



The good ol' hockey game

NHL 07 breaks away from its predecessors, making it the best you'll ever play

NHL 07

Xbox 360
EA Canada
Electronic Arts
Rated E

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For most of us, the beginning of the school year means fighting off crippling apathy and getting back to hitting the books. However, for hockey and video game fans alike, this time has become synonymous with the release of a new game in EA Sports' NHL franchise.

Entering its 16th straight year of publishing, the series' humble roots beckon back to the days of the Sega Genesis, an era some say EA has yet to top. New iterations over the last five years have only introduced gimmicky enhancements—sweeping cameras on breakaways, intermittent bouts of slow motion and the sound of the players' beating hearts—which only served to cheapen the game.

EA now looks to buck this trend with NHL 07 for the Xbox 360. Gone are the gimmicks, and in their place is a brand new control scheme, new puck physics and greatly improved computer AI.

EA calls this new control scheme "Skill Stick," and on the surface it seems very simple. The left analog stick controls your player's motion on the ice while the right analog stick is now used for shooting, deking players on offence and checking on defence.

To shoot, just push the right stick forward to deliver a wrist shot, or pull it back and push forward for a slap shot.

You can also deke-out opponents by moving the stick to the left and right. All of these motions can be combined by moving side to side, and then rolling the stick forward to shoot.

But be forewarned: the learning curve of the Skill Stick is steep. It'll take close to an hour of frustrated playing to finally get the hang of it. However, the payoff is great. Intuitively pulling the puck from Ales Hemsky's forehead to backhand it behind Mikka Kiprusoff was incredibly satisfying.

Other noteworthy enhancements are the new puck physics and computer AI.

Graphics wise, the game is beautiful. Even on a standard-definition television, players are recognizable by their faces, and jerseys flow freely as forwards gain speed through the neutral zone.

Pucks now glance off of players' shoulders and arms rather than sticking, like what happens in other games. This is doubly true for goalies. Pucks, unless trapped by a glove or under the body, are now free to be banged in for those crunch-time garbage goals.

Which brings us to NHL 07's AI. Never has a hockey video game

flowed like an actual game of hockey the way 07 does. Players don't swarm the puck; rather, they skate into open passing lanes and call for it. Even player nuances are there. Ryan Smyth will park himself in front of the net during power plays and tip in shots or slip in rebounds. Dominik Hasek will flop around on the ice like he's having a seizure and ultimately take from you what should have been a goal.

Graphics-wise, the game is beautiful. Even on a standard-definition television, players are recognizable by their faces, and jerseys flow freely as forwards gain speed through the neutral zone. However, the game really shines when running in high definition with the shine of the ice noticeably deteriorating throughout periods, and the flex of stick shafts creating an impressive blur effect during slapshots.

However, for some hockey purists, EA's insistence to release the game before the new season's rosters were finalized is a definite deal breaker. While Heather Smith might laud the inclusion of Igor Ulanov on the Oilers' blue line, some see the weathered Russian as dead weight and will opt to drop him into the minors from the get go.

Overall, EA has really come through with this year's NHL offering to the Xbox 360. The game's improvements, in all departments, make it drastically better than past iterations and offer a fresh experience for those of us that have been with the franchise since it's inception.

JUNIOR BOYS So This Is Goodbye



Junior Boys

So This Is Goodbye
Domino Records
www.juniorboys.net

ELIZABETH VAIL
Arts & Entertainment Staff

When it comes to the latest CD from electronica band Junior Boys, they lost me at "goodbye." The album is comprised of ten bland, grey and wholly uninteresting songs, with the lead singer's breathy whisper serving to weight them down instead of buoy them up.

And how about the uninspired lyrics? Most are just lines repeated over and over again above a murky seabed of tedious computer sounds. Or what about the complete lack of musical dynamic? All the tracks, from the titular "So This Is Goodbye" to "FM" to "In the Morning," blend together into some kind of sticky, cloying musical morass, a swamp of

sucking, tuneless failure.

The boredom experienced listening to this CD is akin to watching 2001: A Space Odyssey. What listeners will remember the most is the incredible lack of speech and action, and the huge amount empty air that's punctuated by an occasional tinkle of a synthesized keyboard, and if you're lucky, a beeping sound or a robotic vocalist stuck repeating lyrics over interminable five-minute tunes. Nothing particularly special or enlightening is to be had on So This Is Goodbye, at least on the first listen. And as for giving the CD a second run-through: I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't do that.



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