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HOW TO START A CAREER IN E-SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about eSports, also known as electronic sports or competitive gaming. Gaming has grown as a business over the past few decades and eSports rival traditional sports in terms of revenue and viewership numbers. The industry is expected to continue growing, and as such, it is interesting to look at different career opportunities within the eSports industry. This paper lays out the history of competitive gaming and explores different career paths possible in the field of eSports, as well as ways to start a career in eSports. The aim of this thesis is to give a good, coherent picture of eSports as an industry, and to analyze the ways professionals in different positions and with different career paths have created their own careers in eSports. This research gives insight into the still quite new industry and the ways professionals from different backgrounds end up working for eSports organizations. Data used consists of written article interviews of professional gamers, YouTube videos of eSports professionals explaining what they do and how they ended up in the industry, as well as a short questionnaire. The conclusions of this thesis answer to the question: How to get a career in eSports?

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Esports (also known as electronic sports or competitive gaming) has seen massive growth within the past few decades. A growing industry means there are also many more professional players emerging each year. Even smaller countries such as Finland have also seen this growth, as there are many gaming clubs and new teams formed each year. Competitive gaming is growing as a business, and challenging traditional sports in both prize money and viewership numbers, and eSports organizations work like any other traditional sports organization.

There are a multitude of career options in eSports as the business side of eSports grows with the player base and viewership numbers. It is no longer true that one can only make it in eSports as a player, or alternatively as a coach. As in any other sport, there have to be marketing professionals, tournament organizers, social media representatives, and even sports psychologists, for example.

Furthermore, eSports has garnered enough attention that there are even eSports-related degree programs popping up in many institutions of higher education. For example, in Finland, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences offers a degree program in eSports Business. Even in some high schools, some eSports-related courses are offered (such as in Sotkamon Urheilulukio or Raahe eSports Academy). Elsewhere in Europe and the United States some other institutions also offer eSports degrees.

This paper shall explore the origins of eSports, and gaming in general. After an introduction to eSports and the business surrounding it, this study will lay out different career options in eSports, as well as the ways in which current eSports professionals have ended up starting their careers. The main focus will be on finding out how professional eSports players and other professionals have started their careers and broken through into the scene. This will be done mainly by analyzing multiple articles and videos with eSports professionals explaining what it is they do and how they ended up with a career in eSports. Additionally, one chapter will focus on a short questionnaire that was posted for eSports professionals to answer to. However, the questionnaire will only have a small role in this paper. Esports as a business field has experienced massive growth in recent years, and probably will continue doing so, and career options are plentiful because of that. For this reason, this paper will attempt to answer the question: How does one start a career in eSports?

2   INTRODUCTION TO E-SPORTS

ESports (also known as electronic sports or competitive gaming) does not yet have a single, universal definition, but there are some that can be used in this thesis. On the International eSports Federation's site, it is written that "eSports (Electronic Sports) is a competitive sport where gamers use their physical and mental abilities to compete in various games in a virtual, electronic environment" (International Esports Federation, cited 15.11.2020). This gives a clear idea of what eSports is. A more scientific definition perhaps comes from Wagner in his study where he defines eSports as "an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies." (Wagner 2006, cited 15.11.2020) These two definitions go hand in hand, but a newer definition was offered by Hamari & Sjöblom who write that eSports is "a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces." (Hamari & Sjöblom 2017, cited 15.11.2020) In more practical terms eSports refers to competitive gaming that is often coordinated by different leagues or ladders and tournaments. ESports players usually play in teams (although sometimes individually) that belong to certain eSports clubs or organizations. (Hamari & Sjöblom 2017, cited 15.11.2020) In most eSports games there are two teams who compete against each other and the team who is first able to complete the objective of the game is the winner. There are, of course, different types of eSports games, but these seem to be the most common type.

2.1   History of eSports

Esports as a term can be traced back in time to 1999 (Winer 2019), but competitive gaming is much older than that. Video games as such made their first appearance already in 1940, in the New York World's Fair Westinghouse, but the game presented at the fair, Nim, was not something that could have been marketed or turned into a business. The game was simply a show of the possibilities of technology back in the 1940s. After that, the timeline takes us all the way to 1958, when William Higinbotham released his work, a game called Tennis for Two, that had a competitive element to it, as two players could play it and there could also be spectators present. (Scholz 2019, 19) However, truly the competitive side of gaming only emerged during the 1970s, when in 1972 multiple companies released their first versions of video game consoles, including Atari, Magnavox,

and Vectorbeam. The same year the first video game tournament, the Intergalactic Space War Olympics, was held at Stanford University. The tournament did have a prize with some monetary value, a yearly subscription to the *Rolling Stone* magazine. (Rönkä 2018, 11-12; Scholz 2019, 20)

All the while these video game consoles were released, gaming also became more accessible and popular. Before video game consoles and home computers, computing machines were almost solely restricted to workplaces, and going back enough time, even those workplaces had to be research centers or other places requiring the highest level of technology to function. Affordability was among the biggest issues as to why computers or consoles (and with them, video games) did not become popular until the 1970s with the lead of Atari.

The 1970s and 1980s were also the golden age of arcade games. Coin-operated arcade games such as Pong or Pac-Man were popular, and the arcade culture that revolved around trying to beat other people's high scores came to dominate gaming culture of said decades. (Rönkä 2018, 12) Arcade games were popular because of the affordability, accessibility and competitiveness of the games. Some of the creators of arcade games eventually ended up programming games for the gaming console market that emerged in the 1980s.

At first, the largest problem for the console manufacturers was trying to monetize the competitive gaming market. Although a growing number of people were playing certain games at arcades and playing competitively for high scores was popular (as were some competitive gaming events), the first experiments by gaming companies themselves to organize gaming events were not as successful. Atari, for example, tried to organize and host a Space Invaders World Championship in 1981, which would have had a prize pool of 50,000$. Only 174 people eventually showed up at the event despite higher expectations, and the winners of the tournament are not reported to ever have received their prize money. (Scholz 2019, 20) This flop of an event was then reputed to have failed because of the fact contestants had to finance their own journey to the event. Furthermore, the event was not well organized, and the official rules were not consistent.

Gaming itself remained popular throughout the 1980s, as was also evident from the show Starcade that ran through 1982-1984. In the show, contestants would compete against each other in popular arcade games and try to break each other's records. Through the show, as well as some gaming-related movies like the 1982 movie Tron made gaming more clearly part of popular culture. This would not, however, be the saving grace of even the largest console manufacturer Atari, who had

to dispose of 700,000 gaming console modules amid a recession that hit the gaming industry in 1983. (Kraneis & Rantala 2018, 13)

After smaller gaming consoles for home use had entered the market, competitive gaming was not yet monetized in a similar manner as it is today. Nintendo, for example, held tournaments for their Super Mario games, as well as other *NES* console games, one being the NES World Championships held in 1990 – yet these tournaments were held mostly to market the consoles and games Nintendo manufactured rather than to cash in from the events directly. Still, this way console gaming and eventually also computer gaming became more and more popular among people, and more companies emerged to tap into the growing gaming industry throughout the 1990s. The arcade era and the beginning of the console era had created a groundwork for the future of gaming.

As personal computers became more affordable in the late 1990s, games for computers also became more widely available to the public. At the same time internet made gaming much more than just trying to break high scores set by others, as it became possible to play in real time against other players online. New gaming genres like fps (first-person shooter) games became popular through games like Doom and Quake, both developed by id Software (Rönkä 2018, 14). Quake was also the game that was played in one of the first eSports tournaments in 1997. The tournament attracted 2000 players, and even the first prize was not something to scoff at anymore – winner of the tournament received a Ferrari 328 GTS two-seat sports car from id Software's lead developer John Carmack. (Scholz 2019, 21)

From there the eSports scene practically blew up, as sponsors like AMD and Intel began financing tournaments, and new multiplayer games were developed. Both companies manufactured computer processors, and as more powerful processors were needed for new games, sponsoring gaming tournaments posed a lucrative marketing opportunity for the companies. Even as gaming tournaments started attracting sponsors, though, the tournaments themselves were not profitable enough to do much more than provide funding for more tournaments. (Scholz 2019, 21-22)

Additionally, as more tournaments popped up especially in the United States every year, tournament organizations were formed. In 1997, for example, the AMD Professional Gamers League was formed, and its first official tournament for Blizzard Entertainment's game StarCraft was held the same year. Spectators in these tournaments could not watch the events through online streams as they can today because of bandwidth issues and simple economical viability,

and as such the tournaments were not yet a highly profitable business model. Rather, only the most keen fans would ever spectate the tournaments. Nonetheless, games like StarCraft would make a lasting impact in the gaming industry. As Asia was hit by an economic crisis in the 1990s South Korea decided its solution to tackle the crisis was modernization, and it improved internet broadband access and even subsidized the purchase of a computer. At the same time internet café culture started in Korea, and StarCraft was one of the games that South Korean people started playing in masses. This is one of the biggest reasons eSports became popular in Asia in the late 1990s. (Scholz 2019, 22)

Another game published by Blizzard Entertainment, WarCraft III, had a built-in level editor that could be used to make custom maps for the game, and the feature was eventually used to create a game called Defense of the Ancients (DotA). DotA also created a new gaming genre called the MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), which is one of the most popular gaming genres for eSports today with games such as Dota 2 and League of Legends (LoL) – both of which are going to be a part of this thesis. Game modding communities also created Counter-Strike with the game engine of Half-Life, as well as Team Fortress with the game engine of Quake.

Finally, in the late part of the first decade of the 2000s, gaming tournaments started gaining enough popularity to turn in a serious profit. This led to games such as *League of Legends* (LoL), Dota 2 and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) holding bigger tournaments each year with more and more prize money involved. The next section will go through the growth of eSports in financial figures, number of professional players, number of tournaments and the number of spectators.

2.2   Growth of eSports

In this section I will be talking about how growth in eSports has shown itself during the last few decades. Firstly, the number of games that hold tournaments with money prizes has multiplied over the years, and the games with the largest prize pools have formidable amounts of money involved in their tournaments. Going back to 1997 when the first so-called professional eSports player, Dennis "Thresh" Fong, won the Quake Red Annihilation tournament, the first prize was donated by the game's lead developer himself. Although the prize was an expensive sports car, it was the only tournament of its kind at the time, and large prize pools would not exist yet for some time. Still, in the beginning of the new millennium, the total of prize money of the year 2000 was already

$745,307. The biggest tournament of 2000 was held in Seoul, South Korea, and a total prize pool of $200,000 was divided between four games: Quake III Arena, StarCraft: Brood War, Age of Empires II, and FIFA 2000. South Koreans dominated the tournament in all games except one, Quake III, which was won by Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, one of the most successful eSports professionals of the early 2000s. (esportsearnings.com)

The global annual eSports prize pool did, however, rise quickly. Mostly the global prize pool rose because of the number of different tournaments growing steadily, but individual tournaments did sometimes have their prize pools in the high hundreds of thousands in the mid-to-late 2000s. Mean tournament prize pools in the first decade of 2000s varied between $6,199 and $14,541, and median prize pools varied between $1,006 and $7,000. Only the financial crisis of 2008 was truly able to stall the progress of eSports as a whole (Both the lowest mean and median prize pools were from 2009), and even then, only for a few years. Figure 1 shows the global annual prize pools of eSports tournaments from the year 2000 through 2009.
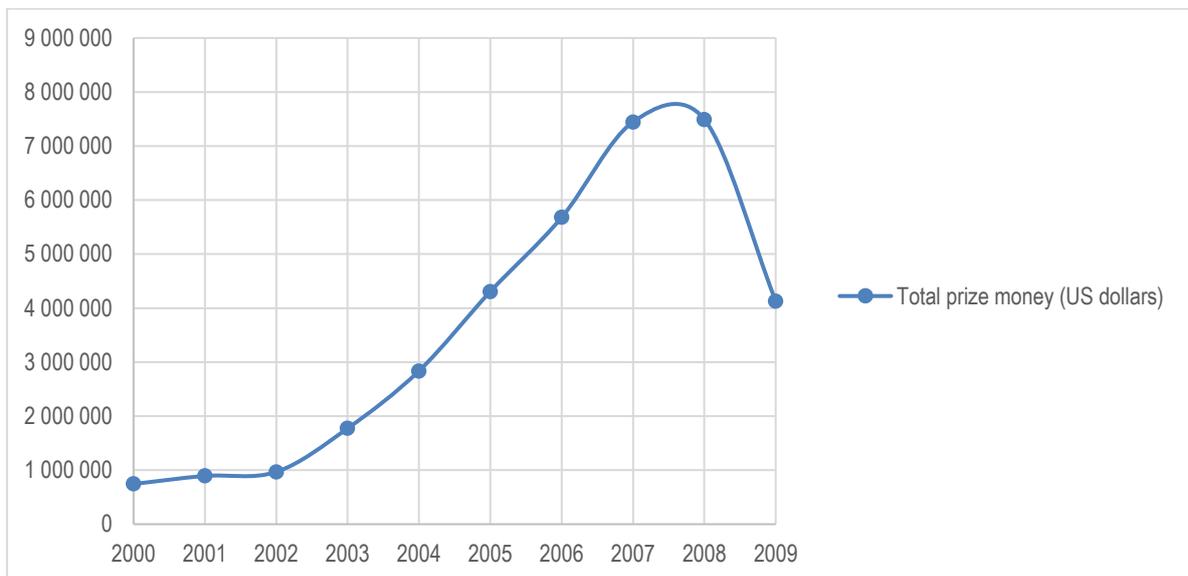

FIGURE 1. Development of global annual prize pools in eSports. (esportsearnings.com 2020, retrieved 13.11.2020)

The eSports professionals who earned the most during the first decade of the 2000s were Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel with $458,089, Jang "Moon" Jae Ho with $383,071 and Ma "sAviOr" Jae Yoon with $326,158. None of these three figures would land a player in the all-time top 200 of eSports players who have earned the most money playing professionally today.

(esportsearnings.com 2020) The beginning of the 2000s did, however, build on the groundwork laid earlier for eSports tournaments both in the absolute number of tournaments, games played, prize money, and professional eSports players. After the financial crisis of 2008 suddenly halted this progress, the industry came back in only two years, and with the help of faster internet speeds and better technology, was able to monetize gaming even further.

In the early 2000s the gaming industry was still figuring out how to best monetize professional gaming tournaments. Early on, players were excited just to take part in international gaming tournaments regardless of the size of the prize pool, and sponsors were nearly the only source of money involved in these tournaments. The way gaming tournaments gained the most traction in the gaming industry was through game developers and companies being firmly involved in organizing tournaments and creating game ecosystems suitable for professional gaming. (Scholz 2019, 24) As players and teams only made money by winning tournaments, and organizers only got money from sponsors, only the frequently winning players/teams and most professional organizers could stay in the industry. In a way this sort of arrangement made the gaming industry volatile during these early years of the 2000s as players and organizers got in and out of the business quickly. The tournament organizing industry would eventually stabilize, though, and players' and organizations' interest in competitive gaming never waned.

Scholz (2019, 25-26) explains how monetizing gaming tournaments at the time focused on trying to sell television rights to companies or otherwise get the larger tournament events televised. He also writes how advertisers did not understand the internet yet as a medium and that many eSports organizations leaned towards televised events because of this and attempted to grow their businesses according to their existing business model. Televised eSports was already happening in South Korea, where eSports became massively popular already in the 1990s, and because of that, advertisers in Europe and North America also thought that televised eSports was going to be the future of the industry.

Scholz (2019, 30-32) also writes about how the financial crisis of 2008 in a way helped the eSports industry by forcing the organizations who wanted to continue their work after the crisis to adapt to new business strategies. Tournament organizer and other eSports organizations changed their overall business plans over the first years of the 2010s and started investing in accessibility to the audience. If games were easy to access to the public to both play and to enjoy watching others play, they thought the industry would organically grow by public demand. Besides business

strategies, game development and streaming services had their own impact. The MOBA game League of Legends was released in 2009, StarCraft II's release was announced in 2010, and the streaming service Twitch opened in 2011. At the time, the MOBA genre of games were the flagships of games suitable to the new marketing strategy of getting all kinds of players to enjoy a free-to-play game that was also easily accessible for spectating during tournaments.

In figures 2 and 3 I will present the overall prize pools of international League of Legends and Dota *2* world championship tournaments (called The International for Dota 2) between 2011 and 2019. These graphs show both the rapid increase of eSports prize money especially seen in the MOBA genre of games, but also how the crowdfunded source of the prize pool for The International tournaments allows for massively larger prize pools.
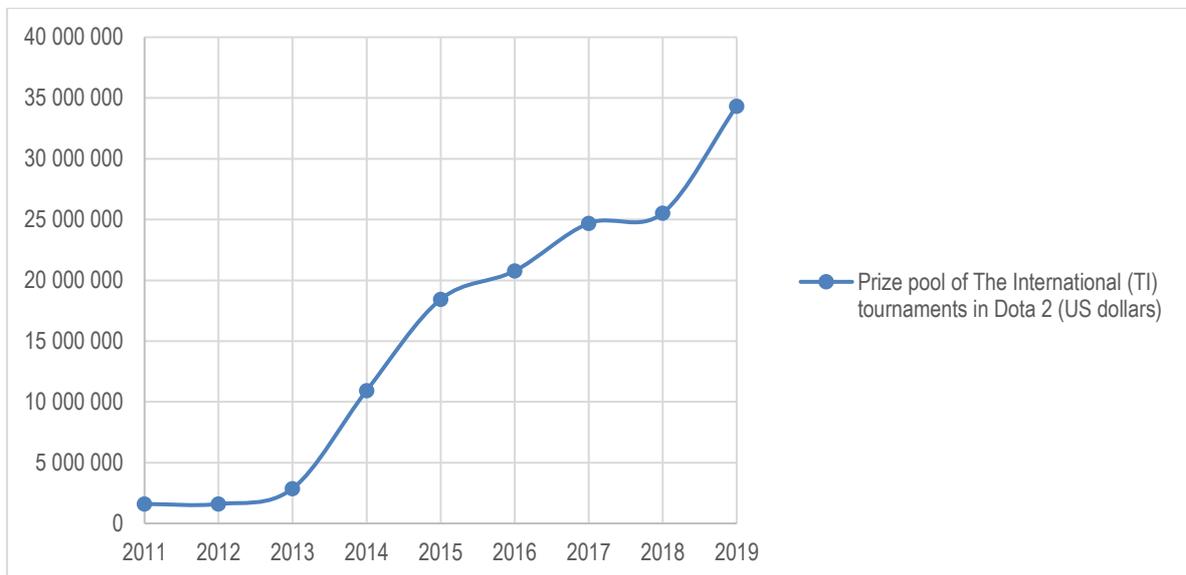

FIGURE 2. Dota 2 The International prize pools from 2011 to 2019. (Gough 2021, 5.6.2021)
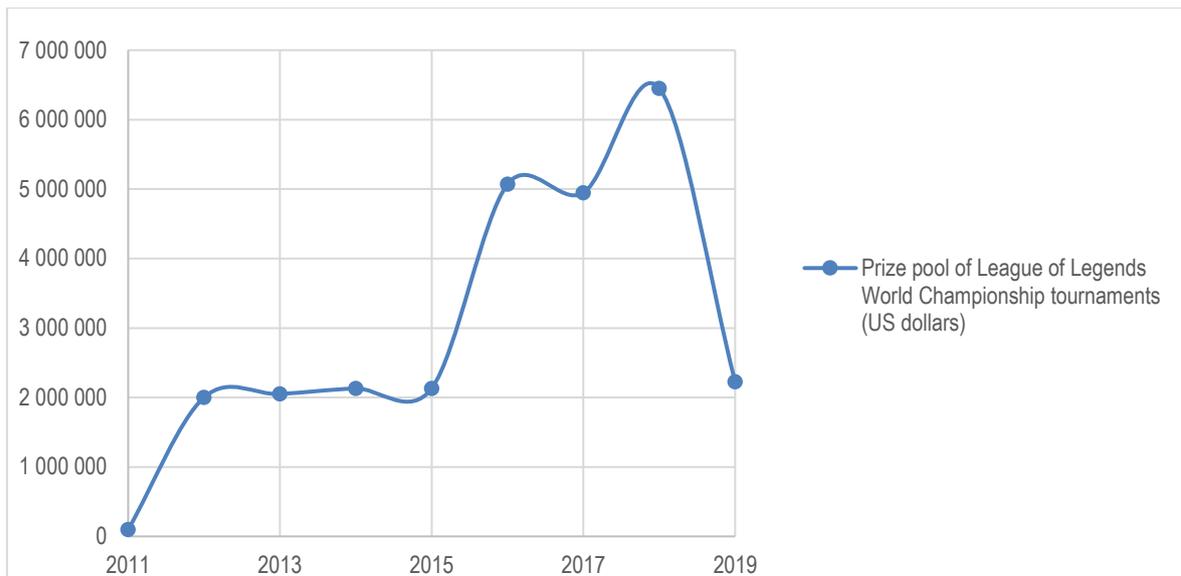
FIGURE 3. League of Legends World Championships prize pools from 2012 to 2019. (Gough 2021, retrieved 5.6.2021)

As previously mentioned, The International tournaments for Dota 2 use crowdfunding in the form of in-game purchases of, for example, in-game cosmetic items and bonuses. The prize pool for the tournaments is, then, explained by the overall appeal of the game and the readiness of its player base to spend money inside the game that is otherwise fully free to play. (Van Allen 2017, retrieved 13.12.2020) League of Legends has had a partly crowdfunded approach to funding their world championship prize pools for the past four years, but their prize pools have remained significantly lower than those of The International tournaments for Dota 2. Additionally, the prize pool dramatically dropped from the 2018 League of Legends World Championships to the next year; the same crowdfunding approach was taken and at least according to ESPN, the tournament's prize pool was expected to at least be close to that of the previous year, and there were hopes that the previous year's prize pool would be eclipsed. (ESPN 2019, retrieved 13.12.2020) There has been no official reason given by the creators of the game, Riot Games, as to why the prize pool rather suddenly dropped during 2019.

Spectator numbers for eSports tournaments have also grown during the past decade, partly because of better streaming opportunities and marketing strategies aimed at the actual players of the games. Figure 4 will show spectator numbers from both The International tournaments for Dota 2 and the League of Legends World Championships throughout some of the previous years. Contrary to the earliest eSports tournaments that ran on sponsor money and were either televised events or, alternatively, only spectators at the event could see them, today's eSports events are

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shown on large streaming services online. This way as many spectators as possible have access to the tournaments. However, the larger tournaments also have live audiences not unlike events like football or basketball fixtures – and especially League of Legends has sought to create a spectacle out of their world championship events. Viewership numbers from these events may not always be entirely accurate and must be taken with a grain of salt, though. Additionally, multiple different ways of counting viewership are possible; there are peak viewership numbers, average viewership numbers, and numbers indicating the total amount of unique viewers that tuned in during the event. These total amounts of unique viewers for eSports events can be extremely high and can sometimes surpass some of the most viewed sports events in the world, such as the Super Bowl. According to CNBC (2019), the 2018 League of Legends World Championship tournament gathered almost 100 million unique viewers online, which was more than Super Bowl the same year, which "only" gathered about 98 million unique viewers.
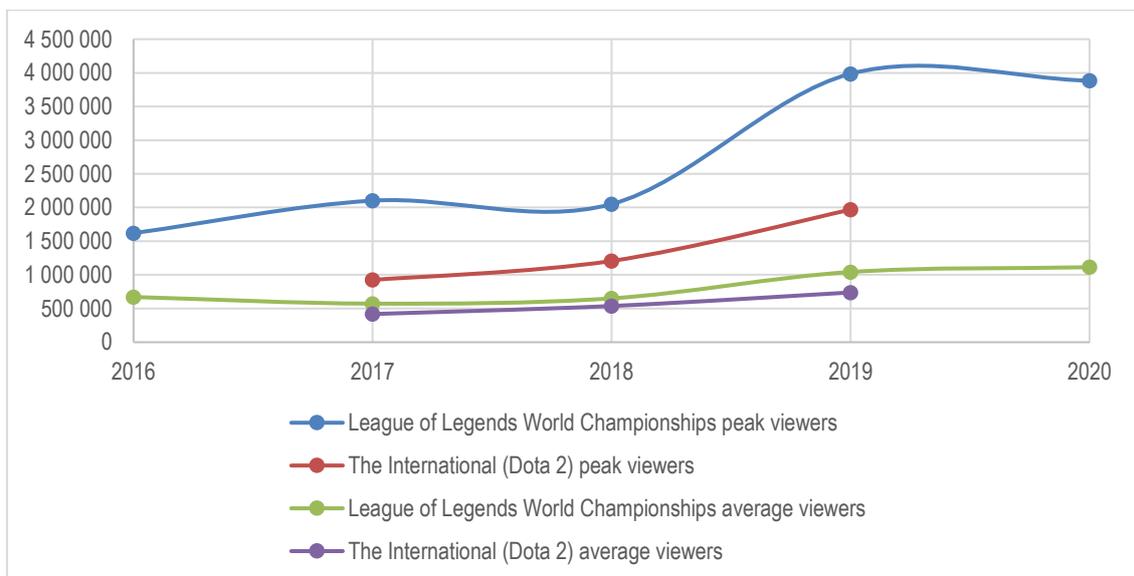

FIGURE 4. Peak and average viewership of The International and League of Legends World Championships tournaments. (Esports Charts, retrieved 13.11.2020)

Due to the lack of readily available data on the viewership of The International tournaments of 2016 and 2020, they are not represented on the graph. However, from the data shown on figure 4 it is apparent that especially the deciding matches of these tournaments gather massive audiences and, as such, the peak concurrent viewership numbers rise steadily every year. This poses lucrative opportunities for sponsors to advertise products during these slots with projected peak viewership numbers, which translates to better opportunities for highly paid sponsorship contracts also for the players who are endorsed by these sponsors.

3 ESPORTS CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The most common way for someone dreaming of a career in eSports to become a professional has traditionally been to dedicate most of their time to playing, and then succeeding in either official tournaments or being high in a game's ranking ladder. This way of becoming a professional gamer obviously still exist, but as the industry grows, other options become available as well. As eSports commercialize more and more, new job titles are also created – for example, one can become an eSports coach, work in eSports marketing, or as a streamer (streamers can make a living even when they are not at the skill level of professional gamers who play in tournaments).

This section will take a look at different eSports career opportunities that exist today, and how one can start a career in each one.

3.1 Playing games

The most obvious one of the eSports related careers is simply playing games. There are still multiple different ways of making a living playing games, though. For example, one of the most common ways of making money from playing games these days is to be a streamer, either playing just one of the most popular games, or playing multiple games and trying to gain a viewership with one's personality. The most challenging way to make a living out of playing games is to be a part of a professional eSports team and playing in tournaments, but it is the original and perhaps most sought-after career there is in the world of eSports.

The first requirement to becoming a professional player in the eSports scene is to play a lot and very good at single game, usually one in the genres of FPS (first-person shooter), MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena), or RTS (real-time strategy), which are the most played and viewed genres of e-Sports. These genres include games such as Counter-Strike, Dota 2, League of Legends, and StarCraft 2, which are all some of the games that hold the most tournaments and in which some of the largest numbers of teams employing professional players exist. Many organizations do also have teams for multiple games.

Cyber Athletiks (2021, retrieved 13.4.2021) lists some key factors that contribute to becoming a professional eSports player:

- Pick your game
- Pick your platform (choosing from PC or different consoles)
- Study your game (optimal strategies and the "meta", for example)
- Hire a coach (makes practising more efficient)
- Communicate (especially important in team-based games)
- Upgrade your equipment (having an optimal frame rate, for example, is vital)
- Practise (the most obvious one, just putting in the hours)
- Join or start a team
- Compete in tournaments
- Get active in the community

This list is very long and includes multiple different things that may be necessary these days to become a professional gamer, but just playing the game might not be enough anymore as the industry grows and gets more competitive.

Besides putting in the effort and playing, studying the game, upgrading one's equipment and joining a team, these days it is also possible to get a degree in eSports. As of 2021, multiple degree opportunities in eSports and eSports related business exist in Europe alone, including: Bachelor's degree in eSports business in KAMK (Kajaani, Finland), Bachelor of business administration with sports and eSports in GBSB Global Business School (Barcelona, Spain), eSports Bachelor of Arts (with honours) in Staffordshire University (Stoke-on-Trent, UK), and Bachelor of Arts in eSports (with honours) in University of Chichester (Chichester, UK) (Keystone Bachelor Studies, retrieved 13.4.2021; British Esports Association, 2021, retrieved 13.4.2021). Some opportunities in the Americas exist as well, including a BSc in Esports Management in the Becker College (USA) and a two-year Esports Entrepreneurship and Administration diploma in the Lambton College (Canada) (Study International, 2019, retrieved 13.4.2021).

3.2   Being an eSports journalist

Another way of having a career in eSports is to become an eSports journalist. This job is very similar to being a regular sports journalist, just specializing in eSports. As the eSports industry

grows along with viewership and the number of gamers in the world, the interest in eSports specific journalism grows as well.

Morgan (2021, retrieved 18.4.2021) has gathered multiple expert opinions on how to get into eSports journalism, and explains in his article that the three most important things to consider when getting into eSports journalism are: Knowing one's audience and tailoring content accordingly, finding your own niche to write about, and networking and making friends who also work in the industry. The field of eSports journalism will probably expand as long as interest for eSports grows and more competitive games and events are played. This also means that more jobs in the industry of eSports journalism will be created.

But where to look for if you want to find a job as an eSports journalist? Esports.net (n.d., retrieved 18.4.2021) lists ReKTJobs, gamejournalismjobs.com, The Esports Observer, UpWork, and Indeed as sites where one can look for and apply for eSports journalism related jobs. Obviously playing the games you write about, being enthusiastic about gaming in general as well as knowing the English language well enough are also needed to be good at the job.

Furthermore, Newell (2016, retrieved 18.4.2021) lists his opinions in how to become an eSports journalist. He writes that a good starting point is to write articles for free or keep a blog to create something for a portfolio. After that he says that you need a plan going forward, and re-reading articles that you have written yourself is a good practise to get better at writing. Then everything is simply up to working hard, making contacts, expecting criticism from others and not being afraid to ask for help.

3.3   Working as an eSports coach

Every competitive team in eSports needs a professional coach to guide the players, to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and to create game plans that take into account the players' skills. Coaching is a good way to work in eSports if one is good at analyzing gameplay in a certain game, but is not interested in becoming a professional player. There are obviously less coaches in eSports than there are professional players though, so in that way it is more unlikely to get a job as an eSports coach. Still, it is one way to work in the industry.

The British Esports Association (n.d., retrieved 18.4.2021) lists requirements and ways to become an eSports coach, as well as explain what an eSports coach actually does. They write that a coach's job is to motivate players, arrange "scrims" (practice matches against other teams), identify the players' strengths and weaknesses and make sure they are performing at their best possible level. They also explain that there are many different types of eSports coaches, for example, head coach, draft coach, strategic coach or a sports psychologist, and a single person can many times fulfil several of these roles at once depending on the team's coaching structure. Any set qualifications in terms of education or experience are not needed to become a coach, but at least some degree is usually required, as well as experience in playing the game at a high enough level and taking part in tournaments.

A coach will also need to be someone who knows strategies and details about the game they want to coach, so they can create good tactics for the players and help them learn the game better. This requires playing, but also recording and watching a lot of games, reading about strategies and learning from other professionals to be able to understand everything there is to know about the game. Watching games is also needed in order to analyze opponents and their play style, but also if the coach needs to help a team's manager to recruit new players. Finally, a coach needs good communication skills to share information with the players effectively.

3.4   Other possibilities

Although playing games and enjoying them is something common for most likely all people employed in an eSports related job, it does not necessarily have anything to do with the job description. Besides players and coaches, eSports teams often employ other professionals as well, and being an eSports journalist is not the only way one ends up writing about eSports.

Esports organizations frequently look for employees on sites such as Hitmarker and ReKTJobs, and the job descriptions vary from UX/UI professionals to human resources officers. As eSports organizations get bigger, they begin to look like any other large sports organization – they employ people to manage their social media, people to code their websites, people to manage other people (such as the human resources officers mentioned before). At the time of writing this, a single North American eSports organization is looking for employees in 8 different positions on ReKTJobs

(ReKTJobs, 2021, retrieved 5.5.2021), including team managers for the games Valorant and Rainbow 6, a human resources officer, a content manager and a video editor.

It seems to be quite usual for even newer eSports organizations to flesh out their organizational structure and to employ different kinds of professionals. Someone with an ability to code well can find their place in an eSports organization as a web designer to create and maintain their site, someone with an aptitude to work with athletes can become a player agent or a team manager. Furthermore, someone who is comfortable with engaging in social media can become a social media manager for an eSports team and work with them to create an image of the organization in the minds of eSports fans.

Beyond the eSports teams, their surrounding organizations and media presence, there is still one more way to engage in eSports related work: organizing events. Like organizing any other sports event or a concert, for example, eSports tournaments need all kinds of professionals to build tournament venues, schedule the events, reach out to sponsors, and to sell tickets. Some of these people working to create venues may be contract workers, but eSports event organizers such as ESL (Electronic Sports League) or MLG (Major League Gaming) employ full-time event organizing personnel whose job it is to create venues, do event marketing, handle team relations, ensure competitive integrity etc. The largest event organizers have an organizational structure alike to the largest eSports organizations that focus on managing their own teams. ESL, one of the largest eSports event organizers, employs over 500 employees across 18 different offices in 14 different countries according to their website (ESL, 2021, retrieved 5.5.2021). A large number of their positions cover marketing and finances alone, which is only telling of the amount of revenue that flows in the industry. The open job postings ESL has on their site at the time of writing include positions in brand partnership, client strategy, commercial, controlling, corporate IT, fan value management & analytics, media rights, partner management, HR, product management, production, publisher relations, and technology (ESL, 2021, retrieved 5.5.2021). All in all, there are surprisingly many ways of getting an eSports related career besides playing games, coaching or writing about eSports.

4 PLAYER INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

This section will examine some player interviews, as well as articles written by professional eSports players or former professional eSports players. The aim of this section is to lay out some of the key factors that contribute into a person becoming a successful professional eSports player in a number of different games. Additionally, a questionnaire was conducted, asking professionals from various eSports organizations to answer how they got into gaming, whether they have a degree, as well as other questions about their background. However, as the questionnaire did not receive a large number of answers from eSports professionals, it is only in a supplemental role in this section, with the focus being on existing videos and articles of eSports professionals explaining how they started their career.

4.1 Questionnaire

A short questionnaire was conducted for this paper and sent to eSports organizations for professionals to answer to. The questionnaire was sent to a total of thirty-four organizations across Europe, five of them located in Finland. Unfortunately, only three professionals from three different organizations answered to the questionnaire, so it is only in a minor role in this study. The questionnaire asked the professionals a series of short questions, either with predetermined options, or open-ended questions. The questions were:

- What game do you play?
- At what age did you start playing games?
- What is the highest schooling level you have completed?
- Are you currently doing other work or school outside of eSports?
- Did you get any training or schooling related to eSports or gaming, before starting to work at eSports?
- Mention three most important skills you think an eSports player should have?
- How do you take care of your physical health? What about mental health?
- What is your working title/job in eSports?
- Tell us briefly how you got into eSports?
- What is the eSports club/organization you work for?

Most relevantly for this study, all of the professionals who answered the questionnaire said that they started playing games when they were between the ages 10-15. Each answered differently to the question about their level of education – one has a high school diploma, one completed vocational school, and one has a master's degree. Two of the professionals said they work in eSports full time, one had another occupation at the same time. None of the professionals had any training or studies related to eSports, and one of them answered that his previous business experience had taught him a lot before joining an eSports organization. When asked about the three most important skills pertaining to an eSports career, motivation and passion for gaming were answered more than once. Communication skills were also mentioned as being important, as well as perseverance and the ability to learn from one's mistakes. The professionals answered that to take care of their health they regularly exercised, tried to maintain a healthy diet and took enough days off. Three fairly similar answers were given when asked how the professionals got into eSports: one played a lot and wanted to succeed as a gamer, another always loved eSports, knew the owners of a professional team and was asked to join, and one had been building other companies before being asked to join an eSports organization. The positions these three mentioned having were a player, a partnership director, and a CEO.

Judging from the few answers to the questionnaire, there are similarities in the personal qualities required to work in the field of eSports regardless of the position. Passion for gaming, motivation, communication skills, perseverance and the ability to learn from one's mistakes were mentioned as being important. Although the questionnaire hardly gives any conclusive answers, it seems that the level of education or the type of degree one has are not as important for success than working hard to succeed and being in contact with the right people to end up working for an eSports organization. All of the organizations that were represented by the participants are Finnish eSports organizations (KOVA, HAVU, and ENCE) – still, it is not difficult to imagine that the qualities and opportunities one needs to become an eSports professional would be somewhat universal.

4.2   Video data from YouTube

Various channels in YouTube, some belonging to players themselves, have posted videos answering in multiple ways to the question of how they got into gaming and ultimately made it their career. This section will explore some of these videos, which answer the questions how one ends

up becoming an eSports professional, what personal qualities it requires to be successful, and what is the routine of a pro player in eSports.

Nathan Stanz, General Manager of Gen.G Esports

Nathan Stanz, the General Manager of Gen.G Esports, has posted two videos on his YouTube channel, both explaining his road to becoming an eSports professional, the first one titled "how to start a career in esports" (Stanz 2020, retrieved 20.5.2021) and the other one "how to get a job in esports" (Stanz 2021, retrieved 20.5.2021). The titles are fundamentally very similar, as is the content in both of the videos, but combining them both gives a good overview of what Stanz thinks is necessary for a person to get a job or start an eSports career. However, it is worth remembering that both of them are narrated from a very subjective and specific viewpoint, even if Stanz does explain how with the general tips he gives anyone can become an eSports professional. In the first video, "how to start a career in esports", Stanz gives a rundown of his own personal experiences and how he ended up working in the industry. His background is that he has played a lot of games his whole life, and he explains that he "played Halo 3, I went to like MLG Anaheim, I did really poorly, but I wanted to be a competitive gamer, I've always loved video games" – in short, he is someone who has always loved video games, which is likely a common characteristic between every eSports professional. He later moved from console games to PC games, and did very well in the competitive ladder of the then new MOBA, League of Legends. At that point he explains that he was in college, and decided to become a professional League of Legends player, so he spent a lot of time grinding to become a better player, and eventually found a team at his college that he could join. After winning a collegiate tournament and gaining access to bigger tournaments, he eventually quit as a player. Instead of playing a game professionally, he then contacted a team owner he knew and asked for a managerial position, which he got.

Basically, Stanz was at the right place at the right time in terms of the game League of Legends being relatively new and its eSports scene rapidly growing, and he was an insider in the sense that he knew who to contact in order to get a job in eSports other than playing a game himself. Still, the basic principle of putting in a lot of hours in a game and understanding it, as well as loving gaming in general, was the core of what eventually made him a professional. In the other video, "how to get job in esports", he explains in more detail the intricacies of the eSports industry. A main point Stanz makes is that being a player or a coach are definitely not the only ways to get an eSports career, but instead, there are hundreds of different job positions in the gaming and eSports industry.

He also explains that even with a completely unrelated degree (such as his own political science degree) one can get a job in the eSports industry. The reason, he explains, is that one can learn whatever basic skills related to working life in a college, and afterwards "grind their way up" in the eSports world. He does, however, specify that something like a business degree is probably useful in the eSports world, and that he does not advocate for eSports related degrees simply because he has not yet seen someone with such a degree succeed well in the world of eSports.

What Stanz advocates for, is simply playing any game that one likes enough to play for long hours and practice, but also getting at least some degree at the same time. This way, even if one is not able to become a professional player or a coach for an eSports team, other possibilities exist in terms of getting a job/career in the eSports industry.

The Cloud9 Overwatch Team

What can one expect from being a pro player, then? In a short video by the NVIDIA GeForce channel on YouTube, players from the Cloud9 organization's professional Overwatch team are asked questions regarding their routines as professional gamers. The six players answer in short to six questions about what it takes to be a pro gamer, how long per day they practice, what their parents think of gaming as a career choice, whether they have pre-game rituals, where they see eSports within 5 or 10 years, and what country they most want to go to for a tournament. A couple of the questions are not relevant for this study, but the questions about what it takes to be a pro gamer and how much they practice per day very much are. The six players' answers do not vary much in answering to the question of what it takes to be a pro gamer. Hard work, dedication, ability to work with a team, and willingness to put the time into analyzing one's own game are perhaps the main points in the players' answers. Not every gamer might realize that pro players watch their own games on replay to see where they did well and what mistakes they made, and having a routine of analyzing one's own game even before turning pro might be beneficial in becoming a better player. Additionally, one of the players mentions having played all sorts of games for over ten years, and he states that just jumping into gaming is not something that is possible to do. When asked how long they practice per day, the answers vary from 4 to even 12 hours of gaming per day, with one of the players saying that he is still going to school, but plays 4 to 8 hours with the team each day after school (NVIDIA GeForce 2016, retrieved 20.5.2021).

Jason Lake, CEO of Complexity Gaming & Jordan Deaton, Trainee at Complexity Gaming

Another perspective is given by a video by the Complexity Gaming YouTube channel, where Jason Lake, the founder and CEO of Complexity Gaming talks with one of his more recently hired employees, Jordan Deaton. Jordan's story is interesting because he did not get into gaming until he was already an adult. Because of a previously suffered sports injury he could not play physical sports anymore in college, but still had a competitive spirit in him when he was introduced to the game League of Legends. Being from a very small town in North Carolina he did not know about eSports before playing League of Legends, but soon came to realize that the industry was intriguing him and that he wanted to try to land a job in the eSports industry. His way of getting a foot in the door was to travel to an e-league major tournament in Atlanta with a stack of printed resumes with him, which he wanted to show to people working in the industry to make contacts and get eyes on his resume. Eventually he made contact with Jason Lake, and after some back and forth with Complexity Gaming he landed a job with them. Jordan's story is an example of the broadness of the eSports industry and its reach; even someone from a small town with no knowledge of eSports before adulthood has a change to work in some way for the industry, even if they are not a pro-level player, coach or something similar. The eSports industry is starting to resemble the traditional sports industry in many ways, and one of the consequences are that people from all kinds of different backgrounds may end up working in the eSports industry in some way (Complexity Gaming 2018, retrieved 20.5.2021).

Josh "Sideshow" Wilkinson, Content Creator and Commentator-Analyst for Overwatch

The final video to be reviewed in this section is from a commentator-analyst Josh "Sideshow" Wilkinson, who has made a video titled "Best way to get a career in esports – and how I did it" (Sideshow, 2019, retrieved 20.5.2021). In the video Sideshow explains the timeline of his eSports career, how he ended up working as an analyst, and how he thinks one can get a career in eSports. Sideshow started his career as a Team Fortress 2 player, and he says that at the time it was the only game he was interested in, and he both played and watched it for a lot of hours over the years in the early 2010s. He explains that, at first he did not even know that it was possible to play in some kind league for Team Fortress 2, but he eventually found one and joined a team. Sideshow also talks about how the way he really got into the more professional side of eSports was when he started following Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), which had a bigger following and many people were creating watchable content of the game. Sideshow was eventually asked to cast TF2

games, and he also ran some tournaments before another break in his career happened: the game Overwatch came out.

Sideshow makes a good point out of the fact that the best way to really get a career in eSports, in his opinion, is to get experience of the industry from a game, either playing or creating content – and when a new game title with potential to be a popular eSports game comes out, to jump in the bandwagon and be one of the first to make it big in said game. This way, he explains, one can break into the scene and not have to stay in the shadow of the professionals who first gain popularity of any new game that builds an eSports scene. Sideshow ended up becoming an analyst for Overwatch tournaments, but he also creates content on YouTube and Twitch and has at least some following on both. What he says is essential to creating a career for oneself in eSports is to enjoy it enough that the long hours for probably less pay than a normal office job do not feel like work. Additionally, he says that if one is going for a career that involves creating content like videos or writing, to not attach too much to a single platform, and to promote others' content even more than one's own, to essentially gain the trust of people on different social media. He also, like Stanz who was mentioned earlier, says that he does not see the point of a degree program focusing on eSports, and that for journalism, for example, it would be better not to limit oneself by getting an eSports journalism degree. Rather, he thinks, getting a normal sports-oriented degree would be better in such case.

In conclusion, all of the players, managers, and the commentator-analyst have similar thoughts as to what makes a good eSports professional, how to get into the scene and how to make a living out of eSports. One of the essential themes they talked about was unsurprisingly spending long hours playing or watching games, or creating gaming-related content, and simply enjoying it enough that the long hours with many times no pay at all feel worth it. Another central theme that was mentioned was seeking contacts: even someone with passion for gaming, and the skills to be a good player, manager or an analyst might never break into the scene if not for networking with the professionals already working for pay in the eSports industry. Furthermore, eSports-related degree programs mostly raised the eyebrows of these eSports professionals as something that would either be too limiting, or simply not necessary to become a professional in the scene; Sideshow even mentioned how – even today as the eSports industry has grown massive – a lot of the eSports related jobs require no degree at all.

Stanz took a slightly different angle with eSports degrees and said that something simple like a marketing degree would be more well-rounded and useful for the eSports industry, even if the only thing that matters in getting a job in the industry is likely experience. Lastly, two more luck-based factors that play into creating a career out of eSports that were mentioned were being at the right place at the right time in terms of networking with other professionals, or alternatively, riding the wave of a new game title that may or may not become popular enough that a proper eSports scene develops around it. All of the professionals that were either interviewed or shared their insights in these videos seemed to also be certain that by just working hard and having passion for gaming should be enough to land a job in the industry. This is because the industry is growing, and the job titles related to it vary so much that from almost any background one can find their way into the scene. The only limiting factor on getting a career out of eSports is one's geographical location – not every country (or even every continent) has an eSports scene worth mentioning, and working remotely for an eSports organization might many times not be possible. Europe and North America are the real hotspots for eSports (as previously explored when talking about, for example, the physical locations of ESL offices), and some places such as the whole continent of Africa, or Central Asia, have little or no eSports activity at all.

4.3   Written articles

This section will look into some written articles that have been done either in interview purposes, or have the eSports professional as the writer themselves. These interviewees are all professional eSports players, and the section will also include an article from a content writer. The themes in the articles revolve around how to get into eSports, what the life of a professional player is like, and what it takes to become a professional.

Eli Gallagher, Professional Overwatch Player for Evil Geniuses

The first article is from the Techradar site, and in it the writer interviews Eli Gallagher, a professional Overwatch player (Hanson, 2019, retrieved 22.5.2021). Gallagher is asked about the game he plays (Overwatch), how he got into gaming, what tips he can give to beginners, and what kind of gaming gear he recommends. Firstly, Gallagher explains that it takes him about 10 hours per day playing the game to keep up his mechanical skills, but that he also frequently plays multiple hours during his free days, only because he does not seem to get bored of the game. This is consistent

with the previous video data, where the players from the Cloud9 team recounted their average playing hours per week. It seems commonplace for professional players, then, to play for more than a full workday's worth of their game each day. Next up Gallagher says that he never really intended to get into professional eSports as a player, and that said development happened because in his school many people were into gaming, and he ended up playing, getting better, and finding a team.

Gallagher's organization, Evil Geniuses, is one of the oldest eSports organizations still around today, having been founded in 1999 around the game Counter-Strike. Gallagher did not instantly end up in Evil Geniuses when he first looked for a team, but rather, he first joined a team called Eastwind, performed well at a tournament and essentially got scouted to a more prominent team. Like many before him, Gallagher also gives advice for beginners to find a game they enjoy enough that they can spend long hours playing and improving, before eventually finding a team to play with. He also points out that rather than playing and enjoying multiple games, it is always more worthwhile to concentrate well on a single game, if one vies to be a professional gamer. What he tells about gaming gear focuses on the fact that a good framerate is one of the essentialities for improving in any game, but that in tournament play, especially bigger tournaments supply the players with adequate equipment. Gallagher basically recounts much of the same information that the other professional players mentioned before in this paper.

Enzo "WarKr0Zz" Conte, Streamer and Former Professional Overwatch Player and Manager

Second, Daily Esports has published an article in which a long-time streamer, eSports player and manager, Enzo "WarKr0Zz" Conte is interviewed about professional gaming (Lee, 2019, retrieved 22.5.2021). Conte says that he has been playing for a long time, since he was 9 or 10 years old, and that he quickly started enjoying the competitive nature of games such as Call of Duty. He was a teenager when Overwatch was a new title, and when he was 16 he reached the top 500 of the game, and was contacted by multiple teams. In this way the beginning of his eSports career started similarly to most players in that he simply played a lot, reached a certain level and was scouted – this differs drastically from how eSports professionals who are not players or coaches have told they got their job, as many of those people were themselves the ones to seek contacts and were not necessarily top tier players themselves. Conte also explains that he views his streaming as a part of the training he does. He also thinks that if someone can consistently play at a great level while streaming, it attracts the attention of fans, who may then screencap and share things that the streamer has done, and thus spread publicity. In this way a player may get free attention within the

gaming community, and further their career that way. Finally, Conte shares his thoughts on how to become a pro player and states that one has to be an excellent player right from the beginning and often play as much as 12 hours a day to become or remain a professional. He essentially thinks that natural talent is a large part of becoming a professional player on top of the long hours of playing and improving.

5   CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the origins of eSports, the growth of the professional eSports business, career opportunities, as well as the ways to become a professional working in an eSports organization. As the field has grown over the past few decades, eSports organizations and business has begun to look much like that of traditional sports organizations and business. The largest games in terms of player base, spectators in tournaments, and prize pools for the winners of these tournaments rival and even outmatch some traditional sports. Different games are in such a way comparable to individual sports and, for example, League of Legends or CS:GO could be compared in terms of spectators of the games and the money involved to traditional sports such as American Football. Esports may not be as widely known yet as traditional sports are, but as a larger portion of people on the planet get a stable and sufficiently quick internet connection, and the eSports market reaches ever more countries, the business can only be expected to grow more.

Different career opportunities within the field of eSports are many, and unlike one might think, being a professional player or a coach are only two careers among hundreds in the business. Esports organizations require business, marketing and social media professionals and representatives just like any traditional sports organization does. Additionally, tournaments do not arrange themselves, and there need to be companies and professionals that build venues, handle equipment and electronics, sell tickets, attract sponsors and investors, and maintain relationships with eSports organizations. As previously mentioned in the paper, the largest eSports tournaments also gather audiences much like traditional sporting events, and tournaments such as the League of Legends world championships are built to be great spectacles. Superbowl has its half-time shows, and the League of Legends world championships also have world-renowned musical guests and entertainment involved in them.

Paths to a career as an eSports professional have also been discussed in this thesis, some of them being unique and unexpected, but most have multiple similarities between them. Unsurprisingly, the biggest similarity between the paths different professionals have taken is the general passion for gaming, as well as willingness to spend countless hours either playing or working among games. Most professionals mentioned in this paper also mention some kind of coincidence that led them to get a job or start a career in esports – most of these were somehow linked to knowing or meeting another person who already worked in the field, and being offered work. In a way, being at the right

place at the right time seems to be the deciding factor for people who become eSports professionals. For some, it is related to starting a new game title that becomes a success and develops an eSports scene, while said player is among the first to climb to the top of a competitive ladder in the game. For some, their passion for gaming leads them to seek out eSports professionals and they happen to meet someone willing to hire them.

In conclusion, getting a career in eSports is a combination of a passion for gaming (as well as usually putting in countless hours into a game), perseverance, and opportunity. Education can not be understated either, as many of the eSports professionals mentioned in this thesis advocate for at least a bachelor's degree, and a business-related degree seems to be one that the professionals thought to be the most useful for a career in eSports. Some eSports related degree programs also exist, many of them combining business studies to them.

6   DISCUSSION

This paper has aimed to answer to how one can get a career in eSports. It acts as an overview to the origins or gaming, how large the industry is, what kinds of career options exist within the industry, and how different professionals have started their careers. However, the scope of this thesis does not allow for more conclusive research into the structure of eSports organizations or how they really compare to traditional sports organizations. Further research into how people with eSports-related degrees fare in the industry would also be interesting to see.

Additionally, it would have aided the analysis in this thesis to get an adequate amount of answers to the short questionnaire that was sent to a multitude of eSports organizations. Unfortunately, only three eSports professionals ultimately answered the questionnaire despite numerous attempts to get more organizations, as well as more people from the organizations that already answered, to take part in the questionnaire. It is unclear whether or not this is because of the fact that this paper is only a bachelor's thesis, or if eSports professionals are generally too busy or uninterested to participate in research about their sport. However even the three professionals who answered helped in answering the research question.

This paper has acted as an overall description of the origins and current state of the eSports industry, as well as different career opportunities. Some branching research could include analysis of the future of eSports, for example, or whether professional eSports players transition well to another career after they retire from professional gaming. The eSports industry continues growing, and as such, more research into the possibilities and current realities of the industry is needed.

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