

Research plan & debrief for foosball training app

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RESEARCH PLAN

This research plan is at the request of Slingshot App in support of design of a mobile app to facilitate foosball training & skills acquisition. The primary goal of the app is to improve performance of established foosball players, with a secondary aim to appeal to a younger player base to attract new players to the sport. This plan details the research steps necessary to optimize the design of the mobile app, including industry & market analysis, requirements gathering, and assessments of potential user base.

RESEARCH GOALS

1. Determine scope of site functionality for initial MVP & future product releases
2. Assess mobile sports training industry, direct & indirect competitors, & existing mobile coaching models
3. Assess user needs, current practices, & areas of potential competitive analysis

RESEARCH METHODS

- **Requirements gathering:** stakeholder interviews to determine scope of app functionality and details pertinent to design decisions (including training content, currently available training media, and potential business models).
- **Secondary research:** literature analysis & subject matter interviews to gain understanding of current practices in mobile sports training & coaching and existing coaching models, including format, content delivery, business models, and information architecture of products & services.
- **Competitive analysis:** because foosball is a relatively obscure sport there are few if any direct competitors, however I will identify & characterize 2 categories of indirect competitors to better understand relevant business models & standard practices: 1) indirect competitors within the mobile sports training / coaching space and 2) indirect competitors with respect to user motivation & content delivery
- **User assessments:** target potential users & perform interviews to understand current foosball training practices, areas of frustration, & areas of opportunity to improve training experiences.

PARTICIPANTS

1. App stakeholders, to include IFP foosball players & app developers
2. Members of identified potential user base, including recreational & competitive foosball players

TIMELINE

Research will be performed in the order presented above, such that findings from each research stage will inform decisions necessary for subsequent steps. Anticipated research timeline:

Days 1-2: requirements gathering, secondary research, & competitive analysis

Days 3-5: user assessments & results analysis. User assessments will also continue through the design phase of the project.

RESEARCH DEBRIEF

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

User interviews were performed to understand practice habits of competitive & serious recreational foosball players, and to gain insights on what would help players get the most out of their practice sessions. Because of time constraints and the small market size, I was able to perform one full in-person interview covering foosball play and practice habits, with answers to practice-targeted questions from an additional 17 players via online foosball message boards. Interview responses yielded several insights on practice habits and allowed patterns to emerge in factors that players find important for effective foosball practice and what type of assistance would be the most helpful.

PRIMARY INSIGHTS

Patterns emerging from foosball player responses point to 3 primary practice assistance targets to address in the app:

1. **Practice organization:** this target includes items such as creating & progressing towards an overall training goal, training exercise categories, and logging & tracking training sessions.
2. **Practice encouragement:** encouraging practice includes optimizing sessions to fit into busy schedules and practice motivators such as visible indicators of progress towards overall goals and points for practice & progress.
3. **Practice effectiveness:** increasing effectiveness of practice encompasses guidance on critical practice areas, effective use of short practice periods, and emphasizing good practice habits.

Players also indicated that player connections are helpful to foosball practice, and social features may be considered as a secondary app target.

SUMMARY OF USER ASSESSMENTS

Responses supporting these primary insights are detailed on the following pages, and can be summarized as follows:

- **Overall practice planning:** importance of developing an overall practice plan based on assessment of individual strengths & weaknesses
- **Practice session goals:** importance of goals for individual practice sessions, working towards overall training goal, but aiming to do one thing better after each session
- **Practice timing & scheduling:** should have defined practice sessions of various lengths, each contributing to overall plan, so that even small periods can be used for effective practice
- **Practice areas:** emphasis on ball control & developing muscle memory, then developing technique & perfecting shots

Current practice-related pain points:

- Not enough time to practice and not sure how to use time efficiently
- Most practice logging methods are difficult to use while playing so don't keep up logs consistently
- Would like to have stats on practice sessions to see trends & progress quickly
- Like to record sessions but mobile video doesn't record at high enough frame rate

USER RESPONSE DETAILS

The following are detailed player responses leading to the primary insights discussed above:

Practice length & frequency

- 2-3 times per week, 2 hours at a time (broken into 20 minute periods with 10 minute breaks, simulate down time between matches & work on warming back up quickly)
- 3 days / week, 2-3 hours
- A little every day, 30 min – hour
- Every day, at least 30 min
- Every day, 2 hours
- 3 hours / week
- Every day, 1-2 hours
- 4 times/week, 30-45 minutes
- 2-3 15 minute sessions / day
- 2-3 times/week, 1 hour session

Practice goals

- To improve my game in some way each time I am finished practicing
- To become pro-rated again
- To get better
- Identify biggest problem & work on it until I fix it. If its not fixed, start the next session with the same thing.
- To be pro
- To always improve & push my limits
- To win Rookie or semi-pro at worlds
- To be a fearful opponent to anyone with their hands on the rods opposite mine
- To do something better after practice than I did before
- To maintain the skills I have
- To be a better forward so I can be more competitive when I draw another goalie in the local DYP

Practice areas

- Warm ups
- Ball control: universally considered most important area to focus on during practice sessions
 - o Tic-tacs from all rods, tic-tac rhythms
 - o Pin control drills (move ball between men & switching from front to back pin along men on the rod)
 - o Move men between rods
 - o Pass 20 times successfully before moving to next pass
 - o Pinning ball & moving it from man to man
 - o Bringing ball to a stop after a strong toss on every rod, every man
 - o Weaves, pins, inline smooth throws from one man to another
 - o Do circles with the ball and tap the ball from man to man and catch from side to side without tapping
 - o Pin the ball from man to man in front and back pins
 - o Weave the ball on the 5 man starting from 1st to 2nd etc and then reverse it.

- Specific skills
 - o Offense 5-man / 3-man
 - o Defense
 - o Specific shots
 - o Passing
 - o Lateral speed
 - o Accuracy
- Mental
 - o Not giving away shots with body language

Effectiveness

- Most helpful
 - o Ball control on every rod
 - o 5-bar practice
 - o All practice is useful if it's done right
 - o Using video to figure things out & make sure they're done right
 - o 5-5-5-5 practice plan: 5 pin pulls, 5 pin pushes, 5 pin put-cut (angle), 5 pin push-cut (angle). If you miss any shot at any time you start over at the beginning. Helps develop focus & patience.
 - o Record practice & watch it after or the next day
 - o Timing drills where you're sitting on the ball for different lengths of time
 - o Have someone call out random holes at different lengths of time, and try to shoot that hole as soon as it is called
 - o 5 bar control, passing, catching, 3 bar shots, goalie shots
 - o Getting more speed on shots
 - o 100s of reps to develop muscle memory
- Least helpful
 - o Shooting reps on 3rd rod without a goalie to shoot at

Pain points

- Not enough time to practice. Would be helpful to track an overall goal so that even a 5 minute session felt like it 'counted' towards achieving that goal
- Most practice logging methods too hard to do while at foosball table, so don't keep up with them (notebooks, excel sheets, etc)
- Video playback helpful but phones don't have fast enough framerate to effectively catch a shot
- Would like to be able to see stats/data on practice sessions

Tips & advice

- "It's important when practicing to have identified a few things before you start and have a plan for what you want to accomplish"
- First make an honest self-assessment of your game, asking yourself & others your strengths & weaknesses. Once you identify what you need to work on make a plan for what you realistically want to accomplish and by when.
- "It's important to identify your strengths & weaknesses so that you can address them in your practice plans"

- “It’s not the amount of practice but the quality of it”
- Goal of practice is to develop muscle memory
 - o “Practice is about consciously trying to learn an action and repeating it so much that muscle memory allows you to repeat that action with your subconscious”
- Ball control most important thing to focus on
- Choose one thing to practice & improve during session
- Helpful to watch video of great shots & practice them immediately after
- Important to think ‘right’ during practice & not beat yourself up, and practice having your play demeanor help you instead of helping your opponent. Mental play separates winners from losers.
- Confidence comes from the right type of practice
- “Ball control is everything. Without it, you can’t get the ball in position to do what you need to.”
- Ball control is important because possession is 9/10s of the law in foosball
- Ball control improves current execution of everything you do, cuts learning curve for new skills & refining skills by exponential amounts...the better the ball control the shorter the learning curve
- “The key is to know when to change and adjust and having a lot of depth to make changes from”
- “You want to minimize your weaknesses & maximize your strengths by working on both”
- Most important to a practice schedule is to plan it out and have the discipline to follow through
- “Practising long hours without some predetermined goals and objectives at best is not an efficient use of your time. At worst it can be a complete waste of time and even hurt your game”
- Schedule practice time and have specific things you want to work on.
- Try practicing with people who are better than you
- Use drills as mini competitions with yourself, like having to hit 10 passes in a row before moving on to the next thing
- “5 minutes of bad practice is too much”
- “You can’t practice too much unless you’re practicing wrong”
- Work on not developing bad habits like setting up your body for a particular shot so your opponent knows exactly what you’re going to shoot.
- Logging practice helpful to see progress, make sure you’re practicing things often enough, and not skipping over certain things