

# Enduring Play Season 2 Episode 11: Backyard Sports with Lindsay Barnett and James Deighan

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Backyard Sports, Backyard Baseball, Playground Productions, Mega Cat Studios, Lindsay Barnett, James Deighan, retro games, accessibility features, fan community, multiplayer, classic aesthetics, educational gaming, transmedia IP, game development, childhood nostalgia, sports games, Enduring Play, motivators of play, spectrum of gaming graphics

## SPEAKERS

Lindsay Barnett, Cheryl Platz, James Deighan, Enduring Play Computer

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- E** Enduring Play Computer 00:00  
Initializing Enduring Play Podcast Season Two Engine. Decompressing audio. Synchronizing waveforms. Reticulating splines. Launching podcast lobby.
- C** Cheryl Platz 00:13  
Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we explore what it takes to create video games that don't just survive but thrive.
- E** Enduring Play Computer 00:22  
Loading Episode Preview.

**J** James Deighan 00:24

You know, once a week, especially on these Thursdays and Fridays, I'd be able to tell my dad "OK, can I go down to South Hills High School, and, you know, can we play tonight?" And we'd be sitting there playing at night, and it felt like we were extra privileged that night, because it's like, nighttime. It's like, "Oh, like, there's like, fireflies!" And, you know, fondest memories. And it was this combination of what would be visually appealing, what would be impactful, what would deliver more kid moments for these characters? What would feel rewarding from a visual feedback standpoint?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 00:49

I'm having the most fun that I've ever had and working harder than I've ever have. So it is, you know, truly a dream project to be able to do this. We get a cool streamer that plays the game, or professional athlete that talks about how this is their favorite, or a kid that sends in some fan mail to us. Every single one of those things means so much. And you know, it happens so frequently that it's really beautiful, and what an amazing life we got, we get to have by working on this brand.

C

### Cheryl Platz 01:23

I'm your host. Cheryl Platz, video game designer, director and author of The Game Development Strategy Guide from Rosenfeld media. Enduring Play Season Two is about scaling our game development ideas beyond the individual. A common thread through most of our conversations is the collective: through communities of game developers, through game education, through games research, and through the events and systems that support the releases and people making our games. Today, we close season two by turning it up to 11: 11 episodes that is. It was too good an opportunity to pass up speaking with Playground Productions CEO Lindsay Barnett and Mega Cat Studios, CEO James Deigan, about their groundbreaking revival of the beloved Humongous Entertainment franchise Backyard Sports. When second grade teacher Lindsay could not find high quality video games for her students during the pandemic, she turned CEO: founding Playground Productions and securing the rights to the Backyard Sports franchise... after tracking the rights down with a private investigator, of course. Then she found James, who had been looking for the chance to work on this franchise for his whole life. Together, they're on a mission. There aren't many stories like this one in video gaming, and it is unfolding as we speak. It speaks to the enduring quality of the work from the original Humongous game devs whose credits I will link in the show notes. It speaks to the shifting motivators of play on the market: how education, comfort and companionship are finally stepping up to the plate in the gaming market. The story also speaks to the power of classic gaming aesthetics, accessible game design that creates inclusive conditions for everyone, transmedia game IP and a thriving developer-publisher partnership. You'll leave this episode a little more hopeful about the power of community and the lasting power of your game narratives. And you'll meet Pablo, if you haven't yet. He's a secret weapon. Together, these companies reverse engineered the original six backyard sports titles and released them successfully to a grateful community across platforms, and they're now gearing up to release a current generation version of Backyard Baseball on July 9, 2026. Let's get into the game.

E

### Enduring Play Computer 03:24

Player One: Cheryl Platz, pronouns, she her. Player two. Lindsay Barnett, pronouns, she her. Player three: James Deigan, pronouns, he, him. Podcast level start.

C

### Cheryl Platz 03:43

Welcome back to Enduring Play, the podcast where we explore what it takes to make games that don't just survive but thrive. And this is a very special episode. It is our first adventure with multiple guests in the same podcast. You might say that we are exploring the motivator of play of companionship. And why are we doing that? Because we have a very special story today, a story about not just surviving and thriving, but reviving. We have two guests here who have taken a franchise that was beloved and revived it for new generations, and I'm so excited for them to bring this story to you. We have Lindsay Barnett, who's the CEO of Playground Productions, and we have James Deigan, who is the CEO of Mega cat Studios. Thank you both so much for being here today.

**L** Lindsay Barnett 04:29  
Thank you for having us.

**C** Cheryl Platz 04:30  
I typically ask folks to introduce themselves a little bit in their own words, since you are better at telling the important parts of your story, and there's just something about your personal perspective, as opposed to like LinkedIn bios. Lindsay, how would you introduce yourself if we had met, say, a few weeks ago at the Game Developers Conference?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 04:46  
Sure, so. I'm Lindsay Barnett. I'm the CEO of Playground Productions, which is the home of the Backyard Sports franchise. Playground was formed when I was actually a Chicago Public School teacher, and I was thinking about how to create better content and thinking about the imagination of kids on a playground. And so the backyard sports franchise really represents the type of content that we are really excited to bring to the world and bring back to the world.

**C** Cheryl Platz 05:17  
Thank you so much, Lindsay. and James, how would you introduce yourself if we met on say, the streets of Pittsburgh?

**J** James Deighan 05:24  
Well, on the streets of Pittsburgh, it's probably a little more conversational, but I'd say that I absolutely love making games. I'm the CEO of Mega Cat Studios. We have a headquarters here in the city, in Pittsburgh, and we have a secondary office in Laguna in the Philippines. So we've been making games for over a decade at Mega Cat. I've been in games for 20 years, and, you know, we have a number of global top sellers. And we've been honored to have the privilege of working with some amazing gaming franchises the last several years that have even propelled our say, like our visibility to new levels that I never expected were possible for a company in a city not known for games or entertainment.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 06:00  
Loading podcast level one, introducing backyard sports.

C

Cheryl Platz 06:05

My first question is setting the stage for folks, because not everybody who's listening is going to be familiar with the Backyard Sports franchise. So if you were trying to introduce the Backyard Sports franchise to somebody who was not familiar with it, how would you describe it?

L

Lindsay Barnett 06:20

The backyard sports games were originally created in the 90s. I actually am an original fan of these games. I played Backyard Baseball in 1997 when I was just five years old, and what I was gravitating towards was: this was the most accessible game that I had seen. 15 boys, 15 girls, all with equal playing ability, playing sports together in the backyard. And at the time, I, you know, loved seeing that type of representation. The girls that were in this game, these games, were amazing players, and you wanted them on your team, which meant a lot to me as a five year old girl who loved sports. But what I didn't know until much, much later on was that the games were actually created as a way to teach kids the rules of sports. So people would play these really fun games in an accessible way, and then they would learn how to actually play that sport, and they were most likely going to go and then play it outside in their own backyard or in their own neighborhoods or playgrounds. And so, you know, these games really mean a lot, because it goes much more beyond the screen than other types of games. It really goes directly into people's backyards and inspires people to play and to play like a kid.

C

Cheryl Platz 07:39

I love that. Thank you so much. And it really speaks to me at some of the projects I'm have worked on and work on try to prepare people for real life interactions. And a lot of the conversations in the podcast this season have been about the loss of third spaces and bringing back a franchise that gives kids a framework for interacting in third spaces in real life is so compelling and really exciting. So thank you for for walking us through that.

C

Cheryl Platz 08:03

James, did you have any experience with the backyard sports franchise before it crossed your path?

**J** James Deighan 08:08

You know, I guess two things come to mind that I have to mention to someone who's new to the Backyard Sports franchise. It would be that one of the things that's so amazing that they got right, that actually kind of magic in our industry, is that they made a game that's that's fun. And they say the hardest part of making a game is finding the fun. But they did it with such great world building and these punctuated characters that are full of personality in an era that wasn't known for really wild, immersive technology. So it was just such a magical experience that it became so memorable, and it had this unique position with it being an educational title that had the underpinnings that it made its way into family friendly spaces and schools. And, you know, I would sit there in my middle school basically playing this game every lunchtime rather than recess. And I something about me: I love recess Cheryl, okay, Like, it's like, I've so many fond memories of just going home and drawing characters - and I'm not a very good artist, by the way. And I think that's shared across a lot of people that grew up in this generation. Because this game really had an impact. As Lindsay was mentioning, it's the representation, inclusivity. But on the game product side, it does all these things that took the games industry, 20-30 years to start really illuminating with you know, quality of life features and how do you bring these... How do you bring characters to life? How do you make them resonant? How do you, you know, the artistry of the game design and everything else in it is really just incredible,

**E** Enduring Play Computer 09:36

loading, tutorial level: education and video gaming.

C

**Cheryl Platz 09:41**

Education in games has taken center stage with products like Duolingo, and it is one of the three modern motivators of play I name in the first chapter of the Game Development Strategy Guide; motivators that didn't really take hold until broadband, compute power, or device availability and technology caught up with need. Today's gamers do see games as an educational tool, and there is a growing body of research that supports the validity of games as a tool for improving cognitive function. The Entertainment Software Association's Power of Play study of 24,000 global gamers in 2025 found that 54% of respondents reported sports games improve real world athletic skills, an incredibly specific finding for Backyard Sports. Sure, there are detractors of educational gaming - like Dr Molly Worthen's recent New York Times opinion piece, "You can't game your way to a real education," But Dr worthen's central argument is: "The greatest blunder in the past decade of K 12 education? The decision to give every child a personal computer and to gamify everything from standardized test preparation to recess." But this sounds like a systemic argument about which games and gaming techniques are applied and how. But the article doesn't address the value of an individual game done right at educating students. In my research, there is a large body of work that supports true and lasting cognitive benefits from gaming like this finding from current opinion in psychology, October 2019: "Cross sectional studies indicate that action video game players outperform non players by about three quarters of a standard deviation across all perceptual skills." Kids these days building open worlds and Roblox Minecraft and learning basic computer science principles at times in the process. And here's the thing, kids have always been here for education in games. I had a floppy disk called Sum Ducks for my Commodore 64 where I was learning math at the age of four. But think about it, how rare was it that I had that for my parents' PC in that era? The original Backyard Baseball shipped on PC and Mac, and in that era, in the early 90s, those platforms weren't plug and play. A game built for kids still required a lot of parental supervision to get running properly, and it was on your parents' device that they needed to use for work. These days, app Stores take care of all the loading, unloading, disc management, search and discovery and other problems that might have made life an uphill battle for the few quality education games in the late 90s and early aughts. Parents can more easily focus on finding the right match and not the right audio drivers. And devices are everywhere now, so the availability of a game like Backyard Baseball on a parent's phone in a key moment is far more useful than taking over your mom's work PC to play a home run derby. Educational gaming required the technological landscape and market conditions to catch up.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 12:09**

Loading podcast level two, building a retro games studio.

C

**Cheryl Platz 12:15**

James, can you tell me a little bit more about the team at Mega Cat studios and what classic or retro games like Backyard Baseball mean to you?

**J** James Deighan 12:23

We're a retro gaming company. I think we're one of the world's most interesting retro gaming companies, because we have original developers on the team now who in the 60s and 70s that were there whenever these games are brand new, kind of like our gray bearded village elders. And then we have folks that are fresh graduates from Carnegie Mellon. So we have this kind of diamond shaped team of really great industry veterans and really great emerging talent that have this shared passion for games. And I think that combination with retro gaming with opportunities like this, it's like it's a wish list territory. And part of how this original we'll say, like, conversation started, was that I have a wish list of these 20 games that our team would just kill to work on and participate in, and I share it with everyone that will listen to it. And we had a mutual acquaintance and colleague that was also talking to Lindsay because she was looking for the right team. And I'd gone pretty far out of my way to explain how I see, you know, arcade sports is, is one of the most missing kind of components of our games industry right now, because most sports games are these very, almost inaccessible simulations where you need finger karate and massive time commitments. And as a very busy dad who has a huge passion for games, I missed the moments of, you know, NBA Jam and Backyard Baseball. And even through grad school, I'd spend 10, 15 minutes playing NBA Jam before bed, because they're just timeless fun, you know, like little escapes of skill checks and Co-Op and just, it's such a an amazing opportunity for us to work on a franchise that for some of us, we grew up dreaming of. And I just remember that, that era of games, where you'd play a game and it would stick with you so much because you'd get so few games that year, you would spend all your free time doodling Pablo on your on your notebook, or thinking about how I'm going to draft my team. And I've been able to relive that because we've had, you know, fans and kids send us, like, mail to the office with like, well, "here's my roster. Tell me. Tell me the kids are still going to be here."

**C** Cheryl Platz 14:07

Awww!

**J** James Deighan 14:07

It's, uh, it just, it's like, some of my favorite moments in my entire career. And I've had a really wonderful and exciting games career with some of the franchises we've contributed to. This has been some of the proudest and some of the most exciting we've been able to participate in because of playground.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 14:25

Loading tutorial level: the Motivators of Play in the Backyard.

C

**Cheryl Platz 14:31**

I'm so grateful for these personal and passionate first hand descriptions of what backyard sports meant to Lindsay and James, because they reflect feelings of a generation of players, and they demonstrate beautifully how the Motivators of Play that I described in that first chapter of my book, *The Game Development Strategy Guide*, not only manifest in different people, but changed for generations over time. Clearly, Backyard Sports was ahead of its time in many ways. In these descriptions, Backyard Baseball seems to play to motivators like education, immersion and comfort more than the traditional competition and mastery motivators that were so popular in the era of the console wars. We've already talked about education. But as for comfort, James's comments about casual play align with the growing body of players who use games for stress relief. James talks about being a busy dad who just wants to take the edge off with an easy sports game. And he's not alone. I've had two students in a class of 15 profile the same game in 2025: *Score Hero*, a casual mobile soccer game. Fandom's *Inside Gaming 2024* report, which asked 5000 players globally why they game, reported that the top self reported motivator of play was "unwinding and stress relief" at 54%. "Challenge" was 33% and "competition" even further down at 18%. And as for immersion, the 1997 release of Backyard Baseball presented players with deep representation and allowed them to project themselves into the world of the game - and then, by proxy, picture themselves as capable real, live backyard players. The power of this immersive narrative representation is best demonstrated by Pablo Sanchez, referred to often as just Pablo. He's one of the most well rounded players in the game, known as the secret weapon for his maxed out stats despite his unassuming appearance. His monolingual Spanish voiceover was also very groundbreaking in this era. There are major league players today, decades later, that use Pablo Sanchez themed bats. But Pablo wasn't the only play to representation. The best pitcher in the game was a wheelchair user. Many backgrounds were represented with equal gender balance. You could see yourself there, and by definition, your team had to be diverse. And a simple control scheme designed for kids and families meant that it was a comforting experience for everybody.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 16:37**

Loading podcast level three: uniting two teams with a shared vision.

C

**Cheryl Platz 16:43**

Thank you so much for that comprehensive look at how you two sort of found each other. Lindsay, to complete that story, what was it like, kind of finding out that James and James' studio was looking for the same things you were?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 16:57

Yeah, it was actually a very easy decision for us to partner with Mega Cat and James on the Backyard Sports titles, because there's a couple of elements to this. The first is, this is not a job to anybody on the Playground team. Obviously, it's what we do for a living, but we don't look at it like a job. This is our purpose and our our legacy and what we want to be doing with our lives. And we really believe that we're working on a project that can change the landscape for children's and family entertainment. And that means that, you know, we have to do things in a certain way that might not be the traditional way, because we're always going to be thinking about our fans first. And that is where James became a really great partner, because he shared that exact same passion and vision for this franchise. It was very much "What can we do to make this a great experience for fans, and how can we bring Backyard back in the most positive way possible?"

**C** Cheryl Platz 18:01

I love the clarity of vision.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 18:06

Loading podcast level four, finding the fun in Game Dev.

**C** Cheryl Platz 18:11

One of the things that came out when talking to people for my book and I was asking people whose games were successful, what was the thing that differentiated the teams that were successful? It wasn't a specific skill or a specific discipline. It was fun. It was the teams managed to have fun. And the unification of your vision, your love for this specific franchise and for giving kids and families a shared experience... that feels like a pathway to having fun making the games. Are you having fun making these games?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 18:39

I'm having the most fun that I've ever had, and working harder than I ever have. So it is, you know, truly a dream project to be able to do this. And every single day, I can't believe what we get to experience. And there's so many... there's so many things that you could take for granted, and that is not something that our team is doing. If we get a cool streamer that plays the game, or professional athlete that talks about how this is their favorite, or a kid that sends in some fan mail to us? Every single one of those things means so much, and you know, it happens so frequently, that it's really beautiful. And what An amazing life we got, we get to have by working on this brand.

C

Cheryl Platz 19:25

You know, I think it's an important point to talk about for a second, because you said I've been having so much fun, and I've never worked harder. And for folks coming into the industry, that can sometimes be a little bit cognitive dissonance, like, "oh, it's gonna be fun and games!" >laughter> And those two things can coexist. In fact, I don't know if you've noticed this, but the more passionate you are about work, sometimes the more difficult it can be to process because you care about it so much. Is that something you struggle with?

L

Lindsay Barnett 19:51

Yeah, I think that that's the hardest part about working on the backyard sports franchise and making a brand new Backyard Baseball game. I mean. The fans love this franchise so much. I love this franchise so much. James loves it so much that there's a lot of pressure to deliver, and we are doing everything we can to make the greatest Backyard title with this new Backyard Baseball game that'll come out this summer. And that's a lot of pressure, but we are up for the task, and I think that's been really fun as well, because we're being able to storytell and work with our favorite characters. So it really is a combination of working super hard to make sure that we can deliver something amazing, and also some pressure to be able to deliver that.

E

Enduring Play Computer 20:39

Loading podcast level five: thriving by reviving lost games.

C

Cheryl Platz 20:46

Let's talk about how you've been thriving under pressure, because when we were getting ready for this podcast, you were sharing some of your success stories. Because working up to the upcoming release, you partnered to re release many of the games that existed before and correct me if I'm wrong. But that has gone pretty well.

L

Lindsay Barnett 21:05

It has gone extremely well. Almost two years ago, when I was able to acquire the rights to the brand, I did not know that any retro titles would be able to come back. I thought that they were completely gone, and when I met Mega Cat, they were able to do something that I thought was impossible, which is CD ROM hack and reverse engineer, and really rebuild the retro titles to make them playable on modern devices. And I thought, "hey, we'll release Backyard Baseball 97 for fan service, and some people will like it," but I did not expect for it to become the number one game on mobile. It knocked off Minecraft from the top spot. I didn't expect it to become a top release on Steam. The fans just came back in droves, and people started streaming it and playing it, and new fans started joining in on the fun. And so the brand was able to come back in a much bigger way than I ever could have expected from these retro titles and from the love of these types of games.

C

Cheryl Platz 22:10

James, can you talk to me about some of the challenges you faced when you were tackling this revival of the beloved franchise to modern platforms? Were there points where you had to make decisions about control schemes or graphical fidelity or art styles that you feel were pivotal in the success of the launch?

J

James Deighan 22:29

You know, the hardest part of the relaunches was we had no access to source code. What we had were fragments of make file chain components, and we're doing what's considered like, if you're familiar with the term, like "RAM sniffing," where you're seeing what's loaded into the memory at a given state, and then basically shifting and forcing new things to get loaded - and it's to expand the memory. Just a lot of very meticulous technical work with some reverse engineering and assembling corners of the globe, we'll say pieces because the software was built in this scum engine that was popularized by LucasArts, you know, many, many years ago. And we were able to reach out to many, many industry colleagues and corners of the retro gaming community to find little clues and little pieces. That- pairing that in with a lot of just black box testing and semi infinite... like because, you know, normally in software development and game development, you have the benefit of things like error logs and crash logs and compilation logs and all these things that you can point back to and extract clues and breadcrumbs that can better inform "Okay, here's what's happening here." But, you know, being able to make these games playable on modern devices was a one of the hardest things that we've ever done, ever. Truly, if it weren't for our love for the playground team and the franchise. There is absolutely no way I'd ever - I don't know if we'd even do it again, to be honest, because the number of places works, if you look at like the Android ecosystem, and like the we have hundreds of phones we'll never touch again at the office, and like a just like graveyard of pain.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 24:06**

Loading tutorial level the scum engine.

C

**Cheryl Platz 24:10**

Scumm spelled s, c, U, M, M stands for script creation utility for Maniac Mansion, and it was a video game engine created by game studio Lucasfilm games eventually renamed LucasArts. We learned about LucasArts in season one, episode one. Like Edith in season two, episode nine. Scumm went beyond game engine to provide game designers the ability to create game designs and scenarios without writing source code. And that abstraction makes it inherently cross platform compatible. According to Wikipedia, Scumm was released for platforms like the 3DO, Amiga, Apple II, Atari ST, Commodore 64, NES Mac, Sega, CD, Windows and Turbo Graphix. You think we have it bad now? The early gaming industry was just as fragmented, but with far less raw material. The creator of Scumm, Ron Gilbert, left LucasArts in 1992 to co found Humongous Entertainment, the company that eventually created Backyard Sports. In exchange for his continued support of scum, Ron gained a license to use it at his new company, a huge step forward in an era when there was no such thing as Unity or Unreal Engine off the shelf. Unlike the game engines we're used to today, scum is associated with narrative 2d story based games. Maniac Mansion is a game where you could select a bunch of word based actions with an image sort of on the top of the screen. It really, sort of blended the worlds between text, RPG and visual novel in a time when things were a lot simpler. By comparison, by the time Backyard Baseball came along, things were a lot more sophisticated.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 25:46**

Loading podcast level six, someone's favorite game.

C

**Cheryl Platz 25:52**

To put things in perspective for listeners, these folks reverse engineered not just Backyard Baseball 97, but baseball 01, soccer 98 basketball 01, football 99, and hockey 02: 6 reverse engineered games across platforms between October 2024 and November 2025. Even if you did have the source code, that seems almost impossible. And all six of them have reviews On steam trending very positive. James, what kept you going?

J James Deighan 26:23

Fans needed it. You know, once, once the first game had the traction, the excitement and the enthusiasm, it did something that happens as a game developer. And we have this, this huge sign on our wall. It says the "principles of cattiness." And one of the things that we have listed in those principles is that every game we create, every game we work on, we want that to be someone's favorite game. And it was instantaneous that we had people just exploding with enthusiasm showing up for this title. So we had to finish what we started. And you know, so much of I think the adrenaline came from, "well, this should be impossible!" when we talked to other colleagues or industry veterans, and that was almost part of the fuel of like for John and Luke and Lawrence and all the team members leading the charge, thinking, "well, if I retire, this is something I'll look back on, and I'll remember this as like a major contribution to the games industry." And it sounds kind of silly, you know, Cheryl, but it's really, truly the type of conversations we had to push through these many 15-18, hour days for a few months for work that we thought was going to be a lot more digestible because the test case to make it run on PC? Very reasonable, very digestible. Everything else, after just started to become a monolithic effort of like, oh, look, there's 17,000 different Android devices that have unique hardware profiles and input fragments and memory allocations that thinking to myself, "This is the hardest way to be introduced to the games industry for Playground." {{art of us being a good partner, supposed to be being this, like, red carpet, like, "Here's here's what to expect," Going through military training and going to war with, like, a one day boot camp. And it was just, man, it was a lot of trust that they gave us. A lot of trust the fans gave us. And something about the Backyard fans, that's so amazing is that they're this, like, happy, just genuinely so enthusiastic and such a personal attachment to the franchise that they're like the most patient, happiest fans I've ever seen. It's unlike anything I've been part of. And we've worked with some global franchises that have massive cult followings and super fandoms and people that just have tattoos and memorabilia and rooms dedicated to merchandise. And we see that same fandom in Backyard Sports now, but it's almost like, it's almost like the franchise previously had never, maybe made it to that same kind of cultural zeitgeist, but we see it happening now. And it's, it's many, many people's favorite game, and they just almost forgot that they loved it as much. And it's, it's such a strange and magical thing, the playgrounds have been able to excite these memories for people. Because from teachers to the kids that grew up in that era, like, oh my god, "Backyard Baseball, that's amazing!" And it's every single day, there's a new moment like that that we have to just kind of step back and have this kind of gratitude for having an opportunity to participate in that moment.

C

**Cheryl Platz 28:57**

Well, you know, it turns out it wasn't silly for you to talk about this being your legacy, because having that commitment and getting this out to so many people helped you build this community of fervent fans. And so it's like being bold enough to dream of that success gives you the space to walk into it, which is amazing. But thank you for being so candid about how hard the journey was, because that is such a unique journey. It also sheds light on how hard it can be to be an independent developer. You sign a deal, you set terms, and then something gets much more complicated than you realize. And it's- it speaks to your sort of your maturity as an independent developer that y'all were able to sort of transcend, like, "oh, wow, this is way more complicated than we thought it was going to be," but you used your team's values and rallied the team to get past this incredible complexity. I hope people really kind of like sit with that story if they've encountered difficult moments in the future. Because gaming is full of those complex moments, and sometimes it's the vision that gets us through

E

**Enduring Play Computer 29:57**

Podcast level paused. begin Host commentary.

C

**Cheryl Platz 30:01**

There's something really timeless in the struggle that Mega Cat Studios had when making the leap to mobile. If you look at their gameography, they went from making games on Game Boy and NES to making games on PC and Playstation, Xbox, and switch and this move to the Backyard Baseball franchise was the step into mobile. The iPhone is bad enough, because you've got multiple generations of iPhones, all with slightly different screen aspect ratios and capabilities. But Android is a whole other world. There's no standard for Android, and a lot of the value in Android ecosystem is lower cost phones. And so you have to figure out which Android phones you're leaving out. It's incredibly complex. It is overwhelming if you're starting this journey for the first time. There's a reason why a lot of indie studios start with iPhone only - because it's a closed system. To put things in perspective, there are 11 different active iPhone models, between the iPhone 11 and the iPhone 17 pro Max, accounting for different form factors, and there are five active iPad models. So that's 16 different Apple devices you need to design for in the mobile space. By contrast, a 2025 article from SQ magazine lists Android 11 device count at 7600 device models, and that's just one of the several active Android operating systems, each with its own count of active device models,

E

**Enduring Play Computer 31:43**

loading podcast level seven: learning from a loyal community.

**C** Cheryl Platz 31:50

I don't blame you for not wanting to port old school scumm engine stuff again. But what the beauty of it was- it gave you access to this community. So what have you learned from working with the Backyard Sports community and their interactions with the retro title that are informing your work on the modern title?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 32:10

I think that it has-

**J** James Deighan 32:11

I mean, I could talk all day long. Oops, sorry, Lindsay,

L

**Lindsay Barnett 32:15**

I think both of us could talk all day long about this specific point, which is probably why we both want to talk about it, because I haven't worked on games like James has, but the fan community is so overwhelmingly incredible to us, and in the hard moments, they truly keep us going and pushing. And you know, James and I are working 18 hour days, seven days a week, because we love this and want to deliver something amazing for them. These fan communities are just, I mean, I've never seen anything like this. And our chief product officer, Chris Waters, has been building brands for 25 years, and he's worked on some of the biggest brands. He worked on Robot Chicken, and they did a Star Wars collaboration. He did DreamWorks stuff with Kung Fu Panda and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. And he said that he's never seen a fan community like this. Because what I think people really resonate with about the Backyard Sports games is not like, "Oh, these were just great games." What they resonate with is: it represents a part of their childhood in which the best thing that you could be is a kid and the best job that you could do is play. And for a generation of millennials who grew up with that as the value system from the game? To just have fun being a kid? I think that is what people are really resonating with today, is it's celebrating that. It's celebrating a spirit of play and just having fun. And we really need a lot more of that, especially as sports and gaming become more professionalized. This is a way for every single person to play the game, how they want to play it, and just enjoy it and have fun. And if that's something that people can take away from our games, then I think we're doing a really good job of communicating that message. And our hope now is - our new game has, has multiplayer, so we're hoping that families play it together. And even with our backyard Derby demo that we just launched, we've seen so many families sitting together at their- at whether it's for holidays or on the weekends, and playing and then going outside and playing. And that's, I think, a really important distinction between the Backyard Games and others, is we love that these games actually encourage everybody to get outside and play. We did a partnership with Wilson, which has Wilson Louisville Slugger and EVO shield, and they said that it was one of the best selling days of Little League and T ball equipment that they can remember in company history. And I thought that was such an important thing to say, "Wow, people played our games and then bought merchandise from Wilson that had our characters on it, and then went outside and played baseball with their family. That is cool to us."

E

**Enduring Play Computer 35:17**

Loading podcast level eight: companionship through couch Co-Op.

C

**Cheryl Platz 35:23**

Let's talk a little bit more about that multiplayer element, because that obviously a lot has changed since the 90s, and the focus on the possibility of multiplayer is one of the big things. But you're an educator, Lindsay, and you know how important it is to get things right when targeting families and kids. How are you approaching the multiplayer challenge? Is it Co Op? Is there matchmaking? What are the safety implications? What is it that makes multiplayer uniquely Backyard Sports?

L

Lindsay Barnett 35:55

First of all, this is going to be one of the most accessible sports games that comes on the market when July 9 hits. We have so many accessibility features, from the different types of modes that you can choose to having competitive features like a global leaderboard. There's a bunch of different ways that people can interact with the game, and we've we've stayed very true to that. If you're an original fan who is a millennial, then we want you to be able to play at your level. And if you're a new fan who has never played a game before, we need those kids to be able to to play as well and have a successful experience. And so we've put in so many accessibility features in the in the demo that is out now we have couch Co Op. This is not a "talking to strangers through a headset kind of game." This is something that we really want people to experience with their friends and their families. And for the demo, we wanted to show off. you know, what that looks like to have collaborative play. And hopefully we'll have some other things up our sleeves going forward. But the safety is very important, and we've been very conscious of, you know, making sure that this is a safe game for kids and families, and that people continue to trust the Backyard Sports brand, because that is truly we want everybody be safe and to be safe in the backyard, and that's a very important pillar of what we're creating.

C

Cheryl Platz 37:25

It's funny how hard it is to come by the couch co-op experiences and how much hunger there is in the market for it. So I'm excited to see that playing out in your demo. And you know, we see we talked in episode two of this season about the I hate the term, but it's what the industry is using right now, the "friendslop" genre, and that speaks a lot to the desire for cooperative play, for adults playing with each other, but a lot of that speaks to like there's not couch co-op, so you go online and you play with your friends there. So it'll be really interesting to see how the availability of this title is embraced by many of the communities that are kind of embracing those titles right now.

E

Enduring Play Computer 38:05

Loading podcast level nine, the spirit of fun in sports.

C

Cheryl Platz 38:12

When you said embracing the spirit of fun in sports games, could you give a concrete example of how this title sort of encapsulates that spirit of fun in a way that other existing titles might not?

L

Lindsay Barnett 38:25

Absolutely so one of the things that I love is in our difficulty settings. I'm going to just use the backyard Derby as an example, because that's the game mode that people can actually see right now. There are two modes in this. There's a classic mode and there's a crazy pitch mode. The crazy pitch mode is our more difficult mode, but instead of it just being more difficult, it has to be more difficult in a Backyard specific way. So the players are getting thrown truly crazy pitches. There's freeze pitches that freeze in midair and melt, and then you have to try to hit them. There's fireballs that come in on fire. There's corkscrews and spit balls and zigzags and elevator pitches, all sorts of different types of power up pitches that make the game harder. And in some ways, our difficulty has that experience of like you laugh instead of get frustrated when you miss, because there's a lot of comedy behind what makes the game difficult. There's nothing like a grown up trying to hit a fireball and swinging and missing because a kid threw it in the game and you missed. And then accessibility of just like this, has a point and click element to the game. So if you are, you know, anybody can, can have success. And we've been testing, and we've heard so many anecdotal experiences of kids having their first home run that they've ever had. And you know, it brings a level of joy to a family. Because a kid can have success in this game.

C

Cheryl Platz 40:03

Thank you. Those are great examples, and I love it because the humor and the specific choices that push the game out of reality and into fantasy are helping the game be good at what games are. And it's like, "why don't you just go play outside?" Because it's more than outside. And it creates this sense of humor that, like makes it easy to be learning these rules or learning these things. And it creates that motivator of play of comfort. It creates that motivator play of immersion, and prepares people, all the while, to learn the rules in case they want to go out into the real world. So that's that's some that's magic, right there. I like that

E

Enduring Play Computer 40:40

Loading podcast, level 10: centering accessibility for every fan.

C

Cheryl Platz 40:47

James, I noticed that the steam page for Backyard Baseball mentions accessibility features fairly prominently. Can you talk more about the role these features play in your design?

J

James Deighan 40:57

Lindsey talked a little bit about accessibility features. And sometimes, when you say accessibility, people start thinking more about color blind mode and, you know, allowing unique audiences and differently abled players to participate. That's, that's actually like a tip of the iceberg. I think really well done and thoughtful, accessible design is actually just making the game a better quality experience for each player to play and experience the game their own way, using the inputs and the style of, we'll say like engagement and difficulty they want. So when they think about accessibility, it's, you know, remappable inputs are not just for different players. It's actually everyone has a preferred input scheme. And when you think about things like high contrast modes and, you know, cognitive and auditory and visual accessibility features, these are actually just people tuning the game to what makes it more likely to be their favorite experience, and more immersive and more, you know, more just satisfying, you know, for what they want from a video game. No, so I just think there's, there's so many things to love about this franchise that already fit those pillars. I think some some products are easier than others, to kind of check these boxes and find ways to really bring out the best of how to make it more approachable.

C

Cheryl Platz 42:00

And the point about accessibility that it's for everybody is so important for everyone to hear. Because I've seen many studios that don't lead with accessibility, when it's easy to build into the engine struggle later, when they're wondering why they aren't growing or why retention is dropping. And finding out later that like, "oh, well, my wife can't play the game because it gives her migraines," or, "Oh, my kids can't play it because they can't figure out the control scheme, because they didn't grow up with consoles." The accessibility isn't about a specific disability. It's about opening your audience to as many people as possible. And isn't that why we all got into games in the first place?

L

Lindsay Barnett 42:39

My experience in, you know, many ways. When I was a teacher, I taught the special ed inclusion class, and so a lot of what I had to do as a teacher was differentiate my classroom for a bunch of different types of students who learn differently, and figuring out what was going to have- get them to learn this material in the same way. And I've applied a lot of that to how we're developing this game. And you know, in some ways, thinking about accessibility as a as a classroom teacher, sometimes the methods that we use for one student actually work really well for another student, and they might not have known that. So when you look at gaming, there are parts of this game might have been created for a specific reason, but work really well for everyone. Certainly, the "swing spot" is a great example of this. You know, we have where you could play with a swing spot and without a swing spot, and we have a ton of fans who just enjoy playing with it because they have more success, and they want to be able to be successful in a game, and they don't want the additional challenge without it. So something as simple as that, we're thinking about a lot of those different elements. And you know, I think that people are going to definitely get to see that when they play the game,

E

**Enduring Play Computer 44:01**

Loading tutorial level: the spectrum of gaming graphics.

C

**Cheryl Platz 44:06**

As a professor of video games, I found myself looking for an objective way to discuss the conscious choices game developers were making about their game aesthetics. The industry basically had three models: "retro", "good" and "other" - not terribly useful. What I created for the Game Development Strategy Guide was a two by two matrix that maps two key measurements of a game's graphical fidelity, on the horizontal axis, alignment to reality, and on the vertical axis, how optimized or not the graphics are. By plotting these with hyper realism at the right and hyper optimized visuals at the bottom, we get four quadrants the upper right is, of course, realistic games like spider man two, they're the most expensive to make, and they're what we normally associate with, "good graphics." The upper left is "artistic" games with high graphical fidelity that don't try to mimic reality. On the bottom right, we have games that mimic reality at low fidelity, which I named after the art movement of a similar spirit, "Impressionism." Last but not least. We have the non realistic, highly optimized quadrant, which I chose to call "classic" games. Retro games typically have a classic esthetic out of necessity, so they sit in this quadrant. But some games are highly visual constrained and don't seek to be retro. So retro is a subset of classic, if that makes sense. Now, the original Backyard Baseball game features stylized human characters in pixelated form, solidly in the classic quadrant, though skewing slightly impressionistic, but the modern Backyard Baseball is higher fidelity and sits more firmly in Impressionism. It's got smooth geometry, but stylized bright colors and cartoonish humans. Parts of the environment and UI feel almost realistic, but the characters are very much a simplified impression of reality. But as you learn in Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics, often this choice to create simpler characters is exactly the right choice when you want your audience to project themselves into your story.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 45:51**

Loading podcast level 11: from retro art to classic games,

C

**Cheryl Platz 45:58**

James, you mentioned we weren't sure that a retro title could succeed, and now that you have this data, can you talk to me about the journey of bringing this new title to life? Like, what choices are you making? One thing I talk about in the Game Development Strategy Guide is that we've gotten to a point in the games industry that classic esthetics are a valid and more desirable choice than ever, and it feels like you're right at the forefront of that movement.

**J** James Deighan 46:25

Oh yeah. Mega Cat has a little bit of an industry kind of look and standard. It's satisfying after over a decade of toiling and making a lot of these preservation projects and working in all these different video game museum initiatives and working with a lot of this retro IP that people have us more synonymous than ever with a lot of those things, But I have articles all about this now where I talk about how pixel art is timeless, and I'm a huge fan for it. But it can be the right design choice for some cases, it's not - it's not for every IP, for every execution, but for every place. I think what makes retro design really accessible and interesting is that you have this, this like distilled pick up and play intuitive nature to it. When you think about the term retro gaming, sometimes people think niche, you know, but I think so much of what I consider retro is like, there's this timeless quality to it. Like, if you would play Super Mario World today, or, as we saw with Backyard Baseball 97 at your baseball 97 you could be a brand new fan who's never played it before, and still be entranced and immersed and lose two hours because you're having a ton of fun.

**C** Cheryl Platz 47:21

Thank you for that. It speaks to me so deeply as a disabled senior leader in gaming that you lead with the accessibility options, because it can be so hard to make that case even for modern games. When I was creating the spectrum of gaming graphics and the game development strategy guide, the quadrant that speaks to pixel graphics, actually chose not to use the word retro, because I didn't want to box it into because, as you say, like some people like, have the closed mindset, and so it's like, you know what? It's just timeless, like the classic that esthetic speaks to all generations, not just the generations that got to see it first. And I'm glad that you're studying that art from the beginning and then bringing it forward for new generations. And you're right, not every IP makes sense for a classic aesthetic, and that's why we also have realism and another aesthetic I was calling Impressionism and artistic games, but it's this seems like a really great match.

**J** James Deighan 48:13

And I think that timeless, retro is the difference of really thoughtful, accessible, fun design that is really what makes these, products timeless? So it's just just a matter of what we're what we're calling retro. And we have an internal term. We call it retro in a bad way. So there are cases where you'll end up in a outdated - like there was this era in the 90s, particularly in a lot of point and click games, where all the user interface was this wide open canvas with every option shown at once, and it was almost like part of the game was trying to figure out how to get through the game. It's like, we often joke internally and call them "inaccessibility features."

**C** Cheryl Platz 48:46

**J** James Deighan 48:46

You know, it is interesting to watch how all these things have evolved, and all these trends have become more and more like centered around user experience and immersion and all these other things you can do to support that with focus groups and telemetry. And, you know, at the core of it, it's really just, "Can the player understand it, have the feedback to find the fun?" And all these other tools and pipelines and ideas and strategies just help validate that, to make sure that we're we're delivering all the things that each each fan is going to want to have the most fun.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 49:16

loading podcast level 12: for the love of The game

**J** James Deighan 49:20

You know, I guess I just wanted to add that one of the things that's been so satisfying when working with this, because we work with a lot of different brand stakeholders and IP managers, is that the playground production scene is this like group of like superheroes that just love the franchise. So when you're coming up against these really hard to communicate, almost like industry specific like, like... I think about, during our pre production phase, we had sent Lindsay this many hundreds of line item

**L** Lindsay Barnett 49:45

**J** James Deighan 49:45

...feature set that broke down concepts for accessibility features and some features. And I said "This takes like, you know, one to two months to go through. And let's, let's meet and discuss each one and see where you think these fit within brand, vision and roadmap." And it was like from Day Zero there was this desire for fan service, which is like our, our number one saying, and then number two it was like obvious that without having been indoctrinated to all the accessibility and launching titles and games product design that Lindsay and Chris and the team were just like so enthusiastic about, making the game approachable, making a quality experience. And it's it's sometimes the case when you're working with, you know, IP licensors or brand managers or brand teams, that it's almost like you're in this perpetual arm wrestling match, of, like, healthy friction, of how do you how do you make the great game uphill against, you know, limitations. And the easy thing to do is just like, let one voice be heard. That doesn't make the great game. That's not how teams, you know, most effectively collaborate, right? So it's been a really wonderful experience, because sometimes that ends up being like the major handicap of why, why games are missing out on these features and why they're not, as, you know, maybe customizable and approachable to as many players. And it was the opposite experience with playground. They they turned over this, like six week assignment in just a couple days We were on a working session. I thought, this is, "this is either like magic, or I should be very concerned, because I've met another version of me somewhere at a different state."

**L** Lindsay Barnett 51:07

**J** James Deighan 51:07

Maybe I lost your child. I don't know. We're distantly related. I think all the time about how extreme some of these experiences have been with in a very positive way. Because, you know, I like, I love games, and when we when we make them, we just live in them. We always joke that we're like method developers.

**C** Cheryl Platz 51:24

**J** James Deighan 51:26

You can see a lot of us- There's like baseball stuff everywhere at the office now and it, but it's just like, it's, it's been such a genuinely wonderful experience doing this with people that actually feel like partners, because these things are so much harder to push uphill, even with industry veterans, because there is like this, there's a real cost and time and money and product positioning and education that some people just aren't open to. And sometimes it's a little bit of like, "There's a way we've always done it," or here's, you know, "Let's not push this." Or, "You know, here's the safer path." But Playground's really been just wonderful to work with because they want to make this great fan accessible game.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 52:07

Podcast level, paused. Begin host commentary.

**C** Cheryl Platz 52:11

This is about as optimal a relationship between publisher and developer as you're going to see in game development. But what does his two roles mean? And who's who? The developer is, the company, who's actually building the game itself. They are the ones writing code, crafting the art, working out the designs and weaving the narrative. However, these things are often done to a set of requirements, specifications or brand guidelines specified by a statement of work from a publisher. Publishers are companies that specialize in the distribution of media. This can mean getting data to App Stores, gaming platforms, manufacturers and the like. Publishers are often setting quality standards and shepherding the builds through final approvals. And publishers often help the game go from its primary language to global scale through localization efforts. Publishers also tend to handle matters like IP licensing, ratings board approvals, community management and marketing. Basically, publishers surround the game and define what games get made. A developer defines how the game gets made and does the work. Sometimes a company is both developer and publisher, like Epic Games. In this relationship, Lindsay's Playground Productions is the publisher that holds the intellectual property rights to the Backyard Sports franchise, and playground productions hired James's Mega Cat studios to be the third party developer partner that helped them bring that IP license back to life. In chapter three of the Game Development Strategy Guide, putting the dev in game development, we talk more about these company roles and how they play out in the industry, as well as many of the different roles that people play in the game development process.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 53:33

Loading podcast level 13: authenticity as audition.

C

Cheryl Platz 53:39

I love the working relationship between your two companies. When- if people came to this conversation without context, they might almost assume that the two of you are in the same company. Do you have any advice for people who are navigating a cross company relationship publisher and developer or co-developer to developer to reach this kind of shared understanding? Are there different types of kickoff workshops or documentation that help you navigate what is still a very difficult process?

L

Lindsay Barnett 54:08

I think, you know, from my experience, it is really important to find people that you like and that you want to be working with. And there's a lot of people that have tons of talent out there. But if you can find people that you really want to be in the trenches with, and you want to spend those hours upon hours with, I think that helps so significantly. And you know, really just liking who James was and Chris and Mega Cat and all of these people that are on our team that has been so crucial. And I remember part of the first time I met James in person was not about what his vision was for Backyard or what my vision was. We talked about our shared love of collecting, and he asked if I wanted to see his game collection. And I've been collecting since I was three years old. I have over 1000 Snoopy action figures, and I have baseball cards and all sorts of things that I care about collecting. And he brought me and and Chris, our Chief Product Officer, to his room, in which is like a giant collection. And he had so many retro video games and all of these different consoles and the first baseball game that was ever made, and it was- I got to see what I needed to know about James, which is that his love for this goes way beyond just a work project. This is a true passion, because what other kind of person is going to have a full collection of retro games and every baseball game ever created on every type of system? Like that's someone who really loves this and can represent a part of the community that is going to make this a really strong game.

C

Cheryl Platz 55:58

That authenticity is a really interesting and important message. It's funny because I there have been times in my career where my collections and my like, love of gaming was, you know, people like, "Oh, it's a little cringe," or "Oh, that's a little much at places." But it has led me to places I never thought I'd get to, and it helped you to connect. And you know, the more crowded the industry gets, the more competitive it gets. It feels like it's just like, live your authenticity, it'll get you to the right people. Will you two be working together on future titles?

L

Lindsay Barnett 56:27

That's the hope, if James will have us.

**C** Cheryl Platz 56:33  
Okay

**L** Lindsay Barnett 56:33  
We love working with mega cat, so of course, we want to keep working with them for many years to come. Part of this relationship with Mega Cat has been from the very first title, backyard 97 this will be our seventh title that we'll release together. We did six retro games, Baseball, Football, Basketball, Soccer, Hockey, MLB Baseball and a brand new Backyard Baseball game. This is a long term partnership and relationship, and we love working with Mega Cat so much, and so our focus is getting this game out in a big way and having tons and tons of fans buy it so that we can keep making more and more games.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 57:15  
Podcast level 14: We're like business married

**C** Cheryl Platz 57:19  
James does, does that resonate with you?

**J** James Deighan 57:22

So I have these conversations with a lot of our team members or new hires that like culture fits are important for us, both internally and with partnerships. And almost exactly as Lindsay described it, I always remind my team the number one most important indicator of job satisfaction is liking the people you work with. And when you make a game, you're like, you're like, business married, you know? Like, where- I for sure, spend more time with Chris Waters, than I do with my wife. That's not and my six year old, you know, you know, but it's- and Chris spends more time with my six year old sometimes, you know, because he's always on the calls in the background. But there's a, there's a true like level of like, shared cultural values that has to work if you're going to love the product together and you're going to make the game together. And you know, so much of our company culture has to mesh with the others. We actually have a like part of our internal green light process, as we've grown Mega Cat is we do like a one to 10 team enthusiasm, but then a one to 10 like, "do we think they want to work with us? Do we think that there is a reciprocated energy and interest, or are we just chasing a dream?" Like, do we think there's a good fit here, and that's actually made it a lot easier for us to make slightly more informed, more logical decisions when we're looking at opportunities, which, you know, thankfully, we're able to assess and choose a lot of our opportunities these days. But that's made our game so much better. If you look at our top performing games, they're because we have teams that we're lucky enough to have worked with that have the same goals and values and passions, and that's, I think it's represented in the quality of the games we make together.

**C** Cheryl Platz 58:58

Thank you. You summed it up really nicely at the end, they're the goals and values and passions being shared, and that leading to games that have the greatest success. And I love your example of the one to 10 scale for reciprocal energy, reading the vibes. It's important. And that's, you know, that was one of my questions, which you've basically answered, was like, how have you helped lead your studio successfully for years, because it is difficult out there.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 59:25

Podcast level 15, space for psychological safety.

**C** Cheryl Platz 59:31

You know, one question I had specifically kind of inspired by your LinkedIn posts was, James, you talked about creating the sense of feeling safe enough to say something, that reporting mistakes more often can create better, better outcomes. How are you building that sense of safety so that you can build the best Backyard Sports game possible?

**J** James Deighan 59:51

There's so many layers to that, but we have, you know, something I've experienced with some of our massive IP licensing partners. There's this really hard firewalls between marketing and production and product, and they they're, like, purposely insulated from one another because they don't want to influence the other without going through the proper chains of custody. And I think it reduces velocity and increases risk in different ways, from a product and fan standpoint, because they're not, they're not making the game their front room activity. They're making these processes leave these protective P&L measures. And, you know, I think that having the the forum where people can at each phase - these things have to be defined and qualified, of course, because you can't just perpetually iterate on everything - but having a forum where we have inbound information that we can have, you know, biometrics and player feedback and sentiment on different disciplines within the team. So the animation team versus the gameplay team, versus user interface, plus different types of focus groups across each of these kind of targeted psychographic demographics of players that we think are most likely to just love and embrace and play the game, and making sure all those points of feedback are able to be shared and able to come into like the hive mind of the people making decisions and swinging the gavel, it just makes them more informed. And the Playground team is so agile. You know, there's not dozens of them too, which makes it a little bit easier, but they're able... One thing that is, for sure, massive strengths of Lindsay is she will make a gavel swing. She does not wait and sit whenever she has the information.

**L** Lindsay Barnett 1:01:14

J

James Deighan 1:01:14

And that is so important in games production, because you end up otherwise, kind of spinning your wheels. And I think leaving a lot of fan service on the table. Like, you know, I don't want to spoil any exciting decisions we've made, but, you know, I think about some of the things that our team has been able to contribute, and some of the things Playground's been able to contribute, and how we've been able to kind of even see through and anticipate we think a lot of fan nice to have. Like, I remember we came up with the first concept of these night games, and you see that in the backyard Derby demo and how fans are over and over and over, just talking about how much they love, like the ambience and the atmosphere and the fireworks and all the all these kind of components. And that's actually is a very thoughtful product design decision there. Because fans love the kids. We wanted to get more kids screen space. We talked about fireworks and how, you know, it looks so much more beautiful when you have this really good contrast for light sources, and how there's this sense of being a kid being, you know, for me, it was like, before the street lights come on, I had to be home for dinner unless I had explicit permission. And you know, once a week, especially on these Thursdays and Fridays, I'd be able to tell my dad, like, "Hey, can I go down to South Hills High School? And, you know, can we play tonight?" And you know, a couple parents would come down, and you know, we'd be sitting there playing at night, and it felt like we were extra privileged that night, because it's like nighttime. It's like a little bit, little bit risque at eight o'clock, you know, like, there's like fireflies, and, you know, we can't see the ball perfectly, even there's some lights a little bit dim. It's it's- some of my fondest memories. And it was this combination of what will be visually appealing will be impactful, what would deliver more kid moments for these characters, what would feel rewarding from a visual feedback standpoint. And I think some of those things are just, that's what comes when you love love games. You love the craft, and seeing fans like PAX East and forums and stuff just kind of gush over too, and reminds me that, like the playground team and the make head team are like doing a good job at shepherds, you know, making some of these extra, maybe hard to anticipate decisions.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:03:00

I love so much about that example, the clear player experience goals you had. Want this to feel like being a kid didn't, put things you couldn't do as a kid, and wanted to be beautiful. But bringing it back to the original question too, I love that when I asked about, how do you create this safe space for bringing up issues or difficult questions, your immediate response was like, well, "here's our framework for getting player feedback," getting that truth of what players need. And in addition, teams - like you mentioned, heartbeat the team and everything, but I love the full circle. And you know, we've talked to like user researchers this season and everything, but it's such a good reminder for people that, like, no matter how much fun you're having with your team, if you are not checking in with the people that you are making the game for, there is no guarantee that you are making the right game, and I love that that whole journey. So thank you for sharing that.

E

**Enduring Play Computer 1:03:47**

loading podcast level 16 modern without micro transactions.

C

**Cheryl Platz 1:03:53**

I know we're getting close to time, and I have two more major questions for you. And the first one, I want to say it's not as fun as fireflies at night and fireworks, but your Steam page says you are fully modern, but no microtransactions, and that's going to resonate with a lot of people. Then I'd like to learn more about like, what your business model means to you. Like, what does fully modern mean? And how have you set yourselves up to thrive with your release without microtransactions?

L

**Lindsay Barnett 1:04:20**

We really wanted this to be a game going back to the safety and trust that we have from the original fans and from parents. We want this to be a game where, on July 9, when people purchase Backyard Baseball, everything that is a part of that purchase is going to be what you need in order to win the game, you don't have to have our greatest characters that are hidden behind a lock box or parts of the game that in order to win, you're going to have to buy them. The game that you get at launch is the game that you're going to be able to win with. And that's really important to the experience is, you know, showing the consumer that that's all they need, and that we're not going to try to take advantage of them or cheat the experience in any way, where you could just buy nine of the greatest character and put nine of those characters on your team. Part of the Backyard fun is that there's all different types of personalities and characters coming together to make a fun baseball team, and sometimes you know that could be you might not get the character that you want, and that's a good lesson of life. So that's our strategy with how we're launching this game. We will not have any micro transactions. We also won't have, you know, it won't be like "here's an advertisement - commercial that you'll have to watch between each inning, and you can pay to get rid of those?" We're not going to have that. So the game is really a contained experience that if you buy it, that's, that's what you're going to get. Now that's not to say that we're not going to have expansion packs and interesting DLCs, but they aren't necessarily going to help you win the game. They might have some additional comedy or some more fun features that we'll be excited to share, because as you might notice, this is Backyard Baseball. This is not Backyard Baseball with a year attached to it. So what we want to do is create this game to be a long term play experience, one that fans can keep coming back, and we will have updates, you know, seasonally, so that this keeps being an exciting game for fans. And then once we get Backyard Baseball out, we can start working on the next sport.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:06:36

Ooh, next sport. Thank you for that. It feels like you're kind of creating a Sims of baseball, where it's there's multiple packs over many years. In the Game Development Strategy Guide I called that quadrant of the spectrum of monetization, just pay to play. It's just you pay and you get to play. And there's no paying for power, there's no paying for self expression. You just pay to play once, and you can have downloads, downloadable content for expansions, but everybody gets the same experience. And that pairs really nice with the classic aesthetic, right? That's the way?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 1:07:03

That's exactly right.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 1:07:08

Podcast level 17. Secret success criteria.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:07:13

What do you secretly hope success looks like when you get this game out? Is there like a signal or like a post to Reddit or something that will really tell you that you're going in the right direction.

**L** Lindsay Barnett 1:07:26

To me, it's a different type of success, and I think this is part of what I really love about both the Playground and the Mega Cat team, is we very infrequently talk about the dollars as the success, and we talk about the players and their experience. What would make me really, really happy and feel like there's been a huge amount of success, is truly getting a lot of families to play this together. And, you know, going and seeing... There's nothing like it when I see, you know, kids and families walking around with Pablo Sanchez T shirts on. And if I'm wearing a hat or a shirt, and someone comes up and says, like, "Oh my gosh. Do you know that those games are back?" Like, that type of experience, to me means so much. We had a beautiful experience of it's just how you're connecting with people. And every day, we feel like we're connecting to new people because of the Backyard brand. And how wonderful is it to connect over something that is wholesome and funny and good for everyone? And I think in some ways, that's what everybody wants a little bit more of is something good to connect over, and this we really believe, is just that.

C Cheryl Platz 1:08:41

Thank you. James. Do you have any secret hopes for this, this game like secret success criteria?

J James Deighan 1:08:48

You know, we just really want every game that we create to be someone's truly favorite game. And I think this has all the signals pointing that we're doing a lot of the right things. And there's such a magical component to the brand that whether you're brand new to meeting Pablo or you've been a super fan since 97 I think there's a really, really interesting, hard to predict magic that that's part of the the franchise that we're doing our best to shepherd for all the all the people that are going to hopefully pick up and play that are now checking out the Backyard Derby on Steam and showing up at trade shows. So really excited to see what this next couple months looks like as people keep exploring and showing up. It's a lot of fun to watch people come to the backyard for the first time, just as much as people returning to the backyard,

E Enduring Play Computer 1:09:29

Loading final boss level: building a transmedia sports universe.

C Cheryl Platz 1:09:36

Now, for our last question of the podcast, often it's the boss level, right? And y'all have broken out of the video games into transmedia, which is a big transition, and I wanted to talk to you about that for a second. You mentioned that you've broken into the animation space. How is that influencing your work?

L

Lindsay Barnett 1:09:56

I think it's, it's very core to what we wanted to do. So I actually studied film and animation as an undergrad and got my master's in teaching, but did all my my research on digital media and wanting to get great programming out to children and families. So it's been a, you know, long term journey for me, and something that I've been thinking about for 29 years of wanting to see these characters in animation. And, you know, I think a very important part of the backyard brand is actually reflecting on other brands that have done it really well. And one of the things that I think about is Pokemon. When Pokemon came out, there were basically three different ways that you could interact with Pokemon. You could play the video game, you could watch the TV show, or you could collect the cards. And we wanted to ensure that we had those types of experiences with the backyard brand as we relaunch and so people can play the game or our games. We now have seven games out they can watch our animation, or they can go and pick up a baseball bat and a glove that we make and actually go and feel like they're playing Backyard Baseball in their own backyard. And I think having different touch points for fans bring people into it in very different ways. We've seen hardcore gamers who come to this we see baseball kids who just love sports wanting to engage with it. We see animation fans and families that aren't gamers at all. So all sorts of different people are coming to the brand in different ways, and I think that's very important for the success and longevity of backyard sports.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:11:36

Thank you. And of course, anytime Pokemon comes up, I need to mention that this podcast is not sponsored or endorsed by my current employer, The Pokemon Company International.

C

Cheryl Platz 1:11:45

Is there anything unique about the existence of the animation that's influenced the development cycle for you James?

J

James Deighan 1:11:51

Well, so much of what we're exploring is like world building, and there's this additional extension of fan sentiment, feedback and fan requests that sometimes inspire some of these bigger brand decisions that I think playground is able to take in real time. And we talked about different voices feeling like they can help co inform what fans want, what players want, and can make something great feel like there's so much, so much value when you're bringing a franchise into new mediums and expanding it to do that, doing that in unison. That's a lot of the same writer rooms and these kind of character development discussions. I think, you know, there's so much crossover between an animated special and a video game in that way, when you're doing a lot of that world building.

**E** Enduring Play Computer 1:12:29  
Loading, final podcast level links and follow up.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:12:34  
Thank you so much for this conversation. I've had so much fun talking to you, learning more about the brand and just getting a deep appreciation for how much passion you bring to this project and helping it not just survive or thrive, but reviving it.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:12:48  
Lindsay, how can people follow your work if they want to experience this?

**L** Lindsay Barnett 1:12:53  
So you can follow us at backyard sports official, on Instagram, backyard sports on YouTube or on Twitter. Tiktok twitch. We have live streams every Thursday, and you can follow me directly at backyard Lindsay

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:13:08  
And James. How about you? How can people learn more about your studio and all of your retro gaming goodness or follow you and your career?

**J** James Deighan 1:13:15  
So we are mega cat studios on all platforms.

**C** Cheryl Platz 1:13:19  
Awesome. Well, thank you both. I am so excited to see how this evolves and see how your launch lands, and I'm sure many listeners will be as well. And I'm wishing you all the best. Thank you for continuing to build pro social experiences that bring families together.

C

**Cheryl Platz 1:13:35**

The backyard sports demo is available now on Steam, and the full game comes out on July 9, 2026

E

**Enduring Play Computer 1:13:43**

Loading: Season two recap.

C

**Cheryl Platz 1:13:47**

As we wrap up Season Two of enduring play, let's reflect on how it all fits together. We heard from community organizers who bring us together and create events that galvanize both gamers and game devs alike. Like women in games International, CEO Joanie Kraut in episode one, Events professional and Latinx in Gaming co founder Christina Amaya in episode four, and Seattle Indies Executive Director Tim Cullings In Episode Five. In addition to being community organizers, all three of these share inspiring stories of getting started and resilience in the face of industry uncertainty. We turned that organizational focus inward on our own studios in Episode Six, when Fusebox Games Director of People Amy White helped us understand how a proactive people policy has helped them nearly eliminate voluntary departures during her three years at the studio. We spoke with researchers who help us better understand how players actually play our games. Narrative Designer and games researcher Adana Nedd in episode two who introduced us to emergent concepts like friendslop and generational gaming. And How to Be a Games User Researcher authored Steve Bromley in episode three, who gave us easy to understand frameworks for applying play testing to any game development process. We got technical in the back half of the season. In episode seven, we first heard about the craft of technical design from Jo Kronk. Who walked us through both their early career at Crystal Dynamics and their fascinating take on Game Dev curriculum as an assistant professor for DigiPen Institute of Technology. In episode eight, we went even further into technical design and education by hearing from melanated game kitchen creative director Timothy Staton-Davis about his unique specialty, cultural technical design, and how it helps his teams craft uniquely authentic interactive stories, and how that skill set intersects with concepts like localization and culturalization. In episode nine, we learned about object engineering on the Sims and how those concepts inspired a career shift to production on Elder Scrolls Online with Corey Jung, who bridges the gap between art and engineering and helps teams be better together at scale with better tools and process like JIRA. And in Episode 10, we explored the human side of gaming, from accessibility to how the motivators of play show up for orphaned children of combat veterans while talking with program manager and head of gaming partnerships and brand for Gold Star Gamers, Desiree Rincon, our conversation also introduced the Always Supporting Games Community, and is a fitting metaphor for the season that wrapped with today's expansive episode about the Backyard Sports franchise that shows how a once lost brand can be revived into a thriving new era. Player needs are changing, and so are our own needs. As game developers, we must lead with curiosity and find community for our players and for ourselves.

C

### Cheryl Platz 1:16:20

Continue exploring the craft of game development with my book that inspired this podcast, The Game Development Strategy Guide available worldwide from your favorite online bookseller or from my publisher, [rosenfeldmedia.com](http://rosenfeldmedia.com) and during play, listeners can get 15% off@rosenfeldmedia.com through July 31 2026, using the code [enduringplays2](https://enduringplays2.com). Follow [ideaPlatz](https://www.instagram.com/ideaPlatz) on Instagram or blue sky to learn more about season three in late 2026. Until then, I'm your host. Cheryl Platz, keep thriving,

E

### Enduring Play Computer 1:17:00

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