

# How the Design of the Stats of a Pokémon Contribute to an Exciting Battle Experience

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First released in 1996 in Japan, *Pokémon Red & Green* became a hit instantly, and eventually save the legendary Game Boy. After its successful debut in Japan, *Pokémon Red & Blue* are released later in 1998 in North America and other countries and regions. After 20 years, the *Pokémon* series has already become the largest cross-media franchise in the world. From the very beginning, the *Pokémon* games encourage players to collect Pokémon, trade with their friends and battle against each other. This critique will talk about how the design of the stats of a Pokémon contributes to an exciting battle experience in Gen 1 *Pokémon* games. (I will use singular form in the following article since I am not talking about trading, and this makes the *Red*, *Green*, and *Blue* the same game.)

The mission of the first *Pokémon* game, unlike recent *Pokémon* games, is to save the sales of Game Boy. It is the first game that fully utilized the communication and networking function of the Game Boy by introducing trading and battle system.

Regarding the battle system, it should be diverse, but not complicated; it can be unbalanced, but it must be exciting. Gen 1 game did this, and the design of the stats is a critical factor. (For recent games, the battle system must become more complex and balanced, since they have a different mission.)

As an RPG, it is essential for the game to be engaging and immersive. Gen 1 is such an immersive game, and it is achieved by not only the story and the adventure, but also the design of the stats of a Pokémon. A Pokémon has three different kinds of values: five base stats, five individual values (IVs) and one effort value (EV). Base stats show the natural difference in species. As the name indicates, IVs represent the individual stats which are also priorly determined, and EV shows the efforts that a Pokémon made.

This design leads to a potential but common situation among young kids, which are the original target audience of Gen 1.

"My Venusaur is stronger than your Pikachu!" (Base stats)

"But my Pikachu is stronger than yours!" (IV)

"I spent more time on training my Pikachu!" (EV)

This kind of conversation always leads to the players starting a battle against each other. The immersion is the first step of a successful battle system: it is the reason why the players start the battle. If the players have no willing to compete, they will neglect even the best battle system.

This design also contributes to a diverse battle environment. Having three different kinds of stats means the player has various choices of how to use the Pokémon in a battle. The base stats act

like a reference. They tell the player what the primary position of this Pokémon is. The base stats, along with the type and the skills that a Pokémon can learn, mainly decide the role of it.

However, if a player wants to have a stronger Pokémon, he will then need to know its IVs. It's almost impossible to get a Pokémon with perfect IVs in Gen 1, and for new players (nearly all players are new players) who don't know about IVs, they will just notice the difference in the final stats and try to catch as many Pokémon as they can and select the strongest one among them. However, if they cannot find a good choice, they will need to think about how to make full use of the Pokémon they have with limited IVs. This non-perfection makes the battle more diverse even the players use the same Pokémon in Gen 1.

EV is also a critical design. It can show the player the result of training the Pokémon. The battle environment in Gen 3 and later is much more diverse because of the separated EVs, but in Gen 1 there is only one EV. This design makes it easier for players to catch the rough idea behind this design quickly. Moreover, how much time the player spent in training a Pokémon can eventually affect its ability and may turn the tide of a battle.

The design of base stats, IVs and EVs have a significant effect on later *Pokémon* games. In later games, a single EV is separated into six EVs, which makes a Pokémon can have even more roles; the increasing number of combinations of base stats requires much more consideration when building up a team; even if the formula of calculating the final stats keeps changing, it still includes the three elements: basic stats, IVs and EVs. This design also contributes to an increasingly completed breeding and training system. Breeding, training, and battle become the most discussed topics in the Pokémon community.

However, there are arguments on whether these hidden values should be canceled. Some believe that it takes too much time in breeding and training a Pokémon. Some think that it is this very mechanism that results in so many cheaters. Other people think that this is an indispensable part of a *Pokémon* game which makes up the whole breeding, training and battle system. (Personally, I am with those who are against this mechanism, but I believe it is not a good idea to cancel it entirely since there are definitely players who enjoy this process. Letting the players directly input the values might be a good idea?) We can see that the developers are making breeding and training much easier in recent games. The player can even increase the IVs with rare items nowadays.

Even so, when we take the background of the era when Gen 1 game was released into account, the base stats, IVs and EVs, whether they are intentionally designed to be like this or not, showed a great potentiality and eventually made Gen 1 game a hit. Maybe it is time to make some changes, but this is where the battle of the Pokémon games came from. This particular design has made an enormous contribution to the success of the game.