

World Series Baseball 2k1 Strikes Out

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by Roman Loyola

I'm a video game jock, and I have the belly to prove it. Give me a choice of building the up experience points for Pinatubo the Barbarian on Battle.net or poking a Randy Johnson virtual slider into right center field, and I'll step up to the batters box every time. I don't know why I love sports games so much -- maybe it's the fantasy of facing Randy Johnson, maybe it's the competition, maybe it lets me relive my youth when I didn't have a belly and played real live games on high school teams and community leagues.

Regardless of the reasons, I await new sports video games anxiously; as of late, I was excited about the release of Sega's World Series Baseball 2K1. The days crept to the release date, and the reviews started trickling through. And then the excitement turned to disappointment as review after review slammed 2K1, for one major flaw: the computer automatically fields the ball for you.

What!?! Automatic fielding? There's not even an option to switch between manual and automatic fielding. What the hell were the folks at Sega thinking? I can't believe it. Here we are, well into the second decade of video gaming -- haven't the folks at Sega learned anything? You don't take away features, you give people more. Taking away fielding from the user is like having the computer automatically fight for you in Diablo II, or having automatic turning in Gran Turismo. Without fielding, 2K1 boils down to a batter versus pitcher dual -- sure, that's the meat of baseball, but it's the fielding that helps baseball video games feel complete.

□ There are other problems with 2K1: inaccurate rosters, wonky expertise levels, odd camera angles, the list goes on. After examining the checklist of flaws, it becomes clear that 2K1 just wasn't ready to be released. I don't know why it was rushed to market -- maybe the fact that we're closer to the end of the current baseball season than the beginning has something to do with it -- but I rather would have the game not ship at all, or at least delayed until it is done right.

Don't get me wrong -- I don't want a developer to take such a long time that it [misses its window of opportunity](#). But when you're talking about a franchise brand such as the 2K Sega Sports series, you're talking about maintaining the level of quality associated with that brand, a level of quality that gamers come to expect as well as have exceeded. The folks at [989 Sports](#) get it; NFL GameDay gets better all the time on PlayStation, and it will probably be mistaken for real, live football on PlayStation 2.

Even more frustrating is that, in the case of 2K1, gamers have waited years for its released. The last time we saw a Sega World Series game? On the Sega Saturn -- you remember the Sega Saturn, don't you? World Series Baseball on Saturn is actually a better game than the Dreamcast version, simply because it's a complete game. OK, you can't swap custom-made players on the Saturn, but really, no one cares about swapping custom players. What really matters is that you can at least attempt to rob your opponent of that single through the middle of the infield, instead of waiting to see if the computer can do it for you.

In the bigger scheme of things, it makes me angry. When bad games are released, it tells me that the company -- in this case, Sega -- either doesn't care about creating great products, or it has lost perspective on what the consumers want. So [many stories](#) creep out of the games industry about the intense pressure put on game designers and creators to ship product, resulting in a substandard product. And in the end, who

pays? Consumers like you and me. Now I'm stuck with waiting again for a killer baseball game on Dreamcast, hoping that the next one makes up for its predecessor.

But you know what? I'm sick of waiting. And it's nice and sunny outside. It's about time I worked off this belly of mine. Anybody wanna play catch?

[Roman Loyola](#) has a killer crossover, opposite field power, a zero handicap, and a 100-mile-per-hour slapshot. Virtually.