

Asshole Football

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Asshole Football is a sport designed with the goal of fostering cooperation between competitors. In this essay I will first look at the overall problems of having cooperation between competitors in a ball sport, then I will look at how we sought to solve some of these problems by both designing the game itself. Lastly I will discuss the whether it is a good idea to put a complex tournament structure in a game that is complicated by itself.

Ideally we wanted to create a ball sport similar to "The Hunger Games" where opponents are forced into creating alliances in order to survive. We would like a game where these alliance could be broken at any time when one if its members decides that she does not benefit from the alliance anymore. Such a dynamic is rarely seen in ball sports, however it is emergent in racing competitions such as cycling, racing and sailing, where competitors are inclined to cooperate because it is mutually beneficial for them. Racing competitions works in a way where two players can help each other making progress towards the goal line or hinder other players progression. This dynamic is rarely seen in ball sports, but it happens from time to time that within a tournament structure two opponents might benefit from the same result. Such a situation arose in football in the European Championship in 2004 where both Denmark and Sweden could proceed from the the group stage if their game ended 2-2. However such situations are tried avoided and there are often regulations stating that teams can not fix or throw matches. Apart from these rare examples within tournament settings it is rare to see cooperation between competitors within ball games. This is probably due to the dichotomic nature of ball games' point system; either you get a point or you do not. With Asshole Football we tried to create cooperation between players both by introducing a less dichotomic point system and creating a tournament structure where tactical play was not frowned upon. The introduced point system, which might be horribly balanced, is letting the scoring player receive 3 points, while her team mate receives 1 point. The game is played within a tournament structure where a player plays on different teams throughout the tournament, which allows for spectators to follow their favorites players and might see them play together with their arch rivals. The tournament structure also affirms the games position as a sport and not simply a football variation, since the it is designed to be played in a sport like competitive setting.

Even though the rules described above affords cooperation within competition, the game still faces design challenges. Regular football both affords, and signifies through its rules, that their should be a division of roles within a team, e.g. a goalkeeper or defender. Though it is a interesting concept that competitors should negotiate the team roles, we found that it would be too big a design challenge to incorporate this negotiation into the game in a meaningful way. Instead we tried to eliminate the need of having roles explicitly in the rules, but still let it be possible to have them emergent. The racing sports we analyzed

often seems to function in this way where there are no explicit roles in the rules. Since a sport like bicycle racing is team based it still has roles within a team, but when opponents sits together in a breakaway, they might take different roles even though they are equal. We sought to eliminate roles from Asshole Football by removing the goalkeeper position and the need for having distinct attackers and defenders. The goal keeper position was eliminated by turning the goals around making it not possible to shoot from one goal into the other; in other words limiting the game. The need for distinct defenders and opponents where removed by moving the goals closer towards the middle, this makes it easily possible for an attacking player to be able to defend as well and vice versa.

Throughout the design process I often made the thought process of imagining how players would actually behave if they were asked to play asshole football. As a side node I must admit that we never tried the game ourself, since we were not enough who saw ourself "competent" to play football. I find it really difficult to figure out how the game would actually be played. We had a lot of ideas of how we wanted the game to be played, but since the sports is quite distinct from other sports I know of, I ca not even figure out, how I would play it myself. I think the reason is that the game has a quite complex layer of strategy; who does player choose to cooperate with? Who do they see as their main opponent? Could to players cooperate later if one has a history of betraying the other?. This is unlike football where the fascinating thing is the physical esthetics's of the game itself combined with a tactical aspect; players ball control, their passes, the physical battles and a goalkeeper jumping into the air in order to catch a ball. After spending some time away from asshole football I have come to the conclusion that the idea of having cooperation between competitors does not lend itself very well to a game like football. When designing the game, I believed as previously stated that the reason this sports do not exists is because of the dichotomic nature of ballgames. I have now come to the conclusion that the main reason is, as to why it is difficult, is that there might simply be too many things going on if football had a heavy strategic layer ¹. Trying to introduce this might be confusing for both spectators and players. Bicycling on the hand has a progression that is so slow that the spectators have time to both enjoy its physical esthetic's and the strategic layer.

In this essay I have presented some of the consideration and thoughts that went into creating Asshole Football. I have described how we found it difficult to create cooperation between opponents in a ball game, which were both because of the dicotomic nature of the ball games and because it might be distracting to add a strategic layer on top of action filled games.

¹I am not trying to say that there is no strategy in football, rather that the moment-to-moment action of a player is not so based on strategy.