# 4D-Boxing

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Remember the early days of eMpTyV when everyone gawked at the cool Dire Straits video "Money for Nothing" that featured somewhat blocky but lovable computer generated characters? Ever wanted to punch the heck out of those very characters because that network played that video ad nauseam?

Now with 4D Boxing from Distinctive Software and Electronic Arts you have the opportunity to do just that. All the boxers in this graphical masterpiece of a pugilistic simulation are obviously designed with the "Money for Nothing" characters in mind. The title "4D" is even excusable because of the speedy animation routines Distinctive developed. This game definitely moves through time as well as simulating the other three dimensions very slickly.

The well written and very informative manual tells of how Distinctive video taped a real boxer and then studied his boxing motions and put them to work in their Tru-Motion human movement simulation system. And with the fluidity with which these boxers move, I can believe it. Tru-Motion maintains a stick figure biped upon which filled polygons are drawn, allowing for the quick realism that 4D provides. The swings of the boxers look exactly as a human punch would, to the point where you can feel the whiplash when your opponent jabs your head and you see the cranium snap back. Even falling to the canvas looks realistic as (hopefully) your opponent twists his legs together and then hits the canvas with a loud thud, not to get up again.

The game itself is also remarkably well crafted. You control your character from the keypad, using those keys in conjunction with the shift and return keys for a total of 4 directions to move, 4 block positions, 9 punches, and 18 different ways to taunt your opponent. The last of these options is one of my favorite features of the game. While your opponent is still standing, you can do such show off maneuvers as sticking your chin out at him or winding up for a bolo punch. When he's down on the canvas and the referee is counting to ten you can do a whole separate set of taunting moves such as raising both arms and looking up in victory or doing a back flip. All of which maintain the same fluidity and true to human motion look which is the highlight of this game.

Moving around the ring and throwing punches effectively was difficult at first, but I felt that I was in control within a few hours. There are many fine points to boxing skillfully in this game that I feel confident I will never master. For instance, which blocking maneuver you should perform at which time depends on which part of your body the opponent is trying to pulverize, as well as where and when you want to attack him again.

Each boxer has three characteristic bars for speed, strength and stamina. A fourth bar takes the average of the scores to show the overall quality of a boxer. The game comes with one boxer you can use for "exhibition" matches only, Paul Savage. Paul has all his stats set up to maximum so that it is easier to learn how to play the game and win your first match using him. In exhibition you can fight one of fifty opponents, or you can play a friend, who unfortunately also has to use the keyboard. Certainly no network capability here. When you play against another human, you can both play Paul Savage so that the match is absolutely fair.

Once you feel confident enough with Paul Savage, you can create your own boxers, using a set number of points distributed among the three characteristics as you like. You can use this boxer in exhibition too, but what is more important, you can have him advance in the "Main Event." Here you battle your way up the fifty ranked boxers that also come with the game. Each time you

beat one you not only advance in your own ranking (you start at 51) but you also get to increase your stats a small amount right before each match through training. My creation, Colin Bumba Harris (all the way from Rygate in Cuba), has gone all the way to being ranked 24th without too much trouble. From there on, though, it's going to be a long hard fight.

While you fight you are shown three stat bars, damage, condition and overall condition. Overall goes down slowly with the punches you take, and doesn't come back. Once you're at a fourth of your original condition, you're pretty much doomed. Damage is how close you are to being knocked out and is driven down by the strength and number of punches that hit you. Fortunately it comes back rather quickly, when you're not being constantly throttled by your opponent. Condition is a combination of the number of punches that land on you and the number of punches you throw. It effects how effective your punches are and also comes back quickly.

What's truly obnoxious about fighting either exhibition or main event fighting is the amount of waiting and hammering the return key endlessly. Unless, of course, you enjoy watching the same minute long pre-fight scene over and over again, or hearing the announcer list, slowly but surely the name and weight of each contestant in the match. And then after the match he drones on just as long. At the end you do get to see a newspaper declaring the winner and with a picture taken from the fight. But all of this hype, which one gets sick of by the end of your fifth fight, should be able to be turned off, not just skipped part by part through lots of repetitive key pressing. And though the game does load surprisingly fast for something with such sophisticated graphics, it still loads these hype graphics whether you like it or not.

Amazingly, the game runs in black and white and 16 or 256 colors. The graphics are brilliant in 8 bit mode, and still very good in 16. In 2 color mode the motion is still great, but the graphics are nothing to speak of. To craft the B&W mode, Distinctive merely replaced the various colors with different patterns from the system resident pattern set. Though you can still make out the characters well enough to play, you may have some trouble telling your body part from your opponents. And, frankly, it just doesn't look all that good. No matter what size monitor you have, 4D runs in a window obviously designed to fit on the 9" Mac screens, which I don't find to be that much of a detriment at all.

One feature of the game which I don't use much are the 12 different ways you can view the fight in progress. There are nine different camera views which you can set to behave in very complex ways before the fight, and then save those setting for the next time you play. The cameras can be set to follow you around the ring while you fight, which I find near impossible to actually play the game with. However, these can be useful in the playback mode, where you can view the entire current round up until the present moment frame by frame. There are also "eye" views from the point of view of you and your opponent, which is an interesting one indeed. These are my favorites, since you can see the world jerk around when you get nailed by an uppercut, or suddenly be looking at the canvas when you're doubled over by a body blow. The "detailed view", which I find the easiest to play from, is the type of view that you would expect to find in a typical arcade boxing game, where the view is non-changing and you can see the entire ring at once, complete with a static picture of the crowd.

Whatever Mac you have, the game is just as fast and playable as it is on my IIci. This is because Distinctive allowed for several controls that vary the simulation level. You can set the "rendering" to one of 6 levels, the lowest being mere stick figures with heads and fists, the top being the "Money for Nothing" creations. This way the processor doesn't have to re-draw so much of the character and hence the action stays fluid. You can also set the rendering to "Auto" which automatically decides how much of the character to draw based on how fast the game is

moving at that moment. A separate control, "SimHigh" and "SimLow" controls the number of extraneous motions the boxers perform. As the manual states "when set to SimLow, the boxers will not bob or move as much." This also speeds up the game if your Mac is not as speedy as it could be.

The sounds and music are also quite nice, utilizing the four track capabilities of System 6.07 or higher. When fighting the crowd will start booing if the tow combatants don't hit one another for too long. For punches connecting there are two different sounds. One, an "ugh" sound, is heard if you hit your opponent (or he hits you) in the lower body. The other, a thud, sounds if you hit the opponent's upper body or if he blocks your shot. This brings up another annoyance with the game. It's often difficult to tell whether you hit the other player, he blocked your attack, or perhaps that thudding noise you heard was his hitting you. You could quickly look at his status bars to see if they went down, but by that point he's probably clobbered you with his left hook. This isn't really a criticism of the game, since in a real boxing match all the events are no doubt much more confusing.

Back when I had my Apple IIe I judged a game on two things. One, whether it had a pause feature and two whether you could reset your game at any point to start over, just in case you'd accidentally lost your first life to a scorpion in Drol (that being the most pathetic of all deaths). Though Drol had both features, 4D only has the former. It is possible to "throw in the towel" at any point during your match, but the game goes to the losers screen where the announcer says that you lost by TKO (Technical Knock Out) and then you have to look at the newspaper screen where it tells you that you gave up. I can understand this treatment when you're actually competing in the main event, but in exhibition fights? Couldn't you just abort the match and forget you ever let Larry Lunchbucket get a punch in on you without having it printed up in the press?

Though the graphics were obviously completely redone for the Mac, this game still shows signs of begin an obvious IBM port. The most glaring error is that the Apple Menu does not list the DAs, only the "About 4D Boxing" selection shows up. This would only require one really simple line of code to fix, but apparently Distinctive just didn't feel like it. This is particularly irritating if you want to adjust the sound level. Luckily, I'm running System 7 and can just click on to the finder and change the sound from the DAs there. But if I weren't running multifinder? I'd have to quit the game and start all over again. Other evidence of 4D Boxing originating on a Big Blue are the buttons which look surprisingly Windows like, and the fact that many of the options are on screen instead of in the menu bar where they should be.

Difficulty wise, I cannot think of a harder arcade game for the Mac then this one. To win that is. I don't understand how any human being could ever beat "The Champ" he usually KOs me in 30 seconds when I fight him exhibition with Paul Savage. Up around the top ten boxers, matches last 12 rounds and are incredibly hard to win. Plus the boxers you design can only fight 35 matches before they begin to "tire" ( as the manual puts it) and only 45 until you have to retire him and start fresh with a new boxer. Even though I know I'll probably never down the champ, it's still fun to beat the hell out of the bottom 20 boxers.

Though this game has its flaws, I like it a great deal, and recommend it to anyone depressed at the sight of the normal, simplistic, easy to win Macintosh arcade games. It is a definite requirement for any sports game enthusiast. A lot of design and skilled programming did go into this game, and I think it is worth every penny of the $49.95 list price, or the $34 I spent on it.