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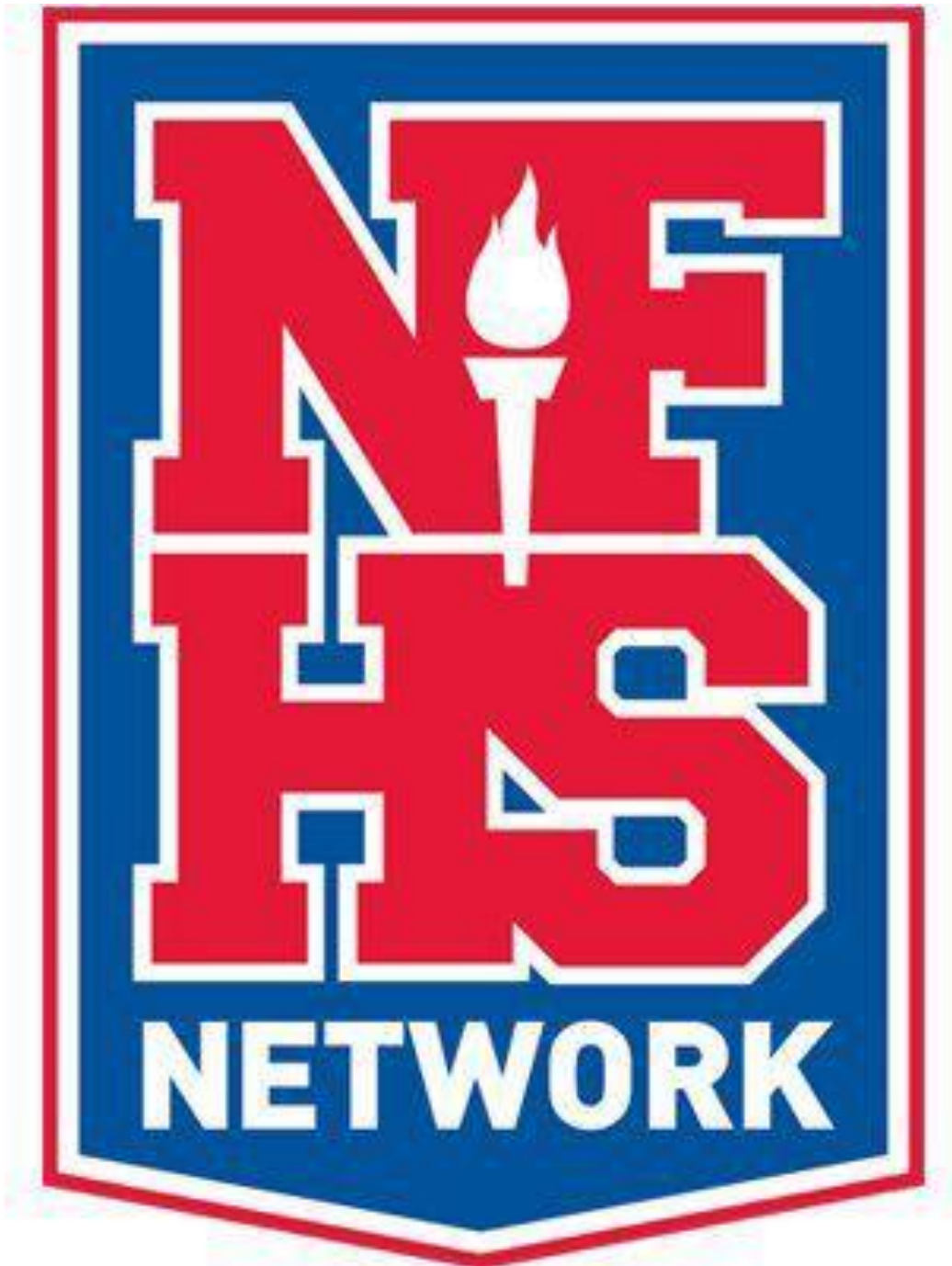
National Federation of State High School Associations

Esports now a new way to compete in high school

Five states are participating in inaugural 'Season Zero'

By Cody Porter, www.nfhs.org Nov 16, 2018

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The National Federation of State High School Associations is the body that writes the rules of competition for most high school sports and activities in the United States. NFHS's headquarters are located in White River State Park in Indianapolis, Indiana. For more information, go to www.nfhs.org.



The National Federation of State High School Associations has teamed with PlayVS to launched their inaugural esports season, which started in October and ends in December.

The role that video games play in the lives of high school students is growing.

So the National Federation of State High School Associations opened the door for a previously untapped group of students in this past October when the NFHS and NFHS Network teamed with their partner, PlayVS, to launch its inaugural esports season.

Season Zero, as it is known, took flight with five NFHS-member state associations and one affiliate group receiving guidance from online gaming provider PlayVS. Schools from the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference, Georgia High School Association, Kentucky High School Athletic Association, Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, Rhode Island Interscholastic League and affiliate member Georgia Independent School Association will be involved in Season Zero.

"Students will learn interpersonal and critical-thinking skills, as well as how to rely on each other to work cohesively as a team," said Delane Parnell, CEO and founder of PlayVS. "The PlayVS platform makes it easy for colleges and universities to access player stats, making the esports scholarships (that often go unclaimed) a huge opportunity for students at participating schools."

The costs for schools to become involved in esports are minimal. Parnell said schools need a teacher to serve as program director, and he noted that the presence of an information technology director could prove helpful to confirm that the equipment and network are capable of hosting games.

A \$64 season participation fee is required for each student and can be paid by a parent, school or sponsor. Thanks to the PlayVS online platform, schools can use computer labs that are already present, which eliminates travel costs.

"We automate the heavy lifting so teachers can fully focus on the kids, ensuring that they stay safe, have fun and have everything they need to be successful," Parnell said.

Parnell said PlayVS Vice President Laz Alberto serves as the lead in working with state associations.

"Every state is unique in their own right and has had their own process for coming onboard," Parnell said. "When we work with a state, we answer their questions, provide resources like presentation materials and videos, and often schedule information seminars where Laz visits the state association office in person."

"No team will meet face-to-face until the final weekend of the state championship, which will be played at potential esports venues in the respective states of our participants," said Mark Koski, NFHS director of marketing and CEO of the NFHS Network. "When available, those venues may include movie theaters converted into esports arenas."

Season Zero, which features the five-player team game "League of Legends," started Oct. 30 and ends Dec. 11. Each week, two matches are played, bringing the season total to 12 matches. Season Zero culminates with a single-elimination playoff bracket in January 2019 to determine a state champion.

Teams can be made up of students from any background, regardless of experience, gender or age and without tryouts. There is no limit to the number of unique teams each school fields, creating a "no-cut" environment to allow students to compete in esports at the varsity level.

"There are currently eight million kids who do not participate in any high school sports, largely because no sport is designed to be scalable," Parnell said. "There are a limited number of teams and a limited number of spots on each roster. With esports, on the other hand, absolutely any eligible student can join a team, wear a jersey and become part of something bigger than themselves. That's hugely significant."

PlayVS shares the NFHS philosophy on working exclusively in the high school setting. The organization's commitment to education-based activities directly correlates to its leadership, which includes former teachers and others with an education background to manage relationships and strategies with schools.

"I think we have an opportunity to engage students in the life of the school with an activity that they might already be participating in on their own," said Dr. Karissa Niehoff, NFHS executive director. "Now, we bring that interest and activity together to combine it with all of the elements of sport that are so special: teamwork, camaraderie, collaboration, storylines, excitement and connection to a group."

Koski noted the students being introduced to esports are largely those who are already going home – or to a friend's house – to play games. The adoption of esports by schools provides them a trusted space to compete "within the walls of our education-based setting after school."

"These are not students who we are taking off our basketball courts and football fields," Koski said. "Esports are a great way to retain students in a scholastic environment under the direction of a teacher/coach who will teach them not only how to be a great gamer, but to also be a lifelong positive citizen and valuable member of the school community."

Esports on the NFHS Network (www.NFHSNetwork.com) are streamed free of charge.

Tom Schardin

Tom Schardin covers sports for Savage and Prior Lake. He is dependable, sarcastic and always joking around. Tom enjoys running and swimming and is often busy coaching his two kids' sports teams.