



NBA 2K23

A hop-step forward

NBA 2K23, the latest in Visual Concepts' long-running, annualized basketball series, introduces multiple new features and revamped game mechanics while taking us on a stroll down memory lane. Though the 2K franchise has garnered a reputation for focusing more on microtransactions than actual gameplay innovation, this year's game mode additions and foundational improvements mostly overshadow the notorious pay-to-win schemes. The result is a package that feels more novel than other titles in the series' recent history.

2K's mechanics have primarily followed a successful blueprint, but this year introduces several updates, most notably the reworked shot meters and stamina bars. The new shot meter leaves little room for error, making it more challenging than previous iterations. Thanks to these stricter release-timing mechanics, I initially struggled with mastering this updated feature. Additionally, the stamina system in 2K23 has also been modified and now includes three adrenaline bars. Sprinting and using explosive dribble moves now deplete the bars, which is especially helpful in online matches as it prevents individual players from over-dribbling and encourages team play.

These improvements to the core gameplay permeate the vast array of modes on offer in NBA 2K23. This suite includes all the series' mainstays and a few exciting new ones, like the Jordan Challenge, which allows you to relive iconic moments from Michael Jordan's career, and MyNBA Eras. The former offers fun challenges, each with its accomplishments to recreate.

In contrast, instead of reliving history, MyNBA Eras enables us to rewrite it by giving four NBA periods to choose from, each having its own varying rules and

rosters. These types of experiences are precisely the kinds of innovation the series has been missing in recent years, and its inclusion in 2K23 does wonders for rounding out this entry's offerings.

If you're looking for more traditional 2K modes, MyCareer remains one of the essential features of any 2K release. This year's storyline leaves a lot to be desired, and the lack of choices makes it feel less like I'm crafting my own player's career and more like I'm pushing through a predetermined narrative.

However, the bulk of the improvements in MyCareer went into restructuring The City, the hub where you access the majority of your activities. Here, Visual Concepts fully embraces its RPG aspects with the retention of its quest system and the addition of The Arena, where MyCareer events are now fully integrated. The inclusion of both features gives players a fully immersive experience, and the gameday events make this mode feel even more like an NBA player's career.

As usual, MyTeam includes a variety of themed solo challenges and matches available where you can earn rewards to help boost your team. If you prefer the casual 2K experience as I do, MyTeam has plenty to offer in terms of its offline, single-player modes. Ultimately though, microtransactions are as present as ever in NBA 2K23. Grinding out MyTeam points and tokens is an option for those not willing to spend beyond the game's premium price tag, but spending real money to buy packs is the easiest way to acquire a stacked squad.

Overall, NBA 2K23 is a fitting tribute to the historical legends and iconic moments that made this sport what it is today. Though the game has its fair share of issues with poor narrative choices and omnipresent microtransactions, it's still a solid improvement over the previous game. This year's release isn't quite the flashy free-throw line dunk that earns a perfect score, but it is a worthy effort that would earn M.J.'s shrug of approval. **BY NICO VERGARA**

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PLATFORM PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
 STYLE 1 to 4-Player Sports (10-Player Online) PUBLISHER 2K Games
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