tremendous implications for individual and public health.

So Our Kids Sit Too Much: Are Videogames to Blame?

Many parents worry that videogames steal time from other activities, especially the kind of outdoor play fondly recalled from their own childhoods (Kutner et al., 2008). "Screen time" has lately become a catchphrase in studies on children's media; the term lumps together all time spent with computers, television, and other electronic screens. Some researchers, concerned that hours sitting in front of screens is unhealthy and promotes obesity, have called for reductions in children's screen time. In fact, a recent review found 33 studies of programs meant to reduce screen time (Maniccia et al., 2011).

However, this concern does not seem to be supported by recent research, including those studies that single out video and computer games. A 2004 meta-analysis (a study of studies) by Marshall, Biddle, Gorely, Cameron, and Murdey looked at relationships between television and video/computer game use, body fat, and physical activity in youth aged 3 to 18. Only 6 of 30 studies focused

on video/computer games. Based on the confidence interval for the sample-weighted effect size, the authors concluded there was probably no relationship between electronic game use and body fat in the population. A four-year lon-gitudinal study of over 10,000 children aged 10–15 (Taveras et al., 2007) failed to find a link between year-to-year changes in hours of television viewing and leisure-time physical activity, suggesting that these are "separate constructs, not functional opposites."

In short, videogames don't seem to undermine or replace exercise. Is there any evidence that they might actually *promote* physical activity? Let's look first at videogames that force players to get up and move.

Can Videogames Be Part of the Getting-Kids-Moving Solution?

In recent years, dozens of studies have looked at the potential for games that demand physical movement—a.k.a. exergames—to reduce sitting time and burn calories. Technological advances now make possible a wide variety of exergames (from dancing to boxing) that attract both boys and girls. Some have been shown to appeal to overweight as well as normal-weight youth (Sallis, 2011). This is noteworthy, because exercise can be uncomfortable or embarrassing for children burdened with extra weight. Several recent reviews of research on use of active videogames by children or adolescents (Biddiss and Irwin, 2010; Rees et al., 2006; Mark et al., 2008) concluded that active games can indeed create measurable physiological effects, such as increased heart rate and oxygen consumption, linked to better health. Active games such as *Dance Dance Revolution* are even being added to school physical education classes (Staiano and Calvert, 2011). This led Ballas (2010) to suggest that videogames ought to have exercise ratings, based on average calories burned per hour, to help parents choose games that might benefit their children's health.

However, it's not yet clear whether exergames can promote exercise partici-pation over the long term, or in outside structured settings such as gym class. A study by Baranowski and colleagues (2012) tried to assess the effects of exergames in a natural game-play environment. Children ages 9 to 12, of normal weight or overweight, were given a Wii console and a game of their choice (plus an appro-priate controller) from a set of five active games, including titles such as *Wii Fit Plus* (Nintendo, 2009), *Wii Sports* (Nintendo, 2006), and *Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 3* (Konami, 2009). Trying to simulate a normal home play situation as much as possible, the researchers provided no instruction on how or when to play the games. Also, children could play other games on the Wii if they wished. A second, control group of children also got Wiis, but were only offered non-active games. During the 13-week experiment, researchers measured children's activity twice, for a week at a time, using an accelerometer attached to an elastic belt. At the end of the study, the researchers concluded that having access to active Wii games did not lead to higher levels of physical activity.

Why didn't access to exergames lead to more exercise? There are several possible explanations. First, there was "cross-contamination" between the experimental and control group: in other words, it turned out that children in both groups played active and non-active games. Another factor is the lack of explicit instructions on how to play the new games (which helped promote exercise in other studies). The researchers also noted that none of the active games had a narrative or story that might potentially have motivated children to spend more time or effort on the exergames.

Other issues that may have affected children's use of the active games came up during post-study interviews. When asked what they didn't like about the games, children mentioned not understanding what a game character was saying, being yelled at by a competitor character, finding the game too hard, or simply "not having someone to play with." This last factor may be especially important. Children often learn to play a new game from a friend or sibling, and most view gaming as a social activity (Olson, Kutner, & Warner, 2008). This may explain why a study by Chin et al. (2008) found that children were more likely to stick with exergaming when assigned to multiplayer dancing games at a sports center versus only home-based use.

These studies imply that we ought to look more closely at factors that motivate a child to try and to stick with a new videogame, and with active games in particular. The potential of exergames might be unleashed with the help of good stories, options for collaboration and competition, and evolving technologies that support more complex movements and put games into homes, schools, clubs and on the streets.

But to get the greatest health boost from videogames, we also need games that will motivate exercise even after the console, computer, or phone is turned off. Can we design videogames in ways that will strengthen those motivating elements and overcome some of the emotional and practical obstacles that block a child's path to fitness? One place to start is by looking at videogames that we *know* are motivating, based on the fact that millions of young people choose to play them every day.

Beyond "Exergames": Could Existing Sports Videogames Be the Coaches and Cheerleaders That Get Children Moving?

"When I play videogames . . . sometimes I can learn from it. Like basketball, if I see someone in the game like, shoot a three pointer and make it in perfectly, I would want to practice my three pointers until I can be just like that."
—Focus group comment from a 13-year-old boy

One recent review of the potential for video games to fight obesity (Guy, Ratzki-Leewing, & Gwadry-Sridhar, 2011) concluded that we ought to study whether exergames could serve as a gateway into organized sports. The idea was that

exergames could increase self-efficacy (confidence in sports skills) and feelings of empowerment, and expose children to "the rules and play of sports activities."

Could we use commercially available videogames to model and trigger real-world exercise? In the rest of this chapter, I'll describe some promising qualitative and quantitative research findings, making the case that widely available, realistic sports games may have a role in promoting real-world physical activity. Here, a "realistic" sports videogame is one that mimics aspects of individual or team sports (tennis, basketball) or other skill-based physical activities (skateboarding, dancing) that young people might watch or practice in their everyday lives. Some games allow players to act as a coach, developing strategies for their virtual teams—often based on real teams and actual statistics—to execute. Others put the player directly in the action, practicing moves similar to those in the real-life sport.

One great advantage of commercially available sports videogames is their wide availability; most families with game consoles already own sports games. According to the Entertainment Software Association (2011), sports videogames are second only to the "action" genre in popularity. In 2010, sports videogames (ones related to real-world sports, excluding dancing and fighting games) accounted for 16.3% of units sold (excluding computer games). Six of the top 20 videogames were sports or rhythm games, including *Madden NFL 11, Wii Fit Plus, Just Dance 2* (Ubisoft), and *NBA 2K11* (2K Games) (ESA, 2011). The few questions on game content in the Kaiser Family Foundation study support the popularity of sports videogames among youth; two-thirds of participants (64%) had played *Wii Sports* or *Wii Play* at least once, and 47% had played a *Madden NFL* (realistic football) game (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

Is There Any Evidence That Videogames Can Support Real-World Sports?

This is a hard question to answer. Few studies have looked for any relationship between videogames and real-world exercise, and those few tend to focus on whether videogames displace exercise—on the assumption that videogames breed "couch potatoes." A national survey of youth aged 8 to 18 by the Kaiser Family Foundation (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) nixed that assumption, finding no relationship between time spent with electronic media and time devoted to physical activity (e.g., sports, dancing, or going to a gym).

Similarly, a survey of 392 British college undergraduates, followed by individual interviews with 16 of those students (Crawford, 2005) found no evidence that playing digital games reduced sports participation. However, Crawford did find that sports videogames were the most popular genre among male students, and that sports videogames appeared to increase interest in and knowledge about sports.

An intriguing analysis of data collected for the U.S. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Nelson and Gordon-Larsen, 2006) hints that videogame play could be compatible with, or perhaps even supportive of, real-world exercise. This

nationally representative study of nearly 12,000 youths in grades 7 to 12 focused on possible links between teens' active and sedentary pursuits, and health risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol or cigarettes, unprotected sex, not wearing seat belts). Nelson and Gordon-Larsen identified seven non-overlapping groups of adolescents based on teen active/sedentary behavior patterns. Two of these groups were heavy videogame players; one also spent a lot of time watching television, but the other group had a "high frequency" of physical activity, such as skating, skateboarding, and bicycling. This group of "skater/gamers" along with a third group that played sports with their parents, were least likely to have low self-esteem. (Interestingly, skater/gamers were also more likely to work outside the home, do housework, and get at least eight hours of sleep per night.) Overall, teens who worked up a sweat at least five times a week were less likely to drink, smoke, or do other health-endangering things. Note that these data were collected between 1994 and 1996, before customizable "realistic" sports games were widely available.

Qualitative Research Supports a Link Between Sports Games and Real-World Sports

To explore potential effects of various videogame play patterns on young adolescents, our research team at Massachusetts General Hospital's Center for Mental Health and Media (MGH) conducted a series of qualitative and quantitative studies in 2004–2005 with children attending seventh and eighth grade in public middle schools. The qualitative research involved focus groups with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of 42 young adolescent boys from the greater Boston area (Olson, Kutner, & Warner, 2008). Our initial emphasis was on the use, perceptions and potential influence of videogames with violent content. But in discussions of favorite games, social aspects of games, and game effects, references to sports came up repeatedly, unprompted.

For example:

RESEARCHER: "How do you think you'd be spending your time if you weren't playing, if videogames did not exist?"

ANTONIO: "Well, let's see. I wouldn't be playing any sports, so I'll say . . . I don't know."

RESEARCHER: "You really think you wouldn't be into sports without videogames?"

ANTONIO: "Probably trying sports. But I wouldn't be as good as I am now, 'cause—"

JARED: "Like, you would have no one to introduce you to all the moves, and practice."

Some boys said they were inspired by games to try new sports.

ERIC: "When I was younger, I only had Nintendo, and one of my favorites was the baseball game. And that's how I really got into baseball. I probably wouldn't have been so much in sports right now if I didn't play some of the

videogames that I have."

ANTONIO: "Like he said, like with the baseball, I would have been like that if I didn't play, like, basketball games and stuff, and football games, and other games and stuff."

RESEARCHER: "So, playing these games made you more interested in doing real-life sports?"

ANTONIO: "It made me, made me motivated to go try out for sports and stuff."

MATTHEW: "Yeah, that's definitely true."

NEIL: "Like, in the games that are real, like, which are mostly the sports games, like, you see them do, like, amazing plays, and like, then if you were to go outside and try them, and keep practicing that, like, you could get better so you can end, like, sometime later on in life, you could probably, possibly do that."

Other boys were motivated to try new sports moves. They tried to imitate physical activities they saw in the games they played. Some felt that playing sports games improved their real–life coordination and timing.

JARED: "When I'm playing games, mostly sports games, I actually look into the sports. Like a roller-blading game that I play, Aggressive Inline, it showed me some cool tricks that you can do. . . . [My little brother and I] get in trouble 'cause we start jumping on the couches, imitating the people in the game. Then, my mom tells us to go outside and roller-blade, and then we try to imitate the tricks. I think that's how we get better and better, 'cause we actually want to be one of the people in the game."

ANTONIO: "Like in basketball, if you see them do a fancy crossover, whatever, you want to learn how to do the same thing. . . . With this game I have called Street Hoops, I figured out how to do some of the moves. Still working on it."

Again, these focus groups were designed to look at the use and influence of violent videogame content, not at sports videogames. But comments like these point to serious potential for sports videogames to create and foster a general interest in sports, as well as motivate children to try new sports and to spend time practicing, improving their skills and confidence in ways that keep them engaged.

Quantitative Findings Regarding Sports Games and Physical Activity

Our MGH quantitative research involved surveys of a diverse sample of 1,254 students attending grades 7 and 8 in Pennsylvania and South Carolina. (For more information on the sample and methods, see Olson et al., 2007). We assessed exposure to various types of game content (computer, console, or handheld) by asking subjects to list "five games that you have played a lot in the past six months."

Based on the focus group comments, we recoded our survey data, creating a new continuous variable based on the number of sports videogames that participants listed to assess exposure to sports content. We limited this category to games depicting realistic sports potentially accessible to young players, including (in alphabetical order) ATV racing, baseball, basketball, bicycling, boxing, dancing, football, golf, hockey, horse riding, martial arts, motocross, rollerblading, skateboarding, snowboarding, volleyball, and wrestling. Games with unrealistic representations of sports in a violent or sexualized context (such as *Def Jam Vendetta)* were excluded.

Table 1 shows the most-played realistic sports games for the overall sample, by gender; 73.6% of boys and 46.7% of girls included at least one sports game on their list of five frequently played games.

Our survey also included questions about time spent on a variety of activities during a typical week, including whether subjects "play sports, run, walk, swim or get other kinds of physical exercise." Boys reported engaging in more regular exercise (85.4% did so, for an average of 4 to 7 hours per week) compared to girls (77.6% did so, for 1 to 3 hours per week). Time spent on videogame play and physical activity for our sample are in line with measurements of similar age groups in other studies from the same time period (e.g., Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005).

Neither game play in general, nor Mature-rated game play in particular, significantly predicted involvement in exercise for boys or girls. However, for boys, the number of realistic sports titles on their list of five frequently played games was positively correlated with time spent on real-world physical activities. We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to assess the predictive effects of game play in general and number of sports games played on activity involvement. We entered hours per week of videogame play in the first step, and number of sports games in the second step. For boys, more sports games played predicted more time involved in physical activity ($R2$ change = .041, $F(1, 532)$ = 22.90, p <.001, B = .208). However, this was not true for girls. (I'll discuss possible reasons for this difference later in the chapter.)

TABLE 1 Percentage of Participants Who Played Popular Sports Games

Game Series	Boys	Game Series	Girls
Madden★	31.5%	Tony Hawk	8.7%
NBA★★	19%	Dance Dance Revolution★★★★	8.4%
Tony Hawk★★★	15.4%	NBA	7.4%
NFL★	12%	Madden	5.4%
NCAA★★	11.8%	SSX★★★★★	4.3%

Note: The lists of games in these series were collapsed; percentages reflect those participants who listed at least one game in the series.

★Football; ★★Basketball; ★★★Skateboarding; ★★★★Dancing; ★★★★★Snowboarding.

This research appears to provide the first evidence that realistic sports games have the potential to support involvement in real-world physical activity.

Based on Research, What Factors Boost or Ding Real-World Exercise Participation for Boys and Girls?

Based on other research about youth and physical activity, how might sports videogames act to influence sports participation? A number of researchers have studied factors that influence physical activity and how it changes during the course of childhood and adolescence. Sallis, Prochaska, and Taylor (2000) reviewed 108 studies of factors correlated with youth physical activity, and found a notable lack of consistency across studies. In the 54 studies of adolescents, a handful of related and modifiable variables came up in multiple studies, including an achievement orientation, perceived competence in the particular activity, intention to be active, sensation seeking (looking for physiological arousal, novelty, or excitement), community sports participation, opportunities to exercise, support from parents and other significant people, and siblings' physical activity level.

In the longitudinal study of over 12,000 American youth by Kahn et al. (2008), baseline factors associated with physical activity included athletic and social self-esteem (but not global self-esteem), trying to look like people in the media, and personal and perceived peer attitudes about body shape and fitness. Parent attitudes about exercise, and parent exercise level, were also important. Other factors cited by researchers that may be important influences on exercise include beliefs about whether peers are physically active, perceptions of peer expectations of one's own physical activity, and sharing physical activity with peers. However, more research is needed to see which of these factors can be used to predict changes in youth physical activity over time.

Studies consistently find lower sports and exercise participation in girls versus boys, but relatively few studies look at why this might be. This difference deserves more attention. Peer support, self-consciousness, self-confidence, and types of exercise options available may all play a role (Rees et al., 2006). In U.S. focus groups and interviews, both boys and girls tend to stereotype athletic girls as being overly aggressive "tomboys" (Vu et al., 2006). A similar study found that girls are deterred by concerns about sweating, getting hurt, and otherwise being embarrassed, but are attracted to exercise by the desire to stay in shape (Grieser et al., 2006).

A 2011 review by Craggs, Corder, van Sluijs, and Griffin focused on reasons why children start or stop exercising, again finding problems with study quality and inconsistent results and measures. They concluded that getting physically active in early childhood, and having high levels of exercise self-efficacy, seemed to lessen the drop in activity typically seen in early adolescence. For older teens, high perceived control over one's behavior, social support for exercise, and self-efficacy were consistently linked to limiting the decline in activity.

Biddiss and Irwin (2010) made recommendations for designing more effective exergames, based on self-determination theory and principles of behavioral economics, which may also have relevance for using sports games to promote exercise. In the real world, children are able to choose which videogames they want to play, and whether to start playing. Biddiss and Irwin posit that enjoyment, mastery, and achievement predict whether people will start and stick with a particular behavior. They recommend that future active videogames (and interventions that use such games) emphasize player personal choice, appeal to a range of ages and interests (including young children, to form early habits and expectations), provide immediate positive reinforcement (e.g., fun to play, earn points) as well as long-term reinforcement (e.g., indicators of growth in skills and progress toward goals), and be low-cost and simple to be attractive alternatives to sedentary activities. They also encourage study of whether incorporating plot development and stories, as well as group play options, could help sustain enthusiasm.

Studies by Mueller and colleagues (e.g., Mueller et al., 2007) detail creative ways to play "sports over a distance," a.k.a. computer-supported collaborative sports, using sociability and competition as lures to physical activity. A review of research on barriers that prevent adolescents from exercising (Rees et al., 2006) reinforces the importance of choices, social aspects, fun, and easy access.

Cox, Smith, and Williams (2008) conducted a two-year study of factors affecting middle-school students' physical activity in and out of school, with the goal of helping physical education teachers encourage more free-time exercise. They stressed the importance of perceived competence at sports; perceived autonomy (having a say in what kinds of physical activities to do); relatedness, or feeling connected to others (in this case, other gym class members); self-determined motivation (exercising because it's fun and personally important, versus exercising to avoid being yelled at or feeling guilty); and enjoyment (having fun playing games in P.E. class). When modeling the results, the authors concluded that competence, autonomy, and relatedness support motivation and promote greater enjoyment. They suggest that physical educators who want to increase student activity focus on enhancing students' perceived autonomy and feeling of social connection to boost self-determined motivation.

Given All This: How Might We Use Commercially Available Sports Videogames to Influence These Variables, and Help Our Kids Get Healthy?

Sports videogames incorporate many of the above factors. They are exciting and fun; provide a large and expanding range of choices for all ages; are accessible, low-cost, and not overly difficult to learn; provide opportunities to socialize, compete, and receive reinforcement from peers; and offer immediate gratification as well as ongoing challenge and feedback on progress over time. Our research on young adolescents, as well as other studies of game play motivations (see Olson, 2010),

found that videogame play is often a focus for social activity, especially for boys. Competition, challenge, and the opportunity to master skills are each important motivators for gaming.

Sports videogames also offer the chance to "interact" with and imitate admired role models. The lack of a significant association between girls' sports videogame play and exercise/sports participation in our studies may reflect the fact that at the time of the study, sports videogame characters—especially in popular team-sport games— were overwhelmingly male. (Another potential limiting factor on the influence of sport-related games on girls' physical activity is the comparatively small amount of time girls spent on electronic game play. In our sample, roughly one-third of girls who played videogames typically did so for less than an hour per week.)

Crawford (2005) found that female undergraduates who played sports-related games were more likely than males to choose games less associated with one gender, including multi-sport games (such as track and field or skiing), and non-team-based games (such as golf and skateboarding), which sometimes allowed players to play as female characters.

Choices for game character customization are now much more varied and complex. In many games for the Nintendo Wii console, such as *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit* games, players create a cartoon-like avatar called a Mii, which performs activities onscreen. Your Mii can be male or female, with a range of customizable physical characteristics. This personalization may attract children whose physical characteristics are not typically represented in sports videogames. More recent games, such as EA Sports soccer, tennis, and golf games (for Xbox 360 and PS3 consoles, and personal computers), take customization a step further, allowing a player to upload a photo of his or her own face to create a realistic-looking, digitally customized playable character (see http://www.easports.com/gameface).

Crawford and Gosling (2005) noted that sports games in the early years of the twenty-first century were not marketed toward female players. This has changed dramatically in recent years. For example, in 2011, a 14-year-old ice and video-game hockey player, Lexi Peters, wrote to Electronic Arts complaining of the lack of female characters in their popular *NHL* game series (ABC News, 2011). EA responded by using photos of her to create a default customizable female charac-ter for *NHL 12*.

Boys in focus groups described feeling motivated by the ability to customize their player's appearance and abilities, and by creating a link to real teams or play-ers they admire. For example:

JARED: "Yeah, like, say if you were good at lay-ups. You would put your lay-ups to a certain level [in your game character]. Like, you wouldn't put it all the way up, cause you know that you are not that good. You would actually want to try to be like you, but you can make the facial appearance and the body appearance, you can put your own jersey. Like, say, the Los Angeles Lakers, you can actually put your person on that team.

RESEARCHER: "What do you like with that? How is that a good thing?"

JARED: "It makes you think you can actually be in the NBA, like you actually have a chance."

MATTHEW: "So it gives you, like, a goal to reach. . . . It's good to have goals so when you play games, you can put yourself into the games so you're like, 'Okay, I'm going through this all day. I'm going to try my hardest. I'm not going to let anything stop me.'"

And unlike most exergames, sports games have the potential for motivating through narratives. Baranowski, Buday, Thompson, and Baranowski (2008) wrote about the potential of videogame stories for health promotion, noting the power of story to capture attention, motivate and emotionally engage the player, and citing research that learning in a fantasy context improves knowledge transfer. Other researchers (e.g., Schneider et al., 2004) have described the power of story and identification with game characters to increase immersion and involvement—which could translate into a greater desire to carry a realistic sports-game scenario into real-world playful exercise.

Self-efficacy related to exercise, or feeling confident in one's ability to learn and do well at a sport, came up repeatedly in research reviews as an important factor in starting and sticking with physical activity[1] The focus group comments above suggest that sports videogames inspire a feeling of "I can do this" that encourages real-world imitation of sports moves. We need to know more about this. Aside from some research showing benefits of action videogames on visual-spatial skills, we know little about whether videogames can teach skills that are directly transferable to real-world sports or other physical activity (Staiano and Calvert, 2011). Our MGH videogame survey did find that "I like the challenge of figuring the game out" was a common motivator for both boys and girls. Interactive games are an ideal way to test new behaviors and roles in a safe environment and build an empowering sense of mastery.

Where Do We Go from Here? Suggestions for Additional Research

This chapter raises more questions than it offers answers. To confirm that commercially available sports videogames have the potential to offer meaningful health benefits for children—and before we can think about using those games deliberately to help more kids happily form exercise habits—we need to know much more about the players and the games.

First, we need basic "epidemiological" data: the who, what, when, where, and whys of sports videogame play. For example, what do we know about those preteens and teens who are already playing realistic sports or dance games, and those who aren't? What got those players interested in sports videogames? Given what we know about the attractions of videogames in general, we might look at

motivations such as being sociable, the challenge of competing and winning, and the opportunity for creative expression. Another "who" question is, who introduced players to sports videogames, and with whom do they typically play (e.g., alone, with an older sibling, a parent, or group of same-gender friends)?

An important "when" question: At what age did sports videogame players typically start engaging with these games? Different games, and different co-players, may be more appealing to different age groups.[2] We know that the early teens is a critical period when sports participation starts to decline; does that suggest an important time window when exposure to sports videogame play could change that trajectory? Is exposure to the idea of sports videogames as a fun way to spend time important for younger kids, and the chance to practice skills or compete critical for older teens?

Moving on to "where": We've seen evidence that children are more likely to use "exergames" in social settings at gyms than alone at home. Does the setting of realistic sports game play make a difference? For example, does having immediate access to a basketball hoop in the driveway or down the block make a basketball videogame more likely to motivate exercise?

More qualitative studies with children can help answer important "why" questions. For example, we can build on the research described earlier in this chapter to understand why and how children feel that a videogame helps them gain mastery over the sport in real life. We've already speculated about why girls typically get less exercise than boys. Now that some sports videogames are aimed at both genders, there is more opportunity to see what types and features of games might especially encourage girls to be physically active. For example, might girls be motivated by different sports than boys? Perhaps some are more likely to find inspiration in skateboarding or dance than traditional team sports. As we've seen, there's at least anecdotal evidence that encouraging the trend toward female playable game characters in the mix might make a difference.

We've also seen that although sports videogames are a very popular genre, many young teenagers never play them. Why are some children not attracted to sports videogames? Is there something about the way they are advertised or packaged that nonplayers interpret as signaling, "This game is not for you?" Are there aspects of gameplay that could be made less confusing or discouraging to newbies—perhaps by adding a humorous tutorial for absolute beginners? We also need research on why boys and girls might *try* sports videogames (and related real-world sports) but not make them a habit.

Once we know more about these basics, we can start to collect evidence that sports videogames really can have the hoped-for effects described in this chapter. We need quantitative studies to confirm whether exposure to age- and interest-appropriate sports videogames can lead children to try a new sport, or to increase their weekly hours of exercise. We also need studies to show whether sports videogames can lead to gains in skills specific to a sport, or that translate across sports.

Can Researchers and Game Developers Collaborate to Help Each Other and Help Our Kids?

With this proof-of-concept evidence in hand, we can start to look at ways to manipulate some of the motivating factors discussed earlier. How might game developers tweak the features of sports videogames to increase their appeal and boost their ability to motivate exercise?[3] What might parents, physical education teachers, and coaches say or do to encourage children's interest in sports games? Can researchers or developers provide guidelines to help parents and coaches choose games most likely to get children of various ages, interests, or health conditions (including overweight children or those with developmental delays) to try, or stick with, new sports?

Researchers might consult game developers on ways to apply state-of-the-art knowledge to make sports videogames more motivating. This might include:

- the idea of self-efficacy, and how to encourage it around specific sports skills;
- aspects of a sports videogame that could influence expectations about participating in the real-world sport, such as players' beliefs about how much fun a sport or activity would be; how peers or parents would view them if they played that sport; how physical activity would affect their health, body, or appearance; and how to manage temporary discomfort or injuries;
- ways to change children's views about whether a sport is "for someone like me," such as providing role models that a range of children can relate to and want to be like; and
- adding elements to the game that implicitly or explicitly encourage players to try strategies or moves from the game in the real world.

An important next step is to open a dialogue between sports videogame designers, researchers, and players, to share ideas and spread best practices. It's not clear whether commercial game developers are aware of the potential power of their creations. Without compromising sales (and perhaps even enhancing them), they have the power to make a significant difference in the health of generations of youth, by showing them the fun, challenge, and social rewards of sports and exercise. Given the urgent need to get kids moving, this is a golden opportunity to highlight benefits of videogames and improve the image of the industry.

Notes

1. See Klimmt and Hartmann [2006] for a review of self-efficacy as it relates to videogame play.
2. Think about games such as *Backyard Baseball* for younger children [Humongous Entertainment].
3. E.g., more real athletes as role models, emotionally engaging characters or stories, detailed and realistic depictions of sports moves, opportunities to test strategies or "manage" a team, or customization options.

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