E-Sports Broadcasting

by

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Abstract

In this work, I situate e-sports broadcasting within the larger sports media industrial complex, discuss e-sportscasters, and investigate the economics behind the growing e-sports industry.

E-sports, often referred to as competitive or professional gaming, stands as a prime example of the merger of work and play. A growing body of literature has started focusing on this pastime turned profession. As more professionals enter the scene and audiences continue to grow, e-sports broadcasters look towards older models of broadcasting to inform their own style. This reapplication of former conventions stands in contrast to the trends in the larger sports media trajectory. E-sports broadcasting is largely informed by traditional sports broadcasting, yet remains unable to fully capture the success of the global sports industry. On-air talent, once informed solely by traditional sportscasters are now looking to their fellow e-sportscasters to create something new. Revenue streams which form the foundation of the sports industry are making their way into e-sports but not in the way that one might expect. Through a variety of qualitative methods, including historical analysis, interviews, and fieldwork, I have investigated e-sports broadcasting to better evaluate the role traditional sports broadcasting has played in shaping the e-sports industry. This work looks not only to what e-sports broadcasters have borrowed from prior sports media, but also where they have innovated.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Sportscasters on a Digital Field

Sitting at a desk under bright lights, two announcers talk at a fast clip. After a weekend full of commentating, their voices are scratchy and fading, yet their excitement never wanes. No one watching can see the two men, though a camera sits just a few feet in front of them. Instead, the live audience and home viewers see the European champions, Fnatic, going head to head with SK Gaming on a virtual battlefield. They're 55 minutes into an absolute slugfest, the two announcers' voices rise and fall with the action of the game. Over the PA, the audience hears that this game is mere seconds away from ending. The SK team has Fnatic on the ropes after brilliantly defending their base. Fnatic's star player, Xpeke stays, attempting to win the game singlehandedly.

The casters initially dismiss the last ditch effort while the bulk of SK's team move to end the game on the other side of the map. However, the camera stays on Xpeke who is in a showdown with one member of SK. Nanoseconds away from defeat Xpeke dodges a deadly ability. The casters erupt in nearly unintelligible, frantic excitement as the 25,000 live attendees at Spodek Arena in Katowice, Poland cheer at the sudden Fnatic victory. Back in the real world, the entire Fnatic team jumps away from their computers and pile onto Xpeke while we hear, "I do not believe it! Xpeke's done it!" Over 643,000 online viewers around the world watch the camera pan across the SK team, stunned in their defeat. From their home computers, these viewers have just witnessed e-sports history.

The above scene unfolded at the 2014 Intel Extreme Masters World Championships in *League of Legends*, a popular e-sports title. The solo maneuver that Xpeke performed on that stage has since made its way into common *League of Legends* vernacular, being invoked in any match, casual or professional, where a player deftly ends a game singlehandedly. E-sports, which encompasses many more titles than *League of Legends*, has become a cultural phenomenon of sorts. People may wonder whether the whole scene is just a flash in the pan or something more significant.

I begin this thesis in much the same way that I have begun many conversations over the past two years: defining e-sports. In most of those conversations, I simply say "professional video-gaming" and move on to other topics. Here, though, I fully elaborate on what e-sports means. More than just professional gaming, e-sports is an entire industry created around competitive gaming at all levels of play. An e-sport is not a just a sports video game like the title might suggest, though some e-sports titles are sports video games. Instead, e-sports titles are meticulously balanced, competitive, multiplayer games. Many games would fall into this category, but it takes a community of people to take an e-sport to the level of the classics like *Counter Strike* and *Starcraft*.

Such communities are core to the identity of e-sports. Indeed, this identity itself is an oxymoronic collision of geek and jock culture; a mixture that media would have us believe acts like oil and water. Even within e-sports communities lines are hazy and misdrawn. As Taylor and Witkowski (2010) show in their study of a mega-LAN event, the e-sports scene is fraught with identity issues not only from outside, but within as well. The jock-like first-person-shooter (FPS) players competing at the same event as the nerdy, enigmatic *World of Warcraft* players

shows the conflicting, lived masculinities in e-sports. Players are unsure whether to act like superstar athletes or tech-geeks. Can you be both?

The word e-sports alone evokes such a conflicting image. Electronic sports seems almost paradoxical in nature. Have we moved beyond a physical match of skill and extended our contests to avatars in a digital world? How can two players sitting at a desk be sporting? As e-sports continue to grow not only as a segment of the gaming industry, but as a spectator affair, we begin to see the 'sports' side of e-sports both challenged and invoked more frequently. In a telling case, Twitter erupted after a *Dota 2* tournament made an appearance on ESPN 2 in 2014. With $10 million at stake, many e-sports fans thought the event warranted the attention of the all-sports network. Plenty of viewers took to social media to praise the move made by ESPN. Others were shocked: "Espn2 is seriously airing an online gaming championship? Wtf man. This is our society now. That is not a sport" (Hernandez 2014). The sports status of e-sports has been both defended and attacked by journalists, academics, and fans alike.

The debate about the status of e-sports has been raging for many years. Witkowski's piece, "Probing the Sportiness of E-Sports", presents both sides of the argument pulling from games studies scholars and assessing e-sports on their terms. Ultimately though, I believe she shelves the debate deftly when she states, "sport is a personal experience… as many a sporting scholar has written before – if an individual considers the sporting activity they are engaged in to be a sport… then it is a sport" (2009, 56). I do not wish to rehash this debate. I have no stake in it. As Witkowski asserts, the attempt would be futile. Instead, I accept the role traditional sports have played in the shaping of e-sports.

In fact, exploring the relationship between e-sports and their traditional counterpart drives this work. In what follows, I argue that the sports media industrial complex has fundamentally

shaped the current e-sports industry. Beyond this grounding, e-sports broadcasters constantly borrow from traditional televisual broadcasts, using models that they feel to be appropriate for their medium. Regardless of whether e-sports qualify as sports or not, they are constantly informed by sports broadcasting and follow a trajectory set out by traditional sports models.

This work comes about at in an interesting moment in e-sports history. E-sports audiences have never been larger, Riot games boasted an impressive 27 million viewers for the *League of Legends* World Championship in 2014 while the 2015 Intel Extreme Masters world championship saw over 1 million concurrent viewers across multiple live-streaming platforms (Riot Games 2014; ESL 2014). An old classic, *Counter Strike*, has re-emerged, albeit in a new package. The audience it continues to draw proves that some titles have staying power in this fickle industry. At the same time, a new title, *League of Legends*, consistently pulls in over 100,000 concurrent viewers for its weekly shows in the U.S. and E.U. As the *League of Legends* Championship Series moves into its fifth season, it has come to resemble a traditional sports broadcast more than it does its fellow e-sports shows. A new addition in Season 5, a segment called Prime Time League (PTL) is nearly indistinguishable from ESPN's Pardon the Interruption (PTI) at a glance.

Figure 1-Left Image: Prime Time League; Right Image: Pardon the Interruption

Comparing these two images reveals the level of sports emulation found in e-sports broadcasting today. From the stats and schedule ticker at the bottom of the screen to the show rundown along the edge of the screen, an uninitiated viewer would have difficulty distinguishing between the e-sports show and the traditional sports show.

A steady influx of television producers and directors are starting to shape an industry that already has an identity crisis while still investigating how best to harness the new medium of live-streaming. These assertions are not meant to give the impression that we stand on the edge of wholly untouched land as pioneers in a new frontier. As shown in the e-sports literature review to follow, the e-sports industry has a history of evoking the feeling of standing on a precipice.

Organization

In the introduction, I first provide a brief history of e-sports and take note of the directions e-sports scholarship has pursued. Following this review, I introduce the sports media industrial complex to better situate e-sports broadcasting within the larger media landscape of sports broadcasting: the focus of chapter 1.

The first chapter begins by looking at the long history of sports and media. By introducing the full gamut of sports media, I am better able to investigate how e-sports broadcasting stays in conversation with each of its predecessors. As evidenced in the reshuffling of sports media through history, we can see that e-sports make use of all of these forms of media while creating something new. During this chapter, I look to the transition moments in traditional sports broadcasting as the foundation of the e-sports industry. Moments of tension and doubt within the sports media industry as it shifted from one medium to another provide perfect lessons

to be learned by the e-sports industry as they struggle with some of the same issues found in the

reshuffling of media history. Indeed, while making use of the same media through journalism,

public relations, and audiovisual broadcasts, the e-sports industry constantly wrangles with the

use of the newly emerged medium of live-streaming. Television especially influences live-

streamed broadcasts, which e-sports broadcasts tend to approach with the same framework as

television.

       Chapter two focuses on e-sportscasters, also known as shoutcasters. I begin the chapter

with a brief look at the history of shoutcasting. Considering that many of the early shoutcasters

pull solely from traditional sportscasters, understanding their influences is crucial in

understanding how e-sports has evolved in the way it has. As, I argue, the single most pointed

signaling of the sportiness in e-sports, these individuals have pushed the e-sports industry

towards a sports model. When first time viewers or listeners leave an e-sports broadcast with the

distinct feeling of a sports broadcast in their mind, it is the shoutcasters doing their job. They rely

heavily on conventions set by traditional sportscasters. Much like their predecessors when faced

with something new, shoutcasters borrowed what they could and innovated when there was

nothing to borrow. Chapter two also focuses on shoutcasters' formulation of their identity within

the e-sports industry as personalities, professionals, and record-keepers. Shoutcasters are just

now creating an identity separate from traditional sportscasting. Where veteran shoutcasters

relied primarily on traditional sports broadcasts, newer casters look instead to other shoutcasters.

These shoutcasters are reshaping their identity while attempting to fully embrace the new

medium of live-streaming.

       The third and final chapter tackles the topic of economics in e-sports. As the history and

trajectory of sports broadcasting has profoundly affected the e-sports industry, many of the

economic models present in traditional sports bled into the e-sports industry as well. The e-sports industry in the US and Europe has yet to be analyzed as such. Some work (Taylor 2012) has focused on e-sports revenue streams including sponsorships, company models, and team ownership, but overall, the subject remains underexplored. Dal Yong Jin's (2010) analysis of the political economy of e-sports in South Korea offers a tool set for this chapter. While the South Korean e-sports model spawned out of an extremely particular set of circumstances that cannot be readily applied to the U.S. or E.U. e-sports scenes, Jin's investigation of the surrounding economic systems surrounding e-sports translates well to my own investigation of the U.S. and E.U. industries. As staggering prize pools continue to make headlines, it is easy to lose sight of the economic system working behind the scenes to keep e-sports financially salable, or in some cases not. The third chapter delves into traditional sports economics and their influence on the e-sports industry. In some areas, the models translate perfectly. In others, e-sports has been unable to tap into the same revenue generators as traditional sports. Unless some developments significantly alter the e-sports industry, it may be more tenable to pursue other models instead of the sports industry.

Methods

This thesis makes use of many qualitative methods including historical analysis, interviews, and fieldwork. To grasp the significance and situation of e-sports broadcasting in its current state fully, one must analyze the same developments in traditional sports broadcasting. As one takes a deeper look into the past of the professional sporting industry, its influences on e-sports become clear. A feedback loop has been created between the two. Historical analysis offers a glimpse at key moments which defined the incredibly successful global sports industry.

Not only are similar situations appearing in e-sports, but e-sports pushes back into each of the investigated forms of media. A few of the issues currently facing e-sports could be resolved through following the path established by traditional sports, while other issues have been caused because so much has been borrowed.

I also had the pleasure of conducting seven interviews with professional shoutcasters. I limited the selection of shoutcasters to full-time professionals, rather than amateurs, to get an insight into how these new professionals view their role within the industry. Roughly half the participants are veteran shoutcasters of five or more years. The other half have joined the scene more recently with one in particular having shoutcasted professionally for less than one year. As these informants are a few of only dozens of professional shoutcasters in the world, I have attempted to keep their identities anonymous. As professional personas, some of these casters may benefit from being associated with this work, but I do not want to run the risk of potentially linking these shoutcasters with their statements in the event that this information could somehow affect the community's perception of the individual or potentially harm their prospects within the e-sports industry. The conversations were all positive, but one can never truly assure their informants that information they have provided in confidence will have no repercussion in any foreseeable future. With these considerations in mind I decided before conducting the interviews that the informants would remain anonymous.

Finally, I was also able to spend time working within the e-sports industry. My time spent working for a prominent e-sports company profoundly shaped this thesis. Working alongside industry professionals sparked countless conversations about the current climate of the e-sports industry and possible futures. These conversations have both helped and challenged my thinking about the e-sports industry. While I often refer to the e-sports industry or community as a

homogenous whole, the professionals who live within the space are not all of one mind and it would be a mistake to present them that way. Within e-sports, there are many different games and communities vying for viewers, players, and attention. What follows is my best attempt at wrangling the many paths e-sports has started to follow.

E-sports Literature Review

E-sports is still a young industry and an even younger subject of critical inquiry. Most entries into e-sports scholarship have emerged within the last five years. E-sports literature tends to come from the much older tradition of games studies, but ties into many other fields including the social sciences, cultural studies, economics, and law. Professional gaming literature is a veritable hotbed of potential research topics with more articles, theses, and dissertations appearing every year. Much of the growing body of e-sports literature focuses on the professionalization of gaming (Jin 2010; Mora and Heas 2005; Swalwell 2009; Taylor, Nicholas 2009; Taylor, T.L. 2012; Witkowski 2012). These histories offer much more than a rundown of the events that created the e-sports industry. They also offer insight into our contemporary social moment. The arrival of a professionalization of video gaming signals many significant developments within both western and non-western culture. The global nature of e-sports and its meshing together of complex and often conflicting identities continues to beg investigation.

E-sports literature primarily resides within the social sciences. Many cultural analyses in e-sports (Chee and Smith 2005; Harper 2010 and 2014; Hinnant 2013; Swalwell 2009; Taylor 2011) have focused on the communities growing within different scenes. Todd Harper, for instance, investigates the culture of competitive fighting games, a fascinating community which stands both within and at odds with the rest of competitive gaming. Gender studies are also

becoming increasingly common within e-sports literature (Chen 2006; Crawford 2005; Leonard 2008; Taylor 2009 and 2011; Taylor and Witkowski 2010; Witkowski 2013). With the fascinating and fraught formulation of masculinity within these spaces as well as the perceived absence of femininity, gender studies are incredibly important within e-sports literature. Nicholas Taylor (2011) offers insight into the ability of e-sports to create embodied performances of masculinity at live events which spread through communities specific to certain titles or genres. Taylor and Witkowski (2010) also show the conflicting versions of masculinity that appear in different e-sports genres.

There has also been an increasing focus on e-sports as a spectator activity. Jeff Huang and Gifford Cheung (2012) found in a study that many of the e-sports fans they investigated prefer watching high-level play rather than playing a match themselves. Kaytou and Raïssi (2012) also investigate spectatorship in e-sports with a focus on how best to measure live-streaming audiences. Others (Bowman 2013; Gommesen 2012; Kow and Young 2013) show that the audience in e-sports has a profound effect on performance for the players, akin to a traditional sports audience. These scholars also investigate the expertise apparent in e-sports players that is passed on through spectating as often as practicing.

As the professional play of video games fascinates so many, e-sports literature has understandably focused primarily on professional players. Notable exceptions include Jin (2012) and Taylor (2012) who, while still heeding players, also investigate the surrounding factors which allow for play at a professional level. Without these other factors, professional players would not exist. It is from the tradition of these two authors, among others, that I base this work. This thesis, like many of the works listed above seeks to better understand the phenomenon of e-sports while analyzing a particular segment of the scene. With few investigations into the

broadcasting of e-sports, I hope to contribute to e-sports literature in a way that is both unique

and replicable to other systems found within the larger e-sports framework.

Sports Media Industrial Complex

As sport and media become increasingly intertwined, it becomes difficult to analyze one

without at least acknowledging the impact of the other. Pointing to the inextricable link between

sports and media, sports media scholar K. Lefever (2012) argues, "while sport provides valuable

content and audiences for media operators, the media is a revenue source and promotional tool

for sport." As such, the steady professionalization and, in turn, commercialization of sport relies

heavily on its media counterpart. The subsequent interdependence between media outlets,

sponsors, and sports leagues creates what is often referred to as the sports/media complex or

sports media industrial complex (Jhally 1989, Rowe 1999, Maguire 1991). Wenner (1989)

coined the neologism, MediaSport, to define the deeply rooted relationship between sports and

media. The two can hardly be considered separate anymore.

Stein (2013), a Comparative Media Studies alumni, building on the work of these earlier

scholars created a model which could be applied to new arrivals in the sports media landscape.

Thankfully, Stein provides a fairly replicable analysis of sports video games within the broader

sports media landscape. His investigation of the relationship between televisual sports video

games and sports media largely informs my own work. He notes an almost relentless stream of

advertising and commercialization rhetoric appearing in sports video games. Building on the

work of Wenner, Rowe, and Jhally, he argues that the commodification and capitalist trends

found in traditional sports broadcasting bleed into newer media such as video games. This steady

influx of advertising and commercialization can be found in e-sports as well.

As e-sports broadcasters gain more experience and access to more robust technology, they have started to incorporate many of the same commercial opportunities Stein noticed in sports video games. Segments of the broadcast are occasionally sponsored, or one might see a sponsor make an appearance in an event's title such as the Intel Extreme Masters tournament. Where Stein argues that sports video games incorporate these advertisements as a signifier of their televisual legitimacy, I argue that e-sports broadcasters make use of the same strategies because they are informed by earlier forms of sports media.

The steady commercialization found in e-sports reveals the influence that the sports media industrial complex has had on the e-sports industry. In documenting the dynamics of the sports media industrial complex, Jhally (1989) argues that sports are best viewed as commodities. Jhally's model focuses on the sporting industry in the US prior to the emergence of new media. More readily applicable to e-sports, Lefever's (2012) analysis of the sports media complex within new media details a phenomenon which has upended the former relationships between stakeholders in the sports media industrial complex. She claims that, "the sports/media complex has somehow changed, allowing the different stakeholders to take up new roles" (Lefever 2012, 13). The stakeholders, including sports franchises, sponsors, and media outlets, have had to adapt to a new media landscape with new roles. These new roles are more transient within the high-demand world of new media. Sports organizations and franchises have taken a more active role in connecting with fans, media outlets have taken a larger interest in sports franchises (often buying sports franchises if it is less expensive than purchasing media rights), and sponsors have taken advantage of new, innovative ways to reach consumers (Lefever 2012, 21). According to sports scholars Haynes and Boyle (2003), television sports viewers are no longer expected to just sit back and relax. Instead they are expected to follow their sport through

social media, forums, blogs, and other digital outlets. This new, active fan fits well within the e-

sports industry and live-streaming, but has changed the traditional sports media industrial

complex. Before delving too far into the role of traditional sports economic models on e-sports,

however, I will first situate live-streaming and e-sports within the larger sports media industrial

complex.

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Chapter 1

Sports Media in Transition

From Print to Live-Streaming

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Every day, millions of Americans are catching up with the latest sports news through print, radio, television, and online. Sports have saturated the entire spectrum of mass media in the US. With the emergence of each form of mass media, sports coverage has been at the forefront of adoption and innovation (Bryant and Holt 2006, 22). Each major medium shift in the US has been accompanied by a massive reshuffling of the sports media landscape. Often, this reshuffling opens a space for a particular sport to take up the new medium, create conventions, and carve a path for others to follow. These sports were not spawned by mass media, but their spike in popularity around the emergence of a new medium indicates very specific social moments in the US. Early sports magazines and print coverage of sports focused primarily on prize-fighting, radio ushered in the golden era of baseball, and television transformed football into a titanic entertainment industry. The rise and stabilization of sports media are as much a product of available technology as they are indicative of societal preoccupations of the time. If sports and sports media are indicative of our social moment, then what can we glean from the arrival of live-streaming and e-sports?

The co-evolution of sports and media is the coalescence of many factors including changes in power structures, modes of production, and available technology. As Bryant and Holt argue in their investigation of the history of sports and media, "[e]ach epoch of social evolution has witnessed important sports-media developments that were affected by the evolving socio-cultural environment" (2006, 22). In what follows, I trace the co-evolution of sports and media with particular focus on the relationship between emerging mass media and the media ecology

surrounding that emergence. By documenting these moments of turbulence, I establish the framework necessary to analyze live-streaming as a new medium with which e-sports has emerged as an early adopter and convention creator. Live-streaming did not emerge independently from its predecessors, but rather delivers on the preoccupations of our current social moment. It has once again started a reshuffling of the roles of media within the sports media complex. E-sports, while primarily viewed through live-streaming, relies on all of the previous forms of media to varying degrees. With this framework in mind, I argue that the feedback between live-streaming, e-sports, and traditional sports has spawned an industry which roots itself in traditional sports media while still investigating the full potential of live-streaming.

I begin by briefly discussing sports media in antiquity with Thomas Scanlon's (2006) piece on ancient Mediterranean sports and media. After this introduction to sports media, I move to the US in the late eighteenth century with the emergence of the first sports-only publication, the sports magazine, as well as early print news coverage of prize fighting during the rise of industrialization and nationalism. The next section maps the push towards immediacy in sports coverage and the rise of radio. On the heels of radio and the golden age of baseball, I discuss the early issues with televised sport before the post-war era. Moving into the 1950s and 1960s, I detail the transformation of football into a televisual sport accompanied by a very specific social contingency. I then transition into an investigation of live-streaming and e-sports, particularly how both are in conversation with sports media history.

Origins of Sports Media

As classicist Thomas Scanlon (2006) posits, there is no history of sports without its media counterpart. Media in antiquity, he argues, "are a tool of society, a means of transmitting a message, primarily one from the rulers to the ruled" (Scanlon 2006, 17). While his definition is

quite limited, Scanlon is correct in noting that media are inflected with the power structures of a society. Sports as media were classically used by those with power to reinforce the hierarchy. Sports events were "represented as a benevolent benefaction from the rich, noble, and empowered to those marginalized" (Scanlon 2006, 18). This reinforcement of power structures comes through not only in the production of sporting events, but also in the medium itself.

Scanlon suggests that the most powerful sports 'medium' in classical times was Roman architecture. The massive circuses and arenas were meant to "provoke awe, admiration, and obedience in the citizens" (Scanlon 2006, 18). Scanlon establishes that the predominant sports medium in a given society correlates directly with their notions of power. Within the realm of more dispersed authority such as the Ancient Greeks, sports media reflected the high value of an individual and his merits. Depictions of athletics in Ancient Greek poetry and pottery, made by and for the common people, focus on a particular athlete's prowess more than the event itself. On the other hand, societies with incredibly rigid hierarchies and god-kings such as the Ancient Egyptians and Persians, tend to represent sports as a demonstration of the ruler's power over their people. Ancient Rome, with its centrally focused authority, used architecture to demonstrate the power of the nobility as both benefactors and arbiters, diminishing the role of the athlete to that of an entertainer. Moving into more recent history with media such as newspapers and radio, Scanlon concludes that sports media became an amalgamation of both the Roman and Greek styles: large spectacles with massive personalities.

Establishing a Media Landscape: Early Sports Media in America

The importance of the printing press on modern society cannot be overstated. While its precise effects are still being debated[1], the affordances of the printing press allowed individuals to produce and disseminate a massive amount of information far more efficiently than ever before. With a massive rise in literacy rates and increased access to print brought about by the printing press, the reading population of the world shifted (Eisenstein 1983). While early readership was restricted to a very small subset of society, the printing press paved the way for the coverage of more mundane topics such as sports. In their analysis of sports media in pre-industrial America, sports media scholars Jennings Bryant and Andrea Holt point to two major developments: first, the appearance of sports in newspapers as 'general news' and second the creation of a completely sports-centered publication: the sports magazine (2006, 22). The advent and success of sports magazines in the early nineteenth century stands as a marker for some of the intellectual shifts of the industrial era. During this time we see a professionalization of sport in the form of prize fighters. We also see a shift from sports as a local leisure activity to something that one follows from a distance. Sports contests began to take on implications beyond a mere matching of athletes.

Many sports magazines started out as independent, one-person operations that began circulation in the 1820s and 1830s (Bryant and Holt 2006, 22). *The Spirit of the Times,* one of the earliest iterations of the sports magazine, actually reached a circulation of over 100,000 readers by the 1840s. The success of this initial sports-focused publication displays the roots of the American sports media tradition. While they note the significance of sports magazines in the overall climate of sports media in America, Bryant and Holt trace the advent of modern sports

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[1] See Elizabeth Eisenstein. 1983. The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe. New York: Cambridge University Press.

media to recaps of prize fighting in the Penny Press age of the 1830s. With increased circulation

to the middle and lower classes, sports coverage increased substantially in the mid-nineteenth

century. Sports coverage in the Penny Press era focused on creating spectacular depictions of

sporting events. As McChesney, a media historian points out, James Gordon Bennett, owner of

the *New York Herald*, was "one of the first exponents of 'sensationalism' as a means of

generating circulation, and sport fit comfortably within this rubric" (1989, 51) Out of the

sensationalism present in these early newspapers, sports began to take on more significant

cultural meaning.

There was particular focus on regionalism and nationalism. Sports media scholar J.

Enriquez explains that sporting events were far more likely to be covered if they featured a

contest which reflected the social preoccupations of the day such as a northern horse racing

against a southern horse, or an American boxer fighting a European (2002, 201). Through these

mediated depictions, sporting events were encoded with much more meaning than a simple

contest. They reflected the contemporary hopes and anxieties of the people. Sports media built

up athletes as representatives. Newspaper recaps did much more than simply describe the

actions; they created dramas (McChesney 1989, 51). The hyped up imagery of athletes and their

contests created through the Penny Press and sports magazines became the paradigm for sports

coverage for decades while a new sport caught America's attention.

Newspaper Sports Writing and the Rise of Team Sports

The rise of baseball as a national pastime coincide with the period of time just after the

American Civil War. McChesney explains, "The Civil War introduced baseball to an entire

generation of Americans, as the troops on both sides played the game when time permitted.

Indeed, baseball emerged as the preeminent national team sport during this period" (1989, 52).

After the Civil War, baseball helped mediate conflict by providing common ground for

northerners and southerners. This moment was one in which the country was seeking to heal its

rift, looking for neutral things that could bind the nation together. Baseball filled a political

agenda by giving people something to focus on without opening old wounds. Sports writing

changed drastically in the years following baseball's spike in popularity. Sports coverage began

to receive regular columns and increased coverage throughout the late nineteenth century,

leading to a new kind of journalistic specialization: the sports-writer (Enriquez 2002, 202). This

fixation on sport was a result of new socio-cultural environments. Mandelbaum (2004), a sports

media scholar and historian, argues that the industrial revolution created a new sports landscape

through several major developments. First, the notion of childhood had expanded. In the

nineteenth century, the period between birth and entering the workforce increased substantially.

The new notion of childhood permitted more people to engage with baseball, football, and

basketball. This increased interest in team sports continued into adulthood. Watching and reading

about sports in the newspaper or sports magazines became an acceptable way to recapture the

"carefree years of their lives" (Mandelbaum 2004, 2). Mandelbaum also argues that baseball

offered a renewed connection to pastoral America, creating a feeling of nostalgia for the new city

dwellers and factory workers who desperately missed the pace and beauty of rural America.

Baseball coverage created the first major feedback loop between sports and media in

America. Bryant and Holt claim that the importance of sport was downplayed significantly in the

puritan era, but, "regular, routine reporting of sports in newspapers and specialized magazines

helped shift the cultural attitude towards sports in general" (Bryant and Holt 2006, 25). They

argue that in the late 1870s through the 1890s, Americans adopted a new stance on sports as

important for the development of mind, body, and society. This new cultural stance on sports

was shaped and fostered by an increased media coverage of sports. As baseball and its media

coverage became more professionalized, Americans began to consume sports media in

completely different methods. Sports spectatorship became a regular and acceptable pastime for

the industrial worker.

　　　The industrial revolution created the first opportunity in America for sports production

and spectatorship to be commercially successful endeavors. The growth of cities and the massive

developments in individual mobility allowed for sporting events to take on new significance

(Mandelbaum 2004, 3). Cities provided large numbers of sports players as well as spectators to

fill newly built stadiums and watch newly formed teams. Sports fandom in the U.S. fit neatly

into the predominant forms of labor and leisure. Zillmann and Paulus (1993), two psychologists

who wrote on sports spectatorship, explain, "spectatorship, as a significant form of recreation, is

an outgrowth of the monotony of machine-dictated labor, sports events became the weekend love

affair of all those whose workday was strictly regulated by production schedules" (601).

Zillmann and Paulus' article further supports the feedback between sports media consumption

and societal structures. Live spectatorship in America had previously been seen as a luxury for

the rich and powerful, but with the increased circulation of newspapers, and in particular sports

coverage, to the middle and lower classes, sports spectatorship became accessible to an entirely

new sector of the population (Bryant and Holt 2006, 21). Architecture once again emerged as an

important medium. Large concrete and steel stadiums were created, replacing the more

organically created playing fields of the late nineteenth century (Mandelbaum 2004, 52). We see

here an important transition into the production of sport as a money making opportunity. As I

discuss in the third chapter, the introduction of investors and producers fundamentally alters

sports and their media counterparts.

The available media shaped the portrayal and perception of athletics in the industrial era as well. The idea may sound a bit romantic, but Benjamin Rader (1984), a sports scholar focused on the transformation of sports media in America, labels the period of sports media prior to television as an era of heroes. Whether speaking of prize-fighters or the Mighty Casey of folklore, sports media in the industrial era painted athletes as larger-than-life characters. Rader claims, "[t]hose standing on the assembly lines and those sitting at their desks in the bureaucracies increasingly found their greatest satisfaction in the athletic hero, who presented an image of all-conquering power" (1989, 16). To Rader, sports media before television presented the American ideal. Athletes were meritocratic role-models playing for the love of the game. Rader's analysis places the impetus on newspapers to depict dramatic stories with characters akin to David and Goliath.

In addition to individual mobility, urbanization, and industrial work, Enriquez attributes the rise and legitimacy of sports journalism as the catalyst for the nationalization of sports in America (2002, 201). As all forms of communication and nationalization were transforming, sports coverage lead the charge. In the early twentieth century, most newspapers had dedicated sports writers on staff. These sports writers became famous through their innovative and entrancing writing. Writers like W. O. McGeehan, who worked for many San Francisco papers, described athletes as sorrowful sages and their contests as the clashing of titans on a battlefield (Nyhistory.org 2015). In this period however, it is difficult to judge the difference between journalism and public relations (Bryant and Holt 2006, 30). In fact, the issue of PR penetrating journalism in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century is explicitly laid out in Michael Schudson's (1981) chapter, "Stories and Information: Two Journalisms in the 1890s". At the turn of the century, there existed a dichotomy between news as entertainment and news as

information. As papers around the country struggled to define themselves, sports media also

went through a defining period. Legitimate sports writing became known for its higher literary

quality, but read more like advertisements with its exaggerated, often hyperbolic, language.

Public relations soon became as much a part of sports journalism as describing the events

themselves. Team owners understood the media's role in keeping attendance at sporting events

up and began catering to sports journalists for coverage (Enriquez 2002, 206). The team owners

expected sports journalists to act as publicists for their events. The gambit paid off as sports

writing filled more and more of the daily papers and attendance at live events continued to rise.

The sports writers added significance to the experience of watching a sporting event. Between

the shifts in the American middle class, leisure activities, and the flowery language of sports

journalism, watching a sporting event began to take on the significance of watching history

unfold. We will see these same issues appear again in e-sports coverage as journalism becomes a

legitimizing force within the e-sports landscape, torn between deep analysis and hyped-up

depictions for the sake of generating publicity.

Liveness continued to assert its role in sports media as new technologies emerged. The

telegraph especially placed the impetus on news sources to provide timely information. In a

fascinating illustration of the desire for timely sports news, the *Chicago Tribune* ran the

following note on March 17, 1897, the day of the legendary boxing match between Jim Corbett

and Rob Fitzsimmons: "The *Tribune* will display bulletins today on the prize fight. It has secured

a telegraph wire to the ring in Carson City and a competent man will describe the progress of the

fight, blow by blow, until the test is decided. The bulletins will be posted thirty seconds after

they are written in the far Western city" (Bryant and Holt 2006, 29). This fixation on live updates

for sporting events across the nation is another example of how sports media has shaped the

media landscape of America. Information began traveling faster than ever via wireless

transmissions, but it was actually a yacht race which saw one of the very first implementations of

wireless for live information transmission. Sporting events saw some of the earliest uses of the

telegraph for news reporting as well (Mott 1950, 597). As the telegraph allowed for a sense of

liveness even for remote events, it paved the way for the most significant development in sports

media prior to television: radio.

A Fixation on Liveness: Radio and Sports Consumption

Radio delivered on the push towards liveness established by the telegraph. The first

broadcast of a Major League Baseball game occurred within a year of the commercial release of

radio (Enriquez 2002, 206). Rader remarks, "Now the fan did not have to await his morning

newspaper; he instantly shared the drama transpiring on the playing field" (Rader 1984, 23). For

the first time, sports were perceived as home entertainment. Broadcasters as well as businesses

capitalized on the shift. Sports coverage was integral to the rise in popularity of radio in the

interwar period. In Rader's words,

> In the pre-television era, the heroes of sports assisted the public in coping with a
> rapidly changing society. The sports world made it possible for Americans to
> continue to believe in the traditional gospel of success: that hard work, frugality,
> and loyalty paid dividends; that the individual was potent and could play a large
> role in shaping his own destiny (1984, 15).

By Rader's account, sports programming on radio delivered a much needed revitalization

of the American ideals through the transient industrial period and The Great Depression.

The rise of radio coincides with the golden age of baseball, but there was an awkward

transitional phase into the new medium while newspapers and radio both tried to define their

new boundaries. While consumers clearly desired liveness, initial radio broadcasts felt flat and

emotionless (Bryant and Holt 2006, 27). Some of the greatest blow-by-blow sports writers were

terrible at delivering a compelling radio broadcast. Sports writers were extremely adept at

creating dramas through print, but they failed to capture audiences in the early days of radio.

Oddly enough, their sports knowledge undermined their sports coverage in the new medium.

Instead, a new role emerged: the sportscaster.

In the era of radio, the performance of live sports broadcasts came with significant stakes.

Adept sportscasters were cherished more for their voices than their sports knowledge. Delivering

play-by-play depictions of sporting events takes little technical knowledge, instead the

entertainment comes from the delivery. Mandelbaum writes of early radio sportscasters, "the

broadcasters were akin to poets and troubadours who preserved and handed down the great tales

of their cultures by committing them to memory and reciting them publicly" (2004, 80). Delivery

was actually so important that sometimes sportscasters such as Graham McNamee, known

especially for his baseball broadcasts, were not even present at the event but instead handed

written play-by-play depictions of the game so that they could add their own dramatic and

authorial tone to the live event (Mandelbaum 2004).

Another issue during the emergence of radio was redefining the role of newspaper sports

coverage. Radio could deliver the liveness desired by sports fans and was incredibly well suited

for play-by-play commentary. Newspapers had traditionally covered the blow-by-blow report of

an event, capturing the drama through flowery language and hyperbole. With radio, the

sportscaster captured the audience's attention through the same means, bringing in even more

emotion as his voice rose and fell with the action of the contest (Enriquez 2002, 202). Sports

writers instead decided to focus on an area that radio broadcasters could not: strategy. Early

sportscasters had to focus so much on the delivery of the action that they could not elaborate on

the reasons behind certain maneuvers. Sports writers took advantage of this deficiency and began

writing articles which focused on everything around the action. From in-depth analysis of strategy to the creation of larger than life athlete personalities, newspaper coverage of sports in the era of radio completely changed to remain relevant.

Sports magazines also had to find a new space to occupy during radio's reign. Completely unable to keep up with the live coverage by radio and the strategic coverage of America's favorite sport, baseball, sports magazines instead began to focus on niche sports such as yacht racing. The other innovation of sports magazines in the early 1930s was their addition of full page color photographs of athletes, something that neither radio nor newspapers could offer (Enriquez 2002, 202). They remained as an important sports medium but had been supplanted by both radio and newspapers. Baseball's hold on the American public was so strong that the niche sports, which were typically covered in sports magazines, hardly seemed relevant. Football in particular rarely saw coverage anywhere other than sports magazines (Bryant and Holt 2006, 32). Football had traditionally been seen as a college sport reserved for the wealthy, but with an increasing number of college graduates in the U.S. and the rise of a new medium, its niche status was about to change (Oriard 2014, vii).

The Televisual Transformation of Sport

Television's initial debut into the sports world was a colossal failure. Reaching only a few hundred people, the first American televisual sports broadcast was a Columbia-Princeton baseball game on May 17, 1939. Just a few years after the commercial release of the television in the U.S., RCA's first foray into televised sport flopped. *The New York Times'* Orrin E. Dunlap Jr. recounted on the following Sunday, "The televiewer lacks freedom; seeing baseball on television is too confining, for the novelty would not hold up for more than an hour if it were not for the commentator" (Rader 1984, 17). He goes on to say, "To see the fresh green of the field as The

Mighty Casey advances to the bat, and the dust fly as he defiantly digs in, is a thrill to the eye

that cannot be electrified and flashed through space on a May day, no matter how clear the air."

Bryant, Holt, Enriquez, and Rader attribute the failure of early televisual sports to several

factors. First, television camera technology was rudimentary and receivers were even worse

(Bryant and Holt 2006, 31; Rader 1984, 18). Viewers could hardly see the player, much less

follow the ball or action on the field. Second, television was not a commercial success upon its

release. Sets were expensive and did not offer nearly enough programming to warrant their price:

an issue that created a sort of negative loop as the television industry needed more viewers to

warrant more content yet could not supply enough content to attract more viewers. The third

factor, described by Enriquez, is the failure for broadcasters to adapt to the new medium.

Sportscasters could not actually see the video feed and casted the game as if they were still on

radio; recounting every single action that occurred on the field despite what was on viewers'

screens at home. Inexperienced camera operators had difficulty following the action and the

image rarely matched what the sportscaster was describing.

Radio sportscasters also had difficulty transitioning into the new visual medium because

they could no longer provide the same level of drama through exaggeration and hyperbole.

Where short infield ground balls could previously be described as laser-fast bullets, the viewers

at home now saw that the play was just another ordinary event. Situated somewhere in between

watching the game live at a stadium yet still sounding like radio, televisual sport had a difficult

time defining itself in the late 1930s and early 1940s. According to Rader, televisual sport

experimentation stopped completely during the Second World War (1984, 23).

With the well-established roles of radio, newspapers, and sports magazines, the revival of

televisual sport seemed to be impossible. The utter failure of televised sports in the late 1930s

into the Second World War left televisual sport in a difficult position. Sports radio's popularity was at an all-time high in the 1940s. Baseball had captured the hearts and minds of the American people, and famous radio broadcasters such as Bill Stern and Jack Armstrong kept them listening with bated breath (Rader 1984, 30-31).

Baseball and more generally live event sports spectatorship, however, could not keep the nation content for too long. In what has been dubbed the Sports Slump of the 1950s by Rader and others (Bryant and Holt 2006, McChesney 1989), spectatorship had finally started to dwindle. Television sets were making their way into homes in record numbers after World War II. In the post-World War II era, pastimes shifted from inner-city, public forms of recreation to private, home-centered forms of recreation. Sports revenue was down and change was in the air.

People could watch baseball on their television sets at home, but not many people wanted to. As shown by the earlier quote from *The New York Times*, television had difficulty containing the magic that baseball once held. Football, however, was poised to rise with the new medium. It had been long overlooked, but football was incredibly well suited for television broadcasts. The large, visually distinct ball and typically slow moving action provided an acceptable subject for contemporary television camera technology (Grano 2014, 13). College football had seen a bit of success in newspapers, but professional football had a negative reputation as a "perversion of the college game played for alma mater rather than a lousy paycheck" (Oriard 2014, vii). Radio broadcasts of football had never reached the same level of success as baseball.

Professional football seemed to be a sport without a suitable medium. As sports media scholar Michael Oriard explains, "[o]nly television could give the professional game a national audience, and Pete Rozelle's defining act as the commissioner who ushered in the modern NFL was to market the league through a single television contract, rather than leaving clubs to work

out their own deals" (2014, vii). This deal with broadcasting giant, NBC, led to the NFL's great

breakout story and what would soon become the model for televised sports (Rader 1984, 85).

With the NBC still losing money on a dwindling sports fanbase, they were ready to pull the plug

on their deal with the budding NFL until the championship match between the Baltimore Colts

and the New York Giants of 1958 (Grano 2014, 13). This match, still hailed as the 'Greatest

Game Ever Played', would become the longstanding origin story of televised football. The game

went into a second overtime, pushing the broadcast into prime time on the East Coast, a slot in

which NBC never dared to place professional football. As millions of Americans tuned in for

their regularly scheduled programming, they instead found John Unitas and his Baltimore Colts

scoring the game winning touchdown after a long, hard-fought battle. Oriard, Rader, Grano,

Oates, and Furness all trace the NFL's commercial success to this one defining moment.

As compelling as origin stories often are, the truth is that many other factors lead to the

success of football in the new mass medium. New technologies such as video tape were integral

to the rise of football in America. Hitchcock argues that instant replay in particular helped with

the rebranding of professional football: "The use of video-tape gave the game of football a whole

new image… The instant replay changed football from brutal, quick collisions into graceful

leaps, tumbles and falls. It gave football an aura of art in movement. It made football attractive to

entirely new segments of the audience" (1989, 2). Where football players had once been seen as

lethargic brutes, instant replay allowed broadcasters to slow down images, dissect plays, and

highlight the athleticism of players (Rader 1984, 83-84).

Sports, with football leading the charge, were once again on the cutting edge of media

adoption. According to Dylan Mulvin, the first documented use of instant replay for review and

training purposes was in 1957 during a game between the Los Angeles Rams and the San

Francisco 49ers (2014, 49). By 1964, instant replay was a standard broadcasting technique across all sports. The NFL's willingness to adapt to the new medium set it apart from other sports at the time.

In addition to these technological and legal advances, Bryant and Holt as well as McChesney argue that one particularly innovative producer reinvented sports broadcasting for television: Roone Arledge. With ABC's full support, Arledge established television broadcasting conventions still present today. After the 1958 Championship game between the Colts and the Giants, ABC was scrambling to catch up to the NBC's success in televised sports broadcasting. As Enriquez describes, "Television broadcasting affected different sports in different ways. It devastated boxing, had mixed effects on baseball, and proved a boon to college and professional football" (2002, 202). As NBC began to ride the wave created by the NFL, ABC looked to get in on the action.

Arledge was given free rein to perform a complete overhaul of ABC Sports. Bryant and Holt argue that the single most important innovation Arledge brought was the notion that a televisual broadcast should be presented "from the perspective of what the typical fan would see if he or she attended the game live" (Bryant and Holt 2006, 33). Arledge (2003) believed that the broadcast should capture the essence of attending a game, not just the play on the field, but the roar of the crowd, the cheerleaders, the marching bands, and the coaches on the sidelines. As Enriquez describes, "under Arledge, television assumed every role previously played by print media; it served as the primary medium for experiencing events, it provided detailed analysis, and it gave human faces to the participants" (2002, 205). Through football, televised sports were able to set conventions which separated them from earlier forms of media. This transition lives

on in live-streaming today as we will see later with live-streaming's adaptation rather than transformation of televised sport.

The arrival of television meant that sports radio and print media had to redefine their role in sports coverage. Television could deliver the liveness of radio and, with the help of commentators and technology like instant replay, the drama and dissection of strategy found in print media. Newspaper coverage of sports was now relegated to simple recaps. Sports magazines on the other hand rode the success of television. As Bryant and Holt assert, "*Sports Illustrated* offers a classic example of an old medium responding to a new one" (2006, 36). Rather than seeking out an area left uncovered by television, *Sports Illustrated* supported televised sports by providing innovative action photography and updates on the most popular athletes and teams at the time.

Sports broadcasts of the 1960s were infused with the hopes and fears of the Cold War era. R. Powers, a television sports scholar, suggests that sports filled a void in the American public, "shrugging off the darker morbidities of the Cold War and McCarthyism" (1984, 118). The re-found focus on sports as spectacle established by "the youthful theme of ABC, echoed the Kennedy idealism of the new frontier, the sporting emphasis echoed Kennedy's image of muscular athleticism…" (Whannel 2002, 34). Entertainment sports media, with its art-in-motion presentation, delivered a message of newness and regeneration to American.

Through broadcasting and advertising deals, sports helped build and perpetuate the growing conspicuous consumption movement and the capitalist ideals of post-war America. Athletes resumed their star status. Sports stars began appearing in advertising everywhere. Merchandising became a key part of sports promotion. Anything from replica jerseys of sports stars to blankets and flags with team branding can be found almost anywhere in the U.S.

Contemporary Sports fandom has come to mean much more than simply following a team. It means buying a team's products, playing sports video games, joining fantasy leagues, and watching sports entertainment television. Oates, a sports media scholar focused on the NFL, writes that fandom has been transformed by the presentation of athletes as commodities to be consumed selectively and self-consciously by sports fans (2014, 80). The previously subcultural hyper-fandom activities such as fantasy football and sports video games, Oates argues, have moved into mainstream prominence and profitability. Fans are invited to interact with athletes as vicarious managers in fantasy sports, offering a completely new, personally tailored form of interaction with sports organizations. This new drive for constant connection and feedback within the sports industry culminates with live-streaming.

Live-Streaming: Constant Connection

As Oates suggests, sports fandom has fundamentally changed to reflect an increased involvement on the part of the spectator. Athletes and personalities have become commodities for fans to interact with. Social media, fantasy sports, and video games have created a connection to sports stars that was never before available in other media. At any moment, a spectator can catch highlights on ESPN, head over to forums to discuss major sporting events, or load a stream of a match on their phone, all while tweeting at their favorite athletes with the expectation that their words will be received on the other end.

Recent trends show a change in the sports media landscape as new platforms begin to vie for control over sports broadcasting in the US. The NFL has recently signed a deal with Google allowing for the streaming of games over the internet after their current contract with DirecTV ends in 2015. This deal reflects the changing media landscape in the internet era. The rise of new streaming platforms poses an interesting dilemma to the current media titans and new

opportunities for new forms of media sports. Thus far, using the tradition established by

McChesney, Bryant, Holt, and Rader among others, I have used sports media as a lens through

which to view particular socio-cultural moments in America. I now turn that lens towards the

contemporary sports media landscape. What can we learn about our own social moment by

looking at the use of streaming platforms for traditional sports or the arrival of e-sports as an

entirely new form of professional competition that makes use of older forms of media, but

thrives in live-streams and video on demand?

The MLB offers an early case study into the use of live-streaming for major league sports

broadcasting. The regular season in the MLB consists of 2,430 games, a staggering number

compared to the NFL's 256. The sheer number of regular season games held each year causes a

problem with over-saturation. This inundation of content lowers the value of each individual

game in the eyes of the major networks (Mondelo 2006, 283). The games that these networks

choose not to air due to scheduling conflicts previously caused many games to go unseen by fans

outside of the local media market for the two competing teams. To remedy the situation, the

MLB streamed over 1,000 regular season games online starting in 2003. The launch of MLB.tv

in 2002 allowed engaged MLB fans to continue watching content even when they did not have

access to the games through the major networks. While not initially a huge commercial success,

MLB.tv still runs today, over a decade later at a monthly subscription of $19.99 and as of 2014

incorporated both post-season games and the World Series as part of the package (MLB.tv

2015). While the MLB has not released the official revenue totals for its live-streaming service,

with 3.7 million subscribers the platform generates well over $400 million per year (MLB.tv

2013). This little-known use of live-streaming shows a hunger for immediate interaction with

sports media regardless of the available medium.

Early live-streaming fundamentally looks and feels like television, but it filled a role

which network television could not: all access and constant connection to media. It took form on

a new platform, but did not truly differ from television. Early live-streaming is more like an

adaptation of television than a new medium. Rather than creating something new, the early foray

into live-streaming by the MLB simply adapted the already present broadcasting infrastructure

and applied it through a different avenue. Television is often invoked in live-streaming. If we

look at MLB.tv, the .tv signifies its connection to television, but that domain is actually the

official domain for the country of Tuvalu. Other streaming platforms like ustream.tv, twitch.tv,

MLG.tv, all based outside of Tuvalu, use the same domain to signal their televisual connection.

Live-streaming emerged at a very particular moment in the evolution of sports media.

With air-time limited on the major networks, the internet allows a near infinite amount of content

to reach sports fans. As Oates would argue, from fantasy sports, to blogs, to live-streaming, the

internet is, for many, the new space of the sports fan. Live-streaming goes beyond the ability of

other media to reach viewers wherever and whenever, whether from a home computer or a

mobile device. Live-streaming delivers on the constant connectedness expected by consumers

today. At its roots, live-streaming is a televisual medium. So what separates it from television?

Live-streaming today has created its own niche by blending other forms of media. Most

live-streams host an internet relay chat (IRC) in addition to the audiovisual component of the

broadcast. This IRC allows viewers to chat with other audience members and often the

broadcaster, a functionality not currently available in television. This live audience connection in

live-streaming is unparalleled in television. Hamilton et al., in their investigation of the

significance of live-streaming for community creation, situate Twitch streams as an important

'third place' for community. Building on the work of both Oldenberg and McLuhan, Hamilton et

al. (2014) suggest that "By combining hot and cool media, streams enable the sharing of rich

ephemeral experiences in tandem with open participation through informal social interaction, the

ingredients for a third place." The third place that the authors point to creates a rich connection

akin to interpersonal interaction. The ephemeral nature of these interactions creates a deep sense

of community even in streams with hundreds of thousands of viewers. Live-streaming and in

turn, the IRC associated with streams creates a shared experience tantamount to the "roar of a

stadium" (Hamilton et al. 2014). These streams also pull in a global audience, connecting

isolated audiences into one hyper-connected community. Live-streaming draws on television for

its look and feel, but delivers not only on the desire for liveness perpetuated in sports media but

also the hyper-connectivity present in today's globalized world.

E-sports, Live-streaming, and Sports Media

Many factors contributed to the success of live-streaming for e-sports. It arrived at a

moment when television seemed closed to e-sports, it was much less expensive to produce, and

much easier to cultivate. Television broadcasts are prohibitively expensive to produce. Early

attempts at airing e-sports on television have typically flopped, rarely surviving past a second

season. E-sports are difficult to film when compared to traditional sports and conventions had

not yet been set for the televisual presentation of e-sports (Taylor 2012). The action in traditional

sports can typically be captured by one shot. E-sports broadcasts, in contrast, must synthesize

one cohesive narrative out many different player viewpoints with varying levels of information.

In a game like *Counter Strike*, broadcasters must wrangle with a large map with ten players in

first-person perspective. The resulting audiovisual feed is a frantic attempt to capture the most

relevant information from the players with an outside 'observer' controlling another viewpoint

removed from the players' point of view. The observer functionality in the early days of e-sports

broadcasting created a difficult barrier to overcome for commercial success on television.

Observer functionality had not yet become a focus for game developers and commentary had not

reached the level of competency it has in more contemporary broadcasts.

Instead of finding success on television, e-sports pulls in millions of concurrent viewers

on live-streaming sites such as Twitch.tv. With television seemingly out of reach and streaming

requiring significant investment per event in the early 2000's, e-sports broadcasting remained

relatively stagnant until the arrival of a reliable, and cheap, live-streaming platform. Justin.tv

(and other similar sites like UStream and Stickam), which launched in 2007, delivered exactly

what e-sports broadcasters needed to grow. The site allowed users to quickly and easily stream

content online with the use of some relatively simple software. Both broadband internet reach

and streaming technology had developed to a point that lowered the barrier of entry for

broadcasters. Players from around the world streamed games from their bedrooms. E-sports

broadcasters reached new, massive audiences.

The success of gaming content on Justin.tv spurred a new streaming site dedicated solely

to gaming. The games-centered streaming site, Twitch.tv, launched in 2011. Twitch.tv

revolutionized the e-sports industry. Each of the casters I interviewed spent time detailing the

importance of Twitch.tv without being prompted. As one explained, Twitch.tv is "the clearest

driving factor that's grown e-sports over the past 2-3 years." As mentioned in the introduction, e-

sports audiences have reached previously unheard of levels. Large scale e-sports events regularly

see concurrent viewer numbers in the hundreds of thousands. These broadcasts still largely

resemble televised sports however, rarely, if ever, making use of the IRC.

Live-streaming is just one of the forms of media the e-sports industry makes use of. In fact, e-sports interacts with most media in the same ways that traditional sports have. The e-sports industry pushes back into almost all of the earlier forms of media discussed in this chapter. Print and radio typically fill a PR role in e-sports coverage. Large events or developments often make their way into publications like *The New York Times.* Local radio segments will occasionally feature summaries of e-sports events occurring nearby. Internet versions of both of print and radio sports coverage are fundamental segments of the e-sports media ecosystem. Podcasts, digital audio files available on the internet through downloads or streaming, vlogs, and video diaries fill essentially the same role for e-sports that radio currently plays for traditional sports. Experts weigh in on recent developments and players breakdown certain aspects of a game.

E-sports journalism has also immerged as a legitimizing force within the industry. Sites like ongamers.com and esportsheaven.com keep fans abreast of any new developments in the professional scene for all of the major e-sports titles. Journalists like Richard Lewis add legitimacy to e-sports through their coverage of current events. Their recaps of developments as well as summaries of various tournaments and leagues closely resemble their print counterparts in sports coverage. It is clear that the e-sports industry is in conversation with many forms of media. Many of the forms and techniques are borrowed directly from sports coverage. These forms of media did not appear instantly however, they are the result of years of push and pull with the larger sports media landscape. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the commentating of e-sports live-streams.

Chapter 2
Shoutcasters
Collecting Conventions

E-sportscasters, often referred to as shoutcasters, both look and sound like professional sportscasters. Their attire and cadence both create an instant connection to televisual sports. Having never seen a game of *Starcraft 2* before, you may watch the flashing lights and explosions with a perplexed look on your face. As you continue to watch, you hear two commentators provide a narrative, stats fly across the screen, and you start to piece together the game in front of you. After a few minutes, you know the two players who are facing off against one another, you feel the excitement as they engage each other's armies, and a slight sting as the player you were rooting for concedes the match with a polite "GG." The whole presentation feels like a variant of Monday Night Football with virtual armies instead of football teams. From the stat-tickers to the sound of the commentator's voice, you can almost imagine the ESPN or CBS logo gracing the bottom corner of the screen. Shoutcasters have become a staple in e-sports. One of the main signifiers of the 'sports' moniker professional gaming has taken on, shoutcasters lend an air of professionalism to a scene which often struggles to define itself. By adopting the 'sport' title, a precedent has been set for e-sports broadcasters which informs their style and conventions.

Shoutcasters are important to investigate because they form a fundamental grounding for e-sports which helps it to create its identity in the face of blistering turnover rates and constant field shifts. E-sports stand in a unique position compared to traditional sports. Where players and coaches in traditional sports often have careers that last for several years, e-sports personalities

suffer from intense turnover rates where professional careers can end within a year. E-sports

players burn out quickly and coaches rarely make a lasting name in the industry. The

recognizable personalities in e-sports are the few innovators and commentators who turned their

passion into a career. In this chapter, I analyze the role of shoutcasters within the larger

framework of the e-sports industry. I build much of this analysis on the foundation that Taylor

(2012) established in her investigation of the rise of e-sports. Much of Taylor's analysis still

holds true today, but some other developments in the field have created new dynamics within

shoutcasting that were not present during her initial encounters with shoutcasters. Understanding

how shoutcasters borrow from earlier forms of media, the issues they perceive within the

industry, and how they cultivate their own identity as shoutcasters while grappling with the

hyper-connection found in live-streaming as a medium allows us to grasp the relationship e-

sports broadcasting has with earlier forms of media while still creating its own identity. I begin

with a very brief look at the history of shoutcasting.

Shoutcasting History

One can see that even early attempts at broadcasting competitive gaming borrowed

heavily from its media contemporaries. *Starcade*, a 1982 show that ran for two years, marks one

of the first forays into e-sports broadcasting. Though the term e-sports had not yet emerged, the

show featured two opponents attempting to outscore each other on various arcade machines. If

we look to *Starcade* as an early example of e-sports, then the origins of e-sports commentating

resemble game show commentary found in *Jeapordy!* or *The Price is Right*. Watching *Starcade*

for the hosting alone reveals many similarities to other game shows: the host wears typical game-

show host garb, pleasantly explains every aspect of the competition, and speaks with the

broadcast voice we all recognize. *Starcade* also shows the constant evolution of competitive

gaming coverage as it continued to refine its camera angles, presentation, and format over its two

year run.

The model which more closely resembles our modern vision of shoutcasting gained

momentum at the turn of the twenty-first century. The title shoutcaster comes from the early

streaming software used for e-sports broadcasting, SHOUTcast. While many people familiar

with e-sports may have no idea where the term comes from, a prominent shoutcaster, djWHEAT

(2012), claims that the title remains due to its signaling of the history of e-sports. SHOUTcast, a

media streaming program, arrived in 1998, allowing interested parties to broadcast audio

recordings to various 'radio' channels for free. SHOUTcast allowed for video streaming, but as

one early shoutcaster I interviewed lamented, the bandwidth and equipment required for video

streaming was prohibitively expensive.

Instead of the audiovisual broadcast we regularly associate with e-sports live-streams

today, early shoutcasters relied on audio recordings akin to early radio coverage of traditional

sports. These early broadcasts only streamed audio to a few hundred dedicated fans on internet

radio. Early shoutcasts follow the form of traditional play-by-play radio broadcasts, focused

primarily on presenting every development in the game. In interviews, veteran shoutcasters were

not shy about admitting the influence radio sportscasters had on their own style. One mentioned

that he spent hours listening to live sports radio to hone his own skills.

Early shoutcasters also performed many aspects of the production that they are no longer

required to perform in the more mature e-sports industry. They would attend events, set up their

own station, typically with their own laptop and microphone. It was a very grassroots affair.

With little experience in the technical aspects of broadcasting, the productions emulated as much as they could from sports broadcasting to lend an air of professionalism.

With the arrival of Twitch.tv, and other reliable streaming platforms, much of the onus of production was taken off of shoutcasters. Instead of acting as producers, directors, editors, and on-air talent all at once as they had in the early audio-only streams, shoutcasters are now more able to focus on the portion of their work from which they get their name. Shoutcasting after the early days of internet radio has come to not only sound like traditional sportscasting, but also look like traditional sportscasting.

Something Borrowed: Influences from Sportscasting

Wardrobe

Many of the shoutcasters I interviewed talked about wardrobe as a huge change within shoutcasting, one that was spurred entirely by looking at traditional sportscasting. Most shoutcasters got their start wearing t-shirts and jeans at various e-sports events. Today, you will rarely find a shoutcaster not wearing a shirt with a blazer. Looking at the image below shows the incredible shift in shoutcasting just within the last six years. Both images feature the same
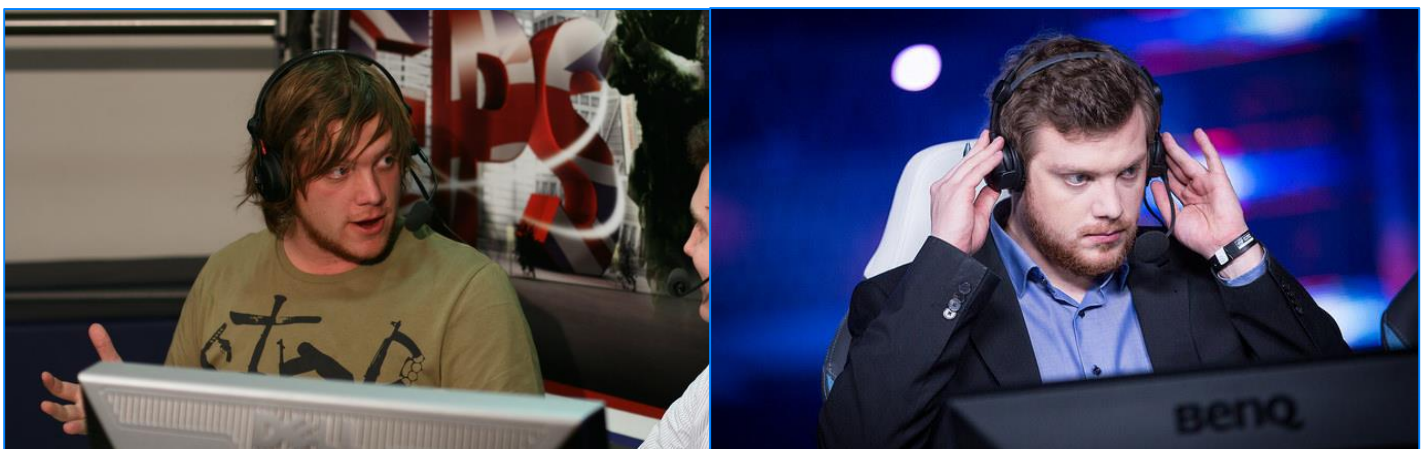

Figure 2-Left: Joe Miller at 2009 Intel Friday Game London; Right: Joe Miller at 2015 Intel Extreme Masters World Championship in Katowice Poland. Image credit: ESL, Philip Saedler and Helena Kristiansson. Flickr.com/eslphotos

shoutcaster: Joe Miller. The left-hand image comes from the 2009 Intel Friday Game London while the right-hand image comes from the 2015 Intel Extreme Masters World Championship. While the images are quite similar, the professionalism apparent in the right-hand image resembles a professional sportscaster. The gamer/geek vibe found in the left-hand image has been removed from the shoutcasting image. As a few of the shoutcasters I spoke with admitted, the drive to rework the shoutcaster wardrobe came purely from traditional sports. On top of that, they pointed to a desire to shed the gamer/geek stereotypes that e-sports had come to inhabit. By adopting professional attire, they felt that they could get rid of the old image and emulate the professionalism of a sports broadcast. Wardrobe is not the only aspect of traditional sportscasting that has made its way into shoutcasting.

Style

One of the more elusive aspects borrowed from traditional sports is the actual commentary style. I use the term elusive here to signal the difficulty in pinning down exactly why shoutcasters remind us so vividly of traditional sportscasters. Early shoutcasters had no models outside of traditional sportscasting so they took as much as they could: "So as a broadcaster we look at traditional sportscasting. We pull from that and then make sure it fits in game casting." As it turns out, many sports commentary conventions translate well into game casting. As such, the first generation of casters share many similarities with television sportscasters. Most of these early shoutcasters admit to being influenced almost entirely by traditional sportscasters. One caster explains, "Television is where we grew up, it's what we watched. So clearly that's where we're going to pull from."

Shoutcasters typically have no media training, instead relying on mimicry of earlier conventions to get by. As with most positions in e-sports, and similar to early sports writers and radio casters, shoutcasters are just passionate fans turned professional. In conversations, they each revealed a bit of their own personal history that pushed them towards broadcasting, but only one ever mentioned having received any sort of formal training. Years into his shoutcasting career, he "went back and did a journalism and broadcasting course for 6-9 months." Of particular note, he mentions, "they did one really good project which was 'how to be a news presenter'. They taught me the basics of that." The rest, he says, he learned on-air through experience. The other shoutcasters I interviewed echoed this story.

Most of the shoutcasters I interviewed fell into shoutcasting through happenstance and had to learn their craft on-air. Shoutcasters are akin to the very early television sportscasters who had to reinvent their style during broadcasts like Bob Stanton, a radio sportscaster turned television sportscaster who would send his friends to sports bars to gather feedback and suggestions from audience members (Rader 1984). Echoing this inexperience and improvisation, one shoutcaster I interviewed confided, "the first time I had ever been on camera, I sat down and I was like, 'I have no idea how to do this.' I had done two and a half years of audio casting, but I had never done video." Another caster recalls of his first show, "All I knew going into my first broadcast was that I know this game. I know how it works, I know these players, and I play against these kinds of players. I don't know how commentary works, but I can do this." After these first, trial broadcasts, both of the above-mentioned shoutcasters admitted to going back and watching traditional sportscasters to learn more about their craft.

Other broadcasting style conventions such as how to handle dead-air, how to end a segment, or how to transition into gameplay were lifted directly from sportscasting. Paul

"ReDeYe" Chaloner, a prominent personality within the e-sports industry, addresses each of

these techniques in his primer on becoming a professional shoutcaster, constantly pointing to

various examples from traditional sports broadcasting to illustrate his points. In his section on

dead-air, Chaloner writes, "[o]ne of the best pieces of advice I had for TV was from legendary

sports producer Mike Burks (11 time Emmy award winner for sports production) who told me 'A

great commentator knows when to shut up and say nothing'" (2009, 9). Chaloner uses traditional

sports broadcasting as a way to explain shoutcasting, a clear indication of its influence on e-

sports broadcasting.

Content Analysis: Play-by-play and Color Commentary in the NFL and LCS

Another convention lifted directly from traditional sports broadcasts is the arrangement

of the casting team. Traditional television sportscasters fall into one of two roles: play-by-play or

color commentary. Shoutcasters use these same two roles. Both sports broadcasts and e-sports

broadcasts feature one of each type. The play-by-play commentator narrates the action, putting

together the complicated and unconnected segments of the game into a cohesive narrative. The

color commentator provides their in-depth analysis of the game, typically from the stance of a

professional player.

Shoutcasters have adopted the two-person team directly from traditional sports

broadcasts. The path to each role follows the same pattern as well. An ex-professional player

almost always fills the role of color commentary in both traditional sports and e-sports. Their

insight is unparalleled. Color commentators attempt to breakdown complex series of events or

highly technical maneuvers as if they were still a professional player. In the words of one e-

sports color commentator, "I'm not pretending to be a professional player, but I'm doing my best

to emulate them." He goes on to say, "You can read up on it and study it as much as you like, but unless you've lived it, you can't really comment on it." In comparison, a play-by-play commentator does not need to have the technical depth, but relies more on presentation. Even though a play-by-play commentator has most likely played hundreds of hours of whichever game they cast, they cannot fill the role of the color commentator. This dynamic allows for play-by-play commentators to switch games with relative ease whereas color commentators, both in traditional sports and e-sports, are locked into one game.

To illustrate the emulation of sports broadcasting found in e-sports, I now turn to a brief content analysis of the commentary found in a regular season NFL game and a regular season *League of Legends* Championship Series game. I start with the commentary from one play in an NFL game. After presenting the traditional model, I move to the commentary from one team fight in *League of Legends* to demonstrate how the convention has been adapted for e-sports commentary. In both cases, I have removed the names of players, commentators, and teams to cut down on jargon and clutter. Each case exhibits the dynamic present in the two man commentary team.

> ### *NFL*
>
> *With both teams lined up, the play begins and the play-by-play commentator comes in immediately.*
>
> **Play-by-play:** Here's [player 1] out to midfield, a yard shy of a first down. [player 2] on the tackle.
>
> *After the play has ended, the color commentator takes over.*
>
> **Color:** It's been [team 1] on both sides of the ball. Whether it be defense and the way that they dominated this ball game and then offensively, the early going had the interception, didn't get much going over the next couple of possessions offensively but since that time, [player 3] has been very precise in how he has thrown the football and they just attacked this defense every which way.

LCS

Three members of the Red Team engage Blue Team at Red Team's turret

Play-by-play: This is going to be dangerous. Doing what he can to hold out. They're going to grab the turret, the fight will continue after the shield onto [player 1] is already broken. He gets hit, the ignite is completely killing the ultimate! He gets hit by [player 2] who turns around again and heads back to [player 3].

With the action over for the moment, the color commentator begins to speak

Color: I thought he finished a camp here too...

The color commentator is cut off as two more members of Blue Team attempt to attack.

Play-by-Play Heyo, as the top side comes in here too. [player 1], will he hit a good ultimate!? Oh! They were staring right at him but now he's just left to get shredded apart here. They couldn't have thought that this was going to go well for them.

With the fight concluded, the color commentator continues again.

Color: Is this just the week of chaos? Because that was a really really uncharacteristic lapse in judgement from [Blue Team]: Not calling everybody into position at the right time, and [Red Team] with the advantage make them pay for it. They didn't expect the ignite from Nautilus. I think they expected Nautilus to have exhaust instead, but [player 1] pops the ignite, and as we said there is no armor so [player 2] just… and it continues!

The color commentator is cut off once again as the two teams engage one another for a third time.

If we look at these examples for their content rather than the specific moment in the game we can catch a full illustration of the two-caster dynamic. As we can see by the NFL example, the play-by-play commentator provides a running narration of the action in the game. When the action ends, the color commentator provides the meta-level analysis of the unfolding events. In the LCS example, we see that the same dynamic is present, however, due to the continuous action in the game, the transition into color commentary becomes difficult. In the first lull, the LCS color

commentator tries to insert his analysis, but he is cut off by a second engagement. The color

commentator stops talking immediately and allows the play-by-play commentator to continue

describing the action. After the engagement ends, we hear the color commentator pick up again,

explaining why the fight developed the way it did as well as his insight into why the teams

played the way they did.

Entertainment and Narrative

Entertainment value was a repeated concept in my interviews with shoutcasters. Some

went so far as to claim that their role was only to entertain. One stated, "I want to get you

excited. I want to get you to watch the game as if it was a show on television." Many would

point to good sportscasters as an example to follow. If we recall the example of the early days of

radio sportscasting, casters had a difficult time making the transition to the new medium. Their

broadcasts felt flat when compared with their print counterparts (Bryant and Holt 2006, 27).

Early sportscasters got locked into the idea that their responsibility was to provide the basic play-

by-play depiction of a match. The golden age of sports radio was brought in by popular

sportscasters, such as Graham McNamee, who were so popular that they'd be asked to cast

games remotely. McNamee, like a live version of his print counterparts, was famous for creating

florid depictions of the game, athletes became heroes and their play became combat as told by

McNamee. While the presentation of live and accurate information was still essential, popular

radio sportscasters shifted sports media from news reports to entertainment. Sportscasters are

responsible for this shift. Without their expert embellishment, play-by-play depictions lack

entertainment value.

Even non-sports fans can feel the excitement from a particularly good sportscaster. The game they portray is far more intriguing than any actual events happening on the field (Bryant, Brown, Comisky, and Zillmann 1982). This disconnect forms one of the primary reasons that the transition to casting televised sport was so difficult. The small liberties that sportscasters took were no longer acceptable in the visual medium. Once the home viewer could see the game, commentary had to shift to accommodate more scrutiny. Radio sportscasters were notorious for their embellishment. As Bryant, Comisky, and Zillman note from one of their several investigations of sportscasting, roughly forty percent of commentary is dramatic embellishment (1977). In 1977, the authors tracked the amount of hyperbole and exaggeration in sports broadcasting and found that over half of the speech was dedicated to drama. E-sports shoutcasters, by comparison, rarely use dramatic embellishment of action. A few of the informants noted that they feel that embellishing actions is not possible due to their audience.

The e-sports audience as pictured by shoutcasters, includes mostly dedicated players. While many sports fans may play their sport casually, e-sports fans engage with the games they watch regularly. As one shoutcaster explains, "we've only ever gone out to a hardcore audience." He acknowledges that the current audience is in flux, but the primary base of e-sports fans are intensely dedicated viewers and players. Because of this dynamic, shoutcasters feel that embellishment of the actions on screen would be difficult to slip past a discerning eye. Their belief that dramatic embellishment isn't possible may say more about their understanding of traditional sports fans than it does about their formulation of their role as commentators. While unacknowledged in interviews, the possibility for shoutcasters to add embellishment exists. Their choice not to use embellishment speaks more to their formulation of the e-sports audience than it

does to their casting quality. Instead of embellishment of action, shoutscasters rely on another convention found in traditional sportscasting: narrative.

Studies that focus on the media effects of sportscasting suggest that sportscasters fundamentally alter the audience perception of the telecast through story-telling and narrative (Krein and Martin 2006). Sportscasters take many liberties in their descriptions of the game to add a dramatic flair. In several empirical studies, Bryant, Brown, Comisky, and Zillman (1979) found that when sportscasters created a narrative of animosity between players, viewers felt an increased amount of tension and engagement. They conclude that the narrative scope of the sportscaster is critical in the perception of sports broadcasting. This narrative creation has bled into shoutcasting as many shoutcasters attempt to amplify the emotional content of their games by highlighting underdog stories or hyping up animosity between players. One caster I interviewed connected his work to the narrative creation in sports commentary by stating, "Emotion is one of the key words in commentary. You need to be able to connect a certain emotion to the words you're saying. You need to be able to make someone scared for their favorite player or overjoyed when they win. Create greatest enemies. You need to be able to make these feelings through what you say or how you say it. Emotion is everything." This caster goes to great lengths to dig up statistics from previous matchups to provide a narrative for the match he casts. Through this investigation, the shoutcaster is able to contextualize a match with a rich history. Perhaps two players have met three times before and each time the result has been the same. Will viewers be able to share in the momentous victory of the underdog? As part of their preparation, shoutcasters will research all of the previous meetings between two players to create a history between them, a tactic which they acknowledge has been used in traditional sports for decades.

Production

Stream production is another realm where e-sports have started to borrow heavily. While e-sports producers may have gotten a head start on streaming live events, they often rely on the expertise of television producers to put a show together. Multiple shoutcasters pointed to a steady influx of television producers making their way into e-sports, "the way we approach a production is very much like television. A lot of the production guys that are getting into it are from television." In fact, the executive producer of the *League of Legends* Championship Series, an immensely popular e-sports program, is former emmy-winner Ariel Horn. Horn won his Emmy as an associate producer of the 2004 Olympics for NBC. Likewise, Mike Burks, executive producer for the Championship Gaming Series mentioned in the above quote from Paul Chaloner, had an immense amount of experience in televised sports before migrating to e-sports. These are just two of the many experienced television producers making their way into e-sports. Their style is beginning to show as e-sports events become more polished every year. If we recall the image of *Prime Time League* in the introduction to this thesis, we can see the influx of television conventions in e-sports from the production side. The shoutcasters benefit from the experience of working with television producers to refine their style. As the field has grown, however, we begin to see minor tweaks in style and delivery. Spending a significant time with e-sports casting, in comparison with sportscasting, reveals several distinctions. Much of this difference comes with the age of the field, but just as *Starcade* evolved over its short lifespan, shoutcasters have found ways to make themselves unique. Their understanding of their role within the overall e-sports industry informs us of some of the key differences here.

Something New: Shoutcaster Identity

Shoutcasters are situated somewhere between fan and professional. As evidenced by the above investigation of how shoutcasters are informed by their traditional predecessors, the role of shoutcasters is still very much in flux. Shoutcasters are just recently creating their own identity separate from their sportscasting roots. In particular, the less experienced shoutcasters I spoke with use markedly different models to inform their own casting.

The Second Generation of Professional Shoutcasters

A second generation of casters is just now coming into the scene. Instead of looking to traditional sportscasters as their models, they emulate veteran shoutcasters: "my influences are the streamers that I watched. I watched everyone who casts and commentates...my commentary style comes from those guys. I don't know how much is conscious or just mimicry." This new caster has been on the scene for only a fraction of the time that the veterans have. In that time he has honed his shoutcasting skills not by finding sports commentary and seeing which aspects apply to shoutcasting, but by absorbing as much information as he could from other shoutcasters. Another fresh shoutcaster offers a fascinating disconnect from the older casters: "I definitely bounce off more e-sportscasters than sports. I just watch more e-sports than sports. Sports are so different than e-sports, there's so little that I can actually use from them." Where his predecessors admit to borrowing primarily from traditional sportscasters, this new generation has left the realm of traditional sportscasting behind.

The professional casters provide material for an amateur level of shoutcasters to pull from. The shoutcasters I interviewed were all professionals who typically work on major events with massive support and budgets. With a robust network of shoutcasters to pull from, however,

we may see much more support for the grassroots level of e-sports that many early fans are accustomed to. Current shoutcasters also provide a model for potential careers. Through the hard-fought struggle of years-worth of unpaid events, the shoutcasters I spoke with have created a legitimate profession worth pursuing. Most warned me that the path is no longer as easy as they once had it. Most of them pursued shoutcasting for the love of e-sports. They had years to fumble through persona creation, broadcast techniques, and conventions.

New, potential shoutcasters are automatically held to a higher standard. A senior caster offered the following advice, "With how casting has changed, you need to be open to casting multiple games. You have to be willing to learn. There is a lot we can teach a caster, but you have to have some skills within you alone. You have to have some camera presence." The mention of camera presence signals a significant jump from early shoutcasting. Just a few years ago, the shoutcasters I interviewed sat down in front of a camera for the first time armed with nothing but game knowledge; camera presence was a foreign word to them.

Perhaps the most significant change to casters is their overall level of experience. Some of the shoutcasters I spoke with have been broadcasting for over a decade. Time has allowed these casters to experiment and find their own style. As mentioned earlier, many of the minutia involved in running a show take time to learn. Most casters got their start casually. They may have been passionate about e-sports and created a role for themselves within the industry. Some are former players who made the hard decision to give up on their hopes of winning big to instead cultivate a community.

As new professionals, shoutcasters are just now coming together with the support of e-sports companies under legitimate full-time contracts. The professional casters I spoke with all acknowledged a significant change in their commentary since making the transition into full-time

casting with other casters around for feedback and training. One explained that he had never

been sure how to handle dead-air, moments when both casters are silent and there is little action

in the game. Through feedback sessions with other casters, he learned that there are some

appropriate times to let the viewer formulate their own opinions on the match. Heeding the

advice of veteran casters like Paul Chaloner, he went on to explain that one of the problems he

sees in shoutcasting more generally is that shoutcasters are afraid to just be quiet during a stream.

Part of the emotional build-up of a game, he explains, is letting the natural flow of a game take

its course without any input from the casters.

It will be fascinating to watch as these expert networks inform e-sports broadcasts across

the world. One informant remarked, "Now that we're all working together, we're learning a lot

off of one another, which hasn't happened in commentary before." Beyond allowing veteran

shoutcasters to compare notes, the professional status of shoutcasting provides training to new

shoutcasters. One veteran claimed, "All the junior people are learning so much faster than we

ever did. They're taking everything we learned over 5-10 years and doing it in months." These

veteran casters can now pass on their experience and their style. Techniques like hand-offs at the

end of a segment or transitions from the desk to gameplay often came up in my interviews as

issues which take years to learn, but newer shoutcasters are able to pick these cues up from

earlier shoutcasters instead of taking what they can from a sports show and hoping that

everything translates well.

Beyond the expected roles that shoutcasters fill, they also perform many secondary tasks

which don't typically fall to traditional sportscasters. In the very early days of live-streaming,

shoutcasters were often responsible for every aspect of the broadcast from set-up to teardown.

Some shoutcasters still regularly assist on production aspects of the broadcast such as graphics

packages, camera set-up, and audio checks, but others leave the production aspects of the stream

to more experienced hands while focusing instead on updating websites, answering tweets,

creating content, or streaming their own play sessionss. No two casters seem to fill exactly the

same role within the broadcast team. They do, however, share some similarities which seem to

form the shoutcaster identity.

Record-keepers and Community Managers

All of the casters pointed to stats-tracking as part of their roles outside of their air-time

responsibilities. Most of them keep highly detailed databases full of every possible stat they can

get a hold of from game clients and public databases. These stats can be as simple as wins and

losses from remote regions or LAN tournaments that do not post their results online. The stats

can also get as minute as the number of units a particular *Starcraft 2* player built in one particular

match. When the data isn't readily available, shoutcasters go out of their way to curate the

database themselves. While some keep their database secret to provide a personal flair to their

casting, others find it important to share this information with their e-sports communities. One

shoutcaster recalled his surprise when he first worked with a major South Korean e-sports

company with its own dedicated stats team. He expressed that he had never realized how much

he needed a dedicated stats team like you find in traditional sports until that moment. It was then

that he realized how much of his daily routine stats curation filled. While he was grateful for the

help, he also felt personally responsible for stats collection and did not entirely trust the figures

from the professional statisticians. This example shows the difficult position e-sports fills,

constantly stuck between borrowing from traditional sports while not fully able to cope with the

maturity of the sports media industry.

Another role which tends to fill a shoutcaster's daily routine is community maintenance. Whether the caster creates their own content on gaming sites, responds to fans on social media, or spends their time streaming and interacting with the community, they all mentioned some form of community maintenance as part of their duties as a shoutcaster. This particular focus on community maintenance most likely results from the grassroots origins of shoutcasters. These casters were a part of an e-sports community long before they became shoutcasters. Whether they view it as their professional responsibility or a social responsibility remains unclear. They all admit to some level of e-sports advocacy, however. They view PR, and the proliferation of e-sports as part of their responsibilities. The most effective way to tackle this issue, many of them have decided, is through community engagement. The community aspect of shoutcasting identity leads me to a discussion of the affordances of the hyper-connectivity in live-streaming.

Grappling with the Hyper-Connectivity in Live-streaming and E-sports

Shoutcaster Connection

I have yet to meet anyone in the e-sports industry who has not remarked on the unique level of connection present in e-sports. Shoutcasters especially, tap into the network created in these online communities. In a representative summary of my conversations, one shoutcaster explained, "the connectedness is so unique in e-sports. The way that we can interact with fans instantly. The players at the end of the day are gamers, they know exactly where to look. They've got Twitter, they go on Facebook, they post on Reddit." Audience members connect ephemerally in the IRC of a Twitch stream, but they constantly scour the social media outlets of their favorite stars, e-sports companies, and shoutcasters, creating a deeply connected community. Professional shoutcasters understand that the e-sports communities operate in a

unique way when compared to traditional sports fandom. E-sports fans have an odd connection

to franchises or teams within their chosen e-sport. As mentioned before, turnover rates and

general industry growth force entire communities to radically reform from one season to another.

     Where traditional sports fans often follow a team based on geographic loyalty, or

familial connections, e-sports fans do not have that option. While you will often hear of fans

cheering for teams in their geographic region (North America, Europe, South-East Asia, etc) if

they make it to the last few rounds of an international tournament, they may also base their

fandom off of a team logo, or a particular player instead. Shoutcasters recognize this dynamic

and use it to cultivate the community.

Communication, they claim, separates them from traditional sports broadcasts or even

news anchors: "We communicate more with our audience than you'll see TV news anchors or

celebrities, but it's part of our job to get more information out there." The focus on

communication seems to be unique to shoutcasters as the majority of it happens outside of their

broadcasts. While many shoutcasters define their role on-screen as an educator of sorts, the

notion of spreading information about e-sports falls outside of their screen time. This double role

of broadcaster and community manager extends what media scholars have dubbed the

broadcasting persona beyond the point typically associated with sportscasters or news anchors.

Shoutcasters and Persona

Horton and Wohl (1956), two social scientists who study mass media, make the assertion

that mass media performers make a conscious decision to create and maintain parasocial

interactions through the creation of a persona. Social scientists have coined the term parasocial

interaction for the intangible connection which most of us feel to some form of media or another.

Standing in contrast to interpersonal interaction, a person to person exchange between two real

and cognizant human beings, parasocial interaction is instead a unidirectional relationship

(Miller and Steinberg 1970). The feeling of connection we create with fictional characters, news

anchors, or sports stars does not fall within the definition of an interpersonal interaction. Whether

mediated through a screen or the pages of a book, a parasocial interaction does not manifest in an

exchange of thoughts or words between individuals. Rather, it is embodied and lived through one

individual. Schiappa et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of parasocial interaction literature to

better understand how broadcasters 'hook' viewers to a certain show. They concluded that

parasocial interactions can create and prolong connection to television programming. While

Schiappa et al. concede that there are a few opportunities for a parasocial interaction to result in

interpersonal relationships in the physical world, the compelling issue is the establishment of

intimacy mediated through means well outside of a person to person context.

Horton and Wohl set out with the goal of creating a term for the relationship between

performers and their audience in mass media. The authors suggest that the emergence of mass

media created an illusion of connection to performers which was previously unavailable. They

argue that the connection people feel to mass media stars is analogous to primary social

engagement. If this type of engagement takes place in radio and television, where users have no

opportunity to interact with audience members who are not co-present, it follows that the

interaction between broadcasters, their audience, and one another in a Twitch stream is a

particularly deep connection even beyond the level noticed by Horton and Wohl.

Shoutcasters create a familiar face and personality for audience members to connect with.

Mark Levy (1979), another proponent of parasocial interaction who focused his work on news

anchors, suggests that both news anchors and sportscasters help to create and maintain

communities through regular scheduling, conversational tones, and the creation of a broadcasting persona. Shoutcasters perform this same role to even greater effect due to the constant changes surrounding the e-sports industry. The regularity and consistency of shoutcasters' broadcasts helps to foster a feeling of genuine connectedness within the community.

Although difficult to quantify, many conversations with shoutcasters turned to the odd feeling of connection that e-sports fans feel towards one another. One shoutcaster attempted to explain this connection by stating, "[w]henever I go to an event, I realize that fans are just friends I haven't met yet." I found this statement to be particularly poignant. It hints to the sort of intangible connection e-sports industry personalities and fans feel to one another through live-streams. Anecdotally, this air of friendship permeated e-sports events that I have attended and went well beyond what I have felt at traditional sporting events or concerts.

Previously, persona creation and maintenance occurred on-screen or at events only. Social media has forced many media personalities to extend their personas beyond the long-held notions of broadcaster-fan interaction. In many ways, shoutcasters must go beyond even these extended boundaries into a near constant persona maintenance because of their roles in live-streaming and community maintenance. Many shoutcasters give up their personal, off-air time to stream their own gameplay or to create video content which necessarily prolongs the amount of time they embody their broadcast persona.

I found that shoutcasters create a variation on the broadcast persona. Rather than a full-blown broadcasting personality which they inhabit while on-air, most shoutcasters have found that between community management, social media interactions, and broadcasts, they almost never get an opportunity to step out of their role as a shoutcaster. Due to this near constant connection, most shoutcasters acknowledge that they act differently on air, but they tend to

simply invoke a more upbeat and charismatic version of themselves. Echoed in each of the

interviews, the casters point to the idea of excitement, "you have to get excited for the person out

there watching." Even if they are not in the mood to shoutcast, or they have had a bad day,

shoutcasters must leave their personal issues out of the broadcast. This aspect of the

shoutcaster's personality comes out in all of their interactions on social media as well.

     Most of the shoutcasters I interviewed situated their role in e-sports as somewhere

between Public Relations, Marketing, and Community Management. One of the casters

explained the importance of invoking the broadcast persona when speaking about sponsor

expectations: "We're working in an industry with companies behind us, we can't always say

exactly what we want to say." Shoutcasters' acknowledgement of their involvement in securing

sponsorships signals an interesting shift in the e-sports industry: the focus of the broadcast team

on potential revenue generation. I turn now to an analysis of the revenue streams found in both

traditional sports and e-sports broadcasting.

Chapter 3
Revenue
Funding Professional Play

After situating e-sports broadcasting within the greater sports media landscape,

particularly in conventions, casting, and use of medium, it is important to analyze the portions of

sports media production that have made their way into e-sports broadcasting. If we acknowledge

the influence that traditional sports broadcasting has had on e-sports broadcasting in the realms

of conventions and casting, we must also understand the importance of this relationship at the

production and economic levels. In this chapter I discuss how the history and development of the

sports media industrial complex in the U.S. has bled into the economics of the e-sports industry.

In particular, I focus on how sports media models inform the e-sports industry while portions of

the sports industry's revenue streams remain out of reach for e-sports broadcasters. Despite the

reshuffling of the sports media industrial complex mentioned in the introduction to this thesis,

traditional sports broadcasting still relies on the same revenue streams that it had in the past.

Traditional sports producers have fully capitalized on the commodification of their content. E-

sports producers, in contrast, are still shaping their revenue streams within live-streaming. The

commercialization found in the sports media industrial complex has taken hold of the e-sports

industry in several notable ways. Following in the example set by Stein's thesis work, it is not

enough to just acknowledge the relationship between e-sports and traditional sports media, we

must also understand the path which brought e-sports broadcasting to its current state.

Revenue Streams Comparison

Traditional sports economic models consist of a complicated network of franchises, media outlets, and sponsors. Revenue in traditional sports comes through four main categories: gate revenue, merchandising, sponsorships, and media rights (NewZoo 2014). Figure 3 below features a comparison of the revenue generation in the global e-sports industry compared to that of the global sports industry. The figure comes directly from the NewZoo and Repucom report, *The Global Growth of E-sports*.
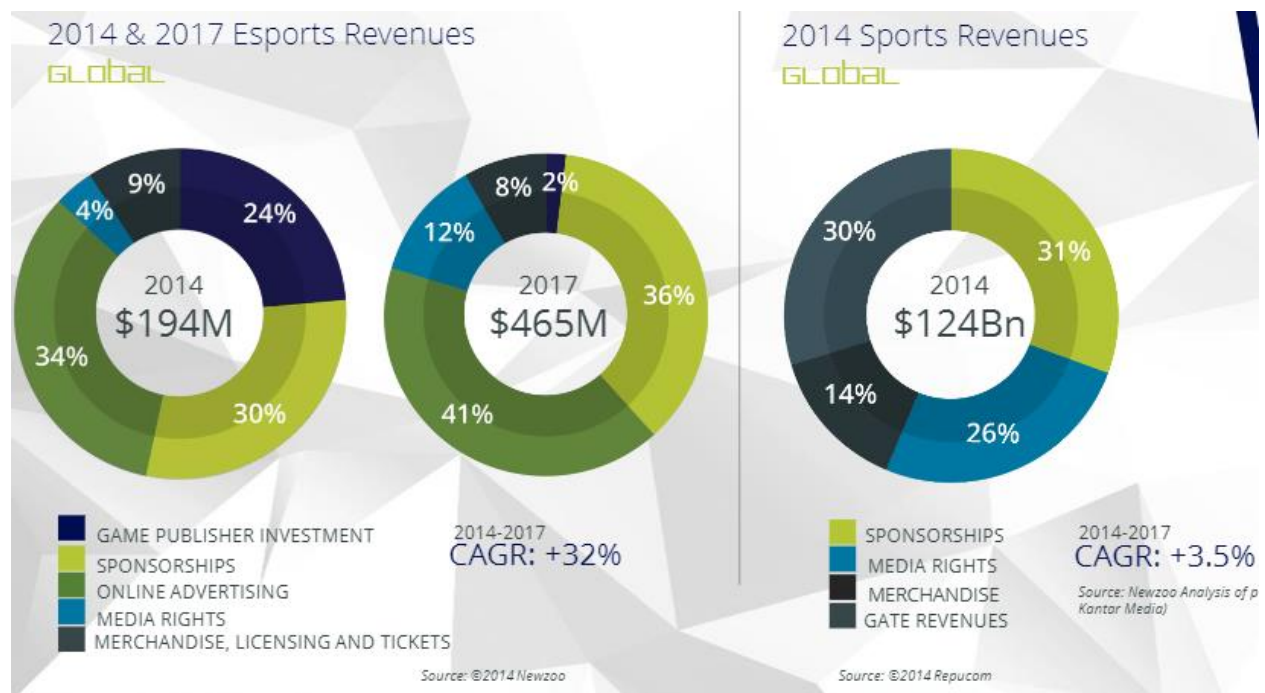
Figure 3- NewZoo and Repucom 2014 Report: The Global Growth of E-Sports

While e-sports companies' revenue streams follow a similar pattern to those found in traditional sports, the two differ in several key areas including media rights, gate revenue, and merchandising. Once again, e-sports broadcasters have borrowed where they could, but end up with something in between categories. Instead of entirely emulating traditional sports broadcasting models, e-sports broadcasters operate in a new system somewhere between that of a

traditional television broadcast, and that of a music festival or tradeshow. There are a few major revenue streams in traditional sports which have yet to cross over to e-sports in any significant way. Two of the major contributing factors to the global sports market, gate revenue and media rights are nearly non-existent in e-sports broadcasting.

Gate Revenue and Merchandising

According to the NewZoo report, gate revenue—ticket sales and other sales associated with live events—contributed 30% of the global sports revenue for 2014. Merchandising, including clothing and other paraphernalia, contributed another 14% of the total. Gate revenue accounted for the vast majority of sports revenue for the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, the sports slump of the 1950's mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis can be attributed directly to the drop in live attendance following a boom in television sales (Rader 1984). Consumers started watching and listening to sports on television and radio more than they attended live games which sent the entire sports industry into a recession. Even through the slump, gate revenue still contributed the majority of traditional sports revenue until 1964. Traditional sports revenue streams changed dramatically after the passing of the Broadcasting Act of 1961 and the emergence of the media rights bidding wars started by Pete Rozelle -- both of which I detail later in this chapter.

Together, gate revenue and merchandising offer the largest disparity between e-sports and traditional sports in terms of revenue. Where traditional sports receive 44% of their revenue from gate revenue and merchandising, e-sports only receives 9%. This huge difference can be accounted for fairly quickly. Sports organizations and franchises are typically multi-million (if not billion) dollar corporations with long histories and access to massive stadiums or arenas. E-

sports broadcasters on the other hand do not have access to the same infrastructure as major

sports franchises. Large sporting venues are prohibitively expensive to rent and have only just

recently started making an appearance in e-sports. As an example, the Intel Extreme Masters

World Championship in Katowice, Poland brought over 75,000 visitors to the Spodek Arena

over the course of a weekend. While a sporting event might charge $100 or more for a single

ticket, audience members attended IEM Katowice for free, a significant factor in the event's

success. E-sports have traditionally had a difficult time pricing live event tickets. Talking to

many industry professionals reveals a split in opinion. Some maintain that the true focus of the e-

sports industry should stay within the realm of broadcasting while others would like to increase

ticket prices to be more in line with traditional sports to provide another revenue stream.

Merchandising, while contributing very little to the overall e-sports industry, has

continued to play a larger part in e-sports over the past few years. Compared to Taylor's initial

investigation of e-sports where team merchandise and online stores for general e-sports

merchandise were relatively rare, e-sports merchandise has become nearly ubiquitous. All large

events will feature gear stores with team sponsored peripherals, t-shirts, hats, and jackets. Almost

every team website also hosts a team store where fans can purchase t-shirts, mousepads, posters,

and the like. Merchandise, similar to traditional sports, has become a signaling of fandom in e-

sports.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships contributed 31% of the total global sports revenue in 2014. Sports

sponsorship helps alleviate the financial burden of sports broadcasting by providing funding

before and during productions. A steady rise in the willingness of companies to participate in

sponsorship-linked marketing has created a hotbed in the sports media industry. As of 2006, sponsorship spending outpaces advertising expenditure in traditional sports (Kinney 2006, 296). As Lesa Ukman of the International Event Group asserts when detailing the appeal of sports sponsorship, "The advantage sponsorship has over all other media is that it is the only medium that gives brands the opportunity to create, enrich and facilitate engaging experiences, emotions and ideas" (1995, 2). Sponsors often look for opportunities to align their product with the appealing aspects of the sporting industry such as the health associations (Kinney 2006, 297).

Functional congruence plays another key role in sports sponsorship. Also known as endemic sponsorship, functional congruence refers to a sponsorship from a product that is inherently part of the event, such as motor oil at a NASCAR events. Lance Kinney (2006), a sports media scholar focused on sports sponsorship, claims that the primary factor in determining the value of a sponsorship deal is the ability of the sponsored event to align with the ideals of the target audience. Functional congruence almost guarantees that these two factors line up.

E-sports broadcasters have had an easy time adapting the traditional sports sponsorship model into their products. Similar to traditional sports, direct sponsorships contribute 30% of the total revenue for the e-sports industry. The arrival of reliable streaming platforms caused a dramatic spike in e-sports viewership. While early SHOUTcasts would reach perhaps a few hundred people, The LCS Worlds and the IEM World Championship both show viewership in the millions (Riot Games 2014; ESL 2014). As a result, sponsors have begun pouring into the e-sports scene attempting to capitalize on the sheer numbers of viewers.

Twitch.tv regularly features promotions and advertisements for all sorts of products. While formerly mired in endemic sponsorships, such as computer hardware or peripheral companies, the field of sponsors has grown considerably. Notably, companies such as Pizza Hut,

Pepsi, and Red Bull have all appeared as sponsors for e-sports events. As these more media savvy companies enter the fray and e-sports broadcasters mature or hire television producers, sponsorships and funding models start resembling their television equivalents. The sponsorship deals mentioned above are often sold and take shape identically to a traditional sponsorship model.

The screen grab below, from a Starcraft World Championship Series, shows how e-sports broadcasters integrate sponsors directly into their stream overlays and in game. When compared to a shot from an NFL game, the similarities are uncanny. I have highlighted the various brand integrations in the broadcasts with yellow boxes. In the *Starcraft 2* image, the large, blue decal is integrated directly into the game's client. As we can see from the two images below, e-sports broadcasters have become quite adept at integrating brands and sponsors into their broadcasts in many of the same ways as traditional sports broadcasters.

Figure 4- Screen grab from Starcraft 2 WCS Match

Figure 5- Screen grab from NFL Broadcast on Fox

Media Rights

Each of the big four sports in the US, football, baseball, basketball and hockey, sell the

rights to broadcast their events for massive sums. While each league sells their media rights for

radically different prices, the major networks quickly buy up the rights to sports events even if

they do not profit off of the deal. As sports scholar Michael Mondello (2006) explains in his

analysis of sports economics, networks "tolerate significant financial losses because they view

sport as a means of validating their position within the industry" (277). They also receive some

ancillary benefits such as making headway in a new region, promotion of their network's

programming, and the ability to activate local subsidiaries. After Fox received criticism for its

$1.58 billion bid for the rights to broadcast National Football Conference (NFC) games, it

quickly deterred critics by showing nearly instant growth in several key markets, including

Detroit, Dallas, and Atlanta (Ashwell and Hums 2004). Fox leveraged its coverage of local

sports to promote other programming in underperforming regions. Media rights sales are about much more than the bottom line.

If we take the NFL as an example, Fox, CBS, and NBC all locked into a collective nine-year deal worth roughly $27 billion in 2011 (Badenhausen 2011). Each of the three networks agreed to pay an average of $1 billion per year while ESPN, separately, renewed their deal with the NFL for an annual fee of $1.9 billion. These figures may seem astronomical. They are. The current bidding war for NFL media rights originated in the leadership of Pete Rozelle and the passing of the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961.

Prior to the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961, team owners were responsible for selling the rights to their team's media independently. This dynamic lead to massive disparity in franchise revenue which, in turn, affects competition and lowers fan interest (Fort 2003, Bellamy 2002, and Mondello 2006). The Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 allowed professional sports franchise owners to share national television revenues equally. As the league's commissioner, Pete Rozelle approached each of the NFL's team owners to hash out a deal collectively with the major networks. In his book on the televisual transformation of sport, Benjamin Rader (1984) explains how Rozelle was effectively able to leverage the bidding war between the three major networks to make it seem as if NFL broadcasting rights were an absolute necessity. As a result, the price for NFL broadcasting rights grew exponentially over the last sixty years. For comparison, the DuMont television network paid $75,000 for broadcasting rights in 1951 compared to 2011's $27 billion. The NFL is often seen as the healthiest of the four major leagues in the US in terms of media rights sales. As such, it provides the perfect model to explain how media rights revenue functions, but is not the most attainable model due to the set of circumstances which propelled the league to its current financial status.

Other major leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA) or Major League Baseball (MLB) have a much more tenuous relationship with television. The MLB especially raises several red flags in the broadcasting realm. The massive number of regular season games diminishes the importance of each individual game. The resulting media rights bidding war, while still impressive, fails to come even remotely near the figures of the NFL. The other contributing factor which, sports scholars Bellamy and Walker (2001) argue, puts the MLB at a disadvantage is the issue of local broadcasting revenue. The MLB still relies heavily on local television revenue. With the massive differences in media markets surrounding different franchises, a revenue disparity appears. This revenue disparity, Mondello argues with the support of Bellamy and Walker, creates a perceived competitive imbalance and subsequent lowered interest in the sport as a whole. Regardless of whether you agree with Mondello, Bellamy, and Walker about baseball's competitive prospects or not, the MLB stands as an example of a league that does not collectively bargain for broadcasting rights and, as a result, is much more dependent on individual media markets.

Large scale international events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup fall somewhere between the two models laid out above. Both the Olympic Games and the World Cup make substantial amounts of money off of media rights by creating regional broadcasting rights battles in each of the areas they serve. For instance, the major networks in the US constantly bid against one another to host the Olympic Game coverage. NBC bought the rights to the 2012 London Olympics for $1.28 billion. NBC's $1.28 billion factors in at about 20% of the overall media rights sales for the 2012 Olympic Games which pulled in just over $5 billion internationally (International Olympic Committee 2014).

This international media rights model has translated into e-sports in a much smaller scale, where local broadcasters will occasionally air e-sports content on television for nominal rights fees (ESL 2014). These very small, local deals in addition to some of the media rights purchases in South Korean markets and live-streaming contracts between players, teams, and streaming platfomrs, make up the 4% total for media rights revenue found in the NewZoo report. While these small scale deals still contribute to the overall e-sports market, the large scale media rights contributions found in traditional sports aren't replicable in e-sports for a number of reasons I investigate below.

Media rights in e-sports only contribute 4% of the total revenue in e-sports. Two primary issues prohibit massive growth surrounding media rights sales in e-sports. First, e-sports lacks a strong, organized coalition of franchises or team owners. The second, and most important restrictions are issues surrounding intellectual property (IP), rights of publicity, and copyright. I will quickly investigate the issues surrounding team ownership and negotiation power followed by an analysis of the IP, rights of publicity, and copyright issues within e-sports.

In the majority of professional sports, team owners exercise an immense amount of power which, makes perfect sense given that most of these franchises are multi-million dollar corporations. Through the formation of a league and installation of a league commissioner, traditional sports franchises are able to collectively bargain with media outlets to their benefit. Both the NFL and MLB provide perfect examples of franchise owners working together to create a sustainable financial ecosystem in which their organizations can thrive. E-sports team owners, on the other hand, have very limited power. In many cases, e-sports teams are a loose coalition of high level players with little to no management experience. There are more formal teams with business savvy owners who navigate the scene efficiently, yet their only resource is the players

they sign. As such, organizing in the same fashion as traditional sports teams does not hold the same appeal.

The closest e-sports team owners have come to creating a unified coalition was the creation of the G7 which collapsed shortly after it began. The G7 formed out of a mutual interest of several e-sports team owners for the proliferation of e-sports as a whole. The organization was focused more on advocating for the e-sports industry than it was on creating a sustainable environment for the team owners. The G7 initiative represented a first step towards a formal e-sports team owner's association which has yet to emerge in e-sports.

As media scholar and e-sports expert T.L. Taylor shows, when stakes become sufficiently high in e-sports, the "the power of the team owners—to negotiate, to maintain their organization—falters" (2012, 153). The LCS follows perfectly in line with Taylor's argument. Per the LCS official rules, many of the team owner's rights are explicitly handled by Riot. The rule set goes so far as to dictate exactly what comprises a team, the salary for each position, including the newly added coaching position, and the position of general manager (Riot Games 2015). Through these, and other rules regarding sponsorships and content within the document, Riot has taken much of the power out of the hands of team owners, instead establishing a model that looks more like the teams being given permission to participate rather than opting into a league such as the MLB or NFL models.

While the models established by the MLB or the NFL team owners might not be replicable in e-sports. One model that may offer a better goal for e-sports team owners is that of collegiate sports. While many people instantly think of the NCAA when referring to collegiate sports, in truth, the athletic conferences such as the ACC, The Big 12, and The Big East actually drive the collegiate sports scene. As Mondello explains, the NCAA only owns the rights to the

national championship tournaments such as the famous March Madness basketball tournament. The rest of the games for the season are the property of the athletic conference of the participating schools. The collegiate sports system is nowhere near flawless, but it makes for a more fitting example for e-sports team owners to work within. It is easy to picture regional e-sports teams associating to negotiate the rights to their exhibitions. At present, however, none of these models seem to be tenable. Of particular concern in applying any traditional sports team ownership models to e-sports is the difficulty in pinpointing exactly who has control over media rights.

The e-sports industry is fraught with many precarious situations surrounding IP and copyright. Unlike in traditional sports, where the game being played is not a product, e-sports inherently runs into issues surrounding game publishers' property. There would be no *Starcraft 2* World Championship Series without Blizzard Entertainment's product, *Starcraft 2*. E-sports companies are at the mercy of game publishers. Their deals can easily be taken away by game publishers. Without the e-sports titles, e-sports broadcasters have nothing to create content with. Issues can arise around e-sports companies working too independently from publishers. In an example of how precarious this position is, I would like to investigate a scuffle around IP and *Starcraft* between the Korean E-Sports Association (KeSPA) and Blizzard Entertainment originally investigated by Taylor (2012). To quickly summarize the battle, KeSPA had been selling broadcasting rights to media outlets without Blizzard's express permission. In 2010, after what Blizzard believed to be a violation of their IP rights, the company decided to end negotiations with KeSPA entirely. The decision dealt a significant blow to KeSPA, which had been instrumental in the fostering of the immensely popular Korean *Starcraft* scene. More

importantly, the KeSPA vs. Blizzard feud over IP offers a cautionary tale for the awkward position of e-sports companies who depend entirely on game publishers.

The debate also raises another concern surrounding IP: ownership of gameplay. As Dan Burke (2013), an IP and copyright lawyer, concludes in his summary of the KeSPA vs Blizzard issue, "[p]articularly with the rise of live video streaming by players, the issues in the dispute are emblematic of the type of intellectual property problem that will be fundamental to e-sports anywhere: does ownership of game output, for broadcast or other purposes, vest with the entity supplying the software medium or with the player controlling the software" (1544). I would add to Burk's stipulation another layer of complication, that of the intermediary broadcaster. Who owns game footage from an e-sports event? Multiple stakeholders may lay claim to e-sports footage. The producer of the broadcast perhaps has the strongest claim considering they produced, broadcasted, and recorded the event, but the game publisher could just as easily claim that they own the gameplay footage since their IP was being used in the tournament. On top of these two stakeholders, to what extent does a player own his performance? Is play a transformative or derivative work? Taylor (forthcoming) investigates the issue of whether these top-tier players create something wholly new and innovative each time they sit down to play a match. Given the popularity of some of these players, is the use of his/her likeness in promotional videos for the tournament an infringement against his rights of publicity?

Some of these questions are much easier to answer than others. According to Burk, most of these issues are nullified through typical game publishers' Terms of Service agreements. While Burk, building on the work of Ochoa, admits that Terms of Service agreements often fail to fully specify the notions of ownership in gameplay, "there is usually not enough at stake for anyone to seriously challenge it" (2013, 1545). Indeed, as Burk continues his analysis of the

potential copyright issues surrounding play as authorial or derivative work, there does not seem

to be a clear set of legal cases which allow for a conclusion.

Turning to traditional sports cases as a model, Burk goes on to cite two court cases which

address professional play as copyrightable work. In the case of *Baltimore Orioles, Inc. v. Major*

League Baseball Players Ass'n, the court ruled that while player performance was unique

enough to constitute copyrightable work, the rights belonged to the team owners instead of the

players (Burk 2013, 1550). E-sports players are in a nearly identical situation as professional

athletes with regards to their rights of publicity. Per typical e-sports player contracts, players sign

over their rights of publicity to the league they play in or to the team they play for (Riot Games

2015, 12). This proviso includes any use of their likeness for promotional activities. It follows

that in the case of e-sports players, their team or the league they play for would own the rights to

their performance as well. This conclusion, however, becomes quite difficult to enforce as a

recent, demonstrative case depicts.

In March of 2015, a dispute arose over who owned the rights to broadcast a certain

League of Legends player's performance. The dispute, since dubbed Spectate Faker,

demonstrates many of the complex issues facing e-sports companies in the realm of media rights.

As part of the *League of Legends* application program interface (API), players are able to search

for any active player and spectate their game within the *League of Legends* spectator client. A

rather savvy Twitch streamer used this functionality to find and automatically broadcast all

games being played by a famous Korean *League of Legends* player, Faker. The stream, named

Spectate Faker, quickly gained a following among the *League of Legends* community, but its

legality was questioned. To provide some brief context, Faker plays professionally for SK

Telecom T1 (SKT), a team owned directly by the South Korean telecommunications company,

SK Telecom. SKT signed a contract with the streaming platform, Azubu, which mandated that

their players would only stream their play sessions on Azubu. Soon after the arrival of Spectate

Faker, the stream's owner received a Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedown

notice from Azubu claiming that the stream infringed on the contract signed between themselves

and SKT over the ownership of the broadcasting rights for Faker's play sessions. The issue was

further complicated when the streamer, StarLordLucian, refuted Azubu's DMCA claim on the

grounds that section VI of the *League of Legends* Terms of Service agreement provides

ownership of user generated content, including game play, to Riot Games (Riot Games 2015b).

Riot then stepped into the issue claiming ownership of the gameplay and refuting Azubu's claim.

After SKT issued a statement regarding Faker's discomfort with his performance being streamed

without his consent, Riot took down the stream on the same grounds that Azubu had originally

pursued (Merrill 2015). This complex and fascinating case showcases the issues that may

become legal battlegrounds in e-sports. Luckily, Spectate Faker, was resolved without a lengthy

legal dispute.

Spectate Faker along with the KeSPA vs. Blizzard dispute show the immense power of

game publishers in this realm. While Riot pursued their course of action based on the Terms of

Service agreement signed by all players, they also could have fallen back on the rules established

as part of the *League of Legends* Champions League in South Korea. Much like the LCS in both

North America and Europe, the rules for the South Korean league include a section which signs

rights of publicity over to Riot Games (Lewis 2014). This example exhibits the complicated

scenarios surrounding media rights in e-sports. Until more formal resolutions are established for

these issues, media rights sales cannot possibly match their traditional sports counterparts.

New Revenue Streams in E-sports

Thus far, we have seen how e-sports broadcasters have capitalized, or failed to capitalize, on the revenue streams found in the traditional sports industry. In addition to these traditional revenue streams, e-sports take advantage of two new revenue streams which they do not replicate from the traditional sports industry: publisher investment and online advertising. Both revenue streams are integral to the operation of the e-sports industry. Online advertising in particular is projected to propel the e-sports industry ever higher as the industry matures (NewZoo 2014, 60).

Publisher Investment

E-sports companies rely heavily on publisher investment, one revenue stream that does not appear in traditional sports at all. This difference allows e-sports to grow in a different direction than traditional sports. Game publisher investment, which represents 24% of all e-sports revenue, shows how much e-sporrts companies depend on game publishers. The figure used by NewZoo accounts for, "the net investment made by publishers after the direct e-sports revenues have been deducted" (NewZoo 2014, 46). It might go without saying, but without game publishers, e-sports would not function.

Truly understanding this dynamic requires a brief investigation into the various models of e-sports companies. Amidst the near constant opening and closing of e-sports companies, several models have shown to outlast others. I now offer two primary models of e-sports organizations with a third model which emerged recently that has yet to be replicated: One-off events like DreamHack or The International, pure e-sports companies like Major League Gaming (MLG) and the Electronic Sports League (ESL), and developer produced e-sports such as the *League of Legends* Championship Series (LCS).

One-off events come in two varieties, single-title events like The International, and multi-title events like DreamHack. The International features only one title: *Dota 2*. The event is billed as the world championship for *Dota 2*, though the same teams that participate in The International often compete against one another regularly at other large-scale *Dota 2* tournaments. Valve, the developers of *Dota 2,* outsourced the streams production to a television crew in 2014, but have, in the past, relied on white label services from other e-sports companies (Valve Software 2014). DreamHack, which is billed as the world's largest computer festival, got its start as a mega-LAN in Sweden. It has since become one of the largest, and most followed e-sports events of the year. DreamHack features tournaments in many different e-sports titles rather than focusing on just one. Stream production at these one-off multi-title events falls to several different stake-holders, either white-label e-sports production companies or publisher-funded productions (Dreamhack 2015).

ESL and MLG fall into the model of what I refer to as pure e-sports companies. They both offer top-tier play and large-scale events while supporting the full range of play from beginner to pro. Neither company focuses entirely on one title. Instead, they rely on the full range of e-sports titles. Publisher relationships make up a significant portion of their business. Without publisher contracts, ESL and MLG have no product. They are stuck in a tenuous situation. Their entire business relies on game publishers providing solid e-sports titles. On the other end of the equation, they both hold substantial investments in production as well as broadcasting platforms. In the case of ESL, they have partnered with Twitch.tv and host their content on both Twitch and ESL.tv. MLG instead hosts their own content on tv.majorleaguegaming.com. ESL and MLG both run multiple tournaments and leagues. For example, ESL offers both large one-off events such as ESL One, and long-term leagues like the

Intel Extreme Masters, which makes multiple stops around the world each season. ESL also

provides white-label services for several publishers including Wargaming.net and Blizzard

Entertainment and, until the 2015 season, helped produce Riot Games' flagship e-sports product,

the LCS.

Riot's LCS emerged recently as a new model for e-sports production: developer produced

e-sports. The LCS is unique in e-sports for a number of reasons. Primarily, it's an e-sports

product run entirely by a game publisher. Riot Games produces both *League of Legends* and its

e-sports component. While Riot partnered with ESL to produce the European LCS broadcasts for

the first few seasons, as of its fifth season, Riot runs the LCS independently.

Riot Games offers an interesting case against the NewZoo model. Where pure e-sports

companies like ESL or MLG rely on publisher funding to offset some of the costs associated

with event production, Riot absorbs those costs. Riot's investment into its own e-sports product

cannot be factored in as a revenue stream. Instead, it represents the same sort of investment CBS,

NBC, or ESPN make into a major sports leagues which regularly account as a loss overall, but

provide many non-pecuniary benefits like exposure in new regions. The LCS may sound like the

solution to many of e-sports' biggest problems, but it has its own set of issues that Riot faces

regularly. Firstly, where companies like Wargaming.net, Activision, and Blizzard offload the

cost of production equipment and studio space to companies like MLG or ESL, Riot has

absorbed that cost themselves. In fact, Riot Games' CEO, Dustin Beck claims that the LCS is an

investment into the game's community. Beck views the e-sports production costs similarly to the

way major networks view broadcasting rights fees in traditional sports. Aside from the cost, the

LCS is entirely beholden to the success of one title. If *League of Legends* starts to falter or wane,

the LCS studios and production team will become a wasted investment. Clearly, Riot has plans

to avoid that fate, but looking through the history of e-sports shows that e-sports titles come and go in waves. Many titles have been able to stay relevant for years, but none have stayed in the spotlight for long.

Riot's success or potential failure with the LCS holds high stakes for the e-sports industry as a whole. If they are able to stabilize *League of Legends* as a consistent e-sports title for years to come while cultivating both a player-base and a large spectator community, Riot may prove that a developer produced e-sports program can create a sustainable e-sports environment akin to traditional sports. Unfortunately, if many more game developers follow suit, companies like MLG and ESL would quickly run out of content.

Online Advertising

Advertising has become ubiquitous at sporting events. Hardly a second passes without banner ads or sponsored portions of the broadcast flashing across the screen. Whenever the action stops, commercials fill the gap. In the US in particular, sports advertising revenue accounts for roughly 24-39% of the total advertising revenue across all content for Fox, ABC, and CBS (Mondelo 2006, 281). Online advertising represents a significant source of revenue in e-sports. Ad revenue from sports programming contributes a significant source of income for the major networks, but does not funnel back into the sports market in the way that direct sponsorships do. The ads that a broadcasting company shows may or may not be entirely independent of the current program. For example, you might see a commercial for a local insurance company during the broadcast of a major national sports event. This local deal contributes to the overall revenue of the network which owns your local station, but not to the revenue generated by the sports industry. The issue comes down to the difference in

infrastructure between television and live-streaming. Where television networks are large

corporations with a vast network of local subsidiaries that distribute content, live-streaming

platforms reach any viewer who has access to and visits the website. This aspect of live-

streaming creates nearly global audiences that view the same content. The sports content on

television networks depends entirely on local subsidiaries. In this way, the e-sports industry

benefits by hosting online advertising directly on their stream which reaches their entire audience

and funnels back to the producer of the event. The traditional sports market can only tap into

those channels through sponsorship and media rights deals at a national level. The disparity

between the two markets will diminish as live-streaming becomes more prevalent in traditional

sports broadcasting.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have embraced the comparison between sports and e-sports to investigate the extent to which the e-sports industry fits within the sports media industrial complex. What I have found throughout is that the industry is in constant conversation with the sports industry, whether through use of media, commentary, or revenue. This influence has helped e-sports to legitimize rather quickly over a short time-span while still attempting to find its identity within the greater sports media landscape.

Through my investigation of sports media in transition, I focused on the historical influences present in the e-sports industry to illustrate how live-streaming and e-sports not only emerge directly from earlier forms of sports media, but actually reassert themselves back into older forms of media. As shown through the many reshufflings of the sports media landscape, these older forms of media still fill their own distinct roles even with the arrival of a new medium. Live-streaming and e-sports may seem different from their predecessors, but they have yet to fully capitalize on the affordances of the new medium. E-sports also still makes use of traditional forms of media in much the same way that traditional sports have.

In my analysis of shoutcasters, I focused on their collection of conventions from traditional sports broadcasts to create their own identities within the e-sports industry where they are just now grappling with how best to make use of live-streaming to foster community connections. Traditional sports provided the model for shoutcasters while also giving them a platform to launch off of. Through their use of traditional sports broadcastings conventions, shoutcasters signal the professionalization and legitimacy of the e-sports industry. This

emulation helps shoutcasters to create a quickly recognizable formula for potential sponsors to appreciate and potentially invest.

Comparing revenue streams present in traditional sports with the e-sports industry revealed many issues which face the e-sports industry. I found that while sports models largely inform the revenue streams in e-sports, there are several significant barriers to entry which hold e-sports back from fully emulating traditional sports. The revenue streams look similar at a cursory glance, but do not necessarily represent the best comparison for the e-sports industry. As exhibited in both the discussion of commentary and revenue, the e-sports industry copies from traditional sports in many places, but fails to truly capture the full toolkit available to traditional sports broadcasters. Whether we look to record-keeping or media rights issues, several key aspects of the e-sports industry would have to change before they could capitalize fully on the models they often follow. I now turn to areas for possible interventions based on the research conducted for this thesis.

Implications and Potential Interventions

Making the Most of Live-streaming: Twitch Plays Pokémon and Can't Kill Progress

Live-streaming still struggles to find its distinctive niche. While offering a combination of earlier forms of media, live-streaming content still apes television broadcasts as we can see from the various screen grabs from e-sports events presented earlier. Live-streaming at its roots offers a deeply connected experience through allowing users in disparate locations to watch and discuss the same live content. Producers have yet to fully tap into this dynamic. Early experimentations with the new medium are beginning to appear though. A great example of the potential of live-streaming that capitalizes on the combination of a televisual broadcast with an

IRC is a stream called "Twitch Plays *Pokémon*". In this stream, viewers are able to affect the broadcast from their home computers or mobile device using the IRC. By inputting commands that correspond to the controls found on a Gameboy, viewers are able to 'play' Pokémon with their fellow viewers. While this functionality would be difficult to implement into a sports or e-sports broadcast, an interesting advertising campaign by game publisher, Square Enix, in April 2015 offers another potential method for fully capitalizing on the audience of a live-stream. The project, titled "Can't Kill Progress," featured an interactive fiction with mechanics for viewers to affect the broadcast through the use of the IRC. The outcome of the narrative depended on viewer votes in the IRC and viewers were able to switch camera angles and other factors in the televisual broadcast by typing into the IRC. Experimental broadcasts such as "Can't Kill Progress" and "Twitch Plays *Pokémon*" show potential ways to take full advantage of the affordances of live-streaming. It will be interesting to see if some of these mechanics make their way into e-sports broadcasting.

Revenue

Online advertising currently contributes 30% of the total e-sports market. When added to publisher investment and sponsorships, 88% of the total revenue generated in e-sports comes from outside sources. With only 12% of revenue generated in e-sports coming from within, the e-sports industry stands in a precarious position. Any one of those three contributing revenue streams could dry up in an instant, leaving pure e-sports companies like ESL and MLG scrambling. Publishers could start following the model established by Riot and create their own e-sports products in-house, but acquiring the necessary components for streaming, including studio space, cameras, production crews, etc. requires a startling amount of investment,

especially when there is no guarantee that an e-sports title will be a hit. Regardless, the current

economic models in e-sports do not seem to be sustainable in the long term. I now offer three

potential interventions within e-sports revenue streams: team organization, formalized media

rights, and the use of a model other than traditional sports.

Team Organization

The G7, while ultimately a failed initiative, indicates a desire among team owners to

create some form of coalition. Indeed, I would argue that the formalization of team owners into

at least a semi-exclusivity deal with a league would create major stability and growth within the

industry. Since many e-sports organizations, like Fnatic, SK Gaming, Dignitas, and Team Solo

Mid, field teams across multiple games, this proposition will not be easy to deliver on. To

organize the teams into a stronger coalition, they would have to work with their competitors

across multiple titles with many different publishers and e-sports producers. Riot's LCS provides

some semblance of the infrastructure I refer to here, but it takes much of the power away from

the team owners. If instead, the team owners met together and collectively approached Riot, or

another developer, to take part in a stable league, we might see an interesting shift in the power

dynamic of e-sports. At the moment, publishers hold the reins in the e-sports industry. As I've

mentioned several times throughout the thesis, without their products, there is no e-sports

industry.

Another issue facing the formal organizing of teams actually comes down to the

community aspect of e-sports. Many community members on social media, forums, and

elsewhere laud the openness of e-sports. A freelance player currently has the ability to create

their own team and, if they play well enough, qualify for some of the biggest tournaments in the

world. A formal team organization like those found in professional sports would stifle this freedom in e-sports, effectively relegating these free-lancers to an underdeveloped amateur scene.

A formal coalition of teams might also exacerbate issues surrounding IP and copyright that do not currently cause huge battles in the e-sports industry. If team owners suddenly decide to take control of their players' performances and perhaps attempt to wrest control of media rights from publishers, we could see a potentially catastrophic legal battle emerge. With only two cases currently available to settle the dispute of IP and media rights ownership in e-sports, we have yet to see the truly industry-altering potential of an extended legal battle in the realm of IP in e-sports. Thus far, players have been willing to sign over their rights of publicity to team owners just like in traditional sports. Deals like SK Telecom signing with Azubu to stream their players' practice sessions are quite common among e-sports teams, but contribute very little to the overall e-sports industry, an aspect which, with the proper intervention, could radically change how the e-sports industry functions.

Formalized Media Rights

A fundamental shift in the way media rights work in e-sports could potentially stabilize the tenuous position occupied by pure e-sports companies. If e-sports companies were able to monetize the rights to their content in the same way that professional sports have, the growth potential is limitless. Mondelo, in his analysis of sports economics, illustrates that media rights revenue has infinite growth potential within the sports industry (2006, 283). Over the past fifty years, media rights prices in traditional sports have grown exponentially. Meanwhile, e-sports barely taps into this potentially massive revenue stream. Thus far, the issue has come down to a

shared interest. Twitch.tv, the current most popular streaming platform is essentially free to use. There has been a general desire between e-sports companies and streaming platforms to grow e-sports together. As the e-sports industry becomes more mature and financially stable, we could potentially see this model of shared interest change. E-sports contributes a massive share of Twitch's viewership and content. If e-sports producers suddenly decided to charge substantial amounts for their content, Twitch would be put in an awkward situation. Likewise, if Twitch decided to charge content creators large hosting fees, we might see a dispersal of the e-sports audience to the many different outlets associated with their e-sports content instead. The current model works for now, but if either party becomes unsatisfied with the arrangement, the industry would drastically transform.

A different model entirely: Music Festivals

While I have spent much of my time comparing the e-sports industry to the sports industry, other models could potentially apply much more readily. As James Lampkin (2015), senior pro-gaming manager at ESL, posits in his talk about mega-events at the Game Developer's Conference in 2015, a music festival provides a fairly analogous model to an e-sports event. Lampkin likes to think of e-sports events more in terms of an e-sports festival than a sporting event. As such, he looks to fund these events not through advertising and media rights, but instead through sponsorships and gate revenue. As an example of success with this model, Coachella, a popular music festival in the US, grossed $47 million in ticket sales in 2012 (Waddell 2012). Replicating the model provided by music festivals means creating an event with enough attraction points to warrant high ticket prices, concession prices, and merchandising prices.

Most of the massive e-sports events run by ESL feature attractions besides the main event. ESL One Frankfurt 2014, a *Dota 2* tournament, featured booths for various game publishers and sponsors. Among the games featured in the stadium during the event, *Heroes of Newerth*, a direct competitor to *Dota 2,* debuted new content and ran their own mini-events in the rear section of the stadium. The same sort of arrangement could not happen at a major league sporting event. You won't see an official Major League Soccer game being played at an NFL game. The *Heroes of Newerth* booth, however, helped alleviate much of the financial burden of producing the event from ESL. These deals help free up funds so that pure e-sports companies can continue to pursue mega-events instead of being turned away by prohibitively high venue rental costs. The festival model in general is more sustainable for e-sports major events though traditional sports models tend to provide the framework for leagues and tournaments.

Further Research

As mentioned in the introductory literature review, e-sports literature is a quickly growing body of research. Soon it may become difficult to keep track of the many directions the scholarship has taken, but there are still several areas that beg for further investigation. Particularly, a critical analysis of team structures and ownership could provide some fascinating case studies that industry professionals could use to better assess a key component in their industry. Michael Kane's 2008 investigation of professional video gaming does delve into the subjects of team ownership and the difficulties facing owners as individuals, albeit through a journalistic lens. It would be fascinating to see an academic inquiry into the major franchises like Dignitas, Cloud9, and Team Solo Mid.

Aside from team owners, I believe an investigation into e-sports sponsors would reveal much about the e-sports industry. Learning how these sponsors view their investment as well as their formulation of the industry could provide an interesting avenue for academics and industry professionals to explore. What do these sponsors believe they receive from their sponsorship? How do they formulate the e-sports audience? How do they choose which events to sponsor? Do they rely entirely on a traditional sports sponsorship marketing model, or on something different?

Closing words

In many ways, I find that the 'sports' portion of e-sports creates an unnecessary distraction. Since the onset of the industry, it has caused a debate that constantly re-emerges as e-sports events, players, and teams make headlines in traditional news outlets. While I find the comparison to be trivial, it cannot be denied that it has fundamentally shaped the entire e-sports industry. For many, including potential fans, players, and even sponsors, sports media offers the only applicable model for comparison when discussing the phenomenon of e-sports with the uninitiated.

I have argued here that the sports media industrial complex informs e-sports, but the industry still innovates and creates something new and different. These innovations provide brief glimpses into the potential for e-sports to create its own identity, away from the comparison to traditional sports. The e-sports industry is still very much an industry in flux. In the constant reshuffling of the field, an impression of volatility has formed, but the industry has survived for over two decades. As I near the end of my research on this subject and prepare to move into the industry, I am struck by just how excited I am to see the uncertain future of e-sports.

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