

Review: 'Kinect Sports Rivals' a moving experience

April 7 2014, by Derrik J. Lang



This image provided by Microsoft shows a scene from the video game, "Kinect Sports Rivals." "Rivals" hopes to compel Xbox One owners to use Kinect for more than just navigating menus. The game itself is composed of six activities: jet ski racing, bowling, rock climbing, tennis, target shooting and soccer. (AP Photo/Microsoft)

When the Xbox One was unveiled last year, Microsoft boasted the Xbox 360 successor would feature an updated—and mandatory—version of its camera-based Kinect sensor with more accurate movement tracking and voice detecting. Then, when the Xbox One was released last November, there were hardly any games that actually employed the new doodad.

That's changing now with the release of "Kinect Sports Rivals" (\$59.99), a stylish collection of virtual athletic pursuits crafted by veteran game maker Rare. "Rivals" hopes to compel Xbox One owners to use Kinect for more than just navigating menus. The game itself is composed of six activities: Jet Ski racing, bowling, rock climbing, tennis, target shooting and soccer.

While that may sound like a straightforward selection of Olympic sports coming to Rio de Janeiro in 2016, the quasi-futuristic versions depicted in "Rivals" more closely resemble those weird sports the Enterprise crew would play in the holodeck on "Star Trek: The Next Generation." For example, rock climbing features electrical obstacles and soccer has holograms.

Before any mountains are conquered or goals are scored, "Rivals" scans users' actual bodies and faces, creating a cartoony avatar that resembles their real appearance. They can later be outfitted with customizable uniforms and gear earned by playing games. It's the most innovative aspect of "Rivals"—and hopefully just a glimpse of the true capabilities of Kinect 2.0.

The sports themselves are a mixed bag. For me, virtual bowling, tennis and Jet Ski racing most closely resemble their real-world counterparts because the new Kinect does a better job of following hands. Shooting and climbing are awkward but amusing. I was least impressed with the dumbed-down soccer.



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If the game's ability to pit a pair of controller-free players against each other in the same room isn't enough, there are increasingly difficult courses and artificial opponents as well as online leaderboards and challenges to boost competitiveness. It always feels like there's another record to break or bonus to unlock, but unfortunately, there are only six [sports](#) to play.



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A silly, albeit superfluous, plot involving three factions—flashy Eagle Legion, techy Viper Network and hokey Wolf Clan—is tied to the game's initial sessions. Luckily, the teams and their grating captains are eventually abandoned, putting the focus back on the action. However, they will apparently have an impact on the game's competitive online elements in the near future.

It's difficult to envision this Kinect title inspiring Xbox One consoles to fly off shelves in the same way "Wii Sports" did for Nintendo's Wii eight years ago. "Kinect Sports Rivals"—much like the original "Kinect Sports" for Xbox 360— isn't groundbreaking. It's just really fun. Two-and-a-half stars out of four.

More information: www.xbox.com/kinectsportsrivals

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