

NFL Gameday 2001 – Sony PlayStation 2

Developed by: Red Zone Interactive (<http://www.redzonegames.com/>)

Published by: Sony Computer Entertainment (<http://www.scea.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: N/A

Genre: Football

Number of Players: 1-4

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 6

Graphics: 8/10

Sound: 8/10

Documentation: 7/10

Getting Started: 6/10

Gameplay: 5/10

Value: 5/10

The Good Press: Excellent commentary; solid graphics and interface; some nice tackle animations.

The Bad Press: The game simply can't compete with *Madden* in terms of features, realism, and gameplay.

Supports: Multi-tap, memory card, Dual Shock 2 Analog Control

Overview: *Gameday* is a solid PlayStation game, but it just doesn't seem ready for PS2 prime.

Tips:

Stiff-arming defenders on running plays is a wildly effective way of gaining a few extra yards.

When in doubt, use screen passes to pick up huge chunks of yardage.

Back in 1997, the *Gameday* series took a giant step forward in its struggle to overthrow *Madden* as the best football game available for PlayStation. By taking the technological leap from sprites to full polygonal players, *Gameday 98* finally put some separation between itself and *Madden*. EA Sports caught up the next year, and choosing a favorite has basically been a matter of personal preference ever since. Time will tell if the rivalry continues on the PlayStation 2, but while *Madden* has taken significant strides to improve for its PS2 release, *Gameday 2001* is nothing more than PS1 title of the same name with improved graphics.

Typical is the word to use when describing *Gameday 2001*'s feature set. Exhibition, season, and playoff modes are of course available, and there are a fair number of ways to adjust the gameplay to suit your playing style. Aside from the standard rookie, pro, all-star, and hall-of-fame difficulty settings, players can also further modify the abilities of computer-controlled players in areas such as run defense, blocking skill, etc. There's also a general manager mode, a player editor, and a create-a-play feature (something you won't find in the competition), but overall, *Madden*'s sheer depth and customizability still wins out in this particular aspect.

Once you take the field, your eyes will be treated to an impressive graphical effort. The players are highly detailed, and the action is smooth and fast. The crowd also comes decked out in hometown garb, and coaches wander the sidelines barking orders to players. The players' facial features look more realistic than the wide-eyed mugs found in *Madden*, and as an added bonus, you'll see lips move in tune with the words that come out of their mouths. It's all pretty convincing and I was pleased to see the added detail. In terms of animation, *Gameday* does a great job with the tackling sequences, but has some problems with quarterback throwing animations. It is not uncommon to see the QB throw the ball to a receiver to the left while his arm moves to the right, or be facing the opposite direction as the ball leaves his hand. Other annoyingly common occurrences include large groups of defenders or linemen that all run and make cuts at the same time (as if they're doing some kind of dance routine), and receivers that completely stop for a few seconds after making a catch.

If there is one area that *Gameday* really outshines *Madden*, it would have to be in the broadcast booth. One of my personal favorite football announcers Dick Enberg teams up once again with Phil Simms and the two do a splendid job of keeping the comments fresh and the banter interesting. Repeated phrases do crop up fairly often as you'd expect, but it's nowhere near as often as you'd hear John Madden say "when you talk about precision passing, that's what you mean." Other stadium sounds are on par with *Madden* with all the standard grunts and trash-talk

that you'd expect from an NFL game. I was also pleased to hear some popular tunes playing over the PA system after scores or particularly exciting plays, something you won't find in *Madden*.

While *Gameday* was able to stay pretty close to *Madden* in terms of graphics and sound, it simply can't compete with EA Sports' rock-solid gameplay. This is mostly due to the fact that SCEA continues to ignore several problems that have plagued the *Gameday* series for several years now. In fact, I really haven't noticed much change in the gameplay department since *Gameday 98*. The game still boasts such essential features as total control passing (which allows you to lead or underthrow receivers based on defensive coverage), but this has been standard for a few years now, and there really isn't anything new to speak of. While *Madden* keeps innovating with features such as hot-routes and coverage audibles, *Gameday* still struggles with the way-too-effective stiff arm move and the Superman-esque flying tackles that allow you to lay-out ball carriers from a good five yards away. To make matters worse, there is still absolutely no sense of momentum in the game. This comes into play a lot on long corner routes where receivers might make a catch and barely stay in-bounds in real life, but have no trouble changing direction immediately—as if on a swivel--after the catch and running up field.

The artificial intelligence in *Gameday 2001* is also severely lacking. On kickoffs for example, I was able to sprint unblocked down the field and tackle the return man at around the 10-yard line every time. Computer defenders are also pretty slow to react, turning plays that should result in lost yardage into big gains. Furthermore, money plays--screen passes especially--are prevalent and wildly effective, allowing you to easily pick apart the defense by running the same or similar plays over and over. You might expect this to occur on the easier settings, but I wasn't having any trouble utilizing this tactic even on the hall-of-fame difficulty setting. Of course you could avoid using these plays altogether, but the temptation is always there when you need to capitalize on that pivotal third-down play.

Overall, I simply don't see much improvement in the *Gameday* series over the past few years for the PS1, and the trend continues with the PlayStation 2 edition. The game has a solid foundation for future success on the PS2, including a terrific broadcast tandem and decent graphics, but until SCEA sits down and actually works to iron out some of the game's annual bugs and takes steps to improve the realism, *Gameday* will be mired in *Madden's* shadow for many seasons to come.