

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A GAME DESIGNER

PART I

by

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THE EARLY YEARS

I was born and raised on the frozen wastelands of northern New York State in the small town of Massena. Massena is near the St. Lawrence River, across from Cornwall, Ontario, which is about 75 miles south of Montreal, Quebec. I wasn't actually born in Massena because no hospital was there then; my dad drove my mom 25 miles to Potsdam where the nearest hospital was located. Thus, Potsdam is the official place of my birth.

My mother wanted my first name to be my father's first name, Mervyn, but my dad never liked Mervyn and developed a nickname, "Buck." My parents settled on Patrick as my first name with my middle name being Mervyn. Most of the families in the area were of French Canadian descent, as was mine: "Premo" was originally spelled "Primeau."

The winters in Massena were brutal. We had no garage, and on particularly cold winter nights, I remember my dad taking the battery out of the car and bringing it into the house for the night.

As a youngster, I delivered newspapers (*The Syracuse Post-Standard*) six days a week in the afternoon, with Sunday papers in the morning. When I ended my route, I was nearly a mile from home, and during the winter, it was dark by the time I was

finished with my deliveries. My parents bought a used bicycle for me, and I remember taking it apart, cleaning and greasing it (I had to buy a new chain as I recall), and painting it a dark blue. I used the bike in late spring, summer, and early fall. However, in the winter, due to ice and snow, I used my sled to carry the papers that I delivered. The temperature was frequently 20 degrees below zero—no exaggeration!—especially in January, and I recall that the last customer on my route often invited me into his house for a hot cup of cocoa, which I really appreciated. Of course, then I had to walk home. On extremely frigid nights, my dad sometimes came to pick me up, unless he was still at work. When the weather was especially cold, I dressed in multiple layers of clothes, socks, mittens/gloves, and scarves. I also wore a full head woolen cap with holes for eyes and mouth, along with a winter coat with a hood. I must have looked like Ralphie's younger brother in *A Christmas Story*!

My earliest memories consist of MY younger brother, the neighborhood kids, and me playing cowboys and Indians (sorry, Native Americans); we all had cap pistols (that would certainly be frowned upon today!) and had a lot of fun. In addition, I can remember listening to such radio programs as *Big Jon and Sparky* (with the theme song "The Teddy Bears' Picnic"); *The Lone Ranger* (Hi-yo, Silver! Awayyyyy!) and "his faithful Indian companion, Tonto" (Get 'em up, Scout!)—all to the rousing score of "The William Tell Overture"; *Straight Arrow* (Kah-nee-wah, Fury!); *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* (On, King, on you huskies!); *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders, Inner Sanctum* (sponsored by Carter's Little Liver Pills); *Tarzan* (From darkest Africa comes Edgar Rice Burroughs' greatest creation); *Gunsmoke* (starring William Conrad as Matt

Dillon); and *The Shadow* (Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows! Hehhehheh heh!), to name some. Those were the days, my friends!

I was a teenager when I visited my Gramma and Grampa Perry on many Saturday evenings. We would watch *The Lawrence Welk Show* followed by *Saturday Night Wrestling*. My grandfather wasn't a fanatic about wrestling, but my grandmother was. She enthusiastically cheered on the "heroes" and booed the "heels." I still remember those classic matches between Whipper Billy Watson and the dastardly Don Leo Jonathan. Did I mention that my grandmother served freshly made donuts? Sometimes my mom came with me and we would all play cards; I think we played Pedro/Pedreaux (pronounced peed-ro). I doubt if I've played since. Those wonderful memories still come to mind even today.

As long as I'm discussing a number of topics and experiences that seemingly aren't particularly relevant to designing sports games, I may as well continue this autobiographical approach to mention other influential memories. When I was a young lad around 10 or 12, I enjoyed reading comic books, which I often traded with other kids in the neighborhood. I wasn't really interested in super heroes; I liked funny comics involving Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Little Lulu, and those zany comics from DC, such as *The Fox and the Crow*, *Dodo and the Frog*, *Nutsy Squirrel*, *The Three Mouseketeers*, and others. I did like some adventure comics, notably *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, *Straight Arrow*, and *Tarzan*. And speaking of Tarzan, I was 10 years old when my Grampa Premo gave me a worn edition of a Tarzan book, one that my dad and his brothers had read growing up. I had seen Tarzan movies, but my dad told me the books were much better. How right he was—

the novel Tarzan was not the Tarzan of the movies. Edgar Rice Burroughs' classic hero was the noble savage in all his glory. I discovered there were quite a few Tarzan novels, and they were still in print. I asked for them for my birthday, Christmas, and other special occasions (I later learned that Burroughs had died two years before my grandfather gave me my first Tarzan novel.) I also found out that Burroughs created other heroes: John Carter of Mars, Carson of Venus, David Innes of Pellucidar (hollow earth with dinosaurs!), and many more. These wonderful books stirred the imagination of a young boy.

Believe it or not, I didn't have any interest in hockey—a popular sport in snow country—or pro basketball for that matter. The Massena Central High School Red Raiders had a strong football program; its teams compiled a 56-game winning streak that ran from 1949 to 1957, but I never paid much attention. The team cheer was: “Little Red Raiders, sittin’ on a fence, trying to make a dollar out of 99 cents; two bits, four bits, six bits, a dollar, all for Massena, stand up and holler.” (I’m surprised I remembered that.) I do recall watching the New York Giants (Charlie Conerly, Sam Huff, Frank Gifford) with my dad and was devastated when the Giants lost to the Baltimore Colts in the famous 1958 overtime game. Also, I was a New York Yankees’ fan (Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra, Roger Maris).

I was about 15 years old when my Grampa Premo took me to the Franklin County Fair in Malone, New York, and introduced me to harness racing. I don't know why I liked that sport so much. We didn't do any betting. Perhaps it was simply being with my grandfather and seeing that he liked the sport.

I recall playing cards with my Grampa Premo on his front porch; we played Pitch and always had a great time. I also recall watching major Thoroughbred horse races with my Grampa and Gramma Premo on their black and white television. I think horses are elegant and exciting, especially when they're racing—doing what horses love to do: run. The first horse race that I saw on TV was the 1957 Kentucky Derby when Willie Shoemaker misjudged the finish line and prematurely stood up in his stirrups, causing his mount, Gallant Man, to narrowly finish second to Iron Liege. What an introduction to the sport!

One year later, I bet on a horse race for the first and only time. I found out that my paper route boss, John Hartford, was a horse racing devotee. In 1958, Mr. Hartford was rooting for Silky Sullivan, a California horse who had an amazing come-from-behind style: he would drop a long way back and then run with a furious rally to win—he once won from over 40 lengths behind. I liked a very good horse from Kentucky called Tim Tam. We bet 25 cents when these horses met in the Kentucky Derby. During the race, I remember that the network covering it had a special camera highlighting Silky Sullivan because he was so far back. There were 14 horses in the race, and when Silky began to run, he made up a lot of ground, but he sputtered and finished 12th. Tim Tam, on the other hand, won the race. (Tim Tam went on to capture the Preakness; Silky was eighth and never won another race. Tim Tam appeared to be a shoo-in to win the Belmont and, thus, the Triple Crown, but at the top of the stretch at the Belmont, he injured his leg badly and staggered in to finish second, and he never ran again.) Mr. Hartford didn't seem too happy that he lost, but to be honest, if I had lost, I don't think he would have taken my two bits. I immediately grabbed my winnings and invested

them in a burger, fries, and a root beer float from the counter special at J.J. Newberry's. Twenty-five cents was a lot of money in those days, at least to a 16-year-old. After all, I could get into a movie for a dime at the long gone Rialto Theater, and Saturday matinees had cartoons, a newsreel, a serial chapter, and the main feature.

From that time forward, I added horse racing to football and baseball as some of my favorite sports. This led to me reading books about horses and horse racing. Two of my favorite series were *The Golden Stallion* by Rutherford G. Montgomery and *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley. Montgomery also wrote books about other animals in the wild and I enjoyed those as well. I found additional wilderness authors, such as Joseph W. Lippincott and Ernest Thompson Seton, all of whom sparked my interest in wildlife, which has lasted to this day.

I'll admit that I wrote little stories about Thoroughbred horse racing when I was a teenager. I made up names for lots of horses (with a favorite in each story) and had them run in various races, using race names from real life, leading up to the Kentucky Derby or, in one case, an international race pitting the best in the world. I think I was influenced by Walter Farley. Now I wish I had kept those stories.

One of the first board games I received was *The Game of Pony Express* (Polygon Corporation); my Aunt Edith gave it to me for Christmas. I really liked this present, and the fact that it had horses didn't hurt. It's fun for the entire family to play and I still have it. My children played it, and soon I'll see what my grandchildren think.

I delivered newspapers for two or three years and then I moved on to jobs that paid more money; I was trying to save for college. While being a paperboy, I remember that half of my earnings were put into a savings account in my name by my boss

(thinking back, my parents must have had to authorize this). After school and on Saturdays, I was a part-time janitor for a laundry company. My Gramma Premo would often ask me to come over and weed her flower garden (in the summer, of course!) or mow the lawn (she had an old push mower, but the lawn wasn't very large) and she would add money to my savings account. I should mention that she almost always made lunch for me, and I remember going into my grandparents' vegetable garden and picking ears of corn. I would shuck them and Gramma would cook them—can't get much fresher than that! Then I found a job at a bank the summer following my senior year of high school. I was a clerk and really liked my position, plus my fellow employees were pleasant.

While I was attending college, I had summer jobs at the Schine Inn in Massena. The inn was built in the early 1960s due to the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, making it possible for large commercial ships to access the Great Lakes. It was a first-class hotel that had an outstanding dining room, cocktail lounge, and snack bar. Also, conventions were held there. It became one of the best restaurants in Massena, but it was the tourism for the seaway that caused the inn to be built—and people came from all over. I was a busboy, then a waiter, and finally a bellhop my first summer. The next two summers I was a bellhop. The governor of New York at that time, Nelson Rockefeller, visited Massena for some important ceremony involving the St. Lawrence Seaway. I was lucky enough to be on bellhop duty when he arrived and he was a big tipper, at least for Massena. I was paid 75 cents an hour (I know, that's difficult to believe) while working at the inn. The assumption was that tips would make up the difference—and they did. As a busboy and a waiter, the tips were just okay, but as a

bellhop, the tips were phenomenal. In those days, tips were not taxable (at least not officially!). The following is an unbelievable statement, but a true one: I earned enough money as a bellhop to cover my tuition for a year! Of course, that was 60 years ago and tuition was not what it is today; students today would be hard-pressed to earn enough money in a summer to cover tuition for a semester. However, there was also room and board plus books and other expenses, which my parents were able to help me with. Fortunately for my parents, I would be out of college before my brother started his education, and thankfully, I had no debt when I graduated from college.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

I attended Ithaca College, situated in the beautiful Finger Lakes Region of New York State, where I majored in accounting. In the fall semester of my senior year, I experienced one of the great tragedies in the history of the United States (US). I had just finished a class and was rushing to my dorm to change clothes for a job interview when I heard other students shouting that President Kennedy had been shot. What a shock, though we didn't know if the president was alive at that moment. The interview was on campus and upon arrival I was unsure whether I should mention the rumors about the president or just take the interview. The interviewers had been in a small room talking with candidates for the entire morning, so I didn't think they had received the news (the person who preceded me had been in the interview when the news broke). I decided to tell them what had happened and I was glad I did because they had not heard about it. It certainly changed the tone of the interview and it was an unusual and unintentional icebreaker. As it turned out, this company was the one I chose to work for.

Shortly after graduating, I flew from Massena to New York City for a week of orientation. On Friday night, I flew back to Massena. Two days later, my folks drove me to Rochester, New York, where my employer was located. Actually, my dad did all the driving because my mom never wanted a driver's license. When my dad died unexpectedly, my mom, who was in her 60s, immediately took driving lessons and got her license. She didn't drive far, just around the sleepy town of Massena, where she bought groceries, ran other errands, and visited her sisters, brother, mother, who was in her 90s, and friends. I had my driver's license, but I didn't have a car because my folks couldn't afford to buy one for me.

My company located a rooming house where I could stay. It was about a half mile from the business, so I could walk to and from work, getting breakfast at a local diner on the way there and stopping for dinner on the way back. This didn't last long because my employer was a public accounting firm which served audit and tax clients. After about a week, I would be assigned to clients at their places of business. The person in charge of the audit would pick me up each morning and drop me off each night. I knew I would have to get a car at some point. Many of our clients were out of town, so we would stay in the area for the week. Because all our lodging and meals were paid for, I was able to save some money. A close friend of mine from college also worked in Rochester and we got together often. He showed me around the city and assisted me in getting acclimated. After a couple months, I was able to accumulate a little more money and my friend helped me find a used car. Life was a lot different then—I was mobile!

I was closing in on the point in my life when I was to design my first tabletop game. After being out of college for a few years, I was drafted into the United States Army. As luck would have it, I was sent to West Germany instead of Vietnam, though I should mention that we were a little concerned about the touchy Czechoslovakia situation for a while. Despite having graduated from college with a degree in accounting and having experience as an accountant, I was placed in a medical records position in a US hospital base in Augsburg, West Germany.

The recreation room on the base had at least one baseball board game (can't recall which brand, but probably *Strat-O-Matic*®). There were a few of us who played it, though most guys—including me—wanted to play the real game outside. Then, I can't remember why but I decided to develop a pro basketball game that we could play (we had no basketball courts on base). Wilt Chamberlain was in his prime about that time and I always liked him. In any event, I wrote the rules and made cards for the best players for each team. Of course, you have to keep in mind that in 1967 the National Basketball Association (NBA) was composed of only two divisions of five teams each. I probably had access to a typewriter (personal computers weren't available yet), so I could type the rules, but I think I had to make each player card—more than likely on paper instead of cardstock—by hand. I playtested the game with some of my friends and finally it was ready to share with the rest of my fellow soldiers. Because I produced only the 1967 season, we eventually grew tired of the game. I don't recall if I left it there for others to play or if I took it home with me (that was over 50 years ago!), but it's long gone. Now, as with my horse racing stories, I wish I had kept it.

After my military service was up, I returned to the States and what I had previously been doing. I soon changed jobs, married a wonderful girl (we've been together for 48 years and are still going strong), and started raising a family (now three children and two young grandchildren).

For some reason, I thought about designing a tabletop horse racing game. I have no memory of what was the impetus to do this other than I wasn't aware of any strategic horse racing game with "real" horses on the market and I thought it would be fun to make one. I've never regretted the decision. The game was called They're Off! (TO!) and had basic and advanced rules. I created individualized cards for each horse. I even decided to include not only Thoroughbreds but also Standardbreds/harness horses (my Grampa Premo would never have forgiven me if I had left them out) and Quarter Horses. Those were the only racing breeds that I knew about (I was to find out how many more there were in later years), and I wanted to add the all-time greats for each breed in the game.

This game took a lot of research in order to obtain information about the horses. I was able to visit both the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, New York, and the Harness Racing Museum & Hall of Fame in Goshen, New York. The curators in each place were extremely accommodating.

Quarter Horses are one-fourth-mile speed demons, although I eventually discovered that some of them can run as far as half a mile, and harness horses, both trotters and pacers, usually performed in one-mile races. A few years later, when I decided to rate foreign harness horses, mostly from Europe and Australia/New Zealand, I read that these animals often ran races up to two miles. When evaluating Quarter

Horses and harness horses, I wanted to realistically replicate that some of them started quickly, others stayed in the middle of the pack, and still others took up the rear, ready to make a big run at the end. Thoroughbreds performed similarly, but the additional bit of realism I wished to emphasize was that some ran only in sprints (five, six, or seven furlongs, with a furlong being one-eighth of a mile), some ran middle distances (eight, nine, or 10 furlongs), some ran the long distance events (11, 12, or even more furlongs), and some did all three, but not necessarily equally. Horse racing in the US utilizes summaries of race horses' careers to date called "Past Performance" reports, which are prepared primarily to aid those who bet. There are also "Lifetime Past Performance" reports that are produced after a horse retires, which contain information about the horse's entire career. I used both publications for assistance.

The other major focus was in designing a racetrack. I thought that a racetrack board with little plastic horses, while traditional, would not accomplish one of my goals: to create a track that would yield a permanent record of the race. A paper racetrack where each horse's post position number was recorded in pencil on little squares on the track after each move, caused by rolling two six-sided dice, appealed to me. Once the race was over, I could see how each horse ran in relation to the other horses, and I had a permanent account of the race should I wish to keep it.

I didn't want to produce and market the game myself, so I presented it to various established sports game companies. The Gamecraft Company agreed to add my creation to its line. It already had baseball, football, and boxing games but nothing on horse racing. The company's owner was easy to deal with and I was very pleased with the quality of the game. Although there was no color, I suggested putting each breed

on a different colored cardstock, which turned out well. TO! had been released for only a couple months when an ironic event occurred.

There were a number of sports game journals on the market at that time and I noticed an ad in one of them for The Thoroughbred Racing Game by Vic Hasselblad. This game sounded a lot like mine, except it had only Thoroughbreds. I purchased it and discovered it had been released approximately the same time as my game. It was beautifully done and, as I was to learn, an excellent simulation of horse racing. Each horse was represented by an individualized card, as it was in my game, but Vic's cards were slightly different, though they accomplished the same thing as mine. Vic sold annual sets; his first year was 1973, the year Secretariat won the Triple Crown. I think he may have included a set of all-time greats as well. But the biggest similarity between his game and mine was that he, too, had paper racetracks so a player could record the progress of each horse around the track during the race. However, he one-upped what I had done. Whereas I had a generic track, Vic had designed a paper track for every major horse racing venue in North America, such as Churchill Downs, Santa Anita, and Belmont. He also included some historic old tracks that had long since closed. I was quite impressed. To be perfectly honest, once I had played his game, I thought it was better than mine.

I contacted Vic and we corresponded for many years. He was a great guy. He continued to release new seasons plus many old seasons going back to the 1920s, and I bought them all.

After a few years, Gamecraft went out of business and the owner sold me the remaining games for a reasonable price. I, in turn, sold them until they were gone.

I had always wanted to update TO! with top current runners and to add steeplechasers, so I found a small game company called Valgames that aided me in doing that. Valgames produced a variety of sports games and the owner was able to release some updates for me for a couple years. The company's creator was Bob Valvano, a very nice person with whom I stayed in touch for a long time. Bob's brother was Jim Valvano, the head coach of the North Carolina State men's basketball team that won the 1983 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I tournament in an upset over the number one seed, Houston. The arrangement with Bob didn't last long, through no fault of his or mine—my horse racing game had run its course and died a natural death.

Vic Hasselblad and I crossed paths one more time. As I mentioned, there were a number of sports game journals (some were house organs) in those days, but the most professional was Avalon Hill's *All-Star Replay*. 3M once had a game division from the early 1960s until the mid-1970s, including such offerings as Win, Place & Show (WPS), which was a horse racing party game. While the game was a simulation of horse racing, it didn't have any real horses; however, it was realistic and a lot of fun (yep, I bought a copy of it). When 3M disbanded its game division (and it had many, many quality products), it sold its entire line to the Avalon Hill Company in 1976. Avalon Hill quickly created and published its own sports game journal, as noted above. I subscribed and found it to be a first-rate magazine, glossy pages with full color. In an early issue, I saw that Vic Hasselblad had used the WPS system to recreate a real race; he selected a great race from the 1960s which included three of the best horses in history: Dr. Fager, Damascus, and Buckpasser. Since WPS allowed only six horses in

a race, Vic used the top six finishers in his. I thought this was a novel idea and one that led to exciting results, and it made me want to create some top races of the past for *All-Star Replay*, but I didn't want to step on Vic's toes. However, the next couple issues didn't have any submissions by Vic. I wrote to the editor and he said Vic's article was a one-time shot and Vic had no plans for anything else. I asked if he would be interested in my taking a crack at it. He was delighted and I was off and running. Incidentally, there was no compensation for writing articles, but none of the contributors seemed to mind because many of us produced a number of pieces over the years. I created some top real races and then I focused on providing information about some of the greatest Thoroughbred race horses of all time so that players could race the best against the best. Subsequently, I submitted other breeds along with rule modifications for steeplechasers, Quarter Horses, harness horses, and others. This was enjoyable while it lasted, but all things must come to an end, and Avalon Hill finally canceled *All-Star Replay*.

THE PRODUCTIVE YEARS

As TO! faded away, I was bitten by the quick-play game bug. Jim Barnes, the creator of Statis Pro Baseball, introduced me to fast-action game approaches through several articles he had written, and I was hooked; I think we may have corresponded briefly, but I'm not certain. Barnes basically recommended that for quick-play team sports, one should have an overall offense number for each team along with an overall defense number and a home-field number. Offense numbers were positive, but the best defense numbers were negative and the worst were positive. The home-field numbers were applied only to teams that performed well at home; thus, not all teams

would have home-field ratings. Individual players are typically not found in quick-play games, which is fine with me. The other thing I like about quick-play is just that: you could play many games quickly.

In 1986, I decided to begin my own fast-action game line with Professional Fast 'n' Furious Football Game (PFFF). I selected pro football because I liked the sport and the stats that I needed were available in any good almanac. My intent was to include every team in every season of every major league that ever existed going back to 1920. With all these teams, games could not only be replayed quickly, but teams from one season could be played against teams from another season, and tournaments could be conducted to determine the greatest pro football team of all time. I then added one more rating, something beyond what Jim Barnes had suggested: a number that allowed teams to attempt a comeback late in the game. The comeback rating was based on various factors, and only a few teams in each season had this number. The ratings differed by team depending upon the factors.

The biggest challenge was finding info on leagues other than the National Football League, but by the time I was done digging, the game contained every team from the All-America Football Conference, World Football League, American Football Association, United States Football League, Arena Football League, World League of American Football, and Continental Indoor Football League, as well as all organizations titled American Football League from the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s.

I wanted to add the Canadian Football League (CFL) and started rating it with 1936. Alas, I had mistaken 1936 for the year when the CFL began play. It was over 10 years later before I discovered the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

thanks to Bob Sproule, the historian of the CFL. I read several of his articles about the league and mailed him a letter. He was gracious with his response and sent me a booklet he wrote about the CFL, refusing to take any payment. In 2000, I split the CFL from my professional football game because there were so many leagues, some going back to 1883, and created a special supplement. In the preface to the game, I explained all the leagues and divisions and gave Bob Sproule full credit. There's a lot of confusion about when the CFL began because the league was formerly known as the Canadian Rugby Football Union until 1958 when it officially became the Canadian Football League, despite the fact that it stopped rugby-type play in 1880.

Since my fast-action games were to be strictly rules, charts, scoresheets, and the listing of teams with their ratings (gamers had to supply two of their own six-sided dice), I was able to easily produce my own materials. Also, there was an excellent printing company in town that was quite reasonable. Later, this company helped to design and print a game brochure. I don't recall the names of the sports game journals in which I advertised, but sales were pretty good, though I didn't quit my day job.

Before I decided to design my second fast-action product, Professional Brief 'n' Brisk Basketball Game (PBBB), my wife and I purchased a Tandy computer from Radio Shack with DOS and 5¼ inch floppy disks. This was wonderful. Changes and modifications in rules and other matters could readily be made, unlike the old typewriter approach. Then, in 1995, we bought an IBM Aptiva which featured Windows, CD ROM, a mouse, and 3½ inch disks (my son remembered all these details—which is probably why he's in the computer industry). Of course, our family availed themselves of these computers for many things besides my games. I used them for work—it took a while

before my employer decided to buy all employees personal computers. And I'd like to think that my children used them for school, which they did, but computer games were also prominent, though as a part-time game designer, I had to feel good that my kids enjoyed playing games.

PBBB was created in 1987. The same fundamentals apply, with the home court replacing the home field of PFFF. The information I needed for the NBA was easy to find, but stats for other leagues were not. Luckily for me, I came across William Himmelman, who provided invaluable data on earlier leagues and competition, and I was able to go back to 1939.

PBBB is one of two of my games that eventually became computerized. The fellow who did this for me was highly skilled, and the finished product was outstanding. The computerized game included not only men's pro basketball but also women's pro basketball along with Olympic basketball for both men and women (see below). And you could play an entire season in seconds! A good friend, Kimbo Robinson, assisted me in finding all the season schedules. In addition, I put in some dream seasons, or gamers could set up their own dream seasons. On the other hand, a few minor glitches developed, and incorporating new seasons each year turned out to be a problem. Sales of the computer version weren't great, so the designer and I parted ways, though we remained friends. I was disappointed because I was hoping we would eventually computerize all of my fast-action games, but it didn't happen.

Since the basics are the same, I won't go into detail on the entire collection of my fast-action games, unless there's something that I think is different or that might be interesting in and of itself. A few of my games have been revised from time to time and

practically all of them were updated after each new season. Here's an annotated chronological list of the remaining games:

1988 – Fast-Action Horse Racing (FAHR): More on this creation below.

1989 – Olympics Brief 'n' Brisk Basketball Game (OBBB): Every nation's team for the men from 1936 and the women from 1976. This game didn't sell particularly well and was discontinued after a few years.

1990 – Major League Brief 'n' Brisk Baseball Game: This is the first and only game where I had a partner, and I'm very glad that I did! Angelo Louisa was and still is an avid baseball fan and historian (among other things) and we worked closely together on the design and development, even though it was long distance because we don't live near one another. We included every team for every season for every league: the National Association, National League, American Association, Union Association, Players League, American League, and Federal League. The game even had some Negro League teams. We had planned on adding more Negro League teams, but life and the difficulty of determining certain ratings got in the way. Angelo and I remain good friends to this day.

1991 – College Fast 'n' Furious Football Game (CFFF): This was a massive undertaking since I wanted to go back as far as I could, which turned out to be 1869, and chose a number of the top major teams for each year as well as select nonmajor teams for certain years. In 1999, I developed a supplement for smaller colleges which involved all of the NCAA's lower divisions, the NAIA, and even some Canadian teams. The research for the early years was painfully slow, but I met many helpful sports information directors (SIDs) and librarians.

1993 – College Brief ‘n’ Brisk Basketball Game (men): This project was also a major effort. As I did with CFFF, I wanted to go back as far as I could, which turned out to be the 1891-1892 season. Doing this took just as much research as CFFF, and possibly more. I was fortunate to be able to visit the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, during a business trip to the area. The staff was very accommodating and I found a lot of information. Obtaining data on the early years was particularly difficult, and I recall having trouble discovering anything, other than the won-lost record, for a certain team. The athletic department of the school that fielded the team had nothing that far back (around the 1920s, I think), so the SID suggested I call the school librarian, which I had done numerous times for other schools. The lady I talked with in the library was affable, but she stated that the library didn’t have any details for those years. I was about to thank her and hang up, when she added, “Just a minute.” She said she remembered a plaque in the library that may have been about that team. She excused herself for a moment. When she returned, she told me the plaque was about the team for the year I had mentioned, and it had every game the team played (about 25, I believe), listing each opponent and the score. I had hit the jackpot! And she was kind enough to read all the information, which I frantically wrote down. There are many other such tales, but this one was particularly memorable. In 2001, I released a men’s smaller school supplement which was similar to the college football supplement. A gentleman who aided me with both men’s and women’s college basketball was Morgan Brenner. He had published a book on every college basketball tournament that he could find—it was a massive tome. After I purchased his book, I contacted Morgan and we corresponded for quite a few years. Then, in 2008, I met Phil

Porretta, a college basketball historian who had done significant research into the men's game, especially for its early years. We became good friends and still are to this day. We compared notes over the phone for hours at a time. He had information I didn't have, and I had information he didn't have. As a result of our collaboration, I published a supplement to the men's game in 2008 which updated data for many of the teams from the early years and allowed me to add more top teams.

1998 – Quick Kick Fast-Action Soccer Game (men): This game had all the men's World Cup soccer teams since 1930. I had hoped to add the women, but the game did not sell particularly well, so, as with OBBB, it was discontinued after a few years. At one time, I thought Quick Kick might be an avenue to introduce soccer league teams from throughout the globe, but I never got that far.

1999 – Women's College Basketball Game (supplement): This supplement was another project that required a lot of research, but I was used to it by now. I was able to go back to 1951-1952 in terms of teams for the game. I included the lower NCAA divisions as well as the NAIA and Canadian college teams. Morgan Brenner, who is noted above, was as helpful with the women as he had been with the men.

2001 – Women's Professional Basketball Game (supplement): This was the last game that I designed, although technically it was a supplement to men's PBBB. It consisted of the Women's Professional Basketball League, the American Basketball League, the Women's National Basketball Association, and one season of the Women's Basketball Association. I wanted to add the Women's American Basketball Association and two more seasons of the Women's Basketball Association, but I couldn't locate sufficient statistics; I tried for years and eventually gave up.

When I retired from my employment in 2007, I also retired from my game business, though I did continue updating the games with current years for my own enjoyment. In early 2020, I decided it was time to stop even that. However, six or seven years ago I received a phone call from Lon Whitehead, who had designed his own horse racing game, Top of the Stretch, which was excellent and had a great following. Lon indicated that he was interested in resurrecting my FAHR game with my permission and assistance. He said if I would update the horses each year, he would do everything else. He was a former customer and had a copy of FAHR. I was taken aback but impressed with his determination to put MY game back on the market (I guess he wasn't concerned with our games competing). I told him I would have to think about it. At that time, I was still updating my games for my own benefit, though he didn't know that, and could send him all the new information for the game. I accepted his offer and he was delighted.

Lon and I are still producing FAHR, primarily because there continues to be reasonable demand for the game. For those who might be interested, here's the URL for the website that has more information:

<https://www.topofthestretchgame.com/fahr.html>.

FAST-ACTION HORSE RACING

I left this game for last since it's the only game of mine still being updated and sold, and it's probably one of my favorite games. This game, along with those on college football and men's college basketball, required the most research by far, but I learned more about horse racing than any other sport. As I had stated previously, when I conducted research for information for TO!, I thought that the only racehorses were Thoroughbreds (these are the most popular type of racehorses and are often referred to as "flat runners" because they run on a flat surface and don't jump over obstacles as do the steeplechase Thoroughbreds), Standardbreds (both trotters and pacers), and Quarter Horses. I probably knew about steeplechasers, sometimes referred to as "jumpers," but I didn't want to venture there then.

As time went on, I gradually acquired knowledge about the long-distance heat racers, which were actually Thoroughbreds of the 1700s and early 1800s, Arabians, Appaloosas, Paints/Pintos (Pintos were a specific breed for a brief period during the 1960s), the legendary China ponies (from the early 1800s until World War II, these small but sturdy horses raced primarily in the Hong Kong area), and mules (mule racing had its roots in the Deep South in the early 1800s; more recently, racing mules are found on the West Coast where they compete at such short distances as 440 yards or even shorter). Heat racers were prevalent in Great Britain and the United States; they often ran at distances of one to four miles and they had to capture two of the heats to win the race—all on the same day! For example, if the first three four-mile heats were won by three different horses, then only these three would race again to determine the

winner, which could have amounted to 16 miles in one afternoon. Now that's endurance!

Standardbreds also race in heats on occasion, primarily for big races such as the Hambletonian (trotters) and the Little Brown Jug (pacers), but typically for only one mile. The reason is that sometimes so many horses are nominated to participate that they all can't fit in one race. When this happens, the horses are put into two or three heats, depending on how many horses there are. For instance, if there are two heats, the top four or five finishers from each heat would make the final. If the winner of this heat isn't one of the two heat winners, then the three winners would race another time to determine the champion. This practice was more common in the early days of harness racing. Recently, the heats are run the week before, and then the race champion is the winner of the last heat, period. Procedures vary from track to track.

Why are Standardbreds known as harness horses? These horses race under harness while pulling a lightweight cart, known as a sulky or bike, upon which the driver sits, unlike all other breeds where the rider, known as a jockey, sits on the horse's back. In the 1800s, when Standardbreds first started racing, they had a rider; the carts came later. Standardbreds are descended from Thoroughbreds and are an American creation; harness racing eventually spread to Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

What's the difference between trotters and pacers? They're the same breed, but the way they coordinate their leg movements (i.e., gait) developed over time. Trotters are diagonally gaited, meaning the left front and right hind legs move in unison in a smooth, high-stepping motion. Pacers are laterally gaited, meaning the legs on one

side move in tandem in a swaying, side-to-side motion. Since Pacers are slightly faster than trotters, the two rarely race against one another.

These different racing breeds were added to FAHR as I learned about and researched them. This was the second of my games to be computerized; the same fellow who designed the PBBB computer version also designed this game (actually, he made this game before he computerized PBBB). I loved this computer version! Its creator instituted some novel approaches. For example, when you picked your horses for a race, you could have the race run more than once—up to 100 times, I believe. Then all you had to do was click “enter” and 100 races would be run in a flash. If, for instance, the race had 10 horses, the computer would indicate how many times each horse finished from one to 10 for the 100 races. In addition, you could select the particular race track you would like to race at, including choosing a dirt or turf track. A number of dream races were added, or you could create your own dream races. As with PBBB, there were some glitches, and after a couple years, we had to abandon the computerized version. I was really disappointed. There was so much potential, but it was not meant to be.

Then I began to become a little more creative. I included fictional horses, such as the steeplechaser named Pie (or The Pie) from the movie *National Velvet*, starring Elizabeth Taylor as Velvet Brown. I combed through Walter Farley’s Black Stallion books, compiled race records for all his horses, and put them into this section. At that time, I still had some of the stories I had written as a teenager and I added the horses from those stories to this section as well. Farley also wrote about trotters, Quarter Horses, and steeplechasers, thus these horses were placed in that section, too. (And

by the way, if you so desire, you can race these fictional Thoroughbreds against real ones, but Farley's Black Stallion is a tough customer!)

My next fun group of horses was called "Western Heroes' Steeds." These were the horses of famous western stars: Silver (the Lone Ranger), Trigger (Roy Rogers), Champion (Gene Autry), and hundreds more that I selected from Western TV shows, movies, and books. I even decided to include other horses of heroes: Shadowfax (Gandalf), Argo (Xena), Black Beauty (Vicky Gordon), Dynamite (Ulysses S. Grant), and the like. These heroes' horses should race against only each other.

And last, but not least, I developed a system whereby gamers could race horses of different breeds against one another—the ultimate fantasy races, real pound-for-pound confrontations. I selected the top horses of each breed, including the Western steeds, and converted each rating for each breed so it would be compatible with all the other breeds. For a reason that escapes me now, I didn't add fictional horses, but for the next release of the game, I'm going to adapt the best fictional horses for the fantasy races. For horses which were rated for multiple distances (e.g., Thoroughbreds and Arabians), I used the best rating for each horse. The current version of the game must have over 6,000 race horses—and many more than that if the fantasy horses are added.

REFLECTIONS

There were other sports for which I considered designing fast-action games, but my impression was that dice sports games were a dying breed—based on my lagging sales, for one thing. However, even today there are many sports games, either tabletop

or computer, still on the market. The sports that I thought about making into fast-action games were:

Track and Field. I very much wanted to create a quick-play game for this sport. I did a lot of research and came up with a large number of athletes—men and women—for every major track and field event, including the decathlon and heptathlon. But in compiling this list, I began to realize that actually rating these athletes was going to take forever. And I felt that a finished product would contain too many pages due to all the lengthy scoring charts for the decathlon and heptathlon, resulting in a higher price tag, which I didn't know if gamers would be willing to pay. Ultimately, I chose to abandon the project.

Amateur Wrestling. This had been a sport I liked to watch since I was in college. While I attended Ithaca, which had very good wrestling teams, I saw many exciting matches. There were no NCAA wrestling divisions in those days, so Ithaca often played such schools as Syracuse and more than held its own. When thinking about a tabletop game, it became readily apparent that there just was not enough data available for me to rate these great athletes, no matter how much digging I would do. So, I shelved the idea.

Pro Wrestling. I was extremely eager to create this game. I would have liked to have included men, women, tag teams for both men and women, and midgets (sorry if this term is offensive, but it was used in the pro wrestling world for years) for men, women, and tag teams. I had located sources that helped me to come up with at least 4,000 participants and had even developed a fast-action system that I thought would work well. However, discovering enough information to rate all these competitors would take

a lot of time. I had my doubts that the game would sell enough copies to provide an adequate return for my effort. Therefore, like the previous two ideas, it went nowhere. (My apologies, Gramma Perry—but see my upcoming second article.)

Superstars Competitions, Men and Women. This sport was developed by Dick Button, Olympic figure skating champion. The first men's event took place in 1973 and was televised by ABC. I remember viewing it and found it quite interesting. It was similar to the decathlon in that the athletes (top guys in various sports) participated in a number of events. The rigor of a real decathlon was not present, but it was fun to watch. Women began to compete in 1975. The contests spread to Great Britain and then to international competitions. There were even some team superstars. These various events were popular throughout the 1980s, but were sporadic until 2009, when they virtually ended. I was planning on adding many great stars from sports all over the world, including the best in history for both men and women, and was going to use the events actually covered during the TV shows. However, I was stymied as to how I would rate such notables as Babe Ruth or Michael Jordan or Jackie Joyner Kersey. In the end, I decided to put it on the back burner, which eventually went out.

The World's Strongest Man and Woman. The men's contests began in 1977 and have been held with just one interruption until the present, being shown on TV consistently. Women's competitions started in 1997 but have had sporadic interruptions through 2020 and were on TV for only the first couple of years. Since then, they haven't been televised in the US and finding copies has been very difficult. I had hoped to put in all the top competitors for all the official events, but I wanted to go back in history and add some of the best strong men and women that I could unearth. I found an article

written by a historian of strong men who listed the top 100 of all time, so I had a source for the men, though this same gentleman hasn't yet tackled an article on the women. However, even for the men, I was once again at a loss as to how to rate those that didn't compete in the specific events of the formal contests. Alas, I had to give up the ghost.

Women's Pro Football. This is a sport that I didn't learn about until after I had retired. In 2016, Neal Rozendaal wrote an outstanding book titled *The Women's Football Encyclopedia*. It has information about the early days, including national champs from 1976 to 2016. The various pro leagues throughout the years are examined, along with league standings, but such leagues as Lingerie Football aren't dealt with because they're not true representatives of the sport. All the information I needed to rank these teams was found in Rozendaal's publication, and I certainly would have made a game for this sport if the book had been published earlier.

Boys' High School Football, Boys' High School Basketball, and Girls' High School Basketball. I began to learn about these sports, too, after I had retired. In my younger days, I definitely would have created games for them. I had found a wonderful source and all the statistical information I needed. Oh well, the timing wasn't right.

So in the words of Walter Cronkite, "And that's the way it is."