

GAMER GUIDE

BUILDING A VGC
POKEMON TEAM
EDITION



the need to know you didn't know you needed



WHAT IS IT?



The Pokémon Company and The Pokémon Company International host a global circuit for VGC competitions, which culminate each year in the prestigious Pokémon World Championships. To qualify for this event, players accumulate points by participating in battles at various in-person events, including regular competitions at local game stores and the annual International Championships. With the exception of Asia, invitations to the World Championships are administered by the Play! Pokémon program.



Competitive Pokémon is the natural extension of the battles in the Pokémon games. There are many different ways to play Pokémon competitively, but this guide will focus on the official style supported by The Pokémon Company. That style is called VGC, which stands for Video Game Championships.

BREAKDOWN THE BASICS



The VGC welcomes all Pokémon players who comply with the current format for each series. VGC formats serve as the rulebook for each year's tournaments, and these guidelines get a facelift every year. When you're strategizing for your team, it's a smart move to acquaint yourself with the latest series details. This includes:

- Current Game Title
- Consoles and Platforms
- Team and Battle Regulations
- Roster of Eligible Pokémon

Age divisions are also in play:

- Juniors: Born after 2011
- Seniors: Born between 2007 and 2011
- Masters: Born before 2007

Mechanics



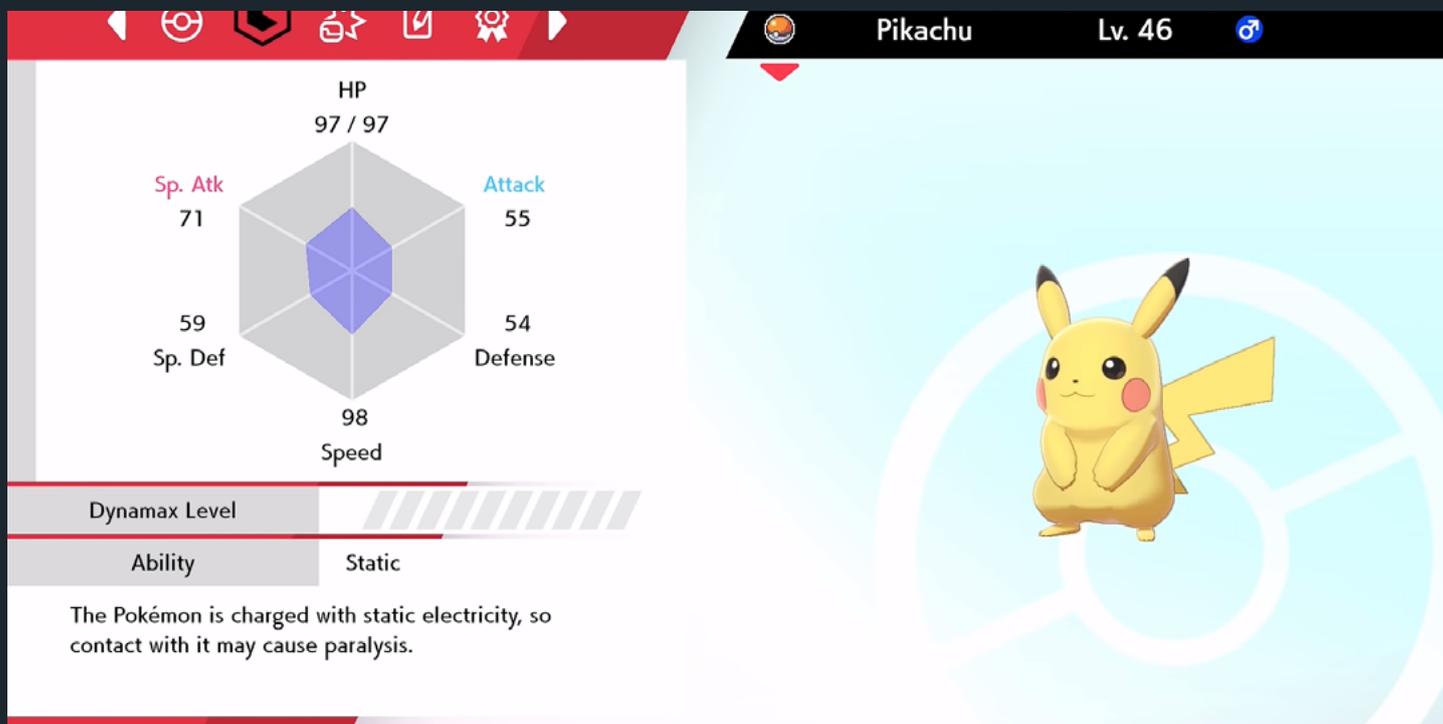
Allowed Pokémon

The roster of Pokémon permitted for VGC competitions undergoes periodic revisions. Competitive Pokémon revolves around dynamic rulesets known as formats, which determine the allowable Pokémon species each year. The legal Pokémon can range from a few hundred to nearly a thousand, but their usage varies significantly due to inherent differences in their strength and capabilities.

Metagame

The metagame is a dynamic reflection of popular Pokémon and strategies in competitive play. Success often lies in understanding the most influential Pokémon rather than attempting to master all of them. The metagame's characteristics shift based on the competitive context, whether it's the general ladder, local tournaments, or matches among friends. Adapting to the specific context helps identify favoured Pokémon and strategies.

This adaptable metagame concept provides insights into the Pokémon you'll likely encounter in battles, extending beyond popularity statistics to include favourable Pokémon, combinations, and strategies.



Evaluating Pokemon

What makes a Pokémon “good” varies depending on battle goals. As a beginner, it’s okay not to have strict criteria. These are some criteria considered by competitive players:

- **Fundamentally Challenging:** A good Pokémon challenges your opponent, often by having tools that other Pokémon can’t easily deal with.
- **Consistency of Strategy:** It should provide consistent strategies, forcing opponents to prepare for them even if they are already aware of the Pokémon’s abilities.
- **Flexibility:** Flexibility can make a Pokémon good since it can adapt to various situations.
- **Field Presence:** A good Pokémon should be able to impact the game by being on the field, either through damage output or support.
- **Consistency:** It should remain valuable throughout the match, not lose value once opponents know its moveset.
- **Reduced Variance:** Good Pokémon should minimise negative variance and reduce the need for risky decisions.
- **Stats:** Base stats play a significant role in determining if a Pokémon is good. Each stat should help the Pokémon achieve its intended role.
- **Team Support:** Good Pokémon should enable and benefit the rest of the team in some way, either through direct support or by taking on specific roles.
- **General Matching:** A good Pokémon should have favourable matchups against common Pokémon in the format. It shouldn’t be easily knocked out by popular threats.
- **Pressure Without Setup:** It should command pressure while on the field without needing complex setup moves.
- **No Reliance on Field State:** A good Pokémon doesn’t require specific field conditions (e.g., weather or Trick Room) to succeed.
- **Consistency:** It should offer safe and consistent plays, avoiding the need for overly risky predictions.
- **Move Coverage:** Having diverse move coverage is essential; relying on too many attacks of the same type can be a drawback.



Typing

Each Pokémon has a type that determines its strength or weakness against other types. A type advantage results in “super effective” damage, while a disadvantage leads to “not very effective” damage. Some matchups might even render your attacks completely ineffective. Mastering the 18 Pokémon types is essential for optimising your damage output.

However, not all Pokémon have just one type; many have dual typings. Additionally, some special mechanics can alter a Pokémon’s type during battles, making the game even more interesting. For instance, the ‘Color Change’ ability of Pokémon like Kecleon changes their type based on the last attack they received.

Attacks classified as “super effective” deal double damage to types you have an advantage over, while “not very effective” attacks deal only half damage to types you’re weak against. If you encounter a dual-type Pokémon that is doubly weak to your attack, you can unleash a devastating 4x damage. However, some types are entirely immune to specific other types. It is practically impossible to memorise all Pokémon and their types, so referring to a chart when you’re building your team is standard practice.



Utility Moves

In the world of competitive Pokémon, utility moves often prove to be the game-changers, providing a diverse array of tools to secure wins. These moves cover vital functions like manipulating speed, drawing attacks away from allies, setting up protective screens, regaining health, and inflicting status conditions.

- Redirection moves, like Follow Me and Rage Powder, deflect enemy attacks away from allies.
- Screens create protective barriers, such as Reflect and Light Screen.
- Recovery Moves allow Pokémon to recover health, best suited for naturally bulky Pokémon.
- Status Moves induce conditions like Sleep, Burn, Freeze, Paralysis, and Poison, but not all status effects are equal.

Speed Control

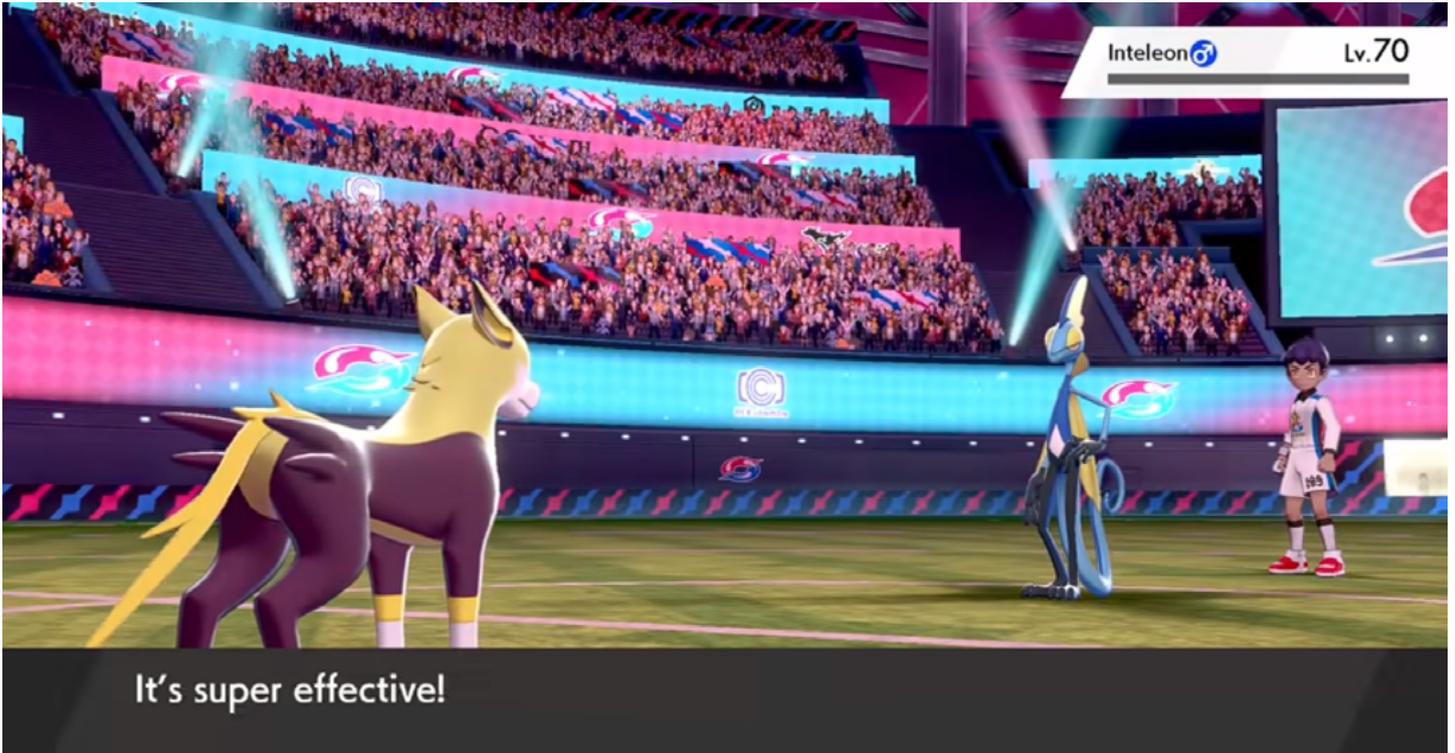
In Pokémon VGC battles, the order in which Pokémon act is dictated by their Speed stat. This makes Speed control, using moves and tactics to alter the order, a pivotal strategy. With the shift to dynamic Speed in Pokémon Sword and Shield (Generation 8), Speed control becomes even more vital. Tailwind, Trick Room, Speed drops, Speed boosts, priority moves, and natural Speed all offer unique ways to control Speed. Your choice depends on your team and the battle format.



Items

In competitive Pokémon battles, you can't use items like Potions or Revives. Instead, you can equip your Pokémon with held items, which offer various in-battle effects. Each Pokémon can hold one item, and these items must be unique within your team. This means competitive VGC teams will have a total of 6 different held items to strategically enhance their Pokémon's performance. When choosing items consider 2 important factors: will it bolster a strength or counter a weakness?

Team Building



The Core

Every team begins with a central idea, whether it's a specific Pokémon, combination, move, or tactic. If your starting point is a Pokémon, add it to your team with some basic considerations. If it's a tactic or move, identify the pivotal Pokémon to execute it. This step establishes the core, the fundamental concept of your team.

Adding to the Core

Once you've established your core idea, it's time to expand on it. Keep in mind that you'll bring only 4 of your 6 Pokémon to each battle. The goal now is to add Pokémon that contribute to your team's primary goal. During this step, there's no need to finalise complex stats or moves. You typically add Pokémon for the following reasons:

- **Complementary Offence:** Choose Pokémon that enhance your core's offensive capabilities, considering factors like Speed, priority moves, or spread attacks. Be cautious not to overemphasise offence, which can lead to a hyper-aggressive team. Balance is key.
- **Complementary Defence:** Add Pokémon that fit defensively, whether through typing, abilities like Intimidate, or good defensive stats. Defensive synergy doesn't rely solely on types. Keep in mind that defence alone isn't enough in VGC; your Pokémon should have multiple roles.
- **Support:** Consider Pokémon that can support your main Pokémon with utility moves. However, be cautious with purely supportive Pokémon as they can offset your team's offensive balance.

It's crucial to add Pokémon that enhance your team's core strength rather than countering specific strategies at this stage. The focus is still on shaping your team's primary goal. While it's acceptable to have Pokémon that can counter other strategies, this should be a secondary benefit to their main role.

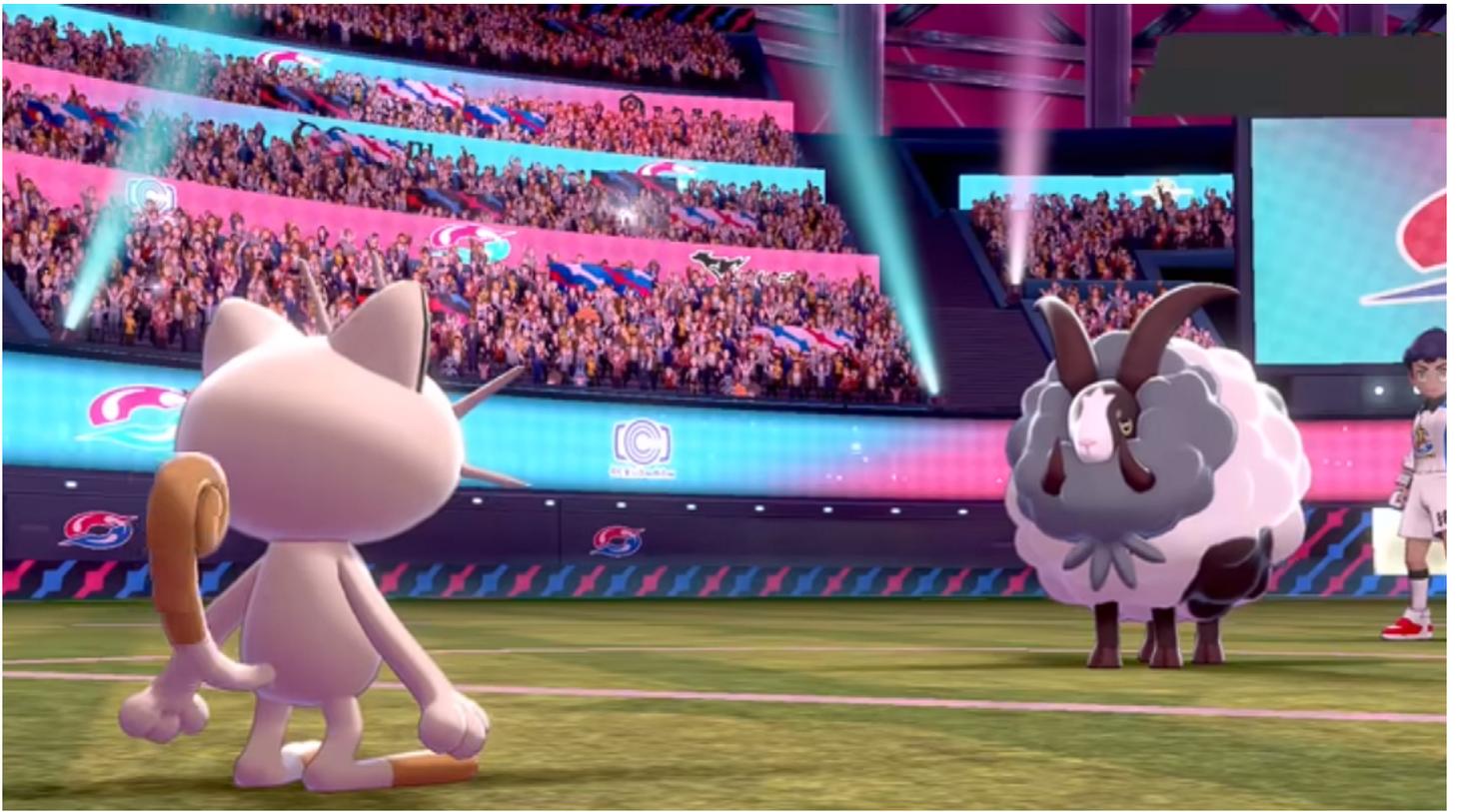


Round Out the Team

At this point, your core is set. However, your team is unlikely to have all 6 Pokémon yet. It's time to assess your team's weaknesses. Are there specific Pokémon, moves, or opposing teams that threaten your strategy? While you might not have all the answers until you test your team, you have 3 options:

- **Counter Difficult Matchups:** Identify problematic matchups and add strong Pokémon that address these issues. Ideally, these new additions should complement your core's strengths without overlapping.
- **Enhance Core Synergy:** Incorporate Pokémon that interact uniquely with your core, providing more versatility and allowing you to adapt to different situations. This is a good opportunity to add utility moves for added depth.
- **Introduce a New Direction:** Consider introducing a completely different approach to your team. Ensure these new additions blend well with your existing team for maximum synergy. Expect to allocate at least 2 Pokémon slots to introduce a new angle.

Follow these guidelines until you complete your team with 6 Pokémon. If you encounter roadblocks, don't hesitate to revisit earlier steps and consider different Pokémon.



Polishing & Practising

By now, you should have selected the 6 Pokémon for your team and have a concept of how you'll use them. It's time to fill in the details such as moves, items, and other specifics. Once you've completed this step, you've created the initial draft of your team. Congratulations, but it's unlikely to be the final version. Testing is crucial to assess your team's performance in real battles and refine it. Be prepared to make changes as needed. If you're having trouble with a particular slot or your core isn't working as expected, it's okay to revisit and adapt. Building teams is a skill that improves with practice, leading to more effective and enjoyable teams.

Battling



VGC battles are conducted using the latest Pokémon games, currently Pokémon Sword and Shield. While many Pokémon games feature single battles where one Pokémon faces off against another, VGC adopts a distinct format: each side deploys 2 Pokémon simultaneously.

In this format, rather than challenging an opponent with your entire team, you assess their team composition and choose 4 out of your 6 Pokémon for the encounter, known as "team preview." Since you release 2 Pokémon at the outset, you gain immediate insight into half of your opponent's chosen Pokémon. The victor in VGC is the trainer who eliminates their opponent's 4 Pokémon first.



Best-of-1 vs Best-of-3

In VGC, it's crucial to master strategies for both best-of-1 and best-of-3 formats. The ladder and online Wi-Fi tournaments, like International Challenges, primarily adopt the best-of-1 style, whereas most major in-person tournaments use the best-of-3 format.

In Best-of-1 matches keep these general strategies in mind:

- **Assume Strong Moves:** Due to limited information about your opponent's team, assume they have their most powerful moves until proven otherwise. This cautious approach helps you avoid unnecessary risks.
- **Leverage Surprises:** Best-of-1 matches are ideal for springing unexpected tactics from your team, catching opponents off guard. Capitalise on any unique features your team possesses.
- **Evaluate Match-Ups:** Understand how your team matches up against your opponent's. Adjust your play style accordingly. In favourable situations, you can play more conservatively, while in unfavourable match-ups, prepare to make strategic predictions.
- **Critical Turns:** In these single-game scenarios, a single turn can decide the outcome. Always be mindful of worst-case scenarios and take steps to avoid them, particularly when Dynamaxing.
- **Accept Volatility:** Best-of-1 matches can be unpredictable. Be prepared for losses, and recognize that team-building is a significant aspect of your success. Learning from unexpected strategies and Pokémon is crucial for your growth in VGC.



Best-of-3 matches allow both players to make adjustments and apply insights from prior games to shape their decisions. Here's what to consider when approaching Best-of-3 matches:

- **Leverage Information:** In a Best-of-3 set, you gain more insights than in a single best-of-1 game. Mastering the skill of making informed decisions with all available information is vital.
- **Adaptability is Key:** Be ready to adapt your strategy. Effectively countering your opponent's plays and responding to their strategies showcased in previous games is crucial in this format. Quick thinking and improvisation skills develop with practice.
- **Game Management:** Winning the first game provides a buffer. While you shouldn't change a successful strategy needlessly, you can take calculated risks in game 2, such as predicting your opponent's lead or pursuing match-winning moves.

Best-of-3 matches can be long and demanding, lasting up to an hour. Stay focused on your overarching goals and strategies, even if the early game doesn't go as planned.

TIPS & TRICKS



Set realistic expectations

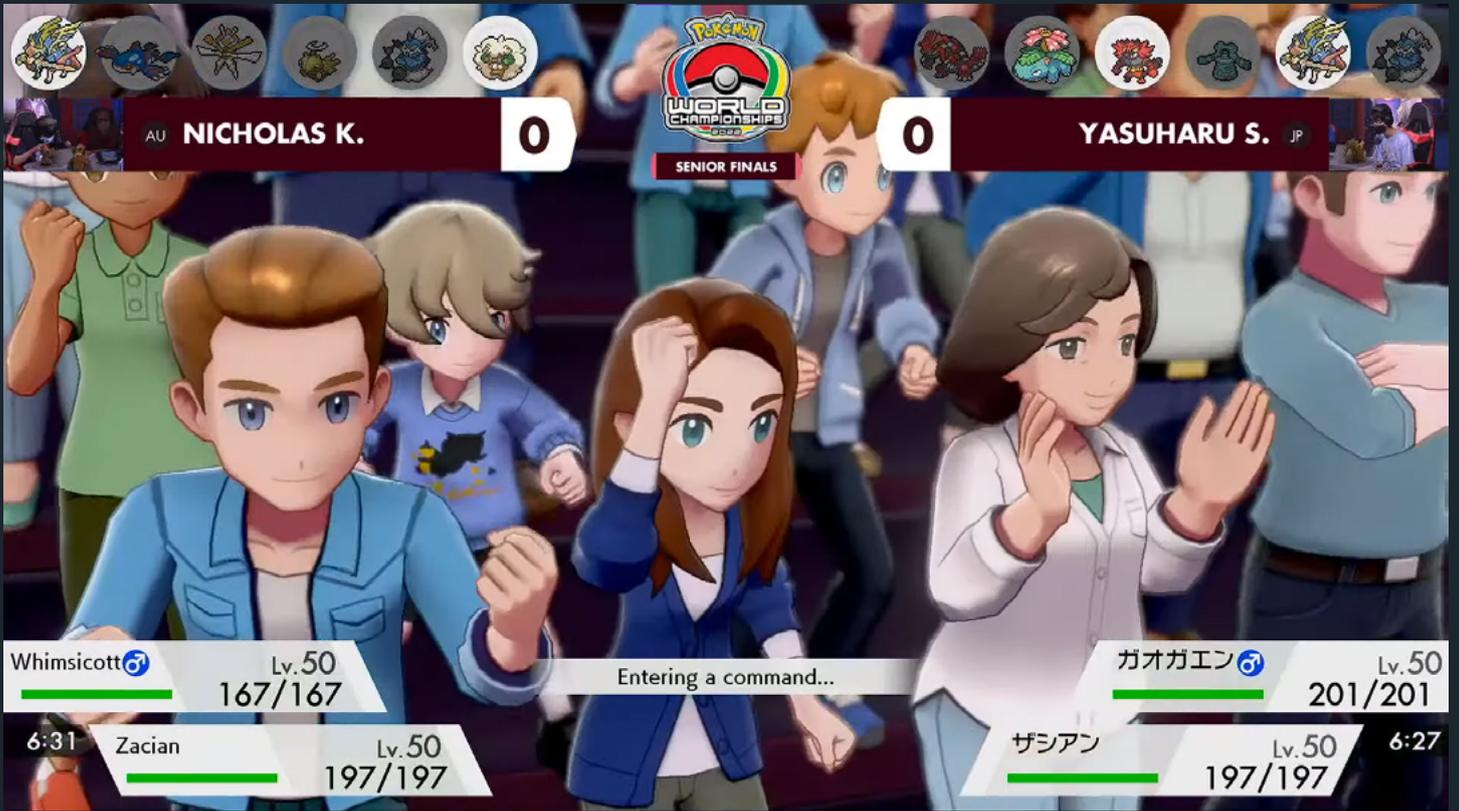
In any competition, especially online and Regionals, it's important to acknowledge that winning on your first attempt is unlikely. Setting realistic expectations is key to maintaining motivation and focus.

Losing equals learning

In VGC, a one-on-one esport, every loss can be traced back to a decision or mistake, offering a valuable learning opportunity. While chance plays a role, taking full accountability for your decisions is vital. Self-critique is essential for improvement.

Learn from elite players

Studying elite players in action is a great way to gain deeper insights into the game. When watching these experts, don't just observe passively. Engage in active analysis and ask yourself questions. By adopting this analytical approach, you can significantly enhance your skills and understanding of VGC.



CONCLUSION

In the dynamic world of Pokémon VGC team building, your journey has just begun. Armed with the knowledge of team synergy, role diversity, and key strategies, you're ready to embark on your path to becoming a seasoned Pokémon trainer. Flexibility, adaptation, and a passion for mastering your team's intricacies are your greatest allies. So keep evolving your strategies and remember your team's potential is boundless. Good luck and, most importantly, have fun!