

NHL 08

Skill-stick, same old shtick

PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: HB Studios GENRE: Sports AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Everyone 10+ MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.3GHz CPU, 256MB RAM (512MB RAM in Windows Vista), 2.78GB hard drive space (gamepad recommended) MULTIPLAYER: 2 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

✓ The good news: The revolutionary Skill Stick feature, a concept introduced on the Xbox 360 *last year*, finally makes its way to the PC version of EA's *NHL* franchise. The bad news: just about everything else. The truth is, *NHL 08* plays a decent game of hockey...as it should, considering the nearly 15 years that EA's had to purportedly refine it (and thusly force every competitor into early retirement).

But how did PC hockey fans become second-rate? Last year, we were deemed unworthy of both the Skill Stick feature and that brain-melting "next-gen" graphics engine. This year,



HOW DID PC HOCKEY FANS BECOME SECOND RATE?

while EA fawns all over the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 crowd with even better graphics and innovations such as dynamic A.I., practice modes, enhanced Skill Stick capabilities, and a nifty system whereby you can develop and *record* custom plays, PC gamers get to languish in the very same "last-gen" technology reserved for the ancient PS2. If this sounds like sour grapes, it is.

It may be damning with faint praise, but *NHL 08* does offer a few token upgrades. Apart from the nifty Skill Stick, which transfers the majority of hockey-stick functions to your gamepad's analog thumb control, the game delivers American Hockey League and European Elite league integration, reintroduces a playoff-only mode, and adds minor Dynasty enhancements. Otherwise, it looks the same, plays *perhaps* moderately better (the star players are just that—and the advantages of smart positional hockey are evident), and brandishes the same clumsy, ported menu interface of recent efforts.

If you're a complete hockey newbie, prepare for some fun. If not, dredge up last year's copy or borrow your buddy's 360. ●Gord Goble



● Ottawa's Dany Heatley (right) rocks Anaheim's Teemu Selanne with a legal (but painful) elbow.

VERDICT

✦ **The best (and only) hockey game on the PC; Skill Stick is an interesting but now-dated wrinkle.**

✦ **PC version = PS2 version, and that sucks, big-time.**

5/10

AVERAGE



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