

# Leveling up the playing field: a new opportunity for gamers across Kansas

A new era is ushered in as KSHSAA sanctions high school Esports

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Due to popular demand, the Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) has sanctioned Esports as an official high school sport. Previously, Kansas Esports teams had operated as a club, with no official end of season tournament, but that is no longer the case. Starting this season, Esports teams in Kansas who chose to participate will have the opportunity to compete for a state championship.

According to Assistant executive director of KSHSAA, Jeremy Holaday, the decision to officially sanction Esports came from the large interest in Esports as a club activity.

"I would say we probably had over fifty to seventy schools that were doing it as a club sport," Holaday said. "So from there, our athletic directors in the state, and principals put a proposal to KSHSAA."

For KSHSAA to officially sanction a high school sport, a proposal is required along with votes from KSHSAA member schools, with 24 participating schools needed for a sport to become sanctioned.

"So the proposal came last year... and after a vote of our member schools, it became our thirty-fifth activity," Holaday said.

For club sports such as lacrosse and previously Esports, the biggest factor in becoming KSHSAA sanctioned is the amount of interest it garners.

"The biggest thing is just interest from students, whether it's just one, two, three, or upwards of 30," Holaday said.

For many schools, funding and technology could be a major barrier in their

Esports. But KSHSAA has taken some action to make Esports more accessible for schools.

"Then probably the next challenge for schools is technology, to make sure they have PC's, Nintendo Switches, whatever that could be," Holaday said.

For schools who need help funding Esports programs, KSHSAA has partnered with PlayVS, who will help run state championship tournaments, along with providing schools with technology.

"Our partner is giving out Nintendo Switches for the first 100 schools that sign up... So that's our immediate aid in technology," Holaday said.

Many current KSHSAA sports such as soccer, tennis, or wrestling, host competitions for boys and girls in separate divisions. As Esports starts out, boys and girls will compete together, but that may change as Esports grows and evolves.

"We like that it's a mixed gender activity because I think it provides a little more development of the human mind and the way they interact... But never say never. It would be interesting to get there, if we felt like there was a need for it," Holaday said.

KSHSAA will be hosting competitions in 3 different games, but there will always be the opportunity for more games to be added, as long as they garner enough interest while adhering to KSHSAA rules.

"So right now, we will for sure be offering Super Smash Brothers Ultimate, then we will do Mario Kart and Rocket League... And then if for some reason we get enough people to sign up for Valorant or Madden, then we could add those this season," Holaday said.

Valorant or Madden are not the only games that have garnered interest outside of the 3 games that are going to be played at KSHSAA competitions. Many schools already play other games that could potentially become included in KSHSAA competitions.

"Then this summer, we may get enough support from our schools to say, 'Hey, we really need to add Marvel

Rivals because we have a lot of kids that want to do that.' Then we would probably do that, because if we're not going to offer games that kids are interested in then it's going to be a failed endeavor," Holaday said.

While some might be hoping for games such as Rainbow Six Siege or Call of Duty, their rating will hold them back from being included. Rainbow Six Siege and Call of Duty are rated M for Mature, which carries an age rating of 17+, while games such as Fortnite or Valorant are rated T for Teen, which allows for the possibility of them being included in the future.

"So we're comfortable with Valorant, because it's got a T rating. So anything T or better, however you want to coin the phrase, we will permit," Holaday said.

South Esports coach Christopher Swartley has also had thoughts on adding new games, particularly Fortnite.

"We play Fortnite, but it's not KSHSAA, so we can't compete against other schools with it. If we could, I mean, I think we'd have more people sign up and we'd have more people just be interested in the KSHSAA games," Swartley said.

Swartley believes a state championship will increase interest in Esports, but it has to start with the players.

"If the players are more interested because they're actually competing with stakes, then maybe more people will be interested when they hear through the grapevine this is occurring," Swartley said.

Swartley also believes that playing everything in a bigger room rather than in his room would bring a lot more attention to Esports.

"It would be sick, like, if we were in the gym or somewhere and we had a big projector screen. I had a big projector screen and people would come watch and not just try to cram in [my room]," Swartley said.

Because Esports is becoming such a big thing, the Olathe School District has decided to build an Esports Arena at the Olathe Innovation Campus.

"I'm stoked for it. I think my honest

opinion is it would be cooler if the schools had specific Esports rooms that were on a smaller scale," Swartley said. "[Because] how often are we going to want to drive there to play a game we could play here versus like if there was a different room, like right down the hall that just had TVs and all sorts of stuff. I think that would be better."

Esports meets will begin after Thanksgiving break, and different days will be different games.

"Wednesdays will be Mario Kart and Thursdays will be Super Smash Brothers and Rocket League and that starts at like 5 o'clock," Swartley said.

After the switches are installed, the Esports meets will be played in Swartley's room, and everybody will hang out there.

"So, like, if we'll have four people on a team from Mario Kart, for example, they'll each be on one of the four switches we have," Swartley said. "So four slots for us and then four slots for like, oh like West, for example. And however they place determines what school wins."

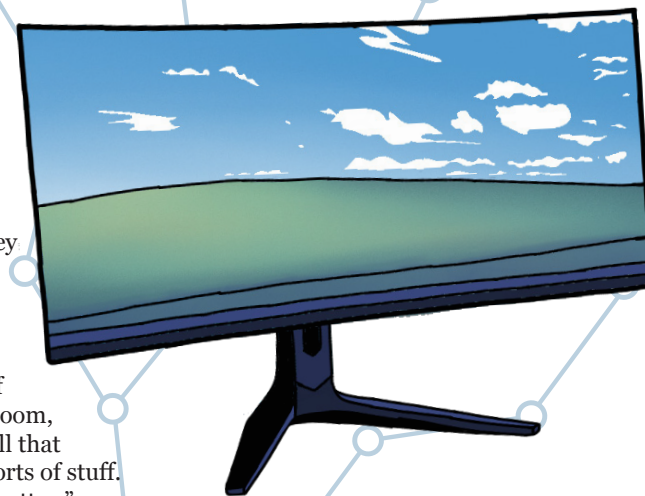
Member of the Esports team Manny McDowell is also hopeful for more games to be included, although there is one game that he specifically hopes is added.

"Probably, like Brawlhalla," McDowell said.

Brawlhalla is a multiplayer platform fighting game, which is similar to Super Smash Brothers Ultimate. McDowell also detailed the process of joining the Esports team, which he competes for as a Mario Kart Player.

"You just show up, in Swartley's classroom (room 310), and you just sign in and play," McDowell said.

KSHSAA does not restrict how many games one player can compete in, meaning somebody could compete in all three games if they liked, but there is a limit on the amount of competitions they can play in, just like other sports such as baseball or basketball.



## CONSOLE WARS

We asked Falcons what their favorite gaming system is. Here were the options:

A: PlayStation

B: Xbox

C: Nintendo Switch

D: PC/Computer

"I could have played multiple games if I didn't have other things going on," McDowell said.

Esports players do not go through as quite a rigorous warm up process as other sports might.

"I think we all just drive there 30 minutes before to get signed in and everything, and then we just play," McDowell said.

Esports meets officially start after Thanksgiving break, make sure to get out and support Manny and his fellow teammates as they chase KSHSAA's inaugural state championships.

"I think that we have a shot at [winning] it," McDowell said. E

## RESULTS

