

## Video Game Review: ‘NCAA Football 11’ Continues Sports Game Dominance

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 13, 2010 - 2:55pm

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CHICAGO – With only a few tweaks to last year’s very successful edition, “NCAA Football 11” maintains the franchise’s pole position as the best sports title available. “Madden NFL” is a great game. So are “MLB The Show,” “NBA 2K,” “FIFA,” and “Tiger Woods PGA Tour.” “NCAA Football” wins by a field goal.

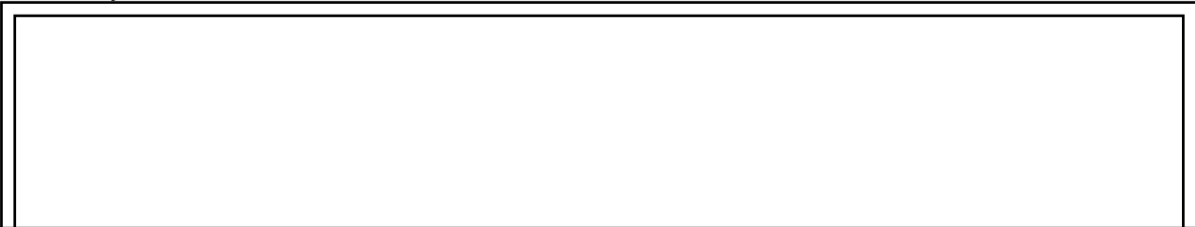


Real-world college football has risen to a point where it’s as dramatically rich as a Hollywood sports movie. Last year, there was rarely a weekend when an underdog didn’t topple a ranked team and it usually happened with unexpected performances from unheralded future stars. How could a college football video game possibly live up to the drama of the actual thing? The team behind “NCAA Football 11” have found a way to take a medium that uses a “controller” and still make it feel spontaneous, enjoyable, and “uncontrolled.”



NCAA Football 11  
*Photo credit: Electronic Arts Inc.*

The perfect balance in “NCAA Football” starts by giving the player an unbelievable amount of depth into the world of their favorite sport. There’s not much to the structure of the title that won’t feel familiar to those who have played previous annual editions. Once again, the title is seamless in its presentation and incredibly customizable to the player’s individual experience. “NCAA Football 11” can be something different for everyone.





NCAA Football 11

*Photo credit: Electronic Arts Inc.*

This player built his experience around the University of Michigan Wolverines through the two major sections of the game — “Dynasty” and “Road to Glory.” In the “Dynasty” mode, you progress through a relatively standard season based on the real-life schedule of your chosen team but you also get access behind-the-scenes with a very deep recruiting process. Every week, you’ll have to check your recruiting boards, make phone calls to potential players, and build for the future. The combination of keeping one eye on the current season while using the other to look to the future makes for a very enjoyable Dynasty experience. And players who enjoy broadcasting their customizable experience will love the “Dynasty Wire,” which allows stories for your own gaming experience to be shared not just through your console but even on Facebook and Twitter. “Storybuilder” takes it a step further, creating summaries and photo displays of highlights from your own game that you can upload to Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Win your “Online Dynasty” and shove it in their faces.

In “Road to Glory,” you move from the office to the field, taking on a position as an individual player. My chosen QB worked his way through his high school playoffs (based on real high schools...my kid went to Andover in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, like his creator...yes the game is THAT deep), losing in the final round but performing well enough to be offered several scholarships around the country. I went with second string at U of M but did well enough in practice to move up the depth chart to a starting job by week three.



NCAA Football 11

*Photo credit: Electronic Arts Inc.*

Obviously, “Dynasty” (which can also be played online with real friends taking on other teams in your conference) and “Road to Glory” are deep gaming experiences that require more than casual gaming, but the title works just as well as a “pick up and play” title — something you can grab with a roommate or friend and play for 20-30 minutes before you go out on a Saturday night. Those players will be most concerned with game presentation and control, two elements that have been slightly tweaked in this incarnation.

Much has already been written about the “Gameflow” system that will be used in the upcoming “Madden” title. It will apparently offer a drastically simplified playcalling system for players who merely want to run and pass. “NCAA Football” doesn’t go that far but the default

system does offer up a limited number of situation-specific plays instead of the deep playbook. With a few clicks, you can open the massive selection, but I found the offering of the dozen-or-so plays that I would likely choose cut some of the fat out of the game, streamlining the experience into something even more enjoyable. And each team’s playbook feels distinct as the developers have made one of this year’s focuses “120 unique ways to play and win.”

As for graphics, each of the school stadiums, mascots, and even cheerleaders for 120 Football Bowl Subdivision schools have been lovingly recreated through something EA calls the “TruSchool” system (something that not only impacts graphics but brings program-specific offensive styles and coaching tendencies to the gameplay as well). This year places an emphasis on the home team’s pre-game rituals and mascots. So, even if the Wolverines are your team, when you play in South Bend, expect to see a lot of shots of a cheering Notre Dame Fighting Irish mascot. Overall, the graphics are even smoother than last year, although some load times between highlights and at the start of games seem a little longer than they should be.



When it comes to in-game graphics, a few small additions make a big impact. The game now includes sideline toe-dragging as receivers try to stay in-bounds along with a very successful new locomotion system that incorporates more realistic running mechanics. Every element of the passing and running game not only looks better but plays more authentically.

The audio of the game is, once again, typically strong with ESPN reporters Kirk Herbstreit, Brad Nessler, and Erin Andrews bringing their A-game. The commentary is surprisingly fluid and much less repetitive than most sports titles, although Herbstreit made a few situation-specific mistakes that surprised me. More than once, I would pass to an open man who then dropped the ball and would be reprimanded for passing into coverage even though there wasn’t a defender anywhere NEAR my intended receiver. A patch could conceivably fix this minor timing glitch by the time you read this review.

Complaints about “NCAA Football 11” are so minor — brief announcer glitches, a few so-so player models, some lengthy load times — that they are all easily overwhelmed by the overall entertainment of what the title does right. Other sports games should take notes.

Check out this preview detailing “120 Ways to Win” for a glimpse of the depth of the “NCAA Football 11” experience before you pick your favorite school and start your own dynasty:

*‘NCAA Football 11’ was released by Electronic Arts Inc. and developed by EA Tiburon. It is rated E (Everyone). The version reviewed was for the PS3 but the title is also available for the Xbox 360 and PS2. It was released on July 13th, 2010.*



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