

VIP Gamer: Jason Aldean

By John Gaudiosi
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Jason Aldean has jumped to the top of *Billboard's* charts this year with his new CD, "Relentless", which is the third best country album debut this year behind Tim McGraw and Martina McBride. Aldean's current hit single, "Johnny Cash", is featured on the soundtrack of EA Sports' NASCAR 08 game, which is out for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 2. Aldean performed at Electronic Arts' NASCAR 08 launch party in New York City's Hard Rock Café, along with Brooks & Dunn, and spent some quality time with the new game.

Although he's a big fan of NASCAR games, Aldean's first love is virtual baseball and football. He's been playing those sports games since the very beginning.

"The Atari Baseball game had stickmen and to hit a homerun you basically had to hit the ball past the outfielders," said Aldean. "When Nintendo came out they had the regular Baseball game, which I thought was really cool. 10-Yard Fight was the first football game I played. Looking back at it now, it's crazy how bad it was. But back then it was great. I also really got into Tecmo Bowl. That was probably the coolest game I had ever played."

With the advent of Tecmo Super Bowl, game companies began licensing NFL teams and players to add authenticity to sports games.

"That was awesome," said Aldean. "I remember RBI Baseball was one of the first ones to have all-star teams with real players. I used to spend nights over at friends' houses and we'd stay up all night playing that game. At the time, it was the coolest thing. It's funny, now if you go back and look at those games, there's no comparison to what they have today."

These days, Aldean is a Sony loyalist. Although he owned early game consoles from Atari, Nintendo and Sega, today he sticks with PS2 and PS3.

"I'm a big Sony fan," said Aldean, who keeps his PS2 on his tour bus and his PS3 at home. "I'm playing MLB 07: The Show right now. That's the newest game I've gotten into. I play as the Braves. I go in and create my own team a little bit. I'll create players and have fun with it and then play my season. I do the same thing with NCAA Football 08. I use the Georgia Bulldogs for that and then make some additions."

Aldean doesn't go overboard with his tweaks because he likes good competition.

"I try to keep it where it's even," said Aldean. "I'll create somebody and put them in place of someone else. I don't want to go in there and win every game by 20 runs. That's not any fun for me. I like a challenge. So in baseball, I'll get rid of someone like Chipper Jones and put him on the free agent list and then put my own guy in there instead."

Although Aldean would love to take his virtual Braves through an entire 165-game season, he has given up on that endeavor.

"I always have the intention of playing the whole 165 game season, but it never works out, so this year I'm playing a half season," said Aldean.

While he's on tour this summer and fall with Rascal Flatts, he's logging a lot of time playing Madden NFL 07 on PS2 – at least until the new Madden launches.

"I play with the guys in the band and we'll play Madden tournaments on the road," said Aldean. "We'll put all the teams in a cup and everybody draws five or six teams out. Whatever teams you have you put in your hat and whichever team you pull out of there you use to play against the other guy. Whoever has the best record at the end of the tournament gets the money. It's not great money or anything, but it's great to kill time on the road."

Aldean said that depending on how long the trip is, the band can spend an entire day playing through a tournament. For smaller stretches of road, they split up the competition over a couple of nights.

"We'll really get into Madden when the new one comes out," said Aldean. "We'll play non-stop until the time that we sound check, and then we'll go back and play until we do the show, and then we'll go back and play all night. We get pretty addicted to it."

Much like the players on ESPN's Madden Nation bus, Aldean's group of Madden players is pretty equal, which makes these tournaments both challenging and fun.

"Everybody has gotten pretty good at it," said Aldean. "That's the great thing about drawing teams out of a hat. You can have somebody who's not that good pull the Patriots out of the hat and someone who is good pick the Raiders. So it makes things even and makes it fun and interesting. We call it the luck of the draft. If you're lucky enough to draw the good teams, you're more likely to win the tournament."

When it comes to playing Madden on the PS3, Aldean said the biggest difference he sees is in the player movement. The virtual players move more fluidly. He said they no longer jump around like the old Sega Genesis and PlayStation days.

"Now you can juke and spin and they move like they do in the real sport," said Aldean. "I dig the realism in games and this is the most realistic I've seen a football game. I hated playing a football game and completing every single pass. I want them to miss the ball or throw an interception once in a while because that's realistic. I think that's the cool thing about next-gen games. It's almost like you're sitting on the field watching it."

The same holds true with his beloved baseball game, MLB 07: The Show. Sony's scanned all of the players' faces and whenever they show a close-up it's pretty accurate and they have all of the batting stances exactly like the real players.

"This new MLB 07 game is probably the best baseball game I've ever played," said Aldean. "I look for games that are realistic and play like the real sport. I don't like the arcade takes on sports like The Bigs. I don't like hitting a homerun every other at bat. I like hitting in the gaps for doubles and hitting down the line and bunting to move guys off base. This game seems to be the most realistic baseball game I've played."