

Ian Strasma

J415

April 26, 2023

Wolgast

Pokémon trading cards have had a renaissance spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic with sales numbers reaching a whopping 43.2 billion cards sold globally during the 2021 fiscal year, a 26.7% increase from 2020. Buying Pokémon cards became trendy after a variety of streamers and influencers popularized opening booster packs in search of rare and expensive cards, but this rise in popularity seemingly had little to do with the game itself. As it turns out, Lawrence is one of the places where the trading card game community is well and thriving.

Game Nut Entertainment, a local Lawrence Game store, is the place in town that holds Pokémon TCG tournaments and friendlies every Sunday at their new location near the intersection of 23rd St. and Iowa St. Walking into the store, you're greeted by shelves of video games, board games, collectibles, merchandise, and accoutrements. But the real venue is off to the side behind a pair of glass-paned doors. Lined up perpendicular to this entrance are four rows of chairs and tables where dual Pokémon TCG and Magic the Gathering events share the space, with both events' attendees bustling in the same exuberant yet restrained way.

The Pokémon TCG event participants, located further back in the room and easily recognizable due to an abundance of colorful Pokémon-themed game mats scattered about the tables, were very welcoming towards new and old players alike. Everyone was either invested in playing and spectating the matches occurring, trading cards to build new and better decks, or teaching newer players how to play the game properly.

“My hometown had a lack of community, so I've been realistically playing here for about a year now,” said KU Junior Adair Torres. “They host regular tournaments, which means that the community is strong and has a consistent attendance which is obviously a very attractive feature to me. And everyone was very welcoming when it comes to the TCG specifically.”

Each month there is an official tournament organized by a local player certified by the Pokémon Company called a Pokémon Professor. Players pay money to enter the tournament and they receive prize packs for participating and winning their matches. But this infrastructure for Pokémon TCG players didn't exist a decade ago.

“I do all of the organizing and scheduling for local Pokémon events. Lawrence didn't really have any sort of Pokémon TCG community before we started doing this around 7 years ago,” said Game Nut's store manager Mitchell Denney. “This is something Anthony, the Pokémon Professor, and I have had to build from the ground up.”

For those interested in putting the Pokémon cards they bought during 2021's craze to use, you'll find a super supportive community ready to teach you the rules of the game.

“It's fantastic here. Like it's a super open community and there's like all levels of skill here,” said Lawrence High School Senior Carson Schraad. “It feels like Pokémon as a whole is kind of a way to reconnect with that younger side of me that was staying up late playing my Gameboy under the covers after my mom thought I was asleep.”