STREET HOOPS
Game Design Suggestions

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Non-Confidential:
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Visitors: Here is the unedited feedback I provided Black Ops Entertainment and Kelly, the manager of the AND 1 Mix Tape Tour basketball players at their request.

Enjoy,
Noe Valladolid

A look at Street Hoops and a comparison and contrast to NBA Street

Dear Street Hoops Team at Black Ops Entertainment,
My name is Noe Valladolid. I am the West Coast Correspondent with Planet Tony Hawk. I was a World Finalist in the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 competition sponsored by Activision. I have an extensive videogame background that is highlighted on my personal webpage http://clas.lbcc.edu/noe/ as well as in the upcoming Twin Galaxies Videogame Book of Records.

I attended the 2002 E3 and had a chance to play some Street Hoops. At the request of Kelly Hill from Urban Legends, I wrote an honest critique of your game. I analyzed the game's strengths and weaknesses in hopes that the feedback is early enough to help in the development process.

You will see a lot of comparisons between your game and Electronic Art's (EA) NBA Street. I do not mean this with disrespect but am giving you ideas to contrast and compare with the "other" successful playground game.

What works in Street Hoops or what did I think was done well?

The licensing and inclusion of authentic AND 1 players and popular Hip-Hop music and clothing lines definitely gives your game credibility. This was one of the things I approached EA with in a list of suggestions and ideas for NBA Street 2. Albeit the game was already very much like the popular Mix Tape Tour. There is a DJ in the opening credits of the game scratching the soundtrack. And of course the emcee Joe "The Show" can be considered a fictional equivalent to the Mix Tape's Set Free. The courts in both games were authentic, like the Cage on West 4th, Rucker Park and Venice.

You can see the web page I made to get ideas from me and a few other fans of the game across to the developers at EA Big. http://clas.lbcc.edu/streetfolder/ If you visit the site you can see I went into great detail describing the things that worked in the game and the things that I thought could have been fixed. Activision and you as a developer, did not hesitate when coming up with a playground basketball title. It seems that Street Hoops is 100% playground action.

An item that I thought worked well in Street Hoops was the full-featured character editor. Clothing, body-size, shoes and even tattoos. All of those items are all great and exactly the things that people look for in any create-a-character game mode. I did like the use of money in the game to buy new items, clothes and such. That is a good motivation to progress through the levels.

I enjoyed being able to choose my game type and assign, 3-on-3, 4-on-4 or 5-on-5 games. I didn't get a

chance to find out how many game types/goals and modes there were for players at the show. I did not see any documentation shown at the Activision booth aside from the control layout posted next to the game.

I wish I had more time to go through the game and try all of the modes. I was very busy covering the E3 for Planet Tony Hawk, as well as for other freelance articles. I didn't even get a chance to ask the developers questions at the show and only got limited game time. But I could give you an opinion to what I thought from what I played and saw at the show.

The game engine looked and played solid. The rendering engine seemed very powerful and the 3-D environments contained great detail. The Rucker, West 4th, all of the courts looked and sounded authentic. The control was intuitive, as with many games from Activision and the O2 brand like Tony Hawk and Matt Hoffman titles. It did not take me too long to become comfortable with the control layout.

Dunks, passing, and trick moves are all animated great and the variety of moves is exceptional. I like that you can control the instant replay camera and choose replay angles and camera positions.

What did I not like or thought was awkward in Street Hoops?

I did not like the default choice of behind the back camera angle. I thought the angle made the court seem distorted and made judging distances harder than a side-scroll camera angle. I don't know if there were other camera angles available in the game, or will become available in the game, but I strongly think the current camera set-up is bad for a basketball game. Behind-the-back really works best for a game like football.

One of the faults with NBA Street was that the levels did not have a full 3-D environment surrounding the court. I can tell that Street Hoops has a great environment every time the camera pans around a steal or a dunk. Will you or have you considered allowing the player to choose from different camera angles? I would like to see side-scroll, courtside or even overhead angles as opposed to behind-the-back views.

Another thing that I did not like in the player animation was how they dribbled. The characters ran with the basketball out to the side and their free arm tight on their body. I know the players dribble like that when pushed to the baseline but they don't dribble like that all the time. I've seen the Mix Tape Tour Vols. 1-4 enough times to know who dribbles like who and how they move the ball up the court. The basic dribble animation looks very awkward and I've really only seen Skip To My Lou dribble the ball like that on a fast break and not all the time.

If you could please consider changing the dribble animation and even changing up the standing dribble animation. This was one thing NBA Street got right that I did not see in Street Hoops. In NBA Street, players standing and dribbling would randomly go through different animations. Players would dribble the ball behind their back, between their legs and even dance on occasion. This variety of random dribble animations, random dunks and random passes helped open up the gameplay in NBA Street.

Of course like your game, tricks, dunks and passes open up with button combinations. But I didn't get a chance to see if Street Hoops had as many, if not more, random animations for passes, dunks, dribbles and trick moves.

I wondered about the defense, zone and blocking A.I. in the game. In NBA Street, even with only a 3-on-3, the defense was formidable in all game types. Players could call for a pick and the computer was relentless for opening up a lane or shoving a player out of the way during rebounds or shot attempts. Of course EA has an extensive history with pro and college basketball titles. They have been working on making computer-controlled A.I. intuitive and very realistic.

I thought the computer-controlled A.I., blocking, offense and defense in Street Hoops was very rudimentary. I

did not see teammates opening up lanes, setting up picks or actively pursuing rebounds. All of the computer-controlled players seemed locked on chasing down one person and could not learn to switch defenders. This cluttered up the court and made getting to the basket or finding a shot a little harder than it should be.

The final thing I did not think was working in the game was the character models. I know that oversized, loose fitting clothes, is the style on many of the courts. However for some odd reason the clothes on the in game characters looked too big. Characters looked bulky and disproportionate. The large clothing made the characters look as if they weighed much more than they actually do and in effect look less like the people they were representing. I know that you can customize the clothes but all of the character models in general looked awkward and bulky.

The textures in Street Hoops are brilliant and not as simplified as the textures on NBA Street models. The downside is the character models in NBA Street looked a lot more realistic that the character models in Street Hoops. This made the visual impact, at least for me, side on the NBA Street version of the playground game.

I checked online videogame magazines to see what they had to say and one in particular noticed many of the things that I did about your game. IGN was one of the first to get a sneak-preview of Street Hoops and got a chance to play it extensively at the E3. Perhaps they can verify the validity of my observations. http://ps2.ign.com/articles/360/360810p1.html

Things that I would like to know about Street Hoops.

Since I didn't get as much game time as I would have liked at the E3, nor any questions with the developers, I did want to know more about the game. How many game modes are there? What type of re-playability does the game have? Are there secrets to unlock? Are there secret players/ courts? Will there be bonuses and awards given to players who complete multiple game modes?

NBA Street had a couple of game modes and a number of items to unlock. All of which made the game very re-playable. In fact I played NBA Street more thoroughly than Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (THPS3) on the Playstation 2. I found that the THPS3 had become redundant and had not revolutionized the gameplay from 2 to 3 as was promised. Despite the high ratings from the major magazines, an entire community of game players dedicated to the THPS series thought the game had become stagnant. I was one of them and I looked for alternatives. NBA Street with it's great control layout and easy to learn / difficult to master gameplay got me hooked.

I hope you do not think my criticism is too harsh. I think that Street Hoops is in great position of usurping EA's chokehold on sport titles. Especially their growing interest in converting existing sport titles into arcade, over the top, games. Titles like NBA Street, SSX Tricky, NFL Blitz, NHL Hitz, Red Card Soccer, are all leaning towards the addictive arcade engine that works in games like Tony Hawk and Matt Hoffman. I would like to see a playground game with arcade elements. Perhaps not too realistic but not too silly, it is a fine balancing act I'm sure. I look forward to seeing the final version of Street Hoops and wish the team best of luck in the future.
Thanks for your time,
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