Ñavas essay

Ñavas is a realistically imaginative sport, as nowadays we cannot find any structure similar to the holey-elevated platform (placed over water) that shapes the pitch of the sport. Like other sports, it differs from other traditional forms of game and play by "the solemnity of the achievement production" in Eichberg words. This is the production of results and records, and the quantification of outcomes, that would be regulated by a Federation.

Apart from this, when thinking about the player experience and gameflow we wanted to create, we were inspired by two different kind of existing sports:

- Skill-based sports that combines two disciplines that influence each other, like the winter sport biathlon, that was developed from an alternative military training in Norway. We focused on how important it is for the players being good in both activities and also being aware on how to balance the effort they make on one of the activities so it doesn't affect negatively their performance on the other one.

- Invasion games, defined as team games that require one team to invade another team's defense to score. Specifically, we focused in those invasion games where the game clock doesn't stop when the ball changes possession. By doing this, we got a sport with a continuous flow, that could easily be engaging for the players and the audience, as our culture is highly influenced by and supporting sports like football, handball or hockey.

This writing is a reflection on the design decisions presented in the prototype of *ñavas*. After a deeper consideration on the design issues, we will provide more specifications in order to improve the prototype, apart from justifying the already presented thoughts.

The field

The axes of the elliptical platform are 20m x 40m, and the goals on each side are 2m x 3m, similar to the dimensions we can find in futsal and handball. These numbers have to be related with the number of players that are on the field. Six players per team could make sense for us, one more than in futsal, as here we have the difficulty of the stick and the "fighting" parts to move towards the opposite score, and one less compared to handball, as we don't have a dedicated goalkeeper.

The dimensions of our playing field are big enough to make a difference if the players are not good at swimming. We decided to place the ladders on the sides of the platform instead of behind the scores, that would require a longer distance to swim if the players fall in the middle area, so the swimming part is not that extremely exhausting, but swimming 10-15 meters after intense activity, trying to avoid the fall, and going up on a ladder and keep playing without interruption is still a significant effort.

When creating the sport we didn't think that any kind of fight in the water could make a contribution to the results we expect. As mentioned in the introduction when talking about biathlon, we want the swimming part to be a challenge itself, when the players have to consider their fatigue state at that moment and try to get back in the game as soon as they can, but also in their best possible condition. For this reason, the audience should be placed in an elevated location, so they can easily follow the game on the field.

Swimming parts can be screening, so the audience can see how the player is dealing with it, but without the need to miss anything about the game.

The shape of the field, lengthened and with the scores placed in the ends, led us to guess that most of the play might happen along the longest axis, as it is the most direct path to the score. That is why we decided to place holes in the middle area, so the players have to deal with the danger of falling to the water even if they are not by the outer edge of the platform. It can also introduce new jump mechanics, maybe not jumping for saving the whole distance of the hole but definitely when running close to the vertices or corners of the gaps.

The stick

At the moment the shape of the field was decided, we agreed on creating a rule to prevent the game from turning into a fight. The idea of being only able to push someone else using the middle of the stick prompted us to add the foam material on that part, recalling pugil stick functionalities.

Having a stick with different ends sounded attractive for us, before even deciding what should be in each part. The cricket part was introduced because we like the feeling of whacking the ball to score, finding again a balance between strength and control. But we still wanted an interesting and daring game in the middle area, where the ball has to be controlled while dodging attacks, so using a lacrosse end would work here, specially thinking about how the shape and use of this kind of stick prompts the opposite team to attack, the same way as bouncing does it in basketball.

Players and roles

We shouldn't think that the fact that we don't have a goalie leads us to an unorganized play where everybody just rush and attack the other team. The open structure of our design stimulate the development of strategies, and it is always better having a person trained specifically to stop the ball than expect all the players to have this ability apart from all the other skills required.

It is true that this might be the reason why there are not popular games with scores and without a dedicated goalkeeper, but it is common, for example, modifying the rules of football this way in training sessions, when the coach wants to focus on other objectives like passing the ball. Kids in playgrounds or PE lessons also take this approach if they are not enough to play in accordance with the dimensions of the field (playing a 4 vs. 4 for example) or just when any of them want to be stuck on a position waiting for the other team to attack. In these cases, the game is not broken, and house-rules can always emerge, like not allowing to score inside the goal area and allowing only one of the players of the team to be there at a time.

This way, the result would be a player (or the players) placed behind, closer to the area, passing the ball from there, ready to go back to the area if the rival takes the possession. In my view, in this particular sport it could be possible having more than one player prepared to be the goalkeeper, as the added difficulty of falling through the holes might keep the 'goalkeeper' out of the game for a few minutes, but it is fair to think that

this would seldom occur. Furthermore, if a team is going to lose and they want to reinforce the attack, having one more player is a way to balance the results, even if they have to risk leaving the score unprotected.

Following this approach, the couch would be the one deciding the different roles, adopting different strategies depending on their skills and the game. This might develop expectation for the audience, misleading for the opponents and a different play-experience by adding one more element to the teamwork organization.

An organization of the roles that could naturally emerge, could be the following:

- Rearguard: players with fast reflexes, quite big and quick at anticipating the movement of the opponents. They move behind the midfield ready to enter to the area to stop the ball.

- Wingers: fast players with strong arms that move at the edges of the field. They run the whole length of the field, being close to the holes and the borders, so it is the most physically demanding position.

- Centrals: in the inner-field. The offensive central, that helps in the attack playing between the holes, must have excellent ball and stick control abilities and tactical awareness to avoid being pushed out of the platform. They must be the best swimmers as they are an easy target for the defensive central, that prevent the ball from reaching the defensive line. These must be skilled at intercepting passes, tackling the ball, and the most trained in pushing people to the water using the foam part in the middle of the stick (mainly heavily-built).

- Forwards: Accuracy, head ability, and ball control are the qualities needed to find and use the opportunity to score the goal.

The referee

When designing a sport it is important to think about how we, or better said, the federation would enforce the rules. After considering different situations in which unsportsman behaviour may well be the case, we could introduce:

- a main referee that penalise misconduct and keeps the flow of the game going. For instance, if a player that is going to fall grabs another player so they fall together, there must be a punishment fair for that, as we cannot just stop the game and wait for that player to go back to the field.

- two assistant referees, one keeping a close eye on each ladder. If any player of the opposite team sticks around that area blocking the players to get back on the field, they inform the main referee that applies the pertinent suspension.

- sensors in the scores that detect if the ball got inside. This kind of devices are starting to be used in football tournaments and are a big help in situations of uncertainty when the responsability used to lie only in the referee.

- a chief referee to deal with complaints and contact the federation.

.

Rules

After presenting the game, we were suggested adding rules to enforce conquer space, the same way as basketball uses the half court violation that forces a team to attack and position ahead, but the game could work without it. It is difficult for a player to keep the possession staying back in his or her field because the other team can pressure on three lanes. The player could only: lose the ball or try to dribble, because the lanes are blocked, make a long pass to escape or fall into the water. Basketball is played with the hands and that makes dribble easier. The basketball court is smaller, but using the hands facilitates getting advantage of little spaces, whereas in *ñavas*, as in football, it is more difficult, so players have to move the ball from one place to another more often. Instead of rewarding fast offense, we are aiming for effectiveness, and the way to get it is by spreading out the team.

Another issue left undiscussed is the way replacements and expulsions work. As the game is physically demanding, substitutions would be allowed as long as they don't break the gameflow. As *Ñavas* is a contact sport and reducing the number of players might be too tough, we could include an article like this one:

- Replacements
    - One or more players could be replaced for others on the bench, prior notification to the referee, at any time during the match, except in the situations described in the next section.
    - Exceptions
        - A player cannot be replaced while being in the water. If replacing that player is the intention, the team has to wait for him to be back on the platform.
        - When a player is expelled, the team has to wait 5 minutes in order to replace it or until the other team scores.

Alike other aspects of sports, rulesets are modified and updated from time to time, to enforce good sportsmanship, please the audience or incorporate new technologies as we have mention. This is the reason why I believe that through playtesting *Ñavas* could evolve in a successful and entertaining sport.