# Mind, Skill, and Strategy: The Push for Global Sport Recognition

Esports integration into the intercollegiate sport model; a natural evolution aligning with university athletics.

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# I. Introduction

Esports integration into the intercollegiate sport model represents a natural evolution that aligns with traditional justifications for non-profit status in university athletics. Like conventional sports programs, esports can demonstrate clear educational and developmental benefits that support universities' broader academic missions. These programs develop critical thinking, strategic planning, and decision-making skills while fostering teamwork, communication, and leadership abilities. Importantly, esports offers a unique advantage through its direct connection to STEM education, providing practical experience in technology, computer science, and digital literacy that align closely with academic programs. The natural integration with academic programs in computer science and game design creates additional educational synergies that support non-profit status justification.

Importantly, esports inclusion in the university athletic department ecosystem actually presents several unique advantages that strengthen its alignment with educational missions. These include lower physical injury risks compared to traditional sports, greater accessibility for a diverse student population, and the potential for direct connections to technology-focused career paths and the chance to go pro in something other than sport.

Further, the integration of esports into existing athletic structures follows familiar patterns that help justify its inclusion in the non-profit model. Programs can implement academic eligibility requirements, structured practice schedules, competitive seasons, and comprehensive student support services. This framework allows esports to mirror the established operational models of traditional athletics while maintaining focus on educational outcomes. Additionally, scholarship opportunities and coaching structures parallel those found in conventional sports, further legitimizing esports' place within collegiate athletics.

Public benefit arguments for esports closely align with those used to justify traditional athletic programs' non-profit status. These include community engagement through events, tournaments, and competitions, economic development opportunities, and career pathway development in the rapidly growing gaming industry. Esports programs can also provide unique opportunities for a diverse student population, including greater accessibility for students with physical disabilities, while developing technology skills beneficial to society at large.

The financial model for collegiate esports can readily adapt to existing athletic department structures. Programs can reinvest revenue into development, provide scholarship support, maintain facilities and equipment, and support both competitive and recreational gaming

activities. This approach mirrors the traditional athletic model of cross-subsidization between revenue-generating and developmental programs, fitting seamlessly into established non-profit frameworks.

# II. The Justification of Traditional Sports in Higher Education

Understanding the justification of esports as a sport requires examining the historical

foundations of sports in US academic settings. The unique merger of sport and education in the United States provides a framework for analyzing how esports can advance the established mission of collegiate sports and fit within the classification of sport for those purposes. By examining the initial goals and justifications that stakeholders used to incorporate sports

## The Unique Merger of Sports and Education in the US Early 19th Century American colleges begin incorporating physical activities and sports as part of their educational mission, focusing on student health and character development. 1852 The Harvard-Yale regatta marks what many consider the first intercollegiate sporting event in America, setting the stage for organized collegiate athletics. Late 19th Century 3 Universities formally organize and regulate athletics, with American football becoming deeply embedded in campus culture. Sports are recognized as a way to build school spirit, attract students, and generate alumni support.



into academic institutions, we can better understand how esports naturally extends these educational objectives. This analysis begins with the fundamental rationale for including sports within the non-profit educational model, which continues to justify athletic programs' presence in academic settings today.

- The unique merger of sports and education in the United States has a distinctive historical development that sets it apart from other nations' approaches. In the early 19th century, American colleges began incorporating physical activities and sports as part of their educational mission, initially focusing on student health and character

development. This period saw the emergence of informal student-organized competitions, with rowing being among the first intercollegiate sports. The 1852 Harvard-Yale regatta marks what many consider the first intercollegiate sporting event in America.

- The late 19th century witnessed a crucial transformation as universities began to formally organize and regulate athletics. This period coincided with the emergence of American football, which became deeply embedded in campus culture. Universities recognized that sports could build school spirit, attract students, and generate alumni support.

- Unlike European nations, which developed separate club-based sports systems, American universities became the primary developer of athletic talent. This unique approach reflected American cultural values about education's role in character development and the belief that athletics could serve educational purposes. The system also aligned with the American ideal of combining sport and academic achievement, rather than forcing students to choose between the two. The unique American model of combining high-level sport opportunities with higher education remains distinct from international approaches. While other nations typically separate elite sports development from educational institutions, the American system continues to view sport as an integral part of the educational experience, all despite growing tensions between commercial success and educational values.

# The American Model of Collegiate Athletics

# **Unique Approach**

Unlike European nations with separate club-based sports systems, American universities became the primary developer of athletic talent, reflecting cultural values about education's role in character development.

# Integration of Sport and Education

The American system views sport as an integral part of the educational experience, combining high-level sport opportunities with higher education.

# **Ongoing Challenges**

Despite growing tensions between commercial success and educational values, the American model continues to justify athletic programs' presence in academic settings.

# III. Esports as an Academic and Athletic Endeavor

Breaking Down Sport Intercollegiate Non-Profit model

Athletic departments at US based universities maintain their non-profit status through a complex framework of legal, educational, and public benefit justifications. At the core of their argument is the integration of athletics within the broader educational mission of universities, where sports programs are positioned as co-curricular activities that enhance student development rather than standalone commercial enterprises. This educational connection serves as the foundational justification for their tax-exempt status under 501(c)(3) regulations. The benefits provided to student-athletes form a crucial component of this justification. Athletic

departments point to high graduation rates, educational opportunities through scholarships, comprehensive academic support services, leadership development, and career preparation programs. These tangible educational

# Justifying Non-Profit Status in Collegiate Athletics



Athletic departments maintain their non-profit status through a complex framework of legal, educational, and public benefit justifications. This model serves as the foundation for integrating esports into collegiate athletics.

outcomes help demonstrate that athletics serves the university's charitable and educational purposes beyond mere sports competition. Public benefit represents another key pillar in defending non-profit status. Athletic departments emphasize their role in community engagement, economic impact on local communities, and cultural contributions through public entertainment.

### Traditional Sport Deficits and Esports Filling Gaps

Traditional sport participation overwhelmingly favors able-bodied participants, creating barriers to educational opportunities based on physical attributes. In basketball, the adage "you can't teach height" illustrates how genetic characteristics often determine access to collegiate sporting opportunities and, by extension, educational pathways. While the NCAA emphasizes that approximately 99% of their student-athletes will go pro in something other than sports, this statistic masks an important limitation: many potential participants are excluded from these educational opportunities before reaching recruiting age due to physical limitations.

Esports presents an alternative pathway that reduces physical barriers to participation, better aligning with the NCAA's stated mission of using athletics as a mechanism for educational opportunity and career development beyond sports. This broader accessibility suggests that esports might better serve the fundamental purpose of collegiate athletics: providing educational opportunities through competitive activities. The definition of sport as "voluntary attempts to overcome unnecessary obstacles" in competition should not be constrained by physical requirements. Maintaining physicality as a primary criterion contradicts the rationale American institutions use to justify including elite sports within non-profit educational settings. If sport is defined primarily by physical ability and genetic advantages, it becomes difficult to defend its educational value and mission, as these limitations exclude significant portions of the potential student population from participating in and benefiting from these opportunities.

# **Esports: Filling Gaps in Traditional Sports**

#### **Broader Accessibility**

Esports reduces physical barriers to participation, aligning better with the NCAA's mission of using athletics as a mechanism for educational opportunity and career development beyond sports.

#### **Redefining Sport**

The definition of sport as "voluntary attempts to overcome unnecessary obstacles" in competition should not be constrained by physical requirements, allowing esports to serve the fundamental purpose of collegiate athletics.

#### **Educational Value**

Esports' broader accessibility suggests it might better serve the educational mission of collegiate athletics by providing opportunities to a wider range of students.

#### Risk mitigation and student welfare

The integration of esports into collegiate athletic departments presents a compelling alternative to traditional contact sports from a risk management and student welfare perspective. Unlike football, hockey, or other contact sports where traumatic brain injuries and long-term physical

consequences remain persistent concerns, esports dramatically reduces the risk of catastrophic injury while maintaining competitive intensity. This shift away from physical contact doesn't just protect students in the immediate term – it fundamentally reshapes the long-term health trajectory of student-athletes. Traditional athletic programs must constantly grapple with the ethical implications of exposing young adults to potential lifelong physical consequences, particularly in light of mounting evidence regarding CTE and other chronic conditions. Esports programs, by their nature, eliminate these concerns while still fostering the mental toughness and competitive spirit valued in traditional athletics.

The risk mitigation benefits extend beyond just injury prevention. Esports programs can pioneer new approaches to holistic student-athlete wellness that focus on sustainable competitive practices. Rather than managing physical recovery and injury rehabilitation, resources can be redirected toward developing comprehensive mental health support systems, performance psychology, and healthy gaming habits. This shift in focus allows athletic departments to develop cutting-edge approaches to stress management, work-life balance, and cognitive performance optimization – skills that translate directly to academic success and career readiness.

# Risk Mitigation and Student Welfare in Esports



Institutions also benefit from reduced insurance costs and liability exposure, allowing for more resources to be directed toward student development rather than risk management. The absence of physical contact in esports competition means programs can operate with lower medical staff requirements and reduced emergency response protocols, creating a more financially sustainable model for athletic departments while maintaining high standards of student care.

### **Esports Participation Benefits**

Esports participation has been linked to increased interest and confidence in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) fields and studies have shown that girls who engage in gaming and esports are more likely to explore technology-related careers, breaking

traditional gender barriers in these industries. Esports fosters problem solving skills, strategic thinking, and collaboration, all of which are critical competencies in STEM and STEAM fields.

# Esports Participation Benefits: STEM and Gender Equity

### **Increased STEM Interest**

Esports participation linked to greater interest and confidence in STEAM fields, especially for girls.

### **Career Pathways**

Esports naturally enhances skills needed for both academic and career success in technologyrelated fields.



### **Skill Development**

Fosters problem-solving, strategic thinking, and collaboration critical for STEM careers.

# Academic Performance

Students with access to gaming technology show improved academic performance, particularly female students in STEM subjects.

Adding esports to an athletic department's program offerings presents a powerful opportunity to enhance both competitive success and student achievement. Previous research demonstrates that students with access to gaming technology show improved academic performance, with particularly strong improvements among female students in STEM subjects (Bustamante-Barreto et al., 2024). This means esports isn't just another competitive program, but also a proven way to help close persistent gender gaps in crucial academic areas.

Unlike traditional sports, esports participation and opportunity naturally enhance skills that students need for both academic and career success. While physical sports develop important attributes such as broader physical literacy, esports adds another layer by developing technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and comfort with technology. Research shows these benefits are especially valuable for female students, who often have fewer opportunities to develop these skills through traditional channels (Corredor et al., 2021). When female students engage in structured gaming environments, it has been determined that they subsequently demonstrate

significant improvements in spatial perception and problem-solving skills that directly support success in mathematics and engineering (Feng & Spence, 2018).

The direct connection between esports and classroom learning makes it particularly valuable for athletic departments focused on student-athlete success. Gaming experiences have been shown to support learning of STEM topics by adapting to individual needs and increasing motivation (Jackson et al., 2011; Taub et al., 2018). For female students especially, gaming provides exposure to technology-based problem solving that research shows can increase interest in engineering and technical fields (Joiner et al., 2011).

From a program development standpoint, esports offer unique advantages in supporting both athletic and academic missions. Gaming environments foster collaborative learning while building technical competency (Shi et al., 2019). Studies demonstrate that even short sessions of gaming can improve spatial skills and problem-solving abilities (Cherney et al., 2014) which include capabilities that directly support success in STEM coursework. For athletic departments looking to maximize their impact on student success, the addition of an esports program would provide a platform that supports both competitive achievement and academic growth.

Overall, esports programs are not merely about adding another competitive program. Instead, the inclusion of esports within the larger athletic department ecosystem would demonstrate an institutional investment in opportunities that demonstrably improve student outcomes. By integrating esports, athletic departments can advance their competitive programs while actively supporting institutional goals for student success and gender equity in high-demand academic fields.

# IV. Addressing Concerns About Esports in Collegiate Athletics

The primary hesitation from athletic conferences regarding esports integration appears to stem from concerns over game title control rather than traditional arguments about physical exertion or sport classification. Athletic stakeholders often cite lack of direct control over championships and competition formats as a significant barrier, using the "non-sport" classification as a convenient proxy for addressing more complex partnership challenges with game developers and rights holders. However, this situation parallels existing relationships between collegiate athletics and traditional sports governing bodies. Athletic conferences and NCAA programs already operate within frameworks where external organizations maintain significant control over various aspects of competition. For example, soccer federations regulate coaching certifications and

standardize rules across institutions, while other sport governing bodies establish universal competition standards outside direct conference control. This precedent suggests that concerns about game title control, while valid, may not fundamentally differ from established models of

# Addressing Concerns About Esports in Collegiate Athletics

#### 1 Game Title Control

3 Economic Benefits

Concerns over lack of direct control over championships and competition formats parallel existing relationships between collegiate athletics and traditional sports governing bodies. 2 Health and Wellness

Many collegiate esports programs have implemented wellness initiatives including physical conditioning, mental health support, and nutritional education.



Esports offers financial and branding opportunities for universities through sponsorships, increased student engagement, and enhanced visibility in digital spaces.

cooperation between educational institutions and external sporting authorities.

# Health and Wellness Considerations

Critics argue that esports contributes to sedentary lifestyles and potential mental health issues. However, many collegiate esports programs have already implemented wellness initiatives, including:

- Physical Conditioning Programs: Strength training, flexibility exercises, and cardiovascular fitness are incorporated into training routines to mitigate health risks.
- Mental Health Support: Esports athletes work with psychologists and performance coaches to manage stress and prevent burnout, similar to traditional athletes.
- Nutritional Education: Proper diet and hydration strategies are emphasized to optimize cognitive function and endurance.

# Economic and Institutional Benefits

Embracing esports as part of collegiate athletics provides financial and branding opportunities for universities. Esports' rising popularity attracts sponsorships, increases student engagement,

and enhances university visibility in digital spaces. Additionally, esports connects directly with STEM fields, offering career pathways in technology, game design, broadcasting, and digital media—industries that are increasingly relevant to higher education's evolving landscape.

# V. The Future of Esports in Higher Education and Around the World

Aligning Esports with the Olympic Model

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has taken significant steps to integrate esports within the Olympic framework, recognizing its potential to engage younger audiences and align with the principles of fair competition. This mirrors the historical trajectory of traditional sports entering academia, reinforcing

# The Future of Esports in Higher Education

#### Establish Governance Models

Work with established esports leagues and publishers to develop regulatory frameworks that align with collegiate athletics.

#### Invest in Infrastructure

Build dedicated esports facilities and training programs to support student-athletes.

#### Promote Academic Integration

Incorporate esports into academic programs, offering courses in game analytics, digital media, and esports management.

#### Ensure Athlete Well-being

Develop holistic wellness programs that include mental health support, physical conditioning, and nutritional guidance.



esports' legitimacy within collegiate institutions.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

To successfully integrate esports into university athletic programs, the following steps should be considered:

- 1. Establish Governance Models: Work with established esports leagues and publishers to develop regulatory frameworks that align with collegiate athletics.
- 2. Invest in Infrastructure: Universities should build dedicated esports facilities and training programs to support student-athletes.

- 3. Promote Academic Integration: Esports should be incorporated into academic programs, offering courses in game analytics, digital media, and esports management.
- 4. Ensure Athlete Well-being: Develop holistic wellness programs that include mental health support, physical conditioning, and nutritional guidance.
- 5. Set parameters for game developers developing competitive games: There are game developers currently working to develop compliant, competitive, esport titles that hold both the impact and excitement of conventional esport titles, but omit the controversial features of traditional FPS titles which are not appropriate or acceptable to large audiences.

# VI. Global Recognition of Esports

# **Global Recognition of Esports**



### International Olympic Committee

The IOC has increasingly recognized esports, aligning it with Olympic values. The 2026 Olympic Esports Games will showcase competition in virtual sports.



# Governmental Classifications

66 countries have formally recognized esports as a sport, including the United States, India, South Korea, and China.



### Educational Institutions

Over 8,600 U.S. high schools and numerous colleges now offer esports programs. Military academies also recognize esports under the classification of sport. The IOC has increasingly recognized esports as a sport, aligning it with Olympic values of excellence, unity, and fair play. The 2026 Olympic Esports Games will showcase competition in virtual sports that reflect traditional Olympic values, fostering global participation and showcasing the skill and athleticism involved in esports.

### **Governmental Classifications**

The United States, India, South Korea, and China are among 66 countries<sup>1</sup> that have formally recognized esports as a sport. The U.S., among others, also grants esports athletes professional P-1A Athlete visas. The International Esports Federation (IESF), established in 2008 and headquartered in South Korea, has been actively working towards global recognition of esports. As of July 2024, the IESF comprises 146 member nations, indicating a widespread interest in the formal acknowledgment of esports worldwide.

Below is a table summarizing these key countries and the respective years of official recognition.

Educational and Military Institutions

- High Schools and Colleges: Over 8,600
  U.S. high schools and numerous colleges now offer esports programs.
- Military Academies: Esports is further recognized under classification of sport at both the United States Military Academy Westpoint and the U.S. Naval Academy, emphasizing its requirements for teamwork and strategic thinking.

Country	Year of Recognition
South Korea	2000
Russia	2001
China	2003
United States	2013
Germany	2018
France	2016
Canada	2018
United Kingdom	2019
Finland	2017
Italy	2014
Ukraine	2020
Philippines	2017

# **Global Recognition of Esports**

# VII. Debunking Myths About Esports: Physicality and Performance in Esports

### The Physical Demands of Esports

Esports is often criticized for lacking physical exertion, but competitive gaming requires fine motor coordination, rapid decision-making, and acute situational awareness. Research shows that high-stakes matches can elevate players' heart rates to 180 bpm, comparable to traditional athletes under competitive stress. Reaction speed, precision, and endurance are all crucial to performance, requiring players to maintain peak cognitive and physiological condition.

The Role of Physical Training in Esports

Professional esports athletes follow structured training regimens similar to traditional sports. Training involves:

- Cognitive Drills: Reaction-time exercises, strategic planning, and situational analysis.
- Physical Conditioning: Strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular training to improve endurance and prevent injuries.
- Nutritional Planning: Maintaining a diet that supports cognitive function, energy management, and recovery.
- Mental Conditioning: Stress management techniques to handle the pressures of competition.

These training routines help esports athletes sustain peak performance, reduce burnout, and enhance longevity in competitive gaming careers.

The Importance of Nutrition and Sleep in Esports

Like traditional athletes, esports players rely on proper nutrition and sleep for optimal performance.

• Nutrition: A well-balanced diet supports cognitive endurance and quick decision-making. Glucose is essential for brain function, while anti-inflammatory foods aid recovery from repetitive motions and prolonged sitting. • Sleep: Adequate rest is crucial for reaction speed, stress management, and sustained focus. Poor sleep can impair strategic thinking and reflexes, impacting performance in competition.

Cognitive and Physiological Demands

Esports requires intense cognitive engagement, leading to measurable physiological responses. Research highlights the following:

# Cognitive and Physiological Demands in Esports



- Cognitive Load and Brain Plasticity: Gaming sharpens working memory, multitasking, and decision-making skills.
- Biometric Indicators: Pupil dilation and heart rate variability (HRV) reflect stress and focus levels during gameplay.
- Physical Fitness Correlation: Even in seated sports, aerobic fitness enhances stress resilience and reduces long-term health risks.
- Injury Prevention: Programs focused on posture correction and periodic breaks mitigate risks associated with prolonged screen time and repetitive motions.

By addressing these areas, esports programs can ensure players' long-term health, reinforcing its viability as a sustainable and demanding sport.

### Competitive Integrity in Esports

To maintain fairness, esports adheres to strict regulations and anti-cheating measures. Organizations such as the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Esports Federation (IESF) enforce standards to ensure clean and ethical competition.

Esports represents the next evolution of competitive athletics in higher education. By embracing esports as a legitimate athletic endeavor, universities can expand access to competitive opportunities, reinforce their educational mission, and engage new generations of students in meaningful ways. The historical justification of traditional sports in academia—character development, institutional branding, and student engagement—applies equally to esports.

The time to universally recognize esports as a sport within collegiate athletics is now.

# VIII. Economic and Cultural Impact

The esports market's projected revenue growth to \$6.75 billion by 2030 reflects its economic significance. Sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and merchandise drive this growth, mirroring traditional sports revenue streams.

Market Growth



Events like the League of Legends World Championship attract viewership surpassing traditional sports events, exemplifying its cultural resonance

# Economic and Cultural Impact of Esports

**Cultural Significance** 

Esports transcends cultural barriers, fostering global unity. Events like the League of Legends World Championship and The International - Dota 2 Championships attract viewership surpassing traditional sports events, exemplifying its cultural resonance.

# IX. Model Adoption for Olympic Esports; A Case Study

The integration of esports into the Olympic Games marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of the Olympic movement. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has emphasized the need for a structured approach to ensure the successful adoption of esports while upholding the values of the Olympic Charter.

Below is an expanded exploration of the proposed framework:

### **Governance Models**

1. Independent Federation Model

- Description: This model establishes a standalone governing body exclusively for esports, ensuring dedicated oversight of its unique challenges and opportunities.
- Advantages:
  - Provides esports with autonomy to develop regulations and standards tailored to its ecosystem.
  - Fosters collaboration with game publishers, developers, and international esports organizations like the International Esports Federation (IESF).
  - $\circ$   $\;$  Enhances global coordination among esports stakeholders.
- Challenges:
  - Requires alignment with the Olympic values, which may differ from some industry practices.
  - Managing the rapidly evolving nature of esports genres and technology.
- 2. Hybrid Model
  - Description: This model integrates esports governance within the existing Olympic structure, while allowing esports to maintain its distinct identity.
  - Advantages:
    - Builds credibility for esports by associating it with the Olympic movement's history and prestige.

- Facilitates access to established Olympic resources, such as anti-doping measures and athlete care frameworks.
- Encourages cross-pollination of ideas between traditional and digital sports.
- Challenges:
  - Balancing traditional sports governance with the dynamic and fast-paced nature of esports.
  - Managing potential conflicts between game publishers and the IOC's regulatory expectations.

### Athlete Care Protocols

Esports athletes face unique physical, mental, and lifestyle challenges that demand tailored care strategies.

- 1. Mental Conditioning
  - Stress Management: The high cognitive load and intense competition in esports necessitate sports psychology interventions to

# Model Adoption for Olympic Esports

1 E	Establish independent federation structures.	or hybrid model integrating esports within existing Olympic
2	Athlete C Develop tail balanced lif	are Protocols ored strategies for mental conditioning, physical fitness, and astyle for esports athletes.
3		Game Selection Criteria Select games that align with Olympic values, promote ethical conduct, and ensure engagement and accessibility.

help players handle stress and maintain focus.

• Burnout Prevention: Structured training schedules, mental health support, and mandatory rest periods are essential to prevent early career burnout, a common issue in esports.

### 2. Physical Fitness

- Injury Prevention: Programs to address repetitive strain injuries, posture-related issues, and sedentary risks, such as deep vein thrombosis, are critical.
- Performance Enhancement: Incorporating fitness regimes that enhance endurance, hand-eye coordination, and reflexes supports peak performance.

### 3. Balanced Lifestyle

- Nutrition: Emphasizing diets that enhance cognitive function and sustain long hours of focus.
- Sleep Hygiene: Enforcing rest policies to counteract the negative impacts of irregular sleep patterns on performance and mental health.

## Game Selection Criteria

The IOC has outlined rigorous criteria for selecting esports titles to align with its values and engage global audiences.

### 1. Alignment with Olympic Values

- Inclusivity: Games must appeal to a diverse audience and promote gender equality, cultural representation, and accessibility.
- Fairness: Titles must ensure competitive integrity through robust anti-cheat mechanisms and adherence to ethical standards.

# 2. Ethical Conduct

- Non-Violence: Avoiding games that depict gratuitous violence or content inconsistent with the spirit of the Olympics.
- Transparency: Ensuring publishers and developers operate transparently, with clear rules and open participation pathways.

### 3. Engagement and Accessibility

- Spectator Experience: Games should be visually engaging and easy for a global audience to understand, similar to traditional Olympic sports.
- Technological Feasibility: Titles must accommodate varied technical infrastructures globally, ensuring equitable participation.

# IOC's Vision for Esports in the Olympics

The IOC believes that esports embodies the principles of excellence, fair play, and innovation, aligning closely with the Olympic mission. Its inclusion is seen as a strategic move for the future:

- Reaching Younger Audiences: Esports resonates with digital-native demographics (18–34 years old), addressing the IOC's goal of increasing relevance among youth.
- Fostering Global Unity: With a worldwide player base and viewership, esports can bridge cultural divides, creating a shared space for competition and celebration.

• Promoting Innovation: Integrating esports demonstrates the IOC's commitment to evolving with societal and technological trends.

# Conclusion

The IOC's transformative decision to adopt esports within the Olympic framework broadens its appeal to younger generations who are growing up gaming. Among Gen Z (born 1997-2012), for example, more than 85% are gamers. By implementing robust governance models, athlete care protocols, and thoughtful game selection criteria, the IOC has provided global leadership for a sustainable, ethical, and inclusive esports ecosystem that enriches the Olympic movement and ensures its relevance for generations to come. This model can be further refined and adapted for other federations, governments, their militaries and military academies, universities, and high schools.

Esports is the evolution of sport, blending all the mental and physical prowess of traditional sport with modern technology. Its recognition as a sport is not merely a validation of its legitimacy but a reflection of evolving definitions of athleticism. By embracing esports, the global sports community can celebrate human excellence in its diverse forms, bridging generational and cultural divides. The time to universally recognize esports as a sport is now.

# Authors



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