

How do pro baseball players survive rigors of sport? They play "Fortnite"

By USA TODAY, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.29.18

Word Count **728**

Level **800L**



Xander Bogaerts of the Boston Red Sox celebrates after hitting a double against the Tampa Bay Rays with the celebratory "take the L" dance from the video game "Fortnite." Photo by Maddie Meyer/Getty Images

Baseball players must master the following to be great at baseball -- running, throwing, catching, hitting and hitting for power. But they also need to have to know how to kill time.

In between games, there is downtime. Over the years, players have figured out plenty of ways to fill it. Now, perhaps, they have found the ultimate way -- "Fortnite."

Right now, the video game is wildly popular among young people. It has been a surprise hit among baseball players as well. It's being played in team clubhouses and on the private jets and fancy hotel rooms of major league players.

"I've never seen anything catch the public eye like this has," said C.J. Cron. He is a Tampa Bay Rays first baseman.

"Just when I think I'm getting bored with it and I'm going to stop playing, I find that it keeps me going," said Nick Williams. He plays outfield for the Philadelphia Phillies. "There are times I'm like, OK, this is my last game of the night. And then I get second place and I'm like, no, no, I need to try again."

Then 12 games later, he tells himself, "All right, this has got to be my last game."

A Game Of Survival

"Fortnite" is created by Epic Games. It is a survival game. It can be played solo or in teams up to four people. Each game begins with 100 competitors in a "lobby." Each player is on a quest to acquire supplies and weapons to better their chances of survival.

Teammates communicate through their headsets. They launch missions to find supplies, build traps and destroy zombies.

The game has plenty of updates, and if players avoid advanced features, it's free. That's part of what keeps baseball players coming back.

They have other reasons, as well.

The Hagerstown Suns is a minor league baseball team in Maryland.

Many players are thousands of miles from home, and some even come from other countries.

For them, "Fortnite" serves as more than a distraction from interminable bus rides, ever-present rain delays and budget motel rooms.



Image 1. Players can play

"It Can Get Overwhelming"

"If you let baseball consume you too long, it can get overwhelming," said Nick Banks. He is a 23-year-old outfielder for the Suns. "The first thing I do after every game is go to my host family's house, in the basement, and start playing."

One day, someone brought a PlayStation4 to the Suns clubhouse. Suddenly, 7 players out of 10 turned into "Fortnitters." When a gamer scores a win, trainers and coaches come out to watch.

Four of the team players were born in other countries, and all of them play "Fortnite." They bond with the rest of the team over the game, said Suns reliever A.J. Bogucki.

Chatting through "Fortnite" also lets players stay in touch. It creates greater connection than a phone call or text, he said.

Major leaguers agree. In fact, some big-league players have made friends online through the game.

Playing On The Ballpark's Big Screen

"I've never met Brett Phillips in person," said Tampa Bay Rays player Matt Duffy. Phillips plays for the Milwaukee Brewers, and the two just played on a big screen at the ballpark. "I'd consider him a little bit of a buddy."

Playing "Fortnite" is all Phillies Aaron Altherr does after a game.

He thinks his longest "Fortnite" session lasted around 10 hours during spring training.

"You play," he said. "Get some food. Play again."

Eickhoff said spring training was a key moment for the Phillies and "Fortnite." Players emerged from winter to realize that, yes, everybody was playing it – or at least half the team, he estimates.

"Taking The L" Doesn't Mean A Loss

It is no surprise then, that the player's love of "Fortnite" began showing on the field.

In the season's opening series, Boston Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts hit a double. When he reached second base, he performed a celebration dance from "Fortnite." It's called "Take the L" and many in the audience knew what it was.

Kansas City Royals' Kevin McCarthy gave another reason why players like "Fortnite." Many baseball players are traded to other teams or leave baseball altogether. "Fortnite" is a great way to keep in touch with friends who move away, he said.

"We still have Xbox and PlayStation."

Quiz

- 1 What effect did "Fortnite" have on Suns players born in another country?
- (A) It helped them become better baseball players out on the field.
 - (B) It let them stay in touch with their families back in their home country.
 - (C) It made them very popular with their team for introducing it to them.
 - (D) It gave them the chance to get to know their other teammates better.

- 2 Read the paragraph below from the section "Playing On The Ballpark's Big Screen."

"I've never met Brett Phillips in person," said Tampa Bay Rays player Matt Duffy. Phillips plays for the Milwaukee Brewers, and the two just played on a big screen at the ballpark. "I'd consider him a little bit of a buddy."

What conclusion can the reader make based on this paragraph?

- (A) Brett Phillips and Matt Duffy became friends because of "Fortnite."
 - (B) Brett Phillips and Matt Duffy were friends before playing "Fortnite."
 - (C) Brett Phillips and Matt Duffy play "Fortnite" but not with each other.
 - (D) Brett Phillips and Matt Duffy will only play "Fortnite" in the ballpark.
- 3 Why does Nick Banks think that "Fortnite" is more than just a distraction?
- (A) because he has been able to make many friends through the game
 - (B) because it helps him have a connection with other baseball players
 - (C) because he needs a break from the pressures of playing baseball
 - (D) because it helps him to get to know his host family much better

- 4 Read the section "Taking The L Doesn't Mean A Loss." Which sentence from the section shows WHY "Fortnite" is important to some baseball players?
- (A) It is no surprise then, that the player's love of "Fortnite" began showing on the field.
 - (B) When he reached second base, he performed a celebration dance from "Fortnite."
 - (C) Kansas City Royals' Kevin McCarthy gave another reason why players like "Fortnite."
 - (D) "Fortnite" is a great way to keep in touch with friends who move away, he said.