

Video Game Review: ‘NBA 2K13’ is a Slam Dunk

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 22, 2012 - 9:29am

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CHICAGO – Most of us thought it wouldn’t happen, others thought it couldn’t, and a select few thought it never should. Despite being the best in the world at what they do, dominating the competition, and improving themselves day in and day out, most of us were ultimately doubters. But we were proven wrong. No, I’m not talking about the Heat’s NBA championship, but instead referring to the fact that, finally, thankfully, gratefully, developer Visual Concepts moved the dribble moves to the right analog stick in “NBA 2K13.” For far too long gamers have struggled to find their swagger while wrestling the complicated, “Street Fighter”-esque control scheme. Now, things are just as complicated, but at least the cross-overs and hot steps have their own place to call home.

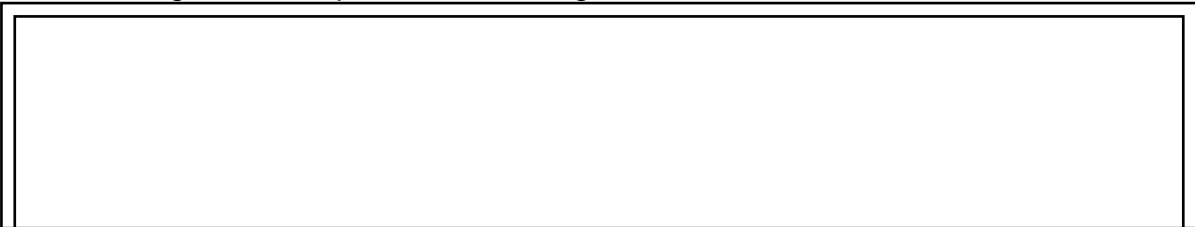


If you’re new to basketball, here’s a brief summary: The “NBA 2K” series is the most authentic, complicated, in-depth, graphically sexy, sports video game on the market today. While sometimes suffering from the relative “sameyness” that annual sports titles do, “2K” typically gets a pass on this criticism because the game has been *so* good for *so* long. This year’s claims to fame, aside from the standard tweaks, are the addition of the 1992 Dream Team, improvements to both “The Association” franchise mode and the RPG styled “My Player” career mode, plus a whole new way to play via “My Team” which is Visual Concepts’ answer to EA’s addicting and wallet-emptying “Ultimate Team”.



NBA 2K13
Photo credit: 2K Games

Oh, and in case you’ve been living under a rock - or in New Jersey - the entire thing was Produced by Hova himself, Jay-Z. While Jay-Z’s fingerprints ultimately lend themselves to mostly aesthetic choices; all the menus being gilded, games beginning with music videos featuring A-list hip hop stars, and an absolutely killer soundtrack. His presence does give everything a sense of legitimacy that’s hard to quantify, but welcome nonetheless. In fact, while playing the game and bopping my head to a particularly jazzy tune, I found myself thoroughly disappointed that the song had to stop due to a loading screen.





NBA 2K13

Photo credit: 2K Games

On the court, “NBA 2k” again manages to deliver a series of welcome tweaks and additions. Visual Concepts made an effort to make star-players even more recognizable, and it shows. During a game with the Lakers I was blown away by how authentic Kobe Bryant and Dwight Howard looked both up close and from afar. It goes beyond visuals, too. Watching a player like Kobe spin and juke and shoot is a sight to behold, and it’s a testament to the animation improvements that I found myself in awe of a collection of polygons with 1’s and 0’s for brains.

If only I could move like that. While I’m grateful that the dribble moves have moved to the right stick, the control scheme for “NBA 2k13” is still bone-crushingly complicated. There are modifiers and button combinations and roll outs and spin moves I’ve yet to perform, and I’ve been playing this series since its inception on the Dreamcast way back in 1999. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, as you can play and have success without knowing the controls in and out, but once you get into situations involving the low-post and the high-post, sometimes things become a crapshoot as to what moves and what buttons do what, and where. Thankfully, there are a series of “Legend’s Clinics” available to you in the “My Career” playmode, which teaches you a variety of advanced techniques in a structured tutorial and help immensely, but still, don’t be surprised if you take a gander at the control scheme and suddenly go cross-eyed.

Speaking of “My Career”, it’s possibly taken over “The Association” in terms of the go-to franchise mode in the “NBA2K” series, and it’s obvious a great deal of effort was put into it this year. The added elements of the aforementioned 1-on-1 training camps with legends, GM meetings, endorsements, social media followers, and the ability to buy clothing with earned income, while somewhat aesthetic in practice, do a great job of getting you into the mindset of a real NBA player.



NBA 2K13

Photo credit: 2K Games

There are a few disappointing caveats left over from last year's "My Player" mode, though. Earning a good teammate grade is excruciatingly hard for a casual player, who likely doesn't know what a box-out is, nor how exactly a Power Forward goes about filling their lane correctly. This is mildly annoying during the regular season, but is almost unforgivable during the rookie showcase, the 1-shot big game in which your player is judged prior to draft day. First timers will find themselves lost, and by the time they get a handle on things, their draft stock will fall faster than Felix Baumgartner.

On the A/V front, the off-the-court graphics could stand a bit of polish. There's only one, admittedly very well-acted, voice available to your player, and it can be a little jarring to hear a deep and stoic voice come out of your 6'1" Russian point-guard. There's a few graphical hiccups as well, as your player talks by moving his lips and not his mouth, and any of the clothing he wears look like they've been carried over from Dreamcast era hardware.

But, by far the best addition to this mode (and game in general) is the addition of "VCs" (Virtual Currency) to pretty much every aspect of your play. In career you earn VCs for playoff appearances, highlight plays, being a good teammate, and it's actually the currency your contract is negotiated in, too. You can then turn around and spend these VCs on stat boosts, equipment, clothing, and for players and contracts in the game's 'Ultimate Team' style mode - too.

This tiny little addition finally fills in the piece that's been missing in every other "my player" style career mode to date: The Benjamins. Dinero. The cheese. Moolah. Show me the moooneeyyyy. Suddenly, when you're not being fed the ball and can't earn your VC bonuses, you get a bit ticked off at your teammates. "I don't care if I'm a 63 Ovr, dish me the rock Kobe! I got (virtual) kids to feed (maybe)!" Almost immediately the idea of saying all the right things, and keeping your head down like a typically well-adjusted human would do, becomes a burden to virtual wallet - the squeakiest wheels get greased, after all.



NBA 2K13

Photo credit: 2K Games

This is even more exciting because VC translates into "2K13"'s version of "Ultimate Team" the totally boringly named "My Team". "My Team" is a bit different from the other offerings, however. First, you actually have to *pay* your players. As a result, if you drop 60 real life dollars on VC to buy all the best players, you'll suddenly realize it's nearly impossible to play all your great players at once without spending an ungodly amount of VC - thus finding the perfect balance between players who want to spend a lot of money, and those who don't.

Second is a pseudo stock market, which sells individual players. What's neat here is that as the NBA season progresses, the players stock (and skills) will rise and fall with their actual on-court performance during the season. So you could theoretically pick up a Kobe or a Lebron during a mid-season slump relatively cheaply, then ride them to success once they start getting their groove back in real life. This is especially nice since dynamic player ratings in previous years only affected exhibition mode, but they now tie into a mode where they are actually important.

With all the major improvements to "My Career" and the addition of "My Team" it's possible to forget the plethora of other modes "2K13" offers. Association returns and besides the standard bug and A.I fixes, has a new cleaned up the presentation, implementing an NBA.com interface which allows easy access to stats, injuries, and trade rumors. The NBA dunk contest gets an all new, Guitar-hero esque mini game, too. There's also some Kinect integration that allows you to call out plays, and you'll look every bit the idiot you feel shouting at your TV.

I could go on for hours about the details, nuances, and crevasis of "NBA 2K13". In a world where sports games are derided for being yearly roster updates, this franchise has continued to evolve itself, making each iteration a worthwhile \$60 dollar purchase. While complicated, and a bit rough around the edges graphically outside of the on-court action "NBA 2K13" is a - pardon the pun - slam dunk.

"NBA 2K13" was released on October 2, 2012. The version reviewed was for the Xbox 360 but the title is also available for the PS3.

By Paul Meekin
Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com

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