

# EXPOSURE



## DISCOVERY, JUST ONE CLICK AWAY

*An esports journey*

Story by [Fresno State](#)

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

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As a child, Kalena Rangel was always quiet and reserved. She constantly struggled to navigate social interactions and find the courage to share her thoughts. But gaming was her escape. It gave her an outlet and would eventually become the exact thing that built her confidence.

With a long-time interest in gaming, Kalena joined the Fresno State esports team as an Overwatch player and was unsure of what to expect. Since then, Kalena has grown with the team, sharpening her skills, finding her voice and coming into her own.

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"I've definitely learned how to speak up," she says. "Now, with esports, I'm actually talking to people that are interested in things that I'm interested in. We're building friendships and relationships here."

Within the game's first-person-shooter format, Kalena and her five teammates work together to accomplish a common goal. Each member controls a unique character with a specific strength, leading most players to specialize in a single role. This year, however, Kalena is pushing even further past her comfort zone to take on a new character – the tank – who leads the team across the map as its primary line of defense.

"Being a leader now is a little scary, because, before this semester, I've always been in the back of the team," she admits. "But it's been fun, and I've been going out of my bubble too."

According to former Head Coach Josh Tolbert, Kalena has "come out of her shell quite a bit" in the last year and continues to make significant strides.

"When she came into the esports room a couple years ago, she was a completely different person," he recalls.

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"She's come such a long way in her personal journey with this team, with her academics. She got a 4.0 last semester. She is hitting it out of the park."

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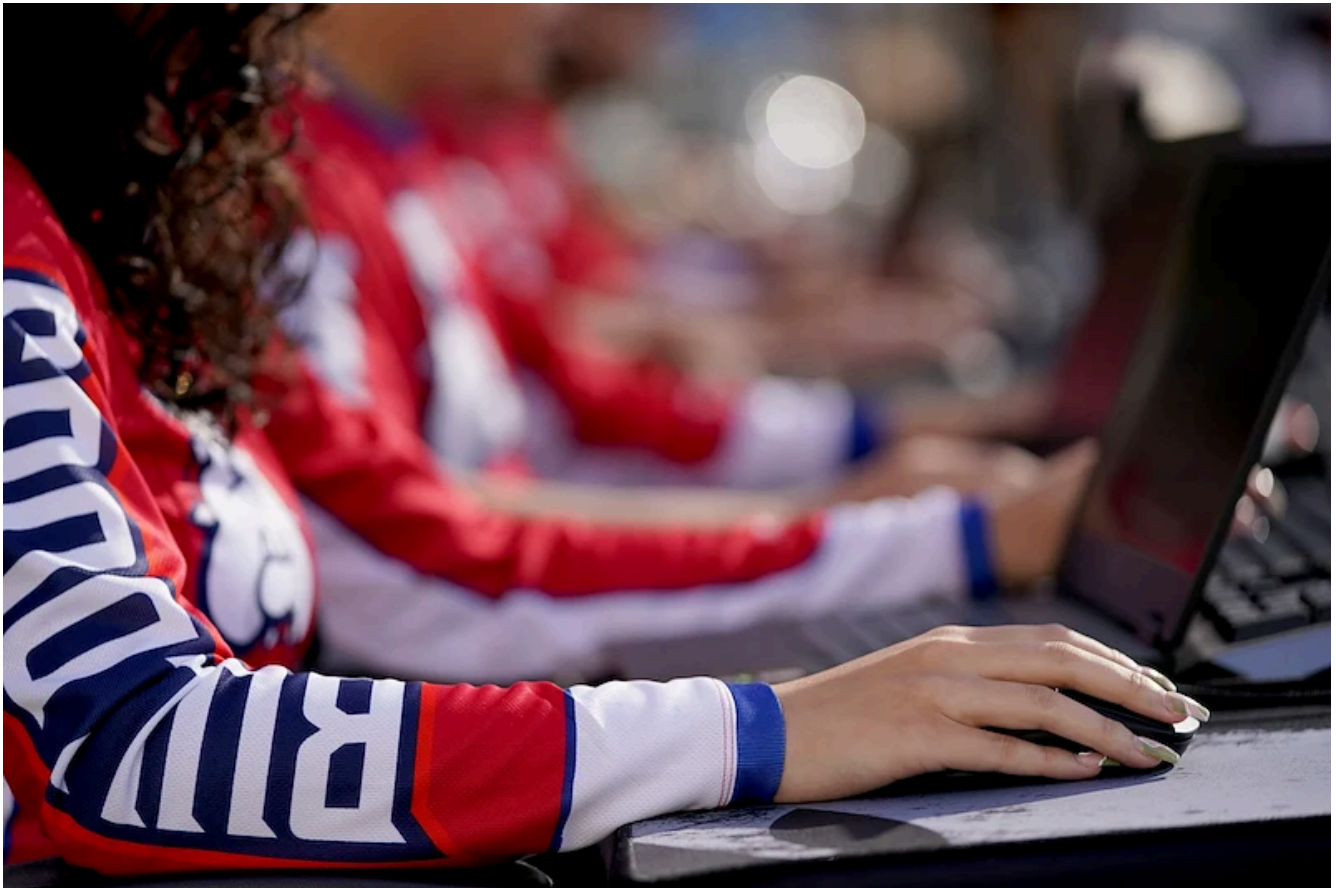
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## CHARTING A NEW PATH

Although Kalena has always had an interest in esports, she wasn't always sure about her career. As a freshman, Kalena originally planned to pursue nursing but switched majors several times before deciding on biomedical physics. She credits the esports team as her biggest motivation in solidifying her degree path.

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“I would say esports has changed me for the better, because, before the whole team, I was kind of lost. I didn't know what to do for college or a degree or even after college,” she says. “But now, with the team, it's made me realize I have to have a plan for what I want to do after college.”

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Through the esports program, Kalena has improved her time management, critical thinking and communication skills. The challenge of balancing athletics and academics has helped her grow as a student, bringing her to new heights and keeping her on track for graduation.

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“The esports program has made me feel motivated to keep doing my classes. It's made me boost my GPA, and it's making get ready for life after graduation.”

With a degree that combines health care, science and mathematics, Kalena plans to become a radiation therapist. She knows that the interpersonal skills she's learning as a student-athlete will help fuel her future success.

“With going to the medical field, I'd be interacting with patients, And if I didn't establish these, at least better, communication skills than I would've originally had, it'd be really hard to talk to people outside of college.”



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# LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

In the past few years, esports has erupted across the globe, but especially within the collegiate scene. Since 2016, more than 170 colleges and universities, including Fresno State, have established a varsity esports program.

“A lot of people don't realize that with esports, there's a lot of potential with it. Because video games and technology have widely grown in our society, and it's just going to keep growing,” Kalena says.

With a rise in esports across other universities, Kalena and her teammates have been able to compete at higher levels, taking on teams from institutions like CSU Sacramento and CSU Stanislaus. In turn, they've found what it takes to excel not only in competition, but as the next generation of leaders.

“It takes dedication, passion, the willingness to learn and do as much as they can,” says Coach Tolbert. “And when they're willing to learn, not just inside the arena, but out, the growth is limitless.”



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→Did you know? The Fresno State Overwatch esports team ranked 16 in the nation during the 2020-21 academic year.

Not only do collegiate esports programs provide students with opportunities for team building and competition, they also create a space that students can call home.

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“Esports has definitely made me feel like I belong here at school,”  
Kalena says.

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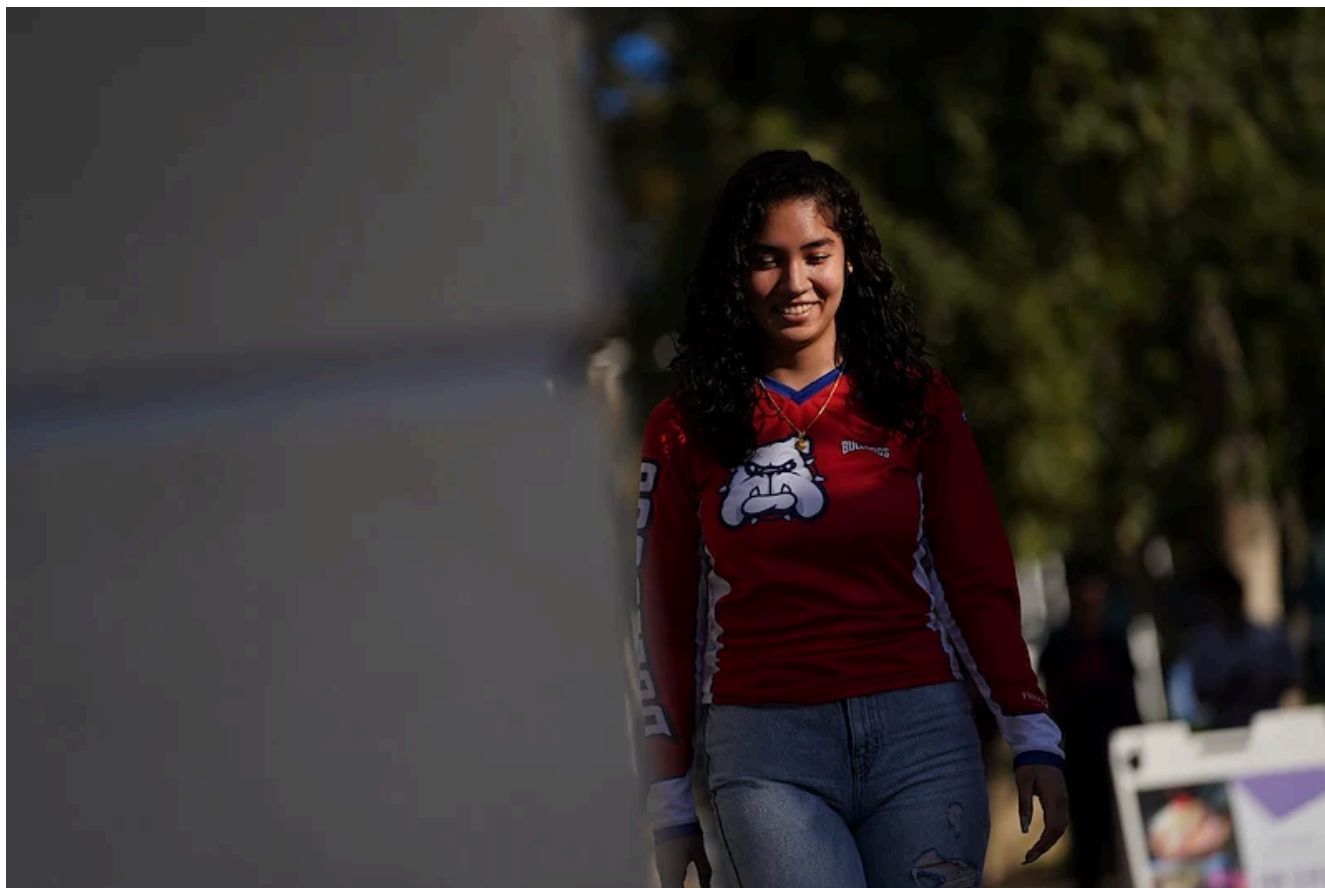
“Because now I'm surrounded by people that have the same interests and likes as me. And I hope that future students will understand that and feel the same as well.”

For Kalena, esports has opened up more doors than she ever thought possible. She hopes the program will do the same for future students and that they, too, will find the courage to walk through them.

“The program here has definitely helped me realize I can do anything that I want to do. And with the college continuing to keep this up, it'll give a lot of students that were like me, that had no idea what to do, a motivation to keep going.”

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Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Victoria Cisneros — University Brand Strategy and Marketing*

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