

LOOK OUT! A \$23 BILLION MARKET FOR GAMES IS FUELING THE DEMAND FOR CANADIAN GRAPHICS TALENT...

WHAM! DUNK!
3L



(left) Setup screens from EA Sports' soon-to-be-released NHL 99, which features real life players such as Chris Chelios (above) and Felix Potvin (opposite page).

AM!

BY DINAH TOLTON

ASK ANY SAVVY COMPUTER/VIDEO GAME STORE EMPLOYEE about current sales and rentals and you will hear that it's a 50/50 world. The story today in gaming circles is that sports games are doing just as well as role playing and action adventure games. Designers take note: that's half of a \$23 billion market worldwide for software and hardware, or in the U.S., twice the potential of theater and movie box offices.

A company such as EA Sports, a division of Electronic Arts, based in San Mateo, California, and highly regarded in expert gamer circles, sees its new releases fly off the shelf. Electronic Arts generated \$909 million in revenue in its last fiscal year. EA Sports is a developer and publisher of interactive entertainment sports software products.

Gamers looking for dazzling graphics like to pair their high-end equipment with role playing and action adventure games. But when it comes to the desire



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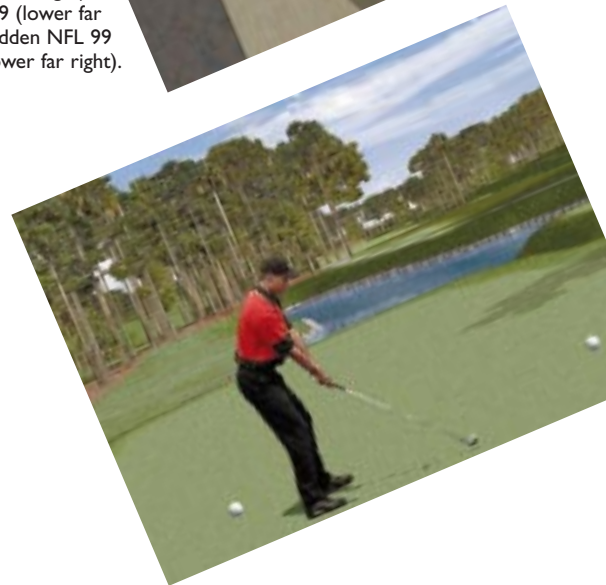
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Other offerings from EA Sports include Nascar 99 (right), Tiger Woods 99 (below), Knockout Kings (upper far right), NBA Live 99 (lower far right), and Madden NFL 99 (lower far right).



for sheer fun, sports games such as *Madden NFL Football*, *NHL Hockey* and *NBA Live Basketball* (all from EA Sports) will be top sellers, particularly since sports games can be played on lower end PCs.

NHL 99 is expected to be EA Sports' hottest title this fall. It will be released on three platforms — PC, Sony Playstation and Nintendo 64. Sports games are fun — but they also bring younger gamers up to speed. Although the games are geared to real sports fans who are knowledgeable and passionate, younger sport gamers tend to become aficionados over time. However true to the EA Sports motto "If it's in the game, It's in the Game", they are created true to life to the actual sport. Just as you don't have knock-down-drag-em-out fights in the NBA or NFL, you don't see them in EA Sports games either.

EA's target market is the 18 to 35 year old crowd, although the objective is to keep gamers' loyalty as they age by developing games that will continue to challenge and entertain. Male gamers now make up 90% of players. Interestingly, last year's *March Madness 98*, a college basketball



game, included women's teams — a strategy designed to woo female audiences.

This year EA is introducing a one-button beginner mode on new releases which will be less intimidating to novice players, so that the same game can be played simultaneously by both the expert gamer with a higher level of difficulty and a player just learning the ropes.

Electronic Arts is now a worldwide company. It was founded in the San Francisco Bay area in 1982.

The motion capture studio used by EA Sports, Electronic Arts Canada, is in Vancouver. It is the largest interactive entertainment studio in the world. It houses graphic artists, animators, motion capture specialists, mathematicians, programmers, audio specialists, video artists and video post production. Currently five games are under development there. A great many artists are hired from Emily Carr Institute in B.C. and Sheridan College in Ontario. Needless to say, the producers tend to be die-hard sports fans.

Before motion capture begins, a shoot list is created (a process which can take several months). The shoot list is a series of discrete movements linked by the game engine, encompassing moves.

The game engine is created in-house with proprietary software; it must tell all the players how to react when the human player controls his character. A player must not just

look like a soccer player but must behave like a soccer player. Motion capture takes the actions of professional athletes to use as a basis for some of the animations in EA games.

After that there is the addition of live play-by-play, sound effects and music. Play-by-play is done using the voices of famous commentators.

Only real life sports players are used in creating games. It begins by placing about forty highly reflective balls (ping pong size) on key parts of the athlete's body. In the creation of a basketball game, for instance, a court is erected with a sprung floor and net. Eight to twelve video cameras positioned on the perimeter of the court rectangle look down on the athlete.

This view from above is called the capture volume. A video camera triangulates and calculates where the balls are in 3D space in real time using infrared lights — at 240 frames per second. The computer program then resolves this into a single 3D view.

To finish rendering the characters and backgrounds, Electronic Arts Canada uses a full suite of digital tools; *Photoshop*, *Illustrator*, *Fractal Design* for still imaging, and in video production *SoftImage*, *Power Animator*, *Maya* from Alias, *3D Studio Max*, Adobe *AfterEffects*, and *Media Composer*. They also have Media 100 and two Flint systems.

EA Sports can be found on the Web at www.easports.com. *