Game Review for

Madden NFL™ 2003

Madden NFL™ 2003

Rami Hamadeh
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Dr. Bruce Maxim

Basic Information for Madden NFL™ 2003

Game title
Madden NFL™ 2003 for PC. (Game is also available on Xbox, Playstation 1 and 2, Gameboy, and GameCube).

Company & Author
Tiburon and Electronic Arts

Type of game
Sports Simulation – Professional Football

Price
$39.95 for PC

Minimum stated hardware requirements
- Windows XP, ME, 2000, 98
- 400 MHz Intel Pentium 2 processor
- 64 MB RAM (128 for Windows 2000 and XP)
- 8X CD-Rom or DVD drive
- 75 MB free hard disk space plus space for saved games (Additional required for Windows swap-file and DirectX 8.0 installation)
- 16 MB Direct3D capable video card using any of: Nvidia GeForce 2, 3, 4 and 256, Riva TNT 1 and 2, ATI Radeon 1, 8500, and 7500, or Matrox G550, G450, and G400 with DirectX 8.0 compatible driver
- DirectX 8.0 compatible sound card
- Keyboard
- Mouse

Actual hardware required
- 600 MHz or faster Pentium 3 or Athlon processor
- 128 MB or more RAM
- 650 MB or more free hard disk space
- 32 MB or greater supported Direct3D capable Video Card with DirectX 8.0 compatible driver
- Supported gamepad
- 56Kbps or faster internet connection for internet multiplayer games
- TCP/UDP compliant network for LAN multiplayer games

Game Summary of Madden NFL™ 2003

Quick overview

Madden NFL™ 2003 is the latest version of the John Madden Football series that dates back about 14 years. The series has always delivered the most authentic, most realistic football game with unmatched feature sets and detail, and this definitely continues with Madden NFL™ 2003. This version has more depth and polish, faster gameplay, amazing graphics and animations, more realistic player AI, and in-depth play modes.

Player's role

The user controls the players on the screen with either the keyboard or a gamepad. The user is basically the coach and the players at the same time. The user selects the diagrammed play that he wants the offense or defense to run and then the user executes the play as diagrammed.

The user may also play in a franchise mode where they take the role of the coach and have the chance of being fired if their performance is shotty.

Installation

Madden NFL™ 2003 is installed onto the hard drive from a CD. A custom installer automatically pops up when the CD is inserted into the CD-Rom. This installer steps the user through the process giving options such as inclusion of a DirectX 8 installation along the way. Once the installation is complete, the game can be run from the hard drive but requires that the game CD be in the CD-Rom drive while playing.

User Interface

The user interface is relatively similar to previous versions of the game. There are two sets of options that the user may click on. The first set includes the game type selection and customizing, such as single-player, multi-player, and player roster editing. The second set of options includes game settings, visual settings, and saved file management. The interface is simple and easy to use because it uses both text and icons next to each option.

Here is a screenshot of the UI:
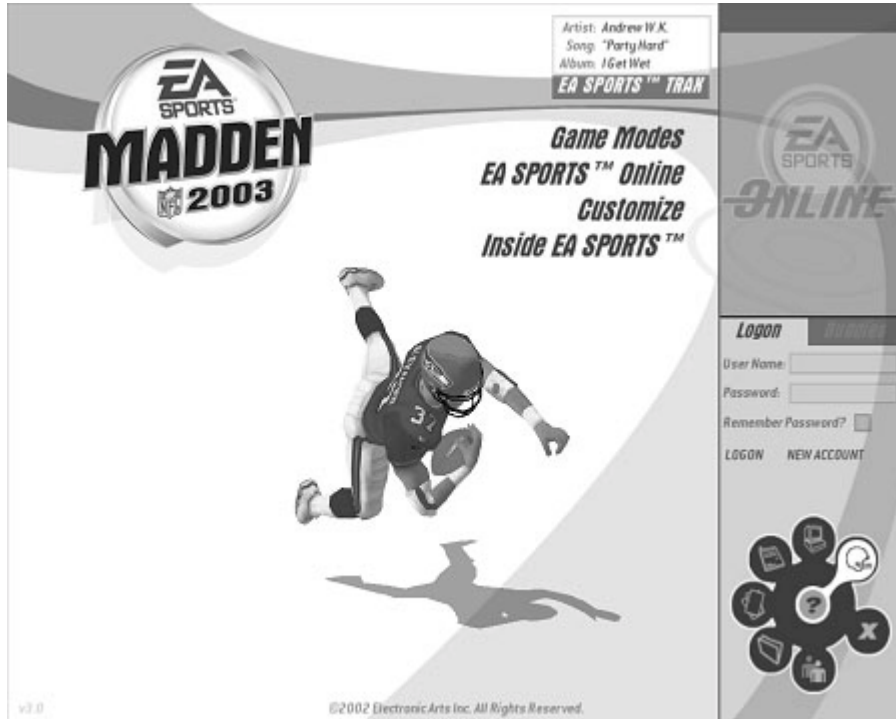
Game Play
The game play is relatively similar to previous versions of the game. There are 4 AI difficulty settings for all types of users such as beginners, intermediates, and experts. It was simple for me to pickup the controller and begin playing because I am not new to the Madden series of football games. To a person who is new to football, the game play would be extremely tough to understand and figure out. That is why a manual is included. To a person who is a football fan but new to the series, this game would be easy to figure out how to play.

The AI is extremely tough sometimes. I feel as though I am cheated on some plays, especially if my team is winning. The total hours that this game can be played is infinite, or until the user gets sick of the game. If a user chooses to play the Season-mode, this would take approximately 20 hours of play altogether. The Season-mode can be extended even farther into Franchise-mode. This is basically Season-mode except that it spans multiple seasons, or as many seasons until the user is fired as the coach or manager of the team.

Scoring
Scoring is extremely simple as with typical professional football. When a team scores a touchdown, they are awarded 6 points. An addition 1 point is awarded for a successful "Extra Point." Field Goals are worth 3 points to the team that successfully kicks one. Safeties are worth 2 points. The score is kept and is shown on all menus and while playing the game.

Artwork
The visuals in this game are incredibly realistic and true to life as shown in the screenshots below. Animations are done smoothly with no glitches because of motion technology. All teams in this game have their appropriate colors and jerseys. In addition, most player faces and coach faces are modeled onto each player!

Sound and Music
The on-the-field sounds are extremely realistic. You hear every bump and bruise and every catch. The play-by-play and color commentary are done by John Madden and Al Michaels, probably the two best sports commentators on television today. It is done in a superb manner.

The music is just as good. It is in mp3 format and features artists like Bon Jovi and POD. The game also lets the user choose his own mp3's to play during the game, incase the user does not like the ones that come with the game.

Special features
The special features that are contained in this game were mentioned above in detail. This includes Season-Mode, Franchise-Mode, and custom mp3 music.

An addition feature not mentioned above is multiplayer gaming. Included with the purchase of this game is a 60-day free trial of EASO (Electronic Arts Sports Online). This is basically a match-making service that keeps track of all of the user's statistics and keeps a national ranking record online. This feature is unlike any other in any sports simulation game, a great addition to this version of Madden.

Manual
This game comes with two manuals. The installation/troubleshooting manual and the game play manual. They are both written in great detail, however, they are an easy read because they are organized and contain a lot of screenshots.

Bugs
After weeks of playing this game, I have not noticed any bugs in the game. Also note that there are no patches for this game as of yet. The game has been on the market for nearly two months now.

Game Review of Madden NFL™ 2003

What is good about the game?
As mentioned in prior sections, Madden 2003 has superb graphics, animations, sounds, music, and customizations. A user will be pleased to buy this game, as I have. There is even a create-a-team feature where the user may create his own team, including logos, jerseys, and players. This is an added feature to the game play, which makes Madden much more fun and have a lasting appeal on the user.

What is bad about the game?
The only negative effect this game has is the AI's ability to magically come-back from losing on some occasions. Everything else in this game is extremely polished.

How does it compare to similar games in the same genre?
Madden NFL 2003 comes out on top of all other football simulations according to many experts that I have researched. This includes Imagine Games Network, Game Spot Network, Gamers.com, and GoneGold.com. They all ranked Madden 2003 on top of all other football simulation games on the PC as well as the other video game systems that Madden is available on.

For example, Todd Zuniga from Gamers.com says, "Is Madden this year's PS2 Super Bowl champ? It is. But it took overtime to win the title. It's so great because of competition. Which means this year, we gamers are the real winners."

Why is it better or worse than similar games?
Madden has been around for a long time. Therefore it is polished to the max. This includes the game play, graphics, and sound. I have always chosen the Madden series over other football sims because of the game play and the Madden play-book. These are definitely what makes Madden better than other football sims out there.

What is the appropriate audience for this game?
The audience for Madden 2003 is any and all football fans. This game has it all. Great sound, graphics, animation, and game play. All ages, male or female, can play this game. Being a football just makes it a lot easier to pick up and play without having to read the manual.

Are any design mistakes present?
So far I have not noticed any mistakes in the game's design. Since the Madden Football series has been around for 14 years, this latest version is extremely polished and the design mistakes in previous versions have been worked out.

Summary

Overall strengths and weaknesses

Strengths:

- Graphics and animation like no other, for both players and environment.
- Sound is crisp and clear. You get to hear all of the on-the-field action.
- Music features popular artists, and is customizable.
- Commentary features John Madden and Al Michaels, 2 legendary sports announcers.
- Game play features four different difficulty settings to accommodate players of all talents.
- Game play also features a Franchise-mode where the user acts as the Manager of the team, in addition to being the typical coach and player for a team.

Weaknesses

- AI's magical catch-up ability
- $10 a month for EASO internet match-up play after the 60-day initial free subscription.

Is the game worth purchasing?

Yes! I would rank this game with an overall of 9.5 out of 10. The reason for this is the 60-day free trial for online multiplayer gaming on EASO. I believe that this should be free for the first year at least, until the next version of the game comes out. I do not believe that the user should pay $10 a month for online play after spending $40 on the game itself.

This game is definitely worth the $40 investment, especially if you are a rabid football fanatic like me.

How could it be improved?

The only negative aspect of Madden 2003 that I have came across so far was the AI's random ability to unwillingly catch up when losing. There should be an option in the game play settings that lets the user disable the AI's catch-up mode. This would make the AI much more fair, however, creates less closely matched games if the user becomes too good.