

# Managing Successful eSports

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## Abstract

In recent years, eSports has grown from an emerging field in gaming culture, to what has been described as a fundamental element in today's youth culture (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport."). However, the rapid and ever changing landscape of eSport brings about difficulties in establishing a framework for achieving success in eSports. This exegesis uses sports sociology theory as a framework to examine and outline factors which contribute to the success of eSports titles. It situates eSports not only within gaming culture, but traditional sports and explores where eSports is situated within a broader sports culture.

This research examines two case studies, League of Legends and World of Warcraft Arena, and analyses the key factors which contribute and detract from the revenue and viewership of these titles. By analysing these case studies, the paper aims to provide insights for eSport organisations to inform development and management of successful eSports titles. This paper situates eSports both within and outside of gaming culture, to define factors for success, and the implications of this growing field in the digital media age.

## Keywords

eSport, Competitive Games, Sport, Professional Gaming, Spectating Games, Game Design, Games Sociology, Sports Sociology.

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## Introduction

### What I want to do, why, and what will be gained

The history of what would now be called eSports began in the 1980s but has grown rapidly in recent years. This recent increase in popularity seems to be largely due to the internet, as its development has allowed for an increase in consumption and subsequently popularity. This surge in popularity also drew the attention of sponsors and promoters, aiding its growth further with their sponsorship funding and establishment of competitions and leagues (Lee and Schoenstedt, "Comparison of eSports and Traditional Sports Consumption Motives").

This research aims to develop a series of recommendations for game developers and eSports organisations for developing, selecting, and/or promoting eSports titles. This exegesis will have broader implications for gaming culture and sports sociology through exploring eSports relationship to traditional sport.

T.L Taylor, one of the more active theorists on gaming culture and eSports gives a comprehensive breakdown of the history of competitive gaming and the culture surrounding eSports in her book 'Raising the Stakes' which this work will build upon. Taylor, other gaming culture theorists, and sports sociology theorists will be analysed.

This analysis will be used alongside with a detailed history of eSports spanning from the gaming culture which led to its inception through to the modern day looking at both of the, notably different, western and eastern markets. Two case studies, League of Legends and World of Warcraft, will also be examined in detail as well as their respective developers and how they manage them.

All of these elements will be used to develop the recommendations proposed by this exegesis which will have implications for any businesses developing or managing eSports titles as well as serving as a potential basis for further exploration into eSports relationship to traditional sports and broader gaming and sports culture.

## Background and chronological history of eSports

### History of eSports

eSports, or 'electronic sport' is the competitive play of video games in a formalised fashion. The term 'electronic sports' also known as eSports dates back to the late nineties, although competitive play of video games was certainly nothing new at this point (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.>").

Competition has been a part of video gaming since its early days, from people trying to beat each other's high scores on early arcade machines in the late 70s (Taylor, 3-4), this continued through to gamers actively bragging over achievements via magazine during the console era (6). However, in North America and Europe, the real breakthrough came with Doom on the PC in the early nineties with the beginning of LAN (Local Area Network) play and DWANGO (Dial-up wide-area network games operation), an early method of online multiplayer. (6)

During that era, teams of online players, also known as "Clans", began competing online and numerous online gaming leagues formed, most noticeably the still influential "Cyberathlete Professional League". The CPL also modelled their business concepts after the major professional sports leagues in the United States (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.>"). This shows

that even in the 90s it was already clear that there was much to be learnt and adapted from traditional sports.

eSports evolved further with the introduction of Quakecon (inspired by the game 'Quake') in 1996, one of the first major LAN events and within a few years Quakecon even began to draw in international competitors (Taylor, 6) and at E3 in 1997 John Carmack, co-founder of ID Software, the developer of both DOOM and Quake, put up his own 1987 Ferrari as the grand prize of a quake tournament (7)

## Korean eSports

One of the earliest countries to embrace and take seriously eSport both as a sport and as a cultural movement was South Korea. The South Korean eSports scene took off in the mid-nineties after a rapid growth of the Korean broadband infrastructure following a change of policy regarding advanced telecom applications. The subsequent infrastructure needed to be filled with content, which was mainly provided through digital television and online gaming (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.").

Almost from the start the Korean gaming market has been dominated by the real time strategy game "StarCraft", released in 1998 by Blizzard Entertainment (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.") with more than half of all global sales of the title coming from South Korea (Olsen, "South Korean gamers get a sneak peek at 'StarCraft II'"). South Korea went on to create television stations focusing on broadcasting computer gaming events. These factors resulted in a gaming culture where professional StarCraft players are able to acquire celebrity status similar to professional athletes competing in major sports leagues (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.")

The genesis of the shift of Pro Gaming into mainstream culture can be seen as early as the establishment of the World Cyber Games (WCG) in 2001. The World Cyber Games, which is often considered the 'Olympics of Pro Gaming' (Taylor, 22) was started in 2001 by Samsung and the South Korean government through their Ministry for Tourism and Culture. (22)

Even though there has been an increased number of events, like the WCG, over the years which aim to bring the Eastern and Western eSports communities together they still continue to operate very independently of each other. However, Wagner claims this is not unprecedented as it is also quite similar to the scenario with different cultures within traditional sports (Wagner, "On the scientific relevance of eSport.").

Through her research and conversation with those in the American and European pro gaming scenes Taylor claims many players consider South Korea a 'kind of promised pro gaming land', this is due to the popularity and treatment of eSports in the country with eSports events often more popular than events from any traditional sport (Taylor, 18-20)

In his interview with Frobes, Brandon Beck, CEO and co-founder of Riot games, talks about the western development of gaming houses where pro teams will live together and practice for 12 to 14 hours a day as important for teams. Gaming houses have been common in South Korea for a long time but are still a new trend in the US. Beck also talks about television broadcasts having great potential depending on how eSports develops in the coming years. (Gaudiosi, "League Of Legends Developer Brandon Beck Talks Rise Of Gaming Houses And Future Of ESports")

## Advances in technology and its influence on eSports culture

Twitch.tv is a video streaming website which is used by players to stream themselves playing various games to a live audience. It is used primarily for competitive titles but many new release games are also popular viewing.

Until about 2011, eSports was growing quite slowly, resembling a generational shift. Before eSports could develop, it required an adult viewer base which had grown up having been comfortable with digital gaming and eSports from a young age. Those adult viewers would then have enough money to attract advertisers and organisations which would be necessary to support the growth of the industry and transform it into something more closely resembling traditional spectator sports. This transformation is beginning to happen on a large enough scale to attract support from major brands (Groen, "How video games are becoming the next great North American spectator sport")

## Connection between player base and spectatorship

Live streaming is a central part of modern eSports culture, there are a lot of players who prefer watching pro-gamers play rather than playing themselves (G. Cheung and J. Huang, "Starcraft from the stands: understanding the game spectator") and there is a visible connection between those games with the largest audience and their sales success, the most watched games are frequently commercially successful as well (Kaytoue et al. "Watch me playing, I am a professional: a first study on video game live streaming"). Kaytoue et al's research involves an in depth breakdown of the viewing habits and demographic of viewers and analyses stream popularity and what factors play a part in that. They found Twitch.tv is the favourite streaming platform, tournament releases cause growths in game audience, and the future audience of a stream session can be predicted from its beginning. This appears to be primarily due to a lack of competition in the west and through the usage of Twitch.tv by Riot Games and numerous League of Legends pro players.

This research further reinforces the enjoyment people get from watching professionals play, and the growth of this entertainment field, as well as helping to inform factors which assist the success of certain eSports.

Brandon Beck says "The vast majority of the fans of the sport are certainly hardcore gamers. The game is nuanced and highly competitive, and there's a significant amount of game expertise and knowledge that's required to deeply understand the sport. That being said, it's not just the hardcore fans of the game that are interested. Virtually all League of Legends players have shown an interest in watching the sport being played at the highest level... I think, as a whole, in five years the mainstream appreciation and understanding of eSports is going to become far more evolved. The idea of going to a sold-out sports arena to watch gamers duke it out is not going to be such a novel idea or experience." (Gaudiosi, "League Of Legends Developer Brandon Beck Talks Rise Of Gaming Houses And Future Of ESports")

This demonstrates that the spectator base for an eSport is primarily within the player base. Without players we have few spectators, so it seems that it is necessary to try and gain as many players as possible for an eSport to be successful. League of Legends manages this by being a free to play game, it can be downloaded and accounts can be made for no cost with its profits gained from an optional micro transaction system. This model has allowed for anyone to download and begin playing without the need for purchase or access to a retailer with the only requirement for access (an internet connection) being required for play anyway and integral for large scale competitive play. By using this method they have allowed for a far larger player base than they would likely have otherwise and by extension have created more spectators.

## Cultural influences

### Sports and Sporting institutions

It is heavily disputed whether eSports can be considered 'sport' as Taylor says in 'Raising the Stakes' "Over the years the scope of what constitutes a 'real' sport, and indeed meaningful athleticism, has been debated. Well before computer games entered the scene, enthusiasts, regulatory bodies, and athletes debated the merits of counting everything from equestrian to snowboarding as a sport... It is in this context that computer gaming now finds itself sitting, often uneasily, between digital play and sport." (Taylor, 36)

For this research various theorists in eSports and traditional sports will be analysed in order to determine eSports place in the sporting sphere, determining this will help to determine what eSports has in common with, and what it can borrow from, traditional sports.

Delaney and Madigan attempt to define 'sport' through an analysis of earlier theorists. They begin by discussing the cultural anomaly that most people seem to understand themselves what is a sport but that it is incredibly difficult to define. It is also something that changes with time; they cite the example of Badminton which it states would have been 'laughable' to consider a sport at all many years ago but is now an Olympic level sport. The term sport comes from the word disport or to divert ones attention, the intention being that sports were originally invented to distract people from day to day life. (11)

Through their review Delaney and Madigan establish a range of features which help to define what constitutes sport. The majority of these definitions do cite physical activity as necessary, but they also put heavy emphasis on the notions of skill, competition, institutionalisation, among other traits (13). For example, backyard football would not be considered sport, as it lacks the professional structure and context necessary despite containing physicality, but golf is because of its structure and context despite the relatively low level of physicality. It is also worth noting that many of these theorists were writing not only pre-eSports but many were also before video games as a medium had gained widespread mainstream acceptance.

The text also takes the position that culture plays a large part in an individual's own interpretation of what is and isn't a sport, citing ESPN's treatment of poker as sport (12), despite the lack of physicality, due to the manner of its organisation and treatment within culture. This is important as it demonstrates the importance of organisation over physicality in defining a sport.

Delaney and Madigan conclude their section on defining sport by discussing that as play becomes more organised and develops into a structured, hierarchical activity within a particular culture it develops into a sport. (19) This could leave room for competitive play of video games, once structured and organised, to develop into sport.

Claus Tidemann presents his definition as "'Sport' is a cultural field of activity, in which human beings voluntarily go into a real or only imagined relation to other people with the conscious intention to develop their abilities and accomplishments particularly in the area of skilled motion and to compare themselves with these other people according to rules put self or adopted without intending to damage them or themselves deliberately." (Tidemann, "Sport (and Culture of Human Motion) for Historians. An Approach to Precise the Central Term(s)")

Inspired by Tidemann's definition of sport Wagner ("On the scientific relevance of eSport.") seeks to refine this idea to better define eSport specifically, his definition is "'eSports' is an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies."

Lee and Schoenstedt ("Comparison of eSports and Traditional Sports Consumption Motives") find that there is a personal and social element to wanting to play eSports; namely three motivations: Competition, Peer pressure, and Skill building, which had a significant impact on time spent playing. eSports players constantly strive to be better than others. This fits within Tiedemann's definition for sport in terms of emphasising development and comparison of abilities.

Daniel Grzelak, CEO of Gamer Institute, believes that League of Legends and Starcraft II could even become Olympic sports by 2020. (Gaudiosi, "*League Of Legends And StarCraft II Could Become Olympic Sports As Early As 2020 Summer Games*") There are a number of factors that need to be overcome before that happens however such as the formation of an international federation to govern eSport and convincing the Olympic Program Commission to include eSport, however petitions are underway and as Grzelak points out, numerous sports that many would have never thought to include years ago now are (such as BMX). The main reason that Grzelak considers that League of Legends and Starcraft II would be the best candidates for Olympic inclusion is that games such as first person shooters would be too ultra-violent and those that simulate existing sports would have too much overlap. LoL and Starcraft II do not have these issues. (Gaudiosi, "*League Of Legends And StarCraft II Could Become Olympic Sports As Early As 2020 Summer Games*")

As Wagner says in his paper "It has to be expected that the activities we will accept as sport disciplines will change as our value system change, for example due to technological progress." ("On the scientific relevance of eSport.")

To fully understand eSports position within the sporting sphere it is necessary to understand the nature of sporting institutions, as institutionalisation is vital to the nature of sport, and to understand how game developers and eSports leagues act much like sporting institutions.

On the subject of sporting institutions, Delaney and Madigan also characterise sports institutions as having four key characteristics: A ranking system (stratification), roles and statuses (the organisational/structural aspect), Social control (the ability to provide rewards and levy punishments/sanctions), Rules (norms and expectations of behaviour) (10).

Groen presents some interesting questions about what the sporting world look like in 25 years when that a significant percent of the population has grown up with the idea of popular competitive gaming or once designers create games designed to be spectated. (Groen, "How video games are becoming the next great North American spectator sport")

This paper, with special attention given to the design analysis of the following case studies and their relation to traditional sports, could serve to aid designing such games.

## Design of Work and Case Studies

This section analyses two case studies using existing literature, and seeks to set up the discussion of what makes some games more successful than others as eSports. In order to understand why these case studies were selected, it is necessary to understand that the two titles have similarly sized player bases and are both within the eSports sphere, but with vastly different degrees of success as eSports titles. This success will be measured through analysis of spectator numbers and financial factors and then explored deeper to understand why this is the case.

## League of Legends

League of legends (abbreviated LoL) was released in October 2009 (Leagueoflegends.com). LoL was possibly the primary cause of a recent surge in popularity of eSports in the western world. 12 million daily active players and 32 million monthly active accounts as of October 2012 play league of legends and the United States, Canada, and several European countries rank in the top ten countries where LoL is most popular (Leagueoflegends.com). Based on the research of Lee and Schoenstedt ("Comparison of eSports and Traditional Sports Consumption Motives") there is correlative evidence that players enjoy watching games they can, or know how, to play. So it makes sense that this high player base would mean a high viewer base and this popularity in western countries could indicate a large western audience.

In terms of its success, League of Legends is very profitable for both Riot Games and its professional players. Professional players make a great deal of money, the highest payed League of Legends stars Alex Sung, Hui Chung Chen, and June Tsan Wang all earning over USD\$203,000 through tournament revenue alone in 2012 (esportsearnings.com). The season two world championships in November of 2012 had a total prize pool of two million dollars (Leaguepedia.com). This demonstrates just how successful League of Legends is and why it is worth analysing in order to develop recommendations for future eSports.

In season three, in 2013, the format changed to further follow traditional sports with the LCS or League Championship Season. Teams which will be part of the LCS are determined through qualifiers at the beginning of the season, after which every week games are held between the teams. Over the course of the LCS each team will face each other team four times before entering a playoff series; this is done twice a year as 'splits' leading up to the championships.

League of Legends is entirely Player VS Player (PvP) centric, every match is standalone and team based, with various positions or roles that players take on and multiple strategic objectives with enormous potential for team variety and player adaptation throughout a match. In fact in a standard match there are five roles, with many different selectable champions, or characters, which can fill those roles and many different ways to customise and modify those champions both before and during each match. This allows for a very long list of strategies which are constantly evolving as they are devised to counter existing strategies and also as new champions or in game modifications, items, are released or older champions or items are modified to promote more balanced play.

League of Legends is one of the more successful eSports in 2013 but there are several other currently popular eSports titles as well.

## World of Warcraft Arena

World of Warcraft is a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) which was released in November of 2004. It quickly became the most successful MMORPG of all time setting Guinness world records for the most subscribers at 11.6 million (Blizzplanet.com). Despite this popularity however, Blizzard Entertainment's attempt at turning one of the game's various PvP elements, The Arena, into an eSport has had relatively minor success. Particularly when compared to the much more successful League of Legends.

The arena consists of either 2v2, 3v3, or 5v5 deathmatch-style matches between players. There are two modes, team battle which are ranked and award special points, which can be used to purchase



various rewards, and practice battles which award nothing. There is no objective in arena matches outside of eliminating the other team. (TenTonHammer)

World of Warcraft has inspired a great deal of literature and research however very little has been written specifically on its Arena component, as such it is quite difficult to fully understand why it has been unsuccessful as an eSport.

### **Criteria for success and differences between case studies**

As outlined in Appendices I, there is a large difference in tournament rewards and viewer numbers between League of Legends and World of Warcraft arena. In 2012 League of Legends had a combined tournament reward of over 4 million USD\$ whilst World of Warcraft had less than USD\$400,000. I compared eSports organisation Evil Geniuses League of Legends and World of Warcraft Arena teams, both relatively successful in their respective games in their viewer numbers and earnings, as well as what social media stats were available, and found that the League of Legends team earned vastly more from tournament revenue and each player had tens of thousands of Facebook likes and followers on Twitch.tv. However, the World of Warcraft team had no recorded tournament revenue on eSports website E-Sports earnings, only one member had a professional Facebook which had less than 800 likes and the team members had between 11,000 and 23,000 followers on twitch.tv.

Looking at the winning teams from their respective 2012 championships showed an even greater gap in following and earnings.

### **Interpreting this data**

Based on these stats there is notably less viewer interest in World of Warcraft Arena and far less player-community interaction. It appears that players are less inclined to interact with their fans, many pro World of Warcraft players lack social media, and those that do have fewer fans than professional League of Legends players. World of Warcraft Arena also has far less financial interest from sponsors and leagues, likely by extension of the smaller viewer community.

Alternatively, League of Legends is the most played game in the world as of October 2012 with 13 million accounts active daily and 32 million active every month (Leagueoflegends.com).

As of February 2013 World of Warcraft subscriptions are at 9.6 million (Joystiq.com) but has previously set records at 11.6 million accounts (Blizzplanet.com)

League of Legends has more players but World of Warcraft is close enough to make for a fair comparison of their eSports as compared to player base. This shows that simply having players is not enough alone to motivate viewership. So why is LoL so much more popular?

## **Discussion**

### **Personalities and their effect on viewership**

A key factor in sports culture is the sporting personalities. Star players in traditional sports are often household names and people may support their team more if they feel a sense of connection to particular players. So does this exist in eSport? Is it necessary for an eSports title's success?

Hyong Jun Hwang, general manager of Ongamenet, talks about treating professional players like one would a television personality. “We realized that one of the things that keeps people coming back to television are the characters, the recurring personalities that the viewer gets to know and identify with, or maybe they begin to dislike... In other words, television needs stars. So we set out to make the top players into stars, promoting them and so on. And we also do a lot of education with the players, explaining that they have to try to look good, that they have to be ready for interviews.” (New York Times)

Taylor (2012) believes that South Korea ‘paints a picture’ of what an eSports scene that has reached mainstream acceptance can be like and that many within the North American and European pro gaming scenes hold it up as a model for the future of e-sports worldwide. Even if this doesn’t prove to be the case, Taylor still believes that looking at the South Korean scene and its history could still be very beneficial (18). This demonstrates that looking at the way South Korea has been managing eSports, and therefore Hyong Jun Hwang’s idea of making Pro Players into sports stars, is a good idea. This idea has actually begun to be adapted in the west by companies like Riot Games.

Riot Games trains their players and commentators with necessary presentation and interview skills, they also have an ‘all-star’ matchup each year as of 2013 between the top players in the various regional leagues worldwide, as voted by fans. This allows fans to feel connected with the sport itself and is motivated by their attachment to certain players as much from their personalities as from their skill. (Edge-Online)

Recently Gamespot, a video game media company, has begun a eSports reality show, called ‘Gamecribs’, which follows a top North American League of Legends team, Team Solomid (aka TSM Snapdragon, as named for their sponsor Qualcomm Snapdragon). This show has shown moderate success with the first episode on video website Youtube getting over 109,422 views as of the 18th of June (Youtube.com).

Riot games also have an ‘all-star’ matchup each year as of 2013 between the top players in the North American and European leagues, as voted by fans. This allows fans to feel connected with the sport itself and is motivated by their attachment to certain players as much from their personalities as from their skill.

## Case Study Comparison

### Case Studies as Sports

There is a great deal of overlap between games and sports, with the major defining aspects of sports as differing from games being their treatment within culture, organisation, and institutionalisation. These elements appear to be more important within culture as evident by the consideration of less physical sports such as poker and golf as fitting within the definition where unstructured or uncompetitive physical activity does not. These important elements are also found in eSport, particularly within League of Legends. This demonstrates not only that eSports is valid and deserving to be considered as sport but also suggests why League of Legends was successful, as it leverages sport sociological elements as well as spectatorship within gaming culture. Alternately World of Warcraft PvP Arena is not as successful an eSport because it fails to perform as a sport would, or to be managed as sports are managed.

Alternately, League of Legends’ World Championships set records both in the size of the prize pool and number of viewers and following this event League of Legends has shifted down a path of even

more sport-like design and management with the introduction of the LCS and greater player publicity.

### **Riot Games as sporting institution.**

Riot Games has all the key characteristics of a sporting institution. Ranking systems are integral and operate not only on an individual level for every player, both casual and professional, but ladder models within systems such as the League Championship Series (or LCS) rank the top teams against each other based on wins and losses. Individual players also have their stats from all their LCS games recorded and they are compared against each other using these stats. Riot also maintains social control and rules they impose on player behaviour and will punish players who fail to keep their expectations; this was demonstrated in 2012 when professional player Christian 'IWillDominate' Rivera had his account banned and was banned from professional play for one year after he was consistently found guilty of unprofessional behaviour (Leagueoflegends.com) but he was later given a chance to earn his eligibility back (Reignofgaming.com).

Individual teams also maintain similar controls, in early 2013 popular North American team Team SoloMid removed player 'Chaox' from the team after it was decided that he was failing to take his role in the team seriously and was consistently late for practice (Gamespot.com). These teams also maintain roles not only in terms of having positions within the game model, much like playing certain positions in most team sports, but also in that they will generally have substitute players, managers, and other such roles Counter Logic Gaming is a good example of this structure. (Leaguepedia.com). Riot games take influence from traditional sports to a greater degree than any game in eSports with Brandon Beck saying "We want viewers to expect a high-quality broadcast, just like if you're watching Monday Night Football. We want to mimic that," he said. "We've hired people with experience at the Olympics..." (Edge-Online)

Something else which seems to only exist within League of Legends and Starcraft (another highly successful eSports title) is the anomaly of eSports professionals as sporting personalities. Within League of Legends in particular, Riot Games attempts to drive the human element of the game through player-community interaction and exposure. They frequently interview players between matches, as well as release videos where the players discuss things like their favourite champions (characters which they play in the game).

Outside of Riot, the individual teams and players usually maintain active social networking sites and release video blogs (or vlogs) on youtube where they discuss personal or team matters and the current state of LoL competition. As well as this, their streams on sites such as Twitch.tv and rival Azubu.tv have chat functionality where the players will engage in conversation with their fans while they play and often will organise 'fan games' where they will play less competitive, faster, game modes with their fans. This is something which we don't see in less popular eSports like World of Warcraft arena and it also presents a fascinating separation from traditional sports which typically includes a great deal less fan-interaction.

### **Comparison to World of Warcraft Arena**

World of Warcraft Arena matches don't have the complexity, strategy, and skill involvement of something like LoL, rather they are short with death match style (where players defeat other players as opposed to competing for objectives) matches and with very few effective strategies due to the nature of the game's mechanics.

World of Warcraft is not promoted and managed to the degree of a sporting institution, the Battle.Net World Championships was not well promoted and few Arena teams have major sponsors.

In World of Warcraft, PvP is only a facet of a much larger game which if anything is more focused on the RPG and Social experiences. Many players, despite their interest in the game, are likely playing for reasons that do not support sports motivated spectatorship.

So what can we take away from this? How should we handle future titles to ensure their success?

Riot games manage league of legends actively and maintain all the key traits of a sporting institution as described by Madigan and Delaney (10). Riot put vast amounts of money and effort into their championship series', promote their players as personalities, and actively promote the game as an eSport.

Blizzard Entertainment host championships every year but they do not promote their players or the eSport to the same extent, rather promoting the game as a whole with a greater focus on the PvE elements of the game. There is no evidence of them adhering to many traits that define sporting institutions.

These differences in organisation are likely a large contributing factor to the vastly different levels of success achieved by these two eSports, but there are other factors that need be considered.

### **Differences in design**

These two case studies are vastly different in terms of their design and gameplay, likely another important factor of their degrees of success.

League of Legends comprises of almost purely PvP gameplay separated into separate matches. Very little in terms of power and potential is accumulated and what little there is does not change frequently. However, World of Warcraft has a constant world within which player avatars are matched up in the arena, as a PvP element within a broader game. These characters are shaped over a great deal of time and with accumulated in game elements such as 'gear' which adjusts player stats and which change frequently.

Before each LoL match a player selects from a pool of champions available to everyone and customises them in ways specific to that individual match up. Also throughout the game, as advantages are developed through objectives, players may further customise and enhance themselves. In WoW, the matches are short death matches devoid of objectives or any customisation during the match.

These differences have a big effect on their success as League of Legends is not only better suited as a sport, due to the skill centricity of its design and PvP focus, but Riot games promote it as sport and use their players to gain and to maintain viewer interest.

### **Conclusion**

There are multiple features which would aid an eSports title's success which should be considered, whether mechanical or organisational. Game developers and eSports organisations can follow the guidelines outlined by this research to assist the management of their eSports titles.

The success of the game itself is also necessary, without players you do not have viewers, focus on gaining and maintaining a large player base through accessibility of the title and player loyalty. However while player numbers and game popularity may be understood to project the potential audience of a game, as generally only those who play the game may be interested in watching, it is far from a guarantee of an audience. All other areas must be considered for a video game to be successful as an eSport.

eSports titles need to be selected for viability for their mechanics and potential player base. The game's mechanics and internal systems should have balanced multiplayer with all competition taking place in self-enclosed matches. The mechanics should allow for a vast range of strategies and extensive skill development, whether this be in areas like reflexes or through strategy and knowledge of the game, there should be no clear limit for potential skill and systems involving luck should be avoided.

It's important to manage and utilise the pro players. Pro players who achieve a degree of celebrity within the viewing community will help to motivate their fans to be more active viewers and are a potential source of merchandising revenue; managers should also foster player-community interaction and player connection to the sport. It's also important to manage your players as they would in any traditional sport, this will help to maintain a professional image. Riot games are very active in their management and promotion of not only their game as game but also of their eSport and its professional players and future organisations would be advised to learn from their example if they wish for their eSports to be successful.

Organisations should hold frequent matches among the top teams and use traditional ladder, playoffs, and championships systems. Models for such systems may be adapted from traditional sports but should be modified to suit the game being used as eSport.

This research may also serve as a basis for understanding and legitimising this aspect of gaming culture and serve as a basis for further exploration into the field and its relationship to traditional sports.

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## Glossary of Terms

### *eSport*

eSport, or Electronic Sport. Is the competitive play of video games at a professional, institutionalised level.

### *Traditional Sport*

Traditional Sport refers to the cultural idea of physical sports such as football or tennis.

### *PvP*

PvP or Player Vs Player gameplay is competitive interaction between players in a multiplayer video game environment. This is opposed to PvE (Player Vs Everything/Player Vs Environment) where the player is in opposition to the game's own systems only, not other players.

### *League of Legends*

League of Legends is a multiplayer online battle arena video game by Riot Games which has had recent success as an eSports title. It consists of mechanics drawn from multiple genres and has multiple game modes; the most successful however is a 5v5 PvP mode. The standard mode of play involves 5 different roles which can be filled by multiple selectable characters of which there are over 100, most capable of more than one role and all can be customised both before and during each match. The game is a free download utilising in game purchases as a funding model.

### *Mechanics*

The actions available to a player within a video game.

### *World of Warcraft*

World of Warcraft is a MMORPG video game by Blizzard Entertainment. The game focuses on PvE Gameplay but contains many PvP elements such as the Arena.

### *World of Warcraft Arena*

A PvP deathmatch mode within video game World of Warcraft which consists of 2v2 or 3v3 PvP matches involving player avatars which have been developed over time with various roles and customisability available to them before each match.

### *Twitch.tv*

An internet based video streaming website which is used to watch people play video games. It is the most successful of its kind.

### *Azubu.tv*

Another internet based video streaming website which is used to watch people play video games. It is Twitch.tv's major competitor.

### *Riot Games*

Riot Games is the video game developer responsible for the video game League of Legends as well as the majority of its management as an eSport title.

### *Blizzard Entertainment*

The video game developer and publisher behind World of Warcraft as well as more successful eSports title Starcraft.

### ***Evil Geniuses***

An eSports organisation with teams in multiple eSports titles including both League of Legends and World of Warcraft.

### ***Counter Logic Gaming***

An eSports organisation with one of the longest running League of Legends teams.

### ***TSM Snapdragon/Team Solomid***

One of the longest running and most successful League of Legends teams in North America, they are also the featured team in Gamespot reality show Gamecribs.

### ***Gamespot***

A popular video game media website.

### ***MMORPG***

A Massively Multiplayer Online Game. A video game which features many players all sharing a large free-roam world where they can socialise with each other as well as engage in role playing activities together. They frequently contain both PvP and PvE elements.

### ***LCS/League Championship Series***

The League of Legends competitive model introduced with season 3 in 2013. It features weekly matches, a ladder system, player stat tracking, and playoffs divided into two 'splits' with a break in between. This is intended as qualification for the world championships at the end of the season.

### ***Taipei Assassins***

Taipei based League of Legends team and the winner of the season two League of Legends world championship in 2012.

### ***Bring It***

World of Warcraft team and winner of the Battle.net world championships for World of Warcraft Arena 3v3 in 2012.

### ***All-Stars***

Teams composed of top voted players from the North American and European League of Legends circuits.

### ***Gamecribs***

A reality YouTube series run by Gamespot featuring League of Legends team TSM Snapdragon.

### ***Vlogs***

A vlog or video blog is a video by an individual uploaded onto the internet for public viewing where the individual discusses a particular topic, usually recurring and with some form of scheduled frequency.

### ***Facebook***

A successful social networking website.

### ***Balanced Play***

Balanced play is the nature of keeping gameplay elements of equivalent effectiveness within the gameplay so as to favour skill. This can be done in a variety of ways such as giving each player the

same mechanics, or making trade-offs between features of mechanics. E.g. If one player has stronger attacks, the other may have faster attacks or a special mechanic to make any matchup between them fair and equal.

### *Gear*

In game elements accumulated by players which adjust their character or avatar's abilities or stats

## Appendices I

League of Legends v World of Warcraft Arena eSports success stats

### *Twitch.tv viewer averages.*

Twitch.tv 19/4/2013 at 2.42pm. League of Legends 32,240 Viewers. World of Warcraft 13,604 Viewers.

Twitch.tv 23/4/2013 at 11:28am. League of Legends 48,335 Viewers. World of Warcraft 10,239 Viewers.

Remembering also that by design League of Legends is entirely match based PvP while WoW is an MMO with many other activities for players (Worldofwarcraft.com)

League of Legends World Championships in 2012 had the largest total prize pool in eSports history at \$2,000,000 with \$1,000,000 of that going to first place (Leaguepedia.com), LoL had 85 tournaments in 2012 with a total USD\$4,420,363.54 prize pool. (esportsearnings.com). Alternately, the Blizzard World Championships 2012 World of Warcraft Arena total prize pool came in at \$189,000 with \$105,000 going to first place. (Battle.net) WoW has 14 tournaments a year with a total USD\$347,650 prize pool (esportsearnings.com)

The League of Legends championships is also the most watched eSports event of all time with over 1.1 million peak concurrent viewers and 8.2 million unique viewers across both internet and television broadcast. (Gamespot.com) World of Warcraft draws less attention from eSports organisations, with less organised teams, one of the few organisations to have teams in both League of Legends and World of Warcraft is Evil Geniuses (abbreviated "EG"). The focus by Evil Geniuses on both of these teams gives an insight into their respective values to the organisation.

On the main page of their website (Evilgeniuses.gg) Of the 7 news items two were referring to their LoL team with no mention of their World of Warcraft team. On their divisions and players tab, League of Legends is listed first with World of Warcraft listed last. The site's poll was also referring to their League of Legends team as the team was only recently acquired. The write ups for the players are also longer.

### **Breakdown of EG players Facebook likes, stream followers, and earnings**

#### *EG: League of Legends*

Snoopeh. 95,610 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/snoopeh>). 49,125 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/snoopeh>)

Froggen. 84,206 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Froggen.LoL>). 43,179 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/froggen>)

Wickd. 81,302 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LoLWickd>). 37,915 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/wickd>)

Yellowpete. 35,186 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Yellowpete.LoL>). 15,067 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/yellowpete>)

Krepo. 46,167 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Krepo.LoL>). 31,064 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/skumbagkrepo>)

Every member of Evil Geniuses League of Legends team is in the top 25 highest earning League of Legends players of 2012 ([esportsearnings.com](http://esportsearnings.com))

### ***EG: World of Warcraft***

Azael. 750 likes on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Isaac-Azael-Cummings-Bentley/262781463755891>). 11,129 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/egazael>)

Cdew. No professional Facebook. 22,582 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/cdewx>)

Talbadar. No professional Facebook. 13,829 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/talbadar>)

Woundman. No professional Facebook. 14,627 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/woundman>)

## **Breakdown of World Championship teams Facebook likes, stream followers, and earnings**

### ***Taipei Assassins (TPA)***

TPA streams through Azubu.tv, as it is their major sponsor, which does not record followers.

Stanley. 117,594 likes on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/stanleysLoL>)

Lilballz. 69,739 likes on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/lilballzLoL>)

Toyz. 122,836 likes on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/toyzLoL>)

Bebe. 68,958 likes on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/bebesLoL>)

MiSTakE (support player at the time of S2 World Championship, now captain of Taipei Snipers) 75,290 likes on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/mistakeLoL>)

TPA players were the highest earning League of Legends players in the world in 2012 all making over \$200,000. They are also all in the top ten across all eSports for 2012 according to eSports Earnings ([esportsearnings.com](http://esportsearnings.com)).

### ***Bring It***

Snutz. 10,969 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/snutz>)

Venruki. 14,106 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/venruki>)

Kollektiv. 2,812 followers on Twitch.tv (<http://www.twitch.tv/kollektiv>)

eSports Earnings does not record earnings for World of Warcraft players, but the total earnings for the title in tournament revenue in 2012 is <\$400,000. That's less than half of the first place earnings for League of Legends Season 2 World Championships, which was also in 2012.