

High Heat Baseball 2001 – Windows

Developed by: 3DO (<http://www.3do.com>)

Published by: 3DO (<http://www.3do.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.3do.com/products/pc/hh2001/index.html>

Genre: Sports

System Requirements:

Computer System: IBM PC or Compatible

Operating System: Windows 95/98 and DirectX® 7.0 or higher

CPU: Pentium 166 (Pentium 200/MMX recommended)

Memory: 32MB RAM

CD-ROM 4x speed or better

Free Hard Disk Space: 110MB minimum (250MB recommended)

Video Card: DirectX 7.0 compatible; 2MBSVGA capable of 800x600 16-bit high color display

Sound Card: DirectX 7.0 compatible; 16-bit recommended

Multi-Player: 28.8 modem or greater (modem/Internet play); TCP/IP or IPX (network play)

Supports: 3D Sound, joystick/gamepad

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 9/10

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 6/10

Documentation: 9/10

Getting Started: 9/10

Gameplay: 9/10

Value: 10/10

The Good Press: The most realistic and enjoyable baseball game available, period.

The Bad Press: Graphics and sound are still quite behind the times; some bugs that have plagued previous games still aren't completely ironed out.

Overview: Now *this* is baseball.

Tips:

Be patient at the plate against the computer. If you can work the count in your favor, your chances of success are much greater.

If you've got a speedy left-hander at the plate, a bunt down the third-base line will get you on base more often than not.

In this age of fancy 3D accelerated graphics and theatre-quality sound, it's rare to find a game that doesn't need all of that to succeed. A prime example of this has been the *High Heat Baseball* series. Past *HH* games have never exactly wowed us with their graphical prowess, and certainly wouldn't win any awards for sound, but the games are extremely fun to play and above all, realistic. 3DO's newest game in the series, *High Heat 2001*, continues the winning tradition by improving on the intangibles without significantly altering their already rock-solid game engine.

The first time you play *HH2001*, you might think that the game is last year's with updated rosters and a few new camera angles. In a lot of ways, this is true, but as you continue to play, you'll find quite a few minor enhancements that really improve the experience. One thing that really frustrated me from past games was the fact that you could rarely throw all the way to a base from the outfield. Since this was the case, it was very difficult to throw out a runner tagging up or a player trying to score from second on a base hit. Thankfully, this flaw has been remedied.

Momentum is another key aspect of baseball that has finally been considered in *HH2001*. If you make a tough running catch, you won't be able to right yourself immediately to make a throw as in years past. There are quite a few new animations in the game as well. Players now tumble head over heels to make shoe-string catches, collide with walls, and pump their fists after a particularly good play. These subtle nuances may not seem like much, but they add another touch of realism to a game that already has plenty of it.

As previously mentioned, the core gameplay from last year has largely been kept intact in *HH2001*. While some may scoff at the lack of upgrades, there really wasn't much improvement needed. The confrontation between the pitcher and batter is still by far the best of any baseball game. If you're used to being pitched strikes right down the middle every pitch (a la *Triple Play*), you've got another thing coming in *HH2001*. Working the count in your favor is your only hope on the higher difficulty levels, and dominant pitchers in real life are dominant in the game. Greg Maddux will drive you crazy with his ability to paint the corners on every pitch, and you may as well head to the showers if you're down late in the game and Billy Wagner is coming in. Conversely, just getting a 3-0 fastball over the plate can be difficult for pitchers with control problems. Quite obviously, 3DO has recognized that the pitcher/batter confrontation is the most exciting part of baseball and has tweaked it to near perfection.

In the field, *HH2001*'s game continues to shine. Homeruns, doubles and triples all happen at acceptable frequency (something that sadly cannot be said for most baseball games). I even pulled off an inside-the-park homer once when my speedster Tom Goodwin blooped one down the line and the fielder dove and came up empty—let's see you do that in *Triple Play*. The control as a whole is very responsive, and confusing situations (controlling multiple baserunners for example) are made easy for Sidewinder or Gravis pad owners. The computer AI is also some of the best I've seen. Pitchers won't take a chance with your big bombers if first base is open, and they'll drop down a bunt when you least expect it. In terms of intangibles, *HH2001* is a slam dunk (oops, wrong sport).

Up until now, I have tried to stay away from mentioning the graphics and sound in *HH2001* because I wanted to emphasize just how great the gameplay is. That said, if this game looked and sounded half as good as *Triple Play* or *MS Baseball*, it would be literally untouchable. Don't get me wrong, the graphics aren't all that bad—but they certainly aren't taking advantage of the technology available today. The players themselves are now more accurately proportioned (no more confusing Mark McGwire with Rafael Belliard), but 3DO decided only to map faces on the certain players. Therefore, a couple of the players on your team might have real faces, but the rest all look alike (aside from varying skin tones of course). Yes, this is a minor gripe, but it seems sort of lazy to do faces for some players and not all of them. On the plus side, the stadiums still look great and all seem accurately portrayed for the most part.

If I had to pick the most noticeable flaw in *HH2001*, I'd have to say the mediocre sound takes the cake. "Mr. laid-back" Ted Robinson is back doing the play-by-play and his high-pitched voice and lack of enthusiasm was excusable in 1998 and even last year, but this year, I was really hoping for something more. Other than a new comment or two, the commentary has remained virtually identical for the past two years. Unfortunately, the stadium sounds aren't much better. I'm sure it's really distracting for a player to have a fan yell "your shoe's untied" when trying to catch a fly ball. There are many cheesy comments like this and for some reason, they all seem to play much louder than anything else. Joy. The mystery of the disappearing pitcher bug has also reared its ugly head again this year. When making double switches, relievers you had warming up in the bullpen have a tendency to hit the showers early. This is a bug that has plagued all three *HH* games, but really isn't that big of an issue.

When all is said and done, you can whine all you want about the graphics and sound, but no other baseball game can touch *HH* on the playing field—and that's where it really counts. The pitcher/batter interface is stellar, the control is top-notch, and above all, it just feels like baseball

should. For those of us not talented enough to make it to the big leagues, this game is easily the next best thing.