

Gamers Review Basketball

Strat-O-Matic computer programmer Bob Winberry says he never gets too much feedback from customers. So despite Dick Hunt's extensive critique of Version 1 computer basketball and Winberry's already-announced changes for Version 2, we offer these views from STRAT FAN readers.

As we have seen with computer baseball, SOM's computer games are a constant work in progress, and Winberry has frequently made late additions to new versions, so it's never too late to comment.

Still, by comparing this month's article on Version 2 improvements you'll see that some of these gamers' wish lists already have been filled.

Our five correspondents are Jim Clouston of Lincoln, NE; Mark Colman of Spokane, WA; Randy Jones of Hempstead, NY; Drew Lane of Tucson, AZ, and Mack Smith of Silver Lake, KS.

We asked them to tell us how they play the game so that their results could be placed in perspective:

Computer power. All but Clouston, who uses a 386 with 2MB RAM and complains that an autoplay game takes him 75 seconds, use a 486, though Smith also uses a small 286 for some games.

Amount of play. Clouston had the least experience at the time these critiques arrived, 25 manual games. Jones had the most experience: 100 manual and 500 autoplay games.

Playing time. Lane, playing in "Show Final Action" mode, is fastest, averaging 35 minutes per game manually. Jones averages 45 minutes against the robot coach, Smith takes 60 minutes and Clouston 75 in "Show Some Action" mode. Colman needs 80 minutes for a game with two human coaches.

"Now I can play the advanced game without it taking me one hour-plus," Lane said.

League / solo play. Colman and Jones are draft leaguers, Smith is doing a 1993-94 Suns replay, Clouston and Lane are also doing solo replays.

"I have been fortunate to play a couple of head-to-head games and found them to be more-enjoyable," Lane said.

Jones, commissioner of a face-to-face draft league, "uses the computer to fine tune and test my board-game team."

Ratings. Only three of our correspondents took us up on rating several aspects of play on a 1-10 scale, with 10 being best:

■ **FUN.** Smith-10, Clouston-7, Lane-8 head-to-head / 6 solo.

"It met my expectations," said Clouston,

who ranks football and baseball ahead of basketball for fun. "The monotony of a full NBA game makes it tough to produce an exciting game." Clouston admitted that his fun was spoiled when he got the game at Christmas, "then tried to cram in a full-season replay before baseball. I gave up after about 35 games." Also, he "hadn't played the board game since the '70s, and thus may not be familiar enough with all aspects of the game."

But for Smith, "There isn't anything I don't like about it. It has made me understand the rules better — much better — and I can now say that I better understand the game. It allows me to have a chance at actually finishing replay projects."

■ **EASE OF PLAY.** Smith-10, Clouston and Lane-8.

Smith, who plays often on a laptop while on frequent business trips, wishes "you could exit the game quicker" since computers must be turned off for airplane takeoffs and landings.

Colman wants the game screen to display a shooter's success chance for each type of shot "so you don't need the cards in front of you to make a shot selection, though I still use the cards a ton." Now, instead of numbers, the screen displays colored lines/bars of different lengths to show success probability. Cards, however desirable, are unnecessary.

■ **REALISM.** Clouston-8, Smith and Lane-7.

"It's probably my fault until I get a better feel for the game," Smith said, "but the computer beats up on my Phoenix Suns more than I'd like. I consistently get the Suns in foul trouble and their defense struggles."

Lane has found a variety of what he calls minor problems, such as "the game will let you play five point guards at one time on a drafted team."

"It doesn't appear the main focus of the computer manager is to win games, but to manage the shots or stats for players on that team," Lane added. "When a little-used gunner (with a low FG%) comes in, the computer will get that player all possible shots instead of going to players with a much better chance of scoring." [Ed: *Sounds like what happens in the NBA when a ballhog is in the game.*]

■ **STAT ACCURACY.** Clouston-10, Lane-9, Smith-7.

Lane cites "the fantastic accuracy of the statistics, even better than baseball." But he'd like to see stats for individual defensive stops and high-scoring game of the year, and

team fastbreak FG%. Colman wants the game to track team rebounds.

"I love the complete statistical package," Clouston said. He and Lane want each player's game stats, his SOM season stats and his actual stats all in a box on a single game screen. "I use this screen regularly in baseball," Clouston said.

Other improvements wanted.

■ Roster disks from past seasons, 1970-plus (Smith). [Ed: *1970-71 is on the way*]

■ Draft-O-Matic and Swap-O-Matic (Jones). [Ed: *Draft-O-Matic is in Version 2*]

■ Ability to download stats into a spreadsheet (Jones).

■ Ability to print the gameplan (Jones).

■ Option to conceal opponents' offensive and defensive strategy (Jones).

■ A game setup option to show whether results came from player's card or team defense card. "I want to be confident that if I select a team for the board and the computer with the same players and strategy, that the results will be similar," Jones said. Similarly, Lane wants the play description to show when the double-team works.

■ Make it easier to enter stats from draft-league road games (Colman).

■ View Scouting Report of multiple players simultaneously to choose matchups (Lane).

■ An overview of a stock team's fastbreak, press and defensive strategy frequency/ability (Lane).

■ Day-to-day rosters (Lane). [Ed: *See the STRAT FAN Basketball Annual*]

■ Ability to setup a play after any timeout, not just the last 2 minutes (Lane).

■ More graphics variety (Lane).

■ Individual technicals and ejections (Lane).

■ An occasional 3-pointer good with a foul (Lane).

Computer Tip

Here's a computer basketball tip from Strat-O-Matic's technical support man, Lenny Schwartz:

"Alex Stivrins played 10 games on four different teams. If you keep him on the roster of all teams at once, you may run into a problem with stats. You are better off keeping him (and others who played with multiple teams) on one team at a time, then trading or cloning him at the right time."