

Case Study

**E-Sports... Like it or not its happening
and golf is the PERFECT sport to benefit**

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Introduction

E-Sports have arrived and will continue to have greater impact on the traditional sporting space. SKY New Zealand has introduced a channel that is dedicated to E-Sports. Tournament prize pools for E-Sports tournaments now rival those for some of the biggest events in traditional sports and global audiences from some of the gaming events are reaching over 100 million people.¹ Football Clubs such as Manchester City have started signing players of the virtual FIFA game while Paris St-Germain have signed full squads of

players over different E-Sports.² Brazilian footballer Wendell Lara, who won FIFA's goal of the year in 2015, gave up playing professional football to take up playing FIFA online professionally.³ E-sports will be included into the Asian Games in 2022 and it is likely that E-Sports will be included in the 2024 Olympics. It was also recently announced the MacDonald's Germany would drop its sponsorship of Football in the country and move that money into E-Sports sponsorship. By any metric, E-Sports has arrived.

E-Sports - Golf

Golf in the US has seen a major drop off from its peak in 2002. Looking at TV ratings, rounds played, golf equipment sales, or golf course construction, all these numbers have fallen. In the UK between 2004 and 2013 one in five golfers in England have given up their club membership and in Scotland the club number is down 14%. In Japan the numbers are down 40% from its peak in the 1990s.⁴ These numbers do not compare well to some of the numbers coming out of E-Sports. 50% of gamers are women, which is a market that golf has struggled to capture and in Australia a 2017 YouGov survey found that 23% of those aged between 18 and 24 have watched professional video gaming. It is a wave that is already here and the USGA have recognized this. For 10 years the USGA has played a supporting role for the virtual US Open Golf Tournament. This year saw the inaugural virtual US Amateur E-Sports competition launched in conjunction with Top Golfs World Golf Tour App. There were 134,000 qualifiers for the virtual tournament which is 18 times larger than the actual US Amateur tournament. The championship round was held at Top Golfs Atlanta Headquarters with the virtual golf course being Pebble Beach which mirrored the US Amateur tournament. One of the finalists made the comment that they had not played 'real' golf since 1998 due to the lack of time. Since the inception of the first US Open virtual tournament 28 million virtual golf rounds had been played for that tournament. The demand to play online golf is evident and some of the biggest selling games on the gaming platforms have been golf.

With the advent of the Nintendo Wii and the Xbox 360, which incorporated a player's body motion to control the character on the screen, games that required a physical motion became more popular. The latest editions of these gaming units do not have motion detection, but it is estimated that by 2025 the Altered Reality/Virtual Reality realm will be an \$US85 million business. There are 200,000 developers now creating Virtual reality content at this time.⁵ For golf this is means a twofold change on how we perceive the game. For the altered reality aspect, it can mean that glasses are produced that will show us where to aim the ball to take break into consideration while on the putting green. It also gives the opportunity to give us a heads-up display, much like some cars do today, for distances to hazards and the pin without having to go to a GPS unit or phone. For virtual reality, it can mean we can play a world class course in our homes in a period of an hour while experiencing the exact conditions that were occurring at that time on that course. This may seem a stretch, but an Xbox version of golf gave the player an opportunity to play the exact week's PGA tour course with the same set up and weather conditions.

Golf is in a unique position when it comes to the E-Sports environment, especially with the motion games. Since you drove the latest F1 game on any of the gaming platforms, it is highly unlikely that you will be given a drive in the next F1 Grand Prix behind the wheel of a McLaren, Honda, or Ferrari. However, the motion of a golf swing may make a person want to take up the game as the motion of a swing on a gaming platform is not that different from what a player will experience on the course. This may seem farfetched, however 50% of users of the FIFA football game reported the game made them bigger football fans and that 34% of people who played were not football fans or had no interest in the game before they played it online. This shows the potential that golf has within the gaming space, people who become involved in sports gaming are likely to gain an interest, or further develop their interest in the sport. Golf can use the E-Sports version to promote the game and also attract new players into the golf via the online version.

Golf clubs are also able to use a gaming console as well. We are aware that golfers adapt and even embrace new technology. We see that with how the golf clubs have changed, but also the use of GPS units and booking times online show golfers, generally, are early adaptors to newer technology. A gaming console with the motion aspect can have several benefits. During periods of bad weather people still can have their golf fix and it brings

people into the club itself. It can make the area more family friendly by giving the younger members of the family something to do while their parents stay in the clubhouse. By having the children introduced to the game and the club atmosphere as well they are more likely to become valuable members of the club in the future. As was shown with the success that the online version of the US Amateur tournament, there could be tournaments run around the E-sports game, or even a combination of nine holes of E-sports and 9 holes of the actual game. The options are endless. To purchase a second-hand X-Box 360 with the Kinect Unit, which tracks a player's movements, and the PGA golf game cost around \$150. This is not a lot with what events can be devised around the unit and what income that can be earned.

Endnotes

- 1 Washington Post August 27th 2018
- 2 The Guardian 16th June 2017
- 3 The Future of Sports <http://futureof.org>
- 4 The Future of Sports
- 5 The Future of Sports

Conclusion

E-Sports and their future in events like the Olympics is going to be controversial. But how many thought that Rugby Sevens, or even Golf would have been seen at the biggest sporting event the world sees. With the number of people involved in E-games and the money becoming generated it would be at Golf's detriment if E-Sports were ignored as "not being real sport." If the USGA is running online tournaments, it is obvious that people at

the highest levels of our sport are taking interest in the how to leverage the interest into people becoming involved in golf. Clubs can do this as well, the potential of gaining more interest in the club from the local community by having a gaming console at the facility is large. The question isn't if E-sports are the future of sports as it has already arrived, the question is are you willing to embrace it or be left behind?

