

Juniata eSports advances to *League of Legends* quarterfinals  
By Jacob Novak

In their first season, Juniata College's *League of Legends* eSports team is headed to the Landmark Conference playoffs on March 26 following a victory against Susquehanna University last Thursday.

The win against Susquehanna occurred on February 28. Juniata achieved a 2-0 victory in the best-of-3 contest. The first game was finished in 22 minutes, very close to their record of 19 minutes.

That match capped off a successful first season for Juniata after wins against Elizabethtown College and Goucher University. With one loss from Catholic University of America and a forfeit from Drew University, Juniata ended the regular season with a 4-1 record.

Their record in 2019 means that they will reach the Landmark Conference Quarterfinals on March 26. Their opponent has not yet been determined between Elizabethtown and Catholic University. According to students on the team, this will depend on the conference's interpretation of the rules in tie-breaking situations.

Senior starters Daniel Fernandez and Ambrose Lutwyche were pleased with the teams' performance in their inaugural season. "I expected us to be a middle of the pack team and compete with most schools," said Fernandez. "We have a realistic chance to win the regular season of the Landmark Conference, which far surpassed what I thought would happen."

Going into the quarterfinals, they also look at ways in which the team can improve. "The team could see the most improvement in coordination," said Fernandez. "We need to work on doing better as a team and not just playing as five individuals, but as one five-man team."

Juniata's playoff berth comes after eSports Kyle McCauley's resignation after just a week. "He was hired and everyone was excited to see him, but he had to resign for personal reasons," said Lutwyche. "We are all a bit disappointed, but it's no one's fault."

Although Juniata is not expected to make another coaching hire until the next academic year, Lutwyche hopes for someone similar to fill the role. "Someone with all of the same qualities. Kyle was the perfect candidate and it's unfortunate that he couldn't stay."

Juniata began to form its eSports program last fall as Fernandez and Lutwyche helped the college administration in building it from the ground up. "The program on campus began because [Matthew] Damschroder heard that we had been competing in a university *League of Legends* tournament on a yearly basis on our own," said Fernandez. "They decided to make it a reality and sought out people to make it happen."

The popularity of *League of Legends* is a large factor in why it became the first game for the program. "It's the most played and watched eSport and has a very good structure already built within the collegiate level," said Fernandez.

The second game added to the program was Super Smash Bros. Ultimate. "Smash was added kind of last second when somebody informed Charley Bein that there was a tournament they could enter, so he slapped together a team," said Fernandez.

Lutwyche also explained that there is potential for the program to expand to more games down the road. Among the potential candidates he noted were *Hearthstone*, *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* and *Overwatch*.

The process of starting the program took some explaining from the students. "It was a lot of focus groups and us telling the administration what it would take, why it could work, and what

it means to us,” said Fernandez. “It took a lot of explaining technology to old people,” said Lutwyche.

While this has been a successful year in kickstarting the eSports program, they also gave ways for the program to continue this momentum. “The program can grow to have an official coach, practice times and uniforms so that it really feels like a varsity sport,” said Fernandez. “The main challenge will be in the future with building up the program past just us.”

Fernandez explained that he was taken aback by Juniata’s reaction to eSports. “I never thought the school would support this, but it really has, and it’s been amazing.”

As Juniata gets ready for the quarterfinals on March 26, fans can watch their matches with live commentary either in-person or online. Spectators can gather in Good Hall, Room 202, or tune in to [twitch.tv/juniata\\_esports](https://twitch.tv/juniata_esports) for the livestream.