Wii: They Don't Have Arms!

Brian Dipert - December 22, 2006

Continued from 'Wii Will Rock You'....

I've got much more that I hope to write about Wii in the coming weeks. I've assembled a bulging Outlook archive of interesting RSS feeds (including some really clever hacks of the Bluetooth-based game controller!), and although I only had a short time with this first console before I had to return it to Nintendo's PR agency, they've promised me a longer-term eval unit once production ramps up and the holiday shopping-created availability drought eases. But since, speaking of shopping, this is the Friday of the last shopping weekend before Christmas, I though I'd get some initial impressions down on cyber-paper for those of you considering a Wii purchase, particularly since I've already covered both the PS3 and Xbox 360 at length.

I'm not sure if I've ever had more fun with a toy than I had playing Wii Sports. Seriously. How's that for a testimonial? And I think my wife might feel the same way. Now, realize that although some folks think of us as 'kids at heart', I'm 40 years old, and she's 42. Ironically, my wife picked up the Wii controller after having spent a frustrating 30 minutes trying to figure out how to play a few Xbox Live Arcade titles (which are supposed to be simple). Within 5 minutes, she was gleefully hitting a cyber-tennis ball around the cyber-court. The Wii controller, and the games it controls, are that intuitive. My favourite moment of the few days we spent testing the console occurred when, after playing Wii Tennis for about an hour, my wife turned to me and said 'this is a really addictive game, even thought the players on screen don't have arms'. Feel free to draw your own conclusions about the relative importance of graphics and gameplay from that particular bit of insight.

To prove that I have absolutely no shame, I will now completely humiliate myself by allowing you to view two video clips that my filmmaker spouse (and her Kodak digicam....Quicktime MOV format....make sure you have your PC speakers turned on!) captured of me making a total idiot of myself, playing:

- Wii Baseball (7 MBytes) (the game was called after two innings when I'd hit 7 home runs....I didn't do quite so well the second time around), and
- Wii Boxing (3.2 MBytes) (yo, Adrian!).

Bowling and tennis were equally enjoyable (I'm not a golfer, either in real life or in cyberspace). The controller-to-display calibration was very precise, and the slight amount of lag was easy to adjust for. I didn't run into any of the Bluetooth-versus-Wi-Fi interference issues that Ron recently mentioned, although as I pointed out to him, at the time I did my testing I didn't have a laptop in the room downloading a Grateful Dead show off Usenet or a Linux distro via Bittorent, the console wasn't generating much network traffic by itself, and for that matter I didn't have the microwave oven or a cell phone operating nearby, either. Other aspects of the controller design, specifically the built-in speaker and force feedback, were equally engaging; when playing Wii Tennis, for example, you'd get a realistic jolt from the controller whenever your virtual racket connected with the virtual ball, along
with the sound of the "ball" hitting the racket, which then traveled back to the on-screen "court".
And yes, I took pictures of my wife playing Wii Tennis, too, but I promised her I wouldn't publicly post them.

I'll write more in the coming days and, after the second review unit arrives, weeks. Until then...good luck shopping, folks.

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