

cyberlaw: the brave new e-world

By Anne F. Downey



E-Sports

This will be the first in a series of columns about e-sports. What are e-sports? While definitions vary, e-sports are essentially competitive video games, with players participating in tournaments to win prizes.

I recently had the opportunity to tour the new Daemen College e-sports lounge and meet with Coach Jeffrey Hamm, Assistant Coach Patrick Ryan, and several team members. The lounge, located in the Wicks Campus Center, features computers and game consoles, large projection screens, and ergonomically-designed gaming chairs. The team members are students who were recruited by the coaches or who, while at Daemen, decided to try out for the team. A number of team members receive a Daemen e-sports scholarship.

Team members Jose Mejia and Oscar Tanta took the lead in showing me how the League of Legends online game is played. League of Legends, published by Riot Games, is one of the most popular e-sports games, played at the college level and in professional e-sports. The object of the game is for a team of five players to move its avatars (called “champions”) around the playing field (the “Field of Justice”), waging battle against the other team in an effort to bypass (and hopefully destroy) a line of defensive turrets and take the enemy’s Nexus, the core building in the enemy’s base.

A lot of strategy is involved, from the first moment when the team must strategically select five champions (out of 143), knowing that each champion has certain attributes, strengths and weaknesses (and attributes change as the game evolves). Once the game is underway, decisions must be made rapidly, with constant offensive and defensive moves and readjustments to the ever-changing threats and opportunities. As in traditional sports, each team member has a designated role. In League of Legends, the roles include marksman, jungler, and mid laner. For example, a jungler tries to kill monsters in the jungle section, and a mid laner tends to travel along the middle lane in the Field of Justice.

A typical match lasts 20 to 60 minutes. Tournaments are held online, and are often live-streamed via a service like Twitch.tv. Actually, the live stream is delayed several minutes to prevent “ghosting”, i.e., an opponent watching the live stream and using the information to his competitive advantage during the game. At Daemen, the live stream of the team’s performance includes play-by-play commentary from Assistant Coach Ryan.

As with regular sports, e-sports teams do their homework before a tournament, watching Twitch.tv footage of their opponents in order to anticipate what the opponent will do during the upcoming tournament. Teams can also look up statistics on individual opponents. Besides studying the opposition, team members gear up for a match by practicing several hours a day.

At the collegiate level, Riot Games offers scholarship money to teams that reach the conference playoffs. Daemen’s e-sports team is part of the Eastern Conference, the same conference in which regular sports teams at Daemen participate. Tournaments are played during the fall and spring semesters. League of Legends is not the only game played in e-sports tournaments; other popular games include Fortnite, Overwatch, FIFA, and Warcraft.

You can follow the progress of the Daemen College e-sports team

on Facebook. Other area colleges also have a presence on social media for their e-sports activities. For example, UB has a varsity e-sports team with an active Facebook page and Twitter account.

Canisius College recently launched an e-sports program, and its team participates in the MAAC conference. The College has set up a special e-sports lab in the basement of the Palisano Pavilion. Niagara University’s e-sports club was inaugurated in October 2018 and held its first event - an NHL19 tournament - on February 20, 2019 in the Gallagher Center, with the involvement of Pegula Sports & Entertainment and an appearance by Sabretooth.

Elsewhere in New York State, SUNY Canton (north of Syracuse) invested \$500,000 in an e-sports lounge. The Canton program offers students a chance to play at the varsity and intramural level. Canton was the first SUNY school to compete in esports, and its teams participate in tournaments organized by the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference (ECAC) and the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE).

I wasn’t sure what to expect before I met with the Daemen College e-sports coaches and players, but I must say that I was impressed by their love for the game and dedication to honing their craft. Some people may roll their eyes when they hear about e-sports, but I came away with respect for the mental, physical, and emotional challenge that the players and coaches face. And I liked the fact that the students gathered in the Daemen e-sports lounge included persons of diverse ethnic and geographic backgrounds and at least one female.

Whether you roll your eyes or not, I think e-sports is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Since 2014, approximately 1000 colleges and universities have launched an e-sports program. In my next column, I will discuss some of the fascinating legal issues involved in e-sports. [B]

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