

# NCAA 2005



College Football's number one selling videogame title is back for another run at glory !

By BrutuStrength, *TSJ*

The 4th of July is just around the corner, and you know what that means: backyard barbeques, family vacations, parties with friends, firework shows, and just over 1 more week until the newest iteration of the NCAA football videogame is released by EA Sports. It's a wonderful thing that we are all provided such a holiday so that we are able to spend so much quality time with our families a week prior to ignoring them for our own personal delight. Once again, NCAA 2005 is looking to build off of its previous successes this year. I'm sure that many of you have read other previews and are already familiar with many of the new features. Sadly, I do not have any new news to release or tell anyone. What I have done, though, is break down many of the new features and explain how they might impact this esteemed videogame franchise. So, without any further ado, here's my interpretation of what's in store for us, the hardcore college football videogame fanatics . . .



Cover Player for NCAA 2005 – Larry Fitzgerald of the Pittsburgh Panthers

## ROSTER MANAGEMENT & RECRUITING

Just to prove to everyone that EA does listen to their customers (at least occasionally,) they have implemented 2 of the most important changes to date: expanded roster sizes and the ability to change player positions throughout a dynasty.

Roster sizes were previously limited to 55 players per team, and this year they have been reported to range from between 70 and 75. My guess (hope) as to why the roster sizes have been reported at both numbers is that the default rosters will contain 70 players per team, but will hold up to 75 per team including created players and new recruits. To be clear, I don't have any inside information that this is factual, rather it is my own hypothesis regarding the matter. Regardless, the 15 to 20 additional roster spaces will be a welcome addition, and will allow dynasty players to keep upperclassmen while providing time to develop their replacements.

Changing player positions has also been sorely needed, especially since so many players change positions throughout their collegiate careers. A practical example of this includes WR/DB Chris Gamble. He was recruited and played as a WR before switching to CB, a position where he recently became a first-round draft pick in the NFL. This feature will also allow dynasty players to recruit "athletes" that can be tried at various positions to see where they will best fit. A prime example of this includes a recent stud recruit for Louisville, Michael Bush, who was who was recruited by many major

programs to play at the QB, RB, WR, and DB positions. He made an instant impact as a freshman last year at the RB and WR positions and will likely be playing at those positions this year.

Recruiting goes even deeper this year by adding in a "pipeline" feature. "Pipelining" refers to when a school is able to recruit out-of-state players from a specific state with consistent and relative ease. For instance, Michigan's football program consistently recruits well despite not having oodles of great in-state talent. They annually turn to talent-rich states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California to bring in their future stars. They have been extremely successful in recruiting from schools in Northern Ohio for a longtime, having drawn such stars as Rob Lytle, Elvis Grbac, Desmond Howard, and Charles Woodson. Such a trend demonstrates a pipeline that Michigan has been able to maintain, at least to some degree, spanning several decades. How this feature will work in the game is still unknown at this time. Speculation ranges from having more recruits from a state interested in a pipelined school, to even lowering the amount of recruiting points that might be needed to recruit them.

Student transfers have now made their way into this year's game as well. Although an incoming transfer might provide some instant help to your team, an outgoing transfer of a stud recruit might leave you sobbing. That's right, in addition to the players that want to leave early to go to the NFL, you'll now need to focus on keeping your underclassmen happy by making sure they get sufficient playing time. The balance of splitting playing time between upperclassmen and budding stars will be a key factor this year, especially with the aforementioned roster expansion. If you can't keep them happy during the season, then you might need to talk them into staying at the end of the year

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Big hit tackles...

... and crazy fans



instead of transferring, and this will cost you valuable points from your recruiting budget.

Speaking of budgets, dynasty mode will include punishment budgets. These points will be used to punish team players that commit various violations, such as skipping classes or practices. As the coach, you'll have to decide whether you want to bench your star RB for his violations and for how long. It seems as though a player can be suspended for as little as a quarter or as long as a season. The tricky part with this is two-fold: longer suspensions use more punishment points from your finite supply and a lack of discipline will cause your program to become corrupt. If your program exceeds a certain threshold of corruption, the NCAA will start investigating the program. The NCAA has the ability to revoke scholarships, limit TV appearances, and restrict bowl games. It has been rumored that the NCAA can even administer the dreaded "death penalty."

### COMPOSURE

"Been there, done that." It's a simple phrase that can only be uttered by those individuals that have previously faced and overcome a difficult challenge. It means their will has been tested and their determination has been strengthened. It means they are prepared for those challenges that lie ahead. It ultimately means that you might want to start your battle-tested players over your newly recruited super athletes that are slated to replace them over time.

This year's version of NCAA has a new composure rating for each player. Upperclassmen will usually have higher composure ratings than their understudies. Their higher ratings have developed as a byproduct from their additional gridiron experience. Conversely, players with low composure ratings are more likely to be "rattled," hence they are more likely to make errors. Additionally, the players' composure ratings might change from play to play. A good play will build a player's confidence up and a bad play will make their psyches even more fragile. There is a definitive equation of risk versus reward with such a system. So let's look at the value of making either decision:

Why should you feel obligated to play the older, unheralded upperclassman over your newest 5-star, sure thing, can't miss, all-world Frosh? He was a good sized QB, with slightly

better than average skills but he had stellar composure. He was able to keep his teammates from being too uptight by cracking jokes in the offensive huddle during drives that held everything on the line. If he couldn't beat a team with his physical tools, then he'd beat them with his level-headedness and his heart.



Online lobby in NCAA 2005

Conversely then, why would you want to start a younger player over an upperclassman? Because sometimes they are just too good to keep off of the field. Maybe they can cover a receiver like Dre' Bly. Maybe they can run the ball like T.A. McLendon. Maybe they can lead a team like Chris Leak. Maybe it's because they can block like Orlando Pace. Or maybe it's because they can step up their game when they're in the spotlight, like Justin Vincent.

If you're confused, then good. Welcome to the world of college coaching. This is where the balance of athleticism and experience needs to be weighed carefully. Oh, by the way, don't forget about your stud Frosh's desire for playing time so that he doesn't try to transfer.

### HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE (HFA)

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic about college football is the atmosphere that is present at every game. In past versions of NCAA football games we've all enjoyed using our linebackers to pump up the home crowds. I'm sure that we've all thought at some point though, that it would be pretty sweet if the noise of the crowd would actually impact the other team's players. Well my friends, there's no reason to make such a wish this year, since the crowd will definitely impact your opponents this year. In fact, the 12th man might even be loud enough to help prevent your team from defeating your most hated rival if you are unfortunate enough to be playing them in their stadium.

I'm sure there are a few fans that have read about this feature and thought to themselves "Damn it! How am I going to win a road game against a team like Tennessee?" Relax my high-strung,

uptight, anxiety-riddled friend, for just as easily as they can pump up their crowds, you can silence them. OK, well maybe not just as easily, but it can be done. Take the crowd out of the equation by completing passes, grinding out yards, scoring, and making defensive plays. Do this and I'll guarantee you that 100,000 fans are far less intimidating when they're sitting on their hands. Just remember to keep them sitting and don't let their team get back into the game.

Some of you might be wondering how the HFA feature can actually impact a game. Well, it appears to be implemented in a very slick fashion. If the visiting team is a human player, then the TV screen might shake and their controller will vibrate. Also, the louder the crowd gets, the more difficult it will be for the visiting team to hear any audibles from the QB. In particular the wide receivers will cup their hands by their ears demonstrating that they can't hear it. If a receiver can't hear his new pass route, then he will run the original pattern. Additionally, the QB will walk around trying to ensure that everyone hears the changes. If he is rattled at the time, he might line up behind a guard instead of behind his center. I don't know what problems this may cause, but I'm fairly confident that it won't lead to anything good.

To make it easier for us to know when we're entering extremely hostile territories, EA is numbering the 25 toughest stadiums to play at this season. Playing at any of these stadiums will make it difficult for the visiting team to earn a victory. Now don't start jumping to conclusions about how unfair it will be for those 25 schools to maintain the HFA advantage throughout an entire dynasty just because they have it the first year. Apparently the 25 toughest stadiums will change at least every season, possibly more frequently, based on how teams perform in their own stadiums. So if your favorite team is the Toledo Rockets, it may be possible for you turn the Glass Bowl into the newest House of Pain. Just don't be surprised if it takes you a few years to accomplish such a feat. Perhaps this feature should be more aptly named "Home Field Attitude," because that's what it's all about baby, attitude.

## ONLINE PLAY (PS2 & XBox)

The biggest news is that this will be EA's first game on Xbox Live. I'm an XBL person myself, but I mostly play dynasty games. I can't help but get excited though when I consider the prospect of beating a Michigan fan, that's actually in Michigan, at any imaginable time of the day. For those of you who previously played online with your PS2s, then you already know what it's like to play NCAA online. However, you'll be pleased to know that EA has also taken some steps to make the experience even better.

Here are some features that I've gleaned from other sources on the Internet. NCAA will offer a mini game for online play. It will be an Overtime challenge game that will put you in a situation where you complete a tied game. Another feature is that each player will have a reputation number. Part of the reputation system is used to allow players the option to filter out other opponents that are at much lower level. Some of the other features include: sending text messages; scouting opponents favorite plays, formations, etc.; and an EA Sports ticker that scrolls real scores across the screen. EA has stated that they will disclose more information about their online features in July.



*Calling an audible with the crowd noise of homefield can sometimes cause confusion if your receivers don't hear you properly*

## GRAPHICS, GAMEPLAY, & PRESENTATION

The graphics and game commentary appear to be slightly improved this year, but nothing has been done to revolutionize these areas. The Sports Illustrated feature is back for a second year and should be even better than last year. It appears that Pontiac is a new sponsor within the game and will sponsor drive summaries, much like Old Spice sponsored the red zone statistics last year. I don't know whether Old Spice remained a sponsor for this year. There are some other new features that relate to this category, so I'll go over them now.

They have now implemented a Matchup Stick feature. This will allow you to quickly scan the field for player advantages and weaknesses based on player ratings and composure levels that are depicted by icons that are near each player. Overall ratings will be shown by a red/green color scheme. A player will show more green color the better they are, and they will show more red color the worse they are. Likewise, a composed player will show more white color and a rattled player will show more black color. The player should focus primarily on the QB, WRs and DBs for pass plays, and the RB, OL, DL, and LBs for run plays. A player with green and white matchup colors will have a decided advantage against a DB with red and black colors.

Another feature that was implemented this year is the Hard Hit button. This will allow for a defender to try and crush a ball carrier with a nasty tackle. Not much is known about this feature at this time. Some things that I can imagine it impacting are: composure of the ball carrier (negatively) as well the tackler (positively;) pump up the crowd or help silence it; create more injuries; or cause more fumbles.

Agile running is another feature that has been mentioned, albeit in a limited context thus far. This appears to be one of those features that might largely be overlooked, but may have one of the greatest impacts on the game. Some of the movies which can be viewed at various sites show running animations that simply look "different." When I first saw one of the animations it was hard to describe. It seems to be that this year's gameplay will utilize more realistic physics for running players. It will now be more difficult for all players to change directions. The players that will be best able to do so will be the runners that possess the greatest agility ratings.

If this is implemented correctly, then it has an excellent opportunity to create more realistic player scenarios. For instance, a CB recruit that doesn't have a very high agility rating might do better if he is moved to a FS or WR position, since top CBs need to have good "hips" to make plays on the ball while it's in the air. Also, on offense, we might find more players like Peter Warrick. The guy was never a speed demon, but his agility enabled him to be a great playmaker in college. His great agility allowed him to weave his way through defenders while making them look silly. If this will enable us to consider more than a player's straight speed, then I'm all for it.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the enhanced fans and "Create-a-sign" feature. Three dimensional fans of the home teams will now be more realistic and will get more TV time during cut away scenes. FSU fans might dress in Seminole garb and do the Tomahawk Chop, whereas their rival Gator fans will retaliate with the Gator Chomp.

This last feature is just about having a little fun within the game. The feature is called "Create-a-sign" and it enables you to, well, create a sign for your fans to show the TV cameras. Numerous signs can be created for each game and can even be used during online games.

I hope you all have great college football seasons, in real life as well as on the virtual gridiron.

## COMPANY LINE . . .

- Electrifying Stadium Atmosphere: Watch the visiting team fight crowd noise when calling audibles and hot routes. Pump up the crowd and build up your home field advantage to take opponents out of the game.
- New Match-Up Stick: Track the crowd's impact on players and see if they have enough composure to withstand the pressure.
- Top 25 Toughest Places to Play: Build your team's stadium atmosphere to rank among the elite stadiums in the country. See, hear and feel the immediate impact from hostile environments like LSU's "Death Valley," "The Swamp" at Florida, Michigan's "Big House," and Nebraska's "Sea of Red."
- New Custom Celebrations: Revel in your favorite team's competitive spirit. Celebrate in style with team-specific fan celebrations like the Gator Chomp.
- Deeper Dynasty Mode™: Monitor discipline levels and grades to ensure your program's integrity, while recruiting promising high school athletes and converting them into skilled position players. Keep players happy with playing time or risk them transferring to one of your rivals in the off-season.
- New Gameplay Enhancements: Choose from new custom playbooks, offensive schemes, and defensive formations that include the 4-2-5 and 3-3-5 Stack.