

Chapter 7

eSports Health and Wellness

ABSTRACT

The reason for injuries in eSports is that in order to succeed at gaming on a competitive level, athletes are typically required to play for many hours a day. Teams often practice together from three to four hours a day, and as with many sports, this is the bare minimum. These practices also take place in environments that have inappropriate lighting, engender poor posture, and challenging time awareness. The result is serious overuse injuries. At the same time, there are important benefits that can accrue from participation. The challenge is then to create an environment that enhances health benefits while allowing the athletes to pursue their chosen sport and minimize health concerns.

INTRODUCTION

The implications for physical and mental health, both in the short and long term, for eSport participants, at both the amateur and professional level, is only now being addressed and recognized as an important issue. The objective of this chapter is to outline both the health and wellness challenges and benefits associated with eSports, while proposing a new model for health care for the athletes who compete in eSports.

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BACKGROUND

Health, wellness and eSports have not traditionally been seen as linked – and certainly not for the broader gaming industry, but there is a growing awareness that perhaps they should.

Several myths surrounding the negative attitudes about eSports exist, including the perception that it includes the ‘life-enveloping’ training schedules of traditional professional sports, but without the benefits of physical exercise, a sizeable paycheck (at the current time), or job stability. Alongside, the perception that the sort of mentality required to climb to the *very* top of any single competitive video game’s player base tends to be extremely competitive, and obsessive. Practicing traditional sports is seen as healthy, can lead to various benefits, and is a good social experience; while practicing a single video game is considered by many to be exactly the opposite. In some cases eSports games and those who play them are considered “toxic” with high-ranking players blaming their team for screw-ups, and unlike ‘real’ sports, the criticism is more severe as their team is made up of faceless strangers who are easy to demonize, scream at through microphones or degrade over in-game chat dialogue.

All of these concerns, regardless of whether or not they are informed by evidence or myth, have led to a perception, perhaps, that eSport is unhealthy. In June 2019, NCAA President Mark Emmert, succinctly expressed this concern about eSports at the organization’s January Annual Convention, stating: “We know there are serious concerns about health and wellness around those games” (Smith, 2019).

The convergence of health and eSport has then perhaps become even more complicated with agreements and cooperation between tradition sport leagues that actively promote health, fitness and strength and the eSport industry. In January 2018, Major League Soccer announced a partnership with EA Sports. Other examples include the NBA 2K League, which is a partnership between the NBA and game publisher Take-Two Interactive, that started in May 2018 with 17 teams (each owned by real-world NBA franchises). Pro sports team owners, including Robert Kraft (New England Patriots), Stan and Josh Kroenke (Los Angeles Rams), and Jeff Wilpon (New York Mets), each paid \$20 million to buy a franchise of the year-old Overwatch League, overseen by gaming giant Activision Blizzard. Fourth, since forming in 2016, the National Association of Collegiate eSports (NACE) counts more than 80 educational institutions as members (McCorvey, 2019). Finally, Zwift, the

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