

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

CLICK IT!

You can find the local sports schedule online at eastoregonian.com.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2021

FOLLOW US ON  TWITTER @EOSPORTS |  FACEBOOK.COM/EOSPORTS

B1

UMATILLA HIGH LAUNCHING ESPORTS PROGRAM

The team hopes to be running by the spring

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Video games have come a long way since Pong. Those who played Pong in the 1970s now have AARP cards, while the younger generation is rolling its eyes at the black and white “tennis” game on the TV screen that took minimal skill to play.

Video games have moved into a new era, where graphics are realistic, colors are vivid and if you are good enough, there is money to be made.

A group of Umatilla High School students are among the elite players, and they have gone the extra mile to bring an esports team to the small Eastern Oregon school.

“It’s a very cool opportunity for the kids,” said Kyle Sipe, who coaches the robotics team at Umatilla, and will oversee the esports program. “The kids took it to the school board to get approval. They had to tell them why they wanted the program and how it could benefit the students. The scholarships from this are huge.”

The group of senior Alejandro Escovedo, juniors Quin McClenahen and Kaidan Blair and freshman Avery Gutierrez have spearheaded the project. All four also are members of the robotics program.

“I researched a bunch,” McClenahen said. “I mainly used one link, which had how many school have esports leagues, how many schools are in each division, and how much scholarship money there is in esports.”

His research showed that nearby Riverside High School has a team, as do Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Portland State University and University of Oregon. The scholarship money available is considerable, but nearly \$5 million in scholarship money has gone unused.

Blair said there are 429,000 jobs tied to the gaming industry. His research noted students who participate in esports programs have a higher attendance at school, and their GPA improves.

“Mainly, we were asking the school board if we could play,” Blair said. “We had already secured grant money. Mr. Sipe took care of that.”

There is an expense with having an esports team, with the biggest chunk of money being spent on computers.

The school district had grant money from the Department of Education, and it was allocated to



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Quin McClenahen, left, and Alejandro Escovedo practice video games Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021, on computers at Umatilla High School, which has started an esports program.

the esports program. The students now are waiting for the computers to arrive — worldwide distribution issues have delayed shipping.

Once the computers arrive, the students will get to put them together. They hope to start competing in the spring.

“It’s a huge financial burden,” Sipe said, “Computers are expensive. Money was the biggest hurdle.”

While Sipe has an impressive robotics team at Umatilla, he is looking forward to hopefully having a new group of students to work with in the esports program.

“I get to make better connections with the kids, and different connections with a different population of kids,” Sipe said. “It gives them a reason to come to school. Like the robotics kids who like to put nuts and bolts together, we now have the kids who will control it. They will learn how to make a video game work.”

A non-contact sport

While encouraging students to get off the couch and do something active is admirable, esports teach some of the same principles of mainstream athletics, including teamwork, strategy, the thrill of competition and learning to lose, but without the bumps and bruises.

Esports also is accessible to those with physical barriers, making it an inclusive program.

When the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily shut down live sports in 2020, people turned to esports to



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Umatilla High School students Avery Gutierrez, left, Kaidan Blair, Alejandro Escovedo and Quin McClenahen pose for a portrait Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021, at Umatilla High School. The students have been pivotal in helping get the high school’s esports program off the ground.

fill the void.

Work and school were done by Zoom, so why not interact with others in the gaming world the same way. Some people play, while others are fans and like to watch the action. In 2020, esports was a \$1 billion business.

Esports combine art, science and business, which is what draws Escovedo to the program.

Escovedo, who teaches a Minecraft class after school at Umatilla, said he has been playing video games since he was 6 years old. He’d like to pursue a degree in computer science.

He carries a 3.8 GPA and has applied to and been accepted to Washington State University, Eastern Washington University and OIT. The scholarship money is a

big draw, which he said he needs to be able to fulfill his college dreams.

Once the Umatilla program is up and running, it will be able to compete against other teams from throughout the world. While some people like the solitude of playing alone, esports encourage teamwork.

“It’s really fun Escovedo said. “You are right next to each other instead of on headsets.”

Blair said he always has had an interest in computers and has built his own. That led him to gaming. You can hear the passion for the esports program in his voice.

“We haven’t officially started asking people to join, but people are asking to come and play,” he said. “We will have scheduled practices.”

Once the program is up and running, participants will be held to

the same standards as the athletes, who must maintain a certain GPA and have good attendance at school.

McClenahen and Escovedo played a session of Valorant, which is one of a dozen games that are approved for esports leagues. While their lefts hands controlled the keyboard, their right worked the mouse. It takes a special skill and hand-eye coordination.

Contrary to popular belief, esports have been around for decades, starting in the 1960s with the game Spacewar, which is considered the first digital computer game.

The first esports tournament was held in 1972, and Spacewar was the game used. There were 24 players and the winner received an annual subscription to Rolling Stone magazine.

Sipe, and his wife Heidi, the superintendent of the Umatilla School District, played video games during the pandemic when everything, including school, was done by Zoom.

Heidi took an interest in Dr. Mario (circa 1990), where the objective is to defeat different colored germs with vitamins of the same color.

“I think if I can beat Dr. Mario, I can end this pandemic,” she said.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Quin McClenahen is the stepson of Hermiston Herald editor/senior reporter Erick Peterson.

How to smoke a Christmas turkey



GARY LEWIS

ON THE TRAIL

The recipe is as follows: Pour 100 grains of powder down the barrel, load a plastic cup with 1 1/4 ounces of lead and seal it with a fiber wad. A shotgun primer goes under the hammer.

In my possibles bag, I keep the plastic shot cups pre-made, ready to go for quick reloads. Quick reloads are important.

One of my favorite shotguns is an Austin & Halleck bolt-action muzzleloader designed by my friend Ray Crow. I call it Old Crow.

Once a year I take Old Crow out for a walk. Sometimes for grouse, sometimes for pheasant, but the most memorable hunts are for wild turkey.

At zero-dark-thirty we sped south, fueled on coffee, bacon and eggs. My friend Troy Rodakowski had a line on a flock of turkeys that were roosting on timber company land and feeding in a friend’s fields.

When the sun lit the eastern horizon, a thin orange line beneath the brooding clouds, the rain began to pour. We pulled into the driveway where we were greeted by the

landowner wearing a slicker. He indicated we could hunt anywhere on the property, but for best results we should use the barn as cover and take a peek into the canyon first. Never one to second-guess a host, I agreed. Troy was a bit skeptical of our chances. We couldn’t hear any birds and, in the downpour, we couldn’t see any birds.

It was 80 yards through the rain to the barn then we had to sneak alongside the tractor and peer into the canyon.

A flock of 20 birds were spread out along the far side of the canyon. Hens and jakes. I picked out a jake standing still, shouldered the gun, put the bead above the bird’s head and squeezed.

Click. I quickly threw the bolt and squeezed again. Click. A bad cap.

In my pocket I had another cap. I pulled the dimpled one off and put the new one on. Now the turkeys were nervous, exiting stage left. One lingered. A jake craned his neck for a better look.

Boom.

One of the things I always forget is the big white curtain of smoke the muzzleloader throws up. I couldn’t see whether I’d hit the bird or not. The rest of the flock legged it up the hill and out of sight.

Forty-two yards is a long shot for a muzzleloader. We had to chase down my trophy and finish it off.

It was a young gobbler, perhaps an 11-pound bird.

A turkey shot with a muzzleloader is only half-smoked. On Christmas Eve, I took the bird out of the freezer, skinless and boneless, and let it sit in a brine for 24 hours. On Christmas Day, I took the bird out, scored it with a knife and coated it with pineapple/roasted garlic Justy’s Jelly.

With the dark meat and jelly folded inside, the bird, wrapped in bacon, bound with string and coated with olive oil, went inside the Camp Chef pellet grill into a haze of maple, apple and hickory smoke.

We kept the juices in and let the jelly and bacon blend with that true wild flavor and tender meat. It took an hour and a half for the internal meat probe to read 165 degrees, which is the magic number.

Speculation before Thanksgiving this year was that supply chain disruptions were making it harder to buy a Butterball. According to the USDA, frozen turkey inventories were 24% below their three-year average volumes.

Not so in the oaks and pine forests of Northeastern Oregon. From the first of December through the end of January, a hunter can use a fall turkey tag on private land. Hunters may purchase tags through the end of the season.

That’s how to smoke a turkey.



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

Even if hunting with a familiar gun and a proven load it makes sense to go to the range and confirm the pattern and effective range including hold-overs at 30, 40 and 50 yards.

Gary Lewis is the author of “Fishing Central Oregon” and “Oregon

Lake Maps and Fishing Guide” and other titles. To contact Gary, visit www.garylewisoutdoors.com.