

Video Game Review: Pound the Boards With Excellent ‘NHL 10’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 8, 2009 - 11:56am

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CHICAGO – Perhaps the biggest praise I can pay EA Sports’ excellent “NHL 10” is this - despite being a sports nut in general, I’m not much of a hockey fan and yet I found this trip to the ice completely entertaining, challenging, and in-depth. The best sports games not only preach to the choir by satisfying people who are already fans of the actual game but also can bring in people who don’t own a hockey jersey. “NHL 10” could actually increase the popularity of the sport.

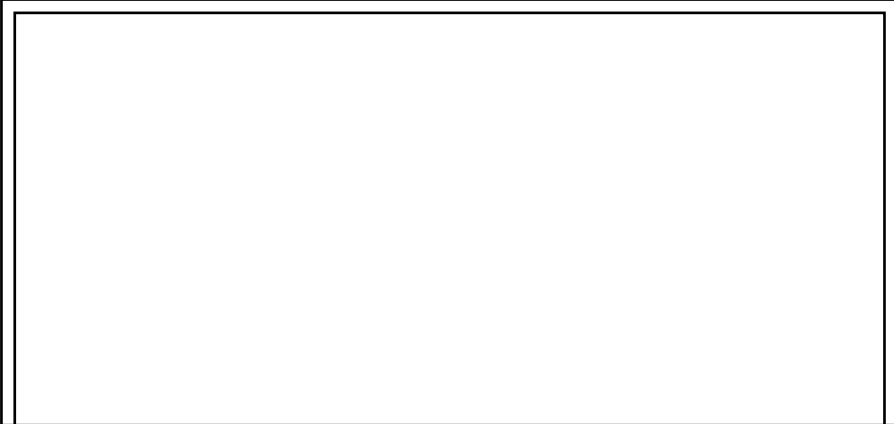


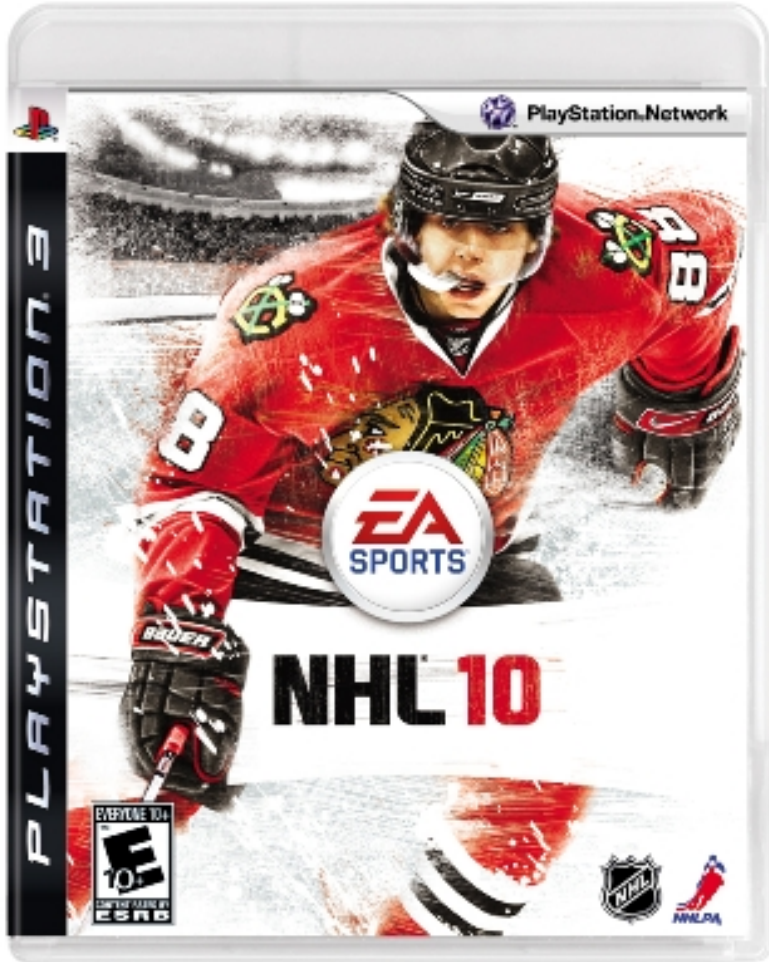
“NHL 09” won twelve sports game of the year awards. Where does a franchise go from there? How can you possibly improve on that? It’s impossible to say that “NHL 10” is an improvement, but it certainly doesn’t tarnish the legacy of the franchise. Is it as much of a leap forward as “09”? No, but how could it be?



NHL 10
Photo credit: EA

“NHL 10” does make subtle but crucial changes to the series. The actual mechanics of the gameplay and most of the presentation remains unchanged. If you loved “09” - and who didn’t - the bulk of the experience is enough the same that it’s hard to imagine you wouldn’t love this title too. Game Styles, Fighting, and Board Play are the major differences this year.





NHL 10
Photo credit: EA

"Game Styles" is a feature that allows for the title to be something different to each player. They are essentially just slider pre-sets that change the way the game is played but their inclusion makes for a title that feels very customizable to the individual experience. We've all picked up sports games, sucked at them, and put them down again. This time, if you suck, you can change the rules.

The "Game Styles" are "Casual," "Default," "Normal," and "Hardcore". Most will stick with the default setting, which is standard play. Most of the gameplay is determined by the real-life attributes of the players and the title feels most like "NHL" of the past.

"Casual" plays as it sounds with a lot of big hits, lots of assisting on passing, etc. This is more of an "Arcade" mode for players looking for the crunch and slap of the ice more than the precision of the sport. It's for game fans, not simulation fans. "Normal" is what players find in Online and the EA Sports Hockey League. Gameplay is slowed down a bit with less pass assist and hitting is harder. Finally, there's "Hardcore" with even slower gameplay, full control of speed and direction of the pass, etc.

The style sliders aren't the only difference this year. The fighting mechanism has changed with nearly a mini-game starting up when you want to start a fight and the game goes from traditional top-down to a first-person perspective. Honestly, it's kind of silly and feels poorly conceived. The game feels much more fluid and well-made as a hockey title than as a fighting one.



NHL 10
Photo credit: EA

The board play is also new this year and much more well-designed. The player can shield the puck against the boards, kick-pass it to their teammates, or pin their opponent until their teammate steals the puck away. The board play is a major part of every game. The "Battle For the Cup" mode is also new as players can work their way through the drama of NHL playoff hockey. It's basically just a "season fast forward," taking you to the playoffs, although the title also includes a "Playoff Mode" and "Season Mode".

As with most sports titles, some of the AI seems a bit wonky. CPU opponents have a near fetish for passing the puck and some of your own teammates may make decisions you don't particularly understand. But these are minor elements and, honestly, not that different from real life. So, the AI makes some unusual decisions? So do real hockey players sometimes.

We're really just scratching the tip of this ice rink with the different approaches the player can bring to "NHL 10". Casual fans can simply pick up and play or more detailed hockey nuts can spend hours getting into the meat of the game. "Be A GM" and "Be A Pro" have been brought over from the last edition and slightly revised. The in-depth EASHL makes its return as well, allowing for players to join up for monthly seasons where teams have a chance to win the Cup each month and earn new unique skater and goalie equipment.



NHL 10

Photo credit: EA

Online play includes a multi-player season mode that allows for an entire season to be played with up to 30 friends all playing different teams or you can control more than one team, or play against the CPU.

As for the video and audio, "NHL 10" looks as good as any hockey game I've ever seen. The player models are fluid and the gameplay smooth at all times. There are no players skating through each other or shooting pucks like something out of "Wanted". The commentators - Gary Thorne and Bill Clement - can get a bit annoying and sometimes fall behind the action but they mostly get the job done.

What do you want out of "NHL 10"? It's in there. Want to manage? Want to be the toughest player on your team? Just want to play a quick game before dinner? How about a whole season? Online? Local? Playoffs? Regular season? EA has truly set themselves apart with their recent sports titles by making them completely customizable experiences - something different depending on each user. With "NHL 10" they took an award-winning, beloved title and only made slight adjustments, producing another absolutely complete hockey experience.

'NHL 10' was released by EA and developed by EA Canada. It is rated E (Everyone). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the XBox 360. It was released on September 15th, 2009.



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