

Sport prototype

What is a sport? What makes a sport different from other games? How do you create a sport? The answers to these undeniably ambiguous questions were the foundation to what became the Stick Around sport prototype. In this essay I will not try to answer these question by arguing for a formalised definition of what a sport is. Instead i will try to describe how Stick Around relates to sports.

Stick Around is a team based sport that requires a great deal of cooperation. Both teams are defending and attacking simultaneously. The basic winning condition of the game is to retrieve the opposing team's stick to your home base. A play through of a single game typically takes a couple of minutes if not less. Hence the pace of the gameplay is very similar to that of handball. This leads me to the first concern regarding the implementation of Stick Around. We did not implement a match goal. Naturally for 'Stick Around' to be attractive as a spectated game there has to be a match goal witch can extend the duration of the game. In handball a match takes 60 minutes and the team that has scored the most points win. A similar system could be implemented into Stick Around to make it more sporty. What is good about Stick Around is that it easily affords a match goal and you can imagine that different kind of match goals can be implemented. Instead of being time based the game could just end whenever a team has reached a set number of points similar to badminton or volleyball. The different kind of match goals affords different play styles. In time based games defensive strategies can be used to stall the game. In football you often see teams going out aggressively to a start to get their first point. If they get that point they often choose to change to a more defensive strategy because a 1-0 victory basically is as good as any victory. A point based match goal may afford a much more aggressive strategies during the entire game because such a strategy often will get the team to faster meet the match goal. In Stick Arounds current state I think it is hard to determine the match goal that suits the game the best. The game is already really fast paced and aggressive. A time based match goal may give the different teams the time they need to find the strategies that suits them best, and may afford different play styles during the duration of the match similar to football.

The pitch of Stick Around has a rather odd shape compared to regular field based sports. The field is rectangular like many other sports fields the difference is that the direction of play happens diagonally across the triangle. In opposite corners of the rectangle is the team's home bases. The other diagonal acts as the borderline between either team's half of the playing field. What is interesting about playing with this kind of field is that the oddly distributed play space makes it either easier or harder to defend and attack depending on where you are on the field. Because of the large space between the two team half's of the play field it is easy to penetrate the opposing team's defence however the closer you get to their home base the less space you have to make it out again. And opposite if you are to make it back with the opposing team's stick to your team's half then the opposing team gets less and less space to try and catch you the further you get to your home base. I think this design lures the players into adapting a more aggressive play style because it is

easy to see openings in the opposing team's defence. The problem with Stick Around is that both teams are playing offence and defence at the same time. Unlike football, where the aggressor is the team controlling the ball, Stick Around does not have a single object that can be used to score points. This means that there is no clear definition of who is attacking and who is not. The consequence of this kind of play is that the game can turn into a "stare down" where none of the teams wants to risk going on offence. Among other things the play field is designed to afford aggressive play style to make up for this problem.

To prevent Stick Around from being an overly physical aggressive game we implemented a ribbon system similar to that found in flag-football. Under the right circumstances a player can pull an opposing team's player's ribbon out and eliminate that player from the game. In Stick Around the ribbon is attached like a tail to each player. This means that as long as a player is facing his / her opponents that player is safe from being eliminated. This creates a very interesting play style where you have to move around the play field in a certain way always watching your back. I think the ribbon system is what makes the game most similar to other sports. In most other popular sports you as a player are handicapped in different ways. In ball based sports you can only use certain parts of your body to move the ball. In some of them you even have to use a device to move it, like tennis or badminton. This is what makes these sports skill based games. You have to learn to use the ball as a natural extension to your own body, hence eliminating the handicap. In Stick Around you have to learn how to move around with an Achilles heel attached to your back. The problem with the ribbons is that the players rarely are aware that it has been removed from their back. This makes them keep playing even though they have been eliminated. In game judges could maybe help solve that problem. My concern I thought that the players may obscure the game before they become aware that a judge has taken them out. Unlike other sports Stick Around does not pause when a player is eliminated which makes the game very vulnerable to eliminated players, playing as if they were not eliminated.

Stick Around is not a sport, at least not yet. It borrows elements from already popular sports and definitely has things that makes it applicable for a sport. One of our design requirements was to make a sport that could be played anywhere from a playground to a stadium. At its current state the game still has more of a playground game feel to it and further adjustments need to be made to turn it into a sport. The biggest concern as of right now is to implement a match goal that can help balance the game so that offence and defence play equally big roles in the game play.