



California State University, Dominguez Hills
1000 E. Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747

CSUDH Esports Association Paving Inroads to University Through Mentorship, Strategic Partnership

CARSON, Calif. - Former Compton High School graduate turned CSUDH freshman Cesar Cedano Jr. levelled up this past summer, making good on his pledge to attend Dominguez Hills after experiencing the Esports Mentorship Program. Now, after successfully making the jump to university, the CSUDH Overwatch Team Captain has his sights set on the future while remaining aware of the journey that has led him to the present. Cedano is the Esports Association's first 360 story, an aspiring university hopeful who is now a mentor to his alma mater.

"As a mentee, [my experience] was nothing but positive," he says. "The mentors were welcoming and charismatic and I learned social skills and leadership, things that helped me become a better player and person in general. As a mentor I think my most useful skill is being able to connect with others and to listen. The main thing is giving back to my community and hopefully being able to influence someone to also follow their dreams"

The middle sibling to two sisters and son of immigrant parents, Cedano, simply by following a passion for gaming, is majoring in Computer Science and demonstrating how Esports is a strategy and not an outcome. "It started with gaming and Overwatch of course," he says. "I learned about Overwatch league and wanted to [play], but it was PC only, so I had to build my own desktop and learn about parts. Eventually through that I started watching YouTube videos and my love for computers blossomed from there."

Helping accomplish the association's mission and propel its vision is CSUDH Esports Association General Manager and chief architect Ruben Caputo. He plays a critical role in its day-to-day operations on and off campus. Caputo has had a finger on the pulse of the local Esports landscape for more than two years and has been instrumental in identifying and developing strategic partnerships between the university and key partners such as Pizza Hut and the Compton Unified School District, among others. Through well thought-out, calculated cooperatives, Caputo is raising the profile of the university via the blueprint of Esports while simultaneously carving out a space for aspiring college students that largely didn't exist three years ago. "The Mentorship program with Compton USD and CUEL community will always be special to us," he says. "When we first began it came in the most difficult time during the pandemic lockdown. Our DH Esports students responded with the willingness to help. Our peer-to-peer mentorship made an impact to the students and their families who were watching their child grow beyond the competition. [I am] thrilled to have mentored Cesar and truly happy for him as he continues his academic journey with us."

In an era increasingly driven and shaped by technology, attaining a marketable, modern skillset is essential, now more than ever. Local community stakeholder, Alvaro Brito is a 21st Century Learning Specialist with Compton USD working with the university to build a bridge to higher learning while supporting students and teachers in the implementation of STEAM initiatives and innovation in the classroom. "Esports can be used as a tool for learning by teaching and reinforcing valuable skillsets to our students," he says. "Many STEAM jobs require students to collaborate and think creatively. Esports reinforces these skills. A plethora of new job opportunities are booming within the Esports industry, and we need to prepare our students to be competitive for these jobs. Students who are passionate about streaming or gaming will learn how to



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harvest these skillsets and add the academic component to flourish professionally."

Cedano walks into a defending NECC National Champion Overwatch Toro team carrying the expectation and role of team captain, a role familiar to him from high school. The young leader is poised to lead the Toros and is not shy about his ambition and vision for the future. "As for my expectations, I would say they are big with CSUDH coming off three NECC championships," he says. "It's intimidating for sure, but I think I can help lead the team to at least one more [championship] while I am at DH. [In five years] I still see myself doing something in Esports even if it's not playing the game, [it could be] coaching or managing. There's nothing like Esports in my opinion and it's something I want to do for as long as I can. Eventually I'd like to form my own Esports organization and take the world by storm but for now I'm focused on doing my best for DH."

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CSUDH Esports Media Contact:

Ruben Caputo, Esports General Manager / Email: RubenCaputo@gmail.com / Esports.CSUDH.edu
California State University, Dominguez Hills

