

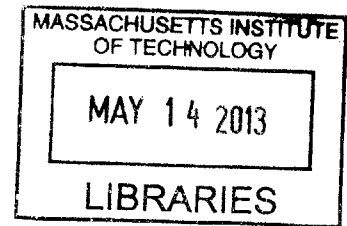
Televsual Sports Videogames

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the three decade long history of sports videogame development, design conventions have lead to the emergence of a new sports game genre: the televisual sports videogames. These games, which usually simulate major professional or college sports, look and sound like television, and they use televised sports as a reference point for players.

This thesis takes a critical look at how these televisual sports videogames are situated in the broader sports media industrial complex of North America, while also considering how the televisual design of these games is meaningful for fans of sports. Specifically, the text looks at how sports videogames reflect or reinforce dominant ideologies of hegemonic sports culture. Building on critical theories in sports studies, and through critical close readings of videogame texts, this thesis explores the relationship between sports television production, and sports videogames, with a focus on features that are found in both. Features such as introductory sequences, audio commentary, in-game advertising, news tickers, and instant replay are all commonly found in both sports television and sports videogames.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Greetings fans... Take the phone off the hook and get ready for a wild one... It's NBA showtime...

-Laker's vs. Celtics and The NBA Playoffs (EA, 1989)

IF IT'S IN THE GAME...

The two frozen sportscasters stare coldly out through the screen as the monologue scrolls across the top of their bright blue studio desk. "... Get ready for a wild one" the man on the left seems to say, though not a sound is made save for the rock music in the background. His body is frozen, only his lips moving as his partner's mouth occasionally parts, revealing a wry smile. The two men are glued to the spot, hands folded politely, as welcoming as frozen newsmen could be. Behind them sits a wall of televisions with static images of sports on each, basketball here, football there. Between the two men sits a large screen with "EASN - Electronic Arts Sports Network" splashed across it. We are to imagine that these lifeless anchors are vocalizing the text ticking across their desk, inviting us to turn off any interruptions and settle in to watch an NBA game on television. It is nearly a still frame, a snapshot invoking a familiar scene.

Such are the images when you first start Electronic Arts' 1991 basketball videogame *Lakers vs. Celtics and The NBA Playoffs* (Electronic Arts, 1991). After choosing your gameplay options, and initiating the match, the player is welcomed to a basketball broadcast on a fictional sports television network, EASN. The sportscasters set the stage for the upcoming match. The lineups are introduced, and we are taken court-side to watch. But, isn't this a videogame?

The scene is a reference to aesthetic conventions in sports television and specifically the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, better known as ESPN. Everything from the two well-dressed male anchors, to the bank of televisions in the background, to the four letter acronym of EASN smacks of a thinly veiled reference to the popular sports television network. Even the halftime show in the game has the suggestion of a highlight reel clip at the anchor desk, an approach to sports coverage for which ESPN is widely known. With the aforementioned introduction sequence, the designers of *Lakers vs. Celtics* are connecting their videogame to sports television, and explicitly to ESPN, offering to the player a frame of reference for understanding and reading their experience with the game. That is to say, the developers of *Lakers vs. Celtics* want the players to compare the videogame to experiences of basketball on television.

The reference to television in sports videogames has become so ubiquitous over the years that it does not seem surprising at all when a game apes television conventions. Indeed, one of the ways certain sports videogames are valued and judged by reviewers and fans is based on how successfully a game resembles sports on television. Consider this line from a recent review for the commercially successful basketball videogame *NBA2K12* (2K Sports, 2011): "...the only thing that could make the presentation better is if 2K snagged licenses from TNT, ESPN, ABC, and NBC. It looks and feels like a real game. The visuals, the overlays, the commentary, I could go on all night" (Toms, 2011). Or consider the claims made by EA regarding the presentation of their *Madden NFL 13* when they advertise that the game "has the feel of a nationally televised broadcast" (easports.com, 2012). Often the language of "realism" and "accuracy," when used by developers, marketers, and critics to discuss sports videogames, refers to how well the games



Figure 1: EASN “Sportscasters” introduce the game in *Lakers vs. Celtics and the NBA Playoffs*.

resemble televised sports. And it’s true, sports videogames have become startlingly accurate in their portrayal of North American sports television.

Fast forward twenty three years from *Lakers vs. Celtics*, start up a game of *Madden NFL 13* (Electronic Arts, 2012), and you’ll find something quite similar. Before every game in *Madden*, after a lengthily opening sequence (complete with aerial fly-overs, theme music, and graphical overlays) the scene switches to a shot of two sports anchors, sitting at a desk. This time animated (though none-the-less icy), the two digital models of famous CBS sportscasters Jim Nantz and Phil Simms welcome the player to another fictional broadcast of “what’s sure to be an exciting football game!” The two work their way through familiar banter, discussing star players, the crowd, or even the weather. It is a well polished introduction honed over years of

collaboration as sportscasters covering real football games for CBS. For anyone who watches football on television, the sportscaster introduction is a familiar scene. Again, and after two decades, *Madden NFL 13*, like *Celtics vs. Lakers*, is set up as a depiction of a televised sport. This time, however, the reference is even more direct, as two sports television personalities are included in the game.

The two scenes from these games serve as anecdotal examples of a design philosophy that has developed into convention over three decades of sports videogame production. Rather than model only an experience of playing a sport, the games are designed to allow players agency as spectators – to control a version of the game they watch on television. Elaborate opening sequences, sportscaster commentary, in-game advertising, graphical overlays, replay, and many other features have been designed into sports videogames in an effort to ape the production techniques found in sports television. The reference to television is designed with the intent of achieving a kind of authenticity for the player predicated on familiarity with TV. The developers want to offer a familiar experience that rings true for fans of the sport, and the dominant form of mediated sport today is television. The earliest motto of EA Sports articulates this pursuit, but also reveals some of the complexity inherent in just such a design approach: “If it’s in the game, it’s in the game.” What does it mean for something to be “in the game” both in the case of the sport and of the videogame representation of it? Developers strive for authenticity, but with a blending of spectator and player perspectives, what does it mean for a game to be “authentic” or “realistic?”

For developers of many sports videogames, authenticity largely means faithful and accurate representation of the televised version of sports. The game looks and sounds real when

it looks and sounds like television. Superficially this is not surprising. The one thing that both media share is a screen, and often that screen is literally the same object used for broadcasting sports and playing sports videogames. But if an authentic experience of sport for videogame players — that experience which is being referenced in the design of games — if that referent is televisually mediated sports, what does that say about the relationship between the two forms of sports media? One can't help but wonder, why are these games designed with such a direct reference to television? How does the relationship to television position sports videogames in the sports media ecology? In what ways does the game address the player as a spectator versus as an active participant? And with these multiple perspectives offered by the game, is there ontological confusion in treating the user as both?

This thesis looks at the relationship between sports television production, and sports videogames, with a focus on features that are found in both. Features such as introductory sequences, audio commentary, in-game advertising, news tickers, and instant replay are all commonly found in both sports television and sports videogames. This thesis explores the historical development of these features, in both television and games. Through close critical textual readings of these features, it is my intention to unpack much of the relationship between the two media forms, and situate that relationship in the broader sports media ecology.

Sport television and sports videogames are but two examples of media in a much broader sports media ecology. There is a long history of mediated sport in North America, and the development of both sports television and sports videogames have many influencing factors. That the two forms evolved to have such a close relationship raises many questions about how the two media forms are situated in the general North American sports media industrial complex.

Indeed, to truly understand the evolution and impact of the relationship between sports television and sports videogames, it is important to investigate the historical cultural context out of which the relationship emerged.

It is also true that sports, in general, occupy a dominant space in North American culture. Sports, and sports media are everywhere — plastered on walls, in news broadcasts, on clothing, in magazines and newspapers. Sports content is so ubiquitous it can be hard to avoid. Sports personalities, whether professional or college athletes or sportscasters, have assumed powerful voices in society. Sport is invoked in political realms, as candidates are expected to have an interest and knowledge of happenings in the sports world. Vast sums of money are in play when it comes to sports and sports media, with teams, athletes, cities and many others all having a stake in the business of sport. Indeed, it may be hard to overstate the influence of sport in North American culture.

With this cultural power is carried the baggage of ideology, and popular sports culture certainly asserts values. Too many to name all, some of the values imbedded in sports narratives are as old as sport itself, whether it's a perceived merit of hard work and competition, the militarization of sport, or a valorization of dominant notions of masculinity. Other ideologies of sport have evolved out of historical context, such as a connection of sport to nationalism or an emphasis on quantification in the valuation of performance. Many of the dominant ideologies found in contemporary sport are also highly contested, locii of cultural conflict, and as such we might consider that there is a "hegemonic sports culture" in North America. This thesis focuses a critical lens on the relationship between sports television and sports videogames, attempting to understand that relationship as part of hegemonic sports culture, and as a site for cultural

contestation. It is in the context of this highly mediated, dominant hegemonic sports culture, what others (Jhally, 1989; Wenner, 1998) have termed the “sports media industrial complex,” that I intend to place my readings of televisual features of sports videogame.

At the same time, sports are meaningful and pleasurable for millions of different fans worldwide, and sports videogames can be a pleasurable actualization of sports fandom for many. Players use televisual sports videogames to engage with the sports they enjoy, extending their television spectatorship through interactivity. Some players use sports videogames to help negotiate with the ideologies of hegemonic sport, creating and playing out scenarios that would otherwise be limited by the politics of the sports media industrial complex — experimenting with gender, with ethnicity, and subverting televisual conventions. While approaching the relationship between sports television and sports videogames from a critical perspective is important, it is my intention to counterbalance such a critique with consideration of how sports videogames, as televisual representations, provide meaningful and pleasurable experiences for many fans of sport.

Televisual sports videogames are wrapped up in the systematic structural logics of the North American hegemonic sports media ecology, and at the same time, and in-part because of such a relationship, they are meaningful media objects for many fans. To look at the relationship between the two media forms, it is important to acknowledge how televisual sports videogames can function culturally as both meaningful fan objects and sites of cultural contestation, how that duplicity can be fraught with tension, and how certain sports fans have been naturalized to that duality.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPORTS TV AND SPORTS VIDEOGAMES

We might first ask, why television; why do sports videogames model a televised game over a played game, or sports experienced on any other medium, like radio or newspaper? To answer this, it makes sense to try and place the development of sports videogames in an historical cultural context, considering when sports videogames emerged in the evolution of mediated sport in North America. The earliest of sports videogames was *Tennis for Two* (Higginbotham, 1958), developed as a sideshow experiment in 1958 by William Higginbotham at his Brookhaven National Laboratory. The game was displayed on an oscilloscope, and featured a side-view of a tennis court, with a small dot representing the ball floating over a line representing the net on another line for the floor of the court (Lambert, 2008). A couple years later in 1961, John Burgeson developed a text only simulation of baseball while employed as a programmer at IBM (Kalb, 2012). His output a crude play-by-play to let players know what was happening in the game, and while that printout may have drawn on the influence of commentary, that influence was both televisual and from radio. *Pong*, a top down version of tennis similar to *Tennis for Two* was developed a decade later in 1971. It would be difficult to claim that any of these early sports video games were explicitly televisual, despite the fact that televised sports had been in development for decades since the 1930s, and had rapidly grown in popularity over that time.

Sports have been a popular source of content for television programming since the birth of the medium. In 1936, German officials broadcast daily the events of the Summer Olympic games in Berlin (Ellsner & Muller, 1990). In the 1930s and 1940s, networks in America experimented with broadcasting different sports contests, including boxing matches, wrestling,

roller derby, college football, and the most popular sport of the time, baseball. Sports were a logical source for early programming on New York based networks because of their ubiquity and cheapness. As Neal-Lunsford points out, “The infant networks, all based in New York City, had easy access to a multitude of local sports teams and events.” (Neal-Lunsford, 1992 p. 59)

By the 1960s, sports content was exploding on television, and television sets were situated in more and more American homes (McChesney, 1989). Technological, social and political factors all contributed to this growth. McChesney argues that the emergence of videotape which allowed slow-motion and instant replay, the ubiquity of television sets in American homes, and the Sports Broadcasting Act, a bill allowing sports leagues to negotiate with networks without facing antitrust litigation, passed by congress in 1961 all contributed to the growth of sports content on television through the 1960s (1989). Networks began to purchase exclusive rights to coverage of sports leagues, which they could then turn for profit with sales of advertising spots during the broadcast; an economic system that is still in place today (McChesney, 1989).

As cable television emerged and expanded through the late 1970s and 1980s, sports continued to occupy a strong portion of programming. New, all-sports networks like ESPN arrived on the dial, providing fans unprecedented quantities of sports programming at any hour of the day. In 1987, ESPN became a major player competing with the big three networks for rights to sports broadcasts when they inked a lucrative, three-year deal with the NFL to air eight primetime games on Sunday nights (Freeman, 2000) That season ESPN’s twenty-four hour ratings surged by thirty-three percent; the network had become a major sports television destination (Freeman, 2000). Even at the time of writing this television remains a dominant

medium for engaging sports content. With cable and satellite distribution, and increasingly specialized networks like The Golf Channel, Outdoor Life Network, or The Tennis Channel, there are more options for watching televised sports than ever before.

It is at this moment in the evolution of sports television, as cable distribution began its growth to dominant sports television in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that videogames saw an explosion in development with the arrival of new home videogame consoles including the Atari 2600, the Intellivision, and the Nintendo Entertainment System. It is also at this time, as developers experimented with graphics for the home systems, that the conventions of televisual sports videogames first began to coalesce. An early example of the influence of television on early graphical sport video game design can be found with Don Daglow and Eddie Dombrower's work on a baseball simulation, *Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball* (Mattel, 1982).

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 Major League 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 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* (Electronic Arts, 1987) or *Larry Bird and Dr. J. Go One on One* (Electronic Arts, 1983), 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.

Given the prevalence of sports content on television, it is perhaps not surprising then that many sports videogames recreate scenes found in sports broadcasts. Developers design sports games based on the most immediate and popularly available sports reference, and the ubiquity of sports television makes the connection between the two forms logical. An investigation of the relationship between the two media forms becomes more complicated however when we

confront the question of what constitutes a “sports videogame” in the first place, and when we consider some of the alternative design approaches taken by developers working on sports titles.

SPORTS MEDIA INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

A primary aim of this project is to analyze sports videogames in relation to televised sports, comparing the two media forms, and piecing together a partial historical narrative of their interconnected development over the past thirty years. It is my intention however to make sense of these sports media as cultural artifacts, and as such it would be a fool’s errand to look at them in isolation, somehow divorced from the vast complexity of the North American sports media industry in general. Indeed it would be naive to suggest that the production and consumption of mediated sport in America happens only in the grand service of fandom, or in the service of the sport as such, if such a thing could even exist. Taking a cultural approach to understanding mediated sports necessitates considering the complicated network of social structures, both implicit and explicit, that inform and reflect the production and consumption of sports media. If the goal is to situate the relationship between sports videogames and sports television in the complex network of a sports media complex, and to analyze how that relationship is manifest in the design of sports videogame texts, then it becomes essential to zoom out on a portrait of that sports media industry, and consider how many different influences inform its shape.

Fortunately, a few scholars looking at sports media have set the stage for this work, establishing some of the vocabulary and frameworks that prove useful for analyzing the relationship between sports videogames and sports television. That relationship represents just one link in a dispersed, and highly complicated network of so called “sports culture” that

includes many other sports media nodes, like radio, newspapers, digital gamecasts, streaming video, and more. American sports media represents a multibillion dollar industry spread across many media platforms (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2008). Or as Wenner (1998) states, mapping sports media “comes about through the interaction of institutions, texts, and audiences” (p. 8). Many scholars suggest that the relationship between sports and media has been especially close in the modern era, to the point where it can be difficult to discuss sports as culture without considering how they are mediated (Bryant and Holt, 2006; Rowe, 1999; Jhally 1989; Wenner, 1989). Sports have historically encouraged the diffusion of newer media technologies, as the new technologies support the growth of sports media industries (Bellamy, 2006). Sports and media have a symbiotic relationship, and as Bellamy reiterates, “the importance of sports content to media has reached a point where it makes less and less sense to discuss sports and media as separate institutions” (Bellamy, 2006, p. 63-64). While Bellamy’s claims may be a bit overblown suggesting that we cannot discuss any aspect of media without considering sports, he does make an important point that it has become increasingly difficult to consider studying the sports industry without considering how sports are mediated.

Wenner calls the complex relationship between sports and media, appropriately enough, “MediaSport” (Wenner, 1998). MediaSport is a neologism for the modern landscape of commodified sports as media, which includes the many different actors and interests from shoe and apparel manufacturers, to broadcasters, through to the players and consumers. Wenner also points out that the tone of discourse around MediaSport is often celebratory, either downplayed as merely leisure, or held up as an area of social cohesion during chaotic or disturbing periods. In the introduction to a volume of critical MediaSport essays, Wenner writes, “Because, almost

without exception, public discourse about sports comes from voices inside the MediaSport combine and from those who stand to benefit as the stakes get higher, the story that is most often told is ‘welcome to the party’” (Wenner, 1998, p.6). It is with Wenner’s call for critique in mind that I approach an analysis of televisual sports videogames. It is not nearly enough to point out how televisual sports videogames relate to televised sports, it must also be asked why they have evolved that way, and what actors have a stake in that relationship, including sports fans and sports media producers.

Other scholars, working in the same vein as Wenner, choose to emphasize how MediaSport has evolved as part of modern capitalist structures. Sut Jhally (1984; 1989) suggests a different name for the complicated network that comprises modern mediated sport as cultural product, calling it the “sports-media complex.” For Jhally, sports and media are inextricably linked, especially in the United States. Rowe takes Jhally’s language of a “sports media industrial complex”

Jhally suggests the conflation of “sport” and “media,” arguing that sports are best understood as capitalist commodities, especially in the United States (Jhally, 1989). He writes, “If we follow through the political economy of professional and college sports, we will see that each stage is dominated by a concern with commodities” (Jhally, 1989, p. 79) Calling for a cultural studies approach to researching mediated sports, a position upon which this thesis also builds, he makes two claims to support his framework, that: “(1) Most people do the vast majority of their sport spectating via the media (largely through television), so that the cultural experience of sport is hugely mediated; and (2) from a financial point of view, professional, and

increasingly college, sports are dependent on media money for their very survival and their present organizational structure” (Jhally, 1989, p. 77-78).

Jhally’s work is an attempt to map the important domains for a cultural studies approach to unpacking the sports-media complex. He uses two frameworks for organizing the various areas he addresses, both extensions of Marx’s model of a circuit of capital (production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction). The first is Stuart Hall’s “encoding/decoding” model (1980), and the second is Richard Johnson’s “circuit of culture” model (1986-87). Jhally divides his argument into four sections based on four interconnected, yet still independent moments in Hall’s model of the process of cultural production: focus on production, focus on texts produced, focus on reading of those texts, and “a focus on ‘lived cultures’ and ‘social relations’ that relate to the ‘uses’ made of the reading of texts” (Jhally, 1984). Jhally spends the majority of his time on the “encoding” half of Hall’s model, and on the sports media texts and their production. While on the one hand, Jhally’s framework is useful for considering how to approach an analysis of televisual sports videogames, his argumentation focuses on sports media as commodity, which feels somewhat lacking. Sports fans who play sports videogames also watch sports television, and so the relationship between the two media has some resonance with the community experiencing both. At the same time, the games and broadcasts as media texts do reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies found in North American sport, and so it is important to focus a critical eye on how these media artifacts contribute to the cultural production of hegemonic North American sport. Indeed, the language of “hegemony” proves quite useful toward this end.

HEGEMONY AND IDEOLOGY

Jhally's invocation of the Birmingham school of cultural studies theorists makes sense when we consider how mediated sports reflect the ideologies of a dominant, hegemonic sports culture in North America. The concept of hegemony is particularly useful when applied to investigations of sports cultural production, in part because of the large role sports play in everyday life in North America, and also because sports enjoy a dominant position in North American society. As Bellamy points out, "Sports coverage consistently and increasingly appears both in its own all-sports media... and as an integral part of the news of the day" (2006, p. 63) Sports stars and sports stories transcend sport-specific media, and even non-fans are inundated with sports content through a variety of outlets. The popularity of sport also leads to the ubiquity of sports reference in other aspects of society, as domains like politics and education continue to be touched by sport.

David Rowe writes about the ubiquity of sport in North American culture: "... the sights, sounds, and 'feel' of sport are everywhere — shrilly piping out of televisions and radios, absorbing acres of newsprint, and decorating bodies..." (1999, p. 4) a list to which I would necessarily add sports videogames. And he is right, sports are everywhere in the North American media ecology, from billboards to late-night talk shows, newspapers, magazines and radio. He continues, "... whether certified 'sports nuts' or the vaguely interested, largely indifferent to or actively dismissive of sport, we are all required to confront and negotiate the power and presence of the sports media" (Rowe, 1999, p. 4) Sports, and the language of sports are integrated into so many different facets of North American culture, that they have become impossible to ignore.

Perhaps because of the preeminence of sports and sports media in North American culture, many cultural studies scholars and sociologists who engage in what McDonald (2006) calls a “contextual cultural study” of sport do so by way of “hegemony theory.” Participating in the popular cultural studies discourse emerging out of the Center for Contemporary Culture Studies at the University of Birmingham, England, these sports scholars seek to make sense of the power dynamics at play in sport as culture. McDonald asserts that scholars working in this fashion see “sport and the sport media as significant sites where power is not merely asserted, but contested and struggled over” (2006 p. 502). McDonald characterizes this type of sports scholarship as “rearticulating power” and work like Gruneau’s look at class struggle in Canadian sport (1983), Hargreaves investigation of hegemonic ideology in British sport (1986), as well as the aforementioned works by Jhally (1984; 1989), Wenner (1998), and Rowe (1999) all fall into this category. It is useful to consider how the MediaSport complex perpetuates a condition of hegemony, recursively reinforcing dominant ideologies that strengthen the role of sports in North American society. Jhally’s articulation of the relationship between ideology and hegemony in cultural production proves useful: “*ideology* is the form that *culture* takes in conditions of *hegemony*” (1989, p 77).

But the notion of dominant ideology in general can be nebulous, so what are some of the known tropes in North American sports media that are continuously reiterated? What are the areas where power relationships manifest, and are contested in North American sport? Wenner (1989) points to Edwards’s (1973) “American Sports Creed” as a logical place to start cataloging some of the tropes found in North American sport, a list comprised of: character, discipline, competition, physical fitness, mental fitness, religiosity, and nationalism. Edwards was largely

focused on sport culture more generally, and Wenner points out that with mediated sport, some of these values take on new meaning and have different consequence. For example, Wenner suggests that notions of character in contemporary sports media often focus on off-field issues and criminality, and that sometimes “bad” character in an athlete can be seen by media producers as a “good” story (1989, p. 24). Jhally also offers some suggestions for where cultural studies scholars can look at power dynamics in mediated sport, including themes of “militarism and nationalism”, “competition and rules of the game”, “labor, the team, and authority”, “gender”, and “race” (Jhally, 1989) Andrew Baerg (2006), looking at the texts of sports videogames identified other tropes for interrogation including corporeality, and quantification. Suffice it to say, there are many areas of focus for investigating how hegemonic sports culture plays out in North American culture. Rather than picking a handful of areas to focus on with this thesis, it is my intent to look instead at specific features found in both sports videogames and sports television, and to see how the relationship emerging from that sharing of content reflects and informs hegemonic sports culture in North America. This will be explained in more detail in the methods section of this introduction, but for now, it is important to lay out that a handful of scholars have endeavored to identify the areas where power is contested in sports media, with a focus on hegemony theory.

This thesis is of the same mold, looking at how the reproduction of television features in sports videogames, and the evolving relationship between the two media forms are both informed by and contribute to the dominance of sports in North American culture. In fact, even a cursory look at sports media in North America can reveal how the industry reinforces dominant ideologies through the narratives and tropes found in mediated sport, whether television

broadcasts or videogame. Also, it is my intention that the manifestation of the relationship can be seen as a site of conflict and struggle, as the needs and desires of sports fandom extend beyond what mainstream content is currently offered by sports videogame publishers. On the one hand, the televisual experiences of sports videogames address a known fan experience of televised sport, however, with that direct relationship comes all the baggage of the cultural production of televised sport, including the emphasis of certain dominant ideologies that are at play in sports content.

SPORTS FAN STUDIES

While obviously sympathetic to critical readings of sports texts as commodities in a circuit of capital, following in the cultural studies tradition of theorists like Hall (1980) and Johnson (1986-87) upon whose theories Jhally builds his arguments, I intend to also consider how televisual sports videogames are meaningful cultural artifacts for fans of sports. Perhaps informed by my own experiences as a sports fan and player of sports videogames, I believe that only considering how televisual sports videogames relate to televised sports in an economic or capitalist context ignores how they can also function as meaningful media objects for many players, operating as a means for actualizing their sports fandom.

One challenge while addressing sports fandom comes from the widely varying ways that different scholars have attempted to define or constrain the notion of what constitutes a sports fan. So called sports culture, even when constrained geographically as I am doing here with North America, represents a vast, broad, and diverse community with differing interests and behaviors. Indeed, it is far more accurate to consider that there is a plurality of different sports

cultures, united in some ways by the form of the games that are at the center of their practice, but differing widely in so many other ways. Wenner (2008) addresses the challenge of constraining sports fandom, and builds on an argument by Crawford (2004) that sports fandom should be framed in terms of consumerism. Understanding the fan as consumer makes sense given the extent to which the sports media industrial complex is commodified as Jhally (1989) and Wenner (1998) have suggested elaborating on the contemporary form of mediated sport. Again, while acknowledging the commercial and economic factors of cultural production is important, it must be counterbalanced with some discussion of the ways mediated sports, and in this case specifically televisual sports videogames, are pleasurable and meaningful media objects for fans.

Another approach to addressing the challenge of identifying sports fans is to look at what are the factors that motivate sports fandom as Gantz et. al. (2008) have done. In a detailed quantitative study, they surveyed 194 people to try to identify which environmental and personality factors may influence or predict sports fandom. The responses showed that social factors like peer encouragement and parental encouragement were strong predictive factors of fandom, but that also the personality factors of competitiveness, sensation-seeking and a desire for group affiliation (Gantz et. al., 2008). We can see how these personality predictive factors could be stimulated by televisual sports videogames, as the game may offer an approximation of the thrill of being an elite athlete, or may offer the opportunity to strengthen affiliation and identification with a team or athlete. Sports videogames are also, often, highly competitive. That the televisual features of sports videogames are often considered to enhance the “realism” or “authenticity” of a videogame for fans, and that such perceived verisimilitude is valued, suggests

that the games address a desire on the parts of players to enjoy a proximity to the games they watch on television.

There is an ever-expanding subset of media theorists and pop-studies scholars working on fan studies upon whose work I can build some analysis of televisual sports videogames in the context of sports fandom. Henry Jenkin's pioneering work on productive fan communities (2006; 2008), for example, informs my analysis of a latino community of sports gamers who hack and modify an old baseball game to make their own *MVP Caribé* game that better represents their own desires to play a simulation of a latino televised baseball experience.

Surprisingly however, sports have been largely ignored by these scholars whose work tends to focus on fans of film, serial narrative television, comic books, and the many iterations *Star Trek*. Roberta Pearson, though not writing about sports fan studies specifically, recognizes that there is an emphasis on so-called "low culture" fan studies and a paucity of scholarship on fandom of "high culture" media such as works by Shakespeare or Johann Sebastian Bach (2007). She writes,

The study of high culture still undeniably thrives in the academy; Shakespeare is far from taking up residence on the dust heap of history. But within the strain of cultural studies that traces its lineage to Birmingham, high culture figures only as a repressive other against which to celebrate the virtues of the popular (Pearson, 2007 p. 99).

Pearson rightly recognizes that fandom on the part of a culture of academics in part accounts for an emphasis on certain strands of the popular in cultural studies. It is just such a personal fandom, in this case for sports, that informs my own work. She points out that it is important to "acknowledge the structural determinants of scholarly inquiry in the history of a discipline..." (Pearson, 2007 p. 101) which begs the question, why has there been so little emphasis on sports in fan studies to date?

Schimmel et. al. (2007) conducted a study to address that very question, and their findings, while not altogether surprising, are enlightening as to why there is not significant overlap between sports fan studies and pop culture fan studies in the academy. The researchers decided to conduct an email survey of 65 scholars working in fan studies, both in the sports and pop culture domains across a variety of disciplines. Findings suggested that sports fan scholars and pop culture fan scholars rarely cross-fertilized with scholarship, as the two groups tended to focus on different sub-disciplines. For example, while pop culture fan studies scholars widely acknowledged Henry Jenkins as an influential scholar, not a single sports fan scholar mentioned Jenkins as an influence. There was also minimal overlap when it came to journals that were seen as outlets for publication. The takeaway for the researchers is largely that “the ‘spaces’ occupied by sports fan studies and pop culture fan studies are more fragmented than we originally suspected. The boundaries seem to run not only between genre and discipline, but extend through sub-discipline as well” (K. S. Schimmel et. al., 2007 p. 592). They rightly point out that this divide between the two scholastic communities impoverishes both, as greater cross-fertilization would greatly improve the discourse in fan studies in general.

A BALANCING ACT

It is thus a tenuous balancing act that I hope to perform, on the one hand considering the many different influences that help to shape the design of televisual sports videogames, and also suggesting how the design may be in the service of experiences associated with sports fandom. This project is in no way a complete deconstruction of the relationship between sports videogames and sports television. Indeed, this work raises many questions about the relationship

through the exploration of a few features shared by the two media forms. Many more questions will be raised about how the relationship between these media forms is understood by groups of fans of both forms of text; questions that are best answered by those fans themselves.

The goal of this thesis, in taking a close look at some of the more explicit and prominent televisual features in sports videogames, is to begin the process of situating sports videogames in relation to television, and by extension begin the process of understanding how that relationship fits in the broader MediaSport ecology. A few scholars have acknowledged that some sports videogames exist in a close intertextual relationship to sports television (Conway, 2010; Crawford, 2012), and a few more have begun the process of close readings of sports videogames as texts (Baerg, 2006), and this thesis will pick up where those scholars have left off with a more detailed look at *how* those sports videogames relate to sports television, and what that relationship tells us about the place of sports videogames in the MediaSport ecology.

With close readings of sports videogame texts as evidence, specifically features that directly reference televised sports, it is my claim that American televisual sports videogames are designed to be interactive extensions of a televised sports experience. The games recreate the experience of a televised game, but allow the player to interact with the system. The games are simulations on two levels, offering a simulation of both sport as played and sport as televised. Despite this dual nature, producers of the games intend for them to be read in relation to televised sports, with which sports fans are often very familiar. Even the language of reality and accuracy when applied to discussion of televisual sports games refers to the ways the games manage to faithfully recreate a televised sports experience. Many of the features of these games, from use of elaborate introductory opening sequences to instant replays are designed to signal a

televisual experience, even when they extend the capabilities of televised sports with expanded interactivity made available through simulation.

Approaching televisual sports videogames in this way, we can begin to more accurately investigate the ways that videogame features designed as representations of television experiences inform the relationship of sports videogames as texts to television as a product of the broader MediaSport complex. In the next section, I will examine how other scholars investigating sports videogames have approached them, explaining how this thesis contributes to the admittedly small discourse around sports videogames. I will then describe the critical reading method I am applying to this work, including some media theories that prove useful in discussing televisual features in sports videogames.

CHAPTER 2

LOOKING FOR THE TELEVISUAL

DEFINING SPORTS VIDEOGAMES

Before moving any further, we must address a definitional question: “which videogames are sports videogames?” If only this were so simple to answer! Indeed, there are many different types of videogames that might fall under the heading of “sports” themed, from skateboarding games to sports team management simulations, to online fantasy sports. Constraining what constitutes as a sports videogame is as challenging an endeavor as formally defining the broad cross-cultural phenomena that are called “sports” (Consalvo et al., forthcoming; Taylor, 2012; Stein, 2013). This thesis will focus on a subset of sports videogames that are designed to be representations of any of the four major North-American sports of football, baseball, basketball and hockey. These games are predominantly designed to specifically reference the top professional leagues for each of these sports, the National Football League [NFL], Major League Baseball [MLB], the National Basketball Association [NBA], and the National Hockey League [NHL]. In referencing these popular sports and their leagues, these videogames also exhibit the most frequent reference to televised sports, so much so that we can refer to them as “televisual” sports videogames.

Conway and Finn (forthcoming) developed a taxonomy for sports videogames, organizing them into sub-genres including management simulations (*Football Manager*), extreme sports games (*NBA Jam*, *NFL Blitz*), and the focus of this work, televisual sports

videogames (*Madden*, *NBA 2K*). Management simulations often position players in the role of a president, owner, or general manager of a sports team, allowing players to make economic and organizational decisions about teams as businesses. So-called “extreme” sports games offer fantastical or abstract versions of a sport, with exaggerated animations, and, often enough, objects that instantaneously catch on fire. While these extreme games will also reference television, because of the fantastical design that representation is less direct.

The games investigated in this thesis, ranging historically from early examples like *Intellivision World Series Baseball* (Mattel, 1982) to more contemporary games like *Madden NFL Football 13* (EA, 2013), all fall under Conway and Finn’s category of “televisual.” These games all directly reference television broadcasts of sports, and do so explicitly. As mentioned before, these games frequently address players as spectators of a television broadcast.

These games offer recreations of known sports, and are referred to as “simulations” by developers, marketers, critics and reviewers. The term “simulation,” however, carries with it some baggage, and before moving to much further, it is useful to unpack in what ways televisual sports videogames can be considered simulations of televised sports, and what the means for an examination of the relationship between the two media forms.

SPORTS VIDEOGAMES AS SIMULATIONS

A common term used for talking about televisual sports videogames is *simulation*. Indeed, some websites and magazines will label televisual sports videogames as “sports simulations” to differentiate them from other types of sports videogames such as racing games or more fantastical “arcade sports” games like *NFL Blitz* or *NBA Jam*. Publishers and developers

also use the term simulation when talking about televisual sports videogames in marketing materials and when discussing features. What does it mean to say that a televisual sports videogame is a *simulation* and what are the consequences of labeling it as such when considering how players make sense of their subjectivity in relation to the game?

This question becomes important as we move toward a critical analysis of televisual features because of the emphasis on representation found in sports videogames. Ian Bogost (forthcoming) argues that a simulation of a sport hinges more on how the formal properties of a game — the rules, the physics of the world, and the behaviors of players — are modeled by the software. He suggests that a videogame of a sport shares a familial relationship ontologically to the sport itself because of the shared formal properties of the two versions of the game. While it is certainly important that the rules of a sport are faithfully recreated in a televisual sports videogame, it is in many ways more important that the game faithfully recreate a known experience of sport for sports fans, and the most familiar experience is televised sport. *NBA 2K12* is not just a basketball game, it is a digital recreation of the National Basketball Association on TV. *Madden NFL* is not just a simulation of any game of football, it is a recreation of the *National Football League* as broadcast. Because televisual sports videogames have a strong connection to sports television, and because that relationship is part of a broader sports media industrial complex that reinforces hegemonic sports culture, it is highly important to recognize that the language of simulation with regards to televisual sports videogames is not just about system and behavior, but also dependent on representation.

There is no consensus among game scholars as to the best definition for the term simulation. Indeed, some contentious debate in the field hinged on how scholars defined the

term. Gonzalo Frasca bases his definition on systems and behaviors. Specifically, he argues that simulations are best understood in opposition to representation and narrative. He writes, “to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system” (Frasca, 2003, p.223). Frasca pushes against semiotic readings, insisting that to understand a simulation, we must look at operations, arguing that “the feeling of playing soccer cannot be compared to the one of watching a match. (Frasca, 2001)” On the one hand, Frasca’s point about behavior makes sense when looking at televisual sports videogames, for example a baseball videogame in which only three balls lead to a walk (instead of four, as defined in the rules of baseball) would seem to be incorrectly simulating the sport. However, as we will see with the recreation of televisual production in sports videogames, representation cannot be discounted when considering how some sports videogames simulate the experience of a televised sporting event.

Ian Bogost takes Frasca’s definition of a simulation and expands upon it in his book *Unit Operations* (2006). Specifically, Bogost focuses on the theoretical space between the source system and a model of that system with which players engage. Calling this space the *simulation gap*, he suggests that the meaning derived from a simulation, which is necessarily ideological, emerges from this liminal space. Players work through the anxiety, or *simulation fever*, that comes from comparing the source system with the necessarily incomplete model of that source. The emphasis on the user’s relationship to the model is useful when considering how televisual sports videogames function as simulations. The question that arises, of course, is what is the source system that is being modeled, is it the sport itself, or the televisual mediation of that sport, or some combination of the two? If players are working through the anxiety of comparing the

televisual sports videogame to the source for the simulation, what is understood to be the source system that is modeled? We might also wonder, how do players conceive of their subjective relationship to both the source and the model?

Jason Begy offers perhaps the clearest and most useful definition of a simulation, building on Bogost's theory of a *simulation gap*, but more clearly articulating how subjectivity and perspective impact the reading of a simulation (Begy, 2010; Begy, 2011). Begy rightly notes that while Bogost at times implicitly acknowledges the relationship between the source system and the simulation, his focus is on the reading of the simulation by the player.

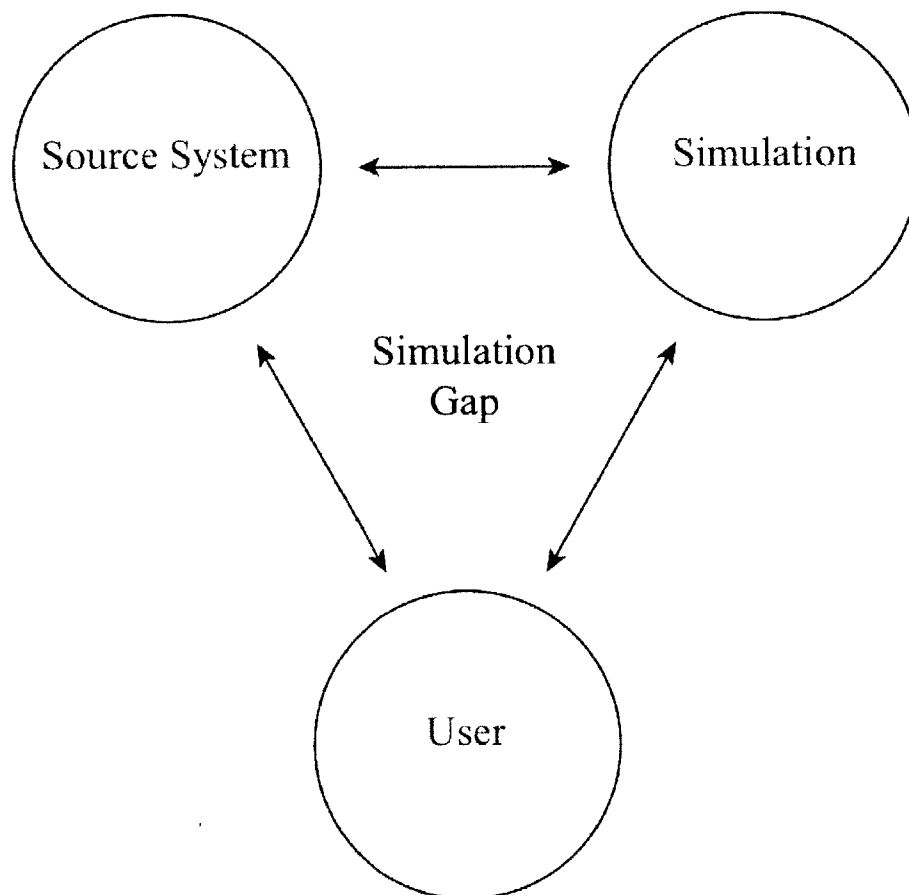


Figure 2: The simulation gap, as re-imagined by Begy at the intersection of the user, the source system, and the simulation. (Begy, 2010).

Begy re-articulates Bogost's simulation gap, including the source system, thereby triangulating the model. The simulation gap, for Begy, moves from simply being the space between the user and the model to the space between the user's mental model of the source and the user's experience of the simulation (see figure 1). He writes,

Through interacting with the simulation the player compares the simulation to the source system, focusing on what the simulation has abstracted out and what it has emphasized, which then leads to an interpretation of the simulation. The user's own subjective position is a key element in how the simulation gap facilitates meaning-making: different people will attach different meanings to what the simulation includes and excludes. This also allows the player to develop a deeper understanding of both the simulation and the source system. (Begy, 2011, p.9)

Begy's re-articulation of the simulation gap accounts for expectations on the part of the user, and for necessarily contextual readings of a simulation. He argues that many simulations signal a relationship to specific source material through representational cues, establishing for users a context for reading their experience of the game.

Returning to our question of what televisual sports videogames are actually simulating, we can see how useful Begy's argument can be for making sense of the genre. Televisual sports videogames simulate some of the experience of playing a sport, but more accurately, they also model an interactive version of sports as experienced on television. The copious references to broadcast sports, from opening sequences, through in-game advertising and on to instant replay, serve as markers of a relationship to a televisually mediated form of sport. It is with this relationship in mind that players engage with and derive meaning from the simulations. The users, by-and-large familiar with sports on television, are experiencing the videogames as interactive models of their experiences watching sports on television (Stein et. al., 2012).

As Begy argues, we must consider the relationship between the player and the source system when thinking about how users experience a simulation. It is not enough to look only at

the relationship between the model and the assumed source, and when the source system is complex and multifaceted, the relationship gets even more nuanced. In the case with sports videogames, I argue that the source system for the simulations is a complex combination of both the sport as played as well as the sport as televised. When we consider the multiple perspectives assumed by a complicated source system for the simulations, we necessarily must include the subjectivity of the player engaging with the game. Specifically, we might ask what subjectivities players assume when engaging a televisual sports videogame, and in what ways the games signal multiple perspectives through a remediation of televised sports. In other words, what roles does the player assume while playing a sports videogame?

REMIEDIATION

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's new media theory of remediation proves useful when considering the relationship between sports videogames and sports on television. In their text *Remediation*, they 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)." 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 & Grusin, 1999, p. 47) 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.

Earlier scholarly work looking at sports videogames have also identified remediation as a useful theory for understanding how developers design certain types of sports videogames,

incorporating production techniques from television. The aforementioned work by Conway and Finn suggests that sports videogames in the “televisual” sub-genre exhibit many examples of the remediation of television productions (Conway & Finn, forthcoming). Crawford too identified that throughout the short history of sports videogames designers have created games in relation, and often with direct reference to sports television (Crawford, 2012). Similarly, Hutchins and Rowe also identify that sports videogames remediate television, and that the relationship is bi-directional with sports television remediating sports videogames in turn (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012).

The remediation of television in sports videogames is often done through the incorporation of multi-perspectival production found in contemporary sports television. Windowed scenes, picture-in-picture, statistical graphics, and overlain scores and news tickers all reinforce the sense that the sports experience on television is emphatically hypermediated, reinforcing for the viewer the ways that the medium informs perspective. These features are also found in sports videogames, on the one hand referencing the televisual, and on the other offering intersecting perspectives for the player. It is with this in mind that we turn to metaphors of windows and frames for making sense of perspective in sports videogames.

WINDOWS AND FRAMES

Metaphors of windows and frames have long been used to make sense of perspective. Windows are looked through —the glass focusing, refracting, blurring and otherwise shaping our experience of the images on the other side. Frames are boundaries, sometimes physical, sometimes figurative, that separate the experiences that fall within the constraints of the frame

from those left out. Language of windows and frames as metaphors for perspective is ubiquitous throughout media, whether we look at the “frame” of a painting, the “framing” of a photograph, or the “windows” on our computer desktop. The metaphors are not just visual either, as arguments can be “framed” and “windows” of time can close.

When considering the subjectivity of a sports videogame player, and specifically the ways in which the games address the player as both an active agent and as a spectator, it is useful to consider the ways that metaphors of windows and frames apply to our understanding of the design of televisual sports videogames. Sports television itself is increasingly windowed and framed with information, from the news crawls ticking on the bottom of the screen, to the ubiquitous statistical graphic, to the advertising bug that pops up in the corner of the screen. Naturally, televisual sports videogames reference these many instances of windows and frames that are found on the broadcasts.

Anne Friedberg’s work on the history and theory of metaphors of windows and frames provides a strong foundation for looking at their use in sports videogames. In her text *The Virtual Window* (2006), she traces the history of the symbolic usage of windows and frames for making sense of perspective, looking at examples ranging from Alberti and perspectival painting in Renaissance Italy to Microsoft’s aptly named Windows operating software. Considering how windows and frames are understood metaphorically proves helpful indeed when considering the remediation of television in sports videogames, and the subsequent perspectives presented to the player.

CLOSE READING

Andrew Baerg's PhD dissertation "The Role of the Digital Sports Game in The Sports Media Complex" (2006) represents the research with goals most closely aligned to those of this thesis. Indeed, the very title of the work points to the fact that Baerg's work attempts to situate sports videogames in the context of MediaSport. Baerg also picks up Jhally's (1984) call for a cultural studies approach to MediaSport, writing "The larger question I consider concerns the cultural meaning of the digital sports game text and its role in mediating modern sport within what cultural studies scholar Sut Jhally [1984] nominates 'the sports media complex'" (2006 p. 3) Baerg focuses his study on four specific sports videogames, *Fight Night Round 2*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004*, *MVP Baseball 2005*, and *John Madden Football 2005*, engaging in close-readings of those texts. Furthermore, his readings explore specific cultural contexts for each game: mediation of the body in *Fight Night Round 2*, golf and golf culture in *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004*, quantification in *MVP Baseball 2005* and audience response to *John Madden Football 2005*.

Baerg's work is important as it represents one of the first scholarly attempts to move beyond simple classification of a sports videogame text, advancing the discourse with the kind of critical readings that have for a number of years been applied to many other genres of videogames but not sports videogames. While this thesis is certainly indebted to the work Baerg initiated, my eye is trained more specifically on the intertextual relationship between sports television and sports videogames. Baerg focuses on a few more recent videogame texts, while this thesis attempts to take a more historical approach to interrogating a specific media relationship in North America. While our methods may differ some, it is my hope that this work

will contribute to the critical analysis of sports videogames, and will help to situate not only sports videogames in the MediaSport ecology, but more specifically locate the overlap between sports television and sports videogame, understanding the latter through its relationship to the former.

The analysis of the games in this thesis is organized based on feature, not by game, to reinforce that over the short history of the genre many different titles have experimented with similar design approaches. The features chosen — opening sequences, audio commentary, in-game advertising, statistical overlay, news tickers, and replay — were all selected because they each represent direct reference to television production. Furthermore, these features each have multiple examples across the history of the genre to draw upon. These features show a complicated relationship to television that goes beyond a simple borrowing of aesthetic design, and this thesis will unpack some of the nuance and complexity of this intertextuality by looking at specific examples from sports videogames of televisual design. In all, I looked at approximately seventy-five sports videogames, ranging from publication in 1978 to 2013.¹ When possible, the games were played either on original equipment or through the use of emulation software. When playable versions of the games were not attainable, video footage of the games was reviewed. Because of technological advances, recently developed games for the current generation of home videogame consoles (Xbox 360, Wii, and Playstation 3) often exhibit more faithful recreation of televised sports, and thus many examples in this thesis are drawn from these games. However, as we will see, many of the features discussed have been experimented with and improved upon over the decades of sports videogame development, and so some

¹ For a full list of the games examined see the appendix.

continuity can be found tracing the genealogy of features throughout the short history of televisual sports videogames.

In addition to close readings of sports videogame features, this thesis will also look at the language of designers who have worked the games. Interviews were conducted with 4 current and one former developer of sports videogames from EA Sports, one of the two major sports game publishers. Current developers worked at Tiburon, an Orlando, Florida based studio where American football videogames are developed for EA Sports.² 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 was arranged and scheduled by a public relations employee of Tiburon¹. 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 email correspondence to clarify some key points.

One of the challenges posed by writing about sports videogames comes from the game inside of a game nature of the genre. Sports have games, and videogames are also games. Sports have players, and players play videogames. There are athletes and characters, though often they are one and the same. As you see, without care, a written argument can quickly devolve into a veritable Abbot and Costello routine — *“I’m not asking you, I’m telling you, Who is on first.”* For the sake of clarity I will separate my vocabulary. A *player* is a person who plays a sports videogame. A *character* is a representation of an athlete in a sports videogame. When I use the

² The interviews were set up with the understanding that I was looking for information related to the televisual aesthetic of sports videogames, so the interviewees were somewhat prepared in advance of our discussion.

term *game* I will be referring to the videogame, and when I say *match* I mean an instantiation of a simulated contest presented by the videogame. With any luck this may at least allow for no confusion as to what I am referring, though it will take more than clarified vocabulary to parse my argument henceforth.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Having dispensed with some of the necessary theoretic for this project, the next few chapters of this thesis dig into the examples of televisual remediation from sports videogames. As mentioned before these examples are organized by feature, starting with Chapter 3: Opening Sequences, and followed by Chapter 4: Commentary, Chapter 5: In-Game Advertising, Chapter 6: News Tickers, and Chapter 7: Replay. Each feature represents a different approach taken by designers to recreate experiences or features from televised sports. Each, in their own ways, also are examples of the presence of dominant ideologies of hegemonic sports culture in North America found in mediated sports.

Finally, the thesis concludes with some thoughts on how the relationship between sports videogames and television may be evolving as new distribution models and new technologies subvert established entertainment paradigms.

CHAPTER 3

OPENING SEQUENCES

SETTING THE STAGE

Sports broadcasts often begin with elaborate opening sequences. Dramatic music sets the mood as graphics of robots, colliding helmets and jet planes flash across the screen. The commentators who will be calling the game begin a hyperbolic description of the forthcoming match, with rich descriptions of the tenacity, the valor, the determination, and the prowess of star players. Intricate camera work, with montage edits of various shots set the stage for the event. A bird's-eye establishing shot of a stadium or arena will often be employed at the start of a broadcast to set the scene for the upcoming event.

In a famous memo written to ABC executives in 1960, then producer Roone Arledge detailed a desire to bring human drama into sports broadcasts, writing that with sports “we have a supply of human drama that would make the producer of a dramatic show drool. All we have to do is find and insert it in our game coverage at the proper moment” (Arledge, 2003, p. 32). He goes on to describe in detail the importance of an opening sequence that sets the stage for the viewer “the moment we take to air...” (Arledge, 2003, p. 32) The opening sequences of contemporary sports coverage serves as a shining example of Arledge’s vision. They have become important framing moments in sports broadcasts, setting up the narratives that will be explored throughout the broadcast.

Of course, the narratives that are established during those important framing moments of an opening sequence will often reinforce conventional sports ideologies. Even in Arledge's memo can be found references that either hint at or directly point to dominant ideologies in sport, such as the perceived gender disparity in sports fandom "women come to football games... to sit in a crowd, see what everyone else is wearing, watch the cheerleaders... (Arledge, 2004 p. 31), the fulfillment of dreams by seizing the moment "the beaming face of a substitute halfback as he comes off the field after running seventy yards for a touchdown, on his first play for the varsity (2004, p. 31)", and even the sexualization of sport, "very few men have ever switched channels when a nicely proportioned girl was leaping into the air or leading a band downfield.... (2004, p. 31)" The opening sequences, and the narratives that get set up in them, will often reflect the dominant ideologies that inform the production of the given sport being broadcast. Opening sequences for baseball games will often invoke the history of the game, a trope that has been well established in the sport. Football games are often referred to as a metaphor for war. Basketball opening sequences will often emphasize specific exceptional players like Michael Jordan, or specific rivalries between opposing players such as that between Larry Bird and Magic Johnson referenced before. These are not the only frames that are erected around the coverage of these sports, and for any given broadcast a reworking of a conventional angle will be leveraged to emphasize the "human drama" that Arledge saw an abundance of in sports culture.

Many televisual sports videogames have adopted a similar opening sequence, in a nod to the convention in televised sports. These videogame opening sequences, which precede the simulated sports contests, set up the videogame experience as referencing the televisual, and establish early in the game that the player will be assuming multiple perspectives, including that

of a television spectator. And just as the opening sequences of television broadcasts reinforce conventional narratives in sports, so too do the opening sequences in sports videogames.

NBA2K12, a National Basketball Association simulation, begins each game with a video of an establishing shot of a real arena like the Madison Square Garden in New York City, or the Staples Center in Los Angeles. As the recorded commentators introduce the upcoming basketball game, the scene crossfades from the real life video of the exterior of the stadium, to an interior vantage of the digital model wherein the game will be played. The incorporation of a full-motion video, and the fade into the digital recreated space emphasizes the ways that developers are positioning sports videogames in relation to the televised experience of the sport. It is remarkable that the photorealistic fidelity of contemporary videogames allows for such a transition to not be jarring for the viewer. More importantly, the use of the transition from establishing exterior shot, to interior shot of the stadium in the videogame represents a clear reference to the televisual heritage of the aesthetic of the game.

Games in *Madden NFL 13* too, sometimes begin with an aerial shot of the stadium wherein the simulation will take place. In this instance, the scene is not a full-motion video of an actual stadium, rather a birds-eye view of the digitally recreated model. As the camera slowly pans over the digital representation of a stadium, the commentator—Jim Nantz, a famous CBS commentator—introduces the game, welcoming an imagined audience to the location of the game, and announcing the two opposing teams. An informational graphic, reminiscent of those found at the start of a televised broadcast, reinforces for the viewer which teams are playing, and gives information about the temperature, location, time, and about the fictional televised production of the event. Where a real televised game might be branded “CBS Sports” or “ESPN”

depending on the network, in the instance of the videogame the contest is presented by “EA Sports.” On the one hand, players of the game understand that EA Sports is the videogame publisher, however the branding during the intro sequence for the game positions EA Sports in the place of networks, establishing for the viewer a connection between the network and the publisher.

Such connections have been experimented with in varying ways throughout the history of sports videogames; some more explicit and others more implied. In *John Madden Football '93* (EA, 1992) developers experimented with branding the presentation of the game under the “EASN” or “Electronic Arts Sports Network” label. There was no real “network” to speak of; the developers simply wanted to associate the game with the televised form of football by invoking broadcast with an imaginary network. This experiment was short lived as by the next iteration of the game the “EASN” branding was replaced with the more simple “EA Sports” and in *John Madden Football '95* (EA, 1994) the televisual branding was replaced with a reference to Fox Sports. Diverse elements ranging from a depiction of a mug on a John Madden’s commentary desk to a graphical overlay in the bottom corner of the screen read “Fox Sports” as a reference to the newly established television rights partnership between the NFL and the Fox network. The commentary team of John Madden and Pat Summerall, who had thereto-for been working for CBS, migrated to Fox that same year, and so the “Madden” branded videogame adopted the new Fox branding. With an eye towards opening sequences, when *Madden NFL '95* is first loaded, players are greeted by the familiar melody from the “NFL on Fox” theme music. Though the blaring brass and cannon drumming of the original is replaced by the relatively shallow MIDI synthesized facsimile, the music is immediately recognizable for players familiar with the Fox

football broadcasts. Though not as involved as the aerial fly over of later *Madden* games, the inclusions of recognizable music serves as a reference to the televisual inspiration for the football videogame.

Other titles throughout the short history of sports videogames used branded opening sequences to reinforce a connection to the televisual. *ABC Monday Night Football* (Data East, 1992) was released with a direct connection to the popular weeknight football program. Though the game did not have licensing rights to depict real NFL teams or players, it did feature ABC branding, music and logos from the television program, and the image of Frank Gifford, the show's popular commentator.³ Though primitive when compared to the intricate opening sequences for *Madden NFL 13* and *NBA2K12* described above, nonetheless *ABC Monday Night Football* (Data East, 1992) features an animated intro sequence when the game cartridge is first loaded. Two football helmets descend from a star filled sky onto the turf of a football field. Then, remarkably, they are both struck by lightning before lifting into the air and slamming into one another, exploding on contact. Such a bold, ostentatious introduction might seem foolish, except that the colliding helmet imagery was familiar from many television introductions to football games on television. In fact, throughout the early 1990s, ABC's "Monday Night Football" program opened with an animation of two helmets descending onto a field, and then slamming into one another in a dramatic explosion. No doubt the developers at Data East, when working on

³ The rights to player names and likenesses in videogames is negotiated by the players unions that represent the professional players. The leagues negotiate with game publishers for the rights to league owned properties like team names, logos, and uniforms. College athletes, because of their amateur status, are not permitted by the NCAA to have their name or likeness in videogames, though publishers have included players in the games that are direct references to real college athletes in everything but name. For more on the vagaries and nuance of the legal issues with likenesses in sports videogames see Huntemann, Nina. (forthcoming) "Likeness Licensing Litigation". In Consalve, M., Stein, A. & Mitgutsch, K. (Eds.) *Sports Videogames*. New York: Routledge.

ABC Monday Night Football in 1992, looked to the introduction of the television broadcast to serve as inspiration for their own videogame introductory sequence.

Sometimes the reference to the televisual opening sequences in sports videogames is more subtle, as with EA's *NHL '95* (EA, 1994). After the player selects the options for starting the game, the introduction features a screen with the logos and cities of the two teams selected opposite one another beneath a heading of "Scouting Report." The overall ratings of the two teams are presented as text representing a commentator types onto the screen. The text introduces the match, welcoming an imagined audience (as in the case with Nantz in *Madden NFL 13*) to the "sold out" arena. As the text fills the bottom half of the screen, the logos of the two teams switches to head shot photographs of two star players for each team, with their name and game rating beneath. Many television broadcasts also highlight star players during the introduction of the contest, placing still images of them on the scene along with some statistical information as the commentators speak about them. The introductory sequence of *NHL '95* abstracts some of the more dynamic aspects of a sports broadcast introduction, converting the commentary into written text, and reducing more detailed statistical representation to single ratings scores. However, the introductory sequence of the videogame is still reminiscent of an introductory sequence that could be found setting up the action on a televised broadcast.

"THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER," NATIONALISM AND MILITARISM

A commonplace occurrence in televised opening sequences, especially in high-profile events like the Super Bowl, or championship games, is the singing of the United States National Anthem "The Star Spangled Banner." The nationalistic and militaristic ties to sport are perhaps

no more apparent or on-display than with the presentation of the flag and the singing of the anthem at sporting events. As Luke Cyphers (2011) writes,

...in a country that lauds actions on the battlefield and the playing field, 'The Star Spangled Banner' and American athletics have a nearly indissoluble marriage. Hatched during one war, institutionalized during another, this song has become so entrenched in our sports identity that it's almost impossible to think of one without the other.

One of the first recorded instances of the National Anthem being sung at a sporting event traces back to the 1918 World Series between the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs, played during World War I, and a day after an act of domestic terrorism in Chicago left four dead and 30 injured. During the seventh inning of that game a military band on-hand played "The Star Spangled Banner" as the players on the field instinctively turned to face the flag and salute (Cyphers & Trex, 2011). Over the decades, the playing of the song evolved into a tradition at baseball games and other sporting events, the song only becoming the official National Anthem of the United States many years later in 1931. Today the song is performed before every sporting event in North America in which a team from an American city is playing, and the song and all of its nationalistic and militaristic baggage have become inextricably linked to professional sports. Television coverage of late has ignored the anthem, using that period of time to instead run advertisements, however during important or high-profile games the performance is still shown.

A number of televisual sports videogames have incorporated "The Star Spangled Banner" in opening sequences as well. An early example of this can be found in Konami's *Double Dribble* (Konami, 1987). Despite not being a licensed NBA basketball product, whenever a game was started an opening sequence showing crowds of people walking into a stadium would show and in the background would play an instrumental version of "The Star Spangled Banner."

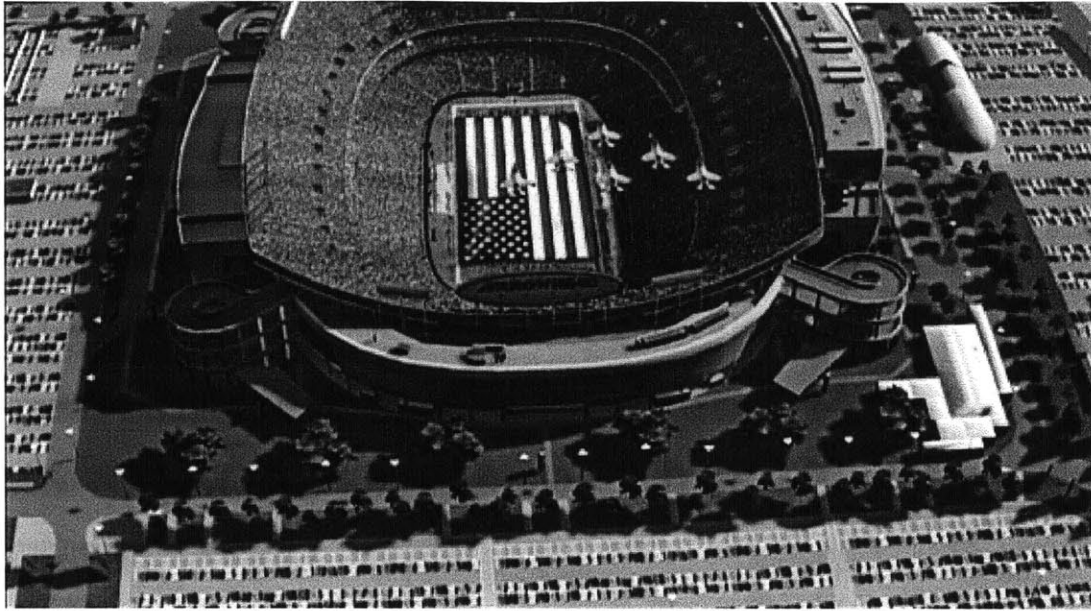


Figure 3: Jets fly over a flagged draped field in the *Madden NFL 12* playoff opening sequence.

During the opening sequence of *NHL 2K* (Sega, 2000), after the commentators and some players are introduced, the game cuts to an image of the hockey players standing on the ice in salute as the last bars of the National Anthem are played with a singer performing the words. *Madden NFL 12* (Electronic Arts, 2011) make a more explicit reference to the inclusion of the National Anthem on television only in high-profile games, as they show a different opening sequence for playoff games that includes the last bars of “The Star Spangled Banner,” images of a giant flag draped over the playing field, and a flyover of the stadium with military jets. The playoff opening sequence in the game is sponsored by the United Service Organization, a non-profit that provides programs for United States troops and their families.

The nationalistic and militaristic ideology found in North American mediated sport is very complicated, and a result of a long history tying them together. It would be audacious to attempt to unpack the entire relationship in this thesis, however it should be noted that televisual sports videogames do incorporate much of the nationalistic and militaristic language found in

sports in the games. Often those symbols and that rhetoric can be found in the opening sequences of televisual sports videogames.

NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS

A final, and comprehensive example of the ways sports videogames replicate television opening sequences can be found during the introduction to a game of football in *NFL 2K5* (2K Sports, 2004). Featuring ESPN branding born out of a licensing agreement between the game's publisher, 2K Sports, and the sports media conglomerate, the game showcased the shared branding by incorporating extensive ESPN images, music, and personalities. As a football game loads, the scene fades in on a digital model of Chris Berman, longtime commentator for ESPN. He is seated at an anchor desk, with a video screen over his right shoulder with the words "ESPN NFL Countdown" and the logos of the teams playing displayed, a direct reference to the longstanding pre-game show *Sunday NFL Countdown* that has aired on ESPN since 1996. Berman introduces the upcoming game, as a recording of his distinctly gravelly voice says any of a number of composited introductions over the ESPN NFL theme music; players might hear lines like, "Hi, I'm Chris Berman, they did it pretty much as a receivers by committee approach last year... one guy stood out as the Patriots went to the Super Bowl, the young speedster Deion Branch. See him in action today. Patriots, Raiders. It's go time!" As Berman finishes his introduction, the scene crossfades to any of a number of establishing shots: an aerial view of the stadium, fans filing into their seats, or players stretching on the field.

The detailed *NFL 2K5* introduction obviously owes much to the production of an ESPN pre-game show broadcast. The use of Berman, who himself introduces games on ESPN, is a

clear reference to the televised form of the game, and specifically, football broadcasts on ESPN. The music is familiar to viewers of ESPN, and the logos borrowed straight from the television network also serve to orient the player to the televisual aesthetic of the videogame.

The use of a line like “See him in action today” in Berman’s introduction also indicates the multiple roles and perspectives the player adopts while playing the videogame. The player is positioned as both an active participant, exercising competitive agency toward determining the outcome of the simulation, but also as a television spectator, watching the unfolding of an event without control. When Berman invites the player to “see” a digital version of a football player “in action” it suggests that the videogame character has its own life and agency that the player may witness, like a player in a game on TV. In a way, this is not at all wrong, as players usually only control one football “character” at a time in the videogame; the other players have complicated artificial intelligence dictating their action. Watching the AI characters move, controlling one at a time, can feel very much like watching a game on television. However, at any point in the game the player might switch control to the character Berman suggested he watch, Deion Branch in our example, thus shifting from role as spectator to that of active player. Throughout the videogame, players continuously dance between these roles, as moments in the game either emphasize the televisual or the interactive. Many times a game feature will delicately balance between the two, engaging the player as a kind of active spectator.

Opening sequences in both sports television and sports videogames are framing moments. In the often dramatic opening sequences producers establish the themes, narratives, and contexts that will be used throughout the rest of the mediated sports experience. As such, the represent moments where many of the ideologically informed themes found in a variety of different

aspects of the media production are established. This chapter presents just a few of the ways that dominant ideology of hegemonic North American sports culture are present in the opening framing sequences of sports television and subsequently televisual sports videogames. But with the ubiquity of sports coverage in the cable television age, and with evolving sports narratives, it bears continued observation of the development of increasingly involved opening sequences in televisual sports videogames to see how designers address recreating the evolving television convention.

CHAPTER 4

COMMENTARY

FROM RADIO, TO TELEVISION, TO GAME

In 1971, Don Daglow, then a writing student at Pomona, was hard at work developing a new baseball simulation for the room-sized PDP-10 mainframe computer (Rogers, 2009). A longtime baseball fan, as a youth Daglow frequently played a popular Cadaco-Ellis baseball board game, *All Star Baseball*, logging “literally thousands of games” (personal correspondence) 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 would later revamp his baseball simulation into *Intellivision World Series Baseball*, the first graphical baseball game, inspired by baseball on television that was described earlier. That Daglow’s first baseball game, on the PDP-10, drew inspiration from the radio commentators suggests the importance of narrative commentary to baseball specifically and to sport in general. Even as Daglow transitioned to a televisual simulation with *Intellivision World*

Series Baseball, he made a point to include audio commentary in the game to reflect the role of a sportscaster in the MediaSport broadcast experience.

Since the earliest days of televised sports, producers have incorporated audio commentary. As radio preceded television as a medium for coverage of sports, when the new visual media form grew in popularity, producers reworked the conventions of radio broadcast into the new form. This transition did not necessarily come naturally, as radio broadcasters had to learn how to adapt a radio style to the new visual medium. Reports about the about the first American televised baseball game in 1939 show just how clumsy the transition from radio to television was for sportscasters. Bill Stern, NBC's premier sportscaster, took the reigns for the first television broadcast, but as Walker and Bellamy write,

Although the video coverage was disappointing for both technical and artistic reasons, the announcing was even worse.... Stern... had no idea what the camera was showing at any given time. With no chance to coordinate his commentary with the video action, Stern simply called the game as though it were on radio, describing all of the action whether the audience could see it or not. (2008, p. 8)

Improvements to sports coverage on television were remarkably quick as the technological and artistic developments accelerated matching the growing demand for content subsequent to the explosive growth of television as a commercial medium. Many other sports radio broadcasters, like Red Barber, Vin Scully, and Howard Cosell transitioned from radio to television. In so doing, these sportscasters needed to adapt their method and style to accommodate the visuality of the new television medium.

INTERTEXTUALITY

In a sense, the incorporation of audio commentary in televised sports broadcasts represents another way that a newer media form incorporates features and aspects of an older

media form; an example of “remediation” not unlike that found in the relationship between televised sports and sports videogames. Bolter and Grusin’s *Remediation* does not offer an earth-shatteringly new theory of the relationship between so called “old” and “new” media (1999). Remediation is not so much new, as a unique way of conceptualizing age-old practice. The authors invoke McLuhan’s notion of a medium as the content of another medium, and even rhetorical *ekphrasis*, in which mediums interrelate. Indeed, they acknowledge the long history of intertextuality that precedes the idea of remediation, writing that digital media will “function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced. (1999 p. 50)”

Bolter and Grusin theorize on the boundary of ontology. They take pains to suggest that remediation is not, in fact, a new process, all the while attempting to leverage the theory to qualify the “newness” of so-called new media. For example, they write, “Repurposing as remediation is both what is ‘unique to digital worlds’ and what denies the possibility of that uniqueness. (1999, p. 50). Ontological obfuscation aside, remediation does offer compelling vocabulary and theory for reinvigorating analysis of intertextual relationships between media forms, and in this thesis specifically, for looking at the genealogy of televisual features in some sports videogames.

Many of the aspects of Bolter and Grusin’s theory build on older ideas of intertextuality found in poststructuralist literary theory following the linguistic philosophical turn throughout the twentieth century. Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin developed a popular theory of dialogism. 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). Other contemporary media theorists like Henry Jenkins have made similar arguments about media, calling the phenomena of intersecting forms “convergence” (Jenkins, 2008).

John Fiske theorized about intertextuality in television programming, presenting another way of considering the relationship between texts that is useful for considering not only how commentary evolved from radio, to television and on to games, but also how that commentary might be read in light of that evolution. Fiske emphasizes that intertextuality is not necessarily explicit, and that it “exists rather in the space *between* texts” (Fiske, 1987 p. 109). He differentiates between vertical and horizontal axes of intertextuality. For Fiske, horizontal intertextuality is more explicit, connecting primary texts “usually along the axes of genre, character, or content” (1987, p. 109). Vertical intertextual is more subtle and often more nuanced, and often operates between texts of different media forms. He writes:

Vertical intertextuality is that between a primary text, such as a television program or series, and other texts of a different type that refer explicitly to it. These may be secondary texts such as studio publicity, journalistic features, or criticism, or tertiary texts produced by the viewers themselves in the form of letters to the press or, more importantly of gossip and conversation. (Fiske, 1987, p. 110)

Fiske concentrates his argument about vertical intertextuality on so-called “secondary texts” such as fan produced narratives, or news stories, but his theories can just as easily be applied to the relationship between sports videogames and sports television. Fiske acknowledges the bi-directional relationship between texts. Writing about other forms of secondary texts, we can imagine Fiske talking about sports videogames when he writes, “It is important to talk about their relations with television and not to describe them as spin-offs from it, for the influence is

two-way. Their meanings are read back into television, just as productively as television determines theirs” (Fiske, 1987, p. 119). Considering how commentators are lending their voice and identity to both television sports and videogames, we can imagine that the videogame commentary is not only influenced by but also influencing and informing experiences of commentary on television as well. The relationship between the commentary in television and that in games is not on-directional, rather it is dialogic or vertical to use Fiske’s language. Especially as innovations in technology and design have lead to more fluidly procedural generation of commentary in games, with fewer awkward or robotic transitions, we can imagine the logics of that design are not only informed by the techniques of the experienced sportscasters, but also inform how fans interpret the commentary heard on television. That interpretation is very important, as commentary has a significant influence on how we read mediated sports in games and television alike.

NARRATIVE FRAMING

Despite evolving from the primary mode of engagement with radio to a complimentary mode accompanying the visuals of television, commentary plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative of a broadcast sporting event. Commentators help to frame the visual content with the trappings of conventional sports narrative (Sullivan, 2006). Raymond Williams called the commentators of televised sport “the real agents” (1970, p. 522) of the reactive event of televised sport, shaping the audience response. Sullivan addresses this important role, writing “Even sports broadcast TV’s most memorable moments... are given shape and purpose by the commentators’ emotional call of them” (2006 p. 140) He also acknowledges that the emotional dramatic

narrative framing employed by sportscasters can “tilt in the direction of bathos” (Sullivan, 2006 p. 140), reframing the sporting moment as melodramatic.

More than just melodrama, the narrative frames employed by sportscasters recursively feed the MediaSport industrial complex. We might take such analysis of sportscasting employed by Sullivan a step further, training a critical eye on how the conventional narrative frames employed by sportscasters will often reinforce dominant ideologies in sports culture. While Friedberg’s language of framing and perspective applied largely to visual windows, the audio commentary of a sports broadcast is another example of figurative framing. As I pointed out in the close reading of opening sequences, of which sportscasters play a pivotal part providing auditory narration, the dramatic framing of a sporting event is not free from the conventional themes that are abundant in sports broadcasting, too numerous to mention in total, but ranging from violence, militarism, nationalism and masculinity, to quantifiable merit, class struggle and even sexualized sport (Wenner, 1989; Jhally, 1989).

Sports commentators have evolved to become more than just the storytellers of a game, and many have become sports personalities that help to define the character of a given broadcast. Many former athletes have been hired to work as sportscasters following their playing career, choosing to stay a part of the game in broadcasts rather than head out to pasture. With the explosion of new local sports channels in the cable television era, many sports teams needed dedicated sportscasters to cover the television broadcasts of their games. Michael Freeman chronicles how the growth of ESPN as a cable network helped to propel specific sportscasters, and the role of the sportscaster in general, to new heights of popularity (Freeman, 2000) Sportscasters have always been a big part of the broadcast experience, and many have been

famous, but in the new era of ubiquitous and diffuse sports coverage, the sportscasters have taken an even greater role as the tastemakers and opinion leaders in MediaSport.

Televisual sports videogames have, since the earliest days of home console gaming, incorporated forms of television sportscaster commentary when possible. Daglow's *Intellivision World Series Baseball*, released in 1982, made use of the Intellivoice Voice Synthesis Module to include basic sportscaster commentary that would do some play-by-play of the game. As shown in the introductory anecdote about *Lakers vs. Celtics and The NBA Playoffs* I used to set up this thesis, even without recorded audio the presence of a commentator could be recreated through images and written text, an approach taken by many sports videogames before console technologies supported playback of extensive recorded audio. Most contemporary televisual sports videogames will include audio commentary as a main feature to reinforce the relationship between the game and televised sports.

The *Madden NFL* franchise of games represents perhaps the most immediate example of the role of the commentator in the design of televisual 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.

Ben Haumiller, a developer at EA Sports who works on the *NCAA Football* franchise, expressed in an interview conducted by phone 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.

Audio commentary has been one way that sports videogame developers have incorporated television network branding and identity in televisual sports videogames. Sportscaster personalities associated with major networks will often be hired to record their voice to be used in the games. The use of likenesses of sports personalities points to the significant role they assume in a sports television broadcast. Sportscasters have become identities that assume and help to define characteristics of specific sports broadcasts. So when a game like *Madden NFL* incorporates two CBS broadcasters, there is an associative tie created to the network, and the style and approach of that network's broadcast. The relationship of game to

television is strengthened by this association, no longer is the game a recreation of a generalized notion of sports television, rather it recreates, in-part, a specific television programming.

The use of personalities and televisual branding in sports videogames to strengthen the associative connection between the two media forms is not established just to create a so-called “authentic” or “real” experience as Haumiller suggests; of course the issues of licensing and the economic implications of a direct network to game relationship are at stake. One of the most significant examples of this kind of direct relationship can be found with a licensing deal established between ESPN, the largest sports media conglomerate in North America, and EA Sports, the largest publisher of sports videogames worldwide.

Early in the life of the company, Electronic Arts was considering how a relationship to the idea of a television network could work in sports videogames. Trip Hawkins, co-founder of EA, explained the origins of the fictional network and the scene with the two anchors introducing the game in *Lakers vs. Celtics and The NBA Playoffs*, “Don Traeger and Michael Kosaka were doing team basketball, such as *Lakers vs. Celtics*, and thought that since they had to present the teams and players and stats to start up a game, why not have it done by a fictional sports announcer for a fictional sports broadcasting network?” (Machinima, 2012). Eventually all the EA sports videogames would adopt the EASN brand, “Along the way it became obvious that all the sports games had this EASN thing in common and it had a good visual feeling, and it moved to the front of the box and became the overall product line branding for sports” (Machinima, 2012). The reference to ESPN was so obvious that it would ultimately lead to a business deal ending the use of the EASN branding, “It later became EA Sports because ESPN was jealous and offered a lot of free TV ads if we would change it—so we did” (Machinima, 2012).

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 shared 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 Raphael Poplock, the Vice President of Games and Partnerships for ESPN, commented on the deal, 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



Figure 4: A digital model of ESPN commentator Lee Corso wearing the mascot head for the University of Florida Gators (*NCAA Football 06*).

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.

Recorded commentary in televisual sports videogames often plays a key role in presenting sponsor relationships found throughout the games, reinforcing how the games are a

cog in the complex machinery of commodified and commercialized sport. I write at length, and in more detail in Chapter 5 about in-game advertising and how it simultaneously reflects the commercialization of the sports media industrial complex and also represents a way that game developers try to recreate a so-called authentic experience for fans, but it is important to make a note here about how central a role recorded commentary plays in sponsor relationships found in televisual sports videogames. For example, in the hockey simulation *NHL 12* (Electronic Arts, 2011) “Be a Pro” mode, wherein a player can simulate the career of a professional hockey player, every game is announced by commentator Gary Thorne as “brought to you by Verizon Wireless.”

Violence is also a prevalent theme found in commentary tracks in televisual sports videogames, which aligns with a consistent presence of violent rhetoric in televised sports. This language of violence is especially prevalent and explicit in the American football and hockey simulations, as the physical contact is a significant part of both sports, and a common theme in television coverage of those games. Commentators will emphasize collisions, often referring to them as “hard,” “violent,” or “explosive,” and athletes get “nailed,” “hammered,” or even “blown up.” Players are also extolled for being tough in the face of violence. A great example of this is the very specific commentary recorded by Chris Collinsworth about NFL wide receiver Anquan Boldin for *Madden NFL 11* (Electronic Arts, 2010):

“Anquan Boldin is simply one of the toughest players at any position in the NFL, we all think back to that tremendous hit he took, the broken jaw, the fact that he came back and played just a couple of weeks later, I just love watching this guy play the game.”

The commentary in these games is obviously not just descriptive; often the rhetoric valorizes the physicality of the athletes initiating the violent contact.

Another example of valorized violence in televisual sports videogame commentary can be found with descriptions of fighting in *NHL 2K7* (2K Sports, 2000). Fighting is a regular occurrence in the game of hockey, and while it is penalized in the rules of the games, it is considered to be an integral part of the sport by many players, fans, and journalists inside the culture of hockey in North America. In the videogames, commentators Bob Cole and Harry Neale, two *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcasters, get excited as the fight begins proclaiming “here we go!” as the players drop their protective gloves. They explain that imagined “contact” or “words exchanged” early in the simulated game may have lead to the fisticuffs. As one athlete tackles the other to the ice, thus ending the fight, the two announcers declare the winner of the fight. Such commentary around fighting is not exclusive to *NHL 2K7*, as many other hockey simulations with audio commentary feature similar reactions. The celebration of fighting in the commentary tracks falls right in line with the kind of reaction that might be expected from a televised broadcast of hockey on North American television. Fighting in hockey, and the violent action that defines the event, are valorized in the culture of hockey, and that valorization translates into the videogames.

In some instances, the ideology of sport that manifests through audio commentary is not intentionally designed into the experience of the game, rather it is a byproduct of ideological conflict and contestation in the design of different features in the game. For example, the developers of *NHL 12* (Electronic Arts, 2011) decided to include the option of playing as a female hockey player in the game, in-part as a response to a letter from a 14-year-old Canadian girl who was a fan of the videogame and of hockey. Players could design a female hockey athlete and use the character in-game. The commentary was not recorded or designed to accommodate

different gendered pronouns, however, and therefore throughout the game the female players would be referred to as “he” or “him.” This reflects the highly gendered, and predominantly male emphasized commentary found in hegemonic sports media. On the one hand, the videogame offers players the opportunity to subvert gender convention in professional hockey; a player could field an entire team of women hockey players. At the same time, the game commentary is biased toward male identity, creating gender conflict in the televisual presentation of the game.

The textual simulations of sportscasting, and the recorded audio commentary tracks, often from famous real life sportscasters all represent a design approach intended to reflect the conventions of North American televised sports. That the ideology of these sports cultures permeates the audio commentary of these games that are pushed yearly to recreate televised sports should come as no big surprise. There are, of course, other sports fan communities for whom North American televised sports is not the object of their fandom, and we might wonder how these communities approach televisual sports videogames.

MVP CARIBE

Some fans of sports who play sports videogames who are excluded by the recorded commentary tracks in televisual sports videogames take matters into their own hands as with the community behind *MVP Caribe*, a hacked version of EA’s 2005 MLB Baseball game *MVP Baseball 2005*. Following the exclusive licensing agreement in 2005 between the NFL and EA prohibiting production of any other NFL football videogames other than *Madden*, 2K Sports retaliated with the signing of an exclusive agreement to make MLB baseball games. While EA’s deal with the NFL killed the popular *NFL 2K* series of games, the counter agreement between 2K

Sports and MLB killed the very popular *MVP Baseball* franchise developed by EA Sports. The final version of the game, *MVP Baseball 2005* was released for home consoles and also for the PC.

Some latino baseball fans, for whom no baseball game recreating Caribbean Winter League baseball exists, endeavored to create a game that would give them a simulation of the baseball experiences that are meaningful to them. An ad hoc team of ten different developers, from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Mexico, and from different walks of life, developed the “total conversion mod” a set of files that dramatically changes the original *MVP Baseball 2005* game for the PC into a practically new game they call *MVP Caribe* (Good, 2010). The modification, or “mod,” overhauls the game, replacing all the MLB teams with Caribbean Winter League teams, replacing the uniforms and stadiums, all the players, and also, remarkably includes some spanish language commentary from Oscar Soria, a Spanish play-by-play commentator for the Arizona Diamondbacks MLB team.

The modded game is very popular in Mexico, where the press has covered the development of the game and where free advertisements for the game are run in Mexican League ballparks (Good, 2010). Héctor Rivera, one of the developers of the mod, spoke about how meaningful it was to have a game that represented the baseball that matters to Caribbean League fans saying, “we have dreamed of a video game with the Caribbean League teams, playing in our hometowns’ ballparks, with our players and our passion... Now I’m proud to say we have made those dreams come true for thousands of people” (Good, 2010). Caribbean Winter League baseball fans want for a simulation of *their* baseball, and they feel unrepresented by the available baseball videogames on the market. This sentiment is expressed in the banner for the

MVPCaribe.com website that reads “porque aqui tambien se juega béisbol...! [Because baseball is also played here]” (MVPCaribe.com, 2013).

The development of MVPCaribe with spanish language audio commentary serves as an example of how commentary in sports videogames is more than just a feature to help recreate a generic televised baseball experience, rather the inclusion of known sports personalities and specific language reinforces a specific hegemonic televisual sports experience — a North American version of televised sports. That a group of baseball fans endeavored to hack a pre-existing game to satisfy a specific fan community’s desire for a sports videogame shows that dominant hegemonic sports culture is not representative of all of sport fandom, and the sports videogame products of that hegemony do not address the wants of everyone.

I have pointed out how audio commentary in both sports television and sports broadcasts plays an important role in reinforcing the dominant ideologies of hegemonic sports culture. Commentators help to frame the experience in both media forms, drawing on conventional narrative tropes to shape the perspective of the viewer. Commentators have also become stars in their own right, adopting a role as a personality to which certain specific sports associations can be drawn. The example of *MVP Caribe* shows some of the limitations of the MediaSport complex in addressing the needs and desires of a diverse sports cultures, and it also shows how the hegemonic sports culture can dominant media production in the industry. Sports television, especially in the cable era, has become diffuse enough such that specific sports audiences are catered to with programming. Sports videogames, on the other hand, are still only simulating dominant MediaSport content. The *MVP Caribe* case shows the lengths sports fans are willing to go to satisfy their desires for a sports videogame experience that simulates

CHAPTER 5

IN-GAME ADVERTISING

COMMERCIALIZED SPORT

American sports television programming has long been inundated with endorsements and advertising. The stadia and arenas are plastered with large-scale neon and poster advertisements placed in locations regularly captured on camera. During the broadcasts, breaks in the action are filled with short-form advertisements, as has become the norm on many different kinds of television programs. In sports programming, these advertisement breaks are especially prominent in coverage of the four major American sports: football, baseball, basketball and hockey. Game rules for the professional leagues have even been changed to allow for more advertising, with modifications to overtime rules or with the inclusion of “TV time-outs.” Throughout the rest of the world, where soccer is more popular, ad breaks are less common in a television broadcast, as the action in a match is continuous and does not easily allow for interruption. To compensate, most of the teams carry sponsorship logos on their uniforms, and other aspects of the production like the score graphic and replays are sponsored and branded.

Increasingly, more different aspects of a sports production will be branded to allow for advertising during the action. Occasional pop-up graphics showing game statistics are often branded, displaying the colors and logos of a sponsor along with the information. Instant replays, on-screen graphics, unique camera angles (blimp), and more are presented to the viewer courtesy of the latest beer, truck, or stick of underarm deodorant. The networks carrying the coverage will

often use graphical overlays to advertise upcoming programming that they think the sports audience may be interested in as well.

Sports videogame designers are incorporating advertising into the games as well, and they are doing so in ways that explicitly reference television production. The advertising serves multiple purposes. On the one hand, in-game advertising is seen as a way to reinforce the realism of a sports videogame. As Mackay, Director of Community development for Netamin, developer of *ESPN Baseball Online* points out, “You don’t have to explain a billboard in the outfield or a cut scene that plays between innings” (Radd, 2007). The ubiquity of advertising in sports, and specifically televised sports, makes sports videogames a natural site for in-game advertising. Robert Fox, a Senior Vice President of TNS, a marketing research firm and the head of a study of sports fans in collaboration with ESPN states, “interactive entertainment [games] enables fans to engage with their favorite sports on a platform that looks incredibly close to the real thing. (Brice, 2010)” I argue that the concept of reality which Fox addresses is, in fact, a combination of an experience of sport as played and sport as televised. In-game advertising touches on both facets, with ads replicating in stadium billboards, and with more televisually inspired advertisements such as sponsored replays or sponsored visual overlays. Of course, it bears pointing out that billboards in a stadium are *also* televisual advertisements, as often the placement is designed to maximize capture on camera, and thus to reach a wider audience that includes the television audience. Some of the advertising also comes in the form of explicit brand relationships between sports television networks and sports videogames, which can also be seen as reinforcing a sense of the televisual for players, as well as explicitly tying the two brands together to create a direct association that reinforces hegemonic sports culture. Of

course, the advertising relationships established in both television and subsequently in-game often reinforce dominant ideologies, whether its an ad for a military related charity, or an advertisement for apparel manufacturers.

NCAA Football 13 incorporates advertising as a very explicit reference to the “ESPN College Gameday” program on ESPN that it continuously references. Many aspects of the game are branded as they are on television. The weather forecast a player sees as they load the options for the game are sponsored by The Weather Channel. Players can even choose to play the game based on an actual weather forecast from The Weather Channel for the current day and location of the simulation.

As the opening sequence for the game begins, with establishing shots and introductory dialog, a graphic showing the biographical information of important players pops up on the bottom third of the screen. Dove, the popular soap and hygiene products brand sponsors this small info-graphic, and the logo for the company is shown alongside the height and weight of the player. As the game is introduced, the voice of Brad Nessler, a famous ESPN commentator who lent his voice to the game, announces the sponsorship saying, “Tonight’s primetime matchup is brought to you by Dove men plus care, be comfortable in your own skin.” As if the player may have forgotten, a mere minute later after the teams have charged out of the locker room onto the field, another screen with the “College Gameday” titles and another advertisement for Dove flash across the screen. Nessler invites us down to the field for the coin toss, and reminds us that, “This game’s brought to you by Dove Men plus care.” EA Sports have incorporated a rotation of sponsors as sometimes Dove might be replaced by Coca-Cola Zero, Sparq, Nissan, or any of a number of other sponsors.

BUGS, REAL AND IMAGINED

In *NBA 2K12* (2K Sports, 2011), a basketball simulation, the developers take in-game advertising a step-further, adding fake advertisements into the mix. The game is filled with television inspired sponsored features like a “Sprite Slam Cam” branded instant replay of a slam dunk, a Gatorade branded time-out screen, a State Farm lineup card, or a Hewlett Packard halftime report. The most unique advertising feature in *NBA 2K12*, however, is when the game advertises a fake broadcast of an upcoming basketball game that only exists in the fantasy of the simulation. For example, during a game the camera occasionally cuts away during a break in the action and switches to a shot of the floor from the top of the arena. With the distance shot of the arena in view, two players superimposed over the scene walk into the bottom left corner and pantomime an argument. The games commentator announces that the player should “tune in” to an upcoming match between the two teams in the advertisement. The two superimposed players walk off the screen and the game resumes.

Called by television producers a “bug,” the superimposed small advertisement occupies only a corner of the screen, but fights for the viewers attention during the show (McClellan and Kerschbaumer, 2001). These bugs have become a standard part of a sports broadcast, as the television producers look for every opportunity to get viewers attention on sponsored messages. One of the most common uses for a bug in a sports broadcast is to advertise upcoming shows or programming to get the viewer to watch more of the network in the future.

The bug in *NBA 2K12* advertises a fictional upcoming broadcast for an imagined network. Such an advertisement of a wholly fictional upcoming game serves no financial purpose, as there is no network that is being endorsed. It also has no operational bearing on the

simulation; it does not effect the outcome of the game or how the player interacts with it. The fictional advertisements exists solely to reinforce a connection between the basketball videogame and coverage of a basketball game on television. This is a strong example of the ways developers include features that reference sports television to create a videogame experience that occasionally positions the player as a television spectator.

The use of advertisements throughout the *NCAA College Football 13* and *NBA 2K12* games serve two related but unique purposes. With most real advertisements the game publisher benefits from the revenue from sponsorship. Perhaps more importantly the designers can incorporate in-game advertising that fit the televisual aesthetic of the videogame. Sports fans have become so naturalized to the experience of advertising peppered throughout the broadcasts that to experience the same in a videogame depiction of a broadcast makes sense. In fact, developers believe that the in-game advertising enhances the authenticity of the videogame in recreating an experience that mirrors a television broadcast (Stein, forthcoming).

Advertising relationships are often born out of a sense of shared audience, or because of a desire on the part of either the advertiser or the content producer to draw a connection between the values of the two institutions.⁴ This is of course manifest in the kind of advertising seen in sports videogames, which often mirrors advertising found on television. While in some cases, the advertising is indicative of a sense of shared audience, as can be found with advertisements for underarm deodorant, apparel manufacturers or insurance companies. Many times a company that advertises on a television broadcast of a sport will choose to advertise in the sports videogame as well. State Farm Insurance is a sponsor of TNT's NBA coverage, and they are also a prominent

⁴ It is also my assumption that the sponsor relationships are lucrative for both companies. Details about these financial benefit to these companies from these relationships proved difficult to find despite searching through trade publications for reports on the deals.

sponsor found in *NBA 2K*. Pepsi-Cola is a featured sponsor of Major League Baseball, and often run ads during baseball broadcasts, and there are also Pepsi billboards plastered throughout digital stadiums in *MLB 2K*. The extension of a television advertising relationship into the videogame space supports Mackay's notion that advertisements in sports media are so commonplace that they feel natural in televisual sports videogames, to the point that they may in fact enhance the notion of realistic sports representation. In a way, the highly commercialized nature of media sport is an ideology that is implicitly reinforced by the inclusion of advertising in sports videogames as a natural and obvious extension of other sports media.

Sometimes the relationship can be more obviously ideological. For example, *MLB 13: The Show* has billboards in many of the digitally recreated stadiums advertising the non-profit organization Welcome Back Veterans. An official Major League Baseball charity, Welcome Back Veterans is an organization that helps military veterans receive treatment and assistance after their term of service has ended. On the one hand, the inclusion of the charity advertisements in the game is subsequent to the connection the organization has with Major League Baseball. At the same time, however, the relationship reinforces the nationalistic, and even militaristic values that can be found in professional sports. The relationship between MLB and Welcome Back Veterans is not exclusive to the videogame medium, and there are in-stadium advertisements for the charity in real life as well, but the inclusion in the sports videogame serves as an example of how the inclusion of in-game advertising can reinforce ideologies found in hegemonic sports culture.

A slightly different example of in-game advertising, but one that still exhibits the corporate relationships found in sports media, is the ubiquity of advertisements for sports apparel

companies in televisual sports videogames. The inclusion of sport apparel ads seems like a tremendously logical fit — famous athletes are often used to promote sneaker or apparel brands in television advertisements, so including the apparel ads in a sports videogame as well makes sense. Branded apparel and equipment can be found on players, from Riddell football helmets to Warrior Hockey sticks and Nike basketball sneakers. But this form of advertising is not directly tied to the televisual. Other examples, like frequent Majestic Apparel ads in *MLB 13: The Show* and Easton logos on the boards in *NHL 98* are a direct reference to stadium advertising that is directed at both attendant and televised audiences.

Coca-Cola's Sprite brand has had a long association with the National Basketball Association, going back to 1994 when the lemon-lime beverage became the “official” soft-drink of the NBA (Emmett, 2011). The annual Slam Dunk Competition performed every year during the NBA All-Star weekend has been branded in association with Sprite, and subsequently, Sprite has been included as a prominent brand in *NBA 2K* videogames. The *NBA 2K* games feature a



Figure 5: A good example of the ubiquity of advertising in televisual sports videogames — note the “Sprite Slam Cam” bug in the lower left, and the “State Farm” and “Spalding” ads on the backboard support arm.

“Sprite Slam Cam” instant replay sequence for slam dunks that occur in the game, and the recreation of the slam dunk contest is also sponsored by Sprite.

While superficially the connection between Sprite and the NBA, and the inclusion in *NBA 2K* may seem inauspicious, there is evidence that suggests it is an extension of efforts on the part of Coca-Cola to target a young black audience with Sprite advertising (Harris et. al., 2011). According to a 2011 Yale Rudd Center Study, the connection between Sprite and the NBA was thorough with 67% of the television ads for Sprite connected to the NBA or NBA athletes (Harris et al., 2011 p. 57). The report also suggests that Sprite is disproportionately advertised toward black youths (Harris et al., 2011 p. 66). This targeted advertising, both in televised sports and sports videogames, serves as an example of how race plays a prominent factor in the production and support of the North American sports media industrial complex. Notions of race and identity in sport are a contested space, with hegemonic sports ideology framing dominant narratives about race in sport.

The sponsor relationships present a seemingly win-win profit scenario for publishers and developers of televisual sports videogames. As aforementioned, developers feel that in-game advertising in sports videogames are actually effective for reinforcing a sense of “realism” or “authenticity” because of the highly commercialized form of contemporary televised sports, and thus the expectation on the part of videogame players to see advertising in their mediated sports experiences. The sponsorships are also another source of revenue for the publishers of the games, as the companies pay large sums of money to have their brand integrated in the popular sports titles. Proctor and Gamble, makers of the “Old Spice” hygiene products, payed an undisclosed six-figure sum to have “Old Spice Red Zone Deodorant” as a sponsor for the halftime show in

NCAA Football 06 (Sports Business Daily, 2004). Old Spice was not the only brand featured in *NCAA Football 06*, as Pontiac sponsored a “Drive Summary” video highlight recap scoring drives in the game.

The use of advertising in televisual sports videogames, while seen as a positive for developers and fans who are seeking an authentic recreation of televised sports, also signifies the extent to which mediated professional sports in North America is a highly commercialized and commodified affair. Jhally has suggested (1984; 1989), as we interrogate the inextricable link between sports and media, we see that a driving factor in the production of that sports media industrial complex is the politics of economy and commodification. Such a dramatic influence of marketing and commercialization is not without some consequence, and it needs increased scrutiny. As Trevor Slack (1998) writes, “While the organizational and managerial changes we have seen take place as sport has increasingly become a form of commercial activity can be enabling and beneficial for sport and sports people, they can also be constraining and, as such, should be the subject of more critical analysis than occurs at present.” As sports videogames have become more sophisticated in recreating televisual experiences, the role of sponsors and advertising has increased, and it is important to keep an eye on what impact these relationships have on the development of these games.

CHAPTER 6

NEWS TICKER

The news ticker or crawl, a continuous stream of succinct news information that scrolls across the bottom of the screen, is another ubiquitous feature of contemporary sports broadcasting referenced in sports videogames. The ticker, resembling a scrolling stock ticker, can carry any manner of information to the viewer to supplement the action in the scene, and sports broadcasters have been using it on television for years to update viewers with scores and statistics. The ticker in sports videogames serves as yet another signal of sports television production, and as an example of the way games simulate the experience of watching televised sports.

While many of the other examples of televisual design in sports videogames are recreations of television production techniques, what makes the ticker unique is that occasionally the implementation in sports videogames is identical to that found on television. That is to say, the crawl found in games is occasionally not a recreation, rather a replica of that found on television, carrying concurrent news information regardless of the medium. The implementation of nearly identical visual features in both sports videogames and television is an instance of more tightly integrated media convergence, and that closeness reinforces the intertextual relationship between the two different media forms.

The news ticker, like many of the other televisual features found in sports videogames, helps to situate the player in the role of spectator with agency, one of two conflated perspectives

addressed by the videogame as simulation of both sport as played and sport as televised. Furthermore, the crawl serves as a visual frame in the sense that Friedberg employs the idea, literally and figuratively bounding the screen, and establishing a vantage for the player as spectator, and situating the content in the context of broader mediated sport.

While the history of the scrolling news ticker can likely be traced back to stock tickers and news wire agencies, the modern example scrolling across the bottom of television news programming is often traced to the beginnings of NBC's *The Today Show*. In the very first broadcast of *The Today Show* on January 14th, 1952, as Dave Garroway reported the news, a paper news scroll crawled across the bottom of the screen next to a graphic showing the time (NBC News Time Capsule, 1952). Between those early origins on NBC and the current instantiations of the crawls, the story of the development of the news feed is rather mysterious (Sella, 2001; Keefe-Feldman, 2007). Despite a dearth of research on the phenomena, what sources do exist agree that the modern form of the 24-hour news crawl really took shape on September 11, 2001 as all the networks covering the event began to display a ticker or crawl to give viewers up to date information on the events transpiring at the World Trade Center (Sella, 2001; Keefe-Feldman, 2007, McClellan & Kerschbaumer, 2001).

Most sports programming, regardless of the network, now feature a crawl with sports scores and topical news items occupying the feed. ESPN runs their "BottomLine" ticker across the bottom of the screen during all programming except for advertisements. In recent years, the crawl has evolved, migrating from the bottom portion of the screen. On the popular ESPN sports news program "SportsCenter", there are two simultaneous tickers on the screen. The traditional

BottomLine ticker carries news and scores from around the world of sports, while on the left side of the screen another ticker carries the order of stories as they will appear on the show.

The crawl serves as an immediate example of framing in modern visual media. The crawl is another boundary, one inside the dimensions of the physical television itself, that separates different perspectives. At the heart of *The Virtual Window* is an analysis of how windows and frames, whether real or virtual, shape the perspectives we assume as we encounter visual media. As she writes, "the window has a deep cultural history as an architectural and figurative trope for framing of the pictorial image. An opening in architectural space, the window supplies a common metaphor for the various frames that form its virtual analogs, the frame of the painting and the photograph, the screens of the movie, television and computers. (Friedberg, 2006 p. 5)" To really understand Friedberg's argument, it is useful to explore how she defines the terms "window" and "frame" in the context of her work.

Windows are fundamentally tied to perspective. The window is most commonly conceived of as a material device separating subjective position from viewed space, interior from exterior, such as with a window in the wall of a building. As Renaissance artist Leon Battista Alberti posited, windows are apertures for light and ventilation, differentiated from doors through which people move. Friedberg emphasizes that windows are not transparent, rather translucent, they effect the image falling within the frame. We are surrounded by physical windows of many different kinds, from gallery vistas to decorative stained glass, and as we imagine the many different kinds of material windows in our world, the connection to vision and perspective becomes, well, clear.

As Friedberg thoroughly points out the window has also been, as theorized since Alberti, an "epistemological metaphor," a means for making sense of our subjectivity and subsequent visual perspective. In other words the window is a "figure for the framed view of the viewing subject" (Friedberg, 2006 p. 26). She directly connects the figure of the window with perspective, writing "the window and its common metaphysical corollary, perspective, have remained central figures in theorizations of the space of vision" (p. 5).

Friedberg agrees with Joseph Masheck's correction of Alberti's original metaphor of a painting as window, re-articulating the role of the frame in shaping the figurative trope. While the window suggest perspective, it is the frame of the window, its boundary, that serves as "the grounding metaphysic of its view" (Friedberg, 2006, p. 33). The metaphor of a frame has been used for centuries as a limiting, boundary establishing concept. A frame can be a housing for a painting or photograph. In still or moving photography, a scene is either in our outside of the frame. We can frame our thoughts, or frame an argument. For visual media, frames shape perspective. As Friedberg writes, "the frame of the image, the frame of the screen, serve as the boundary demarcation between the screen world and the material world of the spectator" (Friedberg, 2006, p. 84). The importance of the frame to film, television, and I argue games, is fundamental. As Friedberg surmises, "the overarching convention of moving-image technologies—of cinema and television—is the containment of the moving image within a frame" (Friedberg, 2006, p. 85).

The idea that frames shape perspective is well established, but a question remains regarding what happens to our sense of perspective when the window of a screen is segmented, disjointed, and subdivided into multiple frames. In the fifth chapter of *Virtual Window* entitled

“The Multiple,” Friedberg addresses the effect of multiple frames, an occurrence she describes as being increasingly common in visual media since modernity. Her sense of increased multiplicity resonates with experiences of digital games “With the advent of digital technologies and new technologies of display in the 1990s, the media “window” began to follow painting’s and architecture’s lead in the challenge to a fixed perspective” (Friedberg, 2006, p. 192).

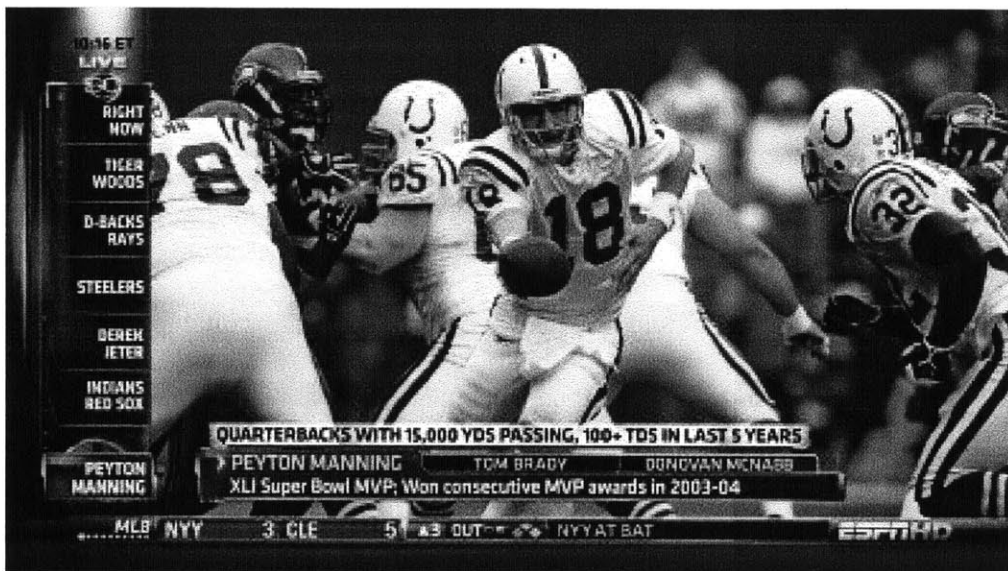


Figure 6: Vertical and horizontal framing of the scene with news crawls on ESPN programming.

Friedberg rightly acknowledges that the development of this frame within a frame moment in cinema and television has developed alongside innovations in graphical user interfaces (GUI) for interactive digital media, like games. Her sense of the contemporary history of visual media aligns with my own understanding of developments in in sports broadcast aesthetics changing as sports videogames grew in popularity during the cable era as described in Chapter 1. She finds the GUI influence leading to increased framing and disjuncture on “Cinema and television screens, the once sacrosanct domain of the single image” that “have been invaded by text crawls, inset screens, and pop-up windows” (Friedberg, 2006, p.194).

Such layered and framed visual design reaches a new level of sophistication with televisual sports videogames. Designed to model the visual aesthetics of sports television broadcasts, but augmented by the display of information pertaining to the interactivity such as controls or gameplay instructions, the televisual sports videogame screen becomes a collage of intersecting frames and subsequent perspectives. As mentioned earlier, sports videogames simulate both the played and televised experiences of sport, and the two perspectives of player and spectator intersect and collide with the overlapping frames on the game screen. In this way, Friedberg's theory holds fast, as televisual sports videogames do represent a collapse of multiple perspectives through the use of multiple frames. That sports videogames came into existence at the same time television producers increasingly experimented with the digital technologies that afford this kind of perspectival disjuncture is no coincidence. The development of this aesthetic of multiple perspective in sports videogames and in sports television was necessarily simultaneous and shared.

Regarding the news ticker specifically, Friedberg cites a "programming style cluttered with text crawls and inset frames..." (2006, p. 193) as an example of multi-perspectival framing in new visual media. The crawl itself, as exemplified by the SportsCenter implementation, occupies spaces on the edges of the scene, acting as a frame inside of a frame. Quite literally, the tickers surround the other content. The frame of the physical television becomes extended into the screen, wrapping the content with endless text information in constant motion.

That the crawls carry information from the world of sports, suggests that the tickers are not only literal frames for the content, but also serve to metaphorically frame sports content with a never ending stream of sports context. Indeed, the crawl delivers information that helps to

shape how fans spectate an event on television. A sporting event becomes instantly connected to the events of the sports world around it, according to the news populating the feed. Where once a viewer might have needed to wait to see how the outcome of a contest would impact standings for a league, now that information is delivered simultaneously. For example, a score may appear in the crawl showing that a team in first place lost, putting new emphasis on the performance of the second place team being broadcast. The information is not just a convenient means for framing the competition of sport for spectators, it also supports continuous sports television consumption, encouraging future viewership to those tuned-in. Subtle advertisements for upcoming contests broadcast on the network, not unlike the bugs that do the same, will populate the ticker.

News crawls will also carry information that may be only tangentially related to the events being broadcast. In the fall of 2007, updates about the federal indictment of former baseball player Barry Bonds on charges of perjury related to statements made about steroid use continuously made its way across the sports tickers during any sports content. Bonds' legal woes were seen as sports human interest stories, and were deemed appropriate for the news crawls. Other news, such as the passing of retired athletes, the selection of Olympic host cities, or any other deemed "news worthy" sports information will populate a sports ticker at any given point. While the majority of information in the crawl during sporting events will be related to sports, other topical news that is considered by broadcasters to be "breaking" or "important" may find its way onto a crawl. Of course, the crawl is informed by the ideologies of the producers choosing the news content that populates the crawl, and the sportsmedia industry tends to feed itself.

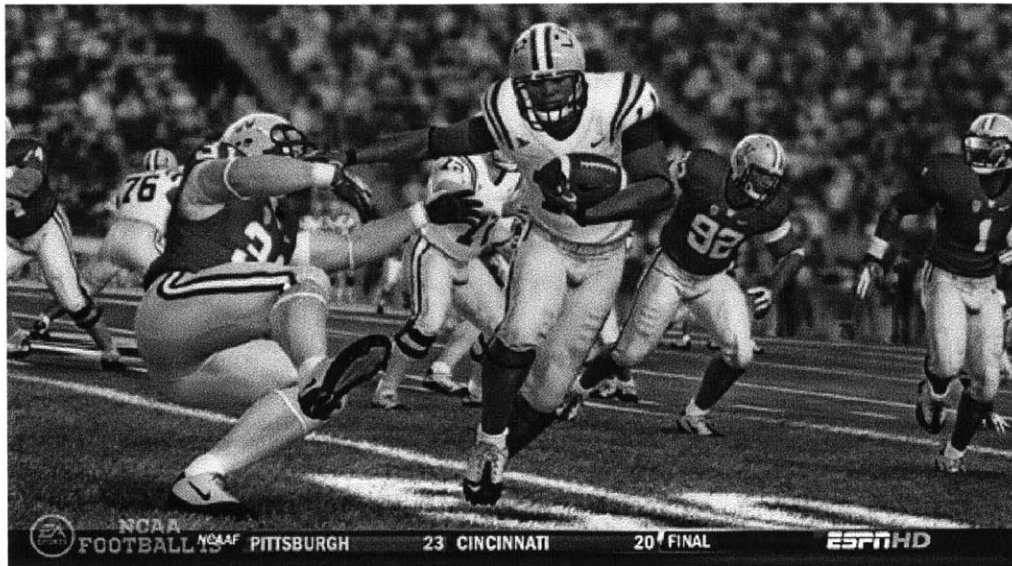


Figure 7: An example of the ticker used in a videogame from *NCAA Football 13* (Image courtesy of EA Sports).

A recent development, spurred by the massive popularity of online fantasy sports games, has been to carry fantasy statistics for top players in the feed. The Fantasy Sports Trade Administration estimates that over 32 million people play fantasy sports in North America (FSTA, 2011), and not surprisingly television producers recognized that there was significant overlap between fantasy sports players and the sports television audience. The use of the sports crawl in a television broadcast to display pertinent information about a sports videogame represents an example of the convergence of the two media. In this case, the televised form plays a role in the videogame, providing useful and actionable information to the player. Of course, with viewership at stake, the producers of fantasy sports and sports television (who at times are one in the same) can support consumption of both through a strong relationship. Players of fantasy sports will tune in to sport television to support their fantasy sports play experiences, and fantasy sports games encourage viewing of televised sports. The crawl supports this relationship,

encouraging viewers to play fantasy sports by offering them relevant statistical information, and supporting continued television viewing for players with the same.

Turning to televisual sports videogames, many feature a scrolling crawl of information across the bottom of the screen during play. In *NCAA Football 2013* for example, a version of the ESPN “BottomLine” appears on the bottom section of the screen throughout the entire game, from main menus to gameplay. The ubiquity of the crawl throughout the game mirrors the constant crawls found on the ESPN television networks during all broadcasts. The crawl is but another way that the game positions the player in the role of a spectator, experiencing the videogame as though it were television. The scrolling information, as a partial frame for the scene, bears a striking resemblance to television broadcasts of college football on ESPN; so much so that a cursory glimpse of the game could be easily mistaken for television.

For the “Dynasty” mode of the football game, where players can manage and control a team across multiple seasons, the crawl is cleverly designed to support immersion in the fictional game world. Scores from simulated games that the user does not control are shown to the player relative to the time in the game world. If the player is playing a game at 1PM in the game world, then scores from other games being played at 1PM are shown to be in progress. Games “scheduled” to be played later in the game world day are shown to have not started yet. Because college football fans understand that results from around the country can impact a team, they are accustomed to watching the ESPN ticker for updates about games in progress.

NCAA Football 13 designer Christian McLeod described the inspiration for and the design of the ticker feature on the blog for the game. He describes how, as a football fan, he enjoys spending Saturdays during the season watching as the unique stories of that week unfold:

“If I’m not flipping between channels during each commercial break, my eyes are glued to score tickers and updates from around the country at every break in the action. (McLeod, 2012)” The ticker was a step taken by the team to create a “truly dynamic, living college football experience...” (McLeod, 2012). That the dynamic experience is inspired by the experience of “spending an entire Saturday in front of the television...” (McLeod, 2012) tells us a lot about how the developers of the game thought about the multiple perspectives of players engaging the game. They wanted to create an experience where players could feel immersed in the fictional world of the game, and they utilized familiar spectator experience to draw players in.

On the menu screens, however, the crawl features statistics, scores, and news stories from around the sports world, and thus is no different from the ticker one would find on ESPN. This is a significant departure from some of the other examples of televisual references in sports videogames, as the feature is no longer a reference to television, rather a wholesale adoption of a television production element. While players clearly understand the difference between the real world information in the crawl, and the simulation of the sport in the game, this example exhibits some of the nuance inherent in the dual role assumed by sports videogame players. The crawl addresses the player as a spectator, doing so exactly as it functions on television. At the same time the player is engaged and controlling the game, and parsing the information from the simulation they receive from the crawl.

For the inexperienced, the blend of real world sports information with the simulated game could create confusion, but for the sports videogame literate, the crawl is a natural fit in the game. The game world of *NCAA Football 13* runs for the duration of consecutive college football seasons. The information scrolling in the news crawl, however, is current to the actual

date of the videogame play session. The player may be setting up a game of football in the snow on December fifteenth in the videogame, while seeing scores from a professional baseball game in August in the crawl. Despite the temporal incongruity, players are largely acclimated to just such a phenomenon. The dual temporality of the in-game events being overlapped and framed by current information also reflects the multi-perspectival experience of televisual sports videogames. The player is simultaneously a spectator of the football game, and audience for contemporary sports information from real life sporting events.

In this instance, the two purposes of the crawl, to feed real world scores to the player and to reinforce the sensation of watching television are not in direct conflict, and work in concert. This speaks to the ways with which a literate sports videogame player is comfortable shifting between the roles during gameplay. With ease the sports videogame player floats between perspectives, taking in related yet perhaps temporally disjointed information. Indeed, the comfort with which a sports videogame player assumes the dual identity suggests that the dialogic relationship between sports videogames and television has become naturalized in the sports media ecology, as players expect to experience this complicated dual subjectivity.

CHAPTER 7

REPLAY

Instant replay has become ubiquitous in sports television programming. At the most basic, instant replay is a reiteration of a prior visual sequence, produced to emphasize a specific sports moment of import such as a home run, a touchdown, or a penalty. Digging a little deeper, instant replay plays with temporality, creating a rupture in the perceived liveness of sports programming, as sequences are disrupted through the use of a replay of footage. The use of instant replay, eased into popularity through the invention of magnetic tape recording, and eventually digital video, has roots in newsreel, and early television network sports highlight shows such as NBC's *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* (Gamache, 2010). The ability to easily disrupt live sequence with pre-recorded images that came with magnetic tape and digital video, however, dramatically changed news television as well as all different types of sports programming.

Not surprisingly, there is debate as to the first instance of in-game instant replay on television. A widely accepted belief is that instant replay debuted on December 7, 1963, during the broadcast of the Army-Navy football game on CBS (Hanson, 2008; Malinowski, 2010; Connelly, 2009). The audience was not primed for the innovation. The new technology was used only once in the game to replay an Army touchdown, and left viewers bewildered, believing that the Army team had, in fact, scored twice. Viewers phoned in to CBS inquiring what had happened, and sportscaster Lindsey Nelson had to explain to viewers what they had just seen (Hanson, 2008; Malinowski, 2010).

However, more than a decade earlier, producer George Retzlaff leveraged novel kinescope processing technology to show replays for *Hockey Night in Canada* on the Canadian Broadcasting Channel (Hanson, 2008; Gamache, 2010). Retzlaff's process was involved and expensive, and as Christopher Hanson (2008) points out in his analysis of instant replay practice, "the advent of magnetic tape technologies and their rapid adoption by the broadcast industries during the 1950s facilitated the widespread proliferation of equipment with the capacity to perform instant replays" (p. 51).

As instant replay evolved, and new magnetic tape and digital technologies allowed for features like slow-motion and zoom, replay has folded back onto the sports covered by television, in many instances becoming incorporated into the games' rule systems. In 1986, the National Football League in America first adopted instant replay technology in-game, allowing officials to watch taped replay video of a play to make a decision about a ruling on the field (Hanson, 2008; Long, 2009). The use in the NFL has expanded to allow coaches the option to ask for a replay twice per game; the request coming at a cost, however. If the ruling on the field, after review, does not change, the team asking for the replay loses an often precious time-out. Other sports like baseball have flirted with instant replay technology; in Major League Baseball now controversial home run calls can be reviewed at the discretion of the umpires.

With over half of a century of development, instant replay in televised sports has expanded far beyond the somewhat simple redundant sequence of identical footage. Arrays of multiple cameras, digital video recording, and graphical visualizations have made the instant replay a robust feature of sports television. Replays will be shown from multiple camera angles,

slowed down, drawn over to illustrate a specific point, and in the case of controversial or exciting plays, will be shown over and again throughout a broadcast.

Replays represent a temporal disruption, a break from the supposed “liveness” of a broadcast. Replays recast our understanding of a sequence, putting an event in the context of itself. As Hanson writes “... because the replay is a repetition of something we have already experienced, our re-experiencing of that sequence has unavoidably been fashioned by our previous experience of the sequence. The replay thus iteratively and recursively re-defines our experience of a given sequence—it is at once very much a part of the flow of television, yet is also a disruptive break in its passage” (2008, p. 58) While the anecdote of viewers being confused by their first experiences of replay suggests that reading of replay is by no means intuitive, the ubiquity of repeated footage in all different kinds of televised content has naturalized television viewers to the “disruptive break” of a replay.

In this sense, replays have become a great example of perspectival multiplicity, with the viewer occupying increasingly diverse, temporally ruptured, and graphically modified vantages. Often frames are used to separate the replay from the live action; as a replay of the controversial call is shown in slow motion, with commentators drawing circles around the key moment, another frame will surround a close-up of an irate coaches face as he screams at an official. The frames separating replay from “live” footage reinforces the perspectival multiplicity, and the disjointed temporality of a sports broadcast. Indeed, it is often up to the sportscaster to narrate replayed sequences to clarify to viewers what is current, and what already occurred. Turning on a sporting event, and first seeing a replay, often leaves a viewer temporarily confused, wondering if the sequence being shown is live or a replay. Framing a replay, thus creating a boundary

between the repeated sequence and the live action, serves as an attempt to clarify for viewers what is being shown, all the while maintaining a multi-perspectival experience.

Instant replay, while certainly enjoyed by sports fans, are not free from the ideologies that inform the production of televised sports, and subsequently sports videogames. After all, choices are made as to what is replayed, and in those choices, for reasons aesthetic or otherwise, are embedded a host of different influences that are shaped by the cultural production of North American sport and by the conventions developed throughout the history of television production. Clarke and Clarke (1982) recognize that instant replays in sports serve two ideological masters, sports and television. or as Whannel writes, citing Clarke and Clarke, “Television, according to its own formal needs, restructures a set of complex ideological elements present around sport itself” (1984, 103). None-the-less, instant replay does reinforce many of the tropes found throughout SportMedia, including narratives of dominant masculinity, of the grandeur of spectacle, of exceptionalism and more. Consider, for example, the ubiquity of replay when a player gets injured after a collision on a football field. On the one hand, it could be argued that the replay is merely informational, to exhibit how the player got hurt. On the other hand, the repetition of the violence, often with an emphasis on the loud recorded sound of the collision, reinforces a football narrative of power, of masculinity, of violence and to some extent the metaphor of football as war. Many of these practices, of sports ideology wrapped into production of instant replay, are reproduced in televisual sports videogames.

Some early sports videogame titles experimented with how to incorporate instant replay as a feature. The Konami basketball game *Double Dribble* (1986) featured a a unique cutscene animation that resembled the use of instant replay. Throughout most of the game, players

controlled the action from a standard broadcast perspective looking over the court from the sideline. When a player executed a slam dunk in the game, however, the scene would cut to a non-interactive scene from a perspective looking up at the hoop as an athlete dunks the ball. While not explicitly described in the game as a replay, the sudden shift in perspective, and the transition to a non-interactive scene is reminiscent of a televisual instant replay. Like instant replay on television, it also represents a dramatic temporal and spatial shift, as the player is transported in an instant to a new perspective. Furthermore, that the replay is a dunk not only references the fact that slam dunks are often the subject of replay on TV, but also that the powerful, dominant scoring act is something to admire and valorize.

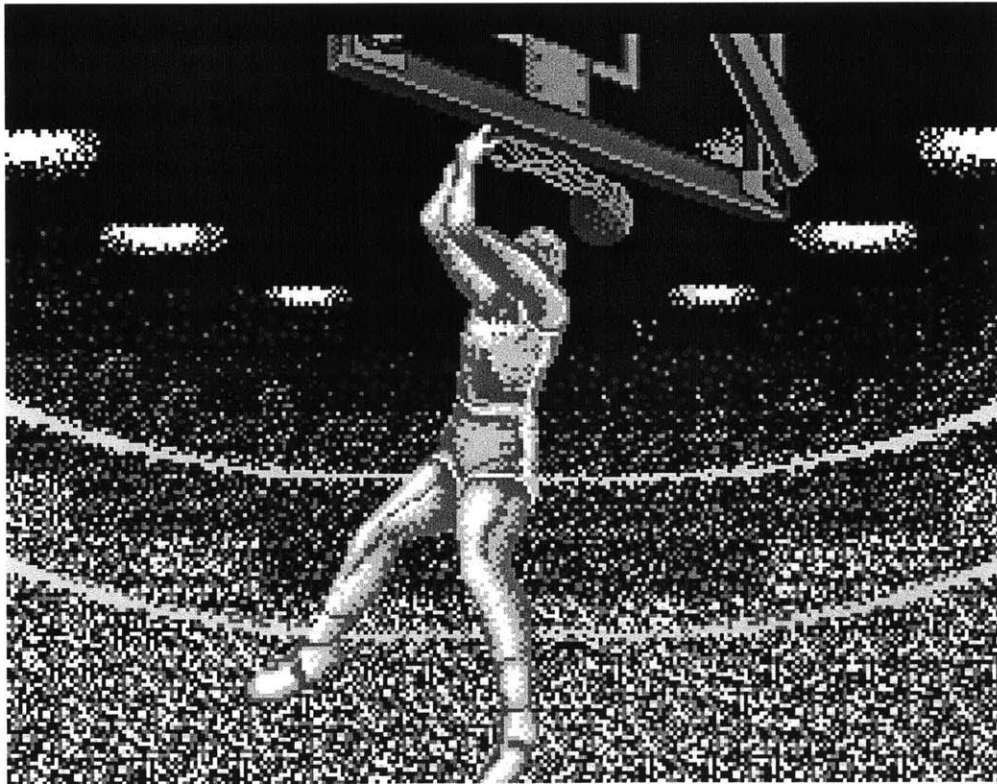


Figure 8: A slam dunk cut-scene from *Double Dribble*, an early approach on replicating televisual instant replay.

The first use of instant replay in the *Madden* football franchise came with the release of *John Madden Football '92* (EA, 1992), the second iteration of the title developed for home consoles. After any given play, players could pull up a pause menu with the option to call a timeout or to watch an instant replay. Selecting “instant replay” takes the player to a scene right before the start of the last play, and in the top left corner of the screen appears a familiar display indicating that players could play, fast-forward or rewind the sequence. Players can freely move throughout the clip. This example of instant replay is different in that it gives the control of the scene to the player. Rather than keeping the player in an explicitly spectator position, they are encouraged to act as a television producer, controlling the replay of the game. This serves as another great example of the ways in which televisual sports videogames simulate a multi-perspectival experience that conflates many aspects of played, viewed, and even televisually produced sports.

All contemporary televisual sports videogames utilize instant replay in one way or another. The baseball franchise *MLB: The Show* for years have shown replays to massage transitions between innings. EA's *NHL* games show replays after scoring plays, and will show occasional compilation clips highlighting certain aspects of play for a given athlete over the course of a game. The *NBA 2K* games have, since *NBA 2K10*, shown replays of slam dunks, such as those mentioned in the matter of the “Sprite Slam Cam.” In each of these examples, the instant replay takes a form that highly resembles replays found on television. The replay is non-interactive, except that a button can be pressed to skip it — the equivalent of a cut scene in other non-sports videogames. The commentators generally speak over the clip, remarking as to why the selected piece was “selected” for repeated viewing, and putting the sequence in the context of

the overall game. The sequences replayed follow many of the same conventions that lead to replay in sports television, including scoring plays, plays that exhibit a specific prowess of a team or player, or plays in which a player is injured. Just as those replays in television reinforce specific ideological values found in MediaSport cultural production, so too in sports videogames.

In addition to the more obviously televisual replay sequences, contemporary televisual sports videogames also feature replay systems that give control to the player, much like the example from *John Madden Football '92*. In some games, like *MLB: The Show*, players can design their own highlight reels, and save the video to removable media to share. Other titles leverage the connectivity of modern computers to enable sharing of save replay clips to websites for sharing. One salient example of this is EA publishes a “Goals of The Week” video podcast that features upload videos of exciting goals scored by players using their soccer title *FIFA*. All of these examples emphasize the convergence of media, and the different roles players assume with televisual sports videogames, not least of which is video content creator.

Other designers have sought to integrate the interactivity of the videogame medium into the instant replay feature in sports games. One of the most compelling examples of this can be found with the “BackTrack” feature in *Madden NFL 09* (EA, 2008). With “BackTrack” the developers of *Madden 09* wanted to make the ubiquitous instant replay more interactive, and so they allowed players to rewind, and subsequently re-play specific moments. For example, if a player throws an interception, the game cuts to an instant replay, and the commentator Chris Collinsworth, himself a real NFL sportscaster, analyzes the mistake the player made reading the defense, using visual aids like a telestrator just as a television commentator would. As the action replays on the screen, the player is presented with a countdown and a choice — they may let the

play stand, or they may expend one of a set number of mulligans, gaining a chance to try the play again, undoubtedly hoping for a different, if not better outcome.

The “BackTrack” feature is a clever manipulation of a well-established sports television production technique. The feature leverages the interactivity of the simulation to offer players an opportunity that does not exist for real athletes, or even for fans who are watching the game on television at home. The “BackTrack” extends the figure of the spectator with agency assumed by the player, now giving her the chance to manipulate time. In a sense, the “BackTrack” feature serves as a compelling example of the perspectival disjuncture Friedberg addresses in *Virtual Window* and as an example of the remediation referenced in Bolter and Grusin’s work. On the one hand, the manipulation of time breaks the supposed liveness of the game even more than a traditional replay, giving players the freedom to play with sequence not just in the reproduction of events, but as a means to change them too. To the extent that the interactivity affords players time and cause-effect manipulation not offered by televised live sports, “BackTrack” represents a remediation of traditional instant replay, an extension of a known production technique in television beyond the capacity of the older media form, and beyond reality, for that matter!

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis looks closely at the features found in televisual sports videogames that ape the conventions found in North American televised sports. These features simultaneously represent a participation in the construction of hegemonic sports culture in North American media, but they also contribute to meaningful experiences for sports fans who enjoy the games, using play as one of the ways to actualize their sports fandom through media. It has been my goal to balance between a much needed critique of televisual sports videogames as cultural objects, while maintaining sensitivity to the ways the games remain meaningful and pleasurable to many. This is not a unique balancing act given the subject of sports, so fraught with the complications of hegemony and ideology, and yet so loved by many million worldwide.

Televisual sports videogames have a complicated duality. They reflect the dominant ideologies of hegemonic North American sport while also being meaningful objects for fans. This duality can lead to tension, as some fans struggle against uncomfortable ideology that permeates the games. Players of the games are not acted upon by the games; they are not merely vessels awaiting fulfillment with the ideology of hegemonic sport. On the contrary, the games are often sites of struggle and contestation, and loci for negotiation of the power relationships found in the cultures of sport. For example, an entire team of women hockey players can be fielded in *NHL 13*, an impossibility in the real National Hockey League. The independent developers of *MVP Caribe*, and ad-hoc collaboration of students and hackers, have taken an outdated game and

modified it to fill a gap left by the sports game industry that has ignored them. The mod is wildly popular for fans of Caribbean League baseball, and it is advertised at real games despite being free. Many fans construct their own highlight reels from in-game footage, many showing otherwise impossible scenarios in sport, and post the videos online. Sports fans play televisual sports videogames and they often *play with* sports videogames.

At the same time, there are many aspects of televisual sports videogames that are harder to crack, and that leave less flexibility for players. Many of the examples of dominant ideology of hegemonic sports culture are hard-coded, written with indelible ink on the games. The highly commercialized form of modern mediated sport, with highly profitable corporate tie-ins, and ubiquitous advertising, has become the norm in televisual sports videogames. Replays, graphical overlays, and entire gameplay modes have been marked with the brands of sport — Nike, Sprite, Old Spice, and State Farm to name just a few. The videogames are “brought to players” by sponsors, and the fit seems natural given the highly commercialized and commodified form of modern televised sport. Televisual sports videogames are filled with the rhetoric of violence, militarism, and nationalism, ranging from violent replays, metaphors of war on the lips of commentators, to American flags and the “Star Spangled Banner” on the digital fields. The ideologies of hegemonic sports culture are abundantly represented in televisual sports videogames, and it is no surprise given the close relationship between the videogames and the television broadcasts that serve as a primary inspiration for their design.

Given the close relationship between televised sports and televisual sports videogames, evolving as a convention situated squarely in the structures of the sports media industrial complex, we might ask how else could sports videogames have been designed if not as a

recreation of television? There are of course other genres of sports videogames that offer different experiences. There are management simulations that resemble the work environment of a sports businessperson, complete with financial analysis tools and fictional email correspondences. There are imaginative “arcade” style sports videogames like *NBA Jam* and *NFL Blitz* wherein balls catch on fire, there are spontaneous explosions, and extreme caricatures of famous athletes. And there are of course racing simulations, that offer a variety of different perspectives for engaging in an automotive race, ranging from a first-person view inside of the cockpit to an overhead view of cars flying around a track.

A fascinating example of experimentation with perspective in a mainstream, otherwise televisual sports videogame, can be found in *NFL 2K5*. Developers presented a highly televisual experience as the primary gameplay mode, but an additional feature called “first-person football” allowed players to assume the perspective of athletes on the field, viewing the action through the mask of a football helmet. Players could jump, like a ghost possessing athletes, from character to character, moving from one perspective to another on the field. Just as the game of American football itself is difficult, so too is the first-person mode in the videogame, though that may be a result of the dissonance with conventions for gameplay. The first-person perspective in *NFL 2K5* is unique, and an approach that has not been taken in many sports games.

There are also televisual sports videogames designed for audiences outside of North America that recreate conventions of televised sports in other communities. *Pro Yakuu Spirits* is a televisual baseball game developed and published by Konami that simulates the Nippon Professional Baseball league in Japan. The professional teams and players in the Japanese league are represented in the game, and while the design of the game is reminiscent of games like *MLB*

2K or *MLB: The Show*, it is designed to address a Japanese television spectator audience. Just as the developers of *MVP Caribe* modded the game to reflect the experiences of Caribbean League baseball, the developers at Konami have specific Japanese television conventions to inform design that may differ from North American conventions. Without intimate personal knowledge of how professional baseball is broadcast in Japan, I can't help but wonder in what ways games developed to represent televised sports in other cultures may differ from televisual sports videogames developed to simulate North American sports.

In many ways this focus addresses sports fandom and videogame player communities in a somewhat abstract or intangible way. The focus of this work is on the design of certain sports videogames, and the relationship between the two media forms of televised sports and sports videogames. But fans and fan communities are real, and more importantly, they can be accessed, and while it fell outside of the scope of this work, I feel that ethnographic studies of sports videogame play communities is an important follow up to this research. There are many different types of sports fans, and many different ways of playing of sports videogames, and to truly understand the motivations, behaviors and value of the videogames, one would need to look at the players directly.

Arriving at the end, we might also turn an eye to the future, wondering how sports videogames may change in the coming years. This thesis has shown that in a relatively brief period of about thirty years, the coevolution of sports videogames and sports television was rapid. Cable television remains immensely popular as a medium for spectating sport, but other forms are quickly taking root in various communities. Gamecasts, web streaming, and interactive video content found in software like *MLB At Bat* or *NHL Game Center* are offering

new ways of spectating sports. If these new media forms take hold, one can't help but wonder whether the televisual conventions found in sports videogames might adapt to reflect newer popular media. Will sports videogames transition from televisual conventions to recreate different versions of mediated sports? On the contrary, perhaps the contemporary evolution of mediated sport may be reflecting the inverse relationship, with games influencing the design of new interactive sports media. However things may change, we might say with some surety that sports media relationships weave a complicated web of interdependency and intertextuality.

APPENDIX

GAMES

- ABC Monday Night Football* (1992) Tokyo, Japan: Data East.
All Star Baseball 2004 (2003) Glen Cove, New York: Acclaim.
Double Dribble (1987) Tokyo, Japan: Konami.
ESPN Major League Baseball (2004) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
ESPN NFL Football (2003) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Intellivision World Series Major League Baseball (1982) Hawthorne, California: Mattel.
John Madden Football (1987) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
John Madden Football '93 (1992) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
John Madden Football '95 (2004) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
Lakers vs. Celtics and The NBA Playoffs (1991) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
Larry Bird and Dr. J Go One on One (1983) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden
NFL 05 (2005) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 06 (2006) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 07 (2007) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 08 (2007) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 09 (2008) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 10 (2009) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 11 (2010) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 12 (2011) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Madden NFL 13 (2012) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts.
Major League Baseball 2K5 (2005) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K6 (2006) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K7 (2007) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K8 (2008) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K9 (2009) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K10 (2010) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K11 (2011) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K12 (2012) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
Major League Baseball 2K13 (2013) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
MLB 09: The Show (2009) San Diego, California: Sony.
MLB 10: The Show (2010) San Diego, California: Sony.
MLB 11: The Show (2011) San Diego, California: Sony.
MLB 12: The Show (2012) San Diego, California: Sony.
MVP Baseball 2003 (2003) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts
MVP Baseball 2004 (2004) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts

MVP Baseball 2005 (2005) Redwood City, California: Electronic Arts
NBA 2K4 (2003) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K5 (2004) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K6 (2005) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K7 (2006) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K8 (2007) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K9 (2008) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K10 (2009) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K11 (2010) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K12 (2011) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA 2K13 (2012) Marin, California: 2K Sports.
NBA Jam (1993) Chicago, Illinois: Midway.
NCAA Football 2005 (2004) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 06 (2005) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 07 (2006) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 08 (2007) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 09 (2008) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 10 (2009) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 11 (2010) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 12 (2011) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NCAA Football 13 (2012) Orlando, Florida: Electronic Arts.
NHL '95 (1994) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
NHL 08 (2007) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
NHL 09 (2008) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
NHL 10 (2009) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
NHL 11 (2010) San Mateo, California: Electronic Arts.
NFL Blitz (1997) Chicago, Illinois: Midway.
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