

## **Back in the Game: EA Sports to Bring Back College Football Video Game**

*EA Sports has finally announced the return of its college football video game series after a seven-year hiatus. Despite the possibility of federal legislation allowing collegiate athletes to receive compensation for their name, image, and likeness, EA Sports currently plans on avoiding any controversy by using randomly generated players.*

On February 2, EA Sports announced its plans to reboot the popular college football video game series. EA Sports last released an NCAA Football video game in 2014, with that version gaining a cult following throughout the years. In 2021, the NCAA Football 2014 XBOX 360 version regularly sells on eBay for over \$100. Since 2014, fans have continuously called for the game's revival.

Despite the game's proven popularity, EA Sports has been hesitant to get back into the college athletics video game arena because of the legal controversy surrounding using college athletes' name, image, and likeness. In 2009, a former UCLA basketball player led a class action lawsuit against EA Sports, the NCAA, and the Collegiate Licensing Company for using his "likeness" in the NCAA Basketball video game series without his permission and without compensation. Ultimately, the case settled for \$40 million and as a result, EA Sports put college sports video games on hold.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the lawsuit, EA Sports did not use the names of the players in the game, but did utilize the numbers, positions, and all physical appearances of each player. As a result, even though the game did not feature the athletes' names, it was easily discernible who each player was in the game. For example, QB No. 2 for Texas A&M in 2013 was unmistakably Johnny Manziel.

For the game's newest installment, EA Sports plans on proceeding without using the name, image, or likeness of players represented in the game. Instead, the game will feature players with randomly generated names, numbers, appearances, and attributes to avoid any risk of liability. Additionally, for the new game, EA Sports is sidestepping any obligations with the NCAA and has come to a new agreement solely with the Collegiate Licensing Company. As a result, the new game will not utilize "NCAA Football" in the name but will instead be called "College Football."<sup>2</sup>

However, the plans to not use the names, images, or likenesses of players may change amidst proposed legislation in the Senate that would allow collegiate athletes to be paid monetary compensation, long-term healthcare, lifetime educational scholarships, and revenue sharing.<sup>3</sup> If Congress passes this legislation, the ramifications could dramatically change the collegiate athletics landscape—including EA Sports' plans for the newest college football video game.

In any event, at least one of the impending changes within the world of collegiate sports will include the return of college football to video game consoles.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.si.com/college/2021/02/02/ncaa-football-ea-sports-stopped-making-games>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2021/02/02/ea-sports-college-football/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.si.com/college/2021/01/14/ncaa-athlete-rights-compensation-congress-nil>

*--Thomas Shelburne*

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