

recently got email from a reader who was rather perturbed by the lack of good sports-related games available for the Mac. While many people have numerous opinions on why the PC has a much thicker catalog of these games, I have my own rather paranoid suspicions.

Last year I completed a book covering nearly every aspect of Mac gaming. In the end we ended up with 16 blood-soaked chapters covering everything from early Mac gaming to MUDs and MUSHES. Without a doubt the hardest chapter to fill with content was—you guessed it—sports.

Chris Breen and I were flipping coins for this baby.

“OK, heads, you win. Best two out of three? Heads again, darn. Best three out of four?”

After a while it became like a bad Abbott and Costello skit. In the final analysis I was handed the dubious honor of dealing with the pathetic array of sports-related games the Mac had to offer. I searched high and low, but mostly in vain, to find enough commercial material to fill even the basic page count for a chapter in our book. Why was it so hard? Why are there so few sports games on the Mac?

Before I delve into this issue, there are a few tidbits I need to get out of the way. For example, I know that even as I write this there are several folks putting electronic pen to paper in protest because they feel that games like PGA Tour Golf and Links Pro (and a couple others) are awesome Mac sporting games. OK, I admit it, the golf games are great games, but for the purposes of this article, let's assume that the few notable exceptions do not exist.

Although the Mac has always lagged behind PCs in almost every genre of gaming, there have been at least some gains made in each game category. Indeed, some of the best computer games of all time were initially developed on the Mac. The notable exception to this is, of course, sports.

'Tis true, most sports-related games on the Mac were pre-released on the PC, usually by months (and in some cases, years). The easy explanation for this is the now-cliche, “Macs couldn't handle the graphics demand on the old 680x0 processors”. But how can this really stand up when a quick glance through my dusty Mac game archives reveals copies of One-on-One with Dr. J and Larry Bird, and Winter Olympics, both from 1985?

Surely if such popular games (in their day) can be converted perfectly to the Mac, other contemporaries could also have been ported.

Another possible, although somewhat lame argument could be that in the early days Macs never had a second joystick port, or for that matter, a numeric keypad. These elements are fairly important for head-to-head play, something for which many sports games are designed. In fact, the pathetic lack of gaming peripherals in general was probably enough to scare away even the hardest developers. Let's get real, I don't think there is even one steering wheel/pedal set on the market for the Mac, even today! And it's been 11 years since the ball got rolling. Come on, it doesn't even take 11 years to finish a presidential election (although it may feel like it).

Lack of peripherals aside, there is yet another, however improbable, position on why the Mac royally sucks when it comes to physical pastimes. Maybe Mac users are just a different breed. You know, maybe we're a group of people who simply aren't into sports in a big way. After all, this is a capitalistic supply and demand society. Maybe the demand has simply never been there, and thus no one has ever thought of developing NHL '9X Hockey on Apple's machines. It could be that sports apathy, combined with the fact that Mac users were so busy fighting for any games at all, is the reason sports games just fell by the wayside.

My personal opinion? I think that the sports market, even on the PC, is a much smaller piece of the gaming pie than any other genre. This in turn makes risking developing or porting a game to the Mac a proposition far too risky, even for the bloated cash-heavy companies.

In the final analysis the answer probably lies somewhere in all the aforementioned probabilities. As with all areas of Mac gaming, the progression of the Mac to ultra-fast Power PC technology has kick-started the proliferation of sports games. For example, there now seems to be life in the racing department. Will we ever see Unnecessary Roughness, Madden, or FIFA Soccer on the Mac? Don't hold your breath.

Somehow, the battle for interest in creating—or for that matter, even porting—sporting games to the Mac was lost early in the Mac's infancy. Maybe it was Apple's unencouraging stance on the Mac as a gaming machine. Maybe it was the lack of a fast processor or a color screen. Heck, for all we know it was just plain old bad karma or a misalignment of the planets Jupiter and Uranus (my personal favorite).

Whatever the reason, the Mac is nowhere near being an acceptable platform for sports lovers, and it is doubtful as to whether it ever will be. We'll just have to get by with the few commercial titles, and good shareware-style games like Playmaker Football and Ingmar's Skiing to make ends meet. So for now, I'll keep my fingers crossed for some good "A" titles, and I'll pick up a Sega Saturn in the meantime.

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