Lethal League Blaze turns handball into a stylish fighting game

It can be difficult to find time to finish a video game, especially if you only have a few hours a week to play. In our biweekly column Short Play we suggest video games that can be started and finished in a weekend.

Lethal League Blaze is a game that feels like a distillation of the things I loved about games on the Sega Dreamcast. During that time I was really into sports games like *NFL 2K* and *Virtua Tennis,* and also fell hard for fighters like *Soulcalibur a*nd *Capcom vs. SNK.* At the same time, I was also enthralled by the incredibly creative gameplay and aesthetics Sega produced with *Crazy Taxi* and *Shenmue*.

Lethal League Blaze combines all of these elements. It's the sport of handball turned into a fighting game, with the brightly cel-shaded styling and funk / electronic dance soundtrack of *Jet Set Radio.*

[embedded content]

Lethal League Blaze is surprisingly simple, especially for a fighting game. Matches take place in rectangular stages of different sizes, with both characters occupying the same 2D plane like in most 2D fighting games. But unlike most fighting games, you aren't actually directly hitting the other character. Instead, you are hitting a ball which then hits your opponent.

Hitting the ball changes it to that character's color. While

it’s that color it will pass through the character that hit it, but damage any other characters it comes into contact with. So the other character can either try to avoid the ball by moving or jumping, or hit it back. Just like any other fighting game, if someone takes too much damage they lose the round. In most matches, if you lose five rounds you lose the match.

A lot of the strategy comes down to trying to hit the ball in a way that catches your opponent off guard while they try to line up a way to hit it back. You mostly do this by hitting the ball at different angles so that when it hits the edge of the arena it bounces off. Additionally, with each hit the ball speeds up, and the faster it goes the more damage it does. Eventually, it can get so fast that it becomes nearly impossible to track, but hitting someone will knock them out instantly.

Like most sports or fighting games *Lethal League Blaze* is essentially infinitely replayable. But what makes it fit this column is the single-player story mode, which only lasts a few hours. It’s basically a series of matches between different characters with little cutscenes that precede or follow each match. The mode serves as a great introduction to the gameplay, the world, and the characters.

That’s really important for a game like this where the characters are all fundamentally controlled the same way, and don’t have move sets to differentiate them like, say, the cast of *Street Fighter*. Instead, they have different attributes. Certain characters might be faster, jump higher, or have different sizes, but the major distinctions come from how they hit the ball. For example, Dice uses a table tennis racket, while Raptor uses a baseball bat. The bat gives Raptor more reach, letting him hit the ball from further away. But as a trade-off, Dice can hit the ball at much sharper angles.

Lethal League Blaze’s story mode is exactly what I want from a

single-player competitive game. Despite being short, you get the opportunity to play every character at least twice, so by the time you've finished making the transition into playing against other people, it feels much less daunting. It serves as an ideal tutorial. You'll likely come out of story mode with a preferred character, and a basic understanding of each character's strengths and weaknesses. It's great fun on its own, but it's also a perfect base for delving even further into the game's multiplayer.

Lethal League Blaze *was created by Team Reptile. You can get it for $19.99 on Steam (Windows). It's coming to Playstation 4, Switch, and Xbox One in Spring 2019. It takes about two to three hours to finish Story Mode.*

https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/9/18116644/lethal-league-blaze-jet-set-radio-fighting-game