

THE WORLD OF
**VIDEO
GAMES**

E-SPORTS AND THE WORLD OF **COMPETITIVE GAMING**

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IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

1972

The Magnavox Odyssey, the first at-home gaming system, is introduced.

1969

Rick Blomme creates a two-person version of *Spacewar!* and releases it on PLATO.

1997

Dennis “Thresh” Fong wins a Ferrari 328 GTS as the grand prize of the first *Quake* tournament, Red Annihilation.

1965

1975

1985

1995

2005

1958

Physicist William Higinbotham creates the first video game, *Tennis for Two*.

1994

The ESRB is created to establish a ratings system for video games.

1980

Atari sponsors the first National *Space Invaders* Tournaments, drawing 10,000 participants.

2008

Four years after its release, *World of Warcraft* becomes the most popular massively multiplayer online (MMO) game with 11.5 million players.



CHAPTER 2

HOW DO PEOPLE PLAY E-SPORTS?

“The notion of converting something you love into something you can do as a vocation holds an almost mythical status in our culture, a goal only the luckiest few attain,” says T.L. Taylor, a video game researcher.²⁰ The path to becoming a professional gamer can be daunting. But the high number of people participating in E-Sports, combined with the visibility of gameplay through streaming, means that video game hobbyists can entertain the possibility of transforming a leisure activity into a paying job.

AMATEUR PLAYERS

With the proliferation of games available on mobile devices, consoles, and computers, there are a variety of ways to play video games. Almost all of these ways can be done alone within the confines of a home. But with E-Sports, the multiplayer aspect is key. When players are able to easily beat a game’s computer-controlled opponents, they seek out greater challengers and often begin playing within a circle of friends. When this loses novelty and a player still has the drive to master the game, they look for other outlets of play. This extends the social circle beyond face-to-face competitions and into the wider gaming community. Taylor notes, “Many average and casual players

GETTING A WINNING EDGE

Ping time is crucial to online gamers. This refers to the amount of time it takes for gaming computers to communicate with the game server. Researcher T.L. Taylor says, “If one of you has a poorer connection (higher ping time) it is going to show through lag in executed moves, what you see on the screen, your feel for the action, and your general ability to act and react.” As a result, having a high-quality internet connection is important to competitive online gamers—especially when the games they play require lightning-fast reaction times.

Players can also gain a competitive edge through the peripherals they use. Peripherals are computer accessories such as mice and keyboards. Players often bring their own preferred peripherals to tournaments. Taylor continues:

When competitors sit down and set up, you often see them quickly move their mouse back and forth across the mouse pad to get a feel for it, to reconnect the embodied action interfacing with peripheral to the digital space.

Peripherals play such a large role that some websites list players’ specific devices. Top players may even endorse particular models, earning an extra stream of income from the peripheral company.

T.L. Taylor, Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015, p. 41.

will never hit the online functionality of a game and seek out new people to compete against.”²¹ However, gamers who are serious about playing professionally will quickly seek out the most challenging opponents they can find.

Some competitive games can be played by a solo gamer, but others require assembling a team. In these games, it can be difficult for an isolated player to form new team connections. The focus of amateur online leagues is to aid gamers who want to test new strategies and form bonds with like-minded players. One league

“There are more than 150 million gamers in the United States alone—there’s no reason only a few top players should enjoy everything gaming competition has to offer.”²²

–Ethos, E-Sports league organization

organization, Ethos, states: “There are more than 150 million gamers in the United States alone—there’s no reason only a few top players should enjoy everything gaming competition has to offer.”²²

Amateur online leagues use a variety of methods including skill level and style

of play to match gamers with comparable opponents or possible teammates. Gamers pay a membership fee. Through successful match play, gamers earn points and begin playing tougher opponents. Some games, such as Blizzard’s FPS *Overwatch*, have their own dedicated websites to promote amateur play. Other websites offer similar services for a wide variety of games across multiple genres. As E-Sports continues its expansion across the globe, new organizations will surface to support competitive gaming at the amateur level. Building up a strong base of amateur players will help train the next generation of professional E-Sports gamers.

PROFESSIONAL GAMERS

Professional gamers tend to focus on a single game. They are also highly competitive. But making the adjustment from playing at home, in anonymity with an online community, to playing on a live E-Sports stage is stark. The center stage features face-to-face competition.

Spotlights flash, commentators analyze each mouse click, referees look over shoulders, and the travel, intensity, and high stakes can wear on the nerves of players.

Professionals have both an expertise in their game and an understanding of ways to get a competitive edge. They know the game's shortcuts, places where they might encounter glitches, and the capabilities of characters, weapons, and items. They may also study the specific strengths and weaknesses of the gamers they play against. Professionals must have a high level of tactical and strategic thinking, along with sharp reaction times. What looks like mere button-pushing can win a game. "At the core, skilled computer game players are engaging in a kind of familiar complex strategic and tactical mastery, a sophisticated form of cognitive and physical work, mediated through technology and perfected through hours of play with others," says Taylor.²³

Clinton "Fear" Loomis was already a *Dota 2* legend when he was featured in Valve's 2014 YouTube documentary *Free to Play*. Loomis told his mother he wanted to be a professional gamer before *Dota 2* even existed. He said, "I'm a very competitive person. Gaming fulfills my

"At the core, skilled computer game players are engaging in a kind of familiar complex strategic and tactical mastery, a sophisticated form of cognitive and physical work, mediated through technology and perfected through hours of play with others."²³

–T.L. Taylor, video game researcher

competitive need.”²⁴ Known as a calm, father-type figure, Loomis has mentored younger players for years. In 2018, at the age of thirty, Loomis was released by Evil Geniuses, the US team he had captained as a player and coached when injured. “Don’t worry guys,” Loomis tweeted, “Happy I get some time at home after a very exhausting and disappointing season. Wish everyone all the best.”²⁵

AGE AND INJURIES

In 2017, ESPN researched the average age of professional athletes in various sports. The results read:

*E-Sports players are significantly younger than their counterparts in other major sports. The average age of the opening day rosters in the most recent season at the highest professional level in football, basketball, baseball and hockey was higher than the average age of any of the E-Sports games we analyzed.*²⁶

For example, the average *League of Legends* player was 21.2 years old, while the average NFL player was 26.6 years old. Some gamers believe a slowing reaction time plays a role in this. In 2014, the manager of the E-Sports team Na’Vi said, “Regarding age, 25 or 26 is the absolute maximum. Your reaction time lowers after that. You can’t click so much as the kids do.”²⁷ Along with this comes physical injury. The main causes of injury to E-Sports players are carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis elbow, and trigger finger. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when a nerve running from the forearm to the palm of the hand gets compressed. It causes pain, numbness, and weakness. Tennis elbow is an overuse injury due to repetitive motion. It occurs where the forearm muscles attach to the elbow. Pain can radiate down the arm to the hand. Trigger finger occurs when a finger gets stuck in a



The team Evil Geniuses has members who play many different types of games. Professional E-Sports players typically only play one game for their team.

bent position. Anyone working in an occupation involving the gripping motion, such as a mouse, is at a higher risk for trigger finger.

Any of these conditions can derail a gamer, as they are all arm-related injuries. Rest is needed for recovery, and in severe cases surgery may be needed. Stretching and performing particular exercises prior to gaming can reduce the risk of injury.

THE GAMES

A handful of games dominate the E-Sports landscape. Several of them—including *League of Legends* and *Dota 2*—are in the MOBA genre. *League of Legends* was released by Riot Games in 2009. Combining real-time strategy with role-playing, gamers choose a champion character to battle opponents. The goal is to destroy

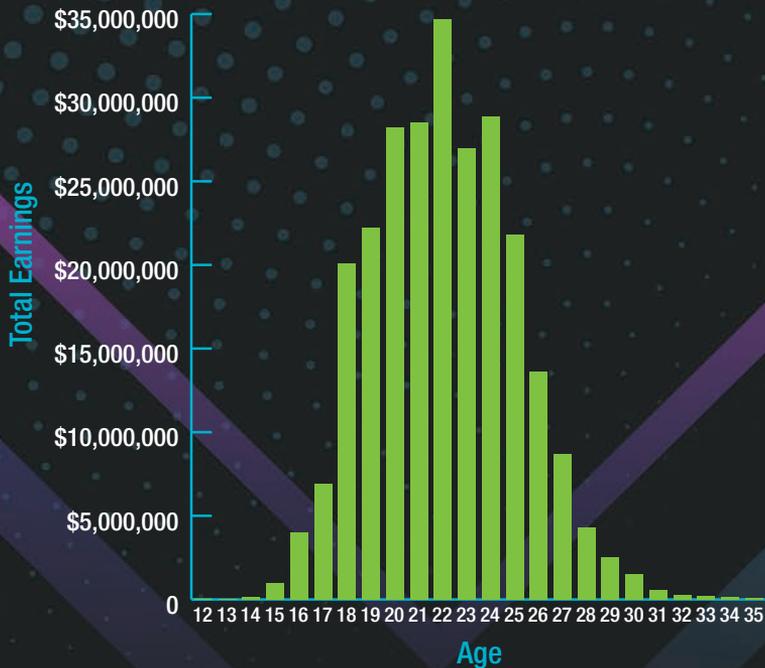
the enemy Nexus while protecting your own Nexus. A top-down perspective is utilized, which allows gamers to see a map-like terrain as they plot their course. By 2018, Newzoo reported that *League of Legends* topped the charts on Twitch, a service through which users can watch people streaming and playing video games. That same year, people spent 274.7 million hours watching *League of Legends* at E-Sports competitions and 742.5 million hours watching *League of Legends* outside of formal competitions. Newzoo says these numbers are not surprising, “as it is the biggest E-Sports title in the world with many popular streamers.”²⁸

Dota 2, released by Valve in 2013, is the top E-Sports game in terms of prize money. In the game, two opposing teams choose heroes to battle the enemy. Routes known as lanes connect the player’s base to the enemy’s base, and these lanes become the focus of the battle. Players try to reach the enemy’s base and destroy a structure called the Ancient. *Dota 2*’s main tournament, The International, accumulates large prize pools by crowdfunding.

World of Warcraft, released in 2004, is an MMORPG set in the universe of Blizzard’s Warcraft RTS games. Heroes complete quests using magical weapons and spells. Much of the game is played cooperatively, with players teaming up to fight computer-controlled enemies. But in areas called Arenas, players can instead battle each other. The Arena World Championship is the *World of Warcraft* E-Sports competition. It culminates with the top 12 teams facing off at BlizzCon, the annual gaming convention hosted by Blizzard.

Heroes of the Storm is another popular title by Blizzard. Released in 2015, this MOBA features well-known heroes and villains from Blizzard’s other famed game series, including Warcraft, Diablo, and StarCraft. Players choose a faction to play for and a hero to control.

HIGHEST E-SPORTS EARNINGS BY AGE



As of September 2018, E-Sports gamers who were twenty-two years old had earned the highest earnings by age at over \$34.7 million. They were also one of the largest groups, totaling 1,440 players. The largest group of players was twenty-year-olds, which totaled 1,641 players. However, the number of players per year after that drops dramatically. For example, there were only 765 twenty-five-year-olds and only 12 thirty-five-year-olds. Additionally, the group of 35-year-olds only made \$93,700 in earnings in 2018.

According to Dr. John T. Holden of Florida State University, “It is not uncommon for E-Sports professionals to retire from competition at an age of 19, occasionally choosing to pursue a career streaming or coaching.” Holden believes that one reason for the drop-off in both earnings and number of players is that “professional and amateur video-gaming is physical and mental exhaustion.”

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