

NBA Shootout 2001 – Sony PlayStation

Developed by: Killer Game

Published by: 989 Sports (<http://www.989sports.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: http://www.scea.com/989Sports/site/titles/nba_shootout_2001/index.html

Genre: Basketball

Number of Players: One to Eight

ESRB: Everyone

Overall Rating: 7

Graphics: 7/10

Sound: 7/10

Documentation: 7/10

Getting Started: 7/10

Gameplay: 7/10

Value: 7/10

The Good Press: Solid graphics, commentary, and ambience; great control; the dunk creation feature is pretty cool.

The Bad Press: Sluggish gameplay; lacks some of the features of *NBA Live 2001*; blocked shots and alley-oops are too easy to pull off.

Supports: Dual Shock Analog Controller; multi-tap; memory card

Overview: The slumping *NBA Shootout* series rebounds in 2001 with some innovative new features, but *Live 2001* still reigns supreme.

Tips:

If you're having trouble scoring, use the surprisingly effective alley-oop play to get your team back in the game.

Use pump fakes and the special dribble button to beat defenders off the dribble.

Since its inception back in 1996, the *Shootout* series has traditionally been a solid hoops simulation, but always seems to be a step behind the *NBA Live* series in terms of gameplay. Just as *Shootout* begins churning out the features to match *Live*'s extensive customizability and unmatched feature set, the folks over at EA Sports up the ante by adding elements like a franchise mode and the awesome direct shoot feature to keep them at arm's length. Unfortunately for 989 Sports, this rule continues this year. Still, *Shootout 2001* serves up a decent game of b-ball, but sluggish gameplay and the lack of a few fundamental options keep it from reaching its full potential.

A quick tour around the interface nets you a fairly standard array of gameplay options and adjustments. Exhibition, Season, and Playoff modes are of course, available—complete with comprehensive stat tracking for teams, players, and users. Other gameplay tweaks allow you to fine-tune your offensive or defensive playbook, change your defensive match-ups, as well as toggle fouls and violations on or off to suit your playing style. For all of you wannabe general managers out there, you can also create, trade, release, or sign free agent players, but sadly, any sort of franchise mode is noticeably absent. In its stead, gamers will have to be happy with the innovative dunk creation feature. This surprisingly cool element lets you customize dunks for different situations by adjusting the release point, dunk style, and elbow/knee joints of your players. Dunks saved to your memory card can then be used by your best players during games. Now, if only someone would implement a slam dunk competition...

Out on the court, *Shootout 2001* boasts some pretty impressive visuals. The player models look slightly cleaner than those in *Live*, as do the courts and other arena graphics. *Live* does a better job of mapping real faces on the players, but other than this, *Shootout* narrowly wins the graphics war. The games are also fairly even in the animation department, but I'm going to give the nod to *Shootout* again thanks to the convincing motion capture work on the game's plethora of dunks. Killer Game has also done a great job of throwing in some extra details to improve the realism of the game. Players will jump to grab high passes, attempt a reverse lay-up to avoid a blocked shot, or pump their fists after a particularly fearsome slam.

Sound is another area where *Shootout* outperforms the competition. Killer Game has opted for only one man behind the play-by-play mic, but he does a great job of keeping up with the action. In addition, his commentary is

informative and entertaining without getting too repetitive. I was also surprised to hear some familiar tunes at certain points of the game. For example, after I severely rejected a shot in the post, "Another One Bites the Dust" could be heard over the PA system. Nice touch.

Great graphics and sound can certainly make a huge difference in the overall enjoyment of a game, but gameplay is what really makes or breaks a title. In this regard, *Shootout* is certainly a contender, but doesn't quite reach the *Live* plateau. The control in the *Shootout* series has evolved nicely over the years, culminating in an intuitive and responsive control scheme this year. Advanced moves like user-controlled alley-oops or blocking out for rebounds are all easily accessible, and you can easily switch or pass to any player on the court with the icon passing or switching features respectively. The controls in both *Live* and *Shootout* are actually quite similar, with one notable exception: the unmatched direct-shoot feature in the EA Sports title. After a strong rebound down low, I really missed the ability to take it back up strong. Instead, players will repeatedly attempt point-blank jumper from right under the basket. This often results in blocked shots and, in many infuriating cases, out-of-bounds calls after your shot hits the back of the backboard.

One area that has always plagued the *Shootout* series is the somewhat sluggish gameplay. The players run around as if they're carrying a lead weight on their backs, passes take forever to connect, and it's nearly impossible to get off a quick shot with any accuracy. In fairness, you'll get used to it after a while, but it just isn't as crisp and fast as NBA basketball should be.

The computer AI in *Shootout* is pretty tight--you'll really have to execute on offense to win on the higher difficulty settings. The computer opponents here do a much better job of passing the ball around and looking for the open man in *Shootout* as opposed to *Live*, and leaving a decent shooter even half-way open is a deadly mistake. The computer rarely misses an open jumper, but if you cover them too tightly, they'll take it to the rack and dunk on you with relative ease. Luckily, if you hold down the X button, the computer will take control on defense. This is especially helpful when you're man is off-screen. On offense, the most effective (and cheap) maneuver just might be the alley-oop play. This is one of the most exciting plays in basketball and you'll get to see it about as often as you'd like in *Shootout 2001*. Regardless of how the defense was set up, I was able to successfully complete about 70 percent of my alley-oop passes. Okay, so it isn't the most realistic aspect of the game, but really fun to watch nevertheless.

Overall, *Shootout 2001* is worthy competition for the *Live* series, which has enjoyed little opposition in the PlayStation basketball wars. The graphics and sound are terrific, and the control scheme is just about where it needs to be. With a little peppier engine and a franchise mode, this game just might be a *Live* beater. Until then, however, 989 Sports and Killer Game will have to be happy playing second fiddle to EA Sports.