

28 January 2012

Tom,

Thanks for your response and your interest in how our game (ULTIMATE BASEBALL THE GAME) compares with DMB. We don't like spam either, and respect your desire to screen it out of your forum. You asked for honesty and to treat you like a friend, so here goes. Following are nutshell descriptions of how we believe UBTG is different. Yes, they sound like marketing soundbytes, but they are precisely what I say when I first describe UBTG to friends over dinner:

1. I represent a company that has launched a product—a strategy baseball board game—that we have been researching and developing for over 20 years, and we and our customers believe in it and are excited about it.
2. While there are several baseball games already on the market, I believe our game is unique, an alternative to traditional replay games...and involves many of the issues being discussed by respondents in your baseball board games thread and in other gaming forums. We want UBTG to appeal to kids, but we also intend for UBTG's advanced game to be taken seriously by hardcore replay and simulation gamers.
3. An obvious goal of any simulation game designer is to achieve optimal balance between fun and realism. Some games are fun but unrealistic. Others, including traditional replay baseball games, often achieve great realism (especially in the area of game results), but lack in the fun factor (especially in the area of gamer-elected strategizing). We believe UBTG is an alternative which achieves a better balance. And we do this not merely by adding plays which can't be found in the other games (which really is not that hard to do), but by infusing nearly every pitch and play with many more opportunities for gamer-elected strategizing. So, for example, we don't just have a "letting the bunt roll foul" play, but gamers must decide, based on several factors, whether to attempt advance or let the bunt roll foul as the play unfolds. We believe this kind of game play is superior to simply mixing stats and ratings, then rolling the dice to see how it turns out.

If, after I've shared these soundbytes, a respondent expresses interest in further information, then I'll delve into the nitty-gritty details. You asked me to be honest and share more specifics re: how UBTG is different from DMB. I will attempt to do so in the following paragraphs.

But the following is somewhat lengthy. Clearly, you allow long posts from respondents and spend a lot of time providing your own comments. But I will not presume that the following would fit into your

forum format. So I'm emailing it to you in hopes you will respond at your convenience, and if you believe some of my points have merit, I would look forward to re-joining your forum at some point.

UBTG GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND PHILOSOPHY

Our purpose in creating UBTG was to design a baseball board game with what we consider to be optimal balance between accuracy and fun. While it is not our purpose to denigrate the great tradition of replay games (Strat, APBA, DMB, OOTP, etc.), and while we concede readily that what is "fun" is largely a matter of personal preference, our opinion is that traditional replay simulations are big on stats and results, but light on strategic game play...on opportunities for gamers to lock minds in tense, exciting, strategic combat (especially involving pitch-by-pitch, pitcher/batter, cat/mouse simulation). Most replay games provide systems whereby historically-based rosters can be pitted against each other with relatively realistic outcomes, but gamers are afforded few opportunities to decide what to do on any given pitch or play. Gamers simply roll the dice and watch the results.

Gamer-led strategizing, in fact, might be something the designers of these games purposefully avoid. The reasoning might be that such strategizing could lead to aberrational results (e.g., a gamer might opt not to use Rickey Henderson as a leadoff runner who walks and steals a lot...meaning that Henderson's game stats might end up veering off course from his player card stats...and from the way he played in real life). Replay gamers tend to measure the success of a simulation by outcomes. Play results are the dominant goal. Gamer-led strategizing takes a back seat.

We prefer a game that affords more gamer-elected decision-making, even if some game results might tend to be aberrational. Sure, a simulation might allow for too many aberrations brought on by too much gamer-elected strategy, so much that the simulation can no longer be taken seriously. So this issue must involve the right balance. In UBTG, much of the fun is in watching gamers control many of the strategic decisions, yet, despite some strategic errors, the play results mostly end up being realistic anyway.

Like traditional replay games, UBTG has several parameters that don't afford gamer-elected strategy: a base runner, for example, regardless of his speed rating, is afforded a jump on a ball put in play when there are two outs. We do not leave such a parameter up to managerial input (any more than we allow the dice to determine whether such a jump is enacted). If a baseball strategy is this routine, we tend to simulate by simply working it into the game parameters.

If a strategy is more subtle, however, we tend to look for a way to incorporate gamer-led strategizing. One example follows on the heels of the two-out jump mentioned above. If you are considering bringing in a pinch runner, you must decide whether the move is advantageous when there are two outs (when a slower runner would be getting a decent jump anyway, and when another out could waste your pinch runner's scoring opportunities at a more crucial point later in the game). Attempting

advance to 3B, for another example, is a move UBTG often leaves up to the gamer. Conventional wisdom, which we support, says the 1st or 3rd out should not be made at 3B. But there are many exceptions that call for on-the-spot management. If a gamer simply follows the conventional wisdom, s/he will be better off than if s/he continually disregards it. But judging each situation on its own merits can reap even greater rewards.

We don't want to allow gamers to make decisions that will make a mockery of the game, but we want to allow the game engine to kick in realistically when bad decisions are made. If the decision is good, rewards usually follow. If the decision is bad, there will be consequences. If a gamer wants to win in UBTG, it's not just about choosing a different roster, season, or lineup. It's about learning and using sound baseball principles. True, a perceptive gamer can learn sound strategy by watching and playing a traditional replay game (especially one like DMB, which provides a pitch-by-pitch version and more gamer-elected opportunity). But in UBTG, gamers are challenged to learn by doing at nearly every turn. You have to manage a lot of things. If you don't manage well, you will lose. You cannot keep blaming poor game design, inaccurate ratings, or the luck of the dice. And you can't just search for another ready-made roster. If you want to win, you must learn sound baseball strategy and use your players in ways that take advantage of their real-life strengths.

Maybe it will be harder to make the case that UBTG utilizes some innovative and unique game mechanics (like simulating fielding difficulty...and we will cover others below, like pitching fatigue, pitch-by-pitch cat/mouse options, and so on). But even if we were to concede it is more a matter of quantity than quality, we'd still argue that UBTG offers many more gamer-elected strategizing options than we have found in other replay games. I will provide more specifics later, but I'd like to cover a couple of examples here.

In some replay games (DMB, for example), a gamer can sometimes elect to "go for the extra base" (which is more than many replay games afford). But, once this declaration is made, the player ratings (fielding, speed, etc.) are poured into the mix and the dice are rolled to find the outcome. In UBTG, there are more factors to consider. What is the FD (fielding difficulty) of the hit ball (on a scale of 1-30, 30 being the most difficult)? What is the base running situation? Where (to which fielder) has the ball been hit? Which relay fielder, if any, is involved? Did the base runner have a big lead to start the play (which must be gamer-elected and simulated before the hit occurs)? On some hits, the fielder can opt to dive for a risky out, which, if missed, could allow the runner an extra base. Should he attempt the diving catch or play containment defense? And so on. This is more than just an exercise in number-crunching and replaying what is expected to happen based on seasonal stats. This is simulating the nitty-gritty decisions that real-life players and coaches must make throughout the unfolding of a given play. The batting team (gamer) must decide which runners will attempt advance, and the fielding team must decide where to attempt the putout (or, if the situation calls for it, the cutoff). All these factors are laid out clearly for gamers to see so that they can make on-the-spot decisions. In DMB, gamers simply must guess. True, they can look at who is fielding the ball and who is running (speed), but there

are no actual numbers or percentages peculiar to the immediate play. So, really, DMB gamers simply are playing general odds. There is no immediacy to the exciting particulars of the play as it is unfolding.

In UBTG, the player cards and ratings themselves are not what determine the initial FD. Many factors are brought to bear via the various game tables and charts, quite independently of the player cards. This means that, despite realistic *tendencies* built into ratings and tables, it is possible for just about any play to result (even if it is rare), regardless of who is involved in the play, which we believe is true to real-life baseball (even Ruth can go several games without a HR, and even Giambi can make a webgem once in a blue moon). So the *possibility* of a play is based on real-life baseball parameters, not on player ratings. But the *outcome* of a play is then heavily influenced by player ratings and, often, on gamer-elected strategizing. Once the play begins to unfold, the player card ratings are brought to bear which modify the FD (some hinder, some help). Based on these modified numbers, gamers must decide how to proceed. This kind of thing happens continuously throughout the entire game. The more plays you simulate, the more results will begin to conform to realistic baseball. You will realize that John McGraw, for example, despite his hitting prowess, is not exactly the best choice to play defense. The ratings are accurate and present, but this gamer-led strategizing challenges gamers to assess the situation and utilize players effectively in appropriate positions and roles. Results depend not only on ratings and dice, but on gamer-elected input at every turn (including down to each pitch).

After years of playtesting, we are confident that UBTG game parameters ensure very realistic results, despite the increased opportunity for gamer-led strategy (and mistakes!). But poor managing will cost you, even if your ratings are extremely accurate and even if your dice have been doubly blessed by Lady Luck. This increased opportunity for—and reliance on—gamer-elected strategizing is precisely what we believe is missing from other replay-style games.

THE LOCUS OF SIMULATION: PLAYER-CENTRIC or TEAM-CENTRIC?

This brings us to the issues being discussed recently on your baseball board game thread: On what do game designers and gamers base their simulation (specifically, on what do they base their player ratings)? On past seasons? On a peak season? On an average of several seasons? Specifically, we are concerned with an issue that we believe has been problematic in most replay-style games: that of aberrations. In seasonal simulations, a given player card usually is based on a particular season, so, if a player (like Garrett Anderson) was ill, injured, or otherwise under par during the majority of that season, his player card (for that season) will reflect that aberration. In our opinion, this might indeed be “realistic”, and might even require some degree of realistic managerial input, but we do not believe it should be a high priority in baseball simulation. We are more interested in how a player played throughout the majority of his career, not in how he didn’t play. This does not mean that we simply use averages. Nor is it an emphasis only on peak seasons. In some cases (say, of Garrett Anderson), it might mean de-emphasizing certain seasons because we believe they are more aberrations than the norm (some of which, admittedly, is subjective). When we draft a player in UBTG, we want to feel

confident that his card represents how he played the game(...how *we believe* that player played the game), not just during one game or season, but throughout his career (your thread addresses this when discussing the pros and cons of seasonal aberrations vs “true talent”).

Is there some subjectivity? Of course. But the HOF is not based on a specific season or game, or even a particular record here or there. As best we can tell, it is based on an entire body of work. If one season is the reigning measure of achievement, then Denny McLain could be rated the “top” pitcher of all time. In reality, most enthusiasts would not even consider McLain for such a ranking, despite his ‘68 season. So we disagreed with the premise of one of your respondents: that an “all-time greats” simulation would be necessarily flawed. The part we disagreed with was his assumption that “all-time greats” is based on players’ greatest seasons (hence, Bonds’ 73 HR, or McLain’s ‘68). We agree with the conclusion that such distortions would lead to aberrational results. But we disagree with the premise that such distortions are necessarily part of an “all-time greats” simulation. If “all-time greats” are based not on best performances or seasons, but on composite, lifetime “true talent”, then an “all-time greats” simulation would no longer be flawed as he predicted. Rather, we should look forward to some very intriguing and believable dream team-style matchups. UBTG gamers would rather simulate “true talent” than seasonal aberrations. We are not interested in using a card that reflects only a record-breaking season any more than in using a card that reflects an injury-laden off year. In UBTG, Bonds *can* hit with that record-breaking power, but it is unlikely to happen often. It would be aberrational, just as it was in real life. His “true talent”, in our estimation, will tend to yield good—but less stellar—results. A simulation that results in a 73 HR season *as an aberration* rather than as the norm is more realistic and fun, in our estimation.

I believe there is a valid philosophical argument as pertains to this issue. It is not merely a question of math and statistics (which, with all due respect, I believe is the easier question to answer). Why, after all, do replay games mostly base a player card on a particular season? Why not on a particular game, or a particular at bat? And why stop there...why not simulate a particular pitch, even down to the possibly missed sign and the itch...or midge (Cleveland!!) on the back of the pitcher’s neck just as he was delivering)? These factors certainly are realistic, aren’t they? Why make a “season” the god, the almighty universal basis, of our simulation? Must we always, as a respondent insisted on one of our threads in another forum, play a full season with playoffs and crown a champion before we can say our simulation is complete, fun, accurate, and fulfilling? And if we are really going to be realistic, why not simulate, say, the illness factor in every game (i.e., roll the dice and see if Mauer has a flu bug for today’s game, or even for a particular at bat...or swing)?

Crunching stats certainly should be a concern in any serious baseball simulation (even if you use fictitious players). But the locus of your simulation must necessarily prioritize among countless factors that could be deemed essential for achieving realism. If you really simulate *every* factor with absolute accuracy, you will *always* get the same result, which is that your replay will be *exactly* like the way it happened in real life. In our estimation, sports videos and historical documentaries may be interesting and may be faithful replays of what really happened, but such replays do not necessarily make a fun

board gaming experience. I admit that this discussion does not guarantee a clear answer as to which simulation is “better”. The purpose of the simulation might not necessarily be better...just different. There is nothing wrong with wanting a faithful recounting of a particular game, but your best bet would be to watch a video archive of that game. Having fun playing a realistic game, however, is quite a different prospect.

Once we establish our purpose, the next question should be, “How well does our simulation achieve this purpose?” In UBTG, our purpose is to accurately simulate the real-life game of baseball in the context of a fun board game...in particular, we intend to simulate game strategies (the *tactics* of an actual bat swing or grip, for example, their relevance to a player’s success notwithstanding, are decidedly *not* included in our considerations), and to simulate game strategies that we believe embody what makes baseball intellectually intriguing. This is our number one priority, regardless of which specific player cards are being used, which seasons or eras are being simulated, or the number of games played. We want gamers to have fun whether they play a full-fledged season with historically-based teams or just one game using all-time greats dream teams.

But, running a close second to this priority are our player cards and ratings. Theoretically, if our first priority succeeds, ANY player cards (with anything resembling realistic baseball ratings that work with our game parameters), juxtaposed with reasonable managerial gamer input, should produce realistic outcomes. If they don’t, a tweak here, a crunch there, and the results should begin to conform to real-life baseball. But we are interested enough in the history of the real-life game and in past players’ lifetime performances that we have embarked on a quest to produce virtual players that accurately represent their real-life namesakes. But here is where we part ways with most replay-style games. We believe a faithful representation of that player should not be based on a particular season, or even peak seasons. We have chosen to create lifetime composites, virtual players that accurately represent how a player played the game. We, therefore, restrict our player pool to retired (or almost retired) players, as most current players’ lifetime composites are, in our estimation, missing essential data. But we want to simulate the greatest players in the game, and we have researched every player (on record) to ever have played in American major leagues (including Negro leagues, All Nations teams, and other extinct leagues), even as far back as baseball’s obscure beginnings in the 1840s. We believe, at the time of launch, that UBTG includes player cards (Charles DeBost, Frank Pidgeon, Goro Mikami, George Stovey, Jack Chapman, etc.) that can be found in no other simulation on the market. We present these players as individual entities, not as having any intrinsic or necessary connection to any particular season or team, and we have ranked these players all side by side, placing them on a level playing field. We have rated specific skills (hitting, pitching, etc.), and we also have ranked players according to our TPR (total player rating).

We concede there will be difficulties inherent in pitting some of these players against each other. How do we rate Brouters’ power when up against Mantle or Bonds? Do we account for different eras (including alleged steroid use, etc.)? In other words, will our ratings afford these virtual players the adjustments and balance needed for gamers to trust that a player himself (his “true talent”), not an era

or other factor, is what is being simulated? Can we play players from different eras together on the same team as well as on opposing teams? The solution offered by many replay games is to keep teams and rosters limited to particular seasons and eras. Some allow you to play a dead ball team against a high mound team, but you'll need to include particular tweaks in order to maintain a level playing field. The irony is that this orientation tends toward a team-centric seasonal model, which, of course, leads to the other distortions mentioned earlier: e.g., seasonal aberrations.

We believe UBTG achieves the goal of placing all players from all eras on a level playing field. So, therefore, anyone can draft any team they choose and be confident they are not being shorted by some era- or season-related distortion. We are confident that we have given Brouthers the power rating he deserves, regardless of who his teammates and opponents are. Despite Yaz' relatively low lifetime career batting average, we have rated him on a par with other .300+ lifetime hitters (accounting for his high mound adversity, among other factors). Without going into great mathematical detail, we believe we have ranked the top 4,000+ players of all time in a way that places them on a level playing field (isn't this at least one of the goals of sabermetrics?). We can draft any players we desire from UBTG's player pool, form any roster we like, and manage our teams to success, all the while enjoying a high level of gaming fun and intrigue, without fearing that Yaz will be disadvantaged or Bob Gibson will be advantaged because they happened to play during the high mound era. And the results are highly realistic: i.e., we still get more doubles than triples, Ruth hits more home runs than Frisch, and Koufax gets more Ks than Joss. We avoid the common replay-style simulation pitfall of being stuck with a player card that may simulate an aberration more than the norm. If you want to re-create a roster based on a particular season, you are free to do so, and UBTG will afford you a thrilling and realistic replay. But our primary goal is to simulate the game of baseball using the best players, not the best teams or seasons.

The skeptic might object that UBTG is being unrealistic by pitting players from different eras against each other...on the basis not so much that our ratings are inaccurate, but that these players never played against each other in real life. But that is precisely one of the fantasies we are trying to simulate. We want to know how these players might have fared against each other had they faced each other in real life. Again, one could easily counter that the replay-style games also do things that did not happen in real life: managers didn't roll dice, for example, to determine a play result. So we all do things in our simulations that are not *exact* replays. The very definition of "simulation" involves at least *some* metaphor, some abstraction. It comes down to the purpose of the simulation. If you simply are trying to re-create realistic season-based results, rolling the dice and watching the results unfold might be the ticket. As some replay gamers have pointed out, this certainly takes less time than UBTG (a game of UBTG takes about as long as a real-life game, as every pitch is simulated...without the help of a computer). If you are trying to re-create more managerial options and make decisions yourself, UBTG fits the bill.

REALISTIC ABERRATIONS

We allow, even expect, that some aberrations will occur in UBTG, just as some aberrations occur in real-life baseball. Following are examples:

1. This aberration is more peculiar to UBTG's design (and was discussed on your forum). If we are simulating the best players of all time, their UBTG *results* will tend toward slightly lower numbers than their historical stats ("true talent"), even if player *skills* have been rated accurately. Hitters will tend toward slightly lower averages (since they are having to face top pitchers more often than they did in real life), and pitchers will tend toward slightly higher ERAs (since they are having to face the top hitters of all time). We have not written these tendencies into the player cards themselves. The UBTG player ratings we believe to be true to real-life skills. But UBTG game results will ultimately culminate in slightly lower ratings than what occurred in real life. It's what we believe would happen if these players faced each other often in real life. If you include several lower-ranked players in UBTG, thereby simulating rosters closer to real-life rosters, your ongoing results will tend to mimic real-life results more closely.

2. The randomness of dice-rolling will afford some degree of aberration. But, of course, this simulates the role of randomness in real life. If you play one game, for example, Ruth might not hit a home run. It is possible, even if you play several games, that Ruth still might not hit a home run. But Ruth, in real life, did not hit a home run every game. He even played (occasionally) several games in succession without a home run. So, again, what appears to be an aberration might actually be a faithful representation of real life. If a simulation doesn't allow for this kind of "realistic aberration", one could make the case that it is not being true to real-life baseball. Of course, after enough games, if the aberration begins to take on the character of the norm, then we'd have a problem. But, in UBTG, even if Ruth is experiencing a slump, I wouldn't bet a lot of money, if the game is tied and in the bottom of the ninth, that he won't belt one into the stands (as my father used to say, "He's due"). In real-life baseball, stats from one game here or there tend to be aberrational. Batters can hit .000 or 1.000 and no one complains that the game was "unrealistic". Likewise, in UBTG, the more games you play, the more your cumulative stats will reflect players' real-life career stats.

3. Because UBTG affords so much gamer-elected strategy on nearly every pitch and play, there will necessarily be missed opportunities. We covered this point earlier. UBTG affords potential for such aberrations. But, if gamers wish to win and are willing to implement sound baseball strategies, such aberrations will begin to disappear. We believe it is a testament to UBTG's realism that poor managerial decisions will yield undesirable consequences. Yes, it is possible to play UBTG poorly and end up with somewhat aberrational results, but you won't often win that way. This is why we believe UBTG has high educational value. It teaches gamers winning baseball strategy.

Essentially, my point is this: the presence of aberration in your simulation is no more a guarantee your simulation fails than accurate results are a guarantee that your simulation succeeds. It all depends on what you are trying to simulate.

SPECIFIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UBTG AND OTHER REPLAY GAMES

I believe a detailed chart comparing features of all the different baseball board and computer games would be a great tool, and I hope to complete one eventually. For now, I will try to proceed from our more philosophical considerations to several specific differences in game parameters and mechanics.

1. THE PITCH-GUESS PROCESS: This constitutes perhaps the single largest difference between UBTG game mechanics and traditional replay games. Most replay games pit the pitcher against a batter to simulate normal baseball matchups. Many of the ratings may be relatively accurate reflections of real life (particularly of single season stats). Many of the results appear to be quite realistic. But the entire at bat is simulated by a single roll of the dice (sometimes 2 or 3 dice, sometimes more than one roll), and then the game moves on to the next at bat. This is the main reason why these replay games take less time to play than UBTG. Replay gamers tend to like simulating entire series or seasons, playing several games at a sitting, then crowning a league champion after a few gatherings. Many of them have expressed hesitation toward UBTG because they believe they do not have the time to simulate every pitch (again, UBTG takes about as long as real-life baseball to play). Even if the total time spent might not be that big of a concern (as replay gamers often spend hours upon hours finishing out a series of games), replay gamers still are skeptical about spending the same amount of time playing fewer games (thus being unable to complete as prolific a series as they are used to playing).

UBTG pitch-by-pitch simulation is also quite different from other pitch-by-pitch simulations. DMB, for example, offers a pitch-by-pitch simulation. Also, DMB is computer-based, so many of the calculations gamers might need to make to calculate the odds involved on a given play, which might be similar to ones in UBTG, are handled by the computer AI, and, therefore, take less time.

It goes without saying that UBTG's pitch-by-pitch process, which involves each gamer (team) simultaneously picking pitch types and strategies in order to outfox and out-guess the opponent, affords an entire array of gamer-elected strategies which simply are non-existent in most replay games. But even in games which include pitch-by-pitch options, like DMB, gamer-elected strategies are comparatively very limited. In DMB, the pitching team selects from 3 or 4 options every pitch (pitchout, normal, pitch around, pickoff, playing in, and intentional walk). The batting team sees this before it makes its selection from among a few options: swing away, take, bunt, steal, hit-and-run. So there is no real element of surprise or opportunity to fool or out-plan. Additionally, several options are simply left out of the mix or are implied in the AI. There is no opportunity, for example, for the batting team to elect to establish a big, risky lead to get a better jump on the ball. Once a bunt is chosen by the batting team, there is no opportunity to renege and take at the last second (a common strategy in baseball,

especially when the pitch turns out to be more than the batting team bargained for). And the DMB AI simply kicks in and “chooses” each pitch, then states what happens at the plate. There is no real strategizing that goes on between pitcher and batter to work the count.

In UBTG, a pitcher’s style (heat, control, knuckle, contact) are not simply thrown into the mix, but are clearly set forth in charts and ratings. Gamers see up front that Walter Johnson has a best pitch (a fast ball) and a second best pitch (also a fast ball, perhaps a bit slower). They see the odds of getting a “ball” if they take. They know even if they guess his best pitch correctly, they are not as likely to get quite as good contact. In this manner, the pitching and batting team must engage in cat/mouse interplay on every pitch. The base running situation, the ball-strike count, the pitch count, the pitcher’s fatigue status, the batter’s handedness, the batter’s hitting rating, the base runners’ speed...all these factors must be considered on every single pitch. Additionally, the pitcher can place the pitch in one of 3 modes: ball (pitch around the batter), strike (dead-red in the zone), or normal (somewhere in between the ball and strike modes). These modes have clear and direct influence on the odds the pitch will be a “ball” if taken, and the odds any contact will be productive. As you might guess, a pitch placed in the strike mode is easier to guess correctly (and easier to hit): every pitcher has 4 different colors (marbles) to choose from secretly, representing different pitch types (or locations and speeds), but a pitch thrown in the strike mode requires that one of these colors be exposed, meaning the batting team need only guess from 3 colors. While this process admittedly involves some degree of abstraction, it affords gamers with extremely intriguing cat/mouse intrigue which playtesters claim feels very much like real baseball. One replay gamer put it this way (after we had asked him to compare UBTG with DMB):

In other replay-style games that include pitch-by-pitch play (and I've played them all), the options are only pitch, pitch around, and pitchout or pickoff attempt, with none of UBTG's true cat n mouse feel at all. Bottom line, there has to my knowledge never been a game--board or computer--where the two players can become so closely aligned with the true narrative of the game within a game of the duel between pitcher and batter! You are right there in a way no other game reproduces. In UBTG, you indeed step into the role of the players on the field-- throughout every aspect of the pitch, the ball in play, and base running--IN ADDITION to that of GM, manager, and base coach. UBTG is the ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER of baseball simulations.

--David H, Indianapolis, IN

2. PICKOFFS: In UBTG, pickoffs also afford a number of gamer-elected options. In many replay games, this strategy is ignored altogether, even if it sometimes is “assumed” in a particular play result. But in DMB, for example, once a pickoff is chosen by the pitching team, the batting team still must choose its batting strategy (swing away or steal). There is no opportunity for the batting team to bait the pitcher by taking a large lead, keeping the batting team’s intentions to itself until the pitch is thrown. Then, once the play is “clicked”, a pickoff is either made or not made, and sometimes the ensuing pitch and play result is provided with no input from either team. It may be a realistic result, but neither team has really had much say in the matter. In UBTG, several factors are brought to bear. Is the pitcher left-handed (making the throw to 1B more potent)? Does the base runner have good speed and base-

running skills? Is the 1Bman left- or right-handed? What is his fielding rating? And so on. These are not simply player stats provided as in an encyclopedia. There are numbers which are provided which are designed to be used with game charts and parameters (numbers based on real-life stats, but which have been translated to work very conveniently with our game), and gamers know on a given pickoff attempt just what the odds of success are. So, for example, a 28 might emerge as the FD (fielding difficulty) for a particular pickoff attempt. The fielding team must roll a number (on the 30-sided die) that beats this number in order to get the putout (a 29 or 30). Meanwhile, a "1" result on the die is a wild throw, while all the remaining numbers result in "return to base safely". Should the pickoff be attempted under these circumstances? What is the score? What is the base running situation? Is someone on 3B? Each gamer must consider these factors before committing to the big lead or the pickoff. Additionally, if the "1" is thrown (wild throw), can the 1Bman dig it and prevent advance? Can his fielding rating be brought to bear enough to reduce this risk? And so on. These factors also apply to catchers' pickoff attempts after the pitch.

3. DOUBLE OFFS: In most replay games, including DMB, the after-effects of a big lead or advance (steal or hit-and-run) are simply ignored or assumed in the play results. In UBTG, often gamers are afforded various options. If the ball is popped up or lined out as a runner attempts advance, can he get back to base safely? What is the fielding rating of the one catching the fly? What is the base-running situation? Again, various factors and ratings are set forth clearly so that each gamer knows the odds of success and can make decisions accordingly.

4. DELAYED UNFORCED ADVANCE: This is a process we have not found in any other replay game. In UBTG, when certain circumstances emerge, gamers are afforded a number of options as the play unfolds. Using the above pickoff example, a runner may opt to advance just as a pickoff is being attempted (even on him). While this play is rare (and rarely successful), it does happen from time to time. UBTG simulates this kind of play by bringing several factors to bear: the fielding rating of the player who receives the initial pickoff attempt, the speed and base-running skill of the runner, the fielding rating of the player receiving the subsequent putout attempt, the base-running situation, and so on. If there is another base-runner (on 3B, for example), he can establish a big lead at this time (even if he did not have one at the time the pitch or pickoff was first delivered), threatening to run home. The fielding team now may decide to cut off the subsequent throw and attempt a pickoff on him or throw home...or continue with the current putout attempt. This kind of delayed action also can occur on a steal or bunt.

5. LETTING A BUNT ROLL FOUL: On the heels of 4 above, this is another play we have not found in any other replay game. Again, it might be included or assumed in a play result, but it does not involve gamers having to make decisions as the play unfolds. In UBTG, there are times when the base-running situation is tenuous and the play at the plate might be crucial. A bunt can roll close to the foul line. Gamers must size up the FD (fielding difficulty), speed of the base runner(s), fielding rating of any involved fielders, game score, and so on, and must make some very crucial decisions. Do we advance? Do we attempt to field the fair bunt? If so, do we throw or hold? Do we let the bunt roll foul? This is

simulated by rolling a factor (on the 30-sided die), then seeing how “likely” the bunt is to roll foul (how likely a second roll will fall within the parameters just established by the first roll). Based on this assessment and all the afore-mentioned factors, gamers make their decisions.

6. THE DIVE PLAY: Another play we have not found in any replay game is UBTG’s “dive play”. This play is similar to 5 above, except it occurs in the outfield on certain fly balls or base hits. If the FD (fielding difficulty) lands on a certain number, we assume the ball could be caught, but only if the fielder dives for it. The risk, of course, is that a muffed dive could result in extra base advance, while containment defense will tend to be less risky. Again, several factors are brought to bear: the game situation, the ratings of the players involved (runners, fielders), and so on. Gamers must make on-the-spot decisions that could change the course of the game.

7. ERRORS AND DEFENSE: In other replay games, errors are assumed and are reported in play results (often based, presumably, on accurate player stats). In UBTG, errors involve significant gamer-elected strategies. Typically, an error in UBTG hinges on a player’s fielding rating. Once the error turns up in a play result, the fielding team is given a chance to “prevent” it...by rolling the die and trying for a result that falls within the fielder’s fielding rating. The better the fielder, the greater the likelihood he will be able to “prevent” the error. So this is not something that is simply part of a play result. Rather, each error can be prevented, right then, before our eyes. UBTG gamers often close their eyes in resignation when an error is made by a fielder with a low rating, wishing they had replaced him (late in the game?) with an appropriate defensive sub. Gamers also may be challenged to consider using up precious special tokens (team leadership tokens) to help prevent errors. If an error prevention fails or is likely to fail, a team leadership token can be “burned” in order to increase the odds of prevention. But each team has a limited number of such tokens, and gamers must weigh several factors before deciding to “use” their team leadership in this manner.

8. GAMER-ELECTED SITUATIONAL HITTING: In UBTG, some players can give up power in favor of situational hitting.

9. TEAM LEADERSHIP APPLICATIONS: There are many applications of team leadership in UBTG. Team leadership can simulate many factors...among them on-the-field leadership as well as off-the-field planning and training. Using team leadership to prevent an error, for example (as in 7 above), can simulate a team’s off-the-field emphasis on defense. Team leadership can be used in 4 major ways in UBTG:

- 9.1. Boost a batter’s hitting rating during an at bat
- 9.2. Help prevent an error
- 9.3. Nullify a pitcher’s “best” pitch effects on a given pitch
- 9.4. Provide an element of surprise: on a pitcher’s pickoff move, or a steal attempt

Additionally, team leadership can sometimes be used to help prevent ejections and some double plays.

10. LETTING A FLY DROP FOR A FOUL: Again, this might be a play that is assumed in some replay simulations, but in UBTG, gamers are given a choice. Depending on the game situation, it might be a very close call. We prefer to have some control over such a play when the situation is that tenuous.

11. PITCHER FATIGUE/ROTATION: Some replay games have a kind of pitcher fatigue factor in place and disallow pitchers from being overused. In UBTG, pitch count is tracked and fatigue is influenced by every pitch and play in some way. The effects are clearly visible to each gamer throughout play so that appropriate decisions can be made all along the way. One playtester called UBTG's pitcher rotation/fatigue system "unparalleled". Because UBTG's pitch-guess system is so strategically-charged, and because UBTG's pitcher fatigue system is so detailed, down to the very pitch, working a pitcher for a walk or to increase his pitch count plays a major role in the ongoing cat/mouse intrigue.

These are just some of the differences between UBTG and other replay games. But, you asked for honesty, so following are several items found in other replay games (especially DMB) that are NOT in UBTG:

1. TIME FACTOR: As covered above, replay games take less time to play than UBTG. Even DMB's pitch-by-pitch simulation takes less time to play, as it is computerized and involves fewer gamer-elected strategies.

2. SEASONAL ROSTERS: As mentioned above, replay games are team-centric and season-centric. They do provide player cards and ratings based on teams and seasons. UBTG provides only top players from all eras, placing them all on a level playing field.

3. CATCHER FATIGUE: DMB, in particular, provides a catcher fatigue factor. We considered this in UBTG, but, finally, decided against including it...at least in our initial offering. Part of our thinking was that catcher fatigue does not play nearly as big a role in baseball strategy as pitcher fatigue, and we simply did not want to complicate UBTG with peripheral concerns (which also applies to several other factors below). Nevertheless, we agree that this is important enough to warrant some attention. UBTG is highly moddable, and we have considered including a catcher fatigue option on our website and in future versions.

4. STADIUM EFFECTS: A number of replay games simulate real-life stadium effects. This can provide for historical and strategic interest, but, finally, we decided that we want to be focused more on the cat/mouse interplay during a game. Stadium effects that affect ongoing play (usually) affect both teams equally. Again, UBTG is highly moddable, and certain effects (wind, dimensions) can be added to game scenarios easily (e.g., you can add a point or two of power to balls hit to right field to simulate playing in Yankee Stadium). But, at least for now, we do not include stadium effects in any of our initial game materials. UBTG does provide some degree of home field advantage, so we believe those can help simulate a team's home field, regardless of the particulars.

5. WEATHER EFFECTS: Several replay games simulate weather effects. Like 4 above, we believe such effects tend to affect both teams equally, so we decided not to include them. But they could easily be simulated just by adjusting a number here or there on our tables.

6. ILLNESS AND INJURY: Some replay games include illness and, especially, injury in their simulations. DMB, in particular, lists statuses of players as the season progresses (based on a particular historical season), and lists which players are more prone to injury. This certainly can affect how you plan your lineups, especially if you are playing an entire season. UBTG has an injury factor, but it is relatively simple and limited. If you overuse a pitcher, for example, you run the risk of injuring him. But we avoid season-ending injuries. Again, our goal is to simulate how our players played, not how they didn't play. Any injury in UBTG is relatively temporary. You can call up a farm player as a replacement, but, usually within a few games, the injured player can come back at full strength.

7. MANAGER'S TENDENCIES: Some games simulate managerial tendencies of real-life managers, building them into ongoing play results. While UBTG's moddability could be adapted for this sort of factor, we prefer to leave managerial tendencies up to the gamers themselves...and to how gamers draft their rosters. If you have a team built for small ball, it's up to you to manage it accordingly.

8. MODDING PLAYER RATINGS: Some replay games (especially computer-based, like DMB) provide a way to change player ratings. Perhaps just for experimentation, or to factor in various effects from different eras, DMB allows gamers to change settings (tendencies) on player ratings. This is especially easily done in a computerized setting such as DMB. UBTG could accommodate any player cards gamers wish to use (even fictitious ones). UBTG's engine will cause results and stats to gradually conform to real-life baseball stats, regardless of what players you use. But, as we have spent over 20 years researching every player on record in American major leagues, and have formulated a rating scale that puts them all on a level playing field, we prefer to keep our pool of players intact..."official". Gamers, of course, are free to mod in any way they wish. But if they change some of the ratings or parameters, we cannot guarantee their changes will produce results that are realistic. As long as they mod within reason, their results should look like real baseball results. But if they give Cobb too much power, for example, he will tend to hit more HRs in UBTG than he did in real life.

9. ABILITY TO DRAW WALKS: Some playtesters have sited UBTG's lack of a special skill that enables batters to draw walks...apart from a power rating that pitchers tend to pitch around (e.g. Rickey Henderson, Joe Morgan, etc.). We tossed this around quite a bit for several years, but finally decided to leave it out. We have found that our realistic pitch-guess cat/mouse system can be worked toward drawing walks, and often such a strategy ends up reflecting real-life player skills fairly closely, but we decided this skill was not quite as tangible and dominant (and common) as our other skills and ratings. This is one we still like to toy with, however, and may end up including it in future editions.

10. REAL-LIFE RECORD AGAINST OPPOSITE/SAME HANDED PITCHER: Some replay games (including DMB) incorporate specific opposite-handed factors...meaning that a general opposite-handed factor

does not fit every player. In UBTG, we apply the one-size-fits-all general rule, and we believe it's universal enough to fulfill our simulation goals. Again, gamers are free to adjust this for particular players if they wish.

11. DEFENSIVE RATINGS PER POSITION: This one is a mixed bag insofar as UBTG's defensive ratings are very accurate (on a scale of 1-14) and include BT (big throw) skills. DMB, on the other hand, uses fewer levels of skill (poor, fair, excellent, etc.), but assigns different levels to different positions (i.e., to positions that player played). DMB also assumes a good center fielder can play left field (an easier position). UBTG assigns only one fielding rating to a player, then lists all the positions that player actually played (we generally apply a "100-game lifetime minimum" rule). If the position is not listed, we do not give that player the benefit of the doubt, and the player's rating must be degraded (even if the position is considered to be "easier"). We believe several examples could support our system, but we agree that DMB has a strong point. We prefer to limit our players to the positions for which they were known in real life. Still, DMB breaks down the positions in a way that gives different ratings to some players depending on the position they are playing.

12. PLAYING SOLITAIRE: Whether because of computerization or intentional board game design, most replay games can be played solitaire. Many replay gamers who like UBTG, as well as many who are considering buying UBTG, have expressed the wish that we would produce a solitaire mod. Some have suggested that might be a better way to compete with the existing games. UBTG, on the other hand, is designed with heavy emphasis on cat/mouse strategizing. We really are trying to provide an alternative more than another replay clone. So much of what makes UBTG unique and fun would be lost if we created a solitaire mod (especially the simultaneous cat/mouse interplay...it's hard to outfox yourself!). So, for now, we are sticking with our emphasis on our two-player simulation.

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I have covered most of the factors replay games have that UBTG does not. But there are many other factors and nuances that UBTG has that I have not covered here. But this analysis already is very lengthy. At this point, I'd like to simply make another offer to send you a game, as that is probably the best way for you to analyze UBTG for yourself. Or I can take you up on your offer...to have someone else review UBTG. Just send an address (yours or theirs), and we'll send the game, along with our official player register and card sets. Any reactions would be welcome.

Thanks so much for your time!

Tim
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