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The Gaming Scene: Here and Now

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Back in the day when when video games were rising in popularity in the 1980's and 1990's, the industry was just seen as a hobby and a source of entertainment. No one could have foreseen the heights that the gaming industry would reach by the late 2010's, and then still maintain the pace of its growth! So what is the deal with esports?

Esports or electronic sports refers to any form of organized video game competitions which could be team-based or individual. Examples of such games include Counter Strike, Overwatch, League of Legends, DOTA etc. These video games, along with the players, form an ecosystem of people playing, spectating and competing for rewards and most importantly, for fun. Although it was a subject of quite a bit of criticism, professional esports is slowly gaining popularity among the masses. With so many interesting games and their tournaments happening round the year, it has gained quite the traction.

Until about last year, India wasn't exactly brimming with esports activities. There are many causes which have led to this surge of viewership and rise of esports in India.

The roots of esports were sown as early as 1972 at a Stanford University LAN tournament, but since then it has grown leaps and bounds. The arrival of the legendary

Quake 3 (a multiplayer focused first-person shooter game) marks a major milestone because it became one of the most-played games of that era, and to this day is respected by the whole gaming community. Subsequently, with the introduction of League of Legends in 2009, and DOTA in 2004, regular tournaments were organized. The prize pool was low at that time, but the incentive and thrill of doing something new was what attracted young people to this world. Corporate sponsorships entered this scenario in 1997. In 2009, the first major Counter Strike tournament was held in Russia.

The Rise of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds

Unless one has been living under a rock, they must have heard of PUBG in some form or the other. PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds was released on December 20, 2017. Soon after, the mobile version of the game was released on March 19, 2018. Since then PUBG has paced up to become one of the most followed and played games of all time. Subsequently this became the first instance of a mobile game having such a huge impact on the esports community. Since PUBG was paid on PC and the mobile version was free-to-play this gave a chance to the gaming community to try out a premium game for free, since there was no loss of gameplay whatsoever among the two versions. Also, this game was easy to learn and play, unlike some other games (cough CS:GO cough) which require dedication from a person to learn and master. That is the true definition of a perfect game: easy to learn and difficult to master.

The first professional PUBG tournament was organised in India in the month of October 2018. The total prize pool was Rs. 50 lacs and it saw participation from about 1000 colleges across the country.

Tournaments

If we look from a global perspective, esports events take place round the clock all around the world. There are regular sponsored and well financed tournaments that reward these professional players with money among other incentives. Much of this is also attributed to the interest garnered by the spectators. Fanfare (no pun intended) is one of the chief reasons for the success of such events. Naturally, this has led to the growth of competitiveness in the circle and hence new teams and groups playing these games are emerging every second day.

This culture is more predominant to Europe, largely because of financial reasons and accessibility. Some countries, such as Finland (the home of our beloved Angry Birds franchise) have even gone on to build schools for modern gaming to train and nurture this spirit among teenagers. But that certainly doesn't mean that other nations are too far behind. Asia is slowly but steadily emerging as a huge hub for esports. Regular events are

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being held in Taiwan, Japan etc. on a very professional level, keeping the competition from other regions in mind. To the delight of the Indian gaming community, Mumbai will be the host to 2019 ESL DOTA 2 Major this April, making it a first in many ways. It will feature 12 teams from all across the world with a prize pool of \$300,000.

Finance

According to a report from the marketing research company Newzoo that was released in early 2018, esports revenues for the year were expected to hit just over \$900 million in 2018. This industry is projected to grow to around \$1.1 billion in 2019, roughly one-fifth of the English Premier League and about twice the revenue generated by IPL, analysing from both these sports' latest annual revenue reports. Pretty impressive considering the sport is yet to get the limelight it deserves.

Most of the revenue from events is chiefly garnered from sponsorships, advertising, media rights, including broadcasting rights, merchandise and ticket sales. But what about India? This scene is especially bleak in India because of lack of the kind of encouragement and support needed to train professional esports players. Then there is this orthodox belief among the youth to choose conventional career options. Albeit few in number, there are world class training facilities and (e)sports centres available. But then again there arises the issue of financing their training. This is somewhat analogous to the story of Olympic medallists in categories such as shooting, wherein equipment and training play a major role in determining the strength of the player. Hopefully, this will improve in the future.

Recognition as a Sport

No other global event garners as much attention as the



Olympics and the World Cups. Bearing in mind this fact, attempts have been made to include esports as a real 'sport' in the Olympics. The International e-Sports Federation has been working hard to get the approval from the IOC (International Olympic Council) to get things rolling. Hopefully, by 2024, their efforts shall bear fruit and we might actually see esports as a medal event in Paris (host for the Olympics that year). It has already been successfully organised as a demonstration (non- medal) sport in the 2018 Asian Games, and will feature as a medal sport in 2022.

Gaming @ IIT - H

Computer gaming is something which has been crafting its own culture in our college for years. Although it hasn't come into limelight, the gaming community in the college has been active for years. Every year Felicity hosts

Zombie Zone, which is a two to three day long event for gaming. Students from across all batches come together to participate and have fun.

The recently introduced "The Gaming Club" has got great plans and it aims to introduce gaming among the student community in a positive light. This is the first time that a club for gaming has been formally established in our college (although there have been informal attempts at in the past). This will help in promoting gaming as a form of recreation in this college and to synchronize and support the number of related events that occur each year. Also, this will be a huge boost in introducing esports to our college community. Wondering what ggwp means? *good game, well played* ■

Note: The author is associated with the gaming club.