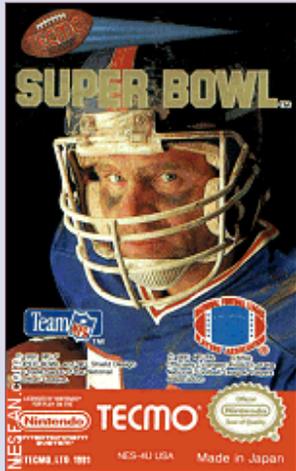STS 145

Cover of TECMO Super Bowl

Review of TECMO Super Bowl

(c) 2001 - Jeffrey Mancuso
Some images are linked to
their respective sources.

Sure Madden 2001 for Playstation 2 has amazing real-time 3D graphics and a physics model- so accurate that you can feel the pain that is unleashed by those 250 pound ape men. But Madden 2001, along with all other electronic football games, will never make quite the bone crunching thud on the development of arcade style football that TECMO Super Bowl for the NES did.

Third Time is the Charm

In 1987 a relatively little known company named TECMO LTD that is largely based in Japan that also has offices in Torrence, California published a game called TECMO Bowl. This overly simple game, composed of only two teams, was designed for four players on a two screen arcade machine[1]. TECMO, looking to take advantage of the ever widening mass market created by the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), followed it up with the NES version for the home in 1988 [2]. While the original version of TECMO Bowl had some highlights, there was much unrealized potential. TECMO took note of this and followed up the wildly popular original in 1991 when it unleashed TECMO Super Bowl upon the
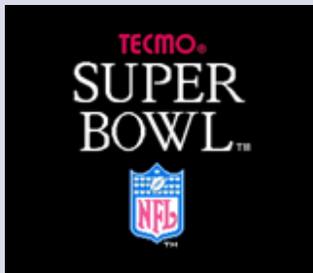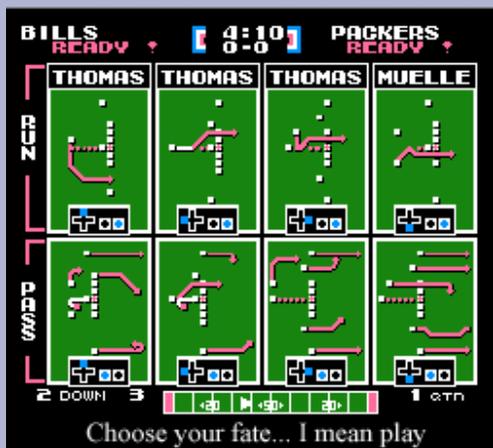

ScreenShot of the Original
TECMO Bowl

world - a game that would forever change the face of arcade style football and would become the benchmark against which so many other games would be judged [3]. No game football game has yet been able to surpass the patentently simple, yet powerful, game play that makes TECMO Super Bowl so much fun.

Title Screen

Cover of the Instructions Manual

Simple is Beautiful

What makes TECMO Super Bowl a sports game with such wide appeal is its remarkable simplicity. A player does not need to have a large background in football and its subtleties in 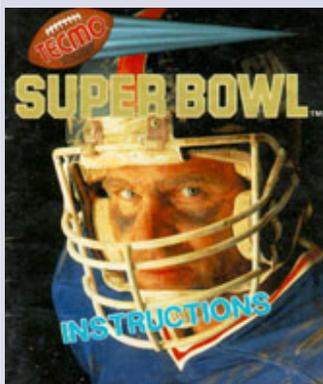order to enjoy and be good at the game- TECMO designed the game to be extremely straightforward. Although it misses many nuances of the game of football it succeeds in creating a game that is easily accessible by the mass market. Game play has both a multi-player mode, where two players can play head to head, as well as a single player mode that allows the player to play an entire 16 game season against the computer. In addition to these two standard modes the game also has a "Season" mode that would allow you to play through an entire season, and would even simulate the outcomes of games you didn't feel like sitting to play. Game dynamics are markedly simple; the only real tactic one must understand is that they need to keep the ball away from the other team. Play picking is kept extremely basic with full graphical explanations of what each option does. After the options are displayed on screen the offense either chooses a running or a passing play while allowing for the defense to attempt a guess at what the they have planned. While this simplicity is a large part of what the game is striving for, it does not attempt to gloss over obvious aspects of football. The game includes realities such as fumbles, special teams plays like onside kicks and field goals, pass deflections and much more. The game also gives an indication of the "health" of a player, much like an injury status, to add a bit of realism to the game. As a whole a typical game of TECMO Super Bowl is, in many ways, akin to a comic strip. A semi-realistic world is created that holds to most laws and rules of the real world but it exaggerates and simplifies most things. TECMO Super Bowl is a game where fast and furious plays with breakaway passes and 60 yard runs proliferate and dominate.
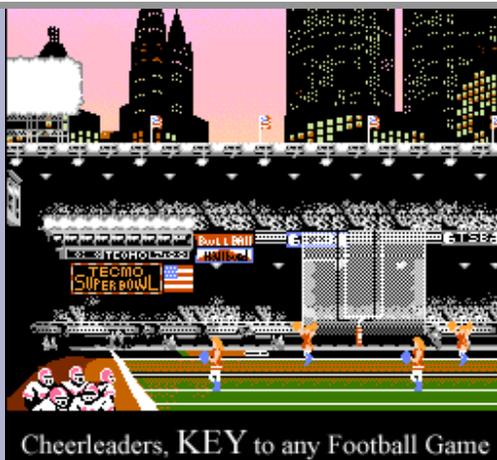

A typical Screen Shot of a game

Make the Best of What's Around

Like any console game, there is inherently little room for dramatic technical

innovation upon a very rigid piece of hardware. Like I'm sure you expect, TECMO Bowl does not suffer from this at all. The graphics, by any modern standards, are ridiculously simple, with simple sprite animation being the only available rendering choice. This limitation in graphics creates a fun, yet somewhat limiting, perspective on a game of football. Seeing that you cannot effectively zoom out or freehandedly scroll around this 2d representation of the field it is very possible that some of your players will be off screen at any given time. The game makes use of graphical devices such as arrows and numbers to show where your active players are or at least in what general direction they are. The only true shortcoming in the graphics arena is that the players sometimes have the annoying characteristic of flickering as the move around.

Cheerleaders, KEY to any Football Game

While not incredibly useful or relevant to game play, TECMO Super Bowl utilizes the Nintendo hardware for a purpose other than rendering a fast paced football game. Those crazy TECMO programmers included TV like cut scenes. At key moments, such as after a touchdown in a game or a quarterback getting sacked, there would come onscreen a short scene of say, a cheerleader dancing, a team rejoicing, or a quarterback getting utterly pummeled by the defense. This brought the game closer to the player instead of having them always watch it from over top. But perhaps the most amusing instantiations of this feature was in the game's inclusion of a halftime show :)

MINNESOTA !
VICTORY !

WORLD CHAMPION

Oh the sweet taste of World Domination

Fun by Design
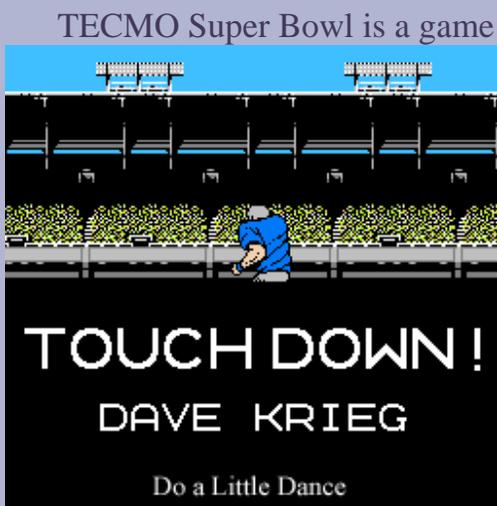
TECMO Super Bowl is a game that is designed to be fun for everyone but complex enough for even sports aficionados to gain satisfaction. TECMO wanted the player to have as short of a learning curve as possible and to get right to throwing the 80 yard bomb from Montana to Rice. The game's success is more or less centered around the strong multi-player aspect, but the single player side of things are hardly underdeveloped. The strengths of the teams as controlled by the computer are slightly unbalanced, more or less reflecting the state of the NFL in the early 1990's. San Francisco has a distinct advantage over other teams, but it is very possible to learn the game well enough to win with any team.

TOUCH DOWN !
DAVE KRIEG

Do a Little Dance

10 Years Later - Still going strong

TECMO Super Bowl is an amazing game that is an unquestionable success. Even 10 years after release this game commands around a $30 price tag at many classic game/hobby stores - almost completely unheard of for an old school NES game, much less and NES sports game. 10 years later it is not at all hard to find the still diehard fan base all over the country.

TECMO Super Bowl undoubtedly holds a place in gaming history. This is one of the very few electronic games that maintains a strong presence long after its publishing date - a testament to what an important place it holds in gaming history. TECMO Super Bowl was certainly not the first football game but it was arguably the first football game that was done right. It's simplicity allowed for everyone of most any age to take control and have a lot of fun. Another reason that TECMO Super Bowl maintains a hold as the most important electronic football game is that it was the the first game to gain a license from the NFL and hence is the very first game to use the names, colors, and logos of real players and teams. Along with this NFL license, TECMO Super Bowl was the first football game to ever include a full running sheet of statistics for each game, the entire season and for entire virtual leagues. All of these things combined have created a game that is almost unquestionably the most profound electronic football game to yet be created.
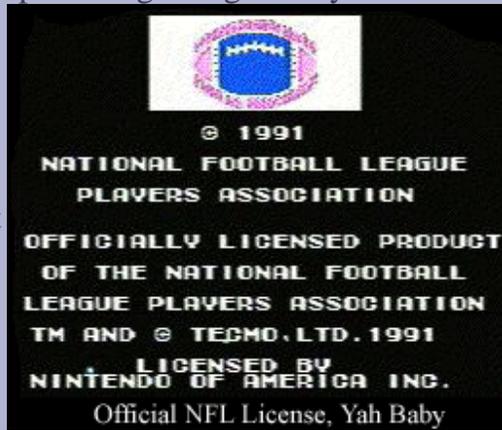
The permanence of TECMO Super Bowl is unquestionable. Since the dawn of NES emulators such as "Nesticle" TECMO Super Bowl has enjoyed an ever greater resurgence. A feature in Nesticle that allows two players to play over the internet has spawned a virtual world of TECMO football leagues. Prime examples of this TECMO induced insanity can be found in institutions such as the Virginia Tech TECMO Football League and the National TECMO Football League. These leagues feature week to week scores, predictions, game highlights and footage (Nesticle will allow game states to be saved in the form of "movies").

TECMO Super Bowl succeeded through its simplicity and through the sheer fun that the player had during game. While most modern sports games are concerned with visual and physical realism they often look past what is most important in the game - fun. Madden 2001 is incredibly complex, far too difficult for anyone under the age of 13 to play without considerable experience or time on their hands. This complexity often makes it difficult for the player to really enjoy the game because they have to spend so much time figuring out how to just get the game to do what they want it to. TECMO Super Bowl is a game that is still played on a regular basis on college lounges and on computer all over the world. It has undoubtedly found it's place in not only the history of computer games but in the

history of modern electronic culture.

RATING: 98%

Look for the PlayStation 2 version of TECMO Super Bowl sometime in 2001-2002!

history of modern electronic culture.

RATING: 98%