Battle Mascots - Project Brief

There's nothing quite like the vibe of spending a late autumn college gameday with a group of fellow college football fans. Yet, as it turns out, there's a dearth of quality entertainment to enhance those moments - enter *Battle Mascots*, a custom-made competitive board game that aims to fulfill that niche. The premise is simple - up to four players take control of various mascot characters in a glorious battle to determine who will represent the up-and-coming University of College Football. Channeling the cutthroat competition of college football itself, *Battle Mascots* is based around gathering resources around a large game board, all ending in a battle for the last man - or, rather, animal - standing.

The action primarily takes place in *Tabletop Simulator*, a Unity-based engine that allows one to recreate and play thousands of board games, both new and recreated, that have been created by users. It is extremely easy to learn, making it perfect for prototyping an idea as ambitious as this. In order to ensure each session of the game feels different, the number of items, traits, abilities, and units rack up to nearly a hundred total, meaning that an extensible program is almost necessary to ensure this game can function. Extensive use of image editing and document writing programs have also been required to plan out the scope of the project and craft the visuals needed for a chaotic game like this.

Personalization is a core theme of the game - each player's mascot has upgradable stats, traits, and abilities, letting them get attached to what they've created and heightening the competitive edge further. This game is not just a one-trick pony - every game aims to be different from the other in order to keep players coming back. Replayability will be how this game makes its mark - without an emphasis on it, players would not get attached to their characters in the same way. *Battle Mascots* provides hours of fun for any sports-loving family or friend group and aims to solidify itself as a member of the hallowed halls of party traditions.

The following may be slightly outdated as it was written before a re-theme of the project.

Project Definition

Battle Mascots aims to be a fun, eccentric, and competitive blend of board and card games that anyone with a passing familiarity with college football can enjoy, be it friends, family, or gaming lovers.

What sets this game apart from the others is its focus on what amounts to customizing your piece; while in other games, which piece you play the game with ends up being fairly arbitrary, as the focus is on the board itself, here, it's your entire identity as a player. Video game-y elements are brought in to make your player piece a character in its own right with statistics, traits, abilities, and allies to defend it. The game is divided into two distinct phases, with a "gather" phase focused on the board game elements and scavenging upgrades for your player character, while the "battle" phase is when the game temporarily transforms into a card game in order to bring those upgrades to life. In a sense, the game is almost like a tabletop RPG, but in a condensed board game form rather than a long-form campaign. I can't think of any board game that manages to take those customization elements and pare them down into a simple, eccentric board game that anyone can enjoy.

Problem & Solution

Outlining a problem for this sort of project is difficult, as games lean more towards being artistic rather than practical. In that sense, a definition of a problem would be more of a statement of the work's intended audience. This game aims to fulfill a need for entertainment at family gatherings and friend groups, especially if there is an interest in college football. Many households throughout the US South have at least one zealous football fan in them - speaking from anecdotal evidence - so the idea of a game playing off of that has a lot of broad appeal, and that's not even considering anything past the theming as a source of interest. Anyone who enjoys board or card games, especially ones that veer towards the chaotic side, will be able to find appeal in this game's conceit, even if they don't necessarily relate with the theming.

Research Report

While this project is primarily a board/card game hybrid, many of the influences on it are actually video games. I'm actually not a huge board game person, but have had enough of a passing interest in them that I decided to make it the genre for my project. In a sense, I've found that not being too into board games has been a stealth benefit; in the past, I've worked on projects where me being unfamiliar with some of the material being drawn from lead me to coming up with ideas that I know I wouldn't have otherwise, and I believe that's also the case here, giving this game even more of an identity and setting it apart from any theoretical competitors.

The single biggest influence on my concept so far, then, is actually the [City Trial mode from *Kirby Air Ride*](). This is the mode my mind jumps to first when I think of a competitive game based around powering up for a final battle, and as soon as I decided on the initial concept I refreshed myself on City Trial mechanics for inspiration. I wouldn't say that there's anything I sought to "improve" from City Trial - rather, I wanted to know what worked in a widely-beloved part of a video game. In particular, I've taken inspiration from the mode for the items and abilities, and I imagine if I ever add more mechanics in the future, such as random events, I'll be taking further inspiration from it.

The [*Mario Party* series]() has also been an influence, a series I'm sure needs no introduction. *Mario Party*, too, has two distinct phases, one of movement across a board game-esque field and one of an interim competitive game. While I didn't initially sit down and think that I explicitly wanted to ape *Mario Party*, there's no doubt that it was a subconscious influence. I wish that I could place more specific influences for the card game elements, but I can't think of anything at the moment; I would like to keep the card game parts as simple to understand and speedy as possible, anyways, so I doubt that there will be too many mechanics to them in the final product besides raw stats and minor abilities.

I was also slightly influenced by [*Monopoly*]() when coming up with the idea of each player having a "leader" - specifically, the many eccentric player pieces that *Monopoly* tends to have and the facetious fights over who gets to play as what piece. I want the players to feel attached to their leader and feel like they're personalizing them, so not only were some gameplay concepts like the traits a result of this line of thinking, the entire concept

of upgrading your piece was also created out of a desire for personalization as well. I also briefly considered the idea of being able to "own" spaces on the board, another mechanic straight from *Monopoly*, but I've thrown this aside for now, especially since I don't think there's room for currency in the game at the moment. It could also be said that my desire to keep the game well-paced and some of the more complex parts of it, such as the card battles, fast-paced is drawn from my hatred of how long and annoying *Monopoly* games are. Perhaps it could be said that most board games are influenced by how terrible *Monopoly* is.

I'm quite satisfied with this blend of elements and I believe that implementing a lot of video-game-esque mechanics as well as a mix of board and card game gameplay will set this game apart from a lot of others. There's a lot of personality to the idea, and the mechanics are flexible enough that it will be easy to expand on - such is the way with implementing card mechanics. The personalization is what appeals to me the most - and I think it's a big reason why City Trial is so beloved, so it makes sense that the idea to transfer it to a board game immediately grappled me.

Technology

The Unity-based engine Tabletop Simulator will be used for this project. The engine gives the user a large 3D space to place objects such as cards, dice, and game pieces in, in order to create their own board games. Hundreds of original and recreated board games are available on a public workshop which can be downloaded for local or online play. There are many features that make Tabletop Simulator board games a smooth process compared to real-life board games; "snap points" for objects and automatically curated and shuffled decks ensure the board doesn't become a chaotic mess of pieces strewn about everywhere. Its nature as a computer program also enables things that wouldn't be possible in a physical board game, such as scripting features, fog of war, and being able to summon in or copy objects that didn't physically exist before. Decks can be shuffled effortlessly, hands can be hidden from other players, and turns can be kept track of automatically. A computer program like this is inherently extensible and allows for experimentation when prototyping; it would be much more of a pain to create physical equivalents for every prototyped idea. The only drawback of this approach is the $20 entry barrier and installation - however, the engine goes on sale quite often, and

the risk is worth it for being able to prototype such an ambitious game easier. The engine has a large install base as-is, anyways.

Feature Outline

Variety is key in this game, so there are a host of features to spice things up and give each round its own personality.

- Four-player support is the most obvious feature that this game offers. The more players that are involved, the more chaotic the game can become, and this is a game that will decidedly thrive on chaos. Therefore, supporting and encouraging as many players as possible is desirable.
- Upgradable stats are another core feature of each player's piece. Each dog leader has three stats: Spirit (health points), Power (attack points), and Speed (board movement bonus). While all players start out with the same stats to keep things balanced, what items they end up getting will mean that they quickly diverge. Will a player value their leader being able to take more hits, or will they lean more towards a glass cannon? This brings a unique level of personalization to the game that isn't present in more traditional well-known board games.
- Card battles are another core feature of the game. Between each full turn (every player rolling and moving their piece) is a battle phase where each leader and any allies they have can attack depending on turn order - the losing players go first. The card battles are important in making sure that the personalization means something - how well you do is the result of what you've managed to gather from the board.
- Units: Extra cards that can be added to your field as support during card battles. While the focus is still on the leader, the units give card battles more variety by providing extra actions, stats, and effects that can buff your leader further.
- Traits: A passive ability that your leader has; for example, an Adorable trait, meaning that your other Units have +1 Spirit. Each leader starts with one random trait (chosen from three), and can gain more as the game progresses. While each leader starts with the same stats, the differing traits means each player will start

out with a slight advantage of their choice, bringing in the personalization element right off the bat.

- Abilities: An active ability that you can gain for your leader; for example, "Doggie Dig", an ability that you can use to obtain extra items from a specific space type. These would be gained randomly by accomplishing tasks on the board, and add a further element of personalization, helping to make the game feel a little more involved and less automatic during the board game phases.
- Items: Cards that stay in your hand that can be used at any time during the board game phase for various effects, such as healing your leader or giving them more damage. These serve a similar purpose as Abilities, making the game feel less automatic and giving players ways to react to and screw over their opponents.

Competitive Advantage Report

Market Justification

As I'll be mentioning below, I found very few results for well-put-together college sports-themed games that weren't something like fantasy football draft leagues. It was honestly a little surprising, given how much of a sensation college football is in the US South. The fact that there doesn't seem to be any original game with similar theming or gameplay to mine is a competitive advantage in and of itself. I want to avoid falling into a 'if you build it, they will come' fallacy, but games in general have to worry less about overlapping with existing products, since art and entertainment are inherently going to have more meaningful differences from each other than something with a practical purpose. Having an easily-understandable game with a strong personality and identity is already miles above a lot of the efforts put into something focused on college football.

Consumer Research

Since the most specific target audience for this game is college football fans, I focused my research on what that demographic looked like. I found a [very useful report]

[published by Learfield](#) that provided a lot of information to that end. To my surprise, the most common age group by far was the 35-54 age group; I was definitely expecting it to lean younger, but the age doesn't matter much as the target audience is still broad enough. This same age group also has disproportionate spending power compared to the other age groups, and typically have stay at home kids in middle or high school. This tells me the "families" part of the target audience is more valuable than I initially thought. The gender balance is also relatively even in the demographic, which may have been more surprising to me if it weren't for the fact that my mother loves college football. The large fanbase with spending power is also particularly attractive - not necessarily relevant for a prototype being made presumably for free, but a nice justification for choosing to go with this theme.

User Personas
Example 1: John Football. Approximately 22 years old, college student who is a frequent attendee of college football games and the tailgating and partying associated with it. Wants to spice up an upcoming party, and has an interest in board games. Uses technology and social media frequently, and is willing to try new things.
Example 2: Mary Football. Approximately 40-year old mother who is a casual fan of college football, tuning in to big games. Has two children that have a passing interest in football as well. Looking for more ways to bond with the family over a shared interest. Doesn't use technology frequently, and only uses social media for contact with friends and news updates. (Theoretically, this game only exists on Tabletop Simulator as a prototype; in a situation where it would be getting sold for money, it would be a physical board game and thus more accessible.)

Product Comparison
A cursory search of the Tabletop Simulator workshop brings up very few things that are similar to my idea at all. Very few results popped up when I searched for games relating to sports, college, or football in any way, let alone ones that seemed credible and well-made. Most results ended up being fantasy football draft leagues or physics-based board games. The theming and functionality of my concept so far is so specific that it would be difficult to find things that are comparable to it. I also searched the game

names of my inspirations to see if I found any board game recreations of them, but little turned up on that front as well. I found nothing for *Kirby Air Ride*, and the *Mario Party* recreations I found either sacrificed the minigames or implemented them in a way that wasn't comparable to the card battles. Out of all the games I found on the workshop, the only ones that seemed to be user-rated at all were the *Mario Party* ones. Searches on websites like Amazon were a little more productive, and the handful of useful results I found will inform the Competitor Research below. However, even still, many of the results were fantasy football draft related or re-themes of existing games. They don't appear to have many reviews on Amazon, so their reach might be fairly limited. Overall, the fact that my idea is so highly specific makes it difficult to find similarities to other products; this may be a double-edged sword.

Competitor Research

Competitor 1: [100 Yards](#)

- Simple family-targeted board game where players compete to reach the end zone on a physical board.
- Cards with different types are what determine how the pieces move.
- Shares a similar theming of cards and a football-themed end goal.
- Obviously targeted towards very young children and their families - it seems very simple and the art style looks kids-picture-book-esque.
- 15 reviews totalling up to 4.2 / 5. Reviews seem about average.
- Could not immediately find much info about this game beyond the Amazon listing, so distribution might be limited.

Competitor 2: [Dawgopoly](#)

- Assuming I stick with the UGA-specific theme, this is the main competitor in terms of "UGA board game."
- However, it's just a re-themed Monopoly, so there's still a niche to be filled.
- Distribution is likely limited to online stores and college merch focused stores.
- Most of the overlap here is with the overt UGA theming - there isn't much gameplay overlap beyond the competitive aspect.

- There are hundreds of reviews, all of which seem to be positive. Many frequently mention it being a great gift for UGA fans. Amusingly, one of the reviews says that they wish there was a bulldog token. Boy, do I have the concept for you.
- I'm not sure how to find units purchased, but it says "50+ bought in the last month", which is presumably pretty good for a board game with specific theming.