

Esports and the New Gaming Culture

Bradley Steffens





© 2021 ReferencePoint Press, Inc.
Printed in the United States

For more information, contact:

ReferencePoint Press, Inc.
PO Box 27779
San Diego, CA 92198
www.ReferencePointPress.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Steffens, Bradley, 1955- author.
Title: Esports and the new gaming culture / by Bradley Steffens.
Description: San Diego, CA : ReferencePoint Press Inc., 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020015968 (print) | LCCN 2020015969 (ebook) | ISBN 9781682829257 (library binding) | ISBN 9781682829264 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: eSports (Contests)—Juvenile literature.
Classification: LCC GV1469.34.E86 S84 2021 (print) | LCC GV1469.34.E86 (ebook) | DDC 794.8--dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020015968>
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020015969>

Contents

Important Events in the World of Esports	4
---	----------

Introduction	6
A Human Drama	

Chapter One	11
A Global Phenomenon	

Chapter Two	24
Inside the World of Pro Gamers	

Chapter Three	37
Building Esports Teams	

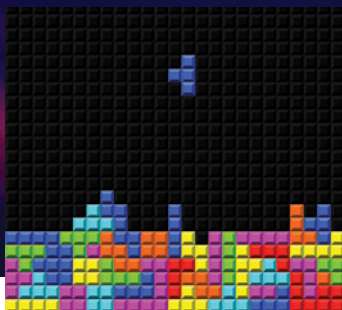
Chapter Four	51
Esports in Education	

Source Notes	66
For Further Research	71
Index	74
Picture Credits	79
About the Author	80

Important Events in the World of Esports

1972

Stanford University students hold the first known collegiate video game tournament for the combat game *Spacewar!*



1990

Thousands of gamers compete in *Super Mario Bros.*, *Rad Racer*, and *Tetris* in the first Nintendo World Championships.

2000

The Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism forms the Korean e-Sports Association.

2005

The Cyberathlete Professional League World Tour holds a series of tournaments for *Painkiller* with a \$1 million prize pool.

1975

1985

1995

2005

1980

Atari holds the first large-scale video game tournament: the National Space Invaders Championship.

1997

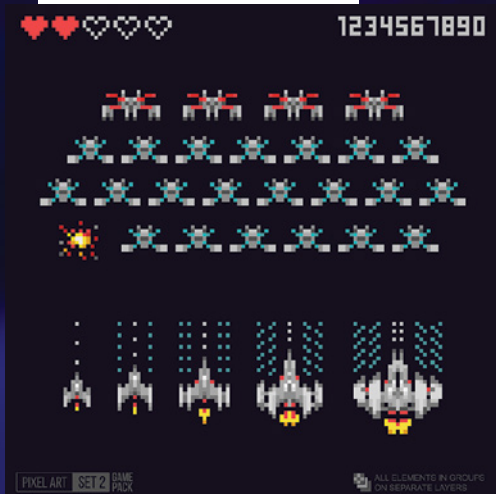
Microsoft sponsors the Red Annihilation tournament for the popular first-person shooter game *Quake*. Winner Dennis "Thresh" Fong receives a 1987 Ferrari 328 GTS as the grand prize.

2002

Sundance DiGiovanni and Mike Sepso found the Major League Gaming Corporation to hold official video game tournaments throughout the United States and Canada.

2009

The Collegiate Starleague launches its first *StarCraft* tournament with twenty-five participating schools.



Chapter One

A Global Phenomenon

Things looked bleak for OG, a *Dota 2* professional team based in Europe, as the 2018 edition of the International's 2018 tournament approached. Earlier in the year, OG star Anathan "ana" Pham decided to take a break from competitive gaming. Without ana, the team struggled through one tournament after another. Then Tal "Fly" Aizik, an Israeli Canadian professional, and Gustav "s4" Magnusson, a Swedish professional, both left OG to join Evil Geniuses, a rival esports team based in the United States. Despite having won several tournaments in the past, OG was so weakened in 2018 that it was not invited to the International or even to the regional qualifier. If OG was going to participate in the International, it would have to do it the hard way, earning a spot through the open qualifying rounds.

Cinderella Story

Just before the tournament began, ana returned to OG. He was joined by Topias Miikka "Topson" Taavitsainen, a Finnish professional *Dota 2* player. The team swept through open qualifying and secured a spot in the regional qualifier. In regionals, OG did not lose a single game, and the team qualified for the main tournament.

The tournament did not start well for OG. Playing in Group A, the Europeans managed to take one game off tournament favorites PSG.LGD, a team from China, but were defeated 2–1. On the second day, OG was swept 2–0 by defending champions Team Liquid of the Netherlands. However, facing elimination on the third day, OG rallied to win five games and lose only one. The winning spree put OG into the tournament’s final four.

Group B winner VGJ.Storm, a North American squad, chose to play OG in the first round of the finals, believing OG to be the weakest of the four finalists. However, OG shocked their opponents, defeating them in two straight games. OG then went up against Evil Geniuses and their former teammates Fly and s4. The best-of-three series came down to the final game, and OG again surprised the experts by defeating their rival. The win put OG in the upper bracket against PSG.LGD, the team that had defeated them 2–1 in the playoffs.

The teams split the first two games, but in the third game PSG.LGD took control by eliminating ana’s hero, Spectre. As PSG.LGD moved in on OG’s Ancient to end the game, Topson fought back with his hero, Zet, the Arc Warden, singlehandedly repulsing three attackers. Topson then led a pulse-pounding counterattack against the retreating PSG.LGD forces, culminating in a successful attack on PSG.LGD’s Ancient, ending the game.

“Against all odds, we stood united, fought until the very end and became your #Tl8 Champions! The Dream is now real.”⁵

—OG team, *Dota 2* champions in 2018

The Grand Final was a rematch with PSG.LGD. For only the second time in the International’s history, the Grand Final went the full five games. After splitting the first four games, PSG.LGD took a commanding lead in the fifth game, mainly through successful deployment of the hero Earthshaker. But, as before, when things looked their worst, OG fought back. Using superior

team fighting tactics, OG overcame the deficit and claimed the Aegis of Champions trophy and \$11 million in prize money. “Against all odds, we stood united, fought until the very end and



A man watches the 2018 International Dota 2 esports games online. The event drew 15 million online viewers in 2018 and more than tripled the number of viewers in 2019.

became your #TI8 Champions!” stated the team on Twitter. “The Dream is now real.”⁵

OG’s 2018 Cinderella story was viewed by nearly 20,000 people who attended the matches at the Rogers Arena in Vancouver, Canada, and by another 15 million people who watched online and on cable and satellite television. As popular as the 2018 tournament was, the number of people watching the championship game more than tripled the next year, when 48 million people watched the 2019 edition of the International, according to Esports Charts. In that tournament, OG shocked the world again when it became the first team in the history of the International to win back-to-back championships.

The International is just one of eight major *Dota 2* tournaments held each year. In addition, there are another eighteen smaller *Dota 2* professional tournaments held throughout the year in as many as twelve different countries. But *Dota 2*, published by American

The Ten Most Popular Games on Twitch

Digital research firm Newzoo continuously tracks live viewing and streaming behavior across Twitch and then ranks the top games on a monthly basis by total hours watched (in millions). Newzoo tracks both esports hours—hours of content from professionally organized esports competitions—and total overall hours, which adds individual player streams to the esports total. Its rankings also show the percentage of the total hours that comes from sanctioned esports alone, which can be high, as in the case of Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six: Siege* or low, as with *Fortnite*. The rankings below are from February 2020.

Game	Total Hours	Esports Hours	Share Esports
1. <i>League of Legends</i>	119.5M	14.6M	12.2%
2. <i>Fortnite</i>	54.3M	0.0M	0.0%
3. <i>Counter-Strike: Global Offensive</i>	49.4M	18.3M	37.2%
4. <i>Escape from Tarkov</i>	48.0M	0.0M	0.0%
5. <i>Grand Theft Auto V</i>	42.6M	0.0M	0.0%
6. <i>Dota 2</i>	34.6M	6.8M	19.7%
7. <i>World of Warcraft</i>	31.3M	0.0M	0.0%
8. <i>Apex Legends</i>	27.8M	0.2M	0.5%
9. <i>Hearthstone</i>	18.9M	0.1M	0.6%
10. Tom Clancy's <i>Rainbow Six: Siege</i>	17.4M	8.0M	46.2%

Newzoo, "Most Watched Games on Twitch," February 2020. <https://newzoo.com>.

video game developer Valve, is just one of many gaming platforms that make up the esports universe. In fact, Valve publishes two other games—*Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress*—that are also played at the professional level.

Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Games

In all, at least forty different games are played professionally. These are divided into eight categories. *Dota 2* is categorized as a multiplayer online battle arena game. Games in this category

involve teams of individual players, each of whom controls a single hero, as they battle for control of an arena—typically a world represented by a three-dimensional map viewed from a raised perspective, known as an isometric perspective. Other games in this category include *Heroes of the Storm*, *League of Legends*, *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, *Smite*, and *Vainglory*.

With *League of Legends* and *Dota 2* in the lineup, the multiplayer online battle arena category is one of the most popular in all of esports. The twenty-three thousand tickets for the 2018 *League of Legends* world final in South Korea sold out in less than four hours upon their release, even though the tournament was broadcast online. The world finals in 2017, held in Beijing’s Olympic Bird’s Nest stadium, drew a sold-out crowd of forty thousand.

Real-Time Strategy Games

Multiplayer online battle arena games grew out of an older but still popular category of games: real-time strategy games. In these games, a player or team typically builds bases, gathers resources, and produces units to conquer enemies and take control of a map, while their opponents are doing the same thing at the same time. Winning requires the players to think strategically about what needs to be done and how to do it. The major real-time strategy game played professionally is *StarCraft II*.

At one time, *StarCraft II* was the biggest esports game on the planet, with dozens of tournaments being played around the world. “‘StarCraft II’ really started the modern era of esports,” says Adrian Harris, a video game executive who headed up the *StarCraft* esports program. “We had this period between 2010 and 2012 when we were the only kid on the block. I remember being at IPL4 [a multi-game competition held in Las Vegas], where ‘League of Legends’ had this tiny side stage, and saying ‘What’s this game?!’”⁶ Other games overtook *StarCraft II*, although many

“‘StarCraft II’ really started the modern era of esports.”⁶

—Adrian Harris, video game executive

“Yess!! Managed to pull it off 4–3!!! Dream come true.”⁷

—Joona “Serral” Sotala, winner of the 2018 *StarCraft* World Championship

fans stayed loyal to the game, especially in South Korea. Every winner of the *StarCraft* World Championship from 2012 to 2017 was from South Korea. The streak ended in 2018, when Joona “Serral” Sotala of Fin-

land took home the big prize. “Yess!! Managed to pull it off 4–3!!! Dream come true,”⁷ tweeted Sotala.

In 2020 the game’s publisher, Activision Blizzard, ended the World Championship Series. It announced that it would fund a new *StarCraft* professional league that would be managed by ESL, a German esports organizing company, and DreamHack, a Swedish production company specializing in esports tournaments.

Shooter Games

Shooter games also grew out of some of the oldest computer games and remain one of the most popular genres in both home entertainment and professional esports. There are two kinds of shooter games, with some overlap: first-person shooter games and third-person shooter games.

In first-person shooter games, the player views the action through the eyes of a single person, the protagonist. Often, the protagonist’s arms extend into view from the bottom of the screen, holding whatever shooting weapon the character is using. As the player advances through the game, the shooter’s-eye view often rocks from side to side, mimicking the human gait. With the first-person perspective and the sounds of footsteps and breathing, the game puts the player into the virtual world. The character’s location is often shown on a small map on the screen. The player shoots and eliminates enemies as the protagonist proceeds toward a goal. The most popular first-person shooter pro games include *Battlefield*, *Call of Duty*, *Counter-Strike*, *CrossFire*, *Doom II*, *Halo*, *Overwatch*, *Rainbow Six: Siege*, *Special Force II*, and *Team Fortress 2*. First-person shooters are very common in competition events.

Third-person shooter games are similar, but the point of view is from above and behind the protagonist. Instead of viewing the action through the protagonist's eyes, the player sees an avatar of the protagonist moving and shooting. This allows the protagonist to be better defined and more interesting to look at. As a result, following the action is like watching a movie. However, the third-person perspective makes aiming the weapon more difficult. The two kinds of games can overlap because third-person games often allow the shooter to switch to a first-person point of view for more precise shooting. First-person games sometimes switch to third-person point of view when the shooter is in a vehicle. The most successful third-person shooter games are *Gears of War*, *Fortnite*, and *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*.

Some third-person games are used in competition. For example, *Gears of War* pits

A gamer plays a third-person shooter game. Instead of viewing the action through the protagonist's eyes, the player sees an avatar of the protagonist moving and shooting.



a team of human players against two virtual enemies: the Locust Horde and the Lambent. The fourth installment in the series has a popular team-versus-team playing mode. In 2016 Xbox, which controls the rights to *Gears of War*, launched the Gears eSports Pro Circuit for *Gears of War 4*. Managed by Major League Gam-

A Teenage Pro Gamer Balances Practice and School

Kyle “Bugha” Giersdorf won the 2019 *Fortnite* World Cup and its \$3 million prize at age sixteen, when he was still a student at Pottsgrove High School in Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania. He discusses how he strikes a balance between gaming and school:

I started playing about two years ago and I think when I first started playing competitively was around, maybe, a year after I started playing. . . .

I [practice], on average, six hours. Usually on school days, I start around 3 and end around 9. So when I get home around 2, I have an hour to do [home]work, and later at 9, I have another hour to do work. . . .

[My parents] were skeptical about the amount of time I was putting into the game because they thought I was missing out on some other aspects of life, but once they realized it could be an actual career, they started supporting me a little bit more. . . .

I think one of the most important things is to stay confident. You definitely want to put a lot of your time improving certain aspects, like going over what you do wrong and how to improve from that. . . .

I’m definitely just going to save the money and invest it into my future. . . .

I just want to keep competing, striving to get better. Also, want to grow my Twitch channel, my YouTube, my social [network pages]. All that.

Quoted in Katie Park, “Meet ‘Bugha,’ the Pennsylvania Teen Who Won the *Fortnite* World Cup’s \$3 Million Prize,” *Philadelphia (PA) Inquirer*, August 1, 2019. www.inquirer.com.

Source Notes

Introduction: A Human Drama

1. John Jewell Balan, interview with the author, February 7, 2020.
2. Quoted in Dian Schaffhauser, “Free Esports Curriculum Contains Full Lesson Plans,” *The Journal*, September 13, 2019. <https://thejournal.com>.
3. Quoted in Robin Miller, “A National Title Is Within Reach for Southern Lab Esports League Gamer Timotheus Moore,” *The Advocate*, December 12, 2019. www.theadvocate.com.
4. Quoted in Nick Schwartz, “ESPN’s President Says That Esports Are Not ‘Real Sports,’ and He’s Wrong,” *USA Today*, September 6, 2014. <https://ftw.usatoday.com>.

Chapter One: A Global Phenomenon

5. OG (@OGesports), “Against all odds, we stood united, fought until the very end and became your #T18 Champions!,” Twitter, August 25, 2018. <https://twitter.com>.
6. Quoted in Will Partin, “‘StarCraft II’: How Blizzard Brought the King of Esports Back from the Dead,” *Variety*, July 13, 2018. <https://variety.com>.
7. Joona Sotala (@ENCE_Serral), “Yess!! Managed to pull it off,” Twitter, August 5, 2018. <https://twitter.com>.
8. Quoted in Reuters, “Drini Shuts Out Spoto 41–0 to Win Madden Bowl,” ESPN, April 28, 2019. www.espn.com.

For Further Research

Books

Paul Chaloner, *This Is Esports (and How to Spell It): An Insider's Guide to the World of Pro Gaming*. London: Bloomsbury Sport, 2020.

William Collis, *The Book of Esports*. New York: Rosetta-Books, 2020.

Roland Li, *Good Luck Have Fun: The Rise of eSports*. New York: Skyhorse, 2016.

Hector Rodriguez, *OpTic Gaming: The Making of eSports Champions*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.

Ryan Rogers, ed., *Understanding Esports: An Introduction to the Global Phenomenon*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019.

Scholastic, *Esports: The Ultimate Guide*. New York: Scholastic, 2019.

Internet Sources

Alex Andrejev, "This Small Pennsylvania School Wants to Be the Notre Dame of Esports," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2019. www.washingtonpost.com.

Jason Chung, "High Schools Need to Get Over It and Embrace Esports," *Wired*, October 10, 2019. www.wired.com.

Brian Feldman, "The Most Important Video Game on the Planet," *New York*, July 9, 2018. <http://nymag.com>.

Index

Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.

Activision Blizzard (video game developer), 16
 Aizik, Tal “Fly,” 11
 Albarella, Jackie, 54, 56, 57
 arthrogryposis, 35
 A\$AP Rocky, 48
 aXiomatic Gaming (gaming company), 44

Balan, John Jewell, 6, 7, 9, 10

Barton, Casey
 “OpTickR3W,” 26

Battlefield (first-person shooter game), 16

Battle for Azeroth Finals, 23
 battle royale style games, 19

Bautista, Jonathan “JB,” 35

Beahm, Herschel “Guy,” IV
 (Dr DisRespect), 32–34

Beckham, Odell, Jr., 47–48

Begum, Mike “Brolylegs,” 35

Blevins, Jessica, 32, **33**

Blevins, Tyler “Ninja,” 32, **33**, 48

Boston Uprising (esports team), 45

Braun, Scooter, 48

Brinkman, Donald, 9

Call of Duty (first-person shooter game), 16, 41, 46, 48, 54

Call of Duty League, 43, 45–46

Camputaro, Justin, 64

Candella, Mark “Garvey,” 51

Chung, Jason, 65

Combs, Sean “Diddy,” 8, 53

Counter-Strike (first-person shooter game), 16, 42, 48, 54

CrossFire (first-person shooter game), 16

Dager, Peter “ppd,” 24–25

Darr, Eric, 58

Davis, Baron, 53

Dignitas (gaming company), 44

Dimick, A.J., 62

Doom II (first-person shooter game), 16

Dota 2 (battle arena game), 6, 13, 14

Drake, 8, 48

Dr DisRespect. *See* Beahm, Herschel “Guy,” IV

DreamHack (production company), 16