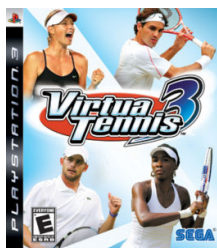


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[Virtua Tennis 3](#)

The tennis title that draws the line between fun sports games and those that make you feel like you're on the spotlight

As you'd have expected, [SEGA](#) has again decided to stick to its roots with the release of Virtua Tennis 3 for the PlayStation 3. Just like they did with [Virtua Fighter 5](#), SEGA has focused more on tweaking up the gameplay experience rather than changing the way the game is played. The publisher, along with AM3, the game's developer, have added some more nifty mini games and a much more compelling career mode, making the game a little bit more extreme than its predecessors. Yes, previous tennis titles from SEGA have different names, but given that Virtua Tennis' system is pretty much the same as with Power Smash and Sega Sports Tennis, we think it's safe to use the term, "predecessors," when referring to them. Players will be very glad to see that player customization has also added a few more features which, along with the game's state-of-the-art visuals, can produce some of the most handsome/beautiful profiles. Well, of course you're going to be able to choose to play men's tour or women's tour...! However, there are some minuses to this title as well. First of all, when we said that SEGA didn't change many of their tennis titles' features when rolling out Virtua Tennis 3, we meant it. The reality is, Virtua Tennis 3, although next-gen and stuff, looks strikingly similar to SEGA's last tennis game. More than that, some of the moves players are able to perform are practically worthless, but we'll discuss those too later on. Assuming that this is probably going to change your perspective on Virtua Tennis 3, we'll take our chances and reveal one more lacking feature: no online play... for the PS3 version of the game anyway. Virtua Tennis 3 for the Xbox 360 does feature online game modes. **Concept** Just to give you a first impression before we start detailing some important aspects such as gameplay, video and audio, those picking up on SEGA's Tennis games only now, should feel the difference between Virtua Tennis 3 and other tennis games, as the game is smoother than ever, delivering an overall top-notch feeling of Tennis, also proving that Sony's PS3 is no match for any system out there (at least when it comes to SEGA's Virtuas). As we stated above, SEGA have delivered their latest tennis title by merely building upon the success of those before it, adding a great variety of mini games, which we'll discuss later on, as well as a better established career mode. **Gameplay** The PS3 version of Virtua Tennis 3 has a bunch of extra gameplay features. One worth mentioning is the unique tilt functionality that allows players to spin, lob and slice the ball with a flick of the SIXAXIS. However, lobs are pretty much worthless while volleying won't do you much good either, as it's sometimes better to just use classical attempts to return a ball to the adversary's court, such as top spin shots, or sliced shots. Now, if you're that kind of gamer who doesn't mind the lack of online play, then we assume that the following lines will make your delight. Remember that we said something about a bunch of mini games? Well, although these too are very similar as with those from previous SEGA tennis titles, some of them add quite a few nifty features. You'll be faced with collecting fruit and dodging large tennis balls that roll out from a truck (Avalanche), or knocking over stacked oil drums with ground strokes (Drum Topple). In Prize Defender, you'll be placed in front of a table full of prizes. Here, you must protect the objects on the table by volleying away balls shooting out of the machines. This is a great way of learning the basics of volleying, although, as mentioned above, the game won't give you many opportunities to make efficient use of this shot. Last, but not least, you have Pin Crusher, where, as the name implies, you must knock down pins with your serve. You'll notice that some of the mini games are quite easy to beat and while you're not going to be able to adjust the difficulty as with Exhibition, as you progress, some of them become quite

punishing and a little frustrating, but don't get the wrong idea, they're not impossible. Also, some of the mini games can also be played by as many as four players at a time on the same console. As far as tournaments go, they take place in various locations across the globe. Players will be traveling to Spain, China, France, England, Germany, Italy, Australia, USA etc., while matches will be held during both day and night, as well as indoors and outdoors, grass, clay and hard courts, featuring the same fast-paced gameplay as within the mini games. This time however, you'll be faced with showing what you've learned so far. You'll also notice a stamina bar right at the top right side of the screen. Any game mode you enter will drain you of your stamina. When your stamina is low, your player faces a greater risk of getting injured so you should fix that as soon as you get the chance by drinking an energy drink. Also to avoid injury, you'll also be able to send your player on vacation. Another interesting off-the-court feature is that you'll sometimes get an email from your coach giving you a piece of advice from time to time. The coach will also read your personal mail to you and award you if you've performed well. Even though there's no money system, you'll definitely feel rewarded (given that you've played a good game) through items, while other players will ask you to play with them on a regular basis, so there's plenty of stuff to look forward to in this game, without the fuss of handling cash.

Controls Now, as far as the game's control scheme goes, even though SEGA and AM3 thought that implementing motion sensitivity support for Virtua Tennis 3 would spice things up a bit, they haven't really succeeded in doing so. You see, before commencing a match you're going to have to make up your mind which control scheme to use, to make your player move around the court. There's no option for that, you're just going to have to make up your mind whether to use the directional buttons to move the player in position for the returning shot, or to tilt the SIXAXIS. However, if during gameplay, you realize that a regular control scheme is better than the one using the SIXAXIS' tilting feature, you may lose a ball or two just because of having to adjust to the changes.

Video You'll surely notice that few sports games show such highly detailed player models, not to mention that playable characters within the game look stunningly similar to their real-life counterparts, with very few exceptions. Courts look absolutely great and amazingly realistic, but you'll have a hard time noticing the crowd. Practically, the only moments you'll be able to see your fans is when you win or lose a shot, which, by the way, isn't something that can be viewed twice (unless the game itself shows the replay), since SEGA and AM3 decided there was no need for instant replay. Now, I may be over reacting here, but if there's one sport in the whole wide world where the instant replay is crucial for the player's moral, that sport is tennis. On the good side though, as Sony has developed the PlayStation 3 to be the benchmark of this generation's gaming hardware, Virtua Tennis 3 makes full use of the systems potential, running at an amazing 1080p (the highest video standard available), not entering the frame rate's domain at all. More than that, the court doesn't miss a thing from announcers to camera crews.

Sound One very noticeable aspect as far as sound goes is that player yelling is a little annoying at times, not always matching with their (your) actions. Sharapova for instance has a grunting that can sometimes be mistaken for a polar bear looking for a mating partner and I'll bet that Sharapova's scream was one of the reasons why you were getting the game for your personal collection. Not to worry, I was just trying to be funny, it's really not that bad. The menu music is again, something that may, or may not be to everyone's liking - rock isn't exactly the most appropriate music style for a tennis game. Still it manages to compensate that with other, more pleasant sound effects, such as the crowd's exaltation when you jump sideways flying in mid-air to catch that top-spinning ball zooming fast towards the corner of your court. Announcers speak in their own native language, which is a really nice touch too.

Conclusion While SEGA's way of looking at one of the most elegant sports in the world has stayed the same, the addition of new mini games and a much better established career mode is definitely the winning formula as far as tennis games go. Drawing the line between real tennis games and simple and fun ones, such as Wii Tennis, Virtua Tennis 3 does an amazing job at making you feel like a real sportsman/sportswoman trying to make his/her

way up towards the top-ranked players in the world. Add that to the amazingly crisp visuals it offers and you've got yourself one of the best tennis games released to date.