

## **Esports at FHSU is going big time – varsity**

If you ever thought your children, siblings, or friends were spending too much time on video games, it might surprise you to learn that esports is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. The esports market is expected to gross more than \$1 billion this year and is projected to continue growth. And as typical of Fort Hays State University, we are not new to the “game.”

Student clubs at FHSU have been holding game tournaments at in-person get-togethers called LAN (Local Area Network) Parties since about 1999. A large event open to the public called TigerLAN happens once each semester, and these have been held regularly over the past 20 years with the most recent – TigerLAN 41 – on Feb. 22.

Originally, the Advanced Technology Student Organization (ATSO) sponsored these events on campus in the Memorial Union. As club membership grew, some gaming members split off and created their own club, known simply as Esports Club. Both Esports Club and ATSO work together now to manage TigerLAN tournaments in a variety of electronic game titles. Over the years, games have changed, but popular titles now include “League of Legends,” “Overwatch,” “Super Smash Brothers,” “CS:GO,” “Hearthstone,” “Fortnite,” “Rocket League” and “Minecraft.”

This coming fall, the next evolution of our esports program is a varsity team. The esports gaming lab in Hammond Hall, room 110, will support club and varsity team practices as well as scheduled tournaments. Gaming hardware will available for fall 2020 participants.

In learning more about esports I was surprised to learn about the rigor involved. According to our director of esports and associate professor of informatics Kevin Shaffer, “Esport is not a push-it-shove-it or knock-it-over type of sport, but it certainly is a very competitive individual and team-based activity that has real physical and mental demands.”

“Professional esports players are on special diets, going to gyms for regular exercise, dealing with stress, training in various aspects of their craft as well as planning team strategy and reviewing opponent game play video,” he said. “They hold regular team planning and strategy planning sessions, and they scope out their competition – just like any traditional sports team. Player strategies, coaching, teamwork and planning are all part of the game, just like any other sport.”

“The Esports Club has given me a home on campus,” said club President Jake “Vynaraz” Boucher, a sophomore education major from Lake Odessa, Mich. “It has brought me out of my dorm room.”

“I have found friends who enjoy what I do, and I am learning skills that will be very valuable outside of gaming,” he said. “We have members of all different backgrounds, but we have a shared love in gaming. I never feel like I can’t get better, and I can grow with them.”

For him, varsity esports will “be a big sense of pride and accomplishment.”

“I’ve been working hard for this to happen, and I can’t wait to share it with the community.” he said. “Everyone is welcome, and we make an effort for everyone to be included on the club level, even if you’re not a competitive gamer.”

For Trevon “Fin” Tatum, an FHSU sophomore from Goddard senior majoring in biology, esports at FHSU “changed my entire trajectory in college.”

“I was always a rather shy and quiet kid, and I did not see myself getting involved in anything on campus when I started my freshman year. Luckily, I saw a flyer for esports at the back-to-school picnic, and a friend of mine got me to ask about it.”

He is on the competitive League of Legends team. “My passion for video games spread into many friendships and a leadership role in the club. It's been an honor getting to help create something so much larger than myself, and I can't express how thankful I am for the experience.”

The prospect of competition and self-improvement drove him to join, but “that very quickly changed to wanting to connect with new, like-minded people and gain friends.”

“Now, I also want to solidify esports' place on campus to provide this amazing opportunity to other students like me.”

He concluded, “I was extremely introverted my whole life. I still am, but I have broken out of my shell. The organization and the people have helped me so much as a person, and I owe them all so much!”

I love how engaged and connected our students are as they participate in their love for esports. Not only is this a great engagement opportunity, it is also a frontier career providing a learning environment where hands-on experience meets the needs of real-world jobs. Plus, scholarships are available: the \$1,000 Esports Leadership Scholarship and the \$500 Esports Gold Scholarship.

For more information about our esports program or to try out for a position on club and varsity teams, contact Shaffer at [kshaffer@fhsu.edu](mailto:kshaffer@fhsu.edu).