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The History of Video Game Design
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If it's in the game, it's in the *game*! **The Evolution of Madden Football:**

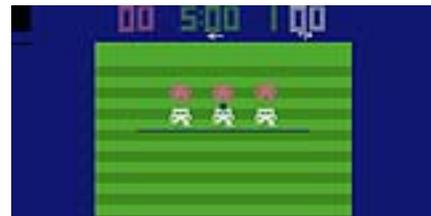
Electronic Arts Sports is the current leader in football video games with an 85% share of the market [gameinfowire.com], largely due to the continued success of the John Madden Football Series. Since its first release in 1989 on the Apple II, Madden Football has consistently topped competitors on every gaming platform. Last year's edition, Madden NFL 2002, sold over 4 million units on seven different platforms while the entire series has sold over 25 million units since 1989 [EA Press Release 236]. Madden Football has achieved a reputation and market share few video game franchises can ever hope to attain, and has spawned numerous competitors at every step of its evolution. How has Madden remained so competitive 14 years after its initial release? Obviously Madden Football has consistently brought innovative new features and gaming concepts onto the virtual playing field, and by looking at the sometimes gradual and sometimes drastic changes in the series, a clear trend towards increased realism emerges. Madden games have pushed the designs of realistic player animations and behavior, NFL based play calling systems, and most recently and certainly most exciting is the now ubiquitous franchise mode where gamers can take their chosen team through dozens of seasons - cutting, trading, and drafting players to their hearts' content.

In addition to its own innovations, perhaps the Madden series owes its continued popularity to the successful integration of its competitors' greatest advances. Without taking inspiration from predecessors like Accolade's 4th and Inches, Tecmo Bowl, and

TV Sports Football and borrowing new game concepts from the more recent Front Page Sports: Football Series, it is hard to believe that Madden Football would still be able to compete against younger franchises. Successful adaptations and a continued emphasis on realism have been the hallmarks of the Madden franchise and explains why the evolution of the Madden series can be seen as the evolution of the entire football genre in the 1990s and one pointing towards exciting new frontiers for the future of football gaming.

The Story So Far...

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, simple, and unrealistic games dominated the football market. One of the first efforts in the genre was Atari's Football, available for the Atari 2600. The game, released in 1978, disappointed fans with its crude graphics and unreliable game play. The entire presentation hardly resembled the game of football as each team fielded only three players (as opposed to the eleven players used in the NFL) and the field itself was



Atari Football was neither pretty nor realistic (courtesy of Hist. Of Football)

devoid of end zones and goal posts [History of Football]. Atari Football left a lot to be desired and Atari's biggest competitor, Intellivision, set out to one up it with its own 1980 NFL Football. Intellivision's NFL Football sported a whopping five players per team and a game field that actually included yard markers. Beyond the technical and stylistic improvements, NFL Football also offered a deeper play calling system with nine offensive and defensive formations [History of Football]. More and more football games entered the market in the next several years and yet none of them possessed the necessary

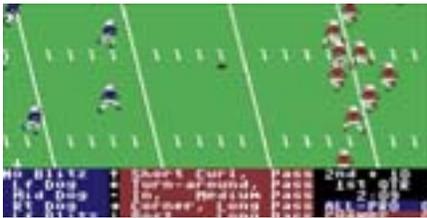


NFL Football featured improved graphics (From Hist. Of Football)

processing power to inject more realism into the genre until Accolade's 4th and Inches began defining the model that Madden Football would

The Birth of *Real* Football Games

Built for the Commodore 64, 4th and Inches represented a vision, albeit an extremely simplified vision, of what Madden Football would become. Released in 1987, it was the first football game offering control over eleven players on each side of the ball. The play calling system became more realistic as well with the addition of specific plays



The 1987 4th and Inches (from Hist. Of Football)

available through different offensive and defensive formations. The refreshing variety of plays enabled gamers to use real football strategy on their virtual fields; sweeps, draws, curls, and bombs were just a

few of the weapons at gamers' disposal [History of Football]. Still, 4th and Inches lacked the processing power to make the most of its superior and more realistic design and was plagued with slow action and flickering graphics. But where 4th and Inches failed, Tecmo Bowl continued developing the game concepts that would become essential to Madden Football's success.

Although Tecmo Bowl did not offer as much realistic game play as 4th and Inches, it did offer one extremely powerful innovation: real player names. Tecmo attained a licensing agreement with the NFL Player's Association (NFLPA) and received permission to place the names of real NFL players into Tecmo Bowl. This move not only

helped Tecmo Bowl tap into a larger market of football fans, but would also key EA's developers into also securing agreements with the NFL and NFL Player's Association several years later. Tecmo Bowl's game play, however, did not offer any more improvements as teams fielded only 5 players and play calling was limited to a couple run and pass plays.



Very limited play calling in Tecmo Bowl (from Hist. Of Football)

Lessons Learned

Right off the bat Madden Football successfully integrated many of the best



Madden Football for the Apple II (from Sports Gaming Network)

elements of its predecessors. The 1989 Madden Football game for the Apple II took many of 4th and Inches' features, including eleven player teams and formation play calling. The eleven player teams, just as in 4th and Inches, allowed gamers to play a game of football as it appeared on television

every Sunday afternoon. The Madden play calling system was also reminiscent of 4th and Inches' with a number of plays each available through different formations including Goal line, near, far, pro formation and shot gun sets [History of Madden Football]. The playing field also resembled its real world counterpart with yardage markers, hash marks, end zones, and goal posts.

Although the Madden series didn't secure licensing agreements with the NFL and NFL Player's Association until the release of Madden '94, the original Madden Football still made use of 16 unique teams each based in a different city. Madden had successfully integrated a realistic presentation style, play calling system and semi-realistic diversity all in its initial 1989 effort. All of these features would be expanded and perfected in the following yearly installments.

Here's Madden!

Electronic Arts realized that the success of earlier football games was largely based on how easily gamers could immerse themselves into the game play and presentation style and chose to create a game that ESPN watching football fans could identify with. John Madden was a popular former coach of the Oakland Raiders turned commentator and had developed a reputation as a product spokesperson. EA knew that



Big John in breaks into the video game business (from Hist. Of Football)

working with Madden would grab the attention of NFL football fans. However, John Madden himself was also a large reason why the series put so much effort into developing such a deep level of realism

compared to other football games.

According to EA lore, Electronic Art's CEO Trip Hawkins first approached Madden in 1986 about collaborating on a football game. Madden only agreed to participate if the proposed game was as realistic as possible. "If it's not 11 on 11, it's not real football. I will not put my name on it if it's not real (as quoted in Madden Franchise)." The existing technology couldn't support twenty-two players on the field, so

the first Madden Football wasn't released until three years later in 1989. Even if the story isn't true, it is representative of the Madden developers' awareness of how important realism was to their audience.

If it's in the game... yeah, yeah, we know, it's in the *game*

Electronic Art's insight into its target audience became critical for the series' success. EA could make a game so drop dead gorgeous and immersive that gamers would think they were Barry Sanders or Joe Montana, but if gamers didn't know about it, they couldn't buy it. Signing John Madden was the first move towards enticing gamers, but EA had to get the word out that Madden Football wasn't just a game, but an experience.

"If it's in the game, it's in the *game!*" Nearly everybody and their mother has heard the line by now, and its message remains as simple and complete as it was back in 1992 when it accompanied Madden Football's initial foray onto the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo gaming systems. Jeff Odiorne, an advertising consultant for EA, takes credit for the slogan. According to Jeff, Madden Football is meant to appeal to "someone who has had the thrill of competition in their life and wants the closest thing to it [as quoted in Sports Rule!]." And many gamers today are quick to defend Odiorne's claim. The Madden NFL 2003 Champion (winner of a large Madden NFL tournament), Robert Hart, is a former high school football player attempting to relive his past on-field glories. "[Madden Football] is as close to the real thing as it gets for me [as quoted in Sports Rule!]." It's a testament to the Madden series' dedication to realism that gamers can express such sentiments about a video game. And really, for Madden Football it's all

about adding new ways to increase realism, even when EA wasn't the first company to come up with the best ideas.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em

Madden Football's developers understood that their largest customer base came from the young men crowding around ESPN every Sunday and Monday night. To make sure that Madden Football was the game those young men would want to play, it meant creating a visual style that was familiar and reassuring. As one former Madden Football producer remarked:

The sports game customer is a rather special person: a sports fan who is also a video game player who wants to play the sport on a computer, not just watch it on TV. These people know the game well; they're not just casual watchers. Attention to the detail of the sport is critical. You must implement every rule and get them exactly right (And in American football, this is really complicated), or the customers will roast you [as quoted in Gamasutra].

Electronic Arts also astutely realized that the best way to tap into the sports watching customer base wasn't to create some new gimmick, but instead to take the best presentation elements of its competitors. To improve its presentation style, EA chose to copy the very successful TV Sports Football.

Now Presenting ESPN... I mean EASN on Madden Football!

TV Sports Football was released around the same time as the original Madden Football in 1989. Produced by Cineware, the game was featured on the Commodore Amiga and TurboGrafx-16. True to its name, TV Sports Football featured a TV style

presentation complete with pregame announcements, a half time show, and numerous cut scenes of the stadium [History of Football].

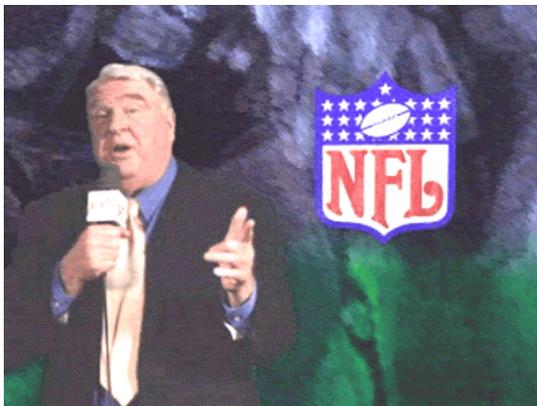
Madden Football '92 (made in 1991 of course), marked the introduction of the so-called



EASN or Electronic Arts Sports Network. The EASN continued only through the '92 and '92

TV Sports Football was ahead of its time in terms of presentation (from Hist. Of Football)

installments, no doubt due to the intervention of ESPN's lawyers. Still, EA managed to



improve upon TV Sports Football's presentation style with a few additions of its own. John Madden himself provided digitized commentary for the first time in Madden Football '93 and the pixilated

Just a couple years later, Madden adopted a similar presentation style (from Gamasutra)

players began adopting more of the habits of their real life counterparts with end

zone celebrations. The '92 edition introduced the stat tracking features that would become common in nearly all football simulations for the next ten years [History of Madden Football]. However, Electronic Art's take on the statistical engine was small fry compared to the package created by Sierra's Front Page Sports: Football, and EA would eventually integrate many of the series' best features.

Stats 'R' Us

In 1992, Sierra released Front Page Sports: Football and began writing the guidelines that Madden Football, as well as nearly every other football franchise, would

follow in the next eleven years. Utilizing the memory and power of the PC, FPS:

Football offered a football experience like no other. Gamers had control over nearly



Small picture here, but FPS: Football was an incredibly deep game (from Hist. Of Football)

every aspect of their team from customized

playbooks and plays to an incredibly detailed stat-

tracking system that gamers could follow through

multiple seasons of play. FPS: Football introduced

the concept of a Franchise mode into football

gaming, allowing players to cut, trade, and draft players to their team for as long they

desired. The AI was also extremely intelligent and remembered gamers' actions from

play to play and game to game [History of Football]. FPS: Football's success proved to

EA and other developers that gamers wanted to be involved in every aspect of the

football experience from quarterbacking, and coaching, to administrating. Although FPS:

Football continued for a few more years, poor quality control doomed the series, leaving

Madden Football to continue its legacy of realistic and immersive game play.

It all comes Together

From about 1995 onwards, EA continued its successful process of integrating the

best features of competing football games and adding its own improvements. Madden

'96, for example, sported the option of player creations and player trades. Madden '97

debuted on the Playstation and introduced the Front Office mode to the series. Gamers

could now change rosters in addition to trading and signing players. Electronic Arts

continued making the expected incremental changes like improved graphics,

commentary, A.I. and increased play options. Madden '97 also introduced options like

player fatigue while the '98 edition on the Nintendo 64 offered a fantasy draft package. Madden '99 for the Nintendo 64 and Playstation finally brought a fully functional franchise mode to the Madden series and allowed gamers to take teams through 15 seasons [History of Madden Football].

Sony's 989 Studios developed the NFL Gameday Series for the Playstation in 1995 and further developed the use of motion-capture technology in football gaming



Gameday had great graphics back in the late '90s (from Hist. Of Football)

[Game Daze]. Before long, the Madden series was also incorporating motion capturing into their player movements and beating

Gameday and other football franchises with its growing

depth and increased game options. Madden '00, for example, featured the first situation creator, in which gamers could attempt to recreate historic drives or simply try out new strategies [History of Madden Football].

Sega's NFL 2K series has most recently clashed with Madden for the title of best football simulation. Although the football market

now features games with incredibly exaggerated

actions like NFL Blitz, the majority of the market remains focused on producing games



Sega's NFL 2K3 (from Hist. Of Football of course)

with TV style presentations and realistic action. The 2K series has even partnered with ESPN to tap into the popular network's large consumer base. Not to be left out of the lucrative football market, Microsoft has released its NFL Fever series onto PCs and its own Xbox to compete with Madden and NFL 2K. All three franchises support realistic



Microsoft's NFL Fever 2003 for the Xbox (from Sports Gaming Network)

visuals with proportional player body parts and detailed physic engines and in depth, stats heavy franchise modes. The

competition between these franchises will be tight

and incredibly beneficial to gamers everywhere.

The Future of Football Gaming

From its origins in games like 4th and Inches and Tecmo Bowl, Madden Football has represented everything that Football gaming was at the close of the 1980s, and, through its constant reincarnations during the 1990s, Madden's evolution has marked the

development of the entire football genre. And with its longstanding reputation as the leader in football simulations, Madden Football is the ideal candidate to continue pushing the football genre to new frontiers, hopefully by increasing the depth of the popular franchise modes.

Although Madden NFL 2003 includes features like the new training modes and



**What's in store for Madden Football?
Hopefully increased franchise depth and
improved commentary (from Sports Gaming
Network)**

the Madden Card system, the most potential lies within the franchise mode. Improving graphics and control schemes are of course a necessity for football games, but only

increased depth will attract new gamers. Just as Front Page Sports: Football opened up new avenues for

football gaming, so too must Madden Football.

Existing franchise modes allow gamers to cut, sign, trade, and draft players, but a gamer's interaction with players can become so much more immersive with increased player A.I. and negotiating options. For example, a gamer really wants to sign an explosive free agent running back, but lacks the necessary cap space. The gamer should have the option of negotiating with one of his veterans to restructure his contract or simply cut him. The veteran, depending on his personality, could respond by refusing to restructure and even demanding more money! Gamers should then be able to cut the veteran or punish him by sitting him for a week or two. Within a couple of weeks the player might be more amenable to contract negotiations. If players truly have a mind of

their own and gamers are given more and new ways to interact with the players, then the immersion and quality of the experience will skyrocket.

Of course, long-term stat tracking is already possible, but deeper, and more natural commentary could also add to the immersion of football games, especially within longer franchise modes. Gamers have long hoped for in-game commentators to make remarks about previous games that aren't completely formulaic. Gamers should hear, "Wow, Jeff Garcia has been sensational the last four games! He's averaged over 315 yards and 3 touchdowns during the span, but let's see if he can hold on tonight against the number one ranked pass defense of the Philadelphia Eagles." [Sports Gaming Network] With commentary like that, it's almost like having your very own NFL, playing games whenever you want, but with the gamer in complete control. These are just a few ideas that can be incorporated into any one of the football franchises competing for virtual supremacy. As we've already seen, Madden Football has dominated the football sports genre by constantly tweaking its game features and adopting the best innovations of its competitors. Chances are if any football franchise will be able to incorporate these and other exciting new ideas into a football game, it will be Electronic Art's Madden Football series.

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