



## ESPORTS: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF TECH-SAVVY STUDENTS

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
SAN ANTONIO



BY TRACY IDELL HAMILTON



**SAN ANTONIO, TX** – Dozens of students representing Texas A&M campuses from throughout the state met at the Boeing Center at Tech Port’s state-of-the-art LAN gaming facility last month for the largest in-person match-up to date among these collegiate teams.

The competition was organized by the esports team at Texas A&M-San Antonio as the first of what they hope will become a new tradition, providing students a stage to showcase their teamwork, leadership and problem-solving skills.

For the inaugural A&M System Showdown, students from A&M-the San Antonio campus competed against teams representing Texas A&M campuses in College Station, Corpus Christi, Texarkana and Commerce.

“This is the first collaboration of its kind,” said Aaron Jagers, A&M-San Antonio head coach and assistant director of recreation, who spearheaded the in-person event. The San Antonio campus started its esports program in 2019, the first in the A&M University system.



Jagger's position at the university didn't even exist five years ago. But as the popularity of sports has grown, colleges and universities understand that adding esports brings them a competitive advantage over schools that don't host teams.

"Esports is very accessible," Jagers pointed out. "You don't have to be 6'2" to be a player."

Students don't even have to play the games to take part in esports.

Esports teams also include students who manage, produce, broadcast and market the games and

tournaments. These "content crews" do everything from narrate live broadcasts, capture video, create social media posts and oversee marketing.

Sykora Guy is a perfect example. The Texas A&M-Texarkana student serves as her team's Esports Coordinator. In that role, she does "player management, a lot of graphics; really anything I can dip my toe in to get the experience."

Guy, who was raised in a ranching family, said that when her high school computer teacher asked if she would be interested in esports, she didn't think she would be. "But I grew really fond of working with computers, and that led me to esports."

That interest led to her first job in esports, with the Region 16 Esports League. She produced her first esports tournament at age 18, hosting 250 students on a shoestring budget. "And we were able to raise about \$50,000 in scholarships, so that was a great experience," she said.

Guy has also been able to pay for her college education through her esports production work. "I have no student debt. I have no loans."

Other esports players gravitate to fields more typically associated with gaming, like computer science and engineering, and esports offers them a community while in school, said Rick Allen, Texarkana's esports coach.

"Esports is a way for these students to find their people," he said – and it's a way to attract these students to a particular campus.

But gaming can be a solitary pursuit; competitions are often online only. That's why Jagers was keen to put together an in-person event that brought the different schools together. The Tech Port Gaming Center made that possible, he said.





The venue, purpose-built with the infrastructure necessary to support esports' speed and data requirements, features 50 PC gaming centers with 20 gigs of fiber LAN internet. Since its launch in 2022, it has hosted the first-ever competition featuring esports teams representing all U.S. military branches as well as some of the world's top professional players.

"We have an excellent partner here in the Tech Port, and they've been our partner since Day 1," said Jagers.

Tech Port is more than a partner, however; it's also a pipeline. Students from A&M-San Antonio's esports program have landed internships on the Tech Port campus, "which have turned into part time jobs, which have turned into careers," Jagers said.

Not surprising, given the alignment between gaming platforms and operating systems used by advanced technologies on the Port San Antonio campus and elsewhere in the region, including robotics, aerospace and aviation and space exploration.

And that's why Port San Antonio built the Tech Port Gaming Center, said Will Garrett, Port San Antonio's Vice President of Talent & Technology Development & Integration. "Do we want to see a kid from the Southside or Northside go play professionally? Of course. But that's not our priority. We're using esports to channel excitement and energy, and help kids understand that their passion for gaming directly relates to academic and industry career pathways."

The recent collegiate tournament further underscores the educational reach of the Tech Port Gaming Center, which already hosts hundreds of local high school students each month through the R20 Premier Esports League, launched by the San Antonio Museum of Science and Technology (SAMSAT) in 2021.

Today, the league consists of teams from 35 schools in San Antonio, who compete in Valorant, Super Smash Bros. and Rocket League. This year's R20 Premier League Grand Finals will be held at the Tech Port Gaming Center May 10-11.

Josh Martinez, director of esports for SAMSAT, said introducing students to esports brings with it an array of benefits. "It's proven to be a good way to





increase graduation rates, increase attendance and increase school participation,” he said, and gives kids a sense of community and belonging.

“Studies show, once you find a place of belonging, you’re ready to thrive,” Martinez said. Esports also offers a stealthy way to expose students to opportunities in STEM fields like computer science and engineering. “There have been a lot of students who come through these doors and have figured out what they want to do with the rest of their lives.”



*Image credits: Mark Sobhani*