Esports team debuts at Cooper

The brand new squad has been climbing up the rankings in the Midwest division

Photo by ROSE VANG-LOHNES

The Hawk gamers were brought together this school year through the efforts of science teacher Ms. Sutliff.

By MARIAH WASHINGTON
Quill staff writer

The Hawks esports team just wrapped up its inaugural fall season. The team is coached by science teacher Ms. Sutliff, who said the players have been doing well considering that it is just their first year competing.

"The [fall] chess team had a great season and finished 39th in the Midwest," Sutliff said.

Sutliff started the planning for the esports team during the 2023-2024 school year.

"We just had some students who were interested in gaming and wished they had a team, so we made it happen," Sutliff said. "It was a bit of a rush at the beginning getting people organized and finding a free league, but we pulled it off."

The Cooper gamers compete through a system called PlayVS. This free platform has partnerships with the NFHS Network, which allows outside viewers to watch the competitions. Additionally, PlayVS is available in nearly every state and offers an assortment of games in which high school players can compete. Currently, the Cooper team is in the Central League, which has teams from Minnesota, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Alabama and Wisconsin.

"Teams log in to our current platform, PlayVS, and have their game accounts connected. Coaches are required to be present online for each match in case something comes up during the match. The players get their match set up and play. It's as easy as that," Sutliff said.

According to player Corey Chesness (11), the competitions against other teams have been enjoyable.

"We would get paired up with another school and communicate with them through this app and the coaches would start the match and it would last around an hour long," he said. "The teams we've gone against were pretty easy to beat so it wasn't too hard to beat our competitors."

Following the successful launch of the team in the fall, the team has been enjoying even more success in the current season.

"Our *Rocket League* team is currently ranked eighth in the Central League and our *Valorant* is currently ranked 12th. Both the *Valorant* and *Rocket League* teams have their eyes set on the title, so we'll see what happens," Sutliff said.

In preparation for the competitions, esports players practice just like athletes in traditional, "real world" sports. However, in esports, a lot of practice time is spent alone.

"The players do the practices on their own," Sutliff said. "Usually the leaders of the teams organize and get online to play. We currently have to play from home since we don't have a designated space here at Cooper, but we're working on that."

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Among the 20 players who signed up for the esports team is William Nichols (12).

"I have been on the esports team since it started this fall and joined because I heard Ms. Sutliff talking about it last year when I was in her chemistry class," he said.

According to Nichols, participating in esports is fun because it connects players to other people with similar interests.

"Students benefit by learning teamwork, getting better at strategies and possibly getting scholarships to a college they might want to go to," he said.

Sutliff echoed Nichols' observation about college scholarships. In fact, many college have established esports teams and offer scholarships to prospective players just like traditional physical sports.

"Several of our older players have interest from multiple colleges and we have a coach from St. Cloud State University coming to speak to a group of us," Sutliff said.

Beyond the promise of scholarships, Sutliff said that esports players learn useful life skills.

"For most of the titles, team play is key, so students are improving their collaboration skills as well as coaching others [and] being coachable. These are valuable traits out in the world," Sutliff said.

Agreeing with Sutliff about the value of teamwork is Hawks player Dylan Vang (10).

"Students benefit from being involved with the esports team by using teamwork. Also, if someone ever needed help with something like homework, they will have friends they can ask immediately," Vang said.

According to player Leland Johnson (11), the teamwork element of esports can result in newfound friendships.

"I like working with the esports team since everyone is very friendly," he said. "I have not seen any hostile behavior at all so far."

Another appealing element of getting involved in esports is developing one's skills at video games.

"Students benefit from their involvement in the esports team by getting better at the game they chose to participate in," Chesness said.

As the team looks toward the 2025-2026 season, Sutliff said she hopes to grow the roster, especially through the recruitment of more female players.

"Yes, there are members of the team who are not guys. Imagine that. We could use many more females," Sutliff said.

One player already looking forward to next season and next year is Tavian Thomas (10).

"I'm really looking forward to playing some more next season," Thomas said. "Hopefully, we can generate some hype for *Splatoon 3*."

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with a principal for a reset and go over school expectations for that student. Now, doesn't that sound like a long process that you don't want to go through?

It gets annoying to not only have fights in the bathroom but all over the school. The easiest way to get half of your peers to dislike you is to start your fight in the stairways. Like, come on. The stairways of all places? It gets tiring having to walk around fights that people want to start in an inconvenient area. On top of that, you then have to try and dodge the people trying to see the fight.

I remember one specific incident in my sophomore year. I was on the third floor, and out of nowhere, a fight broke out. I was confused at first about why people were running. Then, out of nowhere, I was shoved. Luckily, my friend was able to catch me or else I would have ended up on the floor. I can promise you that I wasn't the only one who has experienced this. When little fights break out, I can see my peers get pushed or they try to avoid the area and go a different route to get to class. Why should we have to put up with our peers fighting?

Overall, just don't fight in school. It causes commotions that are not needed and the aftermath of fighting is just not worth it. If you are upset at someone or someone is being disrespectful toward you, find another way to deal with the problem. I promise that there are other ways to deal with the issue. Your fist can only get you so far in life.

Cooper Competitors

The story of the athletes who strive for success in Cooper sports

Princess Nyarkoh

By LESLY TIPANQUIZA ESCOBAR
Quill staff writer

Princess Nyarkoh (12) is a member of the Hawks girls basketball and track teams.

"I started playing in the fifth grade," Nyarkoh said. "I have been playing at the high school level for five years."

Photo by R. JARMAN

Nyarkoh said that the basketball team is a welcoming one thanks to each player's focus on bonding.

"I love the way everyone connects with each other and the teamwork that happens as a result," she said.

As for her favorite aspects of playing the sport, Nyarkoh pointed out some skills she is able to display during games.

"My favorite things are blocking shots from anyone and stealing the ball," Nyarkoh said.

With the winter season now underway, Nyarkoh said her main goal is to provide guidance to the younger players.

"I want to be a role model to the other players on the team," Nyarkoh said.

Once the winter season is at its close, Nyarkoh transitions into track.

"I think this should be a good season," Nyarkoh said.

Beyond her interest in sports, Nyarkoh is interested in medicine.

"My favorite class in school right now is CNA because I want to go into nursing after high school," Nyarkoh said.

With nursing as her ultimate goal, Nyarkoh said that college will come after her time in high school.

"My plans for college are to study nursing so I can become a registered nurse," Nyarkoh said.

In her free time, Nyarkoh said she enjoys singing and dancing.

Jessica Tlaseca

By LESLY TIPANQUIZA ESCOBAR
Quill staff writer

Jessica Tlaseca (12) competed on the Armstrong-Cooper girls soccer squad during the fall sports season.

"I've been playing for almost my whole life outside of school with just my cousins, but I have played for Armstrong-Cooper Football Club for two years," she said.

Photo by R. JARMAN

Among the many elements she has enjoyed about her time in soccer, Tlaseca said her interactions with other people rank among her favorites.

"I have enjoyed working with my friends and coaches," she said.

Looking back at her time in soccer, Tlaseca said it was a game during her junior year that she enjoyed most.

"My best memory is when we won our last game," Tlaseca said.

When she is off the field, Tlaseca is focused on her schoolwork. She cited science, math and AVID as her favorite subject areas.

"I enjoy math because it is easy to me and I like to find patterns, I love science because I am interested in the medical field and I enjoy AVID because of the environment my teacher and classmates create in that class," she said.

Outside of school, Tlaseca spends a lot of time working to earn money for college. She also enjoys playing soccer with her cousins and friends.

Next fall, Tlaseca will be starting college at Concordia in St. Paul, where she is considering a major related to medicine.

"I am interested in the medical field, most specifically, I want to either be an ultrasound technician or a delivery nurse," Tlaseca said.

William Nichols

By LESLY TIPANQUIZA ESCOBAR
Quill staff writer

William Nichols (12) is part of the Nordic skiing team in the winter and the esports chess team in the fall.

"I have been playing on the Nordic team for four years now starting my freshmen year after Ms. Domenichetti kept encouraging people to join during class," he said.

Photo by R. JARMAN

Nichols said he enjoys skiing because it helps him be "more active in winter." Another thing he has enjoyed about the sport are the fun activities he gets to take part in with his teammates.

"My favorite memories are the costume races we do at the end of each season where we all dress up in costumes and ski a short race," he said.

Prior to the Nordic season, Nichols tried a new activity this year by joining the esports team.

"I did chess on the esports team, which has been pretty fun even though we rarely win," he said.

As a student, Nichols said he most enjoys his science classes.

"My favorite types of classes are science classes like AP Environmental Science and AP Computer Science Principles because science is something I find very interesting," he said.

Nichols' interest in his computer science class is actually connected to his long-range plans after high school.

"I plan to go to Bemidji State University for a major in computer information systems," he said. "After that, I hope to work in software development or IT."

Mara Schley

By LESLY TIPANQUIZA ESCOBAR
Quill staff writer

Mara Schley (12) is an athlete who plays hockey in the winter and ultimate Frisbee and softball in the spring. Additionally, she plays in the Cooper marching band in the fall.

"I have been playing hockey since my sophomore year," she said. "I knew I wanted to start a winter sport that year, but I didn't want to do Nordic skiing or play basketball, and I saw hockey in an advisory slide and decided to join."

Photo by R. JARMAN

Schley cited the fast pace of the sport as an aspect she enjoys about hockey.

"I also just love skating on the ice," she said. "It doesn't take much effort and makes you feel so free."

Looking back at her fall season, Schley said that marching band went well in 2024.

"We got third at our competition and we still have marching band next July in Washington, D.C.," Schley said.

Looking ahead to the spring, Schley is still deciding her athletic plans.

"Last year, I participated in softball. Right now, I'm debating on playing softball or taking photos of Frisbee," she said.

When it comes to school, Schley said English is her favorite class.

"I've never really enjoyed English before, but Ms. Kope has really made me enjoy her class," she said.

After graduating, Schley has many plans for what she will do next.

"I plan to major in music performance and minor in nutrition, but I also plan to dual enroll in a nearby community college to practice culinary arts. I hope to be a private chef one day," she said.