



Some of the Best Sports Games Didn't Need a TV



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Contrary to popular belief, there was a world before video games. Today's youth might find that hard to believe, but it's true. While the kids of today exercise their thumbs, the youth of yesteryear actually exercised outside. We played baseball on the street corner, football in the street and basketball in the driveway. None of it was organized by adults. There were no uniforms, scoreboards or officials of any kind. We played with balls, not joysticks and game pads.

But, there were sports games before Atari invaded the mindset. There was actual ping pong before Pong. John Madden actually coached football before pushing video games.

The games were simpler. They had no graphics and few sound effects.

Parents didn't have to worry about the violence quotient in the games, except for the occasional lamp that would be broken when we argued over something.

We thought they were great back then, but that wasn't the video age, and today's youth might find them simplistic or, dare I say, even boring. Maybe we were just easily entertained.

But, for people who remember way back to the '60s and '70s, here is a salute to the games of yore. Maybe you remember some of them.

BAS-KET -- One of the real classics. Board-game sized basketball court with strategically placed holes just big enough for a ping pong ball to roll into it. Spring-levers on the side of the box that would launch the ping pong ball towards a small hoop at either end. Disc-type rollers helped you keep score.

Three-quarter-court shots were commonplace. Once you mastered the tension needed for each shot, a miss could cost you the game. You were, of course, at the mercy of the roll of the ball, but it still was an awesome game. Plus, defense was non-existent, just like my real-life game.

I was pleasantly surprised that it still existed when my son was born, remarketed as NBA Bas-Ket. The rims were now plastic instead of steel. The nets, too. But the same old game.

MATTELL TALKING FOOTBALL -- Two players, each with assorted discs to be placed into the small recorder. Offensive player picks his play (inside run, outside run, short pass, long pass or flea-flicker) and defensive player picks his defense. Then push the button. If memory serves, it was Dick Enberg's voice that would spout the result of the combination of play choices.

I'm not sure how many possibilities there were, but this game seemed almost futuristic back then. And you picked the flea-flicker at your own risk. If your opponent picked the right defense, it would backfire big-time.

STRAT-O-MATIC or APBA BASEBALL: Both games had their select legions of followers and both have also warped into computer games now. But back then they were dice games. Each major league player had his own statistical card and with the roll of the dice, amazingly realistic results.

Harmon Killebrew hit home runs. Nolan Ryan struck guys out and was wild. Morris Nettles was lucky to reach base (you couldn't steal first base with dice either).

A neat feature was the availability of classic cards. Try to beat the 1927 Yankees with any of the teams from the '60s. Not a chance.

Another great feature: dice don't choke, so the '69 Cubs were actually a great team and didn't fade down the stretch.

ALL-STAR BASEBALL: A spinner game. Not as realistic as APBA or Strat-o-matic, but still fun. Each player had a cardboard disc that would fit over the spinner. Babe Ruth's card was half home runs and almost half strikeouts. Still a lot of fun.

ELECTRIC FOOTBALL: An absolutely terrible game, but for some reason, we played this for hours. Arrange your little plastic offensive and defensive players on a long steel playing field. Then turn on the switch.

A loud, droning buzz vibrated the playing field and the players moved every which way. You had very little control, passing was non-existent, not to mention the little kicker they gave you. Mirro Roder looked good next to one of those little impossibilities.

Sounds simpler than the exotic video offerings of today, but I guess times were a lot simpler back then, too.

And we never developed cramps in our thumbs either.

Pat Paul

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