

COLLEGIATE ESPORTS: WEDNESDAY, October 24, 2018 1PM ET

<http://higheredlive.com/collegiate-esports/>

Tony Doody: **I'd like to welcome and thank our guests and ask you to each start off by describing your current role, and I'm curious how you might describe esports in 45 seconds or less. Let's start with you AJ.**

AJ Dimick: Hi, my name is AJ Dimick. I'm the Director of Esports at the University of Utah. We are the first power five school in the country to elevate esports to a varsity scholarship sport, but we are not the only now. The good folks at Ohio State have elevated esports on their campus. To me, what esports is is very simple. Esports is a grassroots student movement across the country to raise the profile of their passion's esports and be so active and visible on their campuses that they are making it by themselves with now some institutional help from their administrations, the next great college set of sports.

Tony Doody: **Love it. All right, Brandon let's hear from you.**

Brandon Smith: I'm Brandon Smith. I work here at the Ohio State University. I've been a proud member of our student life team here at Ohio State for at least the last five years. For the last six months, I have been serving as the Director of Esports here as well as some other duties I have for student life. So as we talk about esports, usually we start with competitive online person against person or team against team video game competition. But as AJ said, as we bring it to the collegiate level it takes on a slightly different flavor. It's an entrée into different career opportunities. It's an entrée into leadership and teamwork, and it's something that we can also build off of as we work across Ohio State at least. From what Deb will lead into, there's a lot more we can do from an academic perspective and a research perspective. So esports, you're playing against other people in a competitive video game and we're gonna take it to the next level here at the college.

Tony Doody: **Awesome. All right, Deb let's hear the faculty academic perspective here.**

Deb Grzybowski: Right. I'm Deb Grzybowski. I'm faculty in the College of Engineering, Department of Engineering Education at Ohio State University. I got into this, involved with esports, because I've been advisor for the student organization called Esports Initiative since 2011. I'm exposed to it from a different perspective actually initially, and that really has to do with how AJ described it as grassroots, growing. This is what students are really interested in, and it is usually competitive, sometimes just for fun online gaming. I think what I'm really excited about is my role as Co-Director of the undergraduate major in Game Studies or Game Studies and Esports is that now we'll be able to allow these students who are passionate about gaming to also major in some areas surrounding gaming and turn that into a career.

Tony Doody: **All right, Tyler.**

Tyler Schrod: Hey. I'm Tyler Schrod. I'm the CEO and founder of the Electronic Gaming Federation. Our role in the esports world is essentially professionalizing the amateur/scholastic portion of the esports industry. We run collegiate leagues for some of the biggest universities in the country including Ohio State. We also run a high school component of that where we work with states like Virginia, Connecticut, Alaska, now Tennessee, Texas, and New York and a bunch of others, where we work with schools to help them develop programs. Provide the league and the governing structure that those teams compete in, then do all the broadcasts and everything else including in making sure that people have the best possible experience and that people coming in from the outside have an opportunity to explore what esports is sometimes for the very first time.

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When we pitch esports we're always looking at esports sort of as a platform, so kind of a culmination of everything that everybody else had mentioned where we think about esports as the opportunity to provide a path to a professional career either as a player or as someone working in the industry. Even more so than that, a great motivating and beautiful uniting tool for people that play video games to look at other things like health and wellness, general social opportunities, and a bunch of really other awesome things that I don't know too many other activities that really bring together people like that.

Tony Doody: Love it. So Brandon, why should colleges in particular pay attention to and invest in organizing esports? What's the institutional benefit?

Brandon Smith: Well, I mean we know if you look at your student organizations in every university, you'll find pockets. There are probably more students than you know that are actually gaming. They're in their residence halls, they're in their apartments. They're coming together and dragging their rigs across campus to the student union so they can have a LAN (local area network) party on a Saturday all day long. So we know they're gaming already. What we really hope to provide is we've talked with our students and we've heard them say, "But I want to wear the school colors. I want to represent the university. I'm really good at this and I'd like to do this on behalf of my university." So from a competitive perspective, they want to go out and represent the Ohio State University or University of Utah and say that I'm part of this university as well. But we also take that to another level of this is a way for us to reach students that we may not already be seeing except for in the classroom.

Brandon Smith: We want them engaged in other aspects of their university life, and if they leave the classroom, go do their homework, and the next time we see them is the next day at class but not involved in student organizations or not connecting with other students on campus, that's a missed opportunity for us. So we see an opportunity for more of the casual and social gaming as a chance to bring them in, have them meet other students, and then they can be exposed to other opportunities across the university. So at Ohio State we've chosen to capitalize on this now because we're at the right timings. The question for every university might be answered a little bit differently.

Brandon Smith: As Deb will represent, we're launching an academic program that's interdisciplinary. We have research projects that are moving along that are gonna be connected to the academic side as well as the student engagement side, so that's why we've chosen to invest at this time, is it's the right time. Our students are watching it. They're competing in it. It's something that they're interested in even more so than some other aspects of watching television, and it's a way for us to meet them where they are.

Tony Doody: So Tyler, I've really, I've talked to other professionals, other colleagues around the country and locally here at University of Delaware. I've found it challenging to describe how big and mainstream esports has become. Can you share some stats or numbers to provide some context for this?

Tyler Schrodt: Yeah, well I mean the professional scene is kind of what made everything that we do possible. If you think back to when I first started competing back in 2001 when Counter Strike was sort of the prominent thing, it was really just people that loved playing video games but weren't quite aware of what was out there in terms of the broader community. When you fast forward to the introduction of Twitch, that's one of the biggest catalysts that made everything else possible because now it was really easy for people to watch esports. Then all of a sudden there was this massive amount of people. Now I think it's just over 275 million people a year watch esports on Twitch.

Tyler Schrodt: It's kind of enabled a lot more mainstream acceptance and starting to see professional investment. There was [inaudible 00:08:56] Drake invested in 100 Thieves, so there's all these people that are now investing in teams because there's been an effort at the professional level to formalize things. Pretty similarly to how you see in traditional sports where now there's franchises, there's professional leagues. People are making six figures or sometimes significantly more than that as players, and really starting to take on a lot of the same traits that you find in traditional sports.

With thinking about esports on campus, both at the high school and college level, when we do our national surveys we tend to see that gamers are super diverse. Between 65 and 75% of students self-identify as gamers. About 30% of that population want to play competitively. A similar number of those students are looking to get involved with the esports industry in some capacity as a professional. So all these sorts of things have created this really cool moment in history where now we're starting to be able to fill out some of those question mark pieces.

I guess just some other stats, The International, which is the biggest esports tournament in the world in terms of prize money, put up about 25 million dollars for their last International this August. So things are getting to a scale where they're not quite the level of professional sports in terms of salaries and things like that, but it's getting pretty close. It's been growing significantly year over year and doesn't seem like that's gonna stop anytime soon.

Tony Doody: **Wow. And we don't need to get to this now, but I would imagine it would be helpful if we could share with other professionals some of those statistics so that they can help advocate and pitch on their campuses. As you're all talking I'm thinking, "Gosh, I need to create a glossary based on what you've said." Brandon you brought up LAN, that's local area network competition, right?**

Brandon Smith: Yeah, sorry. Yes.

Tony Doody: **And then Tyler you brought up Twitch. Can you describe Twitch for someone who has no idea what that means?**

Tyler Schrod: Yeah. Twitch is basically YouTube specifically for live streaming. It's generally gamers, overwhelmingly gamers, although now you'll find Thursday Night Football on Twitch and the NBA I think is coming to Twitch in the winter. It's basically the largest live streaming platform in the world, except for maybe a couple out in China. It's been the enabling platform for a lot of what we do now.

Tony Doody: **All right AJ. So University of Utah has really taken an academic approach to this. Can you talk about some of the skills and learning competencies that you found students gain from participating in competitive gaming?**

AJ Dimick: Yeah. We do view it both as a mainstream sport as it would be housed in athletics, but at the University of Utah it is housed in an academic unit in the Entertainment Arts Engineering program. But yeah. This is an important question to me because of the view on gaming and esports to people that are not conversant in gaming and esports, to the uninitiated, because we're constantly, what we're really talking about, what we're really dealing with is the meme of who gamers are and what they do and what their activity level is.

AJ Dimick: People have the meme that they're the kid that has been in his grandmother's basement for three days, hasn't seen the light of day, and doesn't talk to people, right? I mean so people view it as maybe a counterproductive activity. When what it really is and what people don't understand who aren't engaged in esports is all of the positive outcomes and learning outcomes that you have by participating in a mainstream sport or present in esports.

That is the case so at the University of Utah. They're a highly competitive team. They practice for 20 hours a week. They have coaches, sports psychologists, nutritionists, fitness experts. They have film study where they watch themselves and they watch their opponent. They scout themselves. They recruit. And so you learn dependency on your teammates, communication, perseverance. You learn how to lose well. It's so simple that to explain to people that when you get into this, it's so easy to just transpose all the same positive outcomes for experiencing mainstream sports and do it here, because while the vernacular is different and it doesn't look the same, what they're experiencing and how they relate to it and how they're part of a community is really the same as being on a football team or basketball team or a baseball team.

Tony Doody: **So you liken it to athletics and like a few other colleges, University of Utah is providing scholarships for gamers. I'm just curious, do you get a lot of applications? How do you assess the gamers' ability to award a scholarship?**

AJ Dimick: Well number one, I like to say while this does have a lot of parallels to mainstream sports, the other thing people misperceive about esports is how good of students they are and how they are the exactly type of students that you want to have on your campus. When we announced that we had a team and we started circulating literature to people, because we're in the early stages of esports recruiting, it's hard right now, right? And so you need those students and those very good gamers to find you in addition to finding them. When we started circulating that literature, had over 600 respondents within a couple of weeks.

Over 70% of them were students that were interested in pursuing STEM majors. Those are the types of students this appeals to on your campus and it tends to gravitate to those things. Over 1/3 of them were international students looking to come to school at the University of Utah. This is a more broad audience and it tends to be over on those STEM sides, but as far as what we look for, this is high competition in addition to all the positive outcomes we want on campus and for the kids.

So we're looking for kids that want to be students first, want to come here to get their degree and not just participate in esports. They need to be serious about their life as a student. But after that, just like a football and a basketball team, we're trying to recruit and find the best kids that we can possibly find to field the most competitive teams that we possibly can. It's a fun time in college esports.

Tony Doody: **Debra, I'm hoping you can take us through the why and how Ohio State created and academic major around esports. From talking to some of my faculty colleagues here at University of Delaware, I understand that creating a new major, particularly across disciplines, is no easy feat. So talk us through how this came about and how a school or faculty might have these conversations at their institution.**

Deb Grzybowski: Right. That's a great question. Actually the initial interest in creating an undergraduate major did start in athletics. There was a, one of the athletic employees was out in Vegas and was with his son. He went to one of the big esports finals competition. I don't remember which game it was out there at the time, and was just so impressed with how many people were there in person. Then realized, "Wow, this isn't the entire audience. There's a whole online audience too. Look at the enthusiasm and everything going on." So he brought that excitement back to Ohio State and started talking it up like, "Why don't we look into this? Why don't we do something more with it?" And so their advancement people were given permission to start looking around campus and

see what's happening in research, what's happening in academics to support this, what's happening in student life.

Deb Grzybowski:

They came across me because I am advisor for the student org esports initiative. They brought together other people on campus who were just in little pockets here and there doing pieces with game design or game development, different aspects, doing research on different things. They were able to bring us all together into a room. It turns out that we are from five different colleges. We have arts and sciences, the Fisher College of Business, of course College of Engineering, College of Education and Human Ecology, and the College of Medicine. So yes, we have seats at the table for faculty from all five of those colleges and at times it is like herding cats trying to get us all together to get everybody's input into it. But actually they've been really great. We have a big team.

I'm co-director with Allen Price who's faculty out of ACAD. Both of us have been actively leading this group of faculty from all of the colleges to create our ... We started actually with interviews from companies, and also talking to students about what their needs and interests are. We found out from industry that Ohio State was not putting out students that have all the skillset that they need for this industry. That's kind of where we started. From there, we all brainstormed for a day about what do we want our students to look like, what skillset should they have when they graduate with an undergraduate major in game design and esports. I have to say up front that please don't think this means that we are teaching students to play games. No. It's everything surrounding it from the academic side.

It's production of events. It's the streaming. It's the broadcasting or shout casting of the events. It's the business side of things. It is also, there's all the data analytics and all that that goes with it, the streaming. It's the game design, the creation of games. It's the coaching. It's the rehab. It's everything, nutrition for the athletes. So it's a really comprehensive major. We've come up with eight goals and we're moving forward. We're hoping to have things pretty close for ... I cringe when I say this, but if all the stars align, we might have pieces in place for the fall of 2019.

Tony Doody:

I have to imagine that will be, and probably is for Utah, a great recruitment tool. I'm guessing your admissions and enrollment folks will be really happy at the announcement that you've made. Who is at the table at the most senior levels? Who is present at the table having these conversations around esports?

Brandon Smith:

The other thing that, the part of the development of the curriculum and the program that Deb mentioned and we've been fortunate with is that we've had interests from some senior levels here at Ohio State University. Our provost is leading a group of university leaders to make sure that because we're working through three pillars at the same time through academics, through student

engagement, and also through research, that we have leadership at the highest levels all in sync with each other to make sure that the rest of us can keep in pace.

Brandon Smith: We want the student engagement side to benefit from what's happening with the new major development. We want the academic program to benefit from what's happening in research. So that's one of the things that's really helped enable all of us to move forward. We're doing it all at the same time. Again, there are programs that have done lots of this already. Like we talked with AJ, he's got a very successful program at Utah. Similarly with some other large schools with the student engagement and the competition side. There's other programs that have academic majors in game design.

Ours, we know we're late to the game, but we're also, we're pretty large and we like the fact that we're developing all these new things together at the same time. We still have a lot of questions to answer.

Tony Doody: So you say you're late to the game. Do we have an idea of how many institutions are actively engaged at this level?

AJ Dimick: Well I'll take this a little bit. I mean, so the University of Utah, we have a game design program. When we engaged in it 10 years ago, we're in year 11, we have 600 undergraduate students getting a Bachelor's of Science in games and 130 grad students. There were three, four, five, or six. Now there's literally hundreds, including where Tyler's from, RIT who has also a huge academic program invested in game design and esports out there. So yeah. It's robust, but as all things, when Ohio State jumps in, it's a game changer.

Tony Doody: I'm gonna direct this next question to you AJ and shift the conversation to the competition theme for a moment. I understand having gone to a recent conference on esports that there are lots of opinions and philosophies around organizing intra and inter-collegiate competitions. Some people think publishers should organize. Others believe commissions or external companies should put it together. Still more think that schools should wind up organizing amongst themselves. Can you briefly go through the pros and cons to each approach?

AJ Dimick: So I think to give context to this question, the most important thing to understand is just as I have in previous questions made parallels on this between mainstream sports and how it exists there. The perhaps most nuanced thing you can understand about esports is while nobody owns football and nobody owns basketball, for you to engage and participate in this space, you are using the intellectual property of a game publisher and you have to collaborate and cooperate and have relationships with them to be active in this space. That offers a complexity to this that perhaps other sports don't have. So yeah.

All of the really large current things in college esports are very entrenched in publishers. There are positive outcomes and negative outcomes. One, they have a direct line to those communities on college campuses and they interact with them directly. But as college esports continues to grow in scope and its viability as a self-sustaining sport continues to grow, that is going to become less and less and less the case. To me, the colleges have to jump in. We do have to self-organize this to some point with our students. It can't be a usurping their role on our campuses and taking the things that they do very well and don't need old people to help them with, but we have to play an active role in this and self-govern this as it continues to grow.

AJ Dimick: Because one, we have to be able to support our students and have to be able to pay for our students and be able to help our students identify with the campus and support them. But number two, there are agendas on every college campus where we are the best ones equipped to understand what supporting our students need to be. We have to have a role so we don't continue to get these one size fits all solutions to everything across the boundary of college esports where the publishers and third party entities have to serve 100s of organizations. We have to jump in and self-organize this and help our kids and help them grow this.

Tony Doody: Great answer. Anyone else want to jump in on that?

Brandon Smith: I'll add a little bit there because we do, we ask ourselves the same questions. AJ teed it off just right. I would add to what AJ mentioned is that esports programs even today, even at schools the size of Utah or the Ohio State University are extremely small. Our staff are a part of an FTE or in growing. So as we've talked with some of the game publishers, we can't afford to sit here and manage, "Here's our academic calendar for this game and here's our academic calendar for this game. Here's our code of conduct and here's how we're doing academic standards." For us to try to maintain that with different leagues through different efforts with every single game title, we just can't manage it at this point from the size of what our personnel will be.

Brandon Smith: We need to focus our efforts on supporting the students, helping them figure out which games make the most sense, how should we organize the teams. They're the closest to the ground on how we're going to compete and practice and win, and so we want to spend our time providing the supporting structure, not dealing with relationships ... I mean the publishers are going to make money. They need to maintain their intellectual property. Nobody wants to take that away from them, but they also are asking for our help in how do we make this game more inclusive, how do we make this environment better, how do we make sure there's greater inclusion of people with different ethnicities and genders actually participating?

Brandon Smith: The best place you can do that is at a university or at the high school level where we're already trying to raise good citizens and we can add to that the

aspects of collegiate esports. We do need to organize a bit differently. We do need to listen to the publishers and work with them and say, "If you want your game to be relevant for the next 10 to 20 years, here's how we can help. Here's how we can make sure that people can move forward and rely upon your game and you can introduce new features that keep people excited. But at the same time, we need to know what the schedule's gonna look like for the next semester because our students need to be able to practice and compete and not have to worry about missing a final because they're not gonna do that."

Tyler Schrodt:

I'll say as the third party league that is working on a lot of these challenges, one of the things that we spend most of our time on is how you develop [inaudible 00:27:11] structure to make sure that everybody's able to do what they're really good at without having to worry about how it all comes together, what the glue looks like. The deeper you dive into it, the more unique expertise you need on a variety of ways. For us we were always looking at how does the governance work, how does the economic model of that work to make sure that these programs are sustainable over time. How are we dealing with the fact that games change over a course of years. The games that were played in 2001 are not the same as what are played today. That will probably be the case going into the future. So when we sought out to build the leagues that we have for our universities, we first started with the fact that our number one mission is making sure that everything is done in the interest of the students in our institutions, that it's membership driven.

Our job is to work for those universities, not to pursue our own agenda. Then to go to work building this infrastructure that allowed the different pieces around competition, education, social impact, and all those things were able to come into their own fruition, whatever that ended up looking like over time whether it's something that was consistent and stable and able to produce those, and to now all of our biggest universities are really focused on, "Here's all the things that need to be included in this. Here's how we want to support you to make sure that you can do this to the best extent of what you want to do for students and then be able to follow through on it." This is gonna be around for ... Our personal goal is the next century or so and certainly be up there with the same type of age that you see now in traditional sports institutions.

So I think that what you'll see over the next year, the next two years, the next three years or so is a lot of consolidation and a lot of changes in those perspectives because you'll certainly see a lot of people taking a lot of different approaches. In the end it just ends up being what ends up actually delivering on all those promises.

Tony Doody:

So Tyler, can you go through some of the pros and cons that you have seen for organizing either under athletics, student affairs, recreation, academic affairs, or maybe some area I've not identified?

Tyler Schrod:

Yeah. For us, whenever we're working with campuses we usually follow the Ohio State model. It in our opinion is the most comprehensive and the best approach to dealing with everything that needs to be dealt with right now without creating more headaches for people than is necessary. As with most of the programs you'll see at a higher levels are organized either under student life or some sort of educational department. That has a bunch of benefits in the sense that they're a lot more flexible in terms of the opportunities that are available to students. They tend to be very student focused, which is obviously as I just mentioned, the first and foremost thing that we're all going for.

It gives some unique perspectives as to how to build these programs in a way that hopefully doesn't end up creating the same sort of tension as exists between the academic and athletic side in the traditional sports world. That's something that we're obviously trying to keep aligned and together going into the future. There are very few universities that have it under athletics. Sometimes it's just because they're a very small university where all their departments are sort of one department, and so it just makes sense to allow people that are pretty used to working with an intercollegiate governing body or the commercialization aspects.

Normally when you're seeing programs developing and following Ohio State's lead is when these programs are led, the goal for us is to eventually get them to a point where they're big enough in terms of economic returns, student engagement, and otherwise if they're their own departments. But we always have someone from athletics around the table to offer their expertise because from our perspective, there are many athletic directors that have been around in this industry much longer in traditional sports than I have been on this Earth, so we don't pretend to be experts beyond what they do.

We always try to bring them in to show us how that works. But putting a program there creates a bunch of unique tension points, especially around things like the topic of amateurism because in esports students are already on Twitch or YouTube, or they've probably competed in tournaments where they've won money. That becomes a different challenge and why it's really great to have it elsewhere on campus, but those perspectives become really helpful. So when we're building these programs for up and coming universities and universities who will announce over the next couple of months, it's usually driven by somebody from athletics, somebody from the provost office, somebody from the president's office, and somebody from student life.

It gives that really wholistic approach to it. Then putting it under either a student affairs, student life, rec sports, or an academic department allows the program to flourish on campus under its own power.

AJ Dimick:

You know, I'd love to jump on this a little bit because to me this is ... On college campuses everywhere there are virtually no colleges in the country that are engaged in esports that are sitting down having a conversation going, "We are

gonna do esports. Where does it belong on college campuses? Let's figure out." That really is not the case. If you want to know who is housing college esports in your college campus, it's a bunch of kids that are begging for it to happen. It's that grassroots student movement getting doors slammed in their face everywhere on college campuses. So if you want to know where it's housed, it has nothing to do with is that you on campus, the best suited on campus to house it.

AJ Dimick:

It's who's willing to and simply who is willing to take it on and who is willing to open their doors. So it's an academic unit some place because they were the ones who said yes. In some small colleges it is athletics because one, it's for small college and what they're discovering is it's a hell of a retention strategy for student engagement and to get students on their campus. That's why the first schools jumping in tend to be division II, division III, and high schools of that ilk. Then it's athletics in some other places because they in fact did say yes. If you want to know, there is athletic departments obstinate that they are not believers yet. They don't think this is a thing. So it is not necessarily that their skill sets aren't suited to have it or to ... I for one believe it is dead center belongs in athletics, but the reason why they don't do it is because they haven't bought in yet.

They're starting now. But on every college campus there are completely ill suited units on their college campuses who are doing esports because they're willing to take it on and do the work and have people in large part donate hundreds of hours of time to do things that aren't their job to help get it done. In college esports where the institution's supporting it, that is largely the model of which slave labor person is going to donate all their time to help students get this done. That's what I mean, is schools need to jump in, allocate actual resources in the form of people who are paid to do this actually do this thing, to help support these kids.

Brandon Smith:

Yeah we've had a ... Since our announcement which was just a few weeks ago, and we still have a lot to build, there have been a lot of those questions from advisors. It's been the advisors or people who manage student unions or other things like how do we get started and where do we house it and how did you get going? I think really it's a mixture of both. My response has always been every university's solution is going to be a little bit different. I think here at our university we saw it as a much easier play because we have people who know facilities, we work with our student engagement, we have a technology support team in student life.

For us, that equation worked out very, very easily and very quickly for the student engagement aspect, but again, there could be a champion. There could be an advisor that sits somewhere in an engineering department and that's where it makes sense and they get traction and they get play and that's where they're gonna house it. So I think if we look at just org charts from the top down we can make some recommendations or have some ideas about what was

successful, but every university is gonna have a different approach, different levels of buy in from leadership levels. Someone at the top level has to buy in in order to make this happen. There really is no cut and dry here's how it's gonna work for this university or this college.

Deb Grzybowski: That's right. If I can add also. Like Brandon said, if we did not have the support of Ohio State, the provost, and the president and so on this wouldn't be happening here on campus right now, right? We're very lucky to have Brandon to help organize so many things for us, and other people that are behind the scenes working with our space, developing our arena, and so on. So yeah. It's been a big group effort.

Tony Doody: Fantastic. I want to shift again to speak to the potential shadow side of competitive gaming. There has been criticism that esports encourages sedentary lifestyle, promote violence, can serve as a platform for bullying and sexism. I imagine anyone trying to advocate or bring this up the ranks to senior leadership is likely gonna have to speak to these issues. Any thoughts on how we can best respond?

Tyler Schrod: Yeah, we get that question a lot, primarily from high school because I think college has gotten for the most part, the folks that we get there is an understanding that if you can embrace something that engages students really heavily that you can work through those challenges. At the high school level it's mostly parents that have those concerns more than anyone. There's a combination of studies and other facts that you can point to around different topics. At the end of the day, this is one of the strongest engagement tools for this particular generation. As I mentioned before, we think about it as a platform.

The students that you're seeing participating in this are not just the stereotypical gamers. They're people that are on the football team. There are people that are doing all sorts of different activities and really high achievement. What we've been working towards in Ohio State, Utah, and all those other schools that are taking this seriously are now looking at it, "Okay, now that we've got students' attention, how do we continue to emphasize the social component of that?" Because these are team based games for the most part. You're seeing those same benefits as AJ mentioned before.

How can we tie those in with the physical trainers that are available on campus and really focus on the health and wellness component of it? Because performance is not just limited to how long you play a video game, it's what are you doing to practice good habits to be in good health and to all those different pieces. Even looking at the psychological component of that, that's why mental health is such a big thing for us at the league level and why there's all these different components to it. While there's definitely a number of stigmas that we're always working against whether you're talking about gender equity or any other number of topics that we can spend an entire hour or significantly more

on their own, esports has that beauty of everybody being so bought into the idea because it's such a powerful tool.

Tyler Schrodt: You can start to shape those different elements of that and that's what we're seeing on every campus starting at the high school level. It's still in its early days. There's a lot of things that actually have to be built out in the way that we want to get to where we want to be, but it's the counter to ... In and of itself is the counter to that argument and what it does for students.

Deb Grzybowski: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and if I may add to that. From the perspective of the academic side and the curriculum that we're developing, we do realize that potentially there's an issue with the gender equity and race equity and bullying or whatever you want to call it. We actually, like I said, we have eight goals for our program. One of them is focused specifically. It is diversity equity. That's totally what we're building in the curriculum. We want to name it up front and call it out and shine the light on it. Hopefully we will end up. It is a culture, and so that's also part of our thing is the teamwork and the culture that we want to build, the professionalism, and have students understand that if we want to be recognized as a professional sport, then you better behave professionally. That's really an important part that we're looking at Ohio State.

AJ Dimick: One of the things that I think I'd like to highlight on this is that it's how you frame that conversation of are people saying that those issues exist with sexism and how esports and gaming in general can be a toxic environment so we should steer around it. Well it's going to exist anyway. It's going to exist with your students anyway in massive numbers. Just like many societal issues throughout history, it is the role of academia and higher education to not steer around those things and ignore them because they exist, but to steer right into it and do research on, differentiate between fact and fiction and some of the things that people say about gaming that may or may not be entirely accurate. But also to affect change. There is a lot of valid criticism that can be lobbied at the gaming industry and esports pertaining to its treatment of women, to its treatment of violence, to its portrayal of women that is in fact valid concern.

AJ Dimick: We have to be sensitive to the people that bring those issues up, but also, it's my view that as somebody in higher ed, it's our role to affect change in that area. It's one of the things we're trying to do at Utah and in fact one of the things, because we're invested in game development so much, one of the things that we've observed is that game development is almost 90% male as opposed to female despite the fact that half the consuming audience is female. Our classes reflected that 10 years ago in the fact that in our capstone class of 45 students, there'd be three or four women there it's been that very high priority to us to try to affect that change, get more women involved, because of course there's consequences of the gaming industry because there's so little female engagement on the development side. Now it's over 1/3 female.

AJ Dimick: Those are the types of things that colleges can do, and yes, absolutely. Some of the criticism that you can lob at games is true. We have to help. We have to jump in. Rather than avoiding it and steering around it because those things exist, we have to steer into it because those things against.

Tyler Schrod: We kind of looked at it in the same way that everybody is looking at computer science now, right, and taking really active steps to not just create a better systemic environment, but also to highlight the women that are already there if we're talking about gender equity, or minorities, or any other component of that, to the point where we find that there are a lot of women, for example, in leadership positions. Or sometimes the games that are offered are just not the games that are interested in certain demographics, and so what we try to do is highlight those different elements of it and show there are these super badass women that are already doing this and that it's not an environment. That we're building the environment to make sure that it doesn't fulfill those stereotypes or preconceptions that people might come into and think that it's gonna be super toxic.

It's something that we're really excited about being able to start at the high school level, because by enforcing a really strict code of conduct, working with coaches to create this expectation of anybody coming into that environment that this is the level of professionalization that you're gonna have and then working with all of our colleges to make sure that it's matching what they're doing helps too over a long period of time, because these are definitely not issues that you solve overnight, to create a much more positive environment for everybody. It is worth thinking about all of those different elements of that, the way that we always look at it is there is no easy answers and therefore we try to look at everything that we can and address what we can as it's possible. There are some things that are just gonna be specifically very long term challenges, and that's why we're really excited to have universities that think very heavily about these kinds of things because if people choose to ignore it then obviously nothing's gonna get done about it.

Brandon Smith: And Tony I'm gonna say that when we're done with this podcast we're gonna make sure we have some of our friends in the professional leagues and the game publishers, make sure that they listen to this, because these are all people that are in ... We're passionate about raising, well, having young adults come in, they're already good citizens, making them better citizens whether they're in esports and gaming or not. We want them to be able to be financially well, socially well, physically well, and all of those things. At the same time, they can game and compete and still be winners with that. We've talked with professional teams. We've talked with organizers of leagues at the publisher level.

Brandon Smith: They're tired of dealing with some of their gamers who just are completely immature, haven't been here before, don't know how to act. When a professional team has to put a coach and some of its players on suspension for

conduct, it's the coach right? Shouldn't the coach be mature and teaching the team? Those are the stories that we're hearing. We're not gonna say that as a student comes through a collegiate program that they're gonna be flawless and perfect, but if we're going to make change, it's going to happen with our young gamers coming in through the high school levels and coming in at the collegiate level, and showing them they can still be competitive. They can still have fun, and they can respect people in the process.

Deb Grzybowski: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tony Doody: Wow. I think you're right Tyler. We can probably do a whole episode on several of these topics. I hate to move away from this and the great dialogue we're having on this, but I do want to shift again.

One of the conversations are around space, dedicating space on campus and where that should be. AJ, I think you have space on campus, and I know Brandon, you are creating space on campus. They are starting to appear more frequently on campus. What are some of the considerations for designing and managing such a space? How do you deal with the tech support, security, supervision, updating software, do you have time limits? How does that all happen?

AJ Dimick: Well a lot of those problems I haven't solved yet at all, but I'll address them a little bit. They do exist. Some of them you don't solve by design. I will say that perhaps the most important consideration when you're looking to dedicated space, yes. We have a dedicated training facility and event facility for esports at the University of Utah. It's about to get a lot nicer as we do a huge remodel on the space next year where it will be dedicated to solely esports and spectating esports and all things major college esports.

But the biggest consideration is, once again comparing to mainstream sports, is we have a huge facility on campus that we built five years ago just for football, big \$40 million dollar facility, just for the football team. Benefits 100 students. And a huge basketball facility that benefits about 30 students. So we build these huge things. The biggest thing that distinguishes esports from those other things is, yes, we are growing that facility to engage in high competition in college esports, to train those athletes the best we can to be as competitive as we can, but it cannot just be a facility that benefits just the varsity programs, the esports team, that it has to continue to be growing with the grassroots movement that exists of the 600 student driven huge gaming club we have on campus, Crimson Gaming.

AJ Dimick: That it was the reason why we have varsity esports at the University of Utah because they were so visible and so insistent upon it that anything we do and anything that we do or invest in this space has to go back to complement that grassroots student effort. So we have to be willing to hand that facility over to those students and to the enthusiasts and the weekend warriors and the

fighting game community and everyone in our college campus that has a stakeholder. And treat everyone like a stakeholder and understand that college esports and varsity esports is about those teams, but it's about being that community hub on campus for that huge group of students to coalesce around and have a home for.

Brandon Smith: Yeah I'm gonna agree with AJ, right? It can't benefit just the students who make the competitive team and it's a bunker where they practice and they compete from and then no one else benefits from it. Some schools already have a facility. We've designed a facility that we're building right now. It may not be, it's not gonna be a massive facility that can hold all students, but we've made sure that there's zones for every one of those types of activities that AJ mentioned. That students can come in and have a, our active student organizations, Buckeye LAN and Esports Initiative, that they can come in there and have meetings and they can collaborate.

That students who play console games, which are different than PC games, have a place to compete, have a place to be online and network and play with people out there in the ether, or play with their friends right there on the same network. We want to make sure we have a place for practice and competition, and the same thing for shout casting. We can produce video and stream video from that same facility and have an awesome Utah backdrop like AJ has behind him or switch to green screen or something else behind our shout casters. Those are all things we want to do in that space so that it can include as many students as possible with as many interests around game studies and esports as possible, experience virtual reality.

Again, as we manage this facility and we manage the usage of it, I don't, and maybe AJ can talk about their throughput and how much space they have, but we don't know how popular we're going to be yet. So is our space large enough? We hope so. We think there's things that we can do to manage it. But this industry at the collegiate level is changing so rapidly. We can only plan so much and the rest we'll just have to experience and work toward.

AJ Dimick: Yeah, and as far as security and play time and screen time, my wife comes every night at 10:00 to kick me out of the facility. So we have that security system going. But no, it's a community hub on campus. Like our facility, we're not only housing, we have four varsity teams, but we're also a space for seven competitive club teams to come practice and hold their events in addition to opening it for events to the general public for the fighting game community and the Salt Lake Valley to come hold their events or others. There's such a hole on campus for those types of facilities, to have those types of things, and so yeah. I mean it's frequently times it's not the most secure place on the face of the Earth because it can't be to serve its function.

AJ Dimick: It's just sort of the cost of doing business in those types of things. Luckily we don't have too many people that bring sleeping bags and set up camp and are

there for three days at a time, because they tend to be good students and very serious about what they do. But yeah. I think even if you're not engaged in esports as a high competition next big college sport, that these types of facilities on college campuses, that there's a huge group of an underserved community on campuses everywhere that could benefit from having that community hub on their campuses where they can come engage socially and have fun and do these types of events.

AJ Dimick: That's what some colleges view esports as and in some places we are transitioning from pool tables and bowling alleys to now LAN centers where students can come and hang out and play Hearthstone or WOW or all the other Blizzard titles that have popped in my brain first, League of Legends and so on and so forth. Those are very necessary facilities and places to serve your students whether you're actually engaged in esports as a varsity sport or not, in my opinion.

Tony Doody: Debra, I'm hoping you can share what some of the jobs and career opportunities that currently exist or might soon be created as a result of this industry boom?

Deb Grzybowski: Yes, actually there are many. I think I mentioned before, that's kind of how we led our development of the curriculum, based off of what industry needs were. There are needs for people to manage and run the big competitions that go on, every aspect of that competition whether it be the streaming, the marketing, the getting everything advance set up in the facility. Then we've also got the shout casting side of things. So that's a really important aspect. The streaming and the micro transactions that occur with that. Currently we aren't teaching our students how to deal with those because it's different. Of course there's always the coaching and the rehabilitation. That's all new for this.

So those are needed as has been mentioned, not all coaches out there are doing their jobs appropriately. Then also of course the game design. Game design and the coding of games, games are not just for entertainment, games are used for many other purposes. They're also in the education area. They are using them in medicine quite a bit. That's one of the reasons that College of Medicine's involved because they're used in rehab and in research and a lot of different aspects, so we have to also include those. There are many jobs in the medicine area for helping see the need and develop the game that's necessary to fill that need.

AJ Dimick: I'd love to jump in here. We [are very into this, academically invested, and have the new degree that just came online this year, the Bachelor's of Science in Games. EA at the University of Utah has traditionally for the first 10 years been an interdisciplinary degree between film and computer science. Technically what that is, it is. It is going and talking to industry folks and figuring out where the holes are, where they can fill those needs. When you talk to industry people, and I'd like to expand this past esports and just to the gaming industry

in general, which and the reason why this is such a big thing is because the gaming industry is substantially larger than the film industry now, so you can understand how many jobs there are to fill in this space.

AJ Dimick:

So when you talk about it and you talk about the different disciplines that are required in making video games in addition to marketing, shout casting, and all those things which are actually quite new, what's old is game engineering, game art, technical art, game designers. Which are, no student's getting a job in game design right of school. That's gonna be a third job. But anyway, old spiel. We do all of those things as well. The key is is that at the University of Utah, we're throwing those groups of students in that interdisciplinary work with those different discreet skillsets is throwing artists and engineers in a room together so that they can learn large software systems, learn game pipeline to be able to go out and get those jobs in the industry and having worked with the other and work in large teams and do it.

At the University of Utah, both in their Bachelor's of Science in Games and the graduate program, they have to make a game to graduate. Over the course of their careers they're gonna make four or five games actually, in the four year programs do it, but they're gonna make a thesis game, both as an undergraduate which they are going to have to ship to the public ... I need Jen right here, Tyler, to tell all about the RIT version because it's actually very similar. Where they have to ship a game. At the University of Utah we have shipped in 10 years over 75 games. The most notable part about it is that students actually own the intellectual property for everything and anything they create here, so they actually own those games before they ship it out. Lots of award winning games. Lots of good things. We too have what we call the medical games and therapeutic apps lab at the University of Utah, where those EA students, the kids that are invested in game development, we have a lab in the medical school which is completely devoted to serious games and apps and medical games, which is doing a lot of good work because the skill sets in all of these things of production, shout casting, writing, game development, game engineering, leak into not only the games industry, but every industry there is in the world.

We'll send four kids a year to go make flight simulators. We'll send kids to go work on, in the case of one student, go make UI/UX for a luxury car line. These skill sets are not only appropriate for games and are based in games, but they go out in everywhere and they're highly valuable to students giving employment. So it is. It's absolutely a very valid space for colleges and universities to invest in academically.

Tony Doody:

We're nearing the end of our time here and I want to get to these last two questions. I'd like each of you to make a 60 second prediction if you will on what you think esports will look like on college campuses one decade from now. Let's go in reverse order now. Let's start with you Tyler.

Tyler Schrod: So certainly our goal has been broadly speaking to see esports in a professionalized manner on every campus and on world. So by that point in time we hope we're a lot closer to that, in a lot more countries and a lot more certainty around how to make these programs really successful. We're now past the setup phase and now into the exploration of how can we take these really awesome things that we've built over however many years and really turning that into something that can realize its full potential. So I hope by that point we're well on our way to that and certainly that's our goal to make happen.

Tony Doody: Great, Deb.

Deb Grzybowski: So I predict that in the future that esports, the competition and the whole industry is gonna be as big or bigger than football is in athletics right now. We're gonna have an arena on campus at Ohio State that's dedicated to esports competitions, like equivalent to St. John Arena or bigger.

Tony Doody: Wow, and they are already filling those kind of arenas, right?

Deb Grzybowski: They are.

Tony Doody: All right, Brandon?

Brandon Smith: I think about 10 years from now we'll finally have to stop explaining what esports and game studies are, but I also think they'll be unique games. I think that they'll be a wave, a generation of students who are coming through school and we won't have to worry about is there gonna be great content for games. I think you'll see unique game designs, specifically for esports, specifically that's engaging. I think that the nature of the games themselves will change over time. At the same time, we're really robust programs. We'll have students coming to our schools knowing they're gonna represent their team, put on their school colors and go at it against each other or just like in a recreational sports or intramurals. Or they're come in and casually they'll have competitions against each other. I think those things will be common place, but I think that we'll have an influence, from a collegiate perspective, we'll have an influence on how the games themselves are designed.

Tony Doody: AJ?

AJ Dimick: In 10 years we'll have opened the doors to the John [inaudible 00:58:54] Center and we will put 10,000 people in the building to watch University of Utah esports events. Esports will be a major college sport and major media rights holders will pay for the rights to broadcast college esports.

Tony Doody: Wow, those are big predictions. All right final question. I'm sure people have lots of questions and want to continue to explore some of the topics that we've covered here today. Can each of you share some additional resources,

websites, videos, conferences that might help viewers continue to learn about these issues? Tyler?

Tyler Schrod: Well I will be selfish and say that we're a great resource to reach out and work on things on campus. But we also look at everything from the Esports Travel Summit to Esports Symposium, [inaudible 00:59:45] is doing an esports conference at the end of this year. Otherwise we spend a lot of time looking at everything that is rolling over from traditional sports into this world. Twitter is usually the best place to just follow a couple of team owners, organizations, and places like that. The Esports Observer puts out great information demographics almost every day, and so does Fan AI. So those are the places that I usually spend most of my time if it's not on the ground stuff that we're doing.

Tony Doody: **Great.**

Deb Grzybowski: And there's also the Game Developers Conferences.

AJ Dimick: GDC, yeah. That's what I was gonna say is there is so much that there's a treasure trove on the GDC vault every year about college esports and the esports industry in general, talking about every issue under the sun in both college esports and esports in general that I would look at. Also games.utah.edu to get information about game studies at Utah and the esports program at the University of Utah. But yeah. There's a lot of good resources out there.

Brandon Smith: Yeah, and the main thing I would add is there aren't, you heard us all pause for a moment because we were trying to figure out what those best resources are. So far the best resources have been each other. I've been asking from some folk, our friend Mark Debbie from UC Irvine and Kurt Belcher from Robert Morris. We've been talking to each other getting started, but then again, we're looking at a lot of the commercial resources as well. How do we make this financially viable? So I think Esports Business Summit was a relatively new conference. At the same time, UC Irvine hosted their first collegiate esports conference a few weeks ago, so I'm assuming they're gonna try to do that again next year.

Tony Doody: **Fantastic. I will try and take everything that you just mentioned, throw it up on the website so folks can click directly to some of those resources. I want to thank each of you. This has been one of the most fun conversations I've had. I certainly, I feel like I've got the right people on the panel here today, and it's been a great primer for folks to dive in and explore.**

I will be back next month with an episode on leadership development on college campuses. You can receive reminders about this and other great episodes by subscribing to the Higher Ed Live newsletter. You can also browse the archives at higheredlive.com or subscribe to our iTunes podcast. I'm Tony Doody, thanks for watching everyone. I hope you make it a great week and I look forward to seeing you soon. Take care.