

ECW Anarchy Rulz – Sega Dreamcast

Developed by: Acclaim (<http://www.acclaim.com>)

Published by: Acclaim (<http://www.acclaim.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.anarchyrulz.com/>

Genre: Wrestling

Number of Players: 1-4

ESRB: Teen

Overall Rating: 6

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 5/10

Documentation: 6/10

Getting Started: 6/10

Gameplay: 5/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: More play modes, real wrestlers, and moves than you can shake a metal chair at; decent graphics.

The Bad Press: Poor collision detection; mediocre sound; frenetic button-mashing seems to be the only way to pull off the more advanced moves.

Supports: VMU

Overview: *ECW Anarchy Rulz* is one of the deepest games ever created. Too bad all the time spent with the options couldn't have been devoted to gameplay instead.

Tips:

Soften up your opponents with kicks and punches before attempting the more powerful moves.

Press the start button anytime to get your wrestler's move list. Remember, the moves list changes depending on your opponent's position (grappled, on the mat, etc.) so check it often.

One of my all-time favorite wrestling games on any system was *Pro Wrestling* for the original NES. It wasn't exactly complex, challenging, or by any means pretty to look at, but the moves, although few, were easy to pull off and the game was flat fun to play. Nowadays, wrestling games are becoming so intricate that pulling off some of the more powerful moves requires some amazing finger and thumb gymnastics—not to mention a lot of luck. With this in mind, I feel that despite substantial advances in technology, wrestling is one of the few genres where the enjoyment level has actually deteriorated as gaming has evolved. Case in point: Acclaim's new brawler *ECW Anarchy Rulz*. The game features virtually every ECW wrestler known to man, all the gameplay modes you could possibly hope for, and gives players the ability to use chairs and ladders as weapons. What could possibly be wrong with it? Frustrating gameplay, that's what.

A few months ago when I reviewed <http://www.happypuppy.com/dc/reviews/ecwhardcor%2Ddc%2D1.html> *ECW Hardcore Revolution*, the prequel to *Anarchy Rulz*, the sheer number of customization and gameplay options astounded me. That said, in terms of features, *Hardcore Revolution* is mere child's play when compared to its sequel. For starters, *Anarchy Rulz* features 60 real ECW wrestlers (34 of which are initially controllable), including favorites like Angel, and Masato Tanaka. If none of the real ECW likenesses appeal to you, there is also an extensive create-a-wrestler feature that allows you to easily personalize everything from hairstyle to moves list.

Anarchy Rulz also covers all of the bases in terms of gameplay options. Not only can you put your favorite grappler to the test in standard exhibition, tournament, or career modes, but you're given the opportunity to further refine the game by adding win modifiers, and choosing from a plethora of unique match types. Match types range from relatively normal (versus or tag-team contests), to over-the-top (barbed wire or dumpster bouts). Exhibition mode is more or less a way to practice your technique in any match type, while tournament mode pits you against a series of wrestlers in a standard tiered format. Finally, there is the career mode, which challenges you to compete your way through several championship levels. The ultimate goal is to not only earn prestige from your national television and pay-per-view audiences, but also to take home a belt before the season ends. Combine all the single player options with solid multiplayer support (up to four players) and you'll discover that in terms of gameplay variety, *Anarchy Rulz* is second to none.

Once in the ring, veterans of Acclaim wrestling games will notice that not much has changed aesthetically from previous Dreamcast offerings. Visually, *Anarchy Rulz* is a mixed bag. While slightly improved over *Hardcore Revolution*, the characters themselves simply don't stand out as the behemoths they are in real life. Still, they are highly detailed and bear a decent resemblance to their real life counterparts. As for the backgrounds, the arenas don't look half bad, but the fans in the crowd look like poorly animated cardboard cutouts. In addition, the game as a whole is missing some frames of animation, resulting in slightly jerky gameplay.

On the sound side, *Anarchy Rulz* is nearly identical to *Hardcore Revolution* and as anyone who's played it would tell you, it's pretty forgettable. Wrestlers grunt and groan as they're pounded into submission, and the fans occasionally chime in with a jeer or two if you're not being creative with your moves. Unless you listen closely, you probably won't even notice the commentators, as their infrequent observations are repetitive and uninteresting. While the game's aural performance isn't so awful that it detracts from the overall experience, the voice-overs were sampled too loudly and everything sounds phony and exaggerated.

Of course all of the aforementioned features are secondary to solid gameplay, and this is where *Anarchy Rulz* has problems. It is apparent that Acclaim took steps to improve the control and intuitiveness of the game, but not enough attention was paid to the horrific collision detection. One of the most effective ways to prepare your opponent for a powerful move is to soften them up with some kicks and punches before going for the kill. By landing several blows in a row, you build up the "tie up meter." When the meter reaches the red zone, you can pull off some extremely powerful moves with relative ease. The problem is, if you miss-time a punch or kick and your opponent slams you to the mat, the meter usually completely empties and you have to start again. This doesn't seem so illogical in itself, but when your fist goes sailing through your opponent's face and he turns your misfortune into a fearsome pile driver, you'll understand my frustration. Since these swings appear to connect but mysteriously do not on such a regular basis, it becomes difficult to execute the more complex moves. You can still attempt these moves if the meter isn't full, but your opponent reverses them more often than not.

Another problem I have with *Anarchy Rulz* are the moves themselves. Don't get me wrong, the number of moves at your disposal at any given time is astonishing, but executing the more exciting throws and holds is very difficult. Acclaim has improved on this aspect somewhat by making the more deadly moves easier to perform when attempted after a few kicks or punches, but the included moves list (viewed during gameplay by pressing the start button) only displays one or two, so intense button mashing is about the only way to learn new maneuvers.

Overall, *Anarchy Rulz* is slightly improved over last year's title, *Hardcore Revolution*, but it still has a long way to go to earn elite status. Still, fans of ECW will certainly enjoy controlling all the real wrestlers and the incredible list of gameplay options. But, until Acclaim works out the collision issues and improves the control, it won't appeal to the casual gamer.