NBA 2K23 Review



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 in-game mechanics have primarily followed a steady and 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. I initially struggled with mastering this updated feature thanks to these stricter release-timing mechanics; previously, you could make a shot even if your timing wasn't perfect, but in NBA 2K23, success almost always requires a near-perfect release.







The stamina system in 2K23 has also been modified and now has three adrenaline bars to go along with it. Sprinting and using explosive dribble moves now deplete the stamina and adrenaline bars. This is especially helpful in online matches as it prevents individual players from over-dribbling and encourages team play. These tweaks, though challenging to master, make the game feel as close to the actual sport as possible, which only helps the franchise in the long run.

These improvements to the core gameplay permeate the vast array of modes on offer in NBA 2K23. This suite of offerings 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 like "The Shot" and "The Flu Game," each with its accomplishments to recreate.

In contrast, instead of reliving history, MyNBA Eras enables us to rewrite it by giving us four NBA periods to choose from, each having its own varying rules and rosters. As a Suns fan, I particularly loved revisiting iconic periods, like the "7 Seconds or Less" team of the 2000s, and playing through a season in that era. This type of experience is precisely the kind 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 the 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 find most 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, such as press conferences and pre-game shootarounds, make this mode feel even more like an NBA player's career.

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Players can also access the Jordan Challenge throughout the area, not to mention the multiple online competitive matches found in and around it. The four City affiliations reappear, but each of the factions' neighborhoods has its own beautifully designed theme this time. The City's size in 2K23 has also been reduced, and with the inclusion of fast travel using the subway system, traversing it is easier than in last year's release.

As usual, MyTeam includes many competitive contests playable in both single- and multiplayer versions. Rather than letting you choose your starter outright, this year's edition enables you to try out the starters first in a Triple Threat (3v3) match against A.I. before making you pick. There are also themed challenges and contests available wherein you can earn rewards to help boost your team. If you prefer the casual experience of 2K 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 unless you're incredibly patient, spending real money to buy packs is the easiest way to acquire a stacked squad. It's tough this year as the currency earned through MyCareer and MyTeam matches is so minimal it takes a ridiculous amount of work to get your team and player up to par with higher-rated groups.

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 its 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 lands a perfect score, but it is a worthy, all-around effort that would earn M.J.'s shrug of approval.