

NBA Live 2001 – Sony PlayStation

Developed by: EA Sports (<http://www.easports.com>)

Published by: EA Sports (<http://www.easports.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: N/A

Genre: Basketball

Number of Players: One to Eight

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 8

Graphics: 8/10

Sound: 8/10

Documentation: 8/10

Getting Started: 7/10

Gameplay: 8/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: Superb graphics and sound; all the options you could want; challenging AI; excellent control.

The Bad Press: Rebounding mechanism flat-out sucks; too many dunks and lay-ups; the menu system can be a bit confusing.

Supports: Dual Shock Analog Controller; memory card

Overview: *NBA Live 2001* rips the cords with another superlative basketball effort.

Tips:

Always use “direct shooting” when you’re close to the hoop. This way, you’re more likely to score an easy lay-up or draw a foul.

A simple pump fake is the most effective way to beat defenders off the dribble.

Right from the opening tap, all the way to the final buzzer, *NBA Live 2001* for the Sony PlayStation is by far the most complete and enjoyable basketball game available on any platform. Despite a lack of any significant competition (aside from the slumping *Shootout* series), EA Sports has continued to dramatically improve their popular hoops series, culminating with a near perfect effort in *2001*. The game delivers all the options and play modes you could possibly ask for, a rock-solid control scheme, and, of course, EA Sports’ unmatched presentation value and signature high-flying action. Combine all of that with addictive gameplay and challenging computer opponents, and you have a basketball sim that will keep you happily playing throughout this NBA season and beyond.

A great sports game always begins with a solid selection of options and play modes from which to choose. This has never been an area of concern for EA Sports, and *Live 2001* is no exception. Aside from the standard exhibition, season, and playoff modes, you can also work on your fundamentals on the practice court, sharp-shoot your way to victory in a 3-point shootout, or undertake the ultimate challenge: a schoolyard one-on-one competition with the hoops king himself Michael Jordan (or any other basketball superstar, past or present). Regardless of what mode you choose, you’ll have plenty of opportunity to adjust the rules or options to suit your playing style. In fact, there is so much to see and do in the interface, you might get a little lost in a sea of menus from time to time. Fortunately, it becomes more intuitive as you get used to it, and all of the customizations are certainly a welcome addition.

On the court, *NBA Live 2001* strikes a perfect balance between raucous arcade action and realistic simulation. Computer opponents really play you tough—especially when you crank the difficulty settings to all-star or superstar. This is perhaps the most noticeable improvement to the game: the enhanced AI on both offense and defense. When your team has the ball, you’ll really have to work hard on every possession to score. Defenders are seemingly always right in your hip pocket, and your big name players will often have to contend with double and triple teams in the post. When you’re on defense, the computer helps you out a bit by dribbling around too much and not aggressively attacking the basket. Still, they know how to find their top shooters and love to pound you inside with their centers and power forwards. Casual hoopsters might be turned off by the excessive difficulty, but veterans of the *Live* series will appreciate a competent computer opponent for a change.

If the skillfulness of the computer opponents isn't enough to take you down, the maddening rebound mechanism undoubtedly will. For some reason, grabbing the rock off the rim is quite a daunting feat. This probably has to do with the fact that it's difficult to judge the carom and thus, the direction you should jump. Naturally, the computer has no trouble making this judgment and will undoubtedly kill you on the boards as a result. I literally lost count of the number of games I ended up losing because of the rebound discrepancy. To be fair, rebounding has been an issue in basketball games for as long as I can remember, and the rest of the control is good enough to make up for this setback.

Speaking of control, guiding your players in *NBA Live 2001* can be as simple or as complex as you'd like it to be. Of course there are buttons for shoot and pass on offense, or jump and steal on defense, but you can pull off some more advanced maneuvers (such as backing a defender down in the post, perform fade-away or lean-in jumpers, execute a crossover dribble, etc.) with a few extra keystrokes. New this year is the "direct shoot" feature, which allows you to take it up strong if you're near the basket. Last year's game was plagued by an insane amount of missed easy shots around the hoop. It seemed that unless your player went into the animation to dunk or lay it up, he would miss more often than not—especially the guards. Direct shooting rectifies this situation, allowing your players to aggressively attack the basket and score more easily or draw fouls. If you're feeling really adventurous, you can even call a user-controlled alley-oop play (which typically results in a harmless pass out of bounds), or pull off an up and under move. The new control options not only add to the realism of the game, but perfecting them is almost mandatory if you hope to win on the higher difficulty settings.

No EA Sports title is complete without setting new standards for aesthetic performance in their games. *NBA Live 2001* looks and sounds better than ever thanks to an increased polygon count and a new man in the broadcast booth. The players themselves look outstanding and a large assortment of new animations have been added to spice things up. Bob Elliot now joins Don Poier behind the mic and the two do a great job of keeping up with the game. I especially liked the fact that they show some excitement after big plays, something that can't be said for most sports games. The crowd is tremendous as well, yelling and applauding hysterically while you mount a late-game comeback, or booing mercilessly if you're getting pounded.

Overall, *NBA Live 2001* is an excellent hoops title and a worthy addition to your PlayStation library. It would have been very easy for EA to cut a few corners on the game with the PS2 release looming on the horizon. Quite the contrary, *Live 2001* has been improved in almost every aspect. The arcade and lower difficulty settings will appeal to those looking for a quick b-ball fix, while even the most experienced *Live* players will have their hands full with the computer on the superstar setting. If you've been waiting for an enjoyable NBA basketball game that will really challenge you, look no further.