

Gaming lounge shut down after final conflict

By Tessa Castor
Staff reporter

The gaming lounge, formerly located in the basement of Christy and used by the eSports student organization, has closed its doors. While a new location is being sought by the organization and Jason Knowles, eSports faculty adviser, one has yet to be found – leaving the team to a semester of “reconstruction.”

Knowles said that the organization had received complaints before the lounge’s closing. He said students regularly left the lounge trashed. Loud shouting and music could be heard from Richardson Performing Arts Center, and propped doors led to flooding in the basement of Christy, all things for which Knowles said students had been scolded.

Knowles also said that equipment outside of the gaming lounge was being used for gaming, like a projector in Christy 12. This “spilling out of designated spaces,” Knowles said, also drove the decision to close the lounge, that the equipment’s mistreatment could break it and leave it unusable for academic purposes.

JC Fuentes, communication junior, is eSports president. He said, while Knowles had expectations of the group, these were not communicated through the organization’s former student leadership.

“Our problems were really over the whole year Jason was here,” said Fuentes. “It was a student leadership issue. Leadership-wise, we weren’t all there.”

Despite warnings that the lounge might be closed, Knowles said these issues were not resolved. A former Southwestern student tipped over a vending machine in the basement of Christy in the early morning hours of April 29. Fuentes said the student broke the machine because it wouldn’t give him his change back. He said the student didn’t tell anyone about the situation until the broken machine was discovered.

“The tipping point was the tipping over of the Coke machine,” said Knowles. Though there is still a vending machine for snacks in the Christy basement, the soda machine has been removed.

Students were notified of the lounge’s closing upon their return in the fall. Fuentes said the news was a shock to the eSports students.

“It was kind of just a bomb,” said Fuentes. “We should have expected it with the machine being broken.”

The following is an excerpt of an email sent by Knowles on Aug. 7, addressed to

the officers and members of eSports:

“As your faculty adviser/director, the past 2017-2018 school year provided a valuable opportunity to observe how the student organization operates. At the beginning of the fall 2017 semester, you were all asked to read and sign a team agreement stipulating specific conditions you and your teammates are required to maintain in order to operate in the Christy building. Unfortunately, even after repeated warnings, several of those conditions were not met... All of these actions have placed the further growth of the team in jeopardy. However, the dean has assured us that another space is forthcoming.”

Knowles said that the mental well-being and academic success of students were considered along with the other issues. He said some of the students who had used the lounge in recent years had GPAs below 1.0, and hints of gaming addiction within the group using the lounge were present.

“We’ve been concerned about the amount of time students spent down there,” said Michelle Boucher, communication, computer science and English division chair. “There are other things they should be doing. They’re paying a lot for this education. This wasn’t just about punishing them.”

Knowles said he is concerned about the health of the players, especially in the case of video game addiction. He hopes to break bad habits within the organization.

Gaming addiction has been a recent topic in headlines around the country, particularly after a shooting on Aug. 26 in Jacksonville, Fla. at a “Madden” video game tournament. The shooter, David Katz, 24, was described by MarketWatch.com as a “disgruntled player” and “sore loser,” and he killed two of the tournament’s attendees and injured 11 others before turning the gun on himself. Katz had a history of hospitalization for mental illness and had shown signs of gaming disorder.

“Video games have captured the imagination of Americans since the 1970s,” says AmericanAddictionCenters.org. “Today, video game addiction has been recognized as a process addiction similar to compulsive gambling, in which the rush of winning becomes one of the primary motivations for playing.”

AmericanAddictionCenters.org says that not all researchers believe video gaming is addictive – however, WebMD cites the addiction as a form of “impulse control disorder,” a psychiatric disorder characterized by impulsivity. With the specific substance, in this instance video games, a

person becomes more in need of the substance to keep going, and becomes irritable without it.

Fuentes said, “I’ve seen gaming addiction here. We had people who would skip class to stay in the lounge and play games.”

Students would hide in the lounge on weekdays during checks by campus security, staying the night in the lounge and sometimes, even the weekend, said Fuentes.

“They would go in Friday after classes and would not leave until Sunday night,” remembered Fuentes. “Video game addiction is a serious thing and I respect it. I’ve seen it on campus before. I think it starts with free will, though – it’s more than a disease.”

AmericanAddictionCenters.org lists a sedentary lifestyle, lack of social engagement, problems with concentration, avoidance of developmental tasks such as social interactions, increased aggression and seizures as signs of a gaming disorder. Those who believe they have a gaming disorder can call the American Addiction Centers at 888-970-8035 for help.

For on-campus assistance, Mary Ann Smith, wellness coordinator, may be emailed at maryann.smith@sckans.edu.

The former gaming lounge will soon be converted to an academic space. The student television program is growing, and the station is located next to the former lounge. Knowles also serves as visiting instructor of communication, digital arts and new media. He said this space could serve the television students well, while allowing future show productions to take place without interruption.

In moving forward with eSports, Knowles said he hopes to assist student in building a strong, reputable organization, enforcing new regulations such as using Roberts Rules of Order in meetings, monitoring GPAs of students and designating a treasurer to prepare finance reports. Knowles said that, should eSports become a recognized activity by the NAIA, the team would fall under the rules of Title IX and likely move under the school’s athletic department.

On May 2, Knowles attended a division
See eSports, PAGE 7—

The following regulations for eSports were established:

1. eSports will no longer have access to any Christy Hall facilities.
2. eSports will no longer have 24-hour access to any campus facilities on the weekends.
3. The eSports teammate responsible for the vandalism of the soda machine is no longer a member of the team and his membership has been revoked indefinitely.
4. From now on, students must have earned and maintain a 2.75 GPA or higher in order to remain or become an eSports member.
5. Only members who maintain a 3.0 GPA or higher will qualify for the eSports activity scholarship/financial aid.
6. Any student with a current GPA under 2.75 will not be allowed to join/remain in eSports.
7. Any student who is able to raise his/her GPA to a 2.75 or higher will be eligible to (re)join eSports.
8. Team eligibility of all student members/applicants will be evaluated at the beginning of each semester by the eSports faculty director.
9. Beginning in the Fall 2018 semester, eSports officers will be required to hold monthly meetings that follow Roberts Rules of Order. A record of meeting minutes as well as training statistics of eSports members must be regularly maintained by the organization’s secretary. A copy of these records must also be provided to the academic director on a regular basis.
10. eSports will seek to collaborate with Southwestern College in an ongoing initiative to promote responsible game play by educating the campus community about how to accurately recognize, effectively address and successfully overcome/prevent gaming addiction..

Former Netflix stars tackle Moundbuilder football

By Cale Eirich
Staff reporter

Not far from the border state of Alabama sits the small town of Scooba, Miss.

While you may expect to find nothing but quiet anywhere with a population of 700, Scooba has made noise across the country. With the Netflix documentary series “Last Chance U,” the town’s longtime junior college powerhouse, Eastern Mississippi Community College, EMCC, was thrust into the spotlight.

EMCC has been referred to as the epicenter of junior college football due to their ability to regularly pipeline players to four-year schools throughout the country. EMCC currently has nine graduates in the NFL. The average Division-I football program has seven graduates.

For many of the players at EMCC, the town of Scooba is their last chance to pursue their dreams of playing football. For three transfers on the Builder football team, “Last Chance U” showcased their team’s journey and their own journeys. For Jay Johnson, defensive end junior, Brooks Shannon, sport management junior, and Ryann Lee, sport management junior, their last chance built a bond amongst them stretches from Scooba to Richard L. Jantz Stadium.

The Mississippi trio went into EMCC already knowing each other from competing in high school. Each played key roles on getting each other to the junior college powerhouse.

“I felt like going juco before D-I was a better fit for me because I didn’t know a lot coming out of high school,” said Lee of Batesville, Miss. “Plus, I saw the guys in our recruiting class, like Jay and Brooks, and I just took a chance on playing with those guys.”

A highly-touted class full of Division-I transfers and talented incoming freshmen played a key role in getting the trio to EMCC.

“What got me to East was being the underdog in high school,” said Shannon, Tupelo, Miss. “All the good athletes were going to East Mississippi, so I felt I should go there for the competition.”

Shannon led EMCC in 2016 with 43 receptions, 465 yards and four touchdowns on the year, earning himself All-Region 23 squad. He was also placed on the MAC-JC All-State and North First Team before heading to West Georgia.

Then there is Johnson, the pride of Bruce, Miss. Johnson is somewhere in between the group of kickbacks and freshmen look-

ing for their path to the Division I level. While Johnson came into EMCC as a true freshman, junior college was his second chance after his original plans to attend Ole Miss did not come to fruition.

After being heavily recruited and ranked as the number 45 athlete in the country by 247Sports, Johnson committed to the Rebels, but failed to qualify academically out of high school. Johnson joined Shannon at West Georgia after EMCC.

“My grades weren’t right, so I went to East Mississippi right out of high school,” said Johnson. “I knew Brooks from high school and I met Ryann when I got there, we just instantly clicked.”

The news that East Mississippi would be the host of the Netflix original series “Last Chance U” came after the three had already committed to EMCC, a welcomed surprise for everyone in the Scooba community.

“We were the first group to do a Netflix series. The coaches didn’t even know,” said Johnson.

They waited anxiously for nearly three months after signing their release forms until the first day of fall camp, when the cameras and crew finally showed up to begin filming.

“Having the cameras following us around from being in pads, off the field, going to the cafeteria... Coming from Mississippi, we’re not used to that stuff,” said Lee. “There wasn’t anything wrong with it but it just felt weird, like something for the first time.”

Getting used to continually being filmed for a documentary took time for both Lee and Shannon, but Johnson’s recruitment gave him experience in the spotlight, explained Lee. Over time, they all became equally accustomed to the spotlight at East Mississippi.

“Scooba was good to me. A small town, I don’t like being around a lot of people,” said Shannon. “Just knowing football and being up there, that’s all we did.”

The athletes were pushed academically, going to school year-round to ensure their eligibility and ability to qualify for a four-year school. While at EMCC, the players had a little under a week for summer vacation.

Despite their grueling academic schedule, coupled with the pressure to follow up back-to-back national championships, the culture of the program and lack of distractions at EMCC kept the players focused.

“You don’t let it change you. It’s just a small little town, you got two gas stations and Subway,” said Johnson. “At the end of the day, Scooba taught me how to be



ABOVE: Jay Johnson, defensive end junior, Brooks Shannon, sport management junior, and Ryann Lee, sport management junior, look forward to their time at SC. The three transferred from Eastern Mississippi Community College, where they were featured in the Netflix series “Last Chance U.”

Cale Eirich/Staff photographer
TOP LEFT: Jay Johnson, defensive end junior, plays in the Sept. 8 football game against Sterling College. The Sterling Warriors won the game 43-20.

Tessa Castor/Staff photographer
BOTTOM LEFT: Johnson, Lee and Shannon look onto the field where they hope to play together one day.

Cale Eirich/Staff photographer

a man, taught me how to be responsible, taught me how to not take things for granted. You get it out the mud here, you either going to make it or not.”

The trio matured as football players and men due to the impact of Buddy Stephens, EMCC head football coach. Stephens became well-known in households across the country for his intensity and passion displayed during practices and games shown on camera during “Last Chance U.” Johnson, Shannon and Lee know him for the positive impact he made on his players.

“What you see on camera, man, that’s him, that’s him,” said Johnson. “But at the end of the day you’re dealing with people who got in trouble for drugs, got in trouble for breaking in, stuff like that. Them coming here and being soft on them, that’s not going to work.”

Coach Stephens’ toughness on the players helped shape them into men, explained Johnson. and through their recruiting process he wasn’t afraid to tell them how tough he would be on them. He’s also tough on opposing teams if they don’t come to EMCC.

“He’s going to drop them rings on the table and tell you, ‘You come to us if you want to win, or you play against us and we’ll beat your tail.’ Just like that, simple,” said Lee.

From lessons learned in a small town, to

a hard-nosed coach getting the best out of them, the Mississippi trio brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to Southwestern. Through the grind of playing junior college football and the pressure of their former team having its own Netflix documentary series, the three transfers believe they can help their new program win.

“Coming from a winning program, winning is all we think about,” Shannon said. “That’s what you’ve got to do to be good, just win.”

The bond Johnson, Shannon and Lee built amongst each other at “Last Chance U” brought them halfway across the country to Winfield, and gave them a new opportunity on the gridiron. With one year of eligibility remaining for Johnson and both Lee and Shannon redshirting, the Mississippi trio are sure to be on the field together very soon, a goal of theirs in trying to get all three at the same school.

Once they are together again on the field, the transfers’ final opportunity to pursue their individual goals will be realized together. As far as no longer being in the spotlight of a documentary, Johnson, Shannon and Lee agree – it’s the same here in Kansas. They are brothers all the time.

Cale Eirich is a senior majoring in communication. You may email him at cale.eirich@sckans.edu.