

MADDEN NFL 23

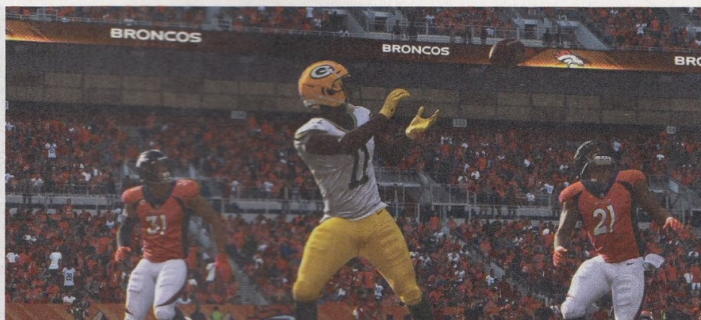
A short gain to start a new drive

In Madden NFL 23, developer EA Tiburon focused on the fundamentals: authentic 11v11 football and cleaning up many bugs plaguing previous Madden iterations. The result is a small step forward for the franchise and a strong foundation to build upon.

The most significant changes in Madden NFL 23 are under the surface. The team at EA calls it FieldSense, a shift to more physics-based interactions on the field. In practice, it's a mostly positive change: Running the ball between bodies is chaotic and violent, true to the real-world game. There are occasional issues; would-be tacklers tend to slide off whoever is running the ball like they are coated in Teflon. The way defenses wrap up opponents and how ball carriers fight for extra yards feels authentic, but the high frequency of fumbles needs adjustment. It's imperfect but a solid first implementation of a system that should improve with future iterations.

The overall presentation is a noticeable step forward. From boot up, everything is awash with the legacy of the late John Madden. It's a fitting tribute to the man behind the name. Updated scans of equipment and players look excellent, and the gameday presentation features more vibrant graphical overlays and cinematic camera work that feel more like an NFL broadcast. The authenticity of it all is appealing, and I skipped fewer transitions during games to enjoy the presentation.

The much-ballyhooed Skill-Based Passing adds an interesting (and optional) wrinkle to throwing the football. Having a target area and reticle takes a bit of getting used to, but the additional control over ball location does make a difference, especially for avoiding defenders while throwing over the middle of the field. It quickly became second nature, and I sorely missed the fine aiming controls when I went back to play a game in Madden 22. The passing meter, on the other hand, is a non-factor.



Generally, my muscle memory for how long to hold a pass button lined up with perfect passes and turning the feature off or on didn't make a noticeable impact on the field.

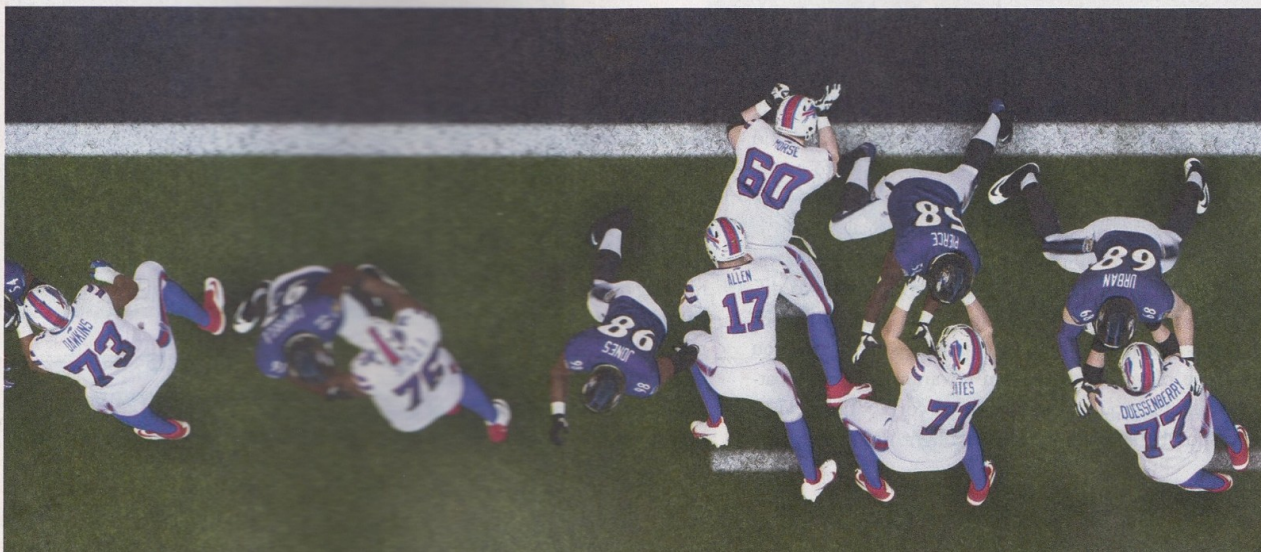
The other updates are mixed. Connected Franchise adds Motivations and Tags. Motivations affect how willing free agents are to join your team; bad teams may struggle signing someone looking to play for a contender, for example. Tags give some players a defined role, like an XP-boosting Mentor. Both are nice additions that humanize the players but could affect balance in competitive leagues. Corner is a new position for Face of the Franchise, but the frequent lack

of involvement in plays makes it a frustrating position.

The Madden NFL series has long had a solid gameplay foundation, maintained by small improvements year over year. Madden NFL 23 is the first iteration in a long time that rebuilds that foundation, and that's where this year's greatest success lies. Some slippery collisions aside, the more physics-based action is a good change, and the control over ball placement from Skill-Based passing is a welcome addition. This comes at the cost of only minor updates to the core gameplay modes, but it was ultimately the right call to make, and Madden NFL 23 is a better game for it. BY JUSTIN KOREIS

7.5

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