A Comparison Between Esports and Traditional Sports

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Sports have been around since the dawn of mankind and civilizations throughout the years have evolved sports into huge events with many spectators. Because of this, it makes sense that the rise of technology and video games has also brought out a competitive scene: electronic sports, or esports for short. As long as esports have been around, people have questioned the validity of the name and whether these video game competitions are actually sports. Society generally sees avid video game players as being lazy and overweight adults or children with too much time on their hands. They associate esports athletes with this same view and assume that just because esports aren't as physically exerting, they shouldn't be considered actual sports. Based on the formal definition, esports are considered sports and with the breakthroughs in technology, future developments will allow esports to be even more aligned with society's traditional view of sports.

Esports exist in many forms with multitudes of games being played and the possibility for several leagues for every game, each with varying rules. These games are entirely separate and usually have separate tournaments. The common factor between all of them is that athletes play video games against each other in a competitive form. Esports naturally began when video games started incorporating network capabilities and the ability to play against others both in person and around the world. Groups of people known as clans began teaming up to compete in games online. Since then, esports have been a quickly evolving concept because of the relatively new presence within society along with the amount of people that are

interested. Although the concept is relatively new, statistics show that revenue from esports reached over $600 million in 2017 and is projected to grow to $1.6 billion by 2021 (Statista). Its not just companies benefitting from the new craze though, prize pools in competitions around the world reached a new high in 2017 with over $120 million being available to esports athletes. Esports athletes that are also students have the opportunity to receive scholarships from several universities including University of California Irvine and University of Utah. These scholarships are similar to scholarships for basketball and football and can even include full payment of all scholastic fees (Scholarships.com).

Just as soccer, basketball, football, etc. teams have staff that help out the team, esports teams are no different. Bigger esports teams can have multiple coaches, analysts, and even scouts that are always looking for new athletes to recruit. This is necessary to have to be considered a professional team which includes participating in tournaments, sticking to practice schedules, and interacting with fans. As viewership of esports continues to rise, people look for teams to support and to be fans of. This is great news for the teams because they benefit both financially (from merchandise sales) as well as on a support level and especially at huge tournaments. It is not just athletes that see the huge potential in this field; companies such as Intel, Red Bull, and Mountain Dew are jumping at the chance to sponsor a team and be able to reap from the big financial investment (Meola). Even traditional sports leagues such as the NBA are putting together esports teams to play competitions in their respective virtual sports games. Kings Guard, the professional esports team for the Sacramento Kings (NBA team), have just started their first season and their facilities include a world-class training facility and state-

of-the-art content studio (NBA.com). All of these developments in the past several years show

how the gap is closing between esports and traditional sports.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, sports are defined as "a contest or game in

which people do certain physical activities according to a specific set of rules and compete

against each other." Although people see typical sports such as soccer, football and basketball

as the benchmark for the definition of sports, activities that are not as physically demanding,

such as car racing, archery, and even chess, are also considered sports. Because of the most

popular sports being very physically demanding, society tends to automatically associate sports

with being physically intense. Although the definition includes that the tasks being performed

have to be physical activities, there is no set guideline to how much physicality is required

before something is considered a sport. Also, it is evident that these physical activities require a

degree of competitiveness to be considered a sport. Esports are physical activities because they

usually include moving fingers across a keyboard and moving a mouse around. They also follow

a specific set of rules (usually set by the programmers when designing the game and by the

tournament coordinators when considering the rules required) and the events are competitive

because of the opposing teams.

According to Wikipedia, the definition of sports is "all forms of competitive physical

activity or games which, through casual or organized participation, aim to use, maintain or

improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants, and in some cases,

entertainment for spectators." This definition adds a part that says that the activities provide

enjoyment to the participants and entertainment for spectators. With the thousands of esports

athletes that compete in tournaments and the millions of people that watch those

tournaments, it is easy to see how they provide enjoyment and entertainment.

People traditionally don't associate esports with being a sport at all because they think

that the esports athletes sit around all day and just play games. They try to make the point that

there is not enough physicality involved in esports to be deemed an actual sport. Although it

may seem so at first glance, with athletes usually sitting and only using their hands, they have

to train their hand movement speed and reaction times to be so precise that this leads to

sufficient physical exertion to be considered a sport. Actions per minute, or APM for short, are a

quantifiable statistic of how fast esports players have to react. Although not an important

quality for all games, APM can quickly tell you about a person's skill level in games such as

Starcraft II and Super Smash Bros Melee. Esports athletes follow intense practice regimens to

improve their muscle memory and collaboration with their teammates. Greg Fiels, a former

Starcraft II champion, said in an interview in 2013 that his team practiced for twelve hours a

day, everyday, and only had one or two days off per month (Stanton). Teams also practice on

keeping their focus levels high through hours of the same gameplay. The point that is being

made is that esports athletes put in the same amount of time to practice, if not more,

compared to athletes of traditional sports.

Another big similarity between traditional sports and esports is how winning the

championship provides a benefit to the team. In traditional sports, winning the championship

usually includes a trophy, a very good reputation and a bonus on top of the player's salary.

Similarly, in esports, winners typically receive a large portion of the prize pool along with a

trophy and a good reputation. This prize pool is split among the players and coaches depending on the team rules but they receive this as a bonus on top of their usual salary.

One concept that is quickly becoming popular among esports teams is making team houses. The athletes move into one house together to be able to closely work with each other daily to improve quicker than their competition.

Example of an esports team house

By using their house to double as a space for living as well as for training, teams efficiently save money and form stronger bonds between teammates. Fortnite, a game that has gotten very popular this year, has already seen several big teams assemble their rosters and even move into houses already (see team TSM). On top of the time that the athletes spend practicing with each other, they are highly recommended to go to the gym. By doing so, they keep their brains sharp for the high mental intensity that goes on from extended hours of focused training and gameplay.

The main goal for most of these esports teams is to qualify for major tournaments and to win for the financial benefits and the reputation that come with it. These tournaments themselves have turned into presentations similar to those of traditional sports. Live audiences watch the athletes compete while sitting not too far from them and many others watch from

home on streaming websites such as Twitch.tv. These tournaments feature interviews,

commentators and even food/drinks for the audience similar to traditional sporting events.

When international tournaments take place in the USA, esports athletes are required to get US

p-1 Visas, which are reserved for individuals who are recognized as international sports

athletes. Because of how similar esports are to traditional sports and because they fit the

general definition, I believe that they should be classified as real sports. Germany has already

begun the process of recognizing esports as an official sport and more countries are to follow

(Speight).

As technology continues to improve, esports naturally evolve to stay with the latest tech

trends. One of those trends is virtual reality and the ability to experience things that are not

physically right in front of you. Companies are working hard to become the first to seamlessly

integrate virtual reality with all five of our senses. One of the biggest new additions is the ability

to walk around in real life and correlate that with movement inside the virtual world. They used

omnidirectional treadmills and a strap that keeps the person in the middle of it to simulate the

person actually moving in VR. With the inclusion of this and other VR techniques that will

increase the physicality and player movement, people may begin to associate esports with

traditional sports.

Example of omnidirectional treadmill combined with VR

Esports have already seen the rise of more physical gameplay because of games such as

Space Junkies and Echo Arena. These games are based on laser tag and disc golf, respectively,

and requirement movement with legs and arms (Johnson). According to Oculus' website, Echo

Arena "combines the physicality of traditional sports with the exhilaration of zero-g to create an

entirely new, genre-defining competition—fun for esports newcomers and hard-core fans

alike". Leagues for VR competition such as the VR League (by Oculus and ESL) are being formed

with huge cash prizes for the winners (Oculus Rift). The VR League includes games such as Echo

Arena, Unspoken, Sprint Vector, and more.

VR esports

Gambling on esports results has quickly become a popular attraction to both fans of

esports and of gambling. Since betting on traditional sports has been mostly illegal (up until a

few days ago), many people have resorted to betting on esports because of how easy it is to do

it if one has access to the internet. Since it has been legal in Nevada, many have placed bets on

esports teams using money, cryptocurrency, and even virtual items. Virtual items are especially

a popular item to use in gambling because people don't associate them with such a high value

as they do with money even though these virtual items can be worth a lot. With the new

supreme court decision allowing sports gambling on a federal level, esports are also now fully

allowed to be gambled on. With esports falling under the blanket of the new rule changes regarding all sports, it shows that esports are starting to be respected as real sports.

In conclusion, esports should be classified as real sports and countries should identify them as such. With the definition of sports highly resembling what esports entail, it should be a no brainer that society views esports as sports and the players as athletes. The high similarity between the presentation formats and league structures allow the billions of traditional sports fans to seamlessly become fans of esports teams. Because of this, the acceptance of esports into society has been growing at an exponential rate with ever increasing fan interest and financial support from both fans and companies. Within the next ten years, I believe esports will rival traditional sports league such as the NHL in terms of viewership numbers and revenue. In the future, we may even see esports in the Olympics or perhaps a separate Olympics just for esports. Either way, its an exciting time to be a fan of video games and esports.

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