

THE BIG DEBATE: SHOULD eSPORTS BE IN THE OLYMPICS?



THE DILEMMA

Electronic sports (known as eSports) are being considered for inclusion in the summer Olympic games, starting in 2024.

The idea was suggested by Tony Estanguet, who is co-president of the Paris Olympic bid committee. Paris will host the summer games in 2024. Mr Estanguet says he will speak with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and eSports representatives about introducing competitive video gaming to the Olympics for the first time.



The 2024 Olympics programme will start to be decided in 2019, with a final decision on what sports are to be included taken after the 2020 Games in Tokyo are over. It has already been confirmed that eSports will be a medal sport at the 2022 Asian Games in China. The Asian Games are the world's second biggest multi-sport event after the Olympics. At the most recent edition in South Korea in 2014, 45 countries and 10,000 athletes participated.

While some people think Mr Estanguet's proposal is a sign that the IOC might be moving with the times, others think it's an outrageous idea because video games are not a "proper" sport. But one thing is certain: eSports are a big business. Some experts predict that, by 2020, they will generate more than £1 billion in revenue (income) and increase their audience to nearly 600 million people.

Given the popularity of gaming – and the skills and training required to be a top gamer – is it high time we saw eSports at the Olympics? Or is sitting down in front of a monitor and pressing buttons simply not an appropriate Olympic sport?

WHAT ARE eSPORTS?

eSports are organised, competitive video gaming events that are usually staged in front of a live audience, with millions more people watching online. The participants are usually professional gamers, which means they earn money for playing, and are sponsored by different companies.

eSports generated \$493m (£400m) in revenue in 2016, with a global audience of about 320 million. Gamers at the very top of eSports need very sharp reactions as well as strong and fast co-ordination between their hands and their eyes. These top gamers train for several hours every day, too.



An eSports event in China

Some of the most popular eSports video games are:

League of Legends , Dota 2, World of Tanks and FIFA



OPINIONS

“We have to look at it because we can’t say, ‘It’s not us. It’s not about Olympics. The youth, yes they are interested in eSport and this kind of thing. Let’s look at it. Let’s meet them. Let’s try if we can find some bridges. I don’t want to say ‘no’ from the beginning. I think it’s interesting to interact with the IOC, with them, the eSports family, to better understand what the process is and why it is such a success.”

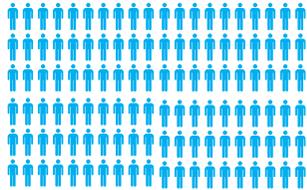
Tony Estanguet, co-president of the Paris bid committee

“We are not yet 100% clear whether eSports is really sport, with regard to physical activity and what it needs to be considered sport. We do not see an organisation or a structure that will give us confidence, or guarantee, that in this area the Olympic rules and values of sport are respected and in place. There is no International Federation that has the necessary authority to give this guarantee and to restrict these activities to the values of sport. I can only give you a very personal remark, but some of these games are contrary to all our values.”

Thomas Bach, Head of the IOC

FACTS & FIGURES

Some **3.5 billion people** around the world watched the 2016 Rio Olympics



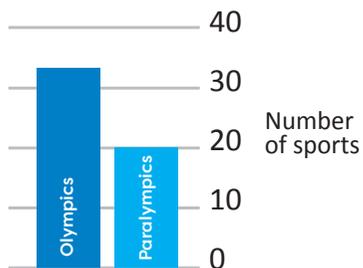
The largest single first prize in an eSports tournament was **£8.2 million**, won by European eSports team Team Liquid for playing *Dota 2* in 2017



Mitch 'Krepo' Voorspoels of the Evil Geniuses eSports team

There will be **33** sports at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics

There will be **20** sports at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics



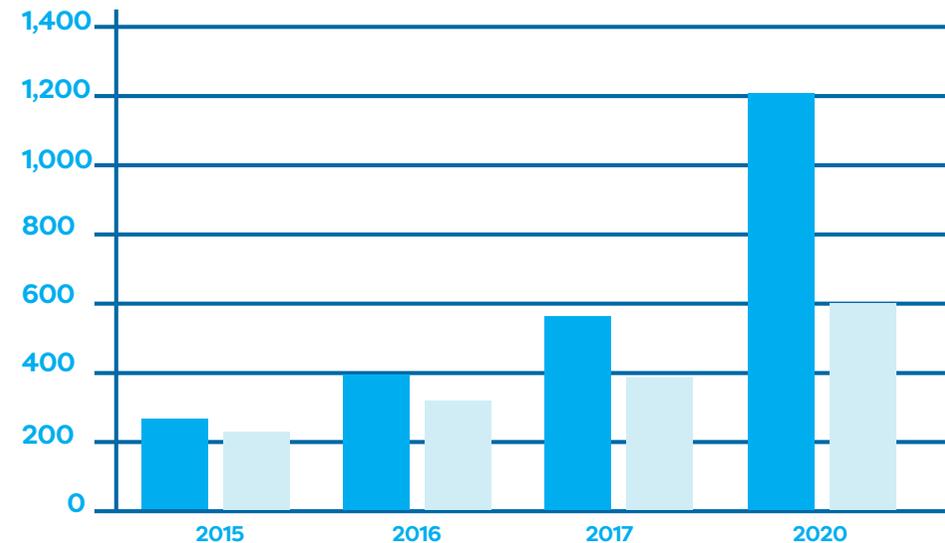
5 new Olympic sports will be making their first appearance in Tokyo: baseball/softball, karate, skateboarding, sport climbing and surfing

2 new Paralympic sports will be making their first appearance in Tokyo: badminton and Taekwondo



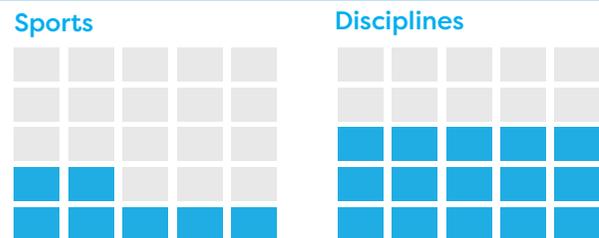
eSports' predicted growth up to 2020

■ Revenue (£m) ■ Total audience (millions)



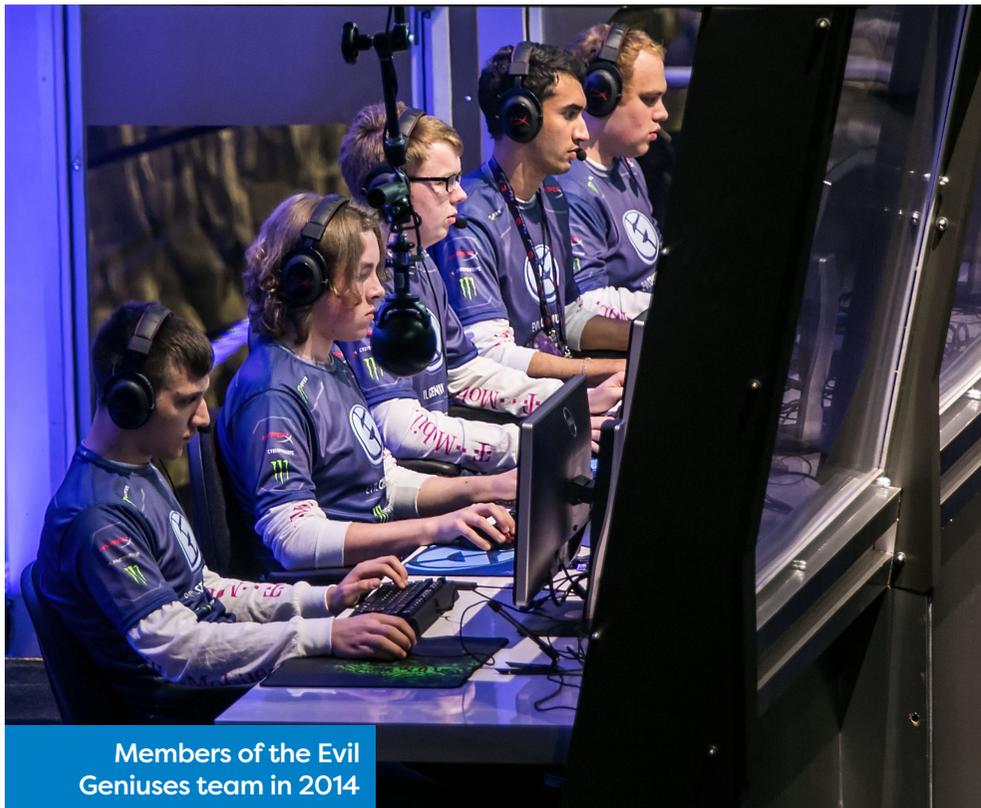
Source: BBC

There will be **7** sports – but a total of **15** individual disciplines within those sports – at the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics



eSPORTS CHAMPIONS

Like any physical sport, it isn't easy being an eSport champion. It takes a lot of practice and dedication. According to Guinness World Records, the most successful eSports team is USA-based Evil Geniuses (EG), who had earned \$14,626,094 (£11 million) from 580 tournaments by 2016. The team's biggest winnings were earned in The International 2015 *Dota 2* championships, when a five-man team won \$6,634,661 (£4,234,759) after defeating CDEC of China in the final. EG was formed in 1999 and has also competed in tournaments for *StarCraft II*, *Halo*, *Counter-Strike*, *Call of Duty*, *World of Warcraft* and various fighting games.



Members of the Evil Geniuses team in 2014

SCIENCE OF eSPORTS



A recent study into eSports competitors showed they possess many skills and have to face many physical strains. Professor Ingo Froböse, who led the research, said: "The eSports athletes achieve up to 400 movements on the keyboard and the mouse per minute, four times as much as the average person. Both hands are being moved at the same time and various parts of the brain are also being used at the same time."

Professor Froböse also said this was a level of strain that he had never seen in any other sport – including table tennis, which is famous for its players' quick and skilled hand-eye co-ordination. The professor noted that games such as *Counter Strike* or *League of Legends* require the gamer to have a very high level of tactical understanding – similar to that required in Olympic sports such as tennis or football. However, Professor Froböse did note that eSports gamers don't prepare themselves physically with enough exercises and fitness training – things he says would improve their games.

DEFINITION OF SPORT

What makes a sport a sport? Is it physical fitness, agility and ability, which is required in most sports? Or is it more about how much training you need to do, and how much you push yourself? Top gamers – and Professor Froböse – would argue that eSports competitors exert just as much energy and effort as a footballer, but they aren't being pushed physically as much as a 'traditional' sportsperson.

Most dictionaries define sport as containing a physical or athletic activity, usually with an element of competition between participants.



If video games are a sport, is chess a sport, too?

SportAccord is the organisation for all global sport federations – both Olympic and non-Olympic.

When they are considering a new sport to join their membership, it must fulfil these criteria:

- The sport should have an element of competition.
- The sport should in no way be harmful to any living creatures.
- The sport should not rely on equipment that is provided by a single supplier.
- The sport should not rely on any "luck" element specifically designed into the sport.

Do eSports fulfil these criteria? Are there any activities traditionally considered to be 'sports' that don't tick these boxes?

OLYMPIC SPORTS?

If video gaming becomes an Olympic sport, is there a case for the following to also appear at the summer or winter games?

Should darts be at the Olympics?

Darts – It's all about hand-eye co-ordination, quick-thinking and performing under pressure – just like gaming.



Snooker – It's hugely popular, and a game of strategy, skill and precision – just like gaming.

Cricket – A sport played by several countries around the globe – the World Cup consisted of 14 nations – cricket is popular and nobody would argue that it isn't a sport in the traditional sense. So why isn't it at the Olympics?

Chess – It's certainly not a physical sport, but it requires great mental skill, strategic thinking, and patience – again, just like gaming.

Dog sled racing



Dog sled racing – It has appeared at the Olympics before, though not as a competitive sport. It would surely be a popular spectator sport.

RETIRED SPORTS



These are some of the sports that once featured at the Olympics, but are no longer in the games:

Sport	Last appearance
Croquet	Paris 1900
Cricket	Paris 1900
Lacrosse	Paris 1900
Polo	Berlin 1936
Tug of war	Antwerp 1920
Water motorsports	London 1908
Military patrol	Chamonix 1924
Snowshoeing*	Salt Lake City 2002
Ski ballet*	Albertville 1992

*These were not medal sports, just 'demonstration' sports. Athletes participated but could not win medals.

Military patrol – This was a team sport consisting of cross-country skiing, ski mountaineering (climbing mountains) and rifle shooting. It appeared as a medal sport just once, in 1924.

Snowshoeing – This is a form of hiking/walking where the athlete wears snow shoes, which are a special type of footwear.

Ski ballet – This is dancing on skis! The participants conduct flips, twists and jumps on the slopes.

NEW OLYMPIC SPORTS

These are sports that have only started appearing at the Olympics in recent years, or are about to make their first appearance.

BMX – Part of the cycling programme, BMX first appeared at Beijing 2008 and continues to be an Olympic sport. In the 1970s and 80s, when BMX became popular, it would have been unthinkable that this hobby – mostly practised by children at the time – could become an Olympic sport.

Baseball – It featured at the 1904 Olympics, but didn't become an official Olympic sport until Barcelona in 1992. It then appeared regularly until Beijing 2008, was removed from London 2012 and Rio 2016 – but is due to come back at Tokyo 2020.

Karate – Despite existing in one form or another for hundreds of years, karate is only making its first Olympic appearance in 2020.



YES, eSPORTS SHOULD BE IN THE OLYMPICS



They are a sport – Hand-eye co-ordination; stamina; mental skills and strategy: eSports have all of this, and more. They are just as much a sport as many other Olympic events, and deserve to be included.

They will modernise the Olympic games – The Olympics has shown in the past it can move with the times and accept new and exciting sports. BMX, mountain biking, trampoline and Taekwondo are among the sports recently added to the roster. eSports will make the Olympics truly modern.

They are more popular than many traditional sports – eSports is a huge global business, with hundreds of millions of fans. It reaches a wider audience than certain sports already in the Olympics. Popularity should count for something.

NO, eSPORTS SHOULDN'T BE IN THE OLYMPICS



It isn't a sport – Any 'sport' that involves sitting down for hours cannot be considered a sport in the true sense. Sport requires a big physical strain. All current Olympic sports require athletes to push themselves physically.

Olympic sports shouldn't rely on computers – A sport shouldn't be in the Olympics if it requires a computer or any other electronic machinery. Just as motorboats, jet-skis and flight simulators don't appear at the Olympic games, neither should PS4s, PCs and Xbox Ones.

It could open a can of worms – If eSports are accepted into the Olympics, there's a chance other games, such as chess or poker, could have a case for inclusion. The Olympics should remain a home for traditional physical sports.



Discuss

How do you define a sport?



Discuss

How would you define an athlete?



Discuss

Do you consider eSports gamers to be athletes?



Discuss

Can an activity that requires you to sit down and not be physically fit truly be considered a sport?



Discuss

Are there any sports missing from the summer or winter Olympics that you think should be there?



Discuss

Would eSports make the Olympics more or less interesting to you? Or would it not change your opinion?



Discuss

If eSports are included, should they feature at the summer Olympics or the winter Olympics?



Discuss

Have you ever watched an eSports event?



Discuss

Is chess a sport?