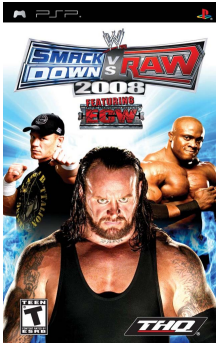


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[WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008](#)

"Pain" is the name of the game

Sometimes I get to play fighting games and I don't expect much from them, unless they're part of the Tekken series. I'm more a fan of storyline-based games, which feature plenty of attacks, magic and complex characters. The only complex characters I've seen in fighting games are the wrestling "divas", but their complexity comes from their appearance and their "assets" rather than their skills and profound thinking. [WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008](#) is the latest installment in the long-running wrestling game series, surfacing on all major platforms, from the Xbox 360 to the Nintendo DS and from the Wii to the PSP. I've played the Xbox 360 demo of the game and I was quite pleased by the graphical innovations, but the title was still plagued by its control system. Now, the PSP version is in my hands... Will it be able to deliver a thrilling experience or will it prove to be just another KO? Read on to find out!

Round 1 Right from the get-go, I was welcomed by some rock music, which prepared me for the series of [violent "sporting" events](#) I was about to take part in. Since this is a PSP game we're dealing with, you might want to select the "Play Now" option and leave the rest of the game modes for a later play. After selecting the previously mentioned mode, you'll only have to choose a player and select one of his/her two styles of combat. Add a manager into the mix and head to the arena in order to battle and impress the public. As you proceed to the ring you'll have to watch a long-lasting entrance which features your character and your foe. They'll be welcomed by fireworks, chicks, a booing public, some visual effects and a specific tune. Back to the game's options, we leave the gameplay for later as we advise you to check out the exhibition mode which features more battle sub-modes than we could count. The main types of matches are the classic "One on One", "Two on Two", "Triple Threat", "Fatal 4 Way", "6 Man", "Handicap" and "Royal Rumble". In case you've ever watched wrestling on TV many of these combat types will seem extremely familiar to you, each one of them being available in yet another series of sub-sub-modes, like "Buried Alive", "Tag Team", "Table Tornado" or "Hardcore Triple Threat". I could go on and on about these games modes, but frankly who cares, as heads and spines are broken in each of them, with changes of arena, rules and number of participating wrestlers. Aside from the Exhibition main menu mode there are also a couple of other "Game Modes", like the brand new "24/7 mode" or the Tournament. If you want to take part in a tournament, keep in mind that you can either select the King of the Ring challenge, or the Beat the Clock Sprint and Quick Play Tournament. There's also a way of creating your own tournament in case you're not satisfied with the available options. For the WWE Smackdown fanatics out there, a special option is available which allows them to recreate the best seasons of legendary wrestlers from 1996 till today. Last, but not least, a Shop mode is featured, which can come in handy specially if you've got plenty of cash to spend on unlocking legends, superstars, costumes, moves and kits. WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2008 also comes with a huge amount of customizable aspects, from the modes you can create to special move sets. Choose a certain fighting style for an already famous fighter or create yours (fighter and style, that is). Select cool new finishing moves and combine them with ground attacks, dashes, dives, tag team actions and many other combo chains. You'll surely want to preview them in order to notice if they make you miss a tempo and become vulnerable to your foe's attacks. The game's customizable section also makes an appearance in the "Create a Superstar" option, which allows you to add your very own creation to the fighters roster, editing their facial expression, body painting, tattoos, piercings, height, body type and tons of other options. A new fighter will surely need a trademark entrance, in order to make a good impression on the public and you'll be able to create such pre-fight shows,

toying with templates, motion scenes, fireworks, screen effects and the lighting. The game's customizability ends with the "Create a Championship" option which allows you to either create a tag or single event and even your own championship belt, with pattern and center plate included. Other than that, you will be able to change the gameplay experience moderately through the main menu's in-game options, messing with the momentum bar charge speed, the difficulty, the HUD, the targeting indicators, the camera cuts and the stamina system. Don't forget to customize the AI settings, in order to setup the frequency of your enemies' special attacks and reversal rates. **Round 2**WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2008 is your average professional wrestling game, surfacing on a market that's really lacking similar gaming titles. The game was developed by Yuke's Future Media Creators and it's been published by THQ selling pretty well in the US, where wrestling is one of the most popular TV shows. Also, the 2008 title is the first to feature the ECW brand, while boasting two fighting styles per player. Each fighter has a primary fighting style and a secondary one, totaling to a number of 8 among which are: high-flyer, hardcore, submission artist, powerhouse, showman, brawler, dirty and technical. Of course, each wrestler has a special move, that's based on his primary fighting style. This year's roster is quite impressive, since it includes great legends of wrestling and the RAW competition, like Batista, the almighty John Cena, King Booker, JBL, which is an unlockable character, Randy Orton, the crazed Rey Mysterio, Ric Flair and many many others. The divas are as hot as ever and they're half of the eye candy you'll be seeing in the game, among the sexiest being Candice Michelle, Melina, Torrie Wilson or Mickie James. The game's AI didn't surprise me one bit, as I even tested it by allowing two COM opponents fight each other in order to see what they're good at. Also, you'll surely notice that the game's pretty repetitive although there are tons of combos to perform. In order to get to use them (or allow the opponent to use them on you), many minutes will have to pass from the start of the fight till the KO or the ring-out. Slamming a chair onto someone's face never felt harder, but still you'll have a tough time defeating your opponent even if you brutalize him enough to make the crowd go wild. Also, the control system isn't exactly what I was hoping for... Instead of focusing on the analog control for the player's movement, the PSP version will have you using the D-pad in order to move the fighter around. Once you've hit the floor, you'll only be able to get up by tapping various action buttons and during submission moves you'll be able to escape by using the analog control. Honestly speaking I didn't feel in control one bit, during many of the fights I took part in. Keep in mind that you can exit the ring, run around it, pick up objects and slam your opponent into the head with them! That's probably the coolest feature of the game, but you'll have to pay attention as sometimes such a violent action can get you disqualified. **Hear the crowd?** The game's audio segment is the best I've heard lately, specially when it comes to rock music. I felt old and outdated, listening to those hardcore tunes, as I didn't recognize many of them. Big rockin' names like Puddle of Mud, Chevelle and Sevendust are featured in the game with songs like "Famous", "Well Enough Alone" or "Driven" plus many other tunes, guaranteed to improve the wrestling experience or at least the menu browsing "experience". Other than that, you'll surely enjoy to hear the crowd's reaction, the announcer's lines and your fighter's screams of pain. **Bloody eye candy**The entrances look great! They're probably the main asset of the game, visually speaking, but several flaws manage to even plague them. For example, some of the ladies have a huge bunch of pixels floating above their shoulders that we human beings usually call "hair". In case you think that this is a minor graphical glitch, wait till you check out the crowd. That's probably one of the worst crowds I've seen since the early FIFA titles and even those games featured members of the public with... faces. The in-game combos and attacks look fairly well, specially because they're varied and they take a while to be performed. All the fighters resemble their real counterparts, while the arenas and the trademark finishing moves are good enough to make this PSP experience a long-lasting one. **Multipainer mode** The game's multiplayer mode allows you to play a "Wireless Exhibition" match or a "Quick Match" in case you're a fan of short PSP wrestling sessions. You can also participate in

wireless title matches, first checking out your opponent's defending streak, his tradition, match history, excitement, title value and title defense. One multiplayer feature that you'll surely dig gives you the opportunity of trading superstars with the aid of your PSP as you progress and unlock more fighters. The matches are lag-free and the gameplay's pretty much the same as the single player one plus human intelligence ready to kick your a*s.

Finishing moveThe latest WWE Smackdown vs Raw title is what a PSP-owning wrestling fanboy needs to relax, because it packs tons of trademark content, which can impress a kid, but surely won't impress a man who plays FPS or RPG titles for fun. Also, its control system manages to spoil an otherwise exciting experience, while the graphics are mediocre, but still manage to shine when it comes to crazy combos and deadly moves. Add some rock music to that and you've got your Saturday night wrestling TV show that will surely keep you glued to your television set, but this time you'll be in control of John Cena and getting ready to go for the Championship belt.