



ROCKET LEAGUE SPARKS CONNECTION AT ELON



PHOTO SOURCE: PSYONIX

Esports team connects through love of the game, sees competitive success

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When sophomore Ryan Voisard came to Elon University as a freshman, he wasn't just looking for strong academics. He was searching for a way to meet people, get involved and pursue a passion that had been part of his life for years.

"I wanted to find something more fun to do," Voisard said. "I was looking at all the intramural sports and I saw esports, and I was like, 'Wait, I love playing video games. I'll try it out.'"

What he didn't expect was that he'd end up rebuilding Elon's Rocket League team nearly from scratch and leading it to one of its best seasons yet.

Rocket League is a popular video game that blends soccer with rocket-powered cars. Developed by Psyonix and first released in 2015, the game is played in teams of typically three players and after a five minute match the team with the most goals wins. Over the past year, Rocket League has had a monthly average of about 17,925 players, according to Steam data.

At the time, the team was just three players — Voisard and two graduating seniors.

"It was just three of us, which was just barely enough for a team," Voisard said. "We actually even made it to this one champions shore tournament. We didn't do well, but we made it. It was so much fun just going off campus to play in the tournament."

When the seniors graduated, Voisard stepped up.

"I got an email saying, 'We need someone to be a lead. You're the

only one left.' So I stepped up to the plate," Voisard said.

Now a sophomore, Voisard has grown the team to nine members, even competing in various tournaments and seeing success.

Founded in 2015, Elon's esports scene has been growing steadily over the past few years, along with the rest of the world. According to Statista research published August 2024, the global reach in the esports market is forecasted to continuously increase between 2025 and 2029 and reach an estimated 896.03 million users.

The university's esports program offers both casual gaming hours, where students can come and play for fun, as well as a competitive structure for those looking to represent Elon in tournaments. Each year, the club forms teams based on interest for other popular titles such as League of Legends, Overwatch, Rainbow Six: Siege and Super Smash Bros.

Voisard wasted no time moving up the team from a regular member to captain. Rather than letting the Rocket League program fizzle out, he took on the responsibility of keeping it alive.

He began recruiting aggressively — at club fairs, around campus and even randomly walking up to students he thought might be interested.

That's how freshman team member Nick Daccurso was recruited.

"He called me out, said I looked like I played video games," Daccurso said.

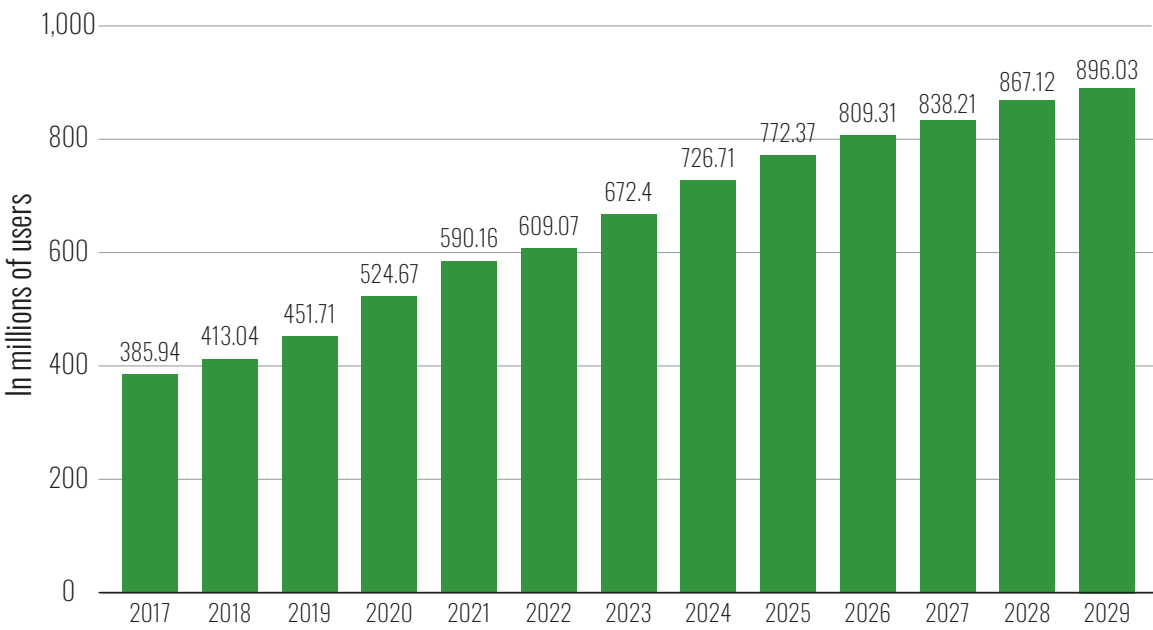
Freshman Ian Kirk had a different path: he had researched Elon's esports programs before even arriving on campus, researching Elon's different teams, ultimately ending with Rocket League.

"It was the only game that I really actively played," Kirk said.

Rocket League practices are

Number of esports users worldwide

Global esports audience projected to hit 896 million users by 2029.



SOURCE: STATISTA MARKET INSIGHTS

DATA VISUALIZATION BY ERIN MARTIN

structured similarly to traditional sports, Voisard said.

"It's kind of like soccer practice," Voisard said. "We'll play a few matches. We'll look over some film."

Voisard grew up playing soccer, following in the footsteps of his father, who had played in college before multiple ACL tears ended his athletic career. When Rocket League launched in 2015, it quickly became a new way for them to share the sport they both loved.

Voisard stopped playing soccer in 2020, due to COVID-19, and Rocket League filled the gap.

"It was a smooth transition," Voisard said. "I just stayed home and played Rocket League. We weren't good at all, but we were having fun every night."

That personal connection — between the real soccer field and the virtual arena — made Rocket

League even more meaningful for Voisard.

For Daccurso, the appeal of Rocket League came from the unique blend of teamwork, strategy and mechanical skill. He's been playing since 2016 and said the experience of practicing and improving with teammates at Elon has made the game even more rewarding.

"I think it's safe to say that I enjoy coming to practice just to, like, fool around, because obviously we're getting better at the game by playing," Daccurso said. "We have definitely gotten better since we got here, but it's fun to just play with my friends."

This year marked a major step forward for Elon's Rocket League program. The team competes under the Collegiate Carball Association and played in a Collegiate Conference

Series tournament with other schools from the Coastal Athletic Association.

"We played in the CAA conference — beat North Carolina A&T and then we lost to Northeastern, but we made third overall in the conference," Voisard said.

They also participated in the ZCL — a community based, independently managed tournament. There, Elon dominated the competition, sweeping through the bracket to take home the championship title.

Most of Elon's players are ranked Grand Champion — one tier below the highest possible competitive rank in Rocket League. Voisard said team chemistry and communication have been their biggest assets, especially when playing against other universities' top players.

"Communication is so vital. You get used to communicating without speaking sometimes," Voisard said.

For now, the team is focused on continuing to grow. Voisard recently won reelection as team captain for next year and has plans for how to elevate the program.

"This year was focused on quantity, really getting numbers so we can compete in tournaments and just stay as a team," Voisard said. "Next year we're going to blow everyone out of the water, and senior year? Number one."

More than the wins, the players said what they value the most is the community they've built together. Before every practice, the players meet up for dinner and often hang out after. They traveled together to University of North Carolina, Wilmington earlier this year for an in-person competition — a rare and exciting experience for a game that's usually played online, Kirk said.

"Video games are typically an online thing, so I never really gotten to go somewhere to play video games," Kirk said.



Elon sophomore and esports team captain Ryan Voisard plays rocket league with Elon freshmen Nick Daccurso and Ian Kirk on April 24.

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