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by Michael Isaac

Due to the rapid growth in the popularity of esports, the public has begun to question whether they should be considered real sports. While it is easy to spot the differences between traditional sports and esports, the general public struggles to also see the similarities between the two. Many individuals have explained why they believe they should or should not be considered sports, but currently there is no definite answer. I will examine the current public opinion of esports, the similarities between esports and traditional sports, the definition of a sport, and the topic of physicality in sports for the sake of supporting esports' legitimacy as sports. In order to make the experience of being an esports competitor or an esports enthusiast safer, esports should be considered a sport.

For many individuals, it is difficult to see how a video game player should receive the same level of respect as a traditional professional sports performer. Matthew Walther (2018) of "The Week" gives an explanation which describes the source of that difficulty by stating that "sitting on a couch interacting with your television set is not a sport, otherwise watching CNN with your grandfather would be one"(para. 4). While this ideology is reasonable, it is not necessarily justified. Much like Walther, most individuals that find it difficult to see an esport as a sport when going off their first impressions. As a result, the most common claims that oppose the validation of esports as sports hold bias.

Similarly, it is commonly believed that esports hold less importance than traditional sports. Traditional sports are held to a high standard while esports are most usually

disregarded. Matthew Walther (2018) of "The Week" illustrated this claim in his statement that "video games are, in other words, another of those illusions we peddle to convince people that the world's problems do not exist"(para. 9). Walther claims that esports work to separate people from reality, but couldn't that be said about football games or baseball games? Both esports and traditional sports are a show of skills for the entertainment of the audience, so one should not be a considered distraction while the other is considered more based in this world.

Esports and traditional sports hold several defining similarities. The amount of skill, dedication and teamwork required for one to become a professional esports competitor is comparable to that of a traditional athlete. At the highest level, competitors will "practice - or scrim - with their teams for up to 10 hours a day" and similar to traditional athletes "pro gamers have a coach who guides them through these practices," in order to stay at the top of their game (Roundhill Team 2020). This dedication enables them to perform high skill feats such as achieving "up to 400 movements on the keyboard and the mouse per minute' which was described as 'a level of strain that the scientist had never observed in any other sport'" (Evans, 2019, para. 12). Teams must move fluidly and make snap decisions that best fit each situation: "in the game Call of Duty, for example, the players have to choose their weapons wisely and simultaneously move in the game" and "the more complex the video game is, the more skills it'll require from the video game players" (McAlpine, 2020, para. 3). A casual game player is unable to accomplish the tasks of a professional competitor similarly to how professional athletes overwhelmingly outmatch casual athletes. The main difference between esports and traditional sports is physicality.

Do sports need to be physical? One definition claims that a sport is "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or a team competes against another or others for entertainment" (Davis, 2020, para. 5). Another defines it as "an athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess" (Steinberg, 2018, para. 2). Since esports do not fit the definition of a physical sport, the lack of physicality prevents some individuals from being able to see it as a sport. BMX competitor Sarah Walker articulates this common concern in an interview in which she states that "'The main difference for me is if I want to practice any Olympic discipline, if I want to try one of them, I actually have to go out and do it. I have to be active. Where gaming is right now, if I was inspired to be a gamer, my first step is to go home and sit on the couch'" (Roundhill Team, 2020, para. 4). While this claim is sensible, it overlooks the fact that there are a multitude of sports that have been formally recognized as sports which lack physicality as well. The Olympics, which is the largest international sporting event, has presented medals for "town planning, drawing, poetry and much more. They still award them for dressage and shooting" (Moosa, 2017, para. 4). Despite none of these sports being known for their physicality, they have been recognized as sports by the largest sports organization of the world. This fact proves that activities that do not require physical prowess can still be considered sports.

Many articles have discussed the viewership of esports when determining if it is a sport. Eric Johnson from Vox states that despite esports' massive popularity "they get little respect from non-players, and even sometimes from ESPN management" (Johnson, 2015). Johnson is right that esports gained their popularity in a category of their own, but that could also be said

about all sports that are popular today. Prior to baseball being considered American's pastime, it was merely a children's game; as baseball became more popular, the nation began to recognize it as a sport. Esports' international audience grew "from 204 million to 292 million between 2014 and 2016" and as it continues to grow the reason for it to be considered a sport grows as well (Young, 2016, para. 9).

The question of esports' legitimacy as sports evokes many emotions on both sides of the argument. One side desires to lift esports to the highest standard, while the other seeks to keep traditional sports from losing their high standard. I believe that esports deserve the high standards that come along with being considered a sport by virtue of the definition of a sport, citing how other popular sports went from a popular activity to a legitimate sport, and introducing the similarities between esports and sports. In order to make the general public more accepting of the esports community and to bring it the respect it deserves, beginning to consider esports a "real sport" is the most important step. As more people begin to learn of the merits of esports, a more positive outlook would gradually work its way into the public's opinion.

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