

Prototype 1: Slopeball

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December 12, 2016

To design a sport we have to first briefly think about what a sport is. What is the experience of the players? The experience of the audience? What are the typical elements used to create a sport and how do they relate to game design? Beyond these question are the detail of implementation and balance that are key to actually make the sport work. Our initial thinking was to borrow from other pre-existing sport to make an intense and exiting experience for both players and spectators.

The core experience of a sport for the players, when taking inspiration from existing sports, is one based in the display of skill(Agon) and the rush of adrenaline(Ilinx). The mixture of the extremeness of snowboarding and violence of rugby provides ample opportunity to display great skill along with the intense rush of such sports. When spectating a team based sport you usually affiliate with one of the teams, leading to a certain amount of identification(Mimicry). The idolizing nature of fans and spectators also means the audience feels the rush from the violence of the action(Ilinx).

When thinking of the way to instil the sport experience, we went with extremes. But for any sport to be playable as a competition and not simply a frame of play it requires rules(Ludus). While in some sports not as important as the rush of adrenaline or display of skill, it is important to ensure fairness and an actual structure.

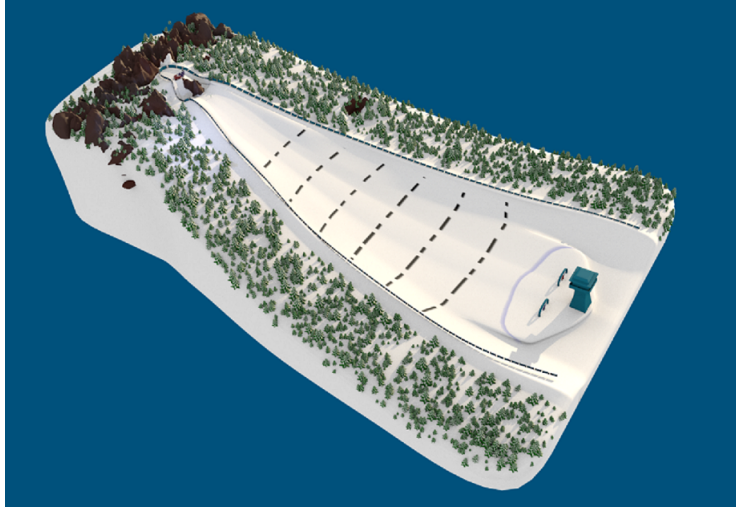


Figure 1: the playing field of Slopeball

To make a sport work we have to set up a structure to guide the play and decide a winner. A central element of many sports is the field. A clearly drawn up space which is where the game happens(Figure 1). The playing field is a clear distinction between what happens that is part of the game and what is not. As an example, as in football when the ball exits the field, play is interrupted. A specific rule(Ritual) is in place to then restart play.

Structure is also part of what makes the game open to spectating. A set of rules and a score allows the audience to follow the game and know how well their affiliated team is doing. Also with the rule that each team has two groups that can alternate, we try to keep downtime to a minimum, making it easier to keep the audience engaged.

One of the central structures of the game, borrowed from rugby. is to only play backwards when you pass the ball. This along with the 'step' rule, enforced trough lines on the field, is done by deducting points from the teams score for each line crossed without passing. Thus making it 'pointless' to rush to the bottom of the field to score.

Challenges of maintaining the rules are most often solved with a number of referees. The nature of snowboarding down a slope, means that it is impractical to interrupt play, especially in a competitive setting. This has lead to our solution for referees, being a team of referees keeping track of points throughout the round. At the end of a round the team of referees would then deliberate the final score of each team.

While the elaborate field and intense core experience makes for a compelling professional sport, the challenge comes when attempting to transfer the sport to an amateur setting. But since a big part of being a fan is replicating you idols, making compromises to allow for more casual play is not unreasonable. Unlike other sports, where most liberties taken are often in the detailed balance rules such as the offsite rule in soccer, compromises for *Slopeball* would probably need to be the highly specialized field and referee heavy point-system. A challenge would also be the violence of the sport. While certainly exiting to watch, the combination of a physical sport with a risky environment could mean frequent injuries for players.

In conclusion while certainly a tough sport for the participants, the excitement and glory of winning, might outweigh the risk of injury. The game would probably be enjoyable to watch, revering the skilful snowboarding while cringing at the painful injuries that might occur. Since it might be difficult to find enough players willing to take the risk to create a professional league, a solution could be a digital version of the sport. While a digital version might not be much in terms of the physical experience, the skilfulness should be of equal measure and still provide a compelling experience.