

Over the past few years, Visual Concepts' 2K series has become a forgettable jumble of rehashed ideas and modes, with its focus on online features and microtransactions. But NBA 2K25 feels different, like a grizzled league veteran and the definition of a perennial starter. There are still gaps in its game, but solid fundamentals and a willingness to adapt help make it a reliable part of any rotation. Or, in this case, a novel and innovative entry that can at least win new fans and bring back oldheads alike.

NBA 2K25 review

A crossover into relevance

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Reviewed on PlayStation 5

Also available on Xbox Series X|S, Switch, and PC

Make no mistake—you still can't teach a long-running basketball sim new tricks, and 2K25 remains very recognizable. But that doesn't mean you can't polish it until it becomes as smooth as Steph Curry's buttery jumper. This is where the return of "ProPLAY technology" shines. Although initially introduced in 2K24, this year's iteration is much better at producing lifelike player animations and motions, so Paul George's fluid jump shot and Jayson Tatum's upper body heave look like the actual thing.

The addition of Go-To moves emphasizes the focus on realistic player movement. With it, you can recreate your favorite player's iconic signature move, like Nikola Jokic's one-legged sidestep jumper or Donovan Mitchell's bump-and-stepback shot, which I loved using (and abusing) whenever I got the chance. My only issue with Go-To moves is the lack of variety. After all, every NBA player's bag is deep, and a one-dribble pull-up fadeaway should not replace Joel Embiid's real-life arsenal of dream shakes and shimmy fakes.

Another interesting new addition is Rhythm Shooting, a completely different and more complex way of scoring middies and threes. To be honest, I initially found it pointless. But after trying both it and the classic shooting method with different jump shot animations, I started preferring Rhythm Shooting more—not just because it's more forgiving toward imperfect releases, but also because you can seamlessly transition into dribble moves after faking a shot.

Of course, with revamped animations comes a new shot meter, which was admittedly frustrating to get used to. Can you blame me for getting angry after bricking three open shots in a row? Clearly, it was the shot meter's fault and definitely not a skill issue. But even though I was dangerously close to hurling both hurtful insults and a controller at my TV, cooler heads prevailed, and I eventually learned about the new Shot Timing Profiles feature that at least slightly redeems the new meter.

By default, NBA 2K25's Shot Timing Profile is set to Difficulty-Based, meaning your current difficulty setting heavily influences your jump shot timings. Thankfully, this isn't your only choice, and there are four other settings you can try out. But Shot Timing Profiles can only do so much

to mask that this year's arrow shot meter is still difficult to time. If only I could use last year's easier-to-master classic bar design instead.

RPGeez, Really?

After experimenting with these features, I went into MyNBA Eras to check out the new Steph Era, which, confusingly enough, begins in 2016 – two years after the Warriors' first championship and the true beginning of Curry's reign of terror. Or, should I say, three-rror? Get it? Although the Steph Era makes the 2010s uncomfortably congested, with the LeBron Era taking place in the first half of the decade, it's a commemoration of Steph and co's near-unstoppable dynasty that I can fully get behind.

Since this is the only new feature in Eras, I immediately turned my attention to the return of MyGM, which, to my surprise, has *almost* turned into an RPG. Although the selection of pre-made characters and six different backstories are relatively decent, the rest of the mode is patchy and incomplete. Every line of dialogue with its NPCs feels unnatural and forced, thrown together just to serve as a way of handing out in-season tasks. In my first conversation with the team governor, he immediately asked me to trade away our oldest (and best) player *because of a dream he had*. You can probably imagine how disastrous that would be for my franchise.

And like that conversation's idle and unrealistic tone, the MyGM building appears equally empty, barely filled with expensive equipment you can't touch, as if it were a barebones museum. Instead of mirroring a bustling business hub for a multi-million dollar NBA team, the weirdly designed, single-floor space feels more like an expensive penthouse apartment you share with four strangers.

Don't Call It a Comeback

With the new features in MyNBA Eras being slightly underwhelming, I was preparing myself for disappointment before diving into MyCareer. Oh, how wrong I was! As soon as I started, I was immediately placed into every hooper's childhood fantasy: it's overtime in game seven of the NBA Finals, my team's in the lead, and (after choosing my preferred position, team, and appearance) I got to finish the rest of the match for a chance to make history.

Although it's only a short snippet of your player's potential storyline to kick things off, this instant thrust into a high-stakes scenario is the sudden revitalizing jolt MyCareer needed to contrast last year's disappointment. And after finishing the match and spending an hour trying out different builds, I jumped back in to try to make this intro a reality. But first, I had to relive my player's humble beginnings through the new story-centric mode, Heart of a Dynasty.

As someone who spent the better part of their teens with the classic MyCareer experience (think NBA 2K10 through 2K13), playing through Heart of a Dynasty with its four story-based matches

was a tremendous breath of fresh air. And even though it's short, finishing every game and watching your player grow through each one is a wonderfully nostalgic experience.

Ultimately, all MyCareer roads lead to Rome, which, in this case, is the overhauled metropolis called The City. Even though this updated hub lacks the easygoing vibe of last year's Miami beachfront-inspired design, I prefer this year's version simply because it's easier to explore and every location feels more accessible.

I've already spent countless hours in The Dunes, The Sideline, and The Temple, beating every Streetball boss, earning Virtual Currency, and collecting the rewards at the end, and it never felt boring or repetitive. In fact, the time I spent bouncing to and from these areas only made me want to explore The City even more.

Microtransaction Misery

Even with Heart of a Dynasty and The City finally quenching my basketball RPG thirst, it isn't all sunshine and rainbows in MyCareer land. Frustratingly enough, the plot-based matches in the former use your player's current attributes. So, if you're starting as a 60 overall brown shirt, you will struggle against a high school JV team even when you're allegedly a five-star athlete. And here's when the specter of in-game microtransactions rears its ugly, invasive head.

Like always, the fastest way to raise your player's attributes is to purchase a mountain of Virtual Currency. Of course, you can always grind it out by playing through NBA matches and completing quests, but that's painfully slow-going. Even with immediate access to 100,000 VC, which is only available with either the All-Star or Hall of Fame editions of NBA 2K25, as well as going through dozens of shootarounds and key games, signing multiple endorsements, and roaming The City talking to every important NPC I could find, it still wasn't enough to bring my player's overall rating up to 80. Naturally, this low of a rating makes it difficult to keep up in online matches against others who paid for VC.

Then there's MyTeam, the fantasy mode where you can assemble a team of historic NBA stars to compete against other similar squads, arguably the most infamous microtransaction cesspit of all. But even though the first things that greet you when you start it up are Deluxe Player Packs that cost thousands of VC, I was pleasantly surprised that spending additional cash to upgrade my squad didn't feel necessary at all here. And that's mainly because of the starting tutorials and the Auction House, which granted me the decent Damian Lillard-led starting squad I needed to put up a fight against other teams online.

Verdict

The more things change, the more they stay the same, and that's never been truer than with NBA 2K25. Although the core gameplay feels familiar (and it most likely always will), a handful of improvements such as Go-To Moves, Rhythm Shooting, and Shot Timing Profiles also make

it more novel and challenging. I love that the Heart of a Dynasty storyline and the return of Streetball highlight a renewed focus on single-player experiences that, *I hope*, mean things will be even better next year. Don't get me wrong; microtransactions are still as pervasive and frustrating as ever. But spending money doesn't always feel as necessary this time, especially in MyTeam, thanks to the return of the Auction House. So, although NBA 2K25 isn't on the level of Michael Jordan's splashy return in 1995, it can at least compare to his late-career stint with the Washington Wizards; you know what you're getting at this point, but it still has a few tricks up its sleeves that longtime fans like me can be pleasantly surprised by even as we grumble about long-standing issues.

Score: 7

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