

Hot to SWAT

By Reg P. Wydeven
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During my senior year of college, I lived in a house off campus with four good buddies. Every night after dinner, we would go off to our rooms or the library to study. At 10:00, however, we would reconvene for a video game tournament.

We would either gather in our living room to play ‘Madden Football’ on my roommate’s Sega or in my room to play ‘RBI Baseball’ on my Nintendo. I held my own playing ‘Madden,’ but really dominated at ‘RBI.’

I would usually run the gamut and beat all of my roommates, typically pretty handily. In an effort to score runs (and taunt my opponent), I would intentionally overrun a base and get into a pickle. I would run back-and-forth and wait until my opponent made a throwing error and I would score.

One night, my mojo wasn’t working and I was losing to my buddy, Jon. During a rundown in the bottom of the 9th inning, I made a crucial error and out of frustration, yanked on my game controller. The yank inadvertently caused the Nintendo to come unplugged, shutting down our game before it was over. I argued that because the game didn’t officially end, my unbeaten record remained intact.

I was called a saboteur and my other roommates voted that the loss was official. While it really was an accident, I understood their ruling. We followed a certain code of etiquette when playing video games that resulted in dignity in victory or defeat.

Apparently that code is as outdated as our Nintendos and Segas.

In today’s digital world, sore losers go way beyond unplugging consoles – now they resort to ‘swatting.’

Swatting involves a gamer facing imminent defeat in an online game. First he tracks down his opponent’s address. He then uses an online program to call 911 but make it look as though he is calling from the opponent’s house. He will tell the 911 dispatcher an outlandish story, such as armed intruders are in the house. In response, the dispatcher sends the local SWAT team to the unsuspecting gamer’s home where they promptly storm in and arrest him, costing him the victory.

If it is a computer game, the gamer’s webcam may capture the whole incident and broadcast it for all the participants to see.

Sadly, swatting happens surprisingly often and can cost municipalities over \$100,000 to assemble and deploy SWAT teams for each occurrence. In addition, it can divert emergency services away from actual emergencies.

Celebrities, including Miley Cyrus, Rihanna and Justin Bieber, were the first targets of swatting. The swatters sought infamy in cyberspace, but the practice evolved into video games. Several states, including California and Michigan, have passed laws making swatting a felony. If convicted, swatters face long prison sentences and hefty fines. Many more states have similar legislation in the works.

In light of swatting, I’m hoping my former roommates realize that accidentally unplugging my Nintendo really wasn’t a big deal.

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