

How to Build a Better Esports Program
Coaching & Athlete Development
Adrienne McIntire
Midland University

Abstract

I started my coaching career in 2016, volunteering for Kent State's esports team as a player advocate and personal trainer. Over the next three years, I filled various roles in coaching staff for middle and high school, collegiate, and semi-professional teams. From social media manager to analyst, to head coach, I learned about all the possible resources players and coaches need to succeed. In 2020, I took over the esports program at Stephens College, transforming it from an inconsistent club to a pillar of diversity within the esports industry. During my three years, I increased program participation by more than 400%, made three postseason appearances, and am the only coach to host MOSEF state championships back to back.

In June of 2023, I joined Midland University, who shares my goal of giving students the opportunity to experience all the career paths esports has to offer, much as I did in 2016. Over the course of my first year at Midland, we have seen drastic changes in how esports operates and how students view it. As the oldest esports program in the state, and part of the largest athletic department in Nebraska, shifting the mentality from casual club back to a competitive sport is the top priority. As I did at Stephens, I am bringing a transparent approach to my athletes. As we rebuild, they have an active role in what esports is at Midland. This provides them with valuable experience that many schools don't offer. From technical documents such as sponsorship proposals and budget requests to equipment maintenance, my students leave my programs with more skills and experience in the industry than any other NAIA school in the country. Every student I have mentored who wanted a job in esports found one before they graduated and I believe that is largely due to how closely students work with leadership to better their experience.

Proposal Overview

Many who haven't had the opportunity to be part of an esports team don't immediately see the massive benefit these programs have. Having that conversation and seeing the excitement and investment from others is one of my favorite aspects of my career. The opportunities are endless, and the creative learning environment is unlike any other sport. This session will be a highly interactive panel as we develop and simulate the creation of a collegiate esports program with limited resources. This will answer questions like:

Are my goals aligned with my resources?

What are the alternatives?

Do I have scholarships and how will I acquire recruits?

Once we have established our simulated program, we will discuss the different types of students that would best suit our program and why we should focus on these particular students over others. This step in the panel will highlight the different recruiting tactics a coach should be able to utilize, and what kind of athletes to expect.

The final step in this panel covers the addition of experiential learning opportunities that other athletes may not have. As a digital sport, computer literacy and a well developed portfolio should go hand in hand. Many schools across the country miss this valuable opportunity with their students. We will explore creative ways to help students get a head start on their career path through programming prebuilt into their collegiate experience.

I will provide those interested with examples of how I've structured my programs, as well as how a collaborative approach within esports develops students in ways they would not have otherwise grown.