

Chapter 40

An Extended Study on Training and Physical Exercise in Esports

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an extended revision of the authors' earlier study (2016) on the training routines of professional and high-level esports players, with added focus on their physical exercise. The study is methodologically mixed with a quantitative survey sample (n=115) and a qualitative interview sample (n=7). Based on this data, high-level esports players train approximately 5.28 hours every day around the year, and professional esports players at least the same amount. Approximately 1.08 hours of that training is physical exercise. More than half (55.6%) of the professional and high-level esports players believe that integrating physical exercise into their training programs has a positive effect on esports performance; however, no less than 47.0% do the physical exercise chiefly to maintain their overall state of health. Accordingly, the study indicates that professional and high-level esports players are physically active as well: those of age 18 and older exercising more than three times the daily 21-minute physical activity recommendation given by the World Health Organization.

INTRODUCTION

Esports have recently become a significant part of our sports cultures. A number of journalists, policy-makers, and academics have thus ended up conceptualizing the cultural identity of the phenomenon: what are the relations between esports and sports, e-athletes and athletes, and esports play and physical

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exercise (see Taylor, 2012; Ferrari, 2013; von Hilvoorde, 2016; Freeman & Wohn, 2017; Karhulahti, 2017; Jenny et al., 2017; Kane & Spradley, 2017), furthermore, what are the related socio-cultural implications and what makes esports engagement rewarding to begin with? (See Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Witkowski, 2012a; Harper, 2013; Martončík, 2015; Nielsen & Karhulahti 2017; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Hallman & Giel, 2017; Siutla & Havaste, 2018.)

This study is not explicitly concerned with the above questions but brings them into a new light. Namely, in what follows, we explore the training routines of professional and high-level esports players with added focus on their physical exercise. This paper is an extended revision of our earlier work (Kari & Karhulahti, 2016), enhanced by supplementary data and insights via qualitative interviews of five professional esports players.

The solitary earlier academic contribution that we were able to find on the topic comes from Andreas Hebbel-Seeger (2012). He quotes a study from esports organization ESL (Electronic Sports League) that apparently issued an unpublished German thesis written by Lüttmann (first name unobtainable) in 2007. According to Hebbel-Seeger (2012), the study claimed that esports players are more active in sports than the average population, with no less than 95% of them exercising traditional sports as well.

Since we have not been able to acquire the referenced study (which appears to be unpublished, non-peer-reviewed, and in German) we take its results with a grain of salt. For instance, it is not clear whether the study concerned professional players, high-level players, amateurs, or fans. Hence, for the present study, a priori hypotheses are not proposed. Training, physical exercise, and players' perceptions will be examined at a descriptive level without utilizing any prior theoretical framework.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative part of the study leans on a data set that we gathered with an online survey between September 2015 and June 2016. The survey was created with the LimeSurvey 2.05+ software. We pre-tested it quantitatively with ten and qualitatively with four scholars from the fields of play research, videogame research, information systems research, and sports research. Based on the received feedback we made small adjustments before the launch.

The supplemental qualitative interviews were conducted in two separate occasions: June-July 2017 and April 2018. Next, we elaborate on both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Reaching Respondents

The global videogame player base arguably exceeded 2B in 2016, while recent speculations talk about figures beyond 2.3B (Statista, 2018). Of those only about 9000 had ever played videogames professionally some years ago (Bräutigam, 2015), while the present number of active professional esports players, according to the website Esport Earnings, is 5950. Consequently, quantitative work on professional esports players differs significantly from that of the general player population.

We set a goal to reach a hundred professional esports players. In order to do that, we contacted 161 professional esports teams and 68 professional players directly by email and asked them to participate. As expected, only a few responded, leaving the total number of individual respondents to 31. Notwithstanding, due to our direct contact method, we have strong reasons to believe that all the above respondents are actual professional esports players (PRO) as defined by their contracts with teams or achievements

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