

## Esports and Their Relation to Sports

The first major argument made for esports to be considered a sport came in 1999 when the English Sports Council decided to not recognize the United Kingdom Professional Computer Game Championships as a sport and is still being debated today as some argue that esports should be included in the Olympic Games. The esports economy is rapidly expanding and is quickly becoming a global entertainment giant. A driving factor in the expansion of esports is accessibility, the only requirement is an internet connection and a console or computer to play the game, this has created an interesting dynamic of global competition that is similar to the world of traditional sports. As esports become more mainstream, the argument around whether or not the games played competitively should be considered the same as sports will surely continue to grow. The basis for the argument against is that esports do not require gross body movement and while they require skill and fine motor skills, the lack of full body movement limits their ability to be considered a sport, while the relative newness of esports and their lack of central governing like the IOC or the Court of Arbitration for Sport also disqualifies them from being considered a sport. There are possible advancements in technology and games that could answer the questions of full body movement but the ability to institutionalize will require time and a continuation of growth to be answered. Meanwhile, esports' following, necessity for skill, level of competition, and organization are all considered to be driving factors behind the argument for esports to be recognized as a sport, but because it does not meet each of the standards it is not a sport.

One definition of sport requires that for an activity to be considered a sport it must include play, be organized, be competitive, require skill, include physical skills, have a large following, and have a certain level of institutional stability (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich 2016). While the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sport as “An activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment.” While these two definitions both hit on points involving skill, physicality, competition, and play; the second of them requires no broad following or level of organization specifically and therefore is much less restrictive of what can be considered a sport. For comparison purposes we’re going to use three activities to determine whether or not esports should be considered a sport. The first is Chess, Chess is a game that is not only played competitively but is played at a global level where during significant periods of history the best Chess player in the world being from a specific country was a source of pride for that country. However Chess is not considered to be a sport despite its popularity and competitive level. The second will be *League of Legends (LoL)*, made by RIOT Games, *LoL* is one of the biggest games in the world and is also one of the biggest esports in the world being one of the only games to have established leagues in nearly every market around the world and in some cases multiple leagues per region. Despite its following and competitive level *LoL* and esports in general should not be considered sports. Finally representing sport will be Curling. A sport played around the world but not the most popular, most people don’t pay any attention to it, at least not in the US, until the Winter Olympics come around every couple of years. This is true for a lot of sports in the Olympics that unless it’s during those couple of weeks every four years little attention is given to something considered to be a sport. Going forward these three examples will be

compared to each other and the two previously listed definitions for sport to determine if esports should be considered a sport.

Games have previously been defined as structured play. Play can be defined as an “activity which is performed for fun or enjoyment”(Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich 2016).

This allows each of the three examples to be considered a sport using both definitions. The hurdle created by play to keep activities from being considered a sport is so low that it would be best to remove it as a requirement because almost any activity done for fun would pass the first test. Each of the three examples also passes the test set by the first definitions of requiring organization or set rules. Chess, *LoL*, and Curling each have a set of defined rules that control the gameplay. Based on this requirement each of these could be considered a sport. Both of the definitions also state a requirement of competition. This again is an easy test for each of the examples to pass. While the definitions only mean competition in that there must be a winner and loser, each of these games are played competitively at levels that most people would never be able to reach. For Chess every two years a tournament is held to determine the world Chess champion. *LoL* holds a tournament every summer to determine the best team in the world each year comprising teams from North America, South America, Europe, China, Korea, Japan, and Oceania. While Curling holds world champion tournaments for both men and women each year, and is also an event in the Winter Olympics. Broad following is one of the criteria not in both definitions that also allows for each of the examples to be called a sport. Chess and Curling while still somewhat obscure do have large followings around the world. Chess was at one point a competition mainly between the USA and the USSR, this elevated competitive chess to not only a national level but to a larger level getting involved somewhat in political disputes. Curling is

the most obscure of the three but has a large enough following and is competitive enough that it merits inclusion in the Olympic games. *LoL* has possibly the largest following of these examples with roughly 27 million daily players and 67 million monthly players. Using the criteria above Chess, Curling and *League of Legends* could each be considered sports using either of the two definitions.

Up to this point all of the examples have fit pretty squarely into the definition of sport. Sport requiring skill is for the most part going to follow this trend. Chess is a game of mental ability and tactics, the game clearly requires skill at a high level such as memorization and being able to look ahead at possible outcomes from each player's moves. Curling requires a high amount of skill as the ability to bowl a stone down a sheet of ice and get it to stop is an impressive feat and gets more impressive when you see people sweeping the ice to make it stop correctly, it also requires tactics and strategy in where to place your stones in the scoring circles. *LoL* requires several skills similar to the previous examples, strategy and tactics are a big part of the game but so are the skills using a keyboard and mouse to play the game. However this is one of the first areas where esports can really start to differ from traditional sports. The requirement of skill also infers that there is a lack of luck required. In traditional sports a ball might take a bad bounce or someone may make a bad decision and these can be considered lucky plays, however they are not a built in part of the activity. Video games in general, no matter how bad randomness can be for games, employ a large amount of randomness or luck. With *LoL* as the example most of the game is the same every time from the number of enemy AI to the number of neutral objectives that can be obtained. However one of the main win conditions in the game, the drakes, are almost completely random. Every few minutes a dragon will spawn into the game

and if a team can capture it they get a boost to a statistic based on the type of dragon, the type of the first three dragons is completely random and until the fourth it is unknown what type is coming. This opens up a new avenue of luck into esports that doesn't exist in traditional sports or even some other competitive activities. This is a small thing in the overall ability to call esports sports but it is something that should be considered.

The physicality associated with traditional sports is one of the main reasons why people see a distinction between them and esports. Chess doesn't meet the requirements here to be considered a sport as no matter how you physically pick up, hold, and move the piece the outcome is the same: you moved a piece from one space to another. This isn't true for traditional sports like Curling, how you bowl the stone and how the other players sweep in front of it greatly affects the outcome. *LoL* and other video games split this category and is why some people would argue that physicality should be split into two groups. *LoL* does not require the kind of exertion and physical effort that goes into a game like curling but it does require physical precision. Unlike chess where how you move the piece isn't important how you move the mouse does have an impact on the outcome of the game, clicking on certain spots and sometimes being pixel perfect can change how a game plays out and is even more prevalent in first person shooters. This leads to the necessity to split physicality for the sake of defining sports. A game like *Jenga* requires precise skills and motions similar to esports, but not many people would call *Jenga* a sport. Of the fifty-two sports played in the Olympics, only two don't require a high level of gross body movements like the other fifty (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich 2016). Therefore it is best to say that activities require gross physical movement as well as fine motor

skills to be considered a sport. This is the first major way that esports vary from the traditional definition of sport and is one of the biggest reasons esports should not be considered a sport.

The first definition for sport requires that the activity be institutionalized and have a governing body to be considered a sport. Esports in general do not have a centralized governing body, while some regions like Korea have their own governing body for esports it doesn't apply to other countries. This is drastically different from both Chess and Curling. Chess is governed by FIDE, The Fédération Internationale des Échecs, or The International Chess Federation, while curling is governed by The World Curling Federation and because of its involvement in the Olympics both national and international Olympic governing bodies. Both Chess and Curling fit precisely into the definition of sport as laid out above, while esports do not, however this is most likely due to esports' relative infancy compared to the others.

In conclusion, the definition of traditional sports can be used to look at other games and activities and decide if they too fall into the classification of sport. Esports do not meet two of the criteria in the expanded definition and therefore cannot be considered a sport. If the decision was left to just the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition there would be a lot more sports in the world as it is a much looser definition because of the excluded section on institutionalization. Overall, esports are more similar to Chess in that they can claim the same level of being a sport if there was a scale. Esports are something similar to sports but not a sport in the traditional sense of the word.

## Works Cited

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