

ESPN Baseball Tonight FAQ/Strategy Guide

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This walkthrough was originally written for ESPN Baseball Tonight on the SNES, but the walkthrough is still applicable to the PC version of the game.



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Introduction

[INTRO]

Baseball season's underway,
Well you better get ready for a brand new day.
Hey Chicago what do you say,
The Cubs are gonna win today.

So everyone knows who I'm for. I don't care if I start my latest guide off in a biased way. What better song can I use to begin this guide, anyway?

ESPN Baseball Tonight is an old baseball game (made in 1994), but if you want a cheap way to have some fun, you might like it. It hails from the days when there were at least three baseball games produced every year for the Super NES, with hardly any of them using both real teams and real players. This game has all 28 MLB teams from 1994, and while it doesn't have names of actual players, the statistics and numbers are accurate (well, most of the time). As soon as you turn the game on, I think you'll recognize the music (the ESPN Sunday Night Baseball theme, still used today), which sounds pretty good. Sounds are pretty good, too, for SNES standards. The graphics are above average; the smooth pitching graphics make up for the jerky animations of baserunners. Ballparks are generic; all look like one of the 1970's cookie-cutter stadiums (Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis, etc.). The controls are nothing unusual; they're fundamentally the same as those used in countless other baseball games, from the 1986 "Major League Baseball" for the NES to Mario Superstar Baseball of 2005. Games tend to be high-scoring. Beating the computer isn't usually very difficult, but playing against a human might be more interesting. While ESPN Baseball Tonight is probably the best Super NES baseball game of its time, it's certainly not without its shortcomings. For one thing, lineup selection is pretty limited, especially since all the players play about the same. The game often counts caught fly balls as hits on the scoreboard. When the bases are loaded, slowdown can be severe. Players come in three different skin tones in this game, but most white players have brown skin, and all pitchers are Caucasian. The biggest problem, however, is the terrible AI, which I go into greater detail on in the strategies section. This computer idiocy generally works to your advantage, though; for example, you can steal home whenever runners are on the corners. Anyway, that's enough reviewing. On to the guide!

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Gameplay Controls [CONTR]
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You can probably figure these out on your own, but here goes anyway:

---Any time---

SELECT: Pause game/change lineup

X: Toggle between display types: score, count, hitter's 1993 stats, and
hitter's stats for the current game

---Hitting---

Control Pad Left/Right: Change hitter's position in batting box

Control Pad Up/Down: Change hit type (see Strategies section)

A: Swing the bat

B: Bunt

---Pitching---

Control Pad Left/Right: Change pitcher's position on mound

A: Throw pitch; down for fastball, up for changeup, left/right during pitch for
curve

B: Hold to make 2B cover second base

B + Control Pad: Throw over to corresponding base (B + Down is a warmup pitch)

R: Show window of runner on first base

L: Show window of runner on third base

Don't forget that you have to press A to return the ball to the pitcher after

outs (or pitches when runners are on).

---Fielding---

Control Pad: Move selected fielder

B: Dive

A: Throw to pitcher

A + Control Pad: Throw to corresponding base (Up = second base, etc.)

---Baserunning---

Y + Control Pad: Advance to corresponding base (Y + Right to go from first base to second, for example)

X + Control Pad: Retreat from corresponding base (Y + Up to go back to second when between second and third)

L: Increase baserunners' jump off the bag, but may cause you to get picked off

R: Returns baserunners to a safer position

---Changing Lineups---

Use Up or Right on the Control Pad to highlight the player you want to replace. Then press Right or Left to change submenus, highlight the player you want to bring in, and press B to make the switch.

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Modes of Play [MODES]
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There are five options on the main screen that determine game setup:

---1 Player/2 Player---

Choose between one-player and two-player games by pressing Left or Right on the Control Pad.

---Exhibition Mode/Enter Playoffs---

Exhibition Mode is a single game between the teams of your choice. Enter Playoffs begins a playoff series where you can select the teams involved in the first matchup, although you can't decide who you play in later rounds. In the playoffs, a password will be displayed after each game, allowing you to resume game progress from where you left off. It's also good if you lose!

---Practice Mode---

Batting practice. Press SELECT to change between the role of the pitcher and hitter.

---Home Run Derby---

This pits you against a pitching machine that spews 15 fastballs at you as you try to hit as many as possible over the fence. While it would intuitively seem wise to select one of the 1993 home run leaders (Juan Gonzalez of Texas or the Giants' pre-steroid Barry Bonds), all the players are equal in this game, so it doesn't matter. Depending on the number of dingers you hit, your final grade may be Peewee, Whiffer, Little Leaguer, Minor League, Major Leaguer, Slugger, or Wow. If you hit more than 10, however, your score will be empty or a random jumble of sprites.

---Game Play Options---

This does several things that really aren't too useful. Sound can be turned off or on if you don't like it. Toggling Errors On/Off doesn't seem to change anything, but using Assisted Fielding makes fielding a little easier (you still have to make the appropriate throws, though). Player 1 Home/Away determines whether the player with Controller 1 bats first or second, which is of no consequence. 3 Division Mode/2 Division Mode is for traditionalists who scoffed at the new division structure and want to return to the old setup (or to reduce the number of games you have to play in the playoffs). Lastly, Enter Password

enables you to resume a playoff series from where you last played. Always be careful to write down your password exactly as it appears on screen.

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Strategies

[STRAT]
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Here are some strategies used in various aspects of this game.

-----Baserunning-----

First, a word on base stealing: If you take off the moment the pitcher begins his windup, you can steal second base quite reliably. If the pitcher throws a fastball or you mistime your move, just press X and Right on the Control Pad to return to first. The stupid computer fielders will never get you caught in a rundown, so be aggressive on the basepaths. Stealing third will never work, so don't even try.

The most fun play in the whole game can be executed with 100% success while you cackle with glee. If runners are on the corners (first and third), you can steal home EVERY time against the computer. Send the runner on first stealing, and a split-second later, press Y and Down to send the man on third toward home. The opposing second baseman will stand there holding the ball while the other man can take home at will! Make sure to send the runner from first back to his base about halfway up the basepath, or he'll be tagged out (don't turn too early, though, or the 2B will throw home).

A similar procedure works with most singles to the outfield. Suppose runners are on first and second and you hit a single to center. Bring the lead runner on home, and when the outfielder throws home (it'll never make it in time), send the other two runners for an extra base. This move - and variants thereof - can be used frequently in this game without much risk.

When in doubt, go for the extra base. If the opponent's throw is good, you can simply turn back to your previous base, and you'll get caught in a rundown as often as you'll see a smart sitcom dad, a conservative sociologist, a well-adjusted serial killer, or a forgiving prosecutor.

Here's a question for anyone here who knows anything about baseball strategy or has ever played a baseball video game or anything resembling competitive baseball: You're the third baseman. There's a runner on second base. You're standing near the base and suddenly, the ball rolls into your glove. What do you do? Throw to first and get the batter out, maybe? Well, that's not what the idiotic AI will do! The third baseman will stand on the bag, waiting in the hopes that your runner will run straight toward third and get tagged out! In such a scenario, make sure to retreat the runner on second, who will go dashing toward his doom if you don't fix the problem yourself. The batter, of course, will be safe.

That's not the only bonehead mistake the computer makes all the time. Computer-controlled outfielders often commit one of the deadly sins of the baseball, "throwing behind the runner." This frequently allows you to get an extra base on a hit. Even better (for you), the computer will often throw straight to the pitcher while you're still zooming around the bases, as if they thought the play was over! This can easily be worth an extra base. Even a church softball team or the Retired Middle Managers' Corporate Picnic can do better than that.

In my experience, all players in this game are of equal speed. In other words, Harold Baines and Roger Clemens are just as fast as Kenny Lofton and Rickey Henderson.

The runner AI is pretty good, so you won't get doubled off very frequently like in a lot of baseball games. This means your big eighth-inning rally isn't likely to die of a triple play.

Because the runners don't stray too far from their bases on fly outs, you can return to base and then go for the sacrifice fly. However, because of the risk that you won't do it quite right (and because there are easier ways to get bases in this game), I wouldn't try to get extra bases through sacrifice flies. That said, I've even been able to tag up a runner on first base on fly outs to left field.

-----Fielding-----

Fielding in ESPN Baseball Tonight is mostly a matter of learning the controls and anticipating how to position your fielders against certain kinds of hits. Here are a few plays that occur with particular frequency, and how to address them:

Slow dribbler down the first base line: Your first baseman has the ball, but because of the lousy AI, your pitcher isn't even thinking about covering first so you can throw to him. Instead, run over and step on first base to get the batter out.

Slow ball that bounces off home plate: These are tricky, especially when right-handed hitters hit to the shortstop. Charge just a little past the dirt part of the infield and wait for the ball to come to you. Then throw to first. Don't let the ball bounce over your head; anyone in the same room as you might start laughing at your bonehead fielding - especially if it's Lucy.

Line drive over a middle infielder: Run diagonally back and dive backwards if necessary. If you miss, let your CF take it.

Hard hit, straight to the right fielder: It looks like the opponents have a one-bagger. But not if you play aggressively! As soon as your RF gets the ball, press A + Right to throw to first base. If you're alert, you can get 'em out (9-3 in the scorebook)! My brother says he saw Andre Dawson do this once; I don't remember it too well since I was about two years old then.

-----Hitting-----

Swing away; the computer doesn't throw many balls (walks are virtually nonexistent), and if you make contact, you can usually reach base safely. Watch out for curveballs, though, which are difficult to make contact with.

Moving left and right in the batter's box doesn't make much difference, so I usually stay near the middle.

If you hold Up while hitting the ball, you're more likely to hit a home run or fly ball, while holding Down tends to result in a shorter hit with lower trajectory - more of a David Eckstein kind of ball.

Success with bunts is random; there's no skill involved, so it works well for beginners. Needless to say, though, don't even think about bunting with two strikes.

Hit-and-run plays are not recommended because of the ease of stealing bases in this game, as well as the risk of runners getting doubled off. I'm not a big

fan of squeeze bunts, either, especially since it's so easy to steal home whenever you've got runners on the corners.

-----Lineups-----

As I'm about to explain, managing your lineup doesn't need to be a complex affair in this game. For one thing, there's no way to change the batting order. For another reason, every player seems to have about the same hitting, throwing, fielding, and running abilities. There isn't even a difference between right-handers and lefties. Don't bother fooling with positions, either; any player can play any position equally well, and some of the lineups (like the Yankees and their twin third basemen) are messed up anyway. I don't even pinch-hit. As for pitchers, leave 'em in all game and start 'em every day. Hurlers don't ever tire in this game.

-----Pitching-----

There doesn't seem to be a lot of skill involved in pitching; the computer players whiff a lot, no matter where you place the ball. In ESPN Baseball Tonight, the game is won at the plate, with the glove, and on the basepaths. Against a human player, though, the most effective pitch is a hard fastball that begins curving outside just as the pitcher releases the ball. Try to paint the corner of the plate. Also, when you're playing a real person, you'd be wise to throw some balls to mix things up; it's impossible to make contact with outside pitches (and some inside ones, too).

===== Frequently Asked Questions [QUEST] =====

Q: What team should I use?

A: All the players in the game are of equal ability; therefore, all the teams are equal. Pick your favorite.

Q: Does anything special happen if you throw a no-hitter?

A: No. You don't unlock any hidden teams or see images of fireworks, flowers, or bikinis.

Q: I've made the World Series. How come the computer gets to use a DH while I don't?

A: You're controlling an N.L. team, and the game doesn't know that the designated hitter rule should apply for the home team's park. Don't fret, though; your pitcher can hit just as well as the DH, since all players are equal in ESPN Baseball Tonight.

Q: How can I get to the deciding game of the World Series?

A: Enter NDGPMPTFBHTS at the password prompt to reach Game 4 of the World Series, with your team (the Chicago Cubs) up 3 games to 0 against the Milwaukee Brewers. Default options apply. You've probably deduced by now that I'm a Cubs fan. I should note that this matchup isn't going to happen any more now that the Brew Crew is in the N.L.

Q: What's Little Caesars?

A: A pizza chain; probably the third-biggest in the U.S. at the time (Papa John's has passed them in recent years). I think the little toga-clad emperor paid some moolah to get their advertisements in the outfield. Lately, Little Caesars has focused on expanding in the northeast U.S. and internationally. Also, their "Pizza! Pizza!" slogan isn't used in Canada because of trademarks.

Q: What other miscellaneous notes do you have?

A: A few random notes:

* All statistics are based on 1993 numbers.

* Unlike some baseball games, ESPN Baseball Tonight doesn't have a "mercy rule" that ends the game when you take a 10-run lead over the computer. I don't know if human players can lose by the mercy rule, though, since I've never dropped that far behind.

* This game is made by Sony; I wouldn't count on seeing a Sony game for a Nintendo system any time too soon.

* This game is won of four ESPN-themed sports games made in 1994; the other three are ESPN SpeedWorld, ESPN Sunday Night Football, and ESPN Hockey Night. I wrote a guide for the former.

* I'd rather have Joe Morgan and Jon Miller announcing this game instead of Chris Berman.

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Comparing to Reality

[REALL]

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The 1994 MLB season was considered by many to be one of the best ever - until its premature end, that is.

The owners and players spent a lot of time disagreeing on small-market teams, revenue sharing, salary caps, and so forth. With neither side willing to compromise on anything, the players went on strike on August 11, ending the season and wiping out the World Series for the first time since 1904. The long-futile Montreal Expos ended the season with the best record in baseball, while the Yankees were the best American League team.

Major League Baseball's realignment into six divisions added a new round of playoffs. While some fans thought this would lead to losing teams winning divisions (like the 52-62 Rangers leading the A.L. West at season's end), this has turned out not to be the case in recent seasons.

The miscarried 1994 season left many players chasing statistical feats. Frank Thomas came close to the long-elusive Triple Crown, and both Matt Williams and Ken Griffey Jr. were on pace to approach Roger Maris's home run record (since broken, of course, with possible asterisks). On a less theoretical note, Greg Maddux of the Braves won his third consecutive Cy Young Award. Also, Cubs center fielder Karl Rhodes (usually known as Tuffy) hit three home runs on Opening Day and never did anything again in American baseball.

And, of course, hoops legend Michael Jordan made his infamous attempt at trying to play minor-league baseball. He soon decided to return to his day job - wisely.

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Version History

[VERSN]

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Date | Version | Size |
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3-17-09 | 0.1 | 2KB | Began guide.
3-19-09 | 0.3 | 5KB | Made some progress.
3-20-09 | 0.5 | 10KB | Won the World Series in the game; expanded FAQs.
3-21-09 | 0.7 | 12KB | Did a little.
3-22-09 | 1.0 | 24KB | Added main guide framework and title art. Finished
 | | | and proofread guide.
4-15-09 | 1.1 | 24KB | Corrected a few glitches.
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Contact Information

[CONTC]
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If you have any questions or comments about this guide, please send an e-mail to VHamilton002@gmail.com. That's zero-zero-two, by the way. Remember that not all e-mail messages will be read. Please follow these guidelines:

Do include "ESPN Baseball Tonight" in the subject line.

Do send polite suggestions for ways to make this walkthrough better.

Do tell me about any errors or omissions you find in this guide.

Do send information about any glitches, tricks, or codes you discover.

Do ask any questions you have about ESPN Baseball Tonight gameplay. I will respond eventually if you follow all of these rules.

Do make a reasonable effort to use decent spelling, grammar, usage, punctuation, and capitalization so I can understand what you're trying to say.

Do use patience. I check my e-mail quite sporadically.

Do not send spam, pornography, chain letters, "flaming," or anything that contains profanity or vulgarity. Again, violating this rule will result in deletion of the message and permanent constipation.

And lastly, a public service message: Fight for and affirm the rights of all humans, regardless of race, age, or creed! And... Never slide into first base, throw behind the runner, or bunt with two strikes. No one's likely going to read this, anyway.

For L.B.