

A Texas college attracts a new kind of student athlete with a state-of-the-art esports arena

St. Mary's University supports an online gaming program with dedicated connectivity

A new intercollegiate sport has the attention of people worldwide. One that doesn't require a court, field, pool or track to play. What's needed is reliable, high-speed internet connectivity. This new, emerging sport is competitive online gaming — more commonly referred to as esports — and St. Mary's University has become the first university in San Antonio, Texas to sponsor a varsity program.

Esports is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, and it is fueled by the next generation of students, many of whom are avid gamers. It's not your average college students playing video games in their dorm rooms, but organized teams typically competing in an esports arena complete with jerseys and devoted fans.

The concept of launching an esports program was initially introduced to St. Mary's vice president of information services, Curtis White, by a couple of his team members. His staff explained that esports would benefit the school by attracting and retaining students, providing a richer college experience, and, much like traditional sports, instill players with discipline, preparation skills and teamwork. White agreed, and broached the idea to the

school's new athletics director, Robert Coleman, in 2018.

Coleman, who had seen other universities successfully start esports programs, was 100 percent on board. "In looking toward the future, for us to be around in another twenty years, it made real sense," Coleman says. "This program could catch the eye of students that maybe wouldn't come to St. Mary's without the program."

After performing due diligence on what was needed to make a varsity esports program happen, Coleman and White presented the idea to the university's leadership council. The university president gave them the green light, and it was off to the races.

Now that the program was approved, two critical decisions needed to be made: where to build the esports arena, and who would provide the digital infrastructure.

A state-of-the-art arena demands dedicated connectivity

Coleman and White were able to secure an optimal location in the center of campus for an esports arena. "It's in the hub of campus activity where the main dining hall and bookstore are; it's a showcase for prospective students," says White.



St. Mary's University chose trusted partner Spectrum Enterprise to provide reliable connectivity for its new esports arena.

Client profile

ST. MARY'S
UNIVERSITY



Organization

St. Mary's University

Industry

Education

Services

Fiber Internet Access
SpectrumU TV

Overview

- St. Mary's University needed a dedicated, high-performance internet connection to support its new varsity esports program.
- The school partnered with Spectrum Enterprise to deploy a scalable Fiber Internet Access circuit just for gaming traffic.

Outcomes

- St. Mary's can provide a gaming experience that meets expectations of gamers and fans alike.
- The school can easily scale up bandwidth to accommodate more gaming consoles and players as the program grows.

Why it matters

- St. Mary's University is providing students with an exciting opportunity to compete in one of the world's fastest growing competitive sports while developing new life skills.
- By investing in the rising interest in esports, St. Mary's can attract and retain more students.

“The level of support we get from Spectrum Enterprise and their commitment to our success is incredible ... [they] focus not only on what's going to meet our needs right now, but also what we're going to need to be successful in the future.”

- Joseph Longo, executive director of infrastructure and enterprise systems



A dedicated 2 Mbps Spectrum Enterprise fiber internet circuit ensures latency and jitter do not impact the gaming experience.

For the digital infrastructure, St. Mary's needed a partner who could provide a highly reliable connectivity solution. “Without reliable connectivity, gaming doesn't happen,” says White's team member Joseph Longo, executive director in charge of infrastructure and enterprise systems for St. Mary's. “Connectivity is the players' soccer field. It's their basketball court.”

St. Mary's existing campus network had enough throughput and bandwidth to support online gaming. However, because that network serves the entire campus, esports traffic would be competing for priority with all other campus traffic, resulting in higher latency and jitter.

“If enough latency and jitter is introduced, it degrades the gaming experience,” says Longo. “You'll have popping in the game play, which means your character is in one place at one moment, and the next moment he's 30 feet away. That experience would make it very hard for our student-athletes to compete.”

For the esports program to be successful, it needed a dedicated internet circuit separate from the campus network. White and Longo turned to Spectrum Enterprise, a partner who had already proven they could provide both reliable solutions and support.

A partner with more than the right technology

St. Mary's had partnered with Spectrum Enterprise in 2019 to replace its traditional cable TV service with SpectrumU, a video streaming service for college students that lets them watch a wide selection of live and on-demand programming anywhere on campus using their personal devices. The move was a huge success for the university. “It's one of those things where the only complaint we've heard is: “How come we didn't offer it sooner?” says Longo.

But the school was impressed with more than just the streaming solution. “The level of support we get from Spectrum Enterprise and their commitment to our success is

incredible,” says Longo. “They have a deep understanding of higher education and focus not only what’s going to meet our needs right now, but also what we’re going to need to be successful in the future.”

St. Mary’s met with Spectrum Enterprise to discuss the vision for the esports program and the school’s connectivity needs. “The Spectrum Enterprise team really understood our vision and was really excited about it,” says Coleman. “That set everything off on the right foot.”

It was decided that connectivity for the esports arena would be provided by a 2 Gbps Spectrum Enterprise dedicated Fiber Internet Access (FIA) circuit. This would offer the school more than enough capacity to support competitions and livestreaming while ensuring that bandwidth could be easily scaled up if needed.

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– Joseph Longo

“Having a scalable solution was critical for us; we always want to be very forward-thinking with the enterprise solutions we bring to campus,” says Longo. “If our program flourishes and we want to increase the number of gaming stations, we can easily upgrade our bandwidth to support them.”

The St. Mary’s IT team and Spectrum Enterprise account team met weekly to assess their progress, and the



Scalable connectivity ensures St. Mary’s can easily upgrade bandwidth to support new gaming stations as the esports program grows.

FIA installation was completed right on schedule in February, 2020; just six weeks after the start of the project. “Everything went very, very smoothly,” says White. “We tested the connection with several of our gaming folks and coaches, and they were very pleased.”

An arena ready for serious gaming

The arena was ready to host up to 30 gamers for the St. Mary’s University inaugural esports season, which started in Fall 2020. Initially scheduled to take place in Spring 2020, the program’s launch was delayed due to COVID-19. The arena was modified so gamers could practice and compete safely, with a revised configuration that includes socially-distanced gaming consoles.

Prepared for the future

St. Mary’s doesn’t plan to restrict esports to their new arena. Plans are in the works to expand the scope of the program to include gaming-related curricula. “We plan to have a certificate in game design, and may even grow beyond that to a course or even a program minor offering, or a major someday as things mature,” says White.

One thing is for certain: No matter how fast the esports program might grow, St. Mary’s is ready to support it with a reliable, high-performance network that’s ready for anything. “Spectrum Enterprise is definitely putting us in a place that we didn’t imagine being in – and that’s very exciting,” Longo says.

About Spectrum Enterprise

Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving America’s largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions: Internet access, Ethernet access and networks, Voice and TV solutions. Spectrum Enterprise’s industry-leading team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. More information about Spectrum Enterprise can be found at enterprise.spectrum.com.

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