

## HCHS Black Bear esports has successful inaugural season

The inaugural season of the Harlan County High School esports program resulted in individual and team growth and the SMITE team reaching the eastern regional playoffs.

Coaches Needham Saylor and Austin Hall said there was great excitement about the success of the players and teams this season.

“We are looking forward to starting back up in February,” said Hall.

The eastern regional includes teams from across the eastern United States, including Michigan, New Hampshire, Florida and many others.



Our Rocket League season ended at the conclusion of the regular season. Team HCHS One reached the playoffs but a technical error forced a forfeit in the final match, knocking them out of the playoffs. The same error kept the Team Black Angels from playing with all their members in a potential playoff berth match.

Team Hot Wheelers finished just shy of making the playoffs after a brutal three game run of top 15 opponents.

The SMITE team started their season with only one experienced player and entered the season a week late due to the program beginning at HCHS.

“They made great improvements over their season. They finished their season 9-5 and made the playoffs for the eastern region,” said Saylor. “They won their last six matches straight to do so. They lost their match in two tight games against the third ranked team in the region. They led in kills until the very end of the match. They officially ended their season with a record of 9-7 and as one of the top 18 teams in the eastern region. This region stretches from around Kentucky, north to Michigan, and north east to Maine.”

Saylor said, “We are proud of all the teams and players. We are officially announcing the expansion of the esports program. When the season starts up again in February, we will be adding NFL Madden, Super Smash Brothers Ultimate, Mario Kart 8 and League of Legends to our lineup of teams. We hope to pick up student commentators to help broadcast and announce the games.”

Kentucky High School Athletic Association sanctioned games include NFL Madden 22, Rocket League, Super Smash Brothers Ultimate and League of Legends.

Hall said he was surprised at the participation from students. “There were 21 students to participate in the first season this fall. We have had 40 plus students sign up for the spring season with the new lineup.”

Tryouts for the spring schedule will be announced soon, but are planned for the weeks of January 10<sup>th</sup> and January 17<sup>th</sup>. Those interested should listen for announcements at HCHS.

Hall said an esports showcase will be held on February 3 at the high school.

“It will showcase the games we will be playing. There will be an overview of the games and esports in general. There will be games played and open for spectators to watch.

Saylor concluded, “What a season! Go Bears!”