

Team Info

Name of the game: Tumbleweed Dodgeball

Team Members: Niclas Axeheim, Thomas Bartlett, Kyle Cooley, Nathan Stanifer.

Creative Process

The initial concept of our game is very similar to the final game we have created over the past few weeks. During the initial workshop in class, where three groups worked together to create game ideas based on what was written down by a previous group, our first idea was to create a free-for-all dodgeball like game. Going with this idea, we at first discussed the possibility of making the theme of the game be space/sci-fi.

The game would be in 3D, with mechanics like zero-gravity. However, we decided against this idea after some more thinking and decided it would be more fun to create the game with a Western theme. We also decided to move to a 2.5D view of the game rather than 3D, mostly because it is easier to develop.

Development and Playtesting

During the first week of development we quickly created a prototype where the core mechanics, such as picking up a ball, throwing a ball, and moving around in the arena, were implemented. This allowed us to quickly start playtesting among ourselves in the group and get a feel for what was good and what was not. We liked the feel of these core mechanics, but now faced the question about how to make the game more fun, given that the core mechanics are relative simple. So, we sat down to discuss this and quickly came to the conclusion that being able to throw with both hands, each hand being mapped to a different button, would make the game more fun. We originally planned to use the triggers on the Xbox controllers to control each hand, but after some testing, we learned that the triggers are very buggy when using InControl, so we switched to the bumpers instead.

After our first round of in-class playtests, we received some very helpful feedback. The first thing we learned was the people generally did not like the way charging the ball worked, where the power of your throw would increase and decrease repeatedly, so players had to time their shots to be at the maximum of the charge bar. Players felt that this was too much to worry about when they're also trying to find balls, avoid other players' shots, and aiming at the other players. In response to this, we changed the charge mechanic so that it would steadily increase over time and then max out, but never decrease again. This meant that players simply had to hold the bumpers for

longer to get a more powerful throw, which made gameplay easier and also seemed easier for most people to grasp. We also found that players generally wanted some way to interfere with other players when they weren't holding a ball. To address this, we added a punching mechanic, which can be used by pressing the bumpers with a free hand. If you punch another player, the player will be temporarily dazed, causing them to move slower.

During our second round of in-class playtesting, we first received some feedback that the camera was not too static, making the game feel boring. Because of this, we added a dynamic camera which moves side to side and zooms in based on the locations of the players. This made the game much more exciting and also gave players a reason to explore the other side of the stage. We were also told that our punching mechanic was not very clear. This was partly due to the punching animation, which did not look much like punching at the time. We re-animated the punching to address this. We also added punching into our tutorial stage so players would know how to do it. Finally, we were told that the special items' (boot, sheriff's star, etc.) abilities were not clear enough, so we added in a short description next to each stage on the level select screen telling players what items would appear in that stage and what each of the items did. We also included only three of these special items in each stage, so players wouldn't be trying to remember the abilities of a large number of items.

Some people described that they wanted some way to avoid a ball, such as a short dash mechanism. We implemented exactly that, such that a player can dash for a few seconds, but must wait a bit in between dashes before they can do it again. We also added to the punching mechanic by allowing players to punch balls out of the air when they're coming at them. To make this even more useful, the ball's source changes when it is punched to be the person that punched it, so players can redirect balls towards other players and receive points for doing so. We were also told that people wanted the ability to throw balls with both hands at once, which was not something we had initially envisioned anyone wanting to do. However, because so many people wanted it, we added that mechanic. We also tried to make it beneficial to the player by changing the balls' trajectories slightly so they covered a wider area. This means that players who throw both balls at once are more likely to hit others with them.

During our extensive playtests when we swapped with another team, we were told that most people didn't like our powerup. We have since added more powerups, but we decided to remove the one that was present in these playtests, which allowed players to throw balls immediately without having to charge them. Many players would pick up this powerup almost immediately the first time they played and, upon playing a second time,

would not understand charging the ball because they hadn't done it the first time. We also felt like, in general, this powerup changed too much of the core mechanic of the game.