

GAME REVIEW

CRICKET 19

The Best a Fan Can Get

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*Cricket 19**Developer: Big Ant Studios**Publisher: Big Ant Studios**Platforms: PS4, XB1, Switch**Release Date: May 28, 2019*

After the massive disappointments that were Don Bradman Cricket 17 and Ashes Cricket (2018), I decided not to buy a Big Ant cricket game anytime soon. However, with all the excitement of the Cricket World Cup going around, I eventually caved in and bought their latest release, hoping it would fare better than their previous attempts.

From the outside, Cricket 19 might simply feel like a re-skin of Ashes Cricket. It is still the official cricket game of the Ashes. It still holds the licenses for only the Australian and English Men's and Women's teams. Thus, the players from other teams have randomly generated appearances and names. The main menu didn't look much different from the previous game either but a very welcome change was the inclusion of a few very catchy rock and pop songs in the OST instead of the same generic instrumentals Big Ant has been using since Don Bradman Cricket 14.

From my experience of playing the previous Big Ant cricket titles, I could tell that it would be a mistake to dive right into the game without exploring the Cricket Academy first. The Cricket Academy lets the community create their own teams, jerseys, players, umpires, bats, stadia and share them with the world to download. New to Cricket 19's Academy is a Scenario Creator which lets you recreate iconic

moments in the history of cricket.

Another addition to the Academy is a feature called PlayFace, which lets players import images onto the created players' heads. While the feature sounds great on paper and is able to produce excellent results with enough time and effort, it has some caveats. Firstly, you cannot just import any image you find on the internet. You need to use a photo editing software such as Photoshop to place the image onto a template provided with the game. Secondly, PlayFace is available only on the Steam demo of the game. The PC version of the full game does not have a release date as of yet so if you are going to use PlayFace, you need to own both a console and a PC. Thirdly, PlayFace only lets you add the texture to the face. The facial features need to be adjusted manually which is a very long and tedious task to say the least.

A strong suit of Big Ant's cricket games has always been the wide variety of game modes and Cricket 19 is no exception. Apart from playing exhibition matches, players can also try out competitions, tours and a career mode. By default, the game offers 5, 10, 20 and 50-over matches and test matches. However, players can also create their own match formats from the Match Type Editor within the game. Cricket 19 also allows players to create their own difficulty modes and lets them tinker with the game's physics. All in all, Cricket 19 offers cricket fans with an unprecedented level of customisability.

The main changes can be noticed once you actually dive into the game. The lighting and shadows have been vastly improved. Both the licensed and unlicensed

player models look very life-like. The players now also have facial animations such as smiling after getting a wicket or getting frustrated after scoring a golden duck. The licensed stadiums such as Lord's, Old Trafford, MCG, etc. have been recreated with utmost attention to detail. All of these put together make Cricket 19 the most visually appealing cricket simulation of all time.

While most cricket games of the past have tried to emulate TV broadcast, Cricket 19 has probably managed to do it the best. Before every match, a promo for the match is shown. International matches now start with the two teams standing before their flags while the national anthem is played. The game also shows highlights at the end of every innings. The camera angles for batting, bowling and fielding are now much less awkward than they used to be. Decent commentary would've been icing on the cake for such a detailed emulation of a cricket broadcast but unfortunately the game falls flat on its face in this department. The commentary team comprising of Michael Slater, James Taylor, and Mel Jones speaks very few lines and they are almost always inaccurate and irrelevant.

The gameplay in Cricket 19 is probably the best we have seen in a cricket game. The game offers two types of controls- the "Classic" controls from Don Bradman Cricket 14/17 as well as the "Standard" controls introduced in Ashes Cricket. On top of that, the game allows players to use separate control schemes for batting, pace bowling, and spin bowling.

Cricket is increasingly becoming a batsman's game and it seems like the developers agree. While the bowling gameplay is unchanged from Ashes Cricket, the batting

is dramatically improved. I have never seen such a huge number of playable shots in any cricket game before. Almost every shot I could imagine- be it slog sweep, reverse sweep, the helicopter or the periscope, they were all in the game and it is almost therapeutic to be able to play so many shots.

A huge flaw in the previous cricket games was the AI. Granted, cricket is a complex sport and thus it can be extremely difficult to create a proper AI that understands and utilises all the nuances of the game. Big Ant, however, has done a praiseworthy job of crafting the AI in this game. The batting AI makes shot selections according to the fielding set-up and will not hesitate to punish the loose deliveries. The fielding AI closely observes your favourite areas and places fielders accordingly. Cricket 19 has set a whole new standard for the AI in cricket games. That being said, there is still some room for improvements such as the batters responding to the required run rate while chasing.

Cricket games are hard to come by and good cricket games are even more so. Even though it is nowhere near as polished as FIFA or other AAA sports titles, Cricket 19 does a very good job of recreating the sport. With better commentary, fully licensed teams and fewer bugs, Big Ant's cricket games in the future may very well inch towards perfection.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert who complements his non-existent social life with video games, Netflix and a whole lot of ice-cream. Send him memes and cat videos to cheer him up at fb.com/NonyKhondaker



Community created likenesses of Mustafizur Rahman (left) and Mushfiqur Rahim (right)