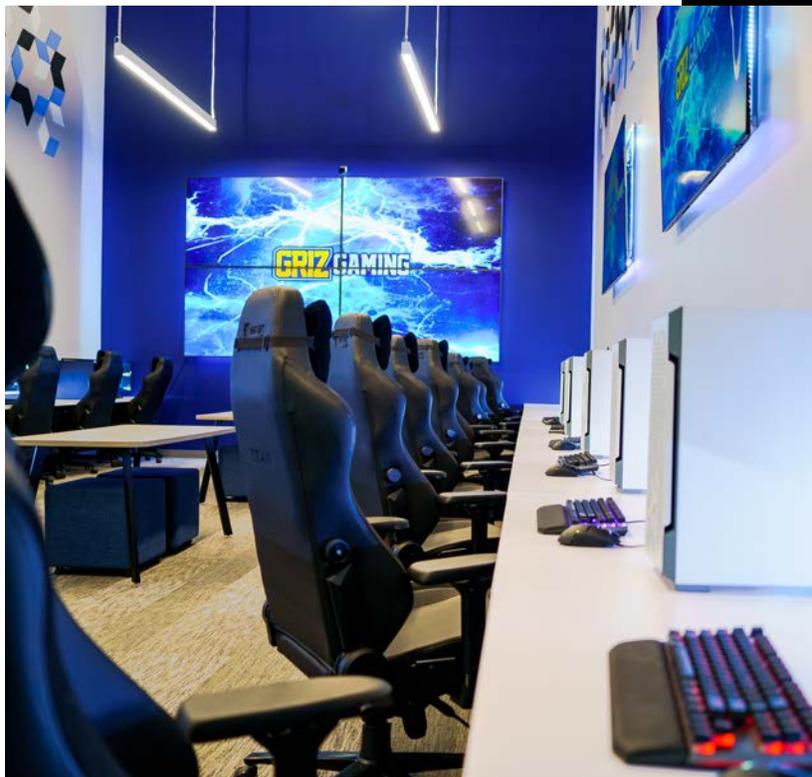


Franklin College's Esports Arena

With more than 400 programs in universities nationwide, it's safe to say that esports have an exciting future in college athletics. Esports are high-energy programs that allow students to train, compete and conquer against rival schools in competitive video games.

Despite how exciting the program can be, esports teams aren't always given an arena on campus that gets the blood pumping. They're often relegated to a stuffy old computer lab or crammed into the corner of a library. But one midwestern university had brighter plans in mind for their team.

With an old racquetball court as a blank slate, Franklin College called on CBMC to help transform the space into a flashy, high-tech gaming arena. We drafted highly technical blueprints and worked with Franklin's general contractor to light up the future of Franklin's esports program.





The Vision

“We didn’t want our team to look like an afterthought,” explains Emily Marten, Project Manager & Facilities Office Supervisor at Franklin College. “We’re excited to have esports on campus, so we needed a space to match that excitement.”

Marten’s concerns certainly carried weight. In our research, even universities working with multi-million dollar budgets have esports spaces that are visually bland and technologically lacking. If there was one goal for this project, it was to create a professional, eye-catching space for Franklin’s fledgling esports program.

Working off a modest grant coupled with a donation from an enthusiastic board member, Franklin needed an experienced lighting partner to make the most of a budget. In their eyes, the arena would be a colorful, dynamic space — but administration couldn’t quite put that vision on paper.

With Franklin’s goals in mind, CBMC put together blueprints for several different approaches at various price points. More than just a general plan of attack, we presented highly detailed drawings outlining electrical work, the configuration of controls, and the schematic designs that would make the arena pop.

Despite worldwide material shortages, we were able to give Franklin a space they love on a budget they could afford.

The Results

High-tech was the name of the game for Franklin's esports arena lighting. Color-changing lights are simple enough to install, but we wanted to give the team a truly customizable space to call their own.

Despite working with various components from different manufacturers, we were able to provide a simple, unified way to control the entire space. Each lighting element is wired to a Bluetooth module, and controllable from an intuitive smartphone app.

Franklin's esports coach Todd Burris explains just how seamless the experience is: "On game day, we press one button and we're good to go. It sets the color, volume and brightness of light for the arena so it looks great and there's no glare on our players' screens. It's just awesome."

That seamless experience rests on three essential lighting elements across the arena:



Gaming Station Backlights

One of the first ideas for the esports space was an LED tape light spanning the length of each side wall. Situated at waist height, these LEDs would provide a backlight for each gaming station.

Originally Franklin planned to install these lights directly onto the wall, but with a little ingenuity we identified an opportunity to mount them into a recessed channel in the drywall. Now the desks can sit flush against the wall, with no risk of damaging the lights.

Monitor Backlights

Competitive video games are a spectator sport, but it's not always easy to watch the action without crowding the players' desks. To provide a real-time view of the competition, Franklin requested two monitors mounted on each side wall, and four monitors on the back wall linked to form a large video wall — all streaming the games in progress.

To add some extra excitement for spectators, we installed low-profile tape lighting to backlight each monitor. Just like the recessed wall lights, these RGB LEDs are color-changing and controlled via the team's smartphone app.



Hanging Backlights

Racquetball courts are notorious for their high ceilings and stark fluorescent ceiling lights. Rather than retrofit the existing fixtures, starting from scratch allowed us to create a truly unique lighting experience to make Franklin's team proud.

We opted for six linear hanging lights, but knew that finding the right height could make or break the space. Too high and they wouldn't provide enough volume to light the arena. Too low and they would produce glare on players' screens — and block the spectators' view of matches being streamed on the wall-mounted monitors.

"Hanging lights sounds like such a simple process, but they put so much thought and care into making them perfect for our space," says Marten. "CBMC did an incredible job."

Even more so than their placement, the color-changing nature of Franklin's hanging lights would be the defining feature of their esports arena. Each hanging bar features LEDs on the top and the bottom sides which can be controlled independently — uplights to illuminate the ceiling, and downlights to wash the space in a color of their choosing.

The team puts those up and downlights to good use, depending on their needs for the day. On meeting days they use crisp, white light to clean their monitors and gaming rigs. But on game day, it's Franklin's blue and gold that wash the arena and get the team ready for action.



Wrap-up

The right lighting can bring electric energy to any sporting arena — for video games or otherwise. For Coach Burris and the rest of Franklin College, that energy is palpable:

“Recruiting at a small school is always a challenge, but our esports arena is the best recruiting tool I could have possibly asked for. When I walk prospective students through the space, I get a verbal commitment on the spot. They want to come to school at Franklin to play in our arena.”

The only worry? Outgrowing the space. Thanks to the arena, Franklin's esports team has grown from its initial 16 members to 27, with another dozen recruits in the wings. Administration already has their eye on a second racquetball court to house the growing team, and CBMC will be right there to help when it happens.

Whether you're a part of university or a general contractor working for one, we can help put your lighting plans on paper and make them a reality on any budget. Reach out to CBMC and we'll level up your esports project.

Let's Work Together



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