

Dominos with Zing-a

Folsom family adds twist to classic game

By: Jamie Trump
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Annya Dahmani, (top left), her sister Katia, brother Yanni and father Dahmane play ZingaMino at their Folsom home. Dahmane and Yanni created the board game that is enjoying national success. Philip Wood/The Telegraph

A Folsom family added a new twist to the game of Dominos. Four twists actually.

By adding an eye-catching game board and domino tiles in four bright colors, the Dahmani family put zing in the long-established game and created ZingaMino, a game suitable for players, age 5 and older.

"We play a lot of Dominos," Dahmane Dahmani said of himself and his son, Yanni. "One day Yanni said, 'This is fun, but can we try this a different way?' So, we played in a circle. OK, big deal. Then Yanni said, 'How about playing in four circles?' It was pretty fun."

When Yanni, now 11, suggested adding connector tiles to link the four circles together, the father-son duo knew they were on to something.

After almost five years of playing around, the Dahmanis' game is legit.

ZingaMino was officially introduced in January and can now be purchased online and at local toy stores as well as at a few shops in Hawaii and New York. Almost 500 games have already been sold.

Lenora Daniels, an employee at Mind Over Matter Toys in Folsom which sells ZingaMino for \$29.95, said the game has been pretty popular. The store's first five games sold so quickly that owners ordered six more.

"It's doing pretty well," Daniels said. "I guess the word is getting out in Folsom."

"I had one man come in who saw (Dahmane) at the eye doctor. (Dahmane) was wearing his shirt that says 'ZingaMino.' The man asked him, 'What's that? What's ZingaMino?' Turns out he was an avid Domino player so he came in and bought two games," Daniels said.

Daniels likes it too.

"It's a fun game," she said. "It's a fun twist to Dominos."

Named after the Swahili word zinga, which means to turn in circles, that's exactly what players do.

By using tiles in orange, red, pink and green, players race around the game board connecting dominos sequentially. Special zinga tiles add the twist to the game by acting as wild cards.

If a player doesn't have a move, they have to dig in a black bag for additional tiles until they can play.

The player who gets rid of their dominoes first, wins the round. All points left in opponents' hands are given to the winner. The game is played to 64 points.

"Dominos is really for adults. (ZingaMino) is more for the kids. It's colorful. The board is fun," Dahmane explained. "It teaches you how to count. It gets you to talk."

That was the whole point.

"I'd see Yanni and his friends play a lot of video games," his father said. "That's so personal. He'd sit by himself and just," Dahmane moved his thumbs as if he was playing a video game. "I wanted a game the whole family could play on a Friday or Saturday night. (Now) we play and maybe have pizza on a Friday night. We're all together instead of each one of us going on our computer."

While the game was officially created by Dahmane and Yanni, the father-of-three says it was an entire family event.

"Yanni is the inventor; he gets the ideas. The twins are the testers," Dahmane said of his daughters, Annya and Katia, 6, who played the game at home Wednesday afternoon with mom, Zina, dad and an older brother.

Although the concept was Yanni's, he's not always the winner. In fact, it's Annya who usually wins.

Besides his family, Yanni also plays with his friends and said the game has gotten positive feedback.

"They say it's cool," said Yanni, who just started sixth grade at Sacramento Country Day School.

It might sound like a blast, but creating a game is not all fun and games.

It was actually a lot of work, admits his father, who in addition to making the game also started his own business, DYD Games & Toys, which stands for Dahmane, Yanni, and Dahmani.

A second game is already in the works, but Dahmane couldn't say much about it.

"If you have Coke, there's Pepsi. Everything in life has something that competes with it. Well, you have Bingo, there's nothing that compares to it. That's all I can say."

Dahmane, an engineer employed at Intel who first moved to Folsom in 1987, hopes ZingaMino encourage families to play together.

"With all the things kids are doing outside of the home these days, I hope this game inspires people to spend more time with their families."

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