



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Looking into possible mental factors that affect professional esports players

Faculty of Arts

Department of Game Design

Authors: Fredrik Nilsson, Jeehyun Lee

Bachelor's Thesis in Game Design, 15 hp

Program: Game Design and Project Management, 180 hp

Supervisor: Patrick Prax

Examiner: Masaki Hayashi

June 10, 2019

Abstract

This paper is studying what kind of mental factors could possibly affect esports players. Qualitative data collection method was chosen for the paper's method. Thus, we gathered 5 individuals that were, or is in the professional esports scene and interviewed them. With the information we gathered from the interviews we could see that most of our expectation about the mental factors were right. This paper will bring up some mental factors that affects the players from their parents, spectators of esports, other competitors and what they do to handle the different factors.

Key words: Esports, MOBA, competition, mental pressure, social pressure, team, tournaments

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Aim and research question	1
2 Background	2
3 Previous works within esports mental health	3
3.1 The pressure that roots within the team	3
3.2 The social pressure professional esports players go through	3
3.3 The pressure that roots outside the team; tournaments	4
4 Method and materials	5
4.1 Analytical method	5
4.2 Limitations and risks of gathering the data	6
5 Analysis	7
5.1 Pressure from the parents	7
5.1.1 Before starting the career	7
5.1.2 After career started	9
5.1.3 Summary of pressure from parents	10
5.2 Pressure within the team	10
5.2.1 Long practice hours and feeling competitive between individuals	10
5.2.2 Summary of pressure within the team	11
5.3 Before tournaments	12
5.3.1 Preparing for tournaments	12
5.3.2 The mental pressure of top dog vs underdog	13
5.3.3 Summary of before tournaments	15
5.4 During tournaments	15
5.4.1 Live crowd pressure	17
5.4.2 Social Media	18
5.4.3 Summary of during tournaments	19
5.5 After tournaments	20
6 Discussion	21

6.1 General discussions and limitations.....	21
6.2 Different perspective.....	21
7 Conclusion.....	22
7.1 Summary of contributions	22
7.2 Future research.....	22

References

Appendix

1 Introduction

As the humans entered digital era, many activities and entertainments became digitalized. Sports is one example of that. Now people are enjoying esports which is a form of competition using video games. Moreover, having profession as a player in esports looks brighter than ever compared to other jobs today. 24.8 million dollars is the largest prize pool for an esports tournament to date (*Dota 2's The International again breaks record with \$24.8M purse*, 2018) the winner gets to share 11.2 million dollars with their team. In 2018(Wolf, 2018) Epic Games, the developer behind Fortnite, announced they will provide 100 million dollars in the 2018-2019 season. Youths all around the world that enjoy playing games are dreaming to be a professional player as seeing all the glitz and glamorous professional players get from the winning. Earning through gaming, how much better could it be?

However, youths are neglecting some points. Like every industry, the esports also have bright and dark sides. Not only are prize pools seeing new highs each year but also the burden on the players. Every wrong move might get scrutinized toxically on Reddit, Twitter and other online forums by the spectators. Weakly formed esports organization cannot protect the players from legal matters and long practice hours are tremendously affecting the player's physical health (Hollist, 2015). At this point we were wondering 'How about the psychological problems?', 'How do professional esports players deal with stress?', 'Where do they get it from?'. Unfortunately, since the esports scene itself is newly built and athletic scenes tend to hide psychological matters (Markser, 2011), there are not many papers that have done research about such issues.

Here we want to investigate the perspective of actual professional gamers and coaches. Their perspectives are particularly relevant since they have insight and experience of the industry more than anyone.

Therefore, we decided contacting several professional esports players and coaches that are currently in the esports industry. We asked them individually about their working atmosphere overall through semi-structured interviews. By doing so we could sum up some factors that cause mental pressure to players and better understanding of the esports scene itself.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors giving professional esports players mental pressure specifically and how they might affect the players.

Esports scene has been expanding their tournament prizes (Newcomb, 2019) and many children find it very tempting to be a professional player simply thinking that they can play games as much as they want and even earn a lot of money. However, the reality is not that bright as it looks to be. It has been a growing issue recently of many pro players suffering psychological or physical problems (Erzberger, 2018). Unfortunately, this has not been dealt much as sports scenes tend to hide the problems that athletes go through rather than opening up (Markser, 2011). Thus, we want to discuss specifically about mental stress which professional esports players get and shed light on hidden part of esports world giving better understanding about the profession for those who want to take part in the scene in the future.

2 Background

To allow readers not familiar with the esports scene we have compiled a list of words the reader need to know the meaning off.

Pro Gamer/Esports Player

In this paper we use the definition of a professional(pro) gamer/esports player as a person who is a full-time competitive player, who is paid to play games professionally. Normally most players are paid by their teams or sponsors, also many tournaments offer cash rewards for winning

Esports

The definition of esports in this paper refers to professional video game tournaments. Just like in athletic sporting competitions, pro players of esports perform individually or as a team in front of live crowd or broadcast through Internet sites as Twitch or YouTube.

Scrims

The word is derived from ‘scrimmage’ and is now used to describe unranked online gaming practice match between pro gamers or pro teams.

TI

TI is shortened for ‘The International’. It is used to describe the biggest Dota 2 competition held by its own developer Valve.

Bootcamp

Bootcamping is a training program which esports players get together physically and practice games at the same physical place. It allows better skill learning and team coordination performances. Bootcamps are typically held before larger tournaments and can range from 2-3 weeks to 1-2 months.

Live Stream

In this paper the word live stream is used to describe the online real time broadcasting. Similar to live shows on traditional TV but done over the internet.

Underdog

The term underdog is used to describe a team or a person that has the least possibility to win in a match or competition.

Top dog

The term top dog is used to describe a team or a person that has the highest possibility to win in a match or a competition.

Liquipedia

Liquipedia is similar to Wikipedia but for online games. Liquipedia has most of the information a spectator can ask for including; match-ups, tournaments, prize pools etc.

3 Previous works within esports mental health

This paper holds a precondition that esports is within the boundary of traditional athletic sports (Witkowski, 2012; Jenny *et al.*, 2017; Kane and Spradley, 2017; Hallmann and Giel, 2018). To support this background, we are citing from an early research that indicates the reasons how and why esports can be perceived as sports. Furthermore, we are looking into the papers that deal with psychological part of the athletes whom are participating in the sports competition. These theories have been the foundation of the choice for our method in this paper which is semi-structured interviews and we prepared numerous interview questions for ex/present esports players.

Additionally, this paper examines how and where esports players get the mental pressure by conducting interviews. From a recent study by Bányai *et al* (2018) they discovered the strong motivations of spending time on esports playing are competition, peer pressure and skill building. Therefore, we divided the pressure giving factors into three categories: social pressure, inside team pressure and outside the team pressure.

Previously done scientific works regarding what social pressure professional esports players might go through, both inside and outside the team suggests that the players are required to put in 12 to 14 hours a day with only 4 hours of sleep (Holden, Kaburakis and Rodenberg, 2018). In a recent study Holden, Kaburakis and Rodenberg (2018) discovered some professional players must take Adderall to fuel their gaming marathon sessions. There are also journalistic articles which are talking about social pressure from social medias criticizing the professional esports player's mistakes from high stake tournaments (Hassan, 2018).

3.1 The pressure that roots within the team

For this part we are basing our research question on a paper called '*Time To Be Grown-Ups About Video Gaming: The Rising Esports Industry and The Need For Regulation*' (Hollist, 2015). In this paper Hollist addresses the long practice hours that players have to practice using the word 'exploit'. To be more specific, she is saying that the system that was built to secure the players to hold highest working conditions are in fact, making work labor atmosphere in the esports industry insecure. The life of some adolescents and aspiring professional esports players can see 12 to 14 hours of play every day and just 4 hours of sleep (Holden, Kaburakis and Rodenberg, 2018). Holden, Kaburakis and Rodenberg(2018) continues to discuss how both amateur and professional video-gaming is both physical and mentally exhausting.

With this theory in the background we wanted to see if the pro players do feel 'exploited' and if there are any other causes that mentally affect the players. We are also investigating if their employment security indeed is insecure.

3.2 The social pressure professional esports players go through

In this paper we are referring social pressure to the society impact around the player. It could be family and friends' responses about gaming. We are assuming that esports player would not have gotten positive impressions about their job from parents since the interview that Kutner *et al* (2008) did with several mothers and sons showed that the mothers showed concern of their boys playing games. Also, we are seeing that social media could be another factor of giving pressure to the players.

These can be divided into two categories. One would be the society as general. Family and friends of the players are included in this group. It was a generic idea that parents do not want

their kids to play games that much and Kutner *et al.* (2008) backs up the idea saying in his paper that “*Parents of young boys tend to have strong concern about their children playing games*”.

The other would be society within the audience of competitive games. To be more specific, the social media where people talk and post about the games such as Reddit and Twitter. Khoo(2012) says a skillful esports player might consider themselves successful, but what would the great public think of him or her? Khoo continues to ask if it even matters as long as the player is content with their own sense of personal identity

Therefore, we wanted to see how the eSports players think and feel about the society around them and how it affects them in pursuing their career.

3.3 The pressure that roots outside the team; tournaments

According to Steinkuehler (2019) esports scene is a fast-growing entertainment that earns a lot of revenue. This also links to the cash amount that players get from the tournament’s prize pool. Steinkuehler further states in his paper that nowadays esports players are paid same or even more than athletes. Faker for instance, who is a League of Legend World Championship winner has recently earned 100 million Korean Won (85 717.5USD) in national tournament in Korea.

In another study by Hallmann and Giel(2018) they researched if esports is a competitive sports or recreational activity. In their study they found other researches who already dedicated their interest on the phenomenon of esports. For example, it was shown that esports players are exposed to physiological stresses and strains during competitions, which are comparable to top athletes from physical sports. They also found out the cortisol level of esports players during competitions is comparable with racing drivers, their heart rate peaks from 160 to 180 beats per minute with an average of over 100 beats per minute. In their discovery they concluded that in combination with the players’ high motor requirements esports is on par with traditional sports regarding the physiological stresses and strains.

That means we will look at the data later and see if there is any connection between the high stakes in winning tournaments and the physiological stresses and drains the players might be exposed to during competitive tournaments.

4 Method and materials

For this paper a qualitative data collection approach would yield the best results. We settled with a semi-structured interview method to gather the data. Through personal interviews, we were able to alter the questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 469). This means we could ask relevant follow up questions which would be impossible if we were conducting a questionnaire. With a self-completion questionnaires we would not be able to verify the participating individuals nor ask follow up questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 234-235).

Before starting to gather data, we had to establish relevant questions to ask. In order to establish relevant and meaningful questions, we had to first look at our existing theories and see how to contribute, as well as how we can answer our research question. For gathering the theories, we used internet sources such as: google scholars, sagepub.com, researchgate.net and sciencedirect.com. With the following keywords: mental health, esports, psychological, athletes and pressure we found several studies. We read all the abstracts of promising papers, after establishing the papers were relevant to our study, we looked at the references in their text to expand our list of existing studies.

After establishing 21 questions, we started looking for individuals who are/was active in the esports scene to interview. The interview subjects were found with help of Kakao talk, Discord, Twitter and Facebook messenger. We first approached them with a friendly greeting, then informed them about our research and later attached a formal request for the interview. For our study we managed to secure five (5) interviewees: three current players, one former player who later transitioned to become a coach and an individual who was always a coach. The questions asked to the coaches were slightly altered compared to the players' questions (Appendix A) (Appendix B).

The structure of the questions was in the formation that could ease in the interviewee to feel welcome and set a friendly atmosphere. Therefore, we had some less irrelevant questions at the very start before going into the deeper questions. For example, *"How did your career start?"*, *"Did you always want to be a pro player?"*.

After establishing a friendly atmosphere, we asked more in-depth questions about their feelings, family oppositions and so on.

All the interviews got recorded using a program called Shadowplay to record both audio and video, however, we never used webcams, so the interviewees face was never captured. Later on, we transcribed all interviews in English except one which was done in Korean. The interview was later translated into English. The way used to transcribe the interviews was to watch back the recorded footage from Shadowplay using VLC Media Player. The tools used to write down the transcriptions was with Microsoft Word to not keep it available in the cloud.

We stored all the recorded data and sensitive documents on an external memory drive to prevent it being compromised.

4.1 Analytical method

We decided to use a thematic analytical method to analyze the data we acquired. The analysis is done by rearranging the quotes we gathered from the interviewees by three themes. The three themes were: pressure from the parents, pressure within the team and pressure from tournaments. After the reallocation, we interpreted the hidden meanings in the sentences and tried to figure out if there were any overlapping issues between players (Bryman, 2012, p. 578).

4.2 Limitations and risks of gathering the data

The limitation of gathering the data was that the interviewees had to be protected anonymously since they had contract issues and private matters. Thus, there were times when we had to avoid questions that might possibly reveal their identity.

The risk we had for gathering the data was uncertainty of response from the people we contacted. Since majority of them were participating in tournaments, we had no confidence or plan of how to gather the data if they declined our request due to busy schedule. Moreover, there were problems of basing our paper on theories that already existed since there were only a few of related scientific papers.

5 Analysis

In this study we interviewed 5 male individuals who are currently or have been active in the professional esports scene.

Name	Profession
Andy	Professional esports player
Ben	Ex-professional esports player
Charlie	Professional esports player
David	Professional esports coach
Harry	Ex-professional player, current coach

5.1 Pressure from the parents

In this section we look at what kind of pressure the player has from their parents. First, we look at when they told them about starting their career and later to see if their perspective changed after the players started their career to become professional esports players.

5.1.1 Before starting the career

We asked all the subjects the following question “*What did your family say when you said you want to become a pro player?*”

Andy is the first subject and his parents and family simply said he is wasting his time as usual.

They were saying don't do it, it's a waste of time as usual. (Andy, professional player)

For the second subject Ben, the following was said. Coming from an Asian background his parents were reluctant. There is a social perception when playing games, especially in Korea he said. It is seen as unhealthy and having a short life span and the players who started their career at a young age do not have any long-term future.

Well, when I was in Korea my parents were reluctant. That time. You know there is a social perception with 'playing game', especially in Korea. Not healthy, short life span and the people who started game early in their age don't have any plans after that has ended...like wholly lacking. I think they respected me not as a pro's career but experiencing something that others can't do easily. But now I sometimes ask other players you know including foreigners 'Hey did your parents allowed you to?' normally say that they have opposed. (Ben, ex-professional player)

In the third interview we found the following data from Charlie. His parents were very negative about him playing video games, his parents kept telling him he was wasting his life away. Charlie tried to convince his parents it is possible to make money out of it, but his dad did not believe him. It made Charlie pretty upset but he kept playing.

My family was always very negative about me playing video games, my dad always told me I was wasting my life away, and it was pointless. I always told him like, you know you can make money doing it, and but he didn't

really believe that. It made me pretty upset. I kept playing. (Charlie, professional player)

For the fourth interviewee coach David, we found the following results. David did not actually inform his parents about his career choice as he had a full-time job on the side of his gaming career. It was not until he had to start skipping work for attending tournaments thus, he told them. They were hesitant at first, but they supported him as they knew gaming had been part of his entire life, it also helped that his esports career did not interfere a lot with his regular full-time job.

I didn't really them for a while as it wasn't really interfering with my full time job at the start, it was only once I started getting offered pay to and stuff and I was going to have to miss work at first to attend tournaments and they were hesitant at first but, they knew gaming is something I had been doing my entire life, as long as it did not interfere with my job they were fine with whatever I was doing. (David, coach)

Harry is the fifth interviewee; Harry used to be a player and nowadays coaching another esports team. When Harry first told his parents about his career choice, they did not really like it. They did not see a future for it. His parents asked if he will still have the same job in five years? They compared it to a career of a sport that is not very popular and that was their main concern. Harry was in his mid to late 20s and that is when people normally start their careers with landing their first job. If he missed that timing window, his parents basically said he could never get back in. Harry said it is normal for parents to be worried whether their kids can support themselves in the future. Eventually they supported him, as long as he did not make the money illegally.

I mean they didn't like it...they didn't really see a future in it, 5 years from now are you still going to have the same job? How they see it is similar to if you want to become a professional athlete in a sport that is not very popular... that was their main concern with me, that I'm going to throw away a lot of the other opportunities that I would have if I took a normal path, especially in Korea it is very age sensitive, back then I was in my mid to late 20s right so if I that is usually when people start their career gets their first job, so if I miss that timing window they are basically saying I can never get back in right, so they didn't like that. I think that is just the reality of the world, like parents are worried that their kid can support themselves, if you make enough money and it's not illegal then I think most parents will support but they always talk me about these honorable jobs but at the core if it is like they essentially want you to be able to feed yourself and if in the case you start a family to provide to that family and it just comes down to money. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Looking at all the responses we can see that all the parents were negative. Some went as far as saying their kids are wasting their time or even wasting their life away. Also, some parents said they are missing time in their life that they will never be able to get back again. Although the parents were very negative about an esports career, it did not stop any of the players from trying to break into esports.

5.1.2 After career started

In 5.1.1 it was established that most of the parents were very negative about the player's career decision, therefore we asked them the following: *"How do they see it today? Did it change to a positive or more negative or remained the same?"*

For Andy we can see a large turn around, going from completely negative to hyper positive.

They are cheering and trying to be with me, yeah you can do it you are so good and so on. It's weird. Going from completely negative to ever hyper positive. (Andy, professional player)

Looking at Ben we can see yet again, another turn from negative to positive. Ben stopped receiving pocket money from his parents and turned it around from receiving to sending pocket money. It was at this moment his parents thought he is at a stage of being economically independent.

I have been not receiving any pocket money for a long time since I learned a lot then, I am sending pocket money to them so they once told me that they thought 'Ah our kid is at the stage of being economically independent'. (Ben, ex-professional player)

When Charlie told his parents, he is actually getting paid to play, his parents became positive about his career.

...as soon as I came with my parents with an actual, listen I'm getting paid to do this now they were all on board when I was actually making an income. (Charlie, professional player)

For David the coach it was a bit difficult to convince his parents about it being a sustainable income for him. Once his parents saw the contracts and his income, they were confident and happy, so his family started attending the tournaments, which he claims helped a lot.

When I went to the ehm, it was a little bit difficult to convince I was really being able to do it full time to pay my rent and stuff, but ehm once they saw contracts they were confident and happy, so my family came to a couple tournaments, being able to see the event in the person have really been helpful as we are not just sitting in our basement. (David, coach)

For Harry's parents, they went from negative to a slightly positive. Even though Harry was part of the winning team at TI, they were a bit less concerned but not entirely. For instance, when they saw the prize pool of millions of dollars USD over at liquipedia.net, they said not bad, but they were still a bit concerned.

The fact that we made it to TI on our first try was considering miraculous by a lot of people, so after that success I just played more and after that when I stopped playing they were concerned again and then I started coaching, and when I won TI they were a bit less concerned because they like checked liquipedia.net and saw the prize money and they were like not bad....it went from a negative to a slightly positive, not like super positive. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

A common theme can be seen here about economic security and being independent. As soon as the players were able to prove to their parents it is possible to make money from doing this,

majority of the parents changed their perception of it. Once the contracts were shown to the parents, they got convinced this is sustainable for now. However, in one of the subjects the parents went from negative to a slight positive, even after being part of the world championship winning team. Harry's parents were still a bit concerned and this is because of what they said earlier in 5.1.1, they don't see this as a long-term economic security, Harry won the biggest tournament of that year but that can be seen as winning the lottery.

5.1.3 Summary of pressure from parents

The results were very interesting in this part since we could clearly see the attitude change of the parents toward their children's career.

First, they were very negative about having gaming as a career. Since such job did not exist in their era, they did not understand how playing game, which is a child's leisure to them, could support an individual in maintaining the life economically.

There were also concerns from the parents rooted from cultural circumstances. For instance, Harry mentioned that in Korea there are certain age role expectation in the society. In other words, if one does not have a job in particular age, the person is considered to be a failure. Harry's parents were worried that their son would get unemployed sooner or later if he starts the gaming career. However, when the parents of the interviewees learned that playing as a professional player could earn a lot of money, they changed their negative opinions and became positive. Ben mentions in interview that his parents felt that their son was fully grown enough to support himself and become economically independent from them when Ben started sending them pocket money instead of receiving one.

This means that the negative attitude of parents was almost exclusively connected to fears of economic unsustainability. There are few traces of prejudice against games for other reasons which could be seen as surprising given....

Before the interview, we assumed that the players would be suffering from the opposition from their parents because we discovered in previous done studies some professional esports players retired at an age as young as 19 (Holden, Kaburakis and Rodenberg, 2018). We were expecting the breakdown of family relationship and that the bad relationship would continue today. Therefore, we did not expect to see the support from the parents after the players' career have started.

5.2 Pressure within the team

In this section we list the results from the pressure the players are exposed to from inside their teams.

5.2.1 Long practice hours and feeling competitive between individuals

Here we asked the players how their day to day life looks like and how many hours they must put in to remain relevant in the scene.

Andy is playing between 9 to 10 hours a day, where 6 to 7 hours are scrims.

Not counting scrim hours, 3-4 hours extra. 9 to 10 hours a day. (Andy, professional player)

Ben practices around 14 to 16 hours a day. He felt it was so tiring and he did not think he could do it anymore. He started thinking school would have been much more comfortable.

We practice like 14? 16 hours a day basically [...] that was so tiring that I don't think I can do it anymore. So, I'm like 'Maybe the school is much more comfortable.' (Ben, ex-professional player)

Charlie scrim 4-5 hours a day depending on the day. He said that one of the nice things is being around other people, to see them grind. It motivates Charlie to grind the game just as much. Seeing how the people around him put in their time, kind of forces him to put in the time as well.

We scrim for 4-5 hours depending on the day, one of the nice things about it, that I like is you are around other people who are like grinding, so it just motivates you to grind the game more because you physically see it. You see it and you're like oh they're putting in more work, now I got to put in that work too.. (Charlie, professional player)

David is the coach of a team, what he told about his team's practicing hours is similar to what others have said. David is spectating the practice matches while his team is playing them.

We scrim through the rest of the day from 4 to 6 hours. I'm busy all day with the team practicing. (David, coach)

Harry who also is a coach thinks 10 hours is the minimum required hours for his team. Some days they have shorter hours, maybe 6 to 8 but he claims that on average it is much more.

I think like, minimum 10 hours including practice, I mean shorter day maybe they play 6 to 8 hours, but the average is much more. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

From the data we gathered we can see the number of hours they have to play is between 10 to 16 hours. Where 4 to 6 hours is mandatory practice hours. These hours are way above the 34.5 hours average a week a traditional job requires you to work in the US (Doyle, 2018). The most interesting finding in this section is from Charlie. He is living with his team in a shared team house, so they get very close together and it's very clear what his teammates are doing. Therefore, Charlie is getting heavily motivated to put in the same number of hours as his teammates does. This finding is also discovered by Bányai *et al.* (2018). In their study they claim competition, peer pressure and skill building are a strong motivation for spending time on esports.

Another interesting finding is from Ben. He felt there was a lot of pressure on him to put in the 14 to 16 hours a day. He was considering going to study and get a traditional job might be more comfortable long-term goal for him.

5.2.2 Summary of Pressure within the team

For this question we have based our assumption on the paper that discuss about how professional players' labor is being exploited under the 'practice' reason. Not surprisingly we could get answers from players that they suffer much from the long practice hours. Not only mandatory 4 to 6 scrim hours but also 6 or more hours are added for the players to practice personally. That adds up to 10 hours or more a day which is 2 hours more than a normal work day (Doyle, 2018). Hollist (2015) talks in her paper about the legal labor protection for esports players are too weak for protecting them. With the results that we have gotten, we can clearly see how players are thrown into situation where they have to perform more labor than others.

However, there was a positive view on the grind of players. Charlie says that it makes him more motivated to see others work/practice hard. Unfortunately, since he is only one from our interviewees that showed different opinion, we do not know if he is a special case within the interviewed units or if there are other individuals that hold same perspective with him. However, it is backed up by a previous study from Bányai *et al.* (2018) claiming a major motivator for esports player is peer pressure.

5.3 Before tournaments

Before dwelling into the general preparations for tournaments, we asked how the players spend their day resting. Here we only found one very interesting quote from Harry. He said the team usually gets one whole day a week where they can do whatever they want but he also highlights an expectation. Esports is a field of competition every day, therefore the hours you don't spend on the game is letting other competitors surpass you or widen the gap. He also briefly touches on the subject if the rest will make the player play better next week.

Usually we have like 1 day a week for you can do whatever you want but, I think there is an unspoken rule that, not a rule but, but like an expectation because in this field it is literally a field of competition every day, or few hours you waste not on dota2 is more time for your competitors to surpass you or widen the gap, so it is at your own, you have to use your own decision whether it is worth it, do I really need this time to cope with this stress so that I can play better starting next week? (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

5.3.1 Preparing for tournaments

Preparations for tournaments can be a very stressful thing, looking back at the practice hours of around 10-16 hours a day. We asked the players how they prepare for upcoming tournaments.

Andy said they play the game a lot more than usual. They start boot camping and focusing all on game play.

Boot camping, playing the game a lot more than usually. Focusing on all game play. (Andy, professional player)

The way Ben's team prepares for a tournament is to be prepared mentally. He claims the best preparation for him is the mental aspect, he had a memorable encounter with his mental coach. Ben was very nervous before the tournament and his mental coach helped him calm down.

For preparing the tournament the most important thing is...well you don't get higher score by studying more a day before sooneung (Korean national university exam). Mental is very important. Mental coach...the most rememberable feedback is when I was being too nervous since the day after was first tournament...well he said something like 'imagine that there is an invisible door that you can't see in front of the arena and if you take a step across that door, you now become a new person' and that did help mentally. (Ben, ex-professional player)

Charlie seems to have interpreted "prepare for a tournament" as before a tournament match, not their preparations leading up to the tournament. However, Charlie still had a few interesting things to say how he prepares to cope with his nerves when playing during a

tournament. Few minutes before his match he has this ritual to chew gum and listen to music to focus and get pumped up. Once the game starts, he gets too focused, so he can't feel the nerves playing any role in his performance.

Few minutes before a tournament I like to have a piece of gum because it helps me focus and I also like to listen to music to get me pumped up and also get all the nerves away if I have any, if it's a big set there is bound to be some nerves but usually as soon as you start playing you are too focused for your nerves to kick in, you know. (Charlie, professional player)

Since David is a coach, he spends a lot of his time preparing for the different teams at the tournament and spends a lot of time trying to identify patterns and find things they can abuse to their advantage.

A lot of reviewing what other teams are doing and trying to identify patterns and try things we can do to abuse to our advantage. (David, coach)

Harry is also a coach and the way his team prepares for a tournament is to just practice normal gameplay. He says it is hard to prepare strategies since they may not have played against similar strategies before and it becomes harder to predict. Instead he and his team focus on the core gameplay.

It is more about you know focusing on your own team, like. Just if you are able to practice all these other teams and your gameplay is good, what more can you do to like, once you get to a tournament there might be teams that might have better strategies right, but I think these strategies are hard to prepare or prepare against until you face them. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Here we see a widespread on how the different teams prepares for tournaments. The general theme seems to be practice, practice and practice. Ben claims mentally preparing is the most important for him, however he was the only person talking about mentally preparing for a tournament. Charlie did touch a little bit on how he prepares for matches during a tournament, but we will analyze the pressure during tournaments a bit later in this study.

5.3.2 The mental pressure of top dog vs underdog

Coming into an important tournament as a top dog or underdog might play a big role in the pressure the team feels.

Therefore, we asked the teams “How is your mental state when being the top dog, or underdog?”.

Ben said he was an existing pro player in an amateur team, and his team was seen as the underdog because of them being amateurs. He mentioned they met the top dog in their first match and they won, immediately people started wondering who they were.

Yes we were under dog. Because we were amateurs that made it into pro scene. So along with already existing pro teams the amateurs came through, the feeling like ‘oh you guys are just amateurs. Oh of course I wasn’t one of the amateurs. I am the one that was scouted when pro scene started. We were evaluated as underdog and our first match was with the top dog and we won so easily...people’s anticipation is like...’oh, who are these guys?’ at that time. (Ben, ex-professional player)

When asking Charlie, he said there is a lot less pressure on you being the underdog. His team came in as an underdog team to a tournament they ended up winning, they didn't expect to win. He then talks about how being the underdog puts a lot less pressure on you as they are expected to lose, and if they win everyone freaks out. However, when being the top dog he claims the expectations are reversed, if a top dog team starts losing the audience starts doubting the team, thinking are they washed up?

I'd say there is definitely a lot less pressure on you if you are a bad team, we went into this tournament at Vegas and we were currently the 13th in NA and we had to qualify, and this was the first tournament we ended up winning. We came from nowhere and everyone was surprised, and I mean. It was probably the best feeling I have had, we came into that tournament hoping for the best, but we didn't really expect to win the whole thing. Ehm, being the underdog puts a lot less pressure on you because if you win, everyone freaks out but if you lose everyone is like we expected it, but at the top when you start losing, wtf are they washed up? They start doubting you. (Charlie, professional player)

David agrees with Charlie and claims there is less pressure on the team not everyone wants to beat. David's team have been the top dog for an 8-month period and they just lost their first league matches and now they feel a lot less pressure when they are not always expected to win. He claims it is much more relaxed and the team is willing to improve.

There is definitely less pressure on the team when we are the team that not everyone wants to beat. We just lost in our league matches last week and it was our first time in our 8-month streak so definitely now we have that pressure of our shoulders everyone is much more relaxed and willing to improve. (David, coach)

Harry says that generally his team is more confident when they can beat most of their opponents. He also touches on being in bad form but still being perceived a top dog, he continues to say it is a bit weird because everyone says they are going to win tomorrow but the team does not feel as confident as the viewers since the team knows best.

The pro is that you're generally quite confident that you can beat most of your opponent's right, but when you are in bad form. Every team will go through a bad form several times throughout at year but when you are in bad form and the rest of the world thinks you are a top dog still it is a bit weird, because everyone saying you are going to win tomorrow but you don't feel so confident because you know best as yourself. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Harry says a bit later how being an underdog is quite the opposite of a top dog. An underdog is expected to lose, and he proceeds to say if enough people say it is not possible for them to win tomorrow, eventually the team will start to believe it. He also says there is definitely less pressure on underdog teams, they can just play.

As underdog it is kind of the opposite, you are expected to lose, and there is some bad things that comes with that, if enough people say there is no way you guys are beating that team tomorrow you will start to believe it too a little right, there is definitely less pressure on underdog teams, they can just play, when they don't get last place they are like oh wow they didn't get last place. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

In this segment we can see how everyone agrees being the underdog puts a lot less pressure on the team as they are expected to lose. However, one interviewee said if people keep saying his team would not win tomorrow, the team might start believing in it and this could lead to the team started doubting itself and not playing their best.

Everyone also agreed being the top dog puts a lot more pressure on the team to perform. If the top dog team suddenly starts losing people start doubting them, wonder if they are washed up or what is going on with the team? David mentions how they had been undefeated for an 8-months long period, and after they lost the pressure to perform just vanished, instead they felt motivation to start improving their play again.

5.3.3 Summary of Before Tournaments

For this theme, we wanted to see what kinds of pressure they get when the players prepare for upcoming tournaments. We simply divided into two subtopics which is how they prepare for an upcoming tournament and the mental pressure of being either a top dog or an underdog.

For the preparation of tournament, there was not much answers related to mental burdens. Only one person talked something relatable. Ben highlighted the fact that he thinks one should mentally prepare before the tournament. Himself experienced feeling more relaxed when his mental coach comforted him before entering the stage.

Although other interviewees did not mention something directly related to the mental pressure, we think that other replies such as practicing more than usual shows a bit of relation to mental preparation. By practicing more, a player would have higher confidence about the competition.

For being underdog or top dog, everyone answered that being underdog gives players much less pressure. According to what they said it seemed like esports players do get much pressure by thinking that they have to live up to spectator's expectations. The bigger the expectation was, the more criticism they would get.

5.4 During tournaments

To get an understanding what kind of pressure the different teams and players might suffer during tournaments we asked, *"How does a day look like during a tournament?"*. We also asked a bit more in depth in schedules in matches and if they were mentally draining.

Andy first talks about a tournament two years ago where he and his team had to play 15 games. They spent roughly 10 hours or more at the venue with only small breaks between matches and the only food they could eat was catering food during small breaks between the matches.

2 years ago, I had tournament where we had played, I think 15 games. We were at the venue for 10 hours or more. Break between matches was like a "pee break" and other breaks were when there were other teams sets going on. There was catering food we could eat from during the breaks. (Andy, professional player)

Andy then proceeds to talk how the tournament he just mentioned did not go to well because the team had to play the most games that day and everyone got exhausted due to the extensive number of matches in one single day.

That tournament I talked about didn't go well because our team got the most games that day and everyone were tired by the end. (Andy, professional player)

Charlie talks about one time in Vegas where they came out of the losers' bracket and had to play two (2) best of five (5) and one best of seven (7) all in one day on the big stage. He mentions they did not have time to get off the stage.

Back in Vegas, we were coming out of the losers' bracket at the championship day, we had to do a bo5, into another bo5 into a bo7 all on the stage, we never really got off the stage so that was the most playing we've done. (Charlie, professional player)

In the tournament Charlie mentioned earlier he said the amount of adrenaline he got from beating everyone made him not feel exhausted during the day. In the past Charlie used to participate in wrestling competitions and he claims they were not as exhausting, even though wrestling is physical.

I had so much adrenaline from beating everyone, I didn't really feel fatigued until the day after, you know I have been wrestling so I would go to tournaments and like wrestling is something that is like physically draining on the body, but I have never been as exhausted after that Vegas tournament. (Charlie, professional player)

Harry had a lot to say about how tournaments scheduling takes a lot more time than what most people think. It's actually a big difference in playing one best of three (3) from home compared to at a tournament. It is a lot more draining in terms of energy, you have to be at the venue far in advance and there is usually a lot of travel time between the hotel and the venue that people are not aware of.

Tournaments scheduling takes a lot more time than what most people think, to give you an example, let's say I play one bo3 today, that is actually quite draining, in terms of energy than what most people think. It is very different from playing a best of 3 at home, you just play 3 games and you're done, no it is not like that, you have so much travel time between hotel and the venue, and then you also have to go there before, like way more in advance than you actually scheduled to play and then you are in these waiting rooms, it's not exactly like your living room you are basically in a waiting room where everyone is watching a tv how their previous matches are going and after you play you have to deal with interviews and whatever applies to you. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Harry also says how the scheduling is not optimal as you might have to skip lunch or have dinner at 10 pm.

The scheduling are not optimal so you might have to have dinner at 10 pm or you might have to skip lunch because it says you are going to leave at 11 am. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Here we can clearly see how the tournament scheduling puts different amount of pressure on the participating teams. If a team comes from the loser's bracket, they will have to play additional matches on the same day compared to their competitors. This is more energy draining than what most people think, the players say there is not always time to have lunch

or might have dinner at a very late hour. Combine this with spending 10 hours at the venue and the players will start to feel it in the long term. The important fact is how Charlie said he had never been this exhausted ever before in his life and he have been participating in physical activities such as wrestling. We can also see how Andy's teams' performances affected them due to the fact they had to play the most games during the final day.

5.4.1 Live crowd pressure

Esports are attracting thousands of live viewers, it is normal to see a fully sold out stadium just like in traditional sports and this puts a lot of eyes on the players on the stage. Therefore, we asked the players how they felt when playing in front of a large live crowd for the first time.

Ben mentions one time in Greece when he was very nervous, he said the crowd can be seen over the monitor when he was playing.

*When I was in Greece it was open studio and if it's open studio...I could say that it makes you nervous. The fact that you can see crowd over the monitor.
(Ben, ex-professional player)*

Charlie thinks how it is really cool to have people wanting to watch them play. He knows his girlfriend is watching from the crowd so it helps him a lot, once he is on stage he just raises his monitor to cover his face so he can't see the crowd. Combine this with his previous answer from **5.3.1** where he said he likes to chew gum and listen to music to get pumped up and focus on the games.

I mean like I thought it was really cool to have people really wants to see us play and I had my girlfriend in the crowd so that helped but once you are on the stage I just raised my monitor to cover my face so I can't even see the crowd, so it's just like I'm playing the game and they're just there to not focus on the crowd, you can't focus on the crowd. (Charlie, professional player)

Harry first talks when he attended his first TI and how it's not comparable with any other tournament. He was very nervous.

Oh very nervous truth to be told, it was nothing, you can't compare it to other tournaments. It's just a stadium full and you know it is the most important tournament of the year, and then you play games and as soon as your game starts you see how many tens of thousands are watching online. I was very nervous. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Later Harry brings up one time from his time as being a coach, he says it is not very trivial but still trivial. During TI one of the players started wearing jeans instead of his normal sweatpants outfit. The team realized he started dressing to look good for the camera, the pressure from being live had made him change his choice of clothes. Harry told the player to not let other people make him feel less comfortable or insecure in his choice of clothes. After that he always started wearing sweatpants during big tournaments again.

There was this one moment that is trivial but maybe not so trivial, so in our first day playing on stage he was wearing jeans right, and he usually don't wear jeans when he is in the house and wants to be comfortable, so we understood this guy. Is he is thinking how he is going to show on camera

and things, so you have to just, block it out, this tournament is about you, and you just need to be in your comfort zone, whatever makes you comfortable, don't let other people make you feel less comfortable or insecure and after that he always wore sweatpants, so that is like an example of what how people might react when it is their first TI and it is so many people. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

Here we can see how everyone found it to be very nervous to play in front of a large crowd. Some even found it really cool to have people watching them. The players cope with being nervous differently, David said he likes to chew gum and listen to music after raising the monitor to block out the crowd. He is doing so believing that such act would release his nervousness.

Harry said something very interesting how the cameras affected the players choice of clothes. During the biggest tournament of the year one player from his team started wearing jeans instead of the comfortable sweatpants he normally wears. It was clear the pressure from everyone watching him affected his way of dressing up.

5.4.2 Social Media

This part follows a bit of the live crowd pressure in 5.4.1. While there is a large number of viewers watching in the live crowd at the venue, there are also several thousands, and in some tournaments several million viewers worldwide (Casselmann, 2015). It is known what have been uploaded to the internet is impossible to get rid of, since all of the tournaments are being livestreamed it brings a high possibility of viewers capturing and compiling a montage of good plays from the tournament, but also the bad plays, the fails and they get memorized forever and might impact the players when playing during a tournament.

Andy starts off with saying he thinks his good plays are not seen as good plays in this opinion, so he does not watch them again after the matches. If he actually feels like he did a good play he would watch it afterwards, and sometimes he watches the bad plays because he finds them funny, but only after the feelings of anger and sadness have passed.

There have been moments of me when I have been doing good plays, but I didn't feel like they were good plays, so I didn't really watch them. If I feel like I really did a good play, then I go watch them. Sometimes I watch the bad plays too because they are kind of funny, but after the emotions have passed like anger, sadness. (Andy, professional player)

Ben says he cannot control the excitement from the arena when he does a very good play. However, he says when he loses with a bad play it makes him think of how people on the internet is going to start criticizing him again and he might start doubting getting his contract extended for the next seasons, he then talks about how it is the deadliest thing to think of during a game. To think of how his bad plays are going to be portrayed after the match is finished.

When I do a nice play...first of all I can't control the excitement in the arena. Ah I did really well. Thinking that I will look great....but when I lost with bad play....well when you are in the match you got to focus on the game since playing game is the assignment that you are facing at the moment, the most important. But if you make a mistake you get extreme inner pressure like 'Ah people are going to criticize me again', 'Ah will I even be making

*contracts next season?' thinking something like this much during the game.
During the game....it's the most deadly thing. (Ben, ex-professional player)*

Charlie have always been watching the bad plays and the good plays as long as he has been competing. He is the captain so he likes to watch back his performance, seeing how he can improve. Getting flamed is not something he minds if he has done a bad play, it is seen as motivation for him to not repeat the same action.

Yeah, I have always done that as long as I have been competing, I just like watching my performance back, seeing what I did wrong even if I did something wrong, I don't mind getting flamed for it, it's motivation to not do it again you know. (Charlie, professional player)

Harry says he think most people ignore watching back the good and bad plays, he claims some people can't ignore it but at least in his team he did not see any of his players watching any of the plays after a match was finished. Harry claims there is no point watching bad plays after a loss, it just makes you feel worse.

I think most people ignore it, some people can't help ignoring it, but at least in my team I didn't see anyone looking at it, like after a bad game, a bad series no checking for that kind of stuff, there is no point, it just make you feel worse. (Harry, ex-professional player, current coach)

In this section we can see how social media such as Twitter and Reddit with help of Twitch.tv and YouTube.com affects the players. The bad plays of a team, that made them loose will be on the internet forever. Not all the players said they watch the bad plays, and some don't even watch their good players. One player said how he always watches all his good and bad plays because he wants to improve, he does not even mind being flamed for it, it is just motivation for him.

However, something interesting is how one player said he might start doubting if he will even be getting a contract for the next season depending on his performance in that one match from a bad play.

5.4.3 Summary of During tournaments

To summarize 5.4 section, we could see that esports players do get pressure from the tournaments in many ways.

First, the waiting hours are easily over several hours which could be stressing to anyone. Moreover, during that time the players cannot go back home and rest but must wait in the venue for their turn to come. The uncertainty of scheduling put players in much more pressure since they cannot do anything else or plan something ahead.

Secondly, the live audiences in the tournament arena gives the players pressure. Our question derives from the articles that say some players chose to be benched rather than playing in the tournament. We wondered if it is true for majority of the players. The cheering and atmosphere of the arena tend to make player be diffidence. This is because the player feels oppression when he sees and thinks that thousands, potentially millions of eyes are watching every move he makes. Our interviewee Charlie told us that he chews a gum and raises the monitor, so he does not see the crowd which all together helps him to become less nervous.

Lastly, a lot of the players tend to not read the social media after bad games due to severe criticism. They do not want to make themselves feel depressed and bad by watching the

mockery about themselves on the media. Only one player answered that he uses the bad comments in order to be motivated to do a better play in the future and not make same mistakes.

5.5 After tournaments

When asking what happens inside the team after a tournament, we only obtained two relevant responses.

According to Ben they give a lot of encouraging words, but if you do not get them you feel a lot more stressed and depressed.

Yes giving a lot of encouraging words but if you don't get them[...] if I did bad and we lost and if my team is not saying anything while heading back home it's....it's gonna be so much stressful. More like could really feel blue.
(Ben, ex-professional player)

Charlie talks about how it is very difficult to lift someone up after losing to a mistake. He says only time can lift them back up.

Losing as a team is one thing but losing because you make a mistake is probably the worst feeling. Ehm because you just keep dwelling on the mistakes and you just keep thinking if I didn't make those mistakes what would had happened, that's always the worst feeling, I mean after a loss you are always down anyways, but if you feel like the loss is on you, you take it extra hard. [,,,] It's really tough to lift someone up after they have lost, there is nothing you can really say after a loss, it's just best to give them the space and let them do their thing until they are feeling better.
(Charlie, professional player)

By the answer from the interviewee we could see that some players do get impact on a loss of a game and if that happens how do they deal with it was our curiousness. With the two responses we got we could see how the players handle it differently depending on their own style. Ben said that it is much better if he gets encouragement words from his teammates. If not, he said that it will make him feel gloomier. On the other hand, Charlie thinks it is best to leave the person alone and wait for the individual to recover himself rather than trying to drag out from self-blaming pit. It would have been much more interesting if we could have gotten responses from other players too and analyze if handling of the self-criticizing appears to be similar or distinct by each individual.

6 Discussion

6.1 General discussion and limitations

Looking at our findings we can now get a better understanding of what professional esports players have to deal with on a daily basis. We established three main mental pressure factors which are social, inside the team, tournaments and how they affected the players.

The selection of a semi-structured interview was a good method for this paper since we could gather more in-depth stories about esports players and from there we could see whether our expectation of what kind of factors cause mental pressure to them. However, it would have been better for our study to have a wider range of players with more various cultural backgrounds. We had two active coaches, two active players and one current retired player from three different continents. Therefore, it is hard to draw any concrete conclusions or could show different conclusion with bigger sample pool. Moreover, as mentioned in 4.2 Limitations and risks of gathering the data, all the interviewees and related information had to be kept anonymously. Thus, some readers might find the interviews not fully written down or even feel frustrated for not knowing the parameters of the players in terms of their nationality, teams, age, game genre and career duration.

Another limitation of this paper is that it is solely dealing three factors. During the interviews there were times when some players brought up new factors such as unstable contracts, being kicked from the team and having to kick players off the team. However, since this paper is targeting only three causes, we had to delete all the additional information.

6.2 Different perspective

To further state, many researchers were handling the issue of whether esports can be a sport. They conclude that the problems brought up in the industry is due to esports not being regarded as sports, therefore having poorly structured organization. For instance, Hollist (2015) says that players' labor is exploited because game organization is not set up properly. However, we believe the prospect upon the problem should be game being treated as leisure activity. Athletic sports are considered profession when there is a monetary gain, not when playing on an amateur level with your friends for fun (Rush, no date). For example, a professional football player is only to be considered an athlete when playing for an established team earning a salary. The game should be regarded in the same way. The activity of playing as esports player should be considered a serious professional movement. To be more specific, the professional players' parents we interviewed was negative in first place since they thought the players were wasting their life enjoying leisure, but we oppose. It should be further discussed but we believe that such issue occurs simply because the notion of playing game is having fun rather than considered seriously.

7 Conclusion

This paper analyzed what kind of mental pressure factors esports players are exposed to. Were we able to find what kind of mental pressure? In short, yes, we did manage to partially present some mental pressure factors the players are suffering. While the coaches had some very good insight about how their team functions, they managed to provide some good results about their team.

7.1 Summary of contributions

To summarize, the pressure from parents are presented in the form of their opposition of the profession since they are concerned about their children's economic status and long-term job security. This result shows the expansion of the perspective of Kutner *et al* (2008) which is that the parents are negative about their children playing games due to its violent, sexual contents and belief that games impair physical health and social skills.

Also, we could gather the information that supports the theory of Hollist (2015) that esports players are over working. In our interview we could see that esports players are required to dedicate 10 to 12 hours a day to the game they are playing. Moreover, they normally "work" 6 days a week. One day off lets other competitors increase or widen the gap, this puts pressure on the players. They tend to think; is it worth to take a rest or will I burn out if I keep playing the way I do?

The live crowd affects the players in terms on how they think about their performance and how their appearance looks on the media. Furthermore, the players try not to read social media to avoid seeing themselves being harshly and unfairly criticized. One player accepted being flamed as a motivation to not repeat same mistake.

Lastly, it is tough to lift a player after they have done a critical mistake that ended up losing the game. Also, the way of lifting up the player differs from person to person.

7.2 Future research

To further research this area, it would be interesting to study the start of esports players' careers a bit more in detail. What happens to an amateur player's life if they put in the 14-16 hours a day it takes to break into esports, and they do not make it in? Do they develop an addiction to the game that might prevent them from getting a traditional job in the future? To research the addiction in more detail, a survey can be conducted to map down how many hours individuals are putting into the game in order to break into pro scene and how it affects their relationship with friends and family. Additionally, asking their parents how they feel about their children trying to make it into the esports industry. We concluded that all of these studies show that players' parents were very negative about their gaming careers at the very start but changed their attitude when their children actually managed to get some sort of economic security by playing the games. However, we would want to further research on the cases of people whom put in the same amount of hours but eventually failed to get into the scene, or is still trying after several years of failure.

References

- Bányai, F. *et al.* (2018) 'The Psychology of Esports: A Systematic Literature Review', *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Springer US, 35(2), pp. 351–365. doi: 10.1007/s10899-018-9763-1.
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. 4th ed. John Wiley & Sons. pp. 234, 235, 469, 578
- Casselmann, B. (2015) *Resistance is futile: eSports is massive ... and growing*, *ESPN*. Available at: http://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/13059210/esports-massive-industry-growing (Accessed: 17 May 2019).
- Dota 2's The International again breaks record with \$24.8M purse* (2018) *ESPN*. Available at: http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/24420798/the-international-8-breaks-record-248m-prize-purse (Accessed: 17 May 2019).
- Doyle, A. (2018) *What is the Average Hours Per Week Worked in the US?* Available at: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-the-average-hours-per-week-worked-in-the-us-2060631> (Accessed: 17 May 2019).
- Erzberger, T. (2018) *Mental health issues remain pervasive problem in esports scene*, *ESPN Esports*. Available at: http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/24427802/mental-health-issues-esports-remain-silent-very-real-threat-players (Accessed: 17 May 2019).
- Hallmann, K. and Giel, T. (2018) 'eSports – Competitive sports or recreational activity?', *Sport Management Review*. Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand, 21(1), pp. 14–20. doi: 10.1016/j.smr.2017.07.011.
- Hassan, A. (2018) *Esports players are burning out in their 20s*, *Quartz at Work*. Available at: <https://qz.com/work/1509134/esports-players-are-burning-out-in-their-20s-because-of-stress/> (Accessed: 22 May 2019).
- Holden, J. T., Kaburakis, A. and Rodenberg, R. M. (2018) 'Esports: Children, stimulants and video-gaming-induced inactivity', *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 54(8), pp. 830–831. doi: 10.1111/jpc.13897.
- Hollist, K. E. (2015) 'Gaming: The Rising Esports Industry and the Need for Regulation', *Arizona Law Review*, 57(823), pp. 824–847. Available at: <http://arizonalawreview.org/pdf/57-3/57arizlrev823.pdf>
- Jenny, S. E. *et al.* (2017) 'Virtual(ly) Athletes: Where eSports Fit Within the Definition of "Sport"', *Quest*. Routledge, 69(1), pp. 1–18. doi: 10.1080/00336297.2016.1144517.
- Kane, D. and Spradley, B. (2017) 'Recognizing ESports as a Sport (PDF Download Available)', *The Sport Journal*, (July). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317929457_Recognizing_ESports_as_a_Sport.
- Khoo, A. (2012) 'eSocial Networking and eSports', *More or Less Democracy & New Media*, pp. 258–273. Available at: http://www.futureleaders.com.au/book_chapters/pdf/More-or-Less/Anthony_Khoo.pdf.
- Kutner, L. A. *et al.* (2008) 'Parents' and sons' perspectives on video game play: A qualitative study', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 23(1), pp. 76–96. doi: 10.1177/0743558407310721.

Markser, V. Z. (2011) 'Sport psychiatry and psychotherapy. Mental strains and disorders in professional sports. Challenge and answer to societal changes', *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 261(SUPPL. 2), pp. 182–185. doi: 10.1007/s00406-011-0239-x.

Newcomb, A. (2019) *Fortnite's First World Cup Will Have a \$30 Million Prize Pool. The Competition Kicks Off in April*, *Fortune*. Available at: <http://fortune.com/2019/02/22/fortnite-first-world-cup-30-million-prize-pool-epic-games/> (Accessed: 17 May 2019).

Rush, M. (no date) *Differences Between Amateur and Professional Athletes*. Available at: <https://www.livestrong.com/article/547998-differences-between-amateur-and-professional-athletes/> (Accessed: 23 May 2019).

Steinkuehler, C. (2019) 'Esports Research: Critical, Empirical, and Historical Studies of Competitive Videogame Play', *Games and Culture*, pp. 1–6. doi: 10.1177/1555412019836855.

Witkowski, E. (2012) 'On the digital playing field: How we “do sport” with networked computer games', *Games and Culture*, 7(5), pp. 349–374. doi: 10.1177/1555412012454222.

Wolf, J. (2018) *Epic Games commits \$100 million for Fortnite competitions*, *ESPN*. Available at: http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/23565267/epic-games-commits-100-million-fortnite-competitions (Accessed: 17 May 2019).

Appendix A

Questions asked to professional players

Hi and thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us. This interview is going to be recorded and later transcribed for use in analytic scientific work and not for anything sensation or journalist. The audio files are only preserved as sources for transcriptions and never published. For this interview we are referring you as <imaginary name> for the sake of anonymity. Environment

Intro questions

- 1) Did you always want to be a pro player?
 - a) No? Why not
 - b) Yes? Why
- 2) How did your career start?
 - a) How long have you been in the scene?
 - b) How much longer do you think you will remain in the scene?
 - i) What determines the duration?

Everyday questions

- 1) What did you expect a pro player's life to be before you were one?
 - a) How is it actually?
 - b) How is your team built up?
 - i) Manager? Coaches? Amount of players?
 - c) If you have a coach, what is their purpose?
 - i) Do you listen to the coach?
- 2) How are your living conditions?
 - a) Are you living in a team house?
 - i) How is it to live with your team? (con and pro)
 - ii) Do you practice at the house?
 - iii) How does it feel to have workspace and living space merged together?
 - b) Why are you not living in a team house?
 - i) What is your opinion on team houses?
 - c) Are you bootcamping?
 - i) How is that?
 - ii) How is a typical bootcamp? Where? When? How long?
- 3) How does a normal day "working" look like for you?
 - a) How do you divide work with free time?
- 4) Are you required to play a minimum amount of time every week?
 - a) Do you feel forced to put that time in?
- 5) Have you ever had an internal conflict?
 - a) How do you go around resolving them?
 - b) Is your manager involved in the matter if such happened?
 - c) How did you feel after the conflict was resolved?
- 6) Have you ever felt any pain in your fingers/arms for example carpal tunnel syndrome?
 - a) If you've been in pain, how does that affect you?
 - i) Do you think "Oh shit" I need to see a doctor or what goes through your head?
 - ii) Does it affect you?

Tournaments

- 1) Imagine a big tournament is coming up, how do you prepare for it?
 - a) Mentally
 - b) Physically
- 2) How did you feel the first time you played in front of a large crowd/big tournament being live streamed?
 - a) How do you feel now?
 - b) Did your manager or teammates help you with confidence?
- 3) Do you ever check social media after a good/bad play during/after a tournament?
 - a) When you played well
 - i) Does it increase pressure?
 - b) When you made a mistake
 - i) Do you feel a burden?
 - (1) How is your team supporting you after a bad play?
 - c) How seriously do you take the comments from the community?
 - i) How do you treat them? Do you think they are too harsh or just being toxic?
- 4) Does size of the prize pool affect your mentality?
 - a) Increased pressure?
- 5) How is your mental state when being the top dog, or underdog?
 - a) Have you been in either situation?
 - i) How did it feel? Pressure?
- 6) How big are the viewership during tournaments, is there a live crowd?
 - a) Compared to an online tournament, do you feel more or less pressure to perform?
- 7) How does a day look like during a tournament?
 - a) How many games do you play?
 - b) How many games have you played at most in one day?
 - i) How many hours did it take?
 - ii) How long breaks do you get between matches? Is it enough?
 - iii) Food?
 - c) Have you ever felt fatigue during a tournament?
- 8) How does the time between your last game of the day and before the first game of the next day look like?
 - a) Trouble sleeping?
 - i) How so?

Miscellaneous

- 1) What did your family say when you said you want to become a pro player?
 - a) How do they see it today? Did it change to a positive, negative or remained the same?
 - b) Why do you think your family reacted the way they did?
- 2) Seeing as other esports games like heroes of newerth and heroes of the storm have ceased their competitive scene. How do you feel the longevity of your game is?
 - a) Do you feel stressed out that tomorrow your game might not exist anymore?
 - i) What is your plan if it were to happen? Move to another game?
 - b) Do you think being a pro-gamer will be a more grown job or be shrinked down?
 - i) Do you talk about it together with your team?
- 3) Have you ever thought about retiring?
 - a) Do you have any future plans?
 - i) Coaching?
 - ii) Streaming?

- 4) Have you heard of any players suffering from mental slump? How do you feel about that?
 - a) In your eyes – have you experienced one for yourself?
- 5) Seeing as esports players have their peak in their early to mid-twenties, does this affect your mentality?
 - a) Does this affect your mentality?

Appendix B

Questions asked to the coaches.

Intro questions

- 1) Did you always want to be a coach?
 - a) No? Why not
 - b) Yes? Why
- 2) How did your career start?
 - a) How long have you been in the scene?
 - b) How much longer do you think you'll remain in the scene?
 - i) What determines the duration?
 - c) Were you a pro player before becoming a coach?

Everyday

- 1) What did you expect a pro player's life would be before you became a coach?
 - a) How is it actually?
 - b) How is your team built up?
 - i) Manager? Coaches? Amount of players?
 - c) What is your purpose as a coach?
 - i) Do you feel like the players listen to you?
- 2) What did you expect a coach's life would be before you became one?
 - a) How is it actually?
- 3) How are your living conditions?
 - a) Are you living in a team house?
 - i) How is it to live with your team? (con and pro)
 - ii) Do you practice at the house?
 - iii) How does it feel to have workspace and living space merged together?
 - b) Why are you not living in a team house?
 - i) What is your opinion on team houses?
 - c) Are you bootcamping?
 - i) Purpose?
 - ii) How is a typical bootcamp? Where? When? How long?
- 4) How does a normal day "working" look for you?
 - a) Drafting? Strategies? Analyzing replays?
 - b) How do you divide work with free time?
- 5) Does the player listen to you?
 - a) How did you obtain that respect? How do you speak to your team? Dictator?
 - i) Is it in their contract to listen to you?
 - b) Not every team have a coach, why do you think that is?
 - i) What are the advantages of having a coach?
 - (1) Any disadvantages?
- 6) Are you required to dedicate a certain amount of hours each week to the team?
 - a) Do you feel forced to put that time in?

- 7) Have you ever had an internal conflict?
 - a) How do you go around resolving them?
 - b) Is your manager involved in the matter if such happened?
 - c) How did you feel after the conflict was resolved?

Tournaments

- 1) Imagine a big tournament is coming up, how do you prepare for it?
 - a) Mentally
 - b) Physically
- 2) How did you feel the first time your team played in front of a large crowd/big tournament being live streamed?
 - a) How do you feel now?
 - b) Was any of the players nervous?
 - i) Did you manage to take some stress off the player? How?
- 3) Do you ever check social media after your team does a good/bad play during/after a tournament?
 - a) When they played well
 - i) How does it make you feel?
 - (1) Does it increase pressure?
 - b) When you made a mistake
 - i) Do you feel a burden?
 - (1) How is your team supporting you after a bad play?
 - c) How seriously do you take the comments from the community? Why? Why not?
 - i) How do you treat them? Do you think they are too harsh or just being toxic?
- 4) Does the size of the prize pool affect your team's mentality?
 - a) Increased pressure?
 - b) Is it something you can notice on them?
 - i) Do you provide any words to put the player's mind on something else?
- 5) How is your mental state when being the top dog, or underdog?
 - a) Do you take it personally if you're the underdog, as they're often seen as the "worse" team?
 - b) Have you been in either situation?
 - i) How did it feel? Pressure wise
- 6) How big are the viewership during tournaments, is there a live crowd?
 - a) Compared to an online tournament, do you feel more or less pressure to perform?
- 7) How does a day look like during a tournament?
 - a) How many games do you play?
 - b) How many games have you played at most in one day?
 - i) How many hours did it take?
 - ii) How long breaks do you get between matches? Is it enough?
 - iii) Food?
 - c) Have you ever felt fatigue during a tournament?
 - i) Why? What can be done to prevent it?
- 8) How does a day look like between the last game of the day and before the first game of the next day?
 - a) Trouble sleeping?
 - i) How so?

Miscellaneous

- 1) What did your family say when you said you want to become a coach?
 - a) How do they see it today? Did it change to a positive, negative or remained the same?
 - i) Why do you think your family reacted the way they did?
- 2) Seeing as other esports games like heroes of the newerth and heroes of the storm have ceased their competitive scene. How do you feel the longevity of our game?
 - a) Do you feel stressed that tomorrow your gamer might not exist anymore?
 - i) Why not? What is your plan if it were to happen? Move to another game?
 - b) Do you think being a pro-gamer will be more grown job or be shrinked down?
 - i) Do you talk about it together with your team?
 - ii) What do you think about coaches in the future?
- 3) Have you ever thought about retiring?
 - a) Do you have any future plans?
 - i) Stramer?
- 4) You don't have to answer this question. Do you get paid the same amount as players?
 - a) If no, why not?
 - b) If yes, why?
- 5) Have you heard of any players suffering from mental slump? How do you feel about that?
 - a) In your eyes – have you ever experience one for yourself?
- 6) Seeing as esports players have their peak in their early to mid-twenties,
 - a) Does it affect your mentality?