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Casting a Competitive Esports Game



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Abstract

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The aim of this Bachelor's thesis was to explain what it is like to cast an esports game, how it affects the viewer, and why it is done. The focus was on the game Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, due to the author's knowledge of the game and competitive community compared to other such games.

The main things required for a caster were simple: Knowledge of the game the person is commentating, and an ability to convey what is happening in a pleasing manner. In addition, having a personality helped quite a lot to differentiate a caster from another. These were the same for both traditional and esports commentary. The biggest difference was the amount of information that had to be conveyed. Whereas traditional sports have a slower build-up for a moment, and a singular point for action, esports have several places where something happens, often at the same time, and the build-up is much faster. This requires the caster to react much faster than in traditional commentary.

To be able to explain what it takes to be a caster, the work looked over how traditional commentators do their work. Since there is not much written about the subject from an esports point of view yet, much of the work was parsing through interviews and comparing casting examples between traditional and esports. A big aspect was the analysis of current professional casters in the Counter-Strike scene, and how they approach their work. Since esports commentary was still growing as of writing this thesis, the esports commentators had very different approaches to the tried and true methods of traditional commentary and gave good pointers on how to improve the author's own casting.

The practical section focused on the author's own experiences as a caster. It compared the work done to the theory section, with emphasis on how it sounded and if it was pleasant to listen to as a viewer. These were important factors raised earlier on, considering it could be the factor that determined whether a viewer wanted to watch the broadcast.

In conclusion the thesis found out how demanding the work is, and what sort of personality is necessary for this line of work. It requires a quick thinking ability, which might require additional work for someone aspiring to become a caster. The conclusion also touched upon where esports commentary will evolve, and how.

Tiivistelmä

Tekijä(t): Manne Eirik

Työn nimi: Kilpailullisen e-urheilupelin selostaminen

Tutkintonimike: Tradenomi (AMK), peliala

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksesta oli käydä läpi ja selvittää mitä tarkoittaa selostaminen e-urheilupeliin, miten se vaikuttaa katsojaan ja miksi sitä tehdään. Työ keskittyi peliin *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, johtuen tekijän tuntemuksesta peliin ja sen ympärillä olevaan kilpailulliseen yhteisöön.

Päävaatimuksset selostajalle olivat yksinkertaiset: Syvälinnen tietopohja pelistä, jota selostaa, ja kyky selittää, mitä tapahtuu katsojaa miellyttäväällä tavalla. Lisäksi omanlainen persoona selostessa auttoi erottamaan itsensä joukosta. Nämä pitivät paikkaansa sekä klassisen urheilun että e-urheilun selostuksessa. Erot tulivat tiedon määrässä, jota piti käsittellä. Siinä missä klassisen urheilun selostuksessa tilanteen kehittyvät hitaammin ja pelissä on yksi kiintopiste, johon keskityy, e-urheilussa asioita tapahtuu monessa paikkaa yhtä aikaa, ja tilanteet tapahtuvat nopeammin. Tämä vaatii selostajaa reagoimaan paljon nopeammin verrattaessa klassiseen selostukseen.

Jotta työ pystyi selittämään mitä tarvitaan selostamiseen, tutkittiin, miten klassisten urheilulajien selostajat tekevät työtään. Koska e-urheilun selostamisesta ei ole paljon kirjallisuutta, suurin osa taustatyöstä oli lukea haastatteluja ja verrata selostusesimerkkejä klassisen ja e-urheilun välillä. Iso aspekti oli myös analysoida tunnettuja e-urheilun selostajia ja sitä, miten he lähestyvät työtään. Koska ala oli vielä kasvava tämän lopputyön kirjoittamisen aikana, oli näillä selostajilla hyvin erilainen tapa suorittaa selostusta verrattuna klassisiin selostajiin. Tämä analyysi myös antoi hyviä ajatuksia, miten tekijä voi parantaa omaa selostustaan.

Käytännön osuus keskittyi tekijän omiin kokemuksiin selostajana. Siinä verrattiin tekijän selostusta käsitteltyyn teoriaan, painotuksena miltä selostus kuulosti, ja oliko sitä miellyttävä kuunnella. Nämä olivat tärkeitä asioita, jotka nousivat esille aikaisemmin, koska ne voivat olla päättävä tekijä siihen haluaako katsoja jatkaa lähetyksen seuraamista.

Yhteenvedossa huomioitiin, kuinka haastavaa työ on, ja minkälaisista persoonallisuuista siinä kysytään. Vaatimuksissa oli kyky ajatella nopeasti muuttuvassa tilanteessa, mikä voi vaatia ylimääräistä työtä selostajaksi haluavalta. Yhteenvetö myös sivusi mihin e-urheilun selostaminen voi kehittyä, ja miten.

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Terminology

- Casting, caster = A commentator, or announcer for a broadcast. Gives running commentary of a game or match. What this thesis focuses on.
- Play-by-play caster = The person who focuses on what is happening at any given time and conveys that to the viewer.
- Color caster = Counterpart to the above. Focuses on the overall picture and explains the depth and nuance of the action to the more casual person watching the broadcast.
- Esports = Electronic sports, competitive gaming. Playing video games competitively against other people.
- Traditional commentary = Commentary referring to games and sport played physically, like football or baseball. Has been commentated for decades.
- Hype, hyping up = Increasing the tension of the audience, livening up the match.
- Streaming = A live broadcast done over the internet, for instance on twitch.tv or YouTube.
- VOD = Video On Demand. A video file of the stream that you can watch after the broadcast. These are saved online for roughly two weeks, depending on service, and can be downloaded for safekeeping or post-production.
- CS:GO = Counter-Strike: Global Offensive. A competitive first-person shooter, where two teams of five members each fight against one another in a bomb defusal scenario. The Terrorists must plant a bomb, while the Counter-Terrorists must prevent the plant or defuse after a plant. Casting involves quite a lot of slang and jargon developed over its 19-year lifespan, and these are explained below.
- Bomb site = Place where the terrorists have to plant the bomb. There are two sites on a map, with counter-terrorists defending those sites.
- Stack = Placing several players on an area, usually a bomb site. Usually over half of the living players on the defending side.

- Major = A tournament hosted by Valve, the creators of CS:GO. Usually the biggest and grandest tournament. Winning one is a great, if not the greatest honor for a player in his/her career.
- CT = Counter-Terrorist. The defenders in a game.
- Ace = One player kills all five opponents in a single round. Quite hard to do, requires both skill and luck to achieve.
- Team Ace = Each player in a team kills one opponent each, thus winning the round.
- Clutch = The last player remaining in a team wins the round. Usually denoted as 1vX, where X is the number of enemies remaining.
- LAN event = An event where people bring their own computer to play video games together over a local network. Can range from as few as two friends to several hundred people.
- Deagle = Desert Eagle, a pistol available in the game. Notable for killing a player with one shot to the head regardless of helmet, where other pistols require two.
- One deag = Player needing only one shot from a deagle, due to landing a head shot. Does not apply if the player shoots several times, with the last landing on the head; it has to be the first shot fired. If this is done with other weapons, it is known as a *one-tap*.
- Rotate = Switch from one area to another on the map. For example, going from one bomb site to another is called a rotation. It is not used to refer to position switches within an area, like inside a bomb site.

1 Introduction

In this day, esports has started to surface more and more, due to the popularity of different competitive games, and thus the viewership has risen as well. For instance, *League of Legends World Championship*-tournament attracted 43 million unique viewers [1], while the 2017 edition of the same tournament drew over 60 million unique viewers for the finals [2]. To get this number of viewers requires several things. One of them is that the casters are professionals that know how to keep the viewers interested, hype them up as required, and otherwise keep them engaged. Even if the match has a lull in it, they know how to keep them entertained, either by analysis, or bantering between each other.

I begin by explaining what casting is, and what sort of tools a caster has at their disposal. In addition, I compare esports casting to casting traditional sports and look at the similarities and differences. Finally, I go over mistakes a caster can do, and thus reduce the enjoyment of the viewer.

Following these, I examine professional esports casters, and how they do their job. The focus is on CS:GO casters, due to my knowledge of following that competitive scene for years, and watching games casted by these individuals. I go over known caster duos and look at their differences and similarities in casting. While doing so, I will be using their in-game nicknames. In videogames, or internet in general, it is common to use a nickname, or identity, that differs from your real name [3], and so the casters are more commonly known by their nicknames. This is a difference from traditional casting, where a caster is usually known by their real name. However, I do mention their given name when I bring them up for the first time and show what the nickname is by putting it inside quotation marks.

Finally, I dive into my own casting. For the past three years, I have been part of the stream crew at the GetOnline - LAN event in Kajaani, and casted the CS:GO - tournaments held there. There are VODs available from GetOnline 2017, which I will analyze. I go over the successes, mistakes, differences from professionals, and where I can improve, with emphasis on things I have highlighted in this thesis. In the end is a compilation of things I could improve, and what I and others should take note, both in my casting and that of professionals.

2 Casting

This chapter will go over what casting is, what it requires, and what tools casters have at their disposal. The job is demanding, requiring a great skillset and technical perks that the players do not have access to. Without a great caster, a viewer might not even watch the game, or find a different broadcast to watch it from. Thus, the job has widened to different roles, and the tools they have available are more varied to provide an entertaining broadcast. These will be explored and explained more in depth below.

2.1 What is casting

In a nutshell, shoutcasting, or more simply casting, is explaining what is happening inside a match or a game, in a way that a viewer can follow the action at hand and knows what is happening at any given time. The caster must also be able to keep the viewer engaged and make the broadcast enjoyable.^[4] For all intents and purposes, they are an entertainer for the viewers at home, making the match enjoyable to watch.

'Shoutcaster' carries the same role as a play-by-play commentator in traditional sports. The rise for the unique moniker came from the early days, where the job was done over a Winamp plug-in called SHOUTcast^[5]. The name stuck, even though the job has grown and expanded over the years.

As can be gleamed from the above, the job is also very similar to what traditional sports commentating is. However, there are differences. Biggest difference is the amount of information that is presented at any given time. Especially in a video game, a situation might have turned on its head and back again within a span of five or ten seconds, while in traditional commentary, there action takes more time to develop^[21]. Complicating the matters is the fact that there is no central point where the action happens. In football, there is the ball. In hockey, there is the puck. In these, the action is usually centered around that object. In esports, the action spans a big map, with something influential happening at any corner, sometimes even several things at the same time. The caster of the game needs to be aware of what is happening at any given time, who is where, and what impact any player can have on the situation unfolding. They need to be able to switch from a more

analytic cast to a play-by-play at a moment's notice. To help with this, the casting is usually done in a duo, where one focuses on the play-by-play, and the other focuses on the analysis. An example of such a duo is below.



Figure 1. Casters at CEVO Season 8 Finals.

This is similar to traditional sports commentating. In both types of casting, there are two casters, who have different roles. In the above picture, this dynamic is represented by Matthew “Sadokist” Trivett and Henry “HenryG” Greer. During a match, Sadokist focuses on play-by-play casting, while HenryG is the color caster^[6]. What this means is that during the action, Sadokist is talking and conveying the action to a viewer. He calls out who is going where, what equipment people have, and so forth. When the situation is over, HenryG breaks it down and analyzes it in such a way that a casual viewer understands the small nuances in action, and in this way bring some color to the viewing experience. Sometimes the color caster is also a former professional player, like in the case of HenryG. This allows him to break it down further, due to the deeper knowledge he possesses.

2.2 Why is there casting?

The reason to have commentary on a game is primarily to provide entertainment. A good caster provides several things for the viewer. It can be humor, like seen later in chapter 3.4. It can be context that the viewer might not be aware of, like having two rivaling teams match against each other. Some casters provide deep insight on the tactics the players use.^[20] Or if the commentary is done over radio, it can be a way for the viewer to follow a match they otherwise would have missed. For a more casual viewer, it might be the reason to watch a game they otherwise would not have viewed, if they recognize and like the casters.

On the flipside, bad casting might turn off viewers completely. The reasons will be touched upon in the next section, but a personal anecdote to show this. A few years back I was watching a CS:GO tournament, and found a Finnish broadcast for it. The caster for that broadcast was doing it alone. He barely spoke a word, only announcing what the teams were doing with a bored voice, and otherwise kept shut. The broadcast was lacking in energy, and it felt like the caster wasn't interested in the match at all. I ended up changing to an English broadcast, because the Finnish broadcast was not able to keep my interest, and the caster made the match boring to watch.

Next, we will look upon what makes a good commentary, and how to avoid the example from above.

2.3 What does casting require?

One of the biggest aspects required to cast a game, be it traditional or esports, is sheer enthusiasm and interest in your chosen game or games.^[7] That enthusiasm usually shines through the broadcast, making it interesting to watch. If the excitement is lacking, the viewer might get bored, or in worst case scenario go find something else to do. A great example is in the below picture.



Figure 2. Casters during ESL One Cologne 2015 match between Virtus.Pro and Ninjas in Pyjamas.

The above situation involves a 1v3 clutch from Ninjas in Pyjamas (NIP) player Aleksi “allu” Jalli. [8] In the clip, NIP and Virtus.Pro (VP) are playing against each other, with VP having three men alive versus two from NIP. However, allu is able to turn the tables around, and manages to subdue all remaining VP players, leaving him the last man standing in an intense situation. The picture above is taken the moment the last kill has landed, awarding NIP the round. You can both hear the excitement from the casters, and the video of them gives further proof that they are as much in the game as the viewers at home. You can say they for all interest and purpose *are* viewers, but with a microphone in front of them.

This ties into the roles of the casters as well. As mentioned in the previous section, one of the casters is play-by-play, and the other is analyst, or color commentator. Sometimes there are a few more, like in figure 2, in which case they usually are analysts. Both of them have to know the game well to cast it. If the play-by-play is lacking in knowledge, they will miss crucial moments, or emphasize the wrong things. If the analyst isn’t knowledgeable of the game, the viewer will miss the deeper impact of different plays, and the thoughts behind them. In the worst-case scenario, the viewer will stop watching.

There are more factors to a good cast, however. One of them is the ability to recognize when to talk, both about the game, and between the casters. [10] The casters are there to talk about the game, keep the storyline of the match flowing, and bringing value to the

match with their insight. If they don't talk, these will be minimal, and the viewer has little interest to follow their broadcast. A great casting duo can make a boring game fun to watch, while a bad caster can suck the enjoyment from a world class match.

There is another extreme, and that is speaking too much. In the worst case, it means that the other caster is not allowed a turn to speak, leaving his contributions minimal. Another is that the viewers miss something important that happens, because casters are talking about something completely different than what is happening on the screen. Silence is a tool, and when used well it can increase the tension to the viewers, and when the situation finally unfolds, the impact is conveyed properly. A good rule of thumb is to keep the talking as intensive as the game and remember the saying *calm before the storm*. If there is a storm brewing in the game, cool down the casting, and when the storm arrives, so does the casting in full power.

Lastly, the caster needs charisma and eloquence. He needs to be able to articulate in a way that doesn't become garbled, even when the situation is packed with action.^[7] A charismatic speaker can be recognized instantly, and usually the casters are personalities in themselves. For instance, if you take the Finnish sports commentator Antero Mertaranta, you can instantly hear he is the man behind the microphone, even if there is not much action going on. These personalities will be discussed in chapter 3.

2.4 What tools do casters have at their disposal?

In this chapter, I focus on tools provided by the game itself, and possible small things the caster can do to make their job easier. In addition, I am going to touch on the technical side of a broadcast as necessary.

On a normal casting desktop, there is always at least one screen, from which the casters view the game they are casting. Sometimes, depending on the game, there might be more. For instance, CS:GO usually has two, while League of Legends manages with only one. This is due to the in-game map, which can be stretched over the whole screen in CS:GO. Having that map visible is an excellent tool to have, since it provides a great overview of the match, and what happens at any given time. In addition, if the game has a mechanic called '*Fog of War*', it is turned off for the casters. An example of Fog of War below, from the player point of view.



Figure 3. Fog of War in League of Legends.

Shortly about the mechanic. It is used to simulate the fact that a unit in game does not have visibility beyond trees, cliffs, and other obstacles. Its primary function is to prevent players from knowing where their opponents are, and that way forcing the player to gather intelligence about their opponent, and then formulating a plan.^[9] In figure 3 is an example of a common one; the area around the player is visible, while the grayed-out area is ‘un-known’. An opponent could stand at the very edge, but as long as they are in the gray area, the player does not know about them. This mechanism is used especially in strategy games, and games where the point of view is from above.

As mentioned, if the game incorporates this mechanic, it is removed from the casters, or they can toggle it. That is visible on the main screen of the casters, which shows the game being played. That view is also broadcasted to the viewers at home. In addition to removing the Fog of War, it also shows other important statistics, like monetary situation, health of the players, and so forth. An example of such is below, from CS:GO.



Figure 4. Broadcast view of CS:GO.

As can be seen from above, the viewer has instant access to the health levels of players, what weapons and utility they possess, where the bomb is, where the players are, and so forth. Most of this information is not visible to the players playing the game, as can be seen from below.



Figure 5. In game view of CS:GO. Taken by the author.

As can be seen, the player viewpoint is much more simplified. He does not know directly what the equipment of his team members are, nor their health. The map is much more limited, showing enemies only if they are in the field of view of a team member.

All these in game tools are to provide the casters more information to work with. As they know about the overall situation, they can make predictions on what might happen, where players will rotate, and so forth. This gives the commentary more depth, and sometimes can provide interesting context. It can be a regular defensive setup from CTs that a team uses, or a team is able to judge the situation and stack a site, expecting a big rush from the opponent. Casters see this ahead of time, allowing them to build up hype if necessary. While there are cheating tools that give the players access to this information, they are in every case not allowed, and will get the player or the team disqualified.

Lastly, the commentators can always fall back on their notes.^[11] These usually include information about the players, their history and statistics, how the team has fared, and so forth. A longtime commentator might know these statistics from the top of their head, but in the heat of the moment it is good to have them written down for reference. In addition, if something happens during the match, they can write it down and reference to it later. They can also use the information in the notes to fill dead air.

In the next section, I will compare casters and what differentiates them.

3 Professional casters; Their similarities and differences

In this chapter, I go over different casters in Counter-Strike: Global Offensive. The first section is about similarities, followed by casting duos and their unique traits. As there are plenty of solo- and duo casters, the focus is on three well-known duos within the CS:GO talent scene: Anders “Anders” Blume & Auguste “Semmler” Massonnat, Matthew “Sadokist” Trivett & Henry “HenryG” Greer, and Daniel ”DDK” Kapadia & James Bardolph. In addition, there are references to other casters, mentioned where necessary.

3.1 Similarities in casting

As mentioned, I will go over three pairs of casters. While they are very different to each other, they are professionals with several years of experience under their belts. This means that they are able to discuss and banter between each other, even if they are casting with someone who they do not regularly provide commentary with. They also know how to support each other while casting, for instance by not talking over each other, but instead increasing hype by using surprised yells and shouts. And even though their specialty lies in color- or play-by-play commentary, they are still able to switch to the other role in a fly for a moment, to avoid talking over the other, before giving the reins back.

Another thing to note is their articulation and use of voice. Every single one of these have a strong, clear voice which is easy to listen for several matches in a row. They are also able to fluctuate their tempo and intensity, giving emphasis where it is needed. For instance, a situation with high action has them shouting and increasing hype, while a calmer situation gives way for a lower voice, maybe analyzing the moment and letting things unfold. And if needed, they can throw jokes and banter without it sounding forced, thus entertaining the viewers when the game is dull.

To showcase these aspects and show them in context, next will be an analysis of a moment from IEM Katowice 2016 – tournament semifinals. The teams are Luminosity Gaming (LG) and Natus Vincere (Na’Vi). The casters for this match were HenryG and Alex “Machine” Richardson.



Figure 6. Screen capture of FalleN vs Natus Vincere 1v4 clutch - video.

A brief rundown of the clip the above picture is taken from.

It begins with Gabriel “FalleN” Toledo accidentally shooting his team member during an attack at around halfway mark of the round, with members of Na’Vi killing the rest, leaving FalleN alone. He is however able to plant the bomb, and later win the round by clutching a 1v4 with some incredibly difficult shots. LG end up winning the map, and later the full game.

What I want to bring up are things that were mentioned above. During the early part of the video we see the team kill from FalleN, but Machine lets HenryG finish what he was saying, instead of talking over him, choosing instead to keep up the hype with a small yelp due to a fast shot against an opponent. The casters continue discussing the situation, and the clip cuts forward to the next important part, where FalleN plants the bomb. Since the situation is calm, they start to banter between themselves, with a reference to the song “*Don’t Stop Believin’*” from Journey:

Machine: “17 points of health and a dream, this would be an ace clutch from Fallen.”

HenryG: “I’m believing.”

Machine: "You're a bit of a believer. Would you suggest that you... *Don't wanna stop believing?*" [12]

At this point the intensity ramps up, with Na'Vi players arriving to the bomb site and trying to hunt down FalleN so they can defuse the bomb in peace. HenryG, who was talking at the time, lets Machine take over the play-by-play while he increases the hype by letting out yells as FalleN hits some quick and difficult shots on Na'Vi players. Finally, Danylo "Zeus" Teslenko is able to kill FalleN, and Machine starts downshifting his speech, assuming that Na'Vi has won the round. When he realizes that Zeus is not able to defuse the bomb, and has to run away, he raises his voice and intensity to build hype for the viewers as the round ends. When he is on the cusp of sounding monotone, HenryG takes over and starts analyzing what happened, while referencing their earlier discussion ("I told you, *you've just gotta believe sometimes*, Alex [Machine].")

While all of this was unfolding, at no point did they speak over each other. Only time it happened was at the very end when neither could believe what just happened, and there HenryG let Machine take the reins until he could inject a word and take over with the analysis. Otherwise only surprised shouts and yells were done over the other talking.

The synergy between them is also worth noting. Usually HenryG casts with Sadokist, and Machine is desk host for events. They do know each other well though, and Machine has some experience casting before he turned to desk hosting. [13] Their familiarity with each other allows for some easy banter and discussion, keeping the viewers interested during the calmer sections of a match.

Next sections will be of the three duos mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, focusing on what makes these duos unique and different to each other.

3.2 Anders & Semmler



Figure 7. Semmler and Anders.

Anders “Anders” Blume and Auguste “Semmler” Massonnat are one of the most iconic casting duos of CS:GO^[14], having casted most of the Major tournament grand finals before Semmler took a break from CS:GO, and later on moved to commentate Overwatch in December 2017^[15]. Before that happened though, they had casted for over four years together.^[16]

This experience commentating together was very much audible during the games they were casting. Early on, they did start with the split mentioned before, but later they evolved and started sharing the duties more, with either being able to do play-by-play or color commentary. In their prime, they were also one of the most energetic duos around, with highlights still being shared online.

The energy is something to note from their casting. While other duos have brought excitement to the table, no duo have brought it the same way that these two were able. Their

passion for the game shines through and bleeds into the casting, making it enjoyable for the viewer. Below are a few clips showcasing this energy, starting with Anders.



Figure 8. Screen capture of Friberg 1v2 clutch at Katowice 2015 Grand Final – video.

Casting the moment is Anders. The match is between NiP and Fnatic at Katowice 2015 Grand Final, at map and match point for Fnatic. This means that if Fnatic wins one more round, they win the whole tournament. They have been able to plant the bomb, and it seems that they will win. However, Adam “friberg” Friberg is able to kill both remaining Fnatic players and defuse the bomb, turning it around and allowing NiP to win the round.

Casting wise, the focus is on Anders’ energy, and how he channels it. During the early clip, when Fnatic attacks the bomb site, he increases his volume as kills unfold. When the action calms down, he lowers back down to talking levels. As the NiP players go towards the site, his intensity rises, with the peak being right after Friberg quickly kills the remaining two players. It is showcased with how he starts yelling with the crowd (“Oh my god!”) and continues with the loud volume as he proclaims that the grand final continues. His energy mirrors that of the crowd, making for a more intense experience for the viewer. Next, a similar scenario from Semmler.



Figure 9. Screen capture of Happy deagle ace vs TSM – video.

Casting the moment is Semmler. The match is between EnVyUs and TSM at DreamHack Open London 2015 Grand Final. EnVyUs is in a poor economic state, having only bought pistols and armor, while TSM has full equipment available. TSM starts mounting an attack towards a bombsite, but Vincent “Happy” Schopenhauer is able to stop the push by killing all of the players as they pop up, or in a few cases shooting and getting hits through a smoke screen.

The way Semmler keeps hype up in the situation is different, but still conveys similar energy to his partner. It starts off lower, as he is commentating on the situation at hand. As TSM players start rounding the corner and Happy picks them off one by one, he increases his volume as each kill happens, reaching screaming levels. When there is a momentary lull, he goes down a bit, but as the final kills happen, he returns to the screaming levels. Instead of trying to convey where and how the players die, or what his teammate is doing, he just recounts how many have fallen, with a little color thrown in when there is time (“Dupreeh is like sweating bullets!”). He almost sounds like a regular viewer, with all the excitement and disbelief such a moment brings forth.

Following next are two casters that have been touched upon earlier in section 2.1, Sadokist and HenryG.

3.3 Sadokist & HenryG



Figure 10. Sadokist and HenryG

Compared to Anders and Semmler, Sadokist and HenryG are more rigid, keeping the roles clearer. This stems from their backgrounds. As mentioned earlier in 2.1, HenryG is a former professional player, having played Counter-Strike: Source and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive on a high level, while Sadokist has no competitive background. They are also the youngest duo that will be analyzed; Sadokist had his first casting breakthrough in 2015, at MLG Aspen Invitational [17], while HenryG gained traction around the same time [6]. Their casting is shaped around quick-paced wordplay from Sadokist, which is balanced with the calm and collected analysis by HenryG.

This balance is the highlight that will be focused on. They have the ability to quickly switch between calm analysis and fast play-by-play. The synergy between them is also of note. They were one of the first duos to enforce the duo of them casting, which helped their personal brand. Anders and Semmler were at their prime when HenryG and Sadokist started, but they would not always cast together [18]. This helped to develop and strengthen their casting together. Next will be a look on this synergy, and their styles of casting.



Figure 11. Screen capture of Snax 1v4 clutch – video. Snax on the right.

The match is between Virtus.Pro (VP) and Natus Vincere (Na'Vi). In the video the picture above is referring to, VP is in a lead after a successful half, but Na'Vi has managed to take over a bomb site, leaving Janusz “Snax” Pogorzelski as the last man standing to retake the site. He quickly one-taps one player on route to the site, and after a brief fire-fight, manages to one-tap two more players, leaving him in a one-on-one situation. After faking a defusal on the bomb, he manages to one-tap the remaining player, and defuse the bomb.

The clip focuses on Sadokists ability to keep a fast-paced cast, while still sounding crystal clear. He is able to explain everything that happens as it unfolds, and weave a little word-play in there as well:

“Big apple, and Snax is hungry.”

This refers to both the place they are playing at, New York [19], and the size of Snax, who is physically one of the biggest players in Counter-Strike. Only stops he has during the cast are quick draws of breath, otherwise he keeps on talking. HenryG knows this, and only highlights a few important situations: The first one-tap, and the last. He doesn't start talking until the climax is over, remarking on the incredibility of the play. This synergy will be explored more in the next clip.



Figure 12: Screen capture of video of Dosia and HEN1 getting four kills each.

The match is between Gambit and Immortals. In the video the picture above is taken from, Immortals is attacking a bomb site with full utility, but Mihail “Dosia” Stolyarov quickly kills three of them, before switching position and picking off one more. Following that, the point of view switches to Henrique “HEN1” Teles, who in turn gets three quick kills, before he goes to pick up the bomb and kills the last one, winning the round.

In this clip, the synergy between Sadokist and HenryG can be heard, as well as their clear-cut roles. In the beginning, HenryG is analyzing the situation and what Immortals is doing, comments on what is about to happen, and calls that it begins. That is the cue for Sadokist to start talking, and he does so without missing a beat. During the action, even with a few seconds of little action, HenryG does not take over, but let’s Sadokist continue to fill in before the climax happens and HEN1 secures the last kill. The rest of the casting is similar to the first clip, with fast-paced and clear play-by-play, and some wordplay by Sadokist.

Lastly will be the final duo who were mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, James and DDK.

3.4 James & DDK



Figure 13: James and DDK.

James and DDK as casters are not as loud, or sound as excited as the previous duos. They make up for this with wit and banter, and especially James tends to use a lot of dry or off-topic humor to spice up the game. This gives the viewer an entertaining match, even if the teams are not equally skilled. Below is a compilation of both casting, funny banter, and on-screen shenanigans between them to showcase this.

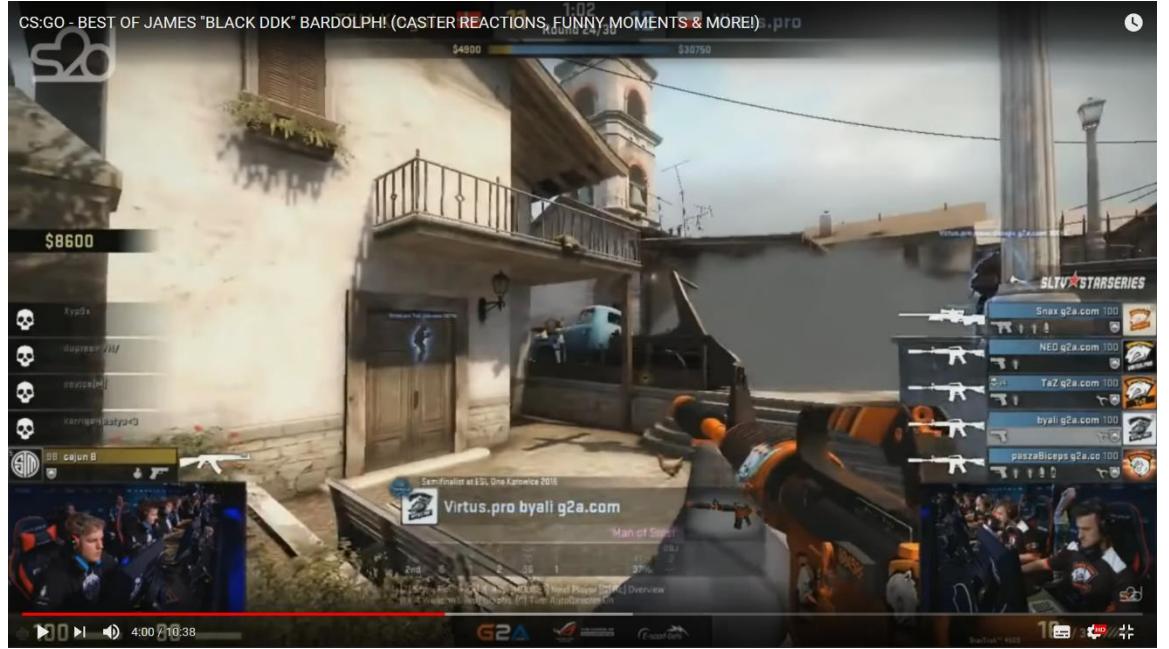


Figure 14. Screen capture of a compilation of casting and funny moments between James and DDK.

What to take note of in the above video is the way James and DDK talks between each other. More than the other two duos discussed earlier, they tend to talk between them about both the match and unrelated matters, like seen from 6:48 onwards. However, they are equally able to hype a situation that deserves it. A good example is the first highlight in the video.

In the highlight, Team Liquid is playing against Fnatic, with Fnatic having the man lead in a 2 versus 1 situation. They see Oleksandr “s1mple” Kostyliev playing away from the site, so they quickly start taking over it, with cover from smoke screens. However, s1mple is quick to rotate onto the site, and is able to kill both of the Fnatic players in a quick fashion, with a weapon unsuited for the task. Afterwards, the highlight is shown from s1mple’s point of view, showcasing that he did not scope with his weapon, leading to a one-in-a-million shot on the second player.

As can be noticed, the casting is calmer than the examples of previous chapters, but when the action unfolds, the excitement goes up instantly. There is also an example of the way they discuss between themselves (“He had one button on his mouse, Dan [DDK]! He had one button!”). For a more regular example of their casting, we will take a look at a highlight video from ELEAGUE CS:GO Premier 2018 match between MiBR and Team Liquid.

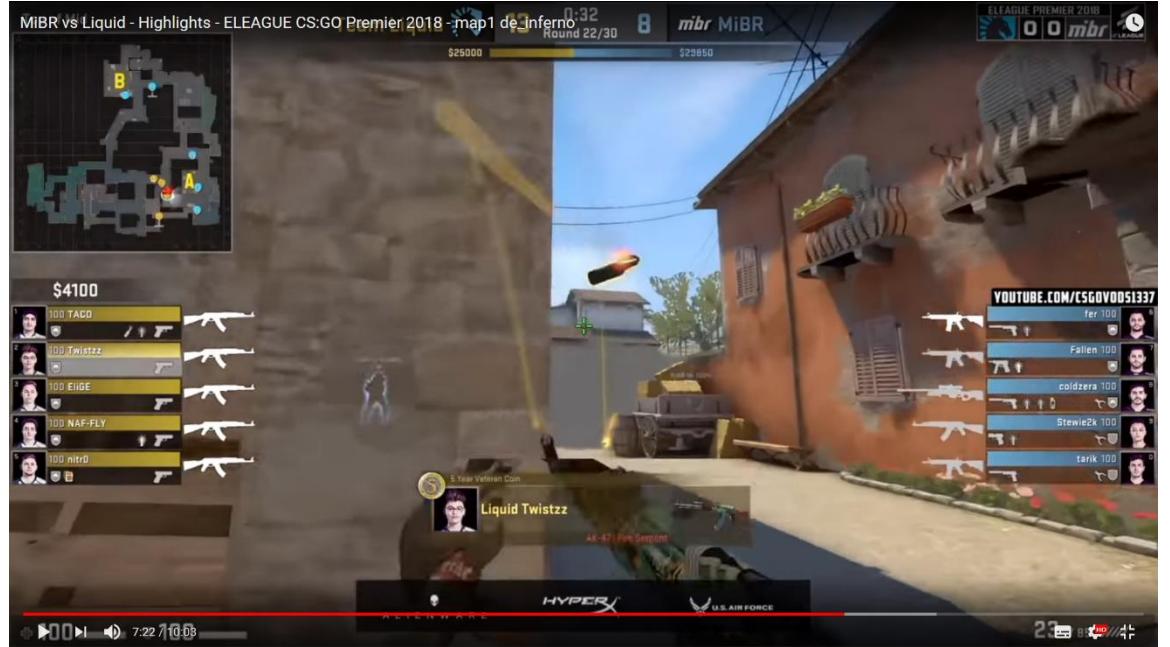


Figure 15: Screen capture of a video of highlights between MiBR and Team Liquid.

Compared to the earlier duos, the hype in the video is much more contained. In situations where other casters would start building up hype, like the moment at 6:58, James and DDK keep a calm and casual attitude. In the clip, Fernando “fer” Alvarenga is able to deny a plant, and a round for Team Liquid by switching positions on the site and killing the bomb planter when there is barely any time left in the round. Instead of hyping up a crucial play like that, James continues to talk in a casual fashion, while still acknowledging the action.

The next chapter will be of my own casting, analyzing how I casted at different events, focusing on aspects that has been brought up in earlier chapters.

4 Analyzing my own casting

For the past three years, I have done some casting of my own on amateur level. These were done at the GetOnline – Ian event in Kajaani between 2016 and 2018. For the event in 2016, I had a second caster with me. The second year I casted both on my own, and with another caster. And in 2018, I again had a second caster for all the games played. Whenever I had a second caster with me, my focus was on the play-by-play, while the other caster did color commentary. All the games were casted in Finnish.

For the next chapter, I go over the event in 2017 and analyze my casting from there. The analyzed matches will be from the Counter-Strike: Global Offensive – tournament at the event, and the VODs of the games will be attached to this thesis for viewing purposes as well.

4.1 GetOnline 2017

During GetOnline 2017, I started off by casting on my own. The first two games were done solo, and then following two were done with a second caster. The second caster was the tournament manager, who wanted to give casting a try. Since the event itself is casual, we decided to test it, especially since I had trouble keeping up with everything on my own. The first two analyzed games will be the solo casts, followed by two games with the second caster.

4.2 First game

From the very beginning, you can notice that I am quite rusty. My voice is monotone, and I don't use it well. Instead of speaking from the diaphragm, I use my throat, which makes the tone of my voice unpleasant. The volume is quite good, however, and my speech is clear, although there are a few nasal sounds mixed in there. I also have a few badly timed stops while talking. There are a few reasons for this.

First one is that I had to take a sip of water. When casting alone, your mouth dries out quickly due to the amount of talking you do, and you have to drink something to avoid the casting from becoming garbled. The timing for those sips were off for me. The second reason was my lack of second caster. Sometimes I lost my train of thought, and in a professional setting, the second caster can cover this by talking themselves. The monotone voice also ties into this. Since I did not have time to think and focus on the overall picture, I missed the development of the situation at hand, and thus missed situations where I could build up hype.

There are positive things to note too. The stops in speech I have are not unnaturally long, and even when combined with the loss of thought I mentioned do not draw focus too much from the viewing experience. I was able to inject humor in to the casting, for instance with a Microsoft versus Apple – confrontation. One of the players had the nickname ‘Jobbpops’, and I started calling him Steve Jobs in the beginning of the match. This way, I got a small storyline I could use during the rest of the match. My vocabulary also improved, and you can notice I start using certain phrases less and less the further you get into the match, although there is a little repetition still. And finally, the tone of my voice becomes more pleasant as it warms up.

4.3 Second Game

There is improvement between the first match and this second game. I am in the zone from the beginning, and there are a few jokes thrown in early on, with them improving towards late game. The monotone tone starts to disappear, and the timing of breaks is better, even if there is room for improvement. The repetition from the first game has disappeared almost completely, too. However, my speech is abrupt, and I stammer quite a bit, which becomes almost distracting. The stammer disappears towards the end of the match. Hyping is also lackluster. This was a problem in the first game as well.

The analysis is very minimal in this match. The reason is simple though: The match was very one-sided. The final score line was 16-6, and the winning team was dominating throughout the whole game. During this match I notice that I don't hype at all. The focus is on explaining the situation at hand, instead of reacting to it with excitement.

4.4 Third Game

Between the second and the third game, we brought in the second caster. Instantly you can notice that there is a much better flow to the cast. We banter between each other, and since I have a partner with me, my voice loses its monotone sound. I am also able to think what I will be saying while my partner is talking, making my job easier. This allows for a little hype during the match.

A few times the cast sounds forced, when both of us freeze in the middle of a sentence. We also talk on top of each other. It is noticeable especially when something is about to happen, and we switch to play-by-play casting, which was my specialty. This leads to what I described in chapter 2.2, about talking too much. I dominated the casting, giving little room to my casting partner, and so his role was marginalized. There is a little stammer to go with the cast, but a lot less than when I was casting on my own.

4.5 Fourth Game

Between the third and fourth games, me and my partner spoke about our performance during the previous game and focused on things we noticed ourselves for the fourth game. I give more room to him, leading to more natural sounding casting. The teams, which we didn't know before the tournament, become recognizable as well, aiding us with the commentary. This can be noticed when we talk and compare their weapon buys to those of previous matches. A side-effect of giving more room to my partner is that I am able to hype the situation more, since I can focus on what happens on the map and predict when action will happen.

Throughout the game, our synergy becomes better. The banter and discussion are better, and we can cover dull sections during the match with analysis from my casting partner. The speech itself is more dynamic as well, with more variance to volume and tempo.

4.6 Summary of my casting at GetOnline 2017

The remaining VODs from this event are lost, so I cannot analyze my improvement from the first match to the last. I can pick up on things to improve from the ones I have available, though.

Highest priority for me is to improve my hyping. It was lacking from every match and left my casting a little cold. In the future, I must bring more emotion and excitement into the match and throw myself into the game. This can be done in the form of shouts, like seen in chapter 3.1, where I analyzed the 1v4 clutch by fallen.

The speech itself had some repetition. Especially the word ‘ja’ (Finnish for ‘and’) was overused. After I got a casting partner, the situation improved, but I have to focus on what I say more in the future. Casting more and gaining experience in the field will help. Getting a routine for casting allows me to focus more on what is happening, instead of first parsing the situation and then figuring out how to present it in a rush.

With a second caster, I tended to be very dominative in my casting. Of course, this is affected by the fact we had not casted together before, and my partner was inexperienced as a caster. We improved upon this during the second match after a discussion, and when my sense of timing improves, it will only get better.

When talking, I have to focus on using my diaphragm more. Experience will aid on this, as will warming up my voice before I start casting. The effects of these two factors were already noticeable during the games analyzed above. The language used is also a factor. I am used to listening and talking in English in the context of CS:GO, so casting in Finnish was a challenge. This can be noticed by the amount of loan words used, and heavy-handed terminology.

On the other hand, a positive factor was that I did not stop talking for no reason. The situation was even without a visual aid, although you must know the in-game terminology to understand it. Since the tournament was not aimed at novices of the game, it can be overlooked, but it is good to keep in mind. There were no long silences, and pauses felt natural, although I touched upon the timing of them above. Finally, my own knowledge of the game was sufficient, and mistakes on that front did not ruin the viewing experience.

5 Final Words

The thesis has now covered what casting is, what it requires, how professional esports commentators handle their duty, and what my own casting is like. The line of work is demanding, requiring a lot of time and effort to be a great caster.

To sum it all up, we can see that a great caster has to be able to throw themselves into the game and bring his or her own excitement into the commentary. They need to be both great articulators and have good knowledge of the game they cast to not sound monotone and boring. Having a unique personality is a great asset, as is a casting partner, as we saw in chapter 3.

The work can be compared and is very similar to traditional sports commentary. With the comparison, we have to keep in mind the differences in game styles, going from physical to digital. The amount of information that needs to be relied to the viewer is immense, so processing and conveying it to the viewer requires quick thinking and the ability not to freeze under pressure.

While writing this thesis, I found a lot of information that did not fit the scope of the work. One of them was the pure evolution of the art of commentary. Within just a few years, casting has gone from voluntary work to a full career. While it started off as a hobby for someone at their home, now a caster with some experience under his belt might end up casting in front of millions of people. This requires a certain type of personality, and it does not suit everybody. However, it still gives room to different types of personalities, like explored in chapter 3, and I believe there are room for a lot more. Just in CS:GO, there are over a dozen casters available for any given tournament, and the number of high quality commentators has risen quickly since the days of Semmler and Anders.

This is partially because of professional players hanging up their mice, so to speak. As we saw with HenryG, they can become great color commentators after their professional player career is over. Currently we are hitting the point where players are at the age it is believed their reflexes start to slow down, and many of them have played for well over a decade. How long they can play before they handicap themselves is still unexplored territory, but if they are good with words, they will have a prospecting career in commentating or the analyst desk.

And there is room for them. Something many broadcast talents have noted is that they travel an immense amount every year. This is explained mainly with the fact that there are not many great casters available, but there are tournaments going on all the time. HLTV.org, a news website for CS:GO that posts tournament information as well, has a new tournament almost every week. The demand is there, but the supply is not. And since these professional players are well suited for analysis, it gives more room for good play-by-play casters who need a color caster to accompany them.

I also noted things I can improve upon myself to maybe even become one of those new generation of casters. A deeper look is in chapter 4, but as I wrote this, I did casting at GetOnline 2018 – an event. Some of the things I read about I was able to apply directly there, like banter between my co-caster. For future, I still have to work on my hyping, but having found someone I work easily with aided immensely on the play-by-play casting I did. Doing this in a fully professional setting would be a great joy as well. With that, I could take an in-depth look on how casters communicate with the producer and observer behind the scenes and live.

I do see the art of commentary evolving even further from there. Of note is something mentioned in source 21, “Why esports commentary is so difficult”. The article mentions how esports commentary is less polished than its traditional counterpart, but that lack of polish is what gives it its charm, and what has drawn so many people in over the last few years. In a few years, I can see esports commentary hitting a crossroad, where it must decide whether it will go for a more polished tone or keep the natural feel there is right now. Going for the former might draw in big networks, but it will alienate previous viewers who are used to the lively way esports is currently commentated. The latter will keep those viewers, and still draw viewers from casual players, but big networks might not want that sort of broadcasts on their channels. Only future will tell which direction this will go, but for now it seems to be on the latter. Which I think is fine. It is what drew me in, and it is what keeps me watching the games and continue doing this.

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6.2 Picture and video sources

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4. Figure 3: ‘Story of Fog and War’, how Riot Games improved the look of Fog of War after updating the game map

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5. Figure 4: In game screenshot of GetOnline 2018 Casual CS:GO tournament Grand Final. Taken by the author.

6. Figure 5: In game screenshot of CS:GO. Taken by the author on an offline solo map.

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11. Figure 10: HLTv PGL Regional Minor Championship Europe 2016 gallery
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5. Fourth game, first map
<https://youtu.be/LK2pmjQB0qM>

6. Fourth game, second map

<https://youtu.be/rvhgFlq1e0>