

Father and son create new colorful domino game

By Marc Maloney
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A father-and-son team from Folsom is trying to revitalize and reinvent the classic game of dominoes, and the duo hopes toy marketers soon will be “zinga-ing” their new game’s praises.

Dahmane Dahmani recently premiered Zingamino, the new game he and his 11-year-old son Yanni created, at the American International Toy Fair in New York City in early February. The game’s name is taken from the Swahili word “Zinga,” which means “to turn in circles.” Dahmane came across the word in a magazine he was reading on an airplane and thought it would make an ideal name for a game that features plenty of circular play.

Dahmane considers Zingamino an updated version of dominoes, a game he learned to love growing up in Algeria.

“I grew up playing dominoes,” he said. “People in Algeria play dominoes all the time.” During a game of Zingamino, two to eight players ages five and up try to be the first to accumulate 64 points. Each game tile, or Zingamino, contains colored dots that represent a point value. As during a game of traditional dominoes, only tiles with a matching number of dots can be placed side-by-side. The tiles are played on a board that is divided into orange, green, yellow, and purple sections, and each tile can only be played within the same-colored circle on the board.

Unlike a typical game of dominoes, Dahmani’s game includes “wild-card” or “joker” tiles that are worth whatever value a player chooses. Dahmani believes these types of differences, and the game’s fast pace, distinguish Zingamino from traditional dominoes. “We wanted to take the classical dominoes game to a new dimension with things like the use of jokers and having players focus on colors and numbers together,” he said. “Plus, this is a family-oriented game. It’s not too complex for kids five and up to play. Most games only last about five minutes.”

Dahmane and Yanni began working on perfecting their idea for a new game in July 2004, after inspiration struck Dahmane during a game of traditional dominoes.

“I was playing dominoes and I thought, ‘There must be another way to play,’” he recalled. “First, I thought about playing in a circle. Then I thought about connecting the circles. The idea of using the jokers brought the total to 64 tiles in the game, and it allowed us to connect the circles on the game board.”

Yanni, a soft-spoken 11-year-old who enjoys playing both board and video games, provides a formidable challenge during a game of Zingamino. He said he is pleased to be able to help his dad create and refine the game.

The pair's hard work appears to be paying off: Dahmane said he was encouraged by the reception the game received during the American International Toy Fair.

"It went better than I expected," he said. "Some of the comments I heard were 'It's easy to play,' 'It's entertaining, and 'I like it.' Some stores already placed orders, and their people said they thought it will revive domino play."

With these sorts of comments fresh in his mind, Dahmane holds lofty expectations for the game he and his son have created.

"First, I just want to have a lot of people play it and enjoy it," he said. "Certainly, I also hope one of the big toy or game companies will agree to license it or take it to the next level. It's very expensive to start a new game, because there are only a few companies, like Hasbro and Mattel, which dominate the game market, so it can be hard to get into the market if your game is not known."

For more information about Zingamino, visit www.zingamino.com

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