

**Public Gaming:
eSport and Event Marketing in the Experience
Economy**

**by
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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2008

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art, and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2012**

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Abstract

This thesis situates organized competitive digital gaming (eSport) in the context of historical sport, the rise of the computer and video games industry, event marketing, and the experience economy. It argues that the oftentimes misattributed origins of eSport in truth first took place during the early 1980s in arcades, when the various criteria for sport, including public contest, a structured framework for victory and defeat, mediatization and promotion, professionalization, record-keeping, and an engaged audience were already in place. It then goes on to discuss the various manifestations and changing nature of eSport as a commercial media product in the internet era before identifying what this all means for sport, gaming, and event marketing in the digital phase of the experience economy. The paper concludes that the transition of competitive play from television to the internet has profound implications for the ways that media products are being consumed and marketed.

Keywords: Digital games; eSport; event marketing; experience economy; professional video gaming; public play

Dedication

*For my amazing parents, Barbara and Les
Borowy.*

Acknowledgements

I am extraordinarily grateful for the guidance of my senior supervisor, Dr. Steve Kline, who persevered through countless drafts of this project. His unsurpassed insight and knowledge spanning countless subjects helped to consolidate my thoughts when they were haphazardly strewn about dozens of pages.

I am also thankful to my second supervisor, Dr. Dal Yong Jin, for being among the early scholars writing on the subject of professional gaming, as well as providing numerous helpful suggestions for this project. I would also like to thank other faculty and staff at the School of Communication for the opportunity to pursue this degree, and who were always available for help when the need arose.

I must also acknowledge the contributions of those people involved in eSport that took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me about their experiences, ideas, and anticipations. Beyond those I bantered with online through email, in games or on message boards, I would like to especially thank those who participated in my formal recorded interviews – Kelvin, John, Ryan, ‘Nucholza,’ as well as those who wished to remain anonymous.

My most profound thanks are for my family. They have supported me regardless of the circumstances, have always been there for me through difficult periods, and have put up with some of my more unappealing characteristics without descending into the realm of loathing (I think). Whatever happens I will always love them.

Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Partial Copyright Licence	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Public Spectacles and the Experience Economy	4
1.2. Overview	11
2. Playing, Gaming and Sports	14
2.1. Introduction	14
2.1.1. On Definition: Play, games, and Sports in Contemporary Culture	15
2.2. Sport History: Play and Spectatorship	18
2.2.1. The Institutionalization of Sport	21
2.2.2. The Olympics as Conceptual Predecessor for eSport	28
2.3. Conclusion	32
3. Offline Public Gaming and eSport in the Arcades.....	35
3.1. Introduction	35
3.2. Early 1980s Arcade Culture.....	36
3.2.1. Playing games ... on Television: The 1980s	43
3.2.2. Arcade Economics in the Late 1980s and 1990s.....	45
3.3. Going Home: The Console Movement.....	51
3.3.1. Changing Characteristics of Public Arcade Play in the 2000s	60
3.4. Conclusion	63
4. The Networking of Public Gaming.....	65
4.1. From Arcade to PC Café	65
4.2. Early eSport League Formation in the U.S.	72
4.3. The Rise of PC cafés in South Korea	76
4.3.1. Korean eSport becomes National Sport	81
4.3.2. Aspirations of Sportization: Conflicts between Institutionalization and Subversion.....	85
4.4. Public gaming transformations in the U.S. – 1990s-2000s.....	93
4.5. Prognosis for the 21 st Century	95
4.6. Conclusion	104

5. Conclusion.....	106
References.....	110

List of Tables

Table 1. Audience statistics for Major League Gaming's 2011 Season.....	65
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List of Figures

Figure 1. Sport and its progeny eSport as a response to – and at the intersection of – the oftentimes colliding interests of contemporary capitalism and the desire/need to be in touch with general human propensities that were lost with urbanization.....	15
Figure 2. Defining Play, Games, and Sport (from Guttmann, 1978, p. 9).....	17
Figure 3. Total arcade games manufactured by Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, and Taito in five-year instalments, between 1981-2010 (inclusive).	58
Figure 4. Coin-operated titles released per year by Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, and Taito.	59

1. Introduction

The centenary 2004 World Series of Baseball has become legendary in the sporting world. The New York Yankees, who were 26-time champions, would bring their opponent Boston Red Sox to within three outs of being swept in four games. Red Sox fans, well-acquainted with the team's history of disappointment in the post-season, anticipated the loss and began to tune out early. However, the team won game 4 in extra innings. Game 5's win was complemented with a controversial game 6 victory, setting the stage for the tie-breaking game 7. After winning the seventh and final game 10-3, Red Sox owner John Henry famously exclaimed that this had been "The greatest comeback in baseball history." Noting that this was the first instance of a major league team overcoming a 3-0 post-season discrepancy, various media began to construct a narrative of the Yankees dynasty as the "evil empire," with the Red Sox as underdog in a David-versus-Goliath confrontation. Boston president Larry Lucchino was quoted as saying "All empires fall sooner or later" (Associated Press, 2004).

Elsewhere that same year, a similar event would transpire that would prove just as significant for U.S.-based arcade/console eSport¹. At Evolution Championship Series 2004, an annual fighting game tournament based in the U.S., competitive *Street Fighter*² contestant Daigo Umehara, a popular professional gamer from Japan, was largely favoured to win his match. However, Daigo, playing as "Ken", was hit with a series of

¹ eSport is the term designated to organized competitive digital gaming.

² *Street Fighter* is a series of games in the fighting genre, developed by Capcom.

unanswered strikes from opponent Justin Wong's "Chun Li". As his health depleted to miniscule amounts, it appeared that Daigo had been beaten in a surprise upset. At 50 seconds left in the 99 second round, Daigo's health bar rested at approximately 10%, in stark contrast to Justin's. At this level of competition, the result seemed certain. Nevertheless, Daigo scored a few hits that dropped Justin to about half. And then down to a third. Regardless, a member of the audience pre-emptively congratulated the apparent soon to be winner, shouting "way to go, Justin!" as Justin was able to score a Super (an exceedingly powerful attack). At this point, Daigo's health was a sliver of his total life bar – it was barely noticeable as Justin launched his powerful outbreak. In a subsequent series of events that would destroy suspension of disbelief in a fictional narrative, Daigo began to parry every attack. In *Street Fighter*, the parry is a skill that, according to professional player Seth Killan, can take over half a year to master (Su, 2010).

Although I was never a competitive *Street Fighter* player by any means, when I first watched this match online during my undergrad I shared the disbelief of those witnessing the event first-hand. That Daigo was able to string a chain of parries (totalling 15) successively in response to a Super was unfathomable to those who watched this bout. Each parry had to be performed within three to four frames of game play (there were 30 frames within a given second in the game) and the parry was significant because it resulted in a lack of chip damage - even blocking attacks would cause minor damage that would have otherwise led to Daigo's defeat. With each successful parry, the audience cheered louder and louder. Then Daigo unleashed his own Super, and the comeback was complete. As K.O. flashed across the screen, the crowd at hand was deafening; such levels of noise are usually reserved for the World Cup or the Super Bowl, not a video game. Tom Cannon, one of three directors at EVO, cites this as "the moment" that professional gaming competitions would become a big deal: "That's when I knew that fighting games could ignite people's passion in the same way that sports do" (Miller, 2010). Images of Daigo's comeback at EVO 2004 spread throughout the Internet, and the match turned out to be a watershed moment for non-PC eSport in North America.

The next year, National Geographic ran a television special on the *World Cyber Games*, which they had dubbed "the Olympics of the Digital Universe." The report

begins by describing that a number of professional gamers, some as young as 15 years old, are making \$100,000 or more by playing computer games in Korea. The top gamers there are described as cyber-athletes: they compete not on a field or court, but on a large stage, with pyrotechnics, dry ice, and laser lights wowing the vociferous audience. Adorned in costumes full of sponsorship logos, the documentary also tracks the regimented team training programs that the gamers undergo. Although I knew that organized competitive games and sports have persisted throughout human history I was unaware that today competitive gaming had reached such a rock concert level of showmanship overseas.

As I started writing this thesis, my academic interest in the gaming industry began to re-focus on the growth of these eSports events as a little remarked-upon aspect of the broader commentary on gamer culture. As I examined the history of eSport events what I saw was the ways that public gaming was re-positioning players and fans within a promotional chain that organizes synergies between competitive gaming forms, public events, spectating, marketing, and business strategy. Historically, this made conventional sporting events into a leading commodity in the mediated marketplace, and examining these convergences resultantly reveals important synergies when it comes to the marketing of gaming as a competitive play experience as well. To analyze the parallels between the growth of the sporting and gaming industries, I will use the idea of “the spectacle,” as first developed by Guy Debord in the 1960s, to comment on the flamboyant audiovisual showcases, corporate marketing ambitions, celebrity and audience-driven passion that are the cornerstones of public events. Accordingly, I will argue that the parallels between these public events are not coincidental. What these two ‘comeback stories’ have in common is that they also reveal a transition in the business models being developed in the digital phase of the experience economy. By investigating the history of public gaming events in more detail, I propose to discuss the issues raised by the synergies forged by high-tech corporations in their efforts to promote eSports.

In this historical analysis I will strive to highlight three aspects of the incorporation of public competitions into the marketing of digital games: the first is the historical dynamics fostering the growing marketization of sports and play; the second is how the adoption of digital technologies re-framed the marketing of public gaming events; and

third, the changes within gamer culture that arise with the professionalization of the cyber-athlete in the eSport model. Consequently, I suggest that the study of eSport affords insight into an important transition from the televised to the digital spectacle for those interested in the political economy of gamer culture.

1.1. Public Spectacles and the Experience Economy

The computer and video games industry is one that is anticipated to grow from \$67 billion in 2012 to \$82 billion by 2017 (DFC Intelligence, 2012). However, ancillary components to the games and the hardware they run on incessantly raise this total to greater heights. Beyond the toys, clothing, and other merchandise, public gaming contests have run parallel to the growth of the various stages of digital gaming and are among the most ubiquitous illustrations of such supplemental products. These competitive gaming events have become a core feature within the promotional apparatus of the digital games industry more broadly; from the very beginning digital gaming acquired a competitive element that was soon integrated into the overall marketing of gaming as a newly burgeoning form of entertainment. In the 1980s tournaments helped to build gamer communities at arcades, while in the 1990s gaming contests at LAN parties and PC cafés worked to support the rise of the PC as a new platform for gaming. More recent eSport contests have become indicative of a shift in the way events are witnessed, from the traditional televised spectacle to the increasingly popular digital online viewership model. In this sense competitive gaming as a key feature of overall gamer culture also demonstrates the changing nature of public event consumption as a leading product of what has become known as “the experience economy”.

The idea of the experience economy emerges from the commentary on global economic change over the last few millennia. For much of human history, the predominant mode of commodity production had been agriculture. This was followed by rapid advances through the industrial economy, leading to the ‘knowledge or service economy.’ Recently, scholars have constructed a dialogue whereby the contemporary economy can be seen as one primarily comprised of and emphasizing “experience” as its hallmark product. However, when examining the cultural industries scholars often

overlook the intermediary stages associated with the transition through the service and information economy. Although media and computerization are assumed to be important drivers of this shift in the cultural industries, there has been a lack of discussion of marketing and commercial television as key apparatuses. After World War II, as a reflection of early transitions to the economy of experience, consumer goods marketing increasingly emphasized the value-added aspects of commercial experiences. McLuhan (1964) indeed highlighted that television proved to be as revolutionary in the U.S. during the 1950s as radio had been in Europe two decades prior. Television allowed viewers “to feel the explosive and aggressive energies that are released by the onset of the new literacy and mechanization. These explosions come just at a time when the new electric technology combines to make us share them on a global scale” (pp. 316-17).

In *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), a work of ‘social forecasting,’ Daniel Bell claimed that within 30-50 years society would experience the emergence of the so called “post-industrial society.” Bell asserted that while goods production through manufacturing is making way for services as one instance of the transition to post-industrialism, there are significant organizational and structural social accompaniments as well, something that is typically overlooked by his readers. One of these new reorganizations is the role that science has played in the information economy. Science and technology have increasingly become the new mechanisms for economic growth and social transformation, and this could be evidenced by the unprecedented rate of expansion and the social centrality of communications and interactive technologies. For instance, Bell notes that modern economics was only possible because of the ability of computers to bridge formal theory and large databases. He elaborates that “The joining of science, technology, and economics in recent years is symbolized by the phrase ‘research and development’ (R&D)” out of which “have come the science-based industries (computers, electronics, optics, polymers) which increasingly dominate the manufacturing sector of the society and which provide the lead, in product cycles, for the advanced industrial societies” (1973, p. 25). What is significant is that advances in technology fields are now thoroughly dependent on “the primacy of theoretical work” and knowledge which become “the strategic resource, the axial principle, of a society.”

Similarly attempting to forecast approaching economic trends during the early 1970s, the formative writings of futurist Alvin Toffler can be seen to anticipate the shift to an experience-centric market. Toffler referred to what he called the experience industries as contributing to the *'throw away culture'* in which "man's relationships with *things* are increasingly temporary" (1970, p. 51). Toffler interestingly used the example of playthings, namely a young girl and her Barbie doll, to illustrate the point. Soon after the girl obtains the doll, a newer version is released, and Mattel, the company manufacturing the dolls, offers a promotion in which trading in older versions of the doll for the newer one will yield some kind of deal advantageous for both interests. Toffler's analysis of the changing economy pointed to the new range of products being bought and sold in the market beyond cars and appliances (from museums and therapy to travel) to anticipate the underlying shift in the overall economic structure. He notes how economists of the time like Bell had recognized the importance of a services-oriented economy, but insightfully wonders what would replace services in a "post-service economy" as the engine of growth. Like Bell, he pointed to the expansion of popular arts and culture, recognizing that much of the existing cultural industries were "devoted to the creating or staging of specialized psychological experiences" (Toffler, 1970, p. 227). He anticipated "the growth of a strange new sector based on what can only be called the 'experience industries'" because the key to the post-service economy³, he argued, lay "in the psychologization of all production, beginning with manufacture" (Toffler, 1970, p. 221).

³ Although many authors conflate the ideas of service, information, knowledge, and experience economy, I hold that there are significant differences. For instance, Poulsson and Kale (2004) highlight that while the experience economy concept could rightly be considered an extension of the service sector, there are significant differentiators; namely, a service entails something that is done *for* you, while an experience is a product that does something *to* you.

Growth in the “experience industries” he believed would be driven by designing goods beyond basic needs, whose ‘added value’ was based on the appeal to “psychological extras” for the consumer. These new industries he argued added a “psychic load to [the] base product” which resulted in “the consumer gladly pay[ing] for this intangible benefit” (Toffler, 1970, p. 222). In other words, consumers are willing to pay for non-utilitarian “extras” when purchasing products in the name of experience or memory. In this milieu, the product actually becomes lived involvement at a particular moment and in a particular place – what is packaged and sold is the consumption process, not a physical commodity. Although Toffler did not explicitly discuss sport as a staple of his vision of the experience industries at this time (for a discussion of sport as a “proto industry” of the experience economy, see Lundberg, 2007), he did note that the various industries comprising recreation, mass entertainment, education, and even some psychiatric services were participating in early experiential production.

With his gaze focused on the synergy between computerization and its implication for the experience industries, in *Future Shock* Toffler predicts that a consumer-based digital gaming industry was on the horizon. At the time, video and computer games were relegated to computer enthusiasts and the military. The first commercially successful video game, *Pong*, was still years away, so Toffler did not have this precedent to draw upon. Regardless, what would become the digital games industry featured prominently in his discussions of the futuristic experience industries. He suggested that “we shall also witness a revolutionary expansion of certain industries whose sole output consists not of manufactured goods, nor even of ordinary services, but of pre-programmed ‘experiences.’ The experience industry could turn out to be one of the pillars of super-industrialism, the very foundation, in fact, of the post-service economy” (Toffler, 1970, 226). In many ways, today’s gaming industry, much of which is turning to digital downloading, fits the criteria of Toffler’s premise rather well. Although some of gaming’s “output” is still experienced through manufactured products and services, the priority and main selling point has always been on the lived in-game experience.

In this light I find Toffler’s musings especially salient for thinking about the current digital stage of the experience economy because he was the first to anticipate the importance of public gaming events in the development of commercial experience.

Toffler noted that computerized experiential products could be of two types. The first is what he labeled “simulated environments” that would be associated with computers, robotics, historical re-enactment, museums and so on. He describes such environments as follows: “Customers entering these pleasure domes will leave their everyday clothes (and cares) behind, don costumes, and run through a planned sequence of activities intended to provide them with a first-hand taste of what the original—i.e., unsimulated—reality must have felt like. They will be invited, in effect, to live in the past of perhaps even in the future” (Toffler, 1970, 228). Although most of gaming’s in-game artefacts, storylines, and personalities are simulacra, they fulfil essentially all criteria that Toffler laid out. He also suggested that \$25 million “super Environmental Complexes” would be ubiquitous. While this has not necessarily materialized at the scale that Toffler predicted, the 40,000 square foot, \$18 million Metrotown mall *Playdium*, which was capable of holding 8000 people per day (Stafford, 1999), proved that attempts were certainly made in this direction in recent years.

The second category was labelled “live environments,” and in many ways they are functionally like sports, travel and gaming events. Although many of his ideas in this section are quite eccentric (such as public mediated gambling for items such as transplants), he suggests that the African safari would be joined by “experiential gambling cities” that would “overshadow Las Vegas or Deauville, combining in a single place some of the features of Disneyland, the World’s Fair, Cape Kennedy, the Mayo Clinic, and the honky-tonks of Macao” (Toffler, 1970, pp. 230-31). Much of what Toffler discusses here has merely been re-established in old experience mega-centres. Public gaming events and venues (as well as other location-based public space events, including sports) have done much to either reaffirm cities or regions as experiential hubs, or have created new ones, which can be seen, for example, by the fact that sports arenas are ubiquitous in essentially any major population centre. This is only one of the ways that Toffler was able to identify that experience would be utilized for high-growth industrial usage in the near future.

On the other hand, business history associates the transition from industrial to ‘experience economy’ as having first been identified by the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998). Although “experience” has been a driver of economic growth in many sectors for much of history (arts, cuisine, sport, travel etc.), the argument developed by Pine and

Gilmore is that on a global level, the marketing of experience commodities has become the primary type of capital accumulation accentuating the 'non-utilitarian' aspects of consumer goods. More recently, Darmer and Sundbo (2008) have produced a compilation examining experience commodities across various sectors, noting that while an experience can consist of a product (they give the example of a theatre play), it can also be a supplement to a product; the experience becomes the entirety of the package, including the consumer's state of mind. They reiterate that experiences embrace more than just the product itself, including connotative elements such as the place of consumption, décor, design, marketing, usage and symbolic values and associations that constitute the experience, which could be applied to everything from shoes to vacations. They also note that experiences can be physical or non-physical, mentally demanding or not, passive or active. Importantly, they also identify that experiences could be visited (the primary goal of tourism) or the experiences could come to the consumer (such as ordering a film from Netflix). But as information technologies developed they both augmented and transformed the previous marketing formations and practices resulting in the "experience economy," where the primary demand underwriting growth is for a peripheral experience or memory, rather than the 'durable goods' of the earlier periods (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

Compared with the selling of durable goods or primary services, selling experiential commodities has migrated online emphasizing consumer participation and customization/personalization, and it has been accelerated through internet delivery methods (Chang et al, 2010). Over the last few years, more and more companies have become interested in integrating a consumer experience-based model of operations, and many have only found success in distancing their branded products from competitors by adopting holistic experience-centric marketing approaches, including adding value to existing products and services as well as focusing on customer data to understand target demographics better (Musico, 2009). The commentary on the sale of experience implied by the experience economy has historically focused on the fields of popular culture, consumer design and tourism. O'Dell (2005, pp. 12-13) writes that with the help of the internet "Experiences have become the hottest commodities the market has to offer," and in the context of adventure tourism (as it is with public gaming events), they represent several "of the more radical ways in which experiences have gone from simply

being a value adding aspect of more concrete goods and services, to valued commodities in and of themselves.” Recognizing that the production of meaning in the cultural industries is the leading edge of the digital experience economy, Poulsson and Kale (2004, p. 270) have defined experience marketing as promoting “an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter.” They argue that a key difference is that experience is exemplified by an intensified consumption phase in which “the act of consuming *is* the product.”

Picking up on the implications of digital technologies and culture decades after *Future Shock*, Kline et al (2003) adopted Martyn Lee’s concept of “ideal-type commodity” (a product encapsulating the most important economic, political, technological, social, and cultural characteristics of a particular regime, as well as the most significant production techniques, marketing strategies, and cultural practices) for understanding the digital gaming industry’s place within the experience economy. Whereas the structure and rigidity of Fordist mass production was best exemplified in 1950s/1960s housing, appliances, and automobiles, post-Fordism/postmodernism/promotional capitalism⁴, they argue, is most vividly illustrated by the video games business model. An immensely successful razors-and-blades digital gaming industry emerged throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While the products being sold were physical consumer electronic items – hardware, games and accessories – the games industry always emphasized the marketing of the experience of play as well as the system to play it on. The distinguishing characteristic between interactive games and competing media such as

⁴ This refers to the changing structure of the production and selling of products since the early 1970s. Instead of mass-produced, homogenized products coming off a standardized assembly line, the new model would instead emphasize personalized products tailored to increasingly niched audiences (or even to the individual), flexible production and distribution, and an emphasis on the brand, celebrity endorsements, and the experience to be had.

film or television was the ability to choose and change the content of the experience. At the same time that game manufacturers were advertising these promised in-game experiences with media advertising, the selling of a “secondary” experience (the act of watching others play) as a promotional discourse in tandem with ‘play environments’ like arcades, PC cafés, and various other public gaming settings where gamers could congregate to socialize and compete amongst one another became prominent. In this sense “event marketing” was central to the selling of the video gaming experience since the founding of the industry. While Fordist industrial marketing dynamics stressed rational consumer choices, experiential promotion appeals to not only a potential customer’s rationality but to his or her emotions: “relationship marketing stresses customer retention, service and quality, and the needs of individual customers through mass customization” (Coles, 2008, p. 240).

1.2. Overview

In this work, “*public gaming*” is defined as engaging with competitive digital games in a public setting. As the gaming industry has become one of the most palpable industries within the experience business, I believe that the following examination of public gaming is timely as it exposes the conjuncture of spectacle and digital media which is important not only for Game Studies, but for media studies more generally. Public gaming is merely one response to historical developments when it comes to public sites of entertainment, such as the amusement park, circus, or cultural festival. In what follows I will portray eSports more specifically as a historical extension of the mediated sports spectacle within the digitally mediated market economy. Gaming events provide an important opportunity for the mass marketing and promotion of the digital industries as part of a broader repositioning of competitive play within the experience economy. With so much of Game Studies recently emphasizing the “virtual space,” it is important not to forget physical space in our analyses as well.

Chapter 2 begins by using the history of sport as a key to understanding the eSport phenomenon as part of the experience economy. First, I argue that the promoters of eSport have borrowed much from the long history of sports as both a form of competitive play and public spectacle. The chapter considers large-scale public

sporting events, including the Olympic Games, in the context of historical continuities of promotion, spectacle, institutionalization and experiential entertainment. By positioning themselves online the eSports industry pioneered a new form of event marketing which was unique to the digitalized, virtual experience commodity characterized by the integration of public competitions into the mediated gaming spectacle. These discourses are meant to offer a theoretical vantage point for understanding subsequent chapters, which analyze the transition from the communal, un-networked public arcade to the global online-driven spectacular eSport event.

Chapter 3 looks at the history of public competitive gaming in arcades, which functioned as the origins of professional gaming, predominantly between 1981 and 1995. It focuses on the emerging area of growth in public gaming championing event-based competition to compare the strategies of promotion developed for cyber-sports. I argue that this era defines the first phase of eSport (the second is covered in the subsequent chapter), emphasizing an un-networked, offline type of competitive gaming that has been overlooked by Game Studies scholars. The chapter also examines how and why these sites of digital gaming competition lost favour among both casual and professional gamers in the mid-late 1990s, resulting in a period of decline which would lead to the eventual desertion of these spaces as public sites of gaming during the 2000s.

Chapter 4 offers an interpretation of the functions of more recent, networked public gaming contests (particularly the evolution of competitive play post-1995 in Korea and the U.S.) as one example of the history of public leisure, focusing on PC gaming. As noted, the most obvious antecedent of the modern public video game spectacle (and especially when we look at competitive gaming venues such as the World Cyber Games and the various Korean pro leagues) is commercialized sport. The argument for this chapter is that the marriage of sport and media discussed in chapter 2 has been rapidly accelerated over the last 15 years as the eSport form that developed out of public PC gaming overtook that which was popularized by the arcades. Furthermore, the chapter argues that eSports helped to pioneer online streaming as a new way of witnessing public events in the 21st century.

Two kinds of evidence are woven into this historical narrative. The first derives from a reading of the trade press, historical accounts and a literature review covering academic writing relevant to describing the emergence of public gaming events, including the history of sporting events (Tomlinson, 2006; Real, 1998), spectacle (Debord, 1967), as well as more general histories of public play and sport which could be considered predecessors to public interactive gaming (Rader, 2004; Cashmore, 2000; Huizinga, 1964; McLuhan, 1964). Major sources covering Game Studies from a political economic perspective that investigates the industry from the vantage point of the history of promotional culture (Kline et al, 2003), as well as the state of professional gaming particularly in Korea (Jin, 2010; Hjorth and Chan, 2009) will be examined.

Secondly, this research has been guided by my communications with people involved in various areas of “public gaming,” but especially eSport. I have talked with numerous people who have participated in eSport, mainly as competitors but also as fans, whether on-site at tournaments or other events, or online on message boards or within games such as *World of Warcraft*. While most conversations took place informally, I also requested some to become participants for formal interviews, between October 2011 and January 2012. This resulted in half a dozen in-depth interviews with participants from Canada and the United States. Two of the interviews took place in-person in Burnaby, British Columbia, while the others took place over Ventrilo, a VoIP (voice over internet protocol) communication tool. Interviewees were questioned according to their involvement with gaming events, and were asked to comment on information gathered in the aforementioned trade press sources. The interviews were semistructured, with questions that would often result from the response of an interviewee. Their content was also dependent on the participant’s role and history with the topic matter. The retrieval of the perspectives and experiences of those who have contributed to these events has allowed me to corroborate and gain additional insight into the way public and competitive gaming activities function within the industry in a more general sense.

2. Playing, Gaming and Sports

2.1. Introduction

I have noted that Game Studies scholars have largely neglected to focus on the public gaming event as subject, or have oftentimes ignored the historical, cultural and political economic roots of particular types of gaming events, namely those relating to the rise of eSport as a prominent part of the gaming market. This chapter therefore provides two new perspectives for the history of the video gaming industry by focusing on the emergence of competitive gaming events as a form of public play. First, sport history is used to lay a foundation for my analysis of the rise of competitive digital gaming as public play event. Second, an analysis of mediated promotion of sports spectacles is offered in order to emphasize the incorporation of event marketing into the context of competitive gaming in the digital phase of the experience economy.

The chapter will begin by putting the eSport movement in the context of an overview of the history of sports culture by emphasizing the role of competitive play and sporting events as a significant component of the public cultures of modernity. It then investigates the rising trend of “spectacularized” sporting events within the mediatized market culture of the 20th century which laid the foundation for the so-called experience economy in which the marketing of cultural products have provided the business models for perpetuating continued economic growth. I go on to suggest that the cultural practices, as well as marketing and business strategies that fostered the expansion of sport culture, were later adopted by eSport promoters providing the impetus for the further marketization of eSport as events within the digitalizing experience marketplace.

Figure 1 shows sport as being at the crossroads of the hunter-gatherer and capitalist economic models. Modern sport came about when various facets between the two amalgamated. In recent decades, the concept of sport-as-entertainment has been revived as the sporting event has become a key experiential commodity, having been

infused with mediated spectacle, namely through television. As the digital gaming industry entered into this mix, competitive gaming began to remarkably resemble the televised sport event, and soon thereafter became an exemplary constituent of digital public experience, notably being disseminated through predominant 21st century media delivery methods, led by the internet.

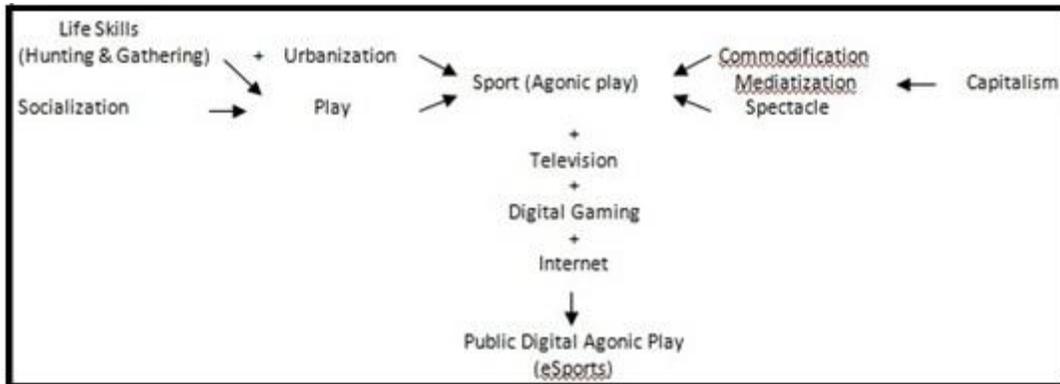


Figure 1. *Sport and its progeny eSport as a response to – and at the intersection of – the oftentimes colliding interests of contemporary capitalism and the desire/need to be in touch with general human propensities that were lost with urbanization.*

2.1.1. On Definition: Play, games, and Sports in Contemporary Culture

This brief history of competitive gaming sets out to put eSports events in the historical contexts of public forms of competitive play. But before I launch into this discussion I need to clarify my terminology for talking about the cultural practices of eSport events by putting this new cultural form in the context of three central historical frames that are applied to it – as a type of play, as competitive sport and as part of digital gaming culture. In his renowned study, Johan Huizinga (1938) positions the spirit of play as a preeminent impulse for the establishment of all culture by stating that “great archetypal activities of society are all permeated with play from the start” (Huizinga, 1938, p. 4). For Huizinga, for something to qualify as play, several characteristics must be evident. His first characteristic for play is that it is free. Secondly, he claims, it must not be “real” life. Instead, it is a “stepping out of ‘real’ life into temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own” (1938, p. 8). Thirdly, play is dissimilar to

'ordinary' life in both locality and duration – time and place are both delimited through its definition as play. His fourth criterion is that through play, order is embodied and created. In this sense chance and uncertainty are essential to play. Yet play is also partially defined by a set of rules so that “as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over” (Huizinga, 1938, p. 11).

These definitions also characterize video gaming as play. However, it is Huizinga's fifth and final characterization of play that seems most problematic in talking about the rise of eSports: Huizinga insists that play “is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it” (1938, p. 13). In short the drive to play freely is the opposite of work which is defined by necessity – that, according to Huizinga, prevents unbridled play to transpire (Cashmore, 2000, 79). In this light play and political economy seem at odds: *Homo ludens* and *homo faber* (as espoused by Marxist political economists and commercial interests alike) are both meant to represent an alleged “natural” state of human needing, favouring the superiority of play and work, respectively. But it is precisely the integration of video game play into the experience economy of digital culture that challenges us to go beyond Huizinga's account of the play instinct when commenting on eSports where players can potentially earn hundreds of thousands of dollars (USD) annually, while associated corporations, sponsors, and leagues labour overtime to produce ever more play. McLuhan also noticed this disparity, identifying that “Games as popular art forms offer to all an immediate means of participation in the full life of a society, such as no single role or job can offer to any man. Hence the contradiction in 'professional' sport. When the games door opening into the free life leads into a merely specialist job, everybody senses an incongruity” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 238).

Another limitation of Huizinga's play theory is that he fails to adequately account for the different forms that the play impulse takes on the level of cultural practice, such as toy play, sports or games. Walther (2003) for example stressed the need to differentiate the related but distinct concepts of “playing” and “gaming,” arguing that play refers to more open ended activities and is a structurally more ambiguous tradition of cultural practices. Games on the other hand have a number of delimiting parameters – time, space, and rules among them – which means that freedom is always constrained, particularly the limitations of freedom of expression imposed by digital technology. In his

chapter appraising Huizinga’s theories as an application to the realm of digital gaming, Henricks (2010) argues that postmodern play borrows many elements from previous forms (premodern, early modern, and late modern), but also drastically modifies the formula. He cites Roger Caillois’ (1961) critique of Huizinga in the latter author’s failure to separate “play” and “game”, or the ability to have non-agonic play.

Scholars have long situated sport within a general framework of “play,” and Guttman (1978) particularly endeavoured to establish a structure for defining and separating the oftentimes similar concepts of play, games, and sport. Figure 2 recreates his chart whereby one can differentiate among various types of play. He notes that when play becomes organized through a socially sanctioned structure of rules and other parameters, when it acquires a competitive aspect, and when participants exert physicality, a sport is identifiable. Quinn (2009) similarly finds two unwavering criteria in his evaluation of what constitutes a “sport:” physicality and competition. Furthermore, according to him sports require that outcomes should never be known in advance and an objective measure of the outcome should be in place (winning and losing), and that a minimal exertion of motor activity is required for something to be deemed a “sport.”

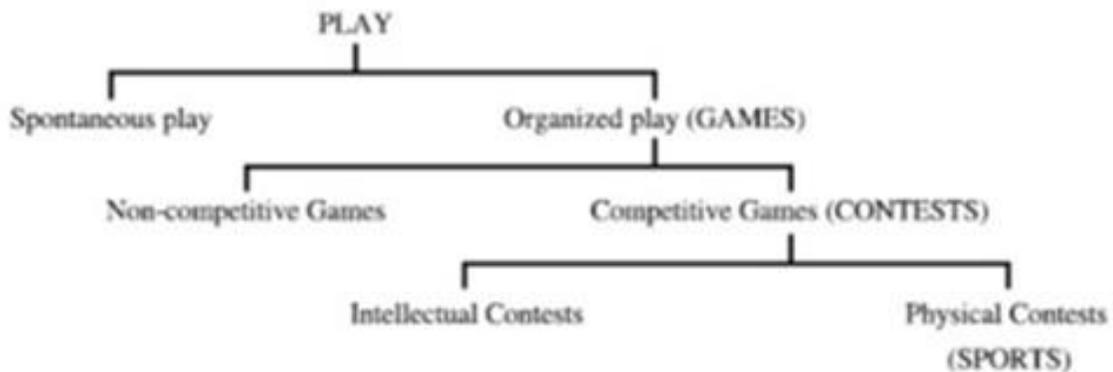


Figure 2. Defining Play, Games, and Sport (from Guttman, 1978, p. 9)

This last qualification has always been the most contentious issue when confronting digital gaming in its pursuit of eSports-status. Jonasson and Thiborg (2010, p. 292) conclude in respect to Guttman’s analysis that eSport must be seen in the context of sport generally, because it has borrowed and still is borrowing characteristics

from modern sport. For the purposes of this paper I will therefore refer to eSport as a legitimate spawn of conventional sport, much the same way that race car driving is a technologically differentiated practice of an underlying cultural form of competitive play; in both cases the competitor is connected to a machine that does much of the work, the contest has winners and losers, and considerable bodily skill is required to participate as a player. Furthermore, when I refer to agonistic gaming events, I refer to those eSports contests that take place publicly, where the competition is through a digital gaming technology and there is some formal process to determine a winner in each match-up. In sum, eSport emerges as a technologically mediated type of public sporting event based on competition between embodied performers.

2.2. Sport History: Play and Spectatorship

Donald Kyle(2007) justifies scholarly study of historic sport by positing that it provides a vantage point for those interested in studying performance, the body as image, and festival. According to him, an understanding of sport and spectacle serves as a basis for grasping the nuances of ancient societies, because sport and spectacle are examples of ‘cultural performances’ that serve as “distinct systems of meaning by which cultural orders (i.e., values, norms, status relationships) are formulated, communicated, and reformulated” (p. 17). Most scholars agree that what came to become known as sport is as old as human history itself. Cashmore (2000) traces the foundations of early sport to the prehistoric need to procure food and escape from dangerous animals. Running, swimming, and eventually riding all served core societal functions, but when advanced civilization centralized populations, the specialization of labour greatly increased and proficiency in these “life skills” became less and less important on an individual-by-individual basis. Nevertheless he claims that the “hunter-gatherer mode of life is central to our understanding of the origin of sport” (p. 55).

According to Cashmore, organized sport came about when people no longer had to rely on physical prowess to survive (see Figure 1); however, the hunter-gatherer way of life was still embedded in our collective history and as such we could not escape it. The population could procure provisions through their own crops or domesticated animals, but demanded the thrill of the hunt in some mutated form regardless. The

chase, the prey, the struggle and the kill were all re-enacted by the time of the Greeks, where the historical Olympic Games rewarded bravery, strength, and agility. Hunting was no longer predominantly practiced for the acquisition of food, but instead as a means of showcasing physical aptitude and to prepare younger generations for conflict. Sport began to serve as preparation and training for youth from its very beginning: one foot in the world of playful self expression and the other in preparation of individuals for an adult life of work, socializing and war.

Although the word “sport” has no ancient etymological basis, Kyle (2007, p. 9) reminds us that the term nonetheless encompasses a number of ancient Greek words. Among them is *agon*, referring to a public contest, the site, and the crowd, which could be applied to a multitude of diverse competitions. Cashmore (2000) likewise defined *agon* as “the compulsion to pursue public recognitions of one’s supremacy through open contest with others” (p. 63). This highlights the fact that the competitive physicality of sport was not private – it was a showcase for others to partake in, to watch and to discuss. From the Greek Olympics and the Roman Colosseum, to the Renaissance and Medieval knightly tournaments, and from sport throughout colonial gentlemen’s play and now the mass mediated commercial spectacle of contemporary sport, one key thread is clear: the presence of the audience.

The ruins of the Civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and Mesoamerica have yielded clear evidence of significant spectator sport, some dating back to at least 3000-1500 BCE, and evidence of ball games is observed in wall paintings from the second millennium BCE. Spectator involvement appeared at a “very early date” in human history, and many drawings show that ancient Egyptians experienced very similar competitions to ours (Quinn, 2009, p. 29). In fact, McLuhan seems to suggest that a clear separation between player and audience is a defining characteristic of a game: “what disqualifies war from being a true game is probably what also disqualifies the stock market and business-the rules are not fully known nor accepted by all the players. Furthermore, the audience is too fully participant in war and business, just as in a native society there is no true art because *everybody* is engaged in making art. Art and games need rules, conventions, and spectators. They must stand forth from the over-all situation as models of it in order for the quality of play to persist” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 240).

The origins of the features of a *modern* sport, conversely, can be noted through European, and especially English, traditions during the 18th and 19th centuries (Scambler, 2005; Maguire, 1999), where a “sportization” process took place that codified folk games, with rules that have largely remained unchanged up to the present. With railways providing rapid access to urban centres, increasing press coverage of sport and the production of high profile teams and new celebrity players, in the “last decade of the nineteenth century organized sport took the first steps towards becoming an organized form of mass, spectator-influenced consumer culture” (Schirato, 2007, p. 104; See also Rader, 2004, p. 97).

This march towards sporting events that revolved around the totality of the event experience- including, but not limited to, the physical drama of ‘higher, faster, stronger’ and the star athlete, a large involved audience in a specially designated arena or gymnasium, and the permeation of ethical ascriptions to organized sports - was precipitated by several key processes that were accelerating throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sports events began to be marketed both as stand-alone spectacles and adjuncts to other events such as large cultural festivals or banquets⁵. Organizers were beginning to see sporting events as valued commodities for public consumption, and soon leagues were springing up promoting their celebrity super star players to an admiring public. Sports were also at the forefront of technological changes as they provided content for newspapers, radio, and soon thereafter television. These media-sport unions soon became among the most dominant market powers of the 20th century. Perhaps most importantly, governments around the world began to institutionalize sport as a major component of their emergent societies, promoting ideals

⁵ For instance, the 1900 Paris Games coincided with that country hosting the Paris Exposition, while the 1904 St. Louis Games took place alongside the World’s Fair. In 1908, London’s Olympics was a secondary event in the shadow of the Franco-British Exposition.

of health, fair play, and competition, but also offering the kind of legitimation that was necessary for widespread adoption by public institutions, including schools, and creating an immense pool of people who would not only participate in sport, but would watch and discuss it as well.

2.2.1. *The Institutionalization of Sport*

In his address during the opening ceremony for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London, International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge declared that the ‘Olympic Games are coming home tonight.’ He acknowledged that British public institutions were critical in codifying folk games into sport at an early date, and that the country is widely recognized as the birthplace of modern sport. Since the 19th century, sport in Britain was instituted as a core component of the educational curriculum, and Rogge noted that here sportsmanship and the sporting ideal were likewise codified early on. Soon thereafter the sports model was exported internationally and this played a major role in creating the foundation of a sports history that positions physical competition at the apex of public spectatorship. When it comes to eSport we can compare how these influences (or lack thereof) participated in the growth of competitive gaming, which will be covered in subsequent chapters.

The long history of sporting practices as well as the support of governments and later corporations has elevated sport to a lofty social position over the last two centuries. Rader points to the 1840s and 1850s as a time when sports events began to be transformed by the urbanization of Britain and America (2004, p. 35). A new attitude towards sport began taking shape in the latter 19th century with college rowing, baseball and football games gaining popularity as spectator events. The early growth of spectator sport, especially in England, was largely a response to increasing amounts of people becoming urban-dwellers, and thus, in the post-industrial revolution era audiences “welcomed, if not needed, diversion and entertainment” which “provided a clear stage for the growth of sports” (McComb, 2004, p. 32). In effect, this transition from rural to urban life provided large centralized audiences for the consumption of sporting events, but it was also a formative factor for the construction of the infrastructure needed for organized physical activity in the form of competitive play. As youth were acclimated to physical activity as an avenue for the promotion of health and friendly competition, as

opposed to as preparation for possible armed conflict or the burdens of life on the farm or in the factory, sports activities were normalized both for participants and audiences, whose numbers grew rapidly.

This changing perspective on sport joined the drive towards rectifying increasing concerns about degrading physical health in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This social anxiety led to teachers, health professionals, and politicians to begin to push for more emphasis on instituting physical activity at schools and in public spaces (Azzarito et al, 2004; Seman, 2009; Dziubiński, 2011). The result was increased funding for the infrastructure of sports, games, and play including the building of more stadiums, fields, gymnasiums and playgrounds. This encouraged outdoor activities, and in turn instigated the formation of various successful sports associations and programs both locally and in other European countries⁶. Sporting events became popularized and their scales grew, eventually becoming integrated into the national culture (Dziubiński, 2011).

In analyzing the commencement of modern sport, Guttman (2004) identifies the latter half of the 19th century as a period in sport history which is increasingly defined by the growing focus on secularism, equality, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization, quantification and the persistent drive towards record-keeping. He identifies sport as ideologically grounded and supportive of modernization, including the realization that sport was becoming a social materialization of a world that was increasingly scientific and numerically-oriented. McComb (2004) notes that this state sanctioning of sport contributed to the regulation of sports by devoted organizations who

⁶ For instance, Poland's Jagiellonian University was the first in that country to institute mandatory physical education courses in 1817 (Dziubiński, 2011, p. 59). In Hungarian city and village schools, physical education became a required subject starting in 1868, and instructors for it were being trained only three years later. In Czechoslovakia, physical education was also a required subject in the 1930s (Seman, 2009).

promoted them as fair contests emphasizing health and excellence, motivation and self discipline. Sports started to become reoriented around chronicling the feats of star athletes who could jump higher, run faster, or throw further, and who devoted increasing amounts of time excelling at fewer sports. Soon the demand for a more structured and competitive sporting alternative beyond compulsory scholastic programs necessitated that competitive sporting venues were available outside the classroom.

As schools began to adopt physical education internationally, one result of institutionalization was that “the athletic side of physical education kept gaining importance and there occurred efforts to enhance physical education with extracurricular sports activities” (Dziubiński, 2011, p. 57). Soon the accomplishments of teams and players were propagated through newspapers and by word of mouth. Schirato (2007, p. 82) identifies the acceleration of these 19th century trends after the turn of the century, arguing that the imminent 20th century media-sport nexus has been the most important aspect of the transformation of sport and its practices, particularly in the ways that games have expanded globally, transforming player/manager/fan relations as the audience for sports events grew. Beyond the mandating of physical education in schools, the sporting ethics of acknowledging and following the rules, striving for personal excellence and adhering to fair competition were soon internationalized as well, notably as the Olympic Games in 1896 were founded on the acceptance of amateur sporting principles internationally.

Sports audiences first experienced radio broadcasts during the 1920s, and within this period, “Sport was very well suited to the editorial needs of the emerging giant newspaper corporations” (McChesney, 1989, p. 57). Despite this exposure, when sports first began to be televised, essentially all of them, with the exceptions of baseball and boxing, had only minor followings in the U.S. Although sport and business were colliding in big ways since the mid-nineteenth century, it was not until July 12, 1928 that a sporting event was first filmed and then televised (a tennis match). Many sports saw their first televised games during 1939-1940, including college (September 1939) and pro (October 1939) football, which were telecast locally (Marill, 2009). In between these two North American milestones, the first *live* televised sporting events in history took place in Germany. The 1936 Berlin Olympics have been particularly noteworthy as they combined sports, politics, and promotion on a scale that had previously been unheard of.

They were also notable because they were the first locally televised Olympics⁷. Hitler initially opposed hosting the Games, but his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels convinced the dictator of the unparalleled possibility of advertising himself and 'his' Germany to the world partially as an attempt to one-up the successful 1932 Los Angeles Games (Rader, 2004, p. 214). In what most would come to see as preparation for war, the Third Reich succeeded in its strategic planning for the event, turning it into one of history's best-known propaganda (Hilton, 2006; Krüger and Murray, 2003). Through potent film and television imagery, the event's marketing machine included fanciful parades, rallies, and marches both to unify the country in anticipation for impending imperialist endeavors as well as to demonstrate the country's military progress and power to the world.

The integration of sporting, state and corporate interests helped to cement sporting events and ideals in the hearts and minds of national publics throughout the 20th century, encouraging mass participation but also ensuring a mass fan base for sporting events that needed large facilities to observe the growing events. Football during the 1920s and 1930s was especially considered as the prototype for what would become the convergence of sports, mediatization, and event marketing. Not only did the game become America's most revered team sport, but in order to attract a more involved

⁷ Holger Preuss (2004, pp. 99-101) has identified six media phases of the Olympic Games: during 1896-32, print media first began its coverage coinciding with the first events; between 1936-55, the Games saw their first live televised coverage, but the emphasis was on event results and not on entertainment; the 1956-68 period saw increasing coverage but small revenues; 1969-80 featured increasing influence and revenue from television; between 1981-2000 there was an "enormous increase in television revenues" including elevated interests for marketing and advertising opportunities, and where entertainment became a major focus for viewership; from 2001 until the publication of his book, Preuss noted that despite warnings that television revenues would diminish, this had not yet transpired, although 'internet television' was seen as potentially the next boon.

audience football promoters began to adorn players with uniforms and school colours and introduce mascots, bands, cheerleaders, and homecoming queens to the event marketing. Rader (2004) saw football as the U.S.' equivalent to Europe's great carnivals and festivals, and as a 'momentary release from [peoples'] daily cares.' During the 1920s, a decade that is widely considered the "golden age of American sports," Rader argues that "football as the king of American sporting spectacles began." During this decade attendance at college games doubled and gate receipts tripled as massive stadia were built around the country, mostly by local or state governments. The onset of professional franchises also practically necessitated that for a city to become a national hub, it had to have a professional sports team and associated stadium⁸: "To attract such teams, cities increasingly had to provide potential franchises with generous terms. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, local governments went on a stadium-building binge" (Rader, 2004, p. 239).

However, attendance was only one measure of the game's success. Rader continues that the amount of space devoted to football in the American press doubled, and by the end of the 1920s five different newsreel companies were screening weekly games for theatregoers. In the 1930s, dozens of games were recounted on radio, at least 48 full-length films on the subject were filmed, and the most popular mass-circulation magazines published 42 football stories (Rader, 2004, pp. 188-89). However, soon television would prove to be the main medium for the spectatorship of sport, as it became the bond that held together the various processes comprising the reinvented

⁸ Sporting events promote the cities and stadia they take place in, cementing regions as hubs of cultural legitimacy and innovation and positioning host cities as players on the global stage (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 600). The same has been true for public gaming and eSport. For instance, Ottumwa, Iowa, would gain the nickname of "Gaming Capital of the World" during the 1980s as the home of Twin Galaxies, an unofficial scoreboard for arcade games. After the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) was formed in the late 1990s, many considered the league's hometown of Dallas, Texas, to be the new "Gaming Capital."

mediatized sporting event. It also became the focal point of the comprehensive experience as marketers pushed to have the sports event meld more effectively with the rising TV audience. Some of the ways that television was coupled with event marketing in the production of promotional synergies included: the emphasis on aggrandizing individual star players, who now seemed bigger than life; creating team 'brands' that were unique to geographical regions, establishing audience pride through aesthetic representations such as paraphernalia and custom logos; and the changing of the flow of the game to accommodate advertisements and the elements of the spectacularization of sport (music, cheerleaders, half-time performances and so on).

While government supports produced stadia, educational programs, co-promotion, and various other subsidies and supports, the introduction of corporate media-sport synergies would infuse sport with capital through media intervention (especially television), a massive influx of advertising, and accompany an overall transformation of sport by introducing these new ancillary constituents. It would also single-out star athletes in the process of endorsement and sponsorship which would contribute to the overall product branding that was also on the rise throughout the 20th century. Although athlete-product relationships were common for much of the 1900s (for instance, the well known association of the Wheaties cereal with sports began in the 1920s and 1930s when Wheaties was tied to the sponsorship of baseball teams and began featuring players on its boxes), the wholesale integration of sport athletes with corporations and featured products hastened rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps the most well-known example is how NBA star Michael Jordan became synonymous with various products, paving the way for similar future arrangements in other sports such as golf (Tiger Woods) and boxing (Mike Tyson). Jordan's value to aligned sponsors was almost unimaginable – his return to the NBA after a brief stint in Major League Baseball is reported to have increased the market value of five of the companies whose products he endorsed (Nike's Air Jordan shoes, McDonald's restaurants, Quaker Oats' Gatorade, Sara Lee's Hanes Underwear, and General Mills' Wheaties) by close to \$3 billion (Crawford and Niendorf, 1999). This all came together to establish a model whereby the worlds of sports, consumer products, and corporate interests aligned in a mutually beneficial relationship, and a model which was then adopted by the digital games industry in the promotion of eSports.

The result of corporate interest and involvement in the sports world can be understood with the idea of the 'spectacle.' In 1967, Guy Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*, which is an invaluable text for understanding the promotion of [e]sport. In it, Debord maps out his critique of modern social life, which he claims has been overtaken by commodities – “the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing.” The result is a momentous degradation of human life, where the media and contemporary capitalism converge, creating his understanding of the term. His claims explicate that in the place of what was once lived, we now have merely “images” or representations that have replaced historical social contacts. His observations included juxtapositions of marketing and religion that illuminate several trends that are not only noticeable when examining contemporary public game events, but are arguably accelerated because digital games are exemplary of the post-Fordist experience economy, or because they are “ideal type commodities” of this mode of capitalist production (Kline et al, 2003). Debord notes that because of the rampant pervasiveness and promotion of commodity images, marketing hype and publicity generate a mass hysteria for forthcoming products (for instance, with thousands of people queuing for product releases, or waiting for hours for the best seats at sport/eSport events), resulting in what he terms “moments of fervent exaltation similar to the ecstasies of the convulsions and miracles of the old religious fetishism.”

To illustrate the point, when the *New York Times Magazine* proclaimed the start of a new season of (American) football in 1939, significantly the emphasis was not on the game on the ground but the experience of observing it:

The cheer leaders turning cartwheels on the turf. The mascot mules, lion cubs, bulldogs and what not.” The coaches on the sidelines and on the benches the “blanketed reserves.” “The banks and the banners. The scorecard scouts flashing their signal cards.” In the stands, the “beauty and mink and chivalry and coonskin.... And below, on white-striped green, the half-dozen officials who risk their middle-aged lives and limbs to run the game, and twenty two-lusty lads who play it. (Quoted in Oriarid, 2001, pp. 199-200)

To add even more appeal to sport, event marketers began to infuse added elements to the games both to entertain the crowds who paid for seats at the gate but also to diversify and expand on the game for the new media audience who watched from a

distance. Soon these sideshows would rival the action of the games themselves; the most impressive added element, according to Rader (2004, p. 283), was the way that cheerleading evolved within only a few short decades. Cheerleaders in the 1950s were clearly present to entertain the audience, literally leading cheers and enacting 'Broadway-like chorus-line routines.' However, by the 1970s and 1980s cheerleading began to become reoriented towards more difficult mixed-gender gymnastics manoeuvres, and over the last 25 years cheerleading has become a 'fiercely competitive' sport in and of itself among high schools and colleges in North America.

Kennedy and Hills (2009, p. 6) have argued that "Our experience of sport is inevitably informed by the sport media, and an understanding of the way the media constructs meanings around sport and identities among its audience is central to a critical engagement with sport. As a phenomenon, however, media sport is forever moving, constantly reconfiguring sport in relation to changing social contexts and values." While many have tied the diffusion of twentieth century sport to discourses on globalization and Americanization/cultural imperialism, many scholars challenge this, having noted that many of the most popular sporting events are not American in origin. Instead, numerous academics opt to speak of the proliferation of 'corporate sport' that largely started in the U.S. In other words, the model whereby attention is steered toward audiences, mass marketing, and profit as opposed to the contest itself has been exported globally (Bernstein and Blain, 2003).

2.2.2. *The Olympics as Conceptual Predecessor for eSport*

The Olympics help us understand the emergence of the spectacular sports model in which mass audiences for sporting events are produced as both live and mediated fans. While other mediated sport spectacles such as the Super Bowl or World Cup also embody and perpetuate the media-sport nexus, the Olympics Games illustrate the state of the art marketing techniques employed in the production of sports events as media spectacles on a global scale. Preuss (2004, p. 114) makes it a point to note that "Since 1936, when the Berlin OCOG offered the first live coverage, the Olympic Games have assumed a leading role in the technology of sports coverage. The first satellites in Tokyo 1964, colour broadcasts in Mexico 1968, multilateral cameras in Los Angeles 1984 and high definition television (HDTV) in Nagano 1998 are but a few examples of

television technology development during the Olympics.” More generally, McChesney (1989, p. 61) also notes that the 1950s and 1960s revolutionized the sports experience through media with colour television, videotape, satellites, and portable cameras. Several benchmark Olympics have especially demonstrated how central media, technology, and promotion are to the presentation of the event. These include the particularly noteworthy 1936 Berlin and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, and during the 1990s and 2000s, new media forms have especially been featured prominently in each iteration of the Games⁹.

The 1936 Berlin Games demonstrated the power of early event marketing tactics that would soon become ubiquitous within the realms of the sport and entertainment industries. Although the U.S. put on a well-received show during the 1932 L.A. Summer Olympics, Hitler’s administration was intent on one-upping the Americans, including by authorizing the construction of a new stadium that could hold 100,000 spectators. Utilizing new technological advances in radio and television, the regime used the international event as a device to promote an otherwise latent agenda. Although commonplace now, the Nazi Games were the first to conscientiously put the spotlight onto peripheral interests. By instituting sport at the largest of scales, these Olympics helped to spur investment in the infrastructure for sport not primarily as an ideological physical contest, but instead as a spectacular show for a massive (in-person as well as mediated) audience that would be bombarded by corporate marketing messages and special interests.

The breach between Olympic ideology and practice only increased after World War II, when the exaltation of athletes began to include the glorification of nations to

⁹ For instance the 2012 London Games have frequently been dubbed either the ‘social media Games’ or the ‘Twitter Games’.

greater degrees, as well as associated businesses and bureaucracies. While the Olympics grew as an international spectator event, commercial concerns began to take precedence as the Games' costs increasingly spiralled upwards. The televisation of the Games was particularly seen as a major opportunity for corporations to advertise to the opening global marketplace. The Olympics during the Cold War era became a major talking point for the media utilizing the notion of nationalistic competition.

The 1952 Olympics, only the second since 1936 because of the Second World War, were significant because of the entry of the USSR as an entity into the Games. This began the Cold War political struggle that reinforced international tension and rivalry that would be ubiquitous within the realms of technological advances, political manoeuvring, and increasingly sport. In effect, this international rivalry would help to commercialize and spectacularize sport, undermining the Olympic ideal in the process, but expediting the prosperity of corporate interests (Real, 1998). Rader (2004, p. 300) also notes that these Games were important as forces external to the idealized sporting movement began to infiltrate the Olympics. While the 1948 London Games had little in the way of commercialization and politics, when the Americans learned of the Soviets' entry into the Games of 1952, they raised funds for the U.S. Olympic Team who were experiencing financial shortfalls. To counter-act the so-called 'Red Tide' Hollywood set up a massive TV Olympic Telethon, watched by an estimated 50 million people and hosted by Bing Crosby and Bob Hope at Los Angeles' El Capitan Theatre. With Crosby exclaiming that the country needed to come together to send the team because 'We've got to show those Reds up,' Hollywood stars, including Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Humphrey Bogart appealed to the American public on NBC and CBS to phone in and donate.

Over the second half of the 20th century, television went from being nearly insignificant to one of the most formidable components of the Olympic Games. During the 1960 Rome Games, 1 out of every 400 dollars of the cost of hosting the Olympics was returned by television. By the 1984 Games, television provided one of every two dollars (Real, 1989, p. 230). Ever since the 1984 Olympics, it has become increasingly common for cities to bid to host the Games, largely due to the possibilities offered by television. The event puts the host location at the centre of the world for a brief period of time, showcasing its status as an international power, as well as expediting urban

development through new construction and aesthetic renewal; the Olympic experience has far surpassed being simply a series of sporting events and is now a massive cultural festival with numerous contingent agendas (Preuss, 2004).

The ensuing television-sports relationship has been so significant that Real (1998, p. 17) asserted that “No force has played a more central role in the MediaSport complex than commercial television and its institutionalized value system – profit-seeking, sponsorship, expanded markets, commodification, and competition.” What would result is what Roche (2000) would term not only a media event, but the Olympic television genre, because the mediated sporting industry forged an especially potent promotional relationship with the burgeoning medium of television in the second half of the 20th century. The opening of the Olympic Games to international broadcasting began in 1956, setting the stage for the subsequent Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and the World Cup in England in 1966 that have been seen as signs of the era of a globally mediated sports spectacle (Tomlinson and Young, 2006; Rader, 2004).

The changing scope of the Games’ relationship with commodified audiences, corporate interests, and prevailing media, according to Gruneau, is best illustrated by the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. During the two prior Games (1976, 1980), host cities experienced heavy financial losses owing to their staging of the event. Consequently, few cities bid to host the 1984 Games, and Los Angeles essentially went unopposed. However, when organizers of these Games were looking for creative directors for the Opening Ceremony, they turned to Hollywood. With several dozen “official” product sponsors and an opening ceremony featuring 84 grand pianos and a procession of wagons, Gruneau argues that these particular Games “are best understood as a more fully developed expression of the incorporation of sporting practice into the ever-expanding marketplace of international capitalism” (Gruneau, 1984, p. 2). Moreover, the LA Games were the first instance of a profit-making Olympics, and it “rewrote the formula for staging the global sports spectacle” for subsequent generations (Tomlinson, 2006, p. 10; See also Rader, 2004, p. 303). Establishing a new standard whereby subsequent nations would be expected to put on spectacular ceremonies, it can be claimed that “the showbiz spectacle pre-empted the sports festival right from the start” (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 590).

The following Summer Olympics, Seoul 1988, occurred in the context of South Korea's telecommunication revolution, which has largely been attributed to the televisation of the Games that "coincided with the rise of the nation's electronics and telecommunications industry to the position of leading exporter and most strategic economic sector" (Larson and Park, 1993, p. xvi). This would position South Korea as among the most technologically developed nations in the world. It also occurred during the massive growth of the newly commercialized and spectaculatized Games, as well as the proliferation of "global television"; the awarding of the Olympics to Korea was seen as a political, economic, and cultural catalyst primarily because of the large television and media presence (Larson and Park, 1993). The Korean case as it relates to the Olympics is especially salient for eSport as it helped to legitimize the country in the international eye, showcasing its newly found technological prowess and paving the way for digital games to become one of the nation's most significant national sports. The South Korean-based World Cyber Games and the various Korean pro leagues continue to retain structural and ideological vestiges that were founded in not only the Olympics in general, but the Korean Games in particular.

2.3. Conclusion

Public play and entertainment events have a multitude of precedents, such as circuses, carnivals, fairs and festivals of all kinds yet I have argued that sports offers the most telling example of the way state legitimation of agonistic play coupled with mediated marketing to lay the foundation of a spectacularized business model for the entertainment economy. Sport has served as an example of successful entertainment-based event marketing in a mediated culture where play has now become both an involved, performance-centric experience as well as a spectatorial one. Sporting events became experiential commodities during the 19th and 20th centuries, and upon the birth of the digital gaming industry, promoters soon adopted this model for this new industry. Owing to competitive gaming's position as an amalgamation of sport, media, and technology, it is also an ideal case study of the virtualized spectacle of the experience economy.

Hutchins (2008) has also recognized the significant parallels between traditional sports events and those put on by eSports promoters. He notes that an examination of eSport unearths “the continuities of competitive gaming with sport as an historical form and organizational model.” However, he continues that “it is also distinctive, creating the space necessary to explain what is new about this activity and those who compete in it... it is a term that allows continuity in understanding, while helping to conceptualize the discontinuous features of this competitive activity” (Hutchins, 2008, p. 862). Jin (2010, pp. 60-61) has likewise claimed that eSports is a difficult concept to categorize because the business is one in which culture and technology, culture and sport, and culture and business come together: “it is important to understand eSports as the convergence of the electronic games, sports, and media,” and it is “an exemplary case of digital convergence.”

Over 200 National Olympic Committees are affiliated with the International Olympic Committee (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007), and it is interesting to note that 90 nations have representatives competing at the Olympics’ gaming counterpart, the World Cyber Games (World Cyber Games, 2011). Scholars have found that in the case of mediated eSport, it is not only a vehicle for promoting media platforms, but is itself an indivisible coupling of sport and technology. Hutchins (2008) attempted to interpret the complicated relationship between digital play, sport and the media by using the WCG event as an application in ultimately assessing that with eSports, one cannot disassociate the media from the sport. The WCG event proves that Internet-enabled technologies of production, spectatorship, and dissemination, as well as the notion of “sport” and digital gaming as a form of media content come together to create a novel entity. The result is “gaming, computing, media and sports event all at once; familiar in its presentation format but unfamiliar in its content” (p. 852).

This chapter has emphasized cultural and historical continuity among sports. It has examined the context of the mediatized spectacle that gaming promoters have borrowed from the political economy of sport marketing. The two theoretical bases of organized sport and an emergent experience-centric economy have been used to position gaming events and eSport at the crossroads of the long narrative of historical public sporting events and the newly materializing digital creative industries. It has been suggested that just as “the cathedral represented the spirit of the Middle Ages and the

great railroad terminal that of the nineteenth century, publicly financed sports stadia were seen as the quintessential symbol of the modern city by their supporters. Not only could the edifices serve as great cultural monuments, enthusiasts argued, but they could also stimulate downtown revitalization and lure tourist and investment dollars to the city” (Rader, 2004, p. 239). The history of the rise of sports events as valued commodities and as ongoing consumptive processes in public spaces has proven to be important because it paved the way for future sporting endeavors. Indeed, many organizers of eSports over the last three decades have understood the professional sports model and have applied it to the world of gaming.

3. Offline Public Gaming and eSport in the Arcades

3.1. Introduction

In chapter 2 I argued that sports marketing was the inspiration for eSport (Jin, 2010; Hutchins, 2008). In this respect I have claimed that the promotional framing of eSports as the 'cyber-Olympics' is more than a rhetorical device. That chapter concluded by examining the changes taking place in sports marketing as exemplified by recent Olympics in which digital media became integrated into the promotional blend of spectacular sports events. The internet later added a new dimension to the way that large sporting events were both marketed and consumed by emphasizing the expansion of social networking, fan sites, participatory forums and blogs, which are particularly familiar to the digital generation and heavy internet users.

However, a major difference between professional sports, such as hockey or football, and eSports lies in the role that digital technologies play not only in the promotional media mix, but also as the medium of play itself. This doubly 'interactive medium' consequently provides a useful way of understanding the confluence of digital technology and agonic play forms in the digital phase of the experience economy. Unlike other commentators on 'eSport' therefore I will pay attention to the unique features of early gaming practices that consolidated the parallel trajectories of interactive gaming, media and sports marketing.

In the following chapter I set out to show how many of the components of eSport were evident in young people's public gaming experiences during the early 1980s in the arcades. Not only were many of the early games derived from the scoring templates of popular sports like golf or bowling, but they were structured as 'contests' where there were winners and losers. In addition to the video game industry getting its start in these public play spaces, the evolving elements of agonic game design and marketing, as well

as the industry's ability to cultivate a fan base were framed by these public displays of interactive play. The growing popularity of these arcade contests in turn inspired new ideas about interactive media as an agonic play technology; like pinball, the scores from competitors left on the machine encouraged comparison with other players. Later in the decade, game designers created new play experiences that more closely resembled confrontational sports including football and hockey but more particularly combat sports (karate, boxing, wrestling etc), where direct involvement with the opponent was integrated into the structure of the game.

Therefore, the rest of the chapter tracks how the arcades supported 1) the development of a new form of agonic play by transitioning from player-versus-machine to player-versus-player contests 2) legitimized digital agonic play through a growing mediatized commentary on this emerging cultural practice and 3) promoted the whole gaming industry through promotional synergies which encouraged the growing professionalization of star players similar to other sports and entertainment industries. Public video game contests in the arcades therefore not only offered a precedent for current eSports events, but the cultural forms and industry dynamics established here lay the foundation for the continuing development of the promotion of 'public agonic play' within the increasingly digital media environment.

3.2. Early 1980s Arcade Culture

The history of video gaming as an industry and cultural practice has acquired a substantial literature. Although early commentaries on the interactive games industry were largely limited to describing the late 1980s/early 1990s Nintendo phenomenon (see particularly David Sheff's *Game Over* first published in 1993) or the effects of game play as part of the 'information economy' more broadly (Cassell and Jenkins, 1998; Poole 2000), the growing significance of the industry was eventually reflected in several works expounding various aspects of the consequences of the industry's rise. Edward Castronova's landmark book *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (2005) evaluated the economic trade taking place in online gaming worlds as a juxtaposition to the existing real world economy, while Kline et al (2003) offered a wide ranging overview of the industry with a combination of political economy and cultural

studies on a scale that was previously unprecedented. The Game Studies literature has exploded far beyond just these categories with its own journals, histories and key debates in recent years.

In *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade (2004) discuss how the “gamer generation” will influence future business practices. One of the key theses in Beck and Wade’s book is that there is a general misconception about game players and socialization¹⁰ (pp. 113-18). Their findings suggest that on average, individuals with more interactive gaming experience report being more social, and this seems to be confirmed when one looks at the general tendencies of these players – they meet with each other to play at homes, arcades, PC cafés, and even at rented-out warehouses and gymnasiums for LAN parties (several users in close proximity connected by PC to a shared network). Gamers also attend advertiser-driven public events, such as large industry trade shows, professional gaming tournaments, travelling orchestral shows, and various other grassroots events such as cosplay gatherings. This raises a significant question: if public events are so significant to so many groups involved in gaming (including but not limited to game corporations, fans, retailers, marketing agencies, the press), why has there been a lack of academic focus on them as public components of the experience business? Historians and

¹⁰ They argue that this was largely a socially propagated myth, where, for instance, parents may have feared that isolation with a console may lead to a deficiency in the social skills of their children. However, this was also part of a far broader dialogue on the potentially anti-social properties of the video game as a medium that was influencing the development of younger generations. Many government groups, academics, and teachers began to suggest that, among other things, the violent nature of the games would in turn lead to an overly aggressive youth cohort. The debate continues to this day, with many scholars and policy makers implicating digital games for a range of negative behaviors (see for example Anderson et al, 2007, or the 2006 U.S. Congressional report, “Violent and explicit video games: informing parents and protecting children”).

commentators of the digital gaming industry have not sufficiently emphasized that the origins of competitive gaming are firmly rooted in public spaces.

Furthermore, accurate accounts of the early origins of eSport have for the most part been lacking. Jin (2010) has been one of the few scholars to correctly identify the origins of eSport as belonging to arcades, but as his book is a political economic look at Korea, this discussion is relegated to only a page and a half and does not focus on the event-as-subject. Beyond this, the absence of acknowledgement of arcades more specifically as the true originators of eSport is also problematic. The issue does not merely lie in chronological fallacies. By attributing the genesis of competitive gaming to South Korea (henceforth 'Korea') and *StarCraft*, or even to the early PC market exemplified by games such as *Doom* and *Quake*, scholars forsake an absolutely crucial piece of the formation of eSports: the fact that they were historically rooted in face-to-face competitive play, and did not originally occur through networked gaming. Jonasson and Thiborg recognize that the pursuit of records is a fundamental feature of modern sports, and make reference to Twin Galaxies as having documented gamer feats, yet they also claim that the "origin of eSports is said to rely heavily on the launching of the worldwide web (www) in 1989, and on the early 1990s software and hardware technologies with network and multiplayer functions. In the early 1990s the history of eSport started" (2010, p. 288). Similarly, Wagner (2006, p. 1) asserts that in "the United States and Europe, the history of competitive gaming is usually associated with the release of networked first person shooting games, in particular the 1993 released game 'Doom' and the 1996 follow-up title 'Quake' by id software." One of the main goals of this thesis is to rectify these misattributions by demonstrating that early 1980s competitive arcade gaming spawned eSport, and that at the time, arcades were robust play spaces that foreshadowed accelerated commercialization when it came to public experiences.

Suffice it to say that most authors acknowledge the importance of the gaming arcades as the foundation of the digital gaming industry (Herman, 1997; Burnham, 2001; Wolf, 2002). These historians note the gaming industry and the evolution of its game design practices emerge in these public spaces evolving from pinball and target shooting, as well as other forms of arcade entertainments (Kline et al, 2003). Although video games had been around since the early 1970s, Burnham (2001) notes that it was

during the early 1980s that the 'arcade explosion' launches the industry into the public spotlight. The explosion refers to numerous themes. Industry efforts to market gaming through designing more and better arcade games, especially in 1980/81 which brought *Centipede*, *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*, *Frogger*, and *Galaga* was one. DeMaria and Wilson (2004, p. 83) similarly claim that 1981 and 1982 constitute "the most significant years in arcade game history." The explosion also refers to the rapid diffusion of interactive gaming, new innovative game forms, and growing popularity among young people, as well as the economic growth in digital entertainment technologies.

Arcades in 1981/1982 earned an estimated \$5 and \$6 billion annually, meaning that 20 billion quarters were inserted into these machines (Sheff, 1999, p. 149; Burnham, 2001, p. 278). In what constituted 75,000 annual man-years of videogame play, gamers would support an industry that earned "twice as much money as all Nevada casinos combined, nearly twice as much money as the movie industry, and three times as much money as major league baseball, basketball, and football" (Kent, 2001, p. 152). By 1982, 1.5 million arcade machines were in operation in approximately 24,000 full arcades and 400,000 street locations (Ibid). One major factor in the growing popularity of the arcades was that players would attempt to top the high scores of all other players at their local arcades. This resulted in a robust competitive community, where each arcade would have its own superstar players that were renowned by others, but who were also targets for aspirants.

To promote gamer culture (as was the case with early sports), arcade owners began to stage tournaments. Parallel to the historical origins of sports event marketing, the initial unstructured arcade competitions were soon organized as public contests complete with title sponsors, audiences, and even some media coverage. For instance, on October 28, 1981, a three-day national video game championship was held at the Chicago Exposition Center by Tournament Games, a company that promoted tournaments for billiards and darts. The event was promoted as "a major *new sporting contest* in which 10,000 to 15,000 of the world's best video-game players would go head-to-head on a single game-*Centipede*" (Kent, 2001, p. 162). The organizers misgauged the scope of attendance, however, as contestants were expected to provide for their own transportation and housing, something that most of the teenage players could not afford, along with the fact that practice cabinets were not free and had a short

time limit¹¹. Only 150 players ended up attending. Another major event in the legitimization of gaming competitions as a 'sport-like' activity occurred in November 1982, when *Life* magazine visited the Twin Galaxies arcade to photograph the best video game players in the U.S. for its special issue, "The year in Pictures" (Burnham, 2001, p. 239; Dean 2005). The inclusion of arcade gamers in *Life* magazine under the discourse of 'sports' and 'athletics' was seen as a major step for not only the players, but the industry as well. Jonasson and Thiborg assert that "Being a sport makes the activity automatically legitimized and accepted. In that respect, organizers as well as players attain a high social status and obtain bigger funding and sponsoring" (2010, p. 293). The year prior, 15-year-old Steve Juraszek had his picture in *Time* magazine for scoring

¹¹ Interestingly, this shows a disconnect between competitive players and tournament organizers, something that is still a problem to this day. In 2009, the aforementioned EVO tournament partnered with *Street Fighter* developer Capcom and GameStop, a video and computer game retailer with 6,500 international locations. The World Finals were held in Las Vegas and attended by thousands of players and fans that came to the event from around the world, with hundreds of thousands more watching the event live online (Carle, 2010, p. 161). However, the event was mired in difficulties for the players; Su (2010, p. 5) explains that "Gamestop officials failed to understand that SF4 was not just another console game by failing to understand the importance of joysticks. It is revealing here that the hardware one uses is emblematic of seriousness, competitiveness, and respect." He continues that "The incident with joysticks in the Gamestop tournament highlighted the conflict arising when parties ignore competitive gamer values" (p. 10). The problems that were observed at EVO 2009 followed a long tradition of U.S. eSport promoters and organizers failing to accurately gauge the expectations of pro gaming competitors, fans, and even sponsors. This disconnect between Western professional gamers and organizers was further elaborated on by a tournament player that I spoke with, who specialized in Capcom fighting games. Speaking of the difficulties that the fighting game genre has within eSports in general, he related that "the thing about the eSports is they don't consult the community, so for example one tournament, I think it was World Cyber Games back in the day, they wanted to add fighting games into the tournament. But then they didn't consult the community, and they picked like, Virtua Fighter, and nobody plays Virtua Fighter, nobody really considered it as a competitive game, where they could have picked Street Fighter or something else – Tekken or whatever, but they didn't. They just randomly picked a fighting game, and it was terrible." This has become one of the critical factors in the inability for mediated, spectacular eSport to transfer as desired from the Asian (and even European) markets to the West.

almost 16 million points in a 16-hour game of *Defender* (Kent, 2001, p. 152). In the minds of the gamers, the celebration of their achievements through recognition in national magazines, newspapers, and success in tournaments was not only a major motivator for advanced play, but reinforced the acceptability of public competitive gaming, as well as the notion of 'expert' or 'seasoned' players. Without an obvious alternative route to justifying their gaming, players would engage in spectacular competitive feats not only for love of the game, but also to gain notoriety.

Much of this promotional framing of video game play as a sport was due to a number of major factors that fostered the increasing professionalization of public play competitions. Walter Day's forming of Twin Galaxies as an 'official' scorekeeper for the industry was one. Established in 1981, Twin Galaxies, "The Official Scoreboard for Electronic Entertainment" (Twin Galaxies, 2011), collects rankings and scores, tournament data, and statistics exclusively based on digital gaming, much in the same way that other publications compile sports statistics. The formation of this organization fulfilled several criteria required towards institutionalizing gaming as a sport – namely recordkeeping, the setting of guidelines, and the promotion and encouragement of competition. Secondly, the creation of the U.S. National Video Game Team in the mid-1980s was also an early indicator towards ushering in professional gaming. Comprised of the best arcade players, the team was present at many tournaments, expos, and trade shows and handed arcade challenges to foreign embassies, nudging the international community to participate in tournaments in what paved the way for the World Cyber Games a decade and a half prior to the latter's origination. Another similarity to the modern World Cyber Games is that the U.S. National Video Game Team held preliminary state competitions before players could advance to the national level. They also sponsored and funded invitational contests, such as the 3rd Annual North

American Video Game Challenge during January 12-13, 1985, in which only the 50 best North American players were allowed to compete. They were indeed “history’s first professional video game team”¹² (Dean, 2005) but the growing eSports literature seems to have overlooked this. Third, the continued growing media interest in these public gaming events allowed for the staging of digitally mediated ‘sporting’ competitions. These events were soon discussed in gaming fanzines, newspapers, and news reports on television. By 1984, the national “Video Game Masters Tournament,” which was held in a number of U.S. cities including San Jose, Manhattan and Anchorage, would judge player scores in 60 official arcade games (Millar, 1984).

These factors culminated in the growing recognition of gaming as a sports-like contest. In 1985, at popular Los Angeles video arcade “Captain Video,” the best arcade game players, along with ABC News, *USA Today*, and *Guinness Book*, congregated to commemorate the 3rd Annual Player of the Year Coronation Day contest. The results of this competition were to be featured in the 1985 iteration of the *Guinness Book of Sports Records*. The next year’s instalment of the *Guinness Book of World Records* proper went a step beyond, including high scores for dozens of games as well as the names and hometowns of the record holders (Dean, 2005). This legitimization of early high scores by Guinness Book reinforces the idea that histories of eSports need to factor in early arcade play. However, the relationship between Guinness and gaming did not end in the 1980s. The publication of the more recent *Gamer’s Editions* (2008 onwards)

¹² However, documentary film *Chasing Ghosts: Beyond the Arcade* (2007) does well in showing that this is an era of the past – most of the pro arcade players no longer play at all, and according to *Joystiq* writer Kevin Kelly (2007), “there’s a sequence in the film that shows some of the gamers struggling at a modern arcade. It’s comical, but also a bit sad as you realize that they’re part of an era that’s long gone.” Therefore, this chapter also looks at the contributing factors for the diminishment of the public gaming industry in North America during the 1990s, which also acted as the primary divider between the two major phases of eSports.

sparked much discussion about the potential growth of current eSport. However, many of those engaged in this dialogue have been unaware that Guinness has been publishing high score records since the early 1980s. Much like *Twin Galaxies* itself, the *Gamer's Edition* covers "Record Breakers" and tournament composites (in other words, the groundwork for eSports), and much of the text is still reserved for the realm of eSport, including high scores, fastest completion times, and longest play sessions. These examples contribute to the evidence of a growing professionalization of competitive gaming during the 1980s.

3.2.1. *Playing games ... on Television: The 1980s*

The growing interest in the video game industry also resulted in attempts to promote gaming with TV programmes. As early as 1982, competitive arcade gaming was being televised for a national (U.S.) audience. In his account of the game show *Starcade*, contestant Damon Claussen describes the process of applying for an audition, the televised competition itself (where he formed a team with his mother), and more importantly, the sentiments of competing on television. He states that "the next best thing to being at the arcade was watching one on TV... It was no doubt ahead of its time" (2001, p. 332). On the show, two players (or teams) would answer questions, where the first to respond correctly would be allowed to choose which game to play first. Afterwards contestants competed to obtain as high a score as possible within the allotted time, followed by the other players. This was repeated for two more rounds, and scores were totalled to produce a winner. *Starcade* aired on WTBS between 1982-1984, effectively making it the first video game television show featuring competitive gaming, preceding others such as *Video Power* (1990-1992) and *Nick Arcade* (1992-1993).

These TV programmes are important not only for drawing out the comparison between video gaming and sports, but also for building the star system of gamers. For example, in her story on the 1984 Video Game Masters Tournament, Millar (1984) talks to competitive arcade gamer Roy Shildt (at the time of her writing, he was the record holder of arcade game *Missile Command*), who states that beyond several hard-core players insisting that video games are sports, "Whatever video competition means, it can sometimes be profitable to those good enough to win world records." In fact, for his early eSports achievements, Shildt had received sponsorships from various companies

including Taco Bell and Nike, perhaps suggesting an even greater variety of corporate sponsors than those involved with modern eSports, which are predominantly corporations in the telecommunications and IT sectors. The star making process can minimize the fickle nature of creative industry fans by assuring that a star can bring in a healthy profit, offsetting the costs of other endeavours, and has become a major staple of the media sports cultural complex. This is also one example of the promotion of ancillary goods that is so ubiquitous within the cultural industries overall. Sponsors and promoters advance large sums of capital into the marketing of professionalized celebrities, from which they expect returns on their investments. But this professionalization of gamers as sportsmen also helped to foster acceptance of gamer culture.

While dedicated eSports shows have existed since the early 1980s, more generally-focused game shows have featured video game competitions throughout the years as well. The best early example of this occurred in 1983, when U.S. television reality game show *That's Incredible!* (1980-1984) featured three arcade pros competing to determine the national video game champion. Kennedy (1983) recounts this particular episode from the perspective of sixteen-year-old gamer Ben Gold as he competed in the challenge which was filmed at the ABC studios in front of more than one hundred people. The event is not so far displaced from current eSport events – bright stage lights, a large TV audience, celebrity host (Cathy Lee Crosby), and even a gold medal for “the first video game champion of the world” (Kinser, 2006; Dean, 2005). Although this latter designation would be considered contentious in the era of the World Cyber Games and networked eSports, it is one echoed by Walter Day, who considers players like Gold pioneers of professional gaming, and that “The player of yesteryear is just as good as the players of today. There just weren’t as many opportunities for

sponsorships and competitions back then” (Ibid). Day considers Gold as the first ever video game champion, while Gold foresaw the future of eSports, envisioning higher payouts and more competitive events that are now commonplace. Some have gone so far as to call these events the “first ever Videogame Olympics” (Burnham, 2001, p. 239). While sharing several characteristics of the WCG, such as elimination qualifiers and medals, they still lacked a crucial formative factor of both the Olympic Games and the WCG – namely, an international presence¹³. Although it was not a truly global affair, the discourse of eSports contests in the early 1980s comparing these competitions to the Olympic Games is significant.

3.2.2. Arcade Economics in the Late 1980s and 1990s

The growing media coverage of arcade-based eSports fostered mounting public debate about the emerging gamer culture and its growing host of young male player celebrities. As a reflection of their immense popularity, arcades were depicted in all facets of 1980s popular culture, contributing to the coining of the term “gamer generation” with its concomitant portrayal of the ‘gamer’. For instance, *The Last Starfighter* (1984) follows an enthusiastic arcade-goer who ends up as a recruit of an alien force attempting to repel vicious enemies. The teen’s gaming skills and high score in an arcade game bearing the namesake of the film attracted the extraterrestrials as they fought their war (one of the aliens had designed the game to locate the one Earth player who could turn the tide of battle). The film joined others, including *Tron* (1982, featuring an arcade owner who is sucked into a computer and made to compete in gladiator-like games, with the peril of being “deleted” should he lose), *Joy Sticks* (1983, depicting the efforts of a group of children attempting to save their arcade from closure),

¹³ However, players from other North American countries were involved; for instance, one of the other finalists on *That’s Incredible!* came from Alberta, Canada.

and *The Karate Kid* (1984 – an arcade was a favourite haunt of the protagonist) in the propagation of arcade spaces as major formative elements for 1980s youth culture. Recent television shows that have their plots set in the late 1970s/early 1980s oftentimes use arcades as significant recurring backdrops¹⁴, as do many television shows produced during the time.

But the popularity of violent games also garnered much negative attention from commentators. Scholars in the early 1980s were already remarking on the divisive arcades, where many parents, legislators, and teachers joined the police in denouncing arcades as sources of troublemaking and delinquency¹⁵. Several sources cite U.S. surgeon general C. Everett Koop in particular, who in 1982 stated that digital games were producing ‘aberrations in childhood behavior’ and causing extensive addiction (Sheff, 1999; Poole, 2000). Williams and Smith (2007) identified that moral panics centered on gaming have been part of a long history of such alarm in the 20th century (following, for instance, jazz music or rock’n’roll), which they largely ascribe as having been propagated by the media and biased scholarship. They declare that gaming panics took place through two trajectories. The first was through ‘fantasy gaming’ (such as *Dungeons & Dragons*) where fears grew of the likelihood of occult worship and ‘negative psychological conditions’ such as attempted suicide. However, the authors claim that these panics faded by the late 1980s¹⁶. Secondly, they note that computer-

¹⁴ For example, *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005-2009), which depicts the experiences of a teenage Chris Rock, frequently features an arcade, as do shows like *The Simpsons* (1989-present). In fact, *The Simpsons* uses the arcade as one of the hangouts of rebellious and troubled ten-year-old “Bart,” which reflects the negative stereotypes given to arcades throughout the 1970s-1990s – Bart would often avoid class to hang out at the arcade.

¹⁵ Burrill (2008, p. 7) assesses that arcades were “Traditionally inhabited by a particular adolescent breed, the semidelinquent technophile.”

¹⁶ Despite their claim that this kind of panic has failed to persist, similar criticisms were leveled at Nintendo’s immensely popular *Pokémon* (1996) franchise.

mediated culture created a new wave of moral panic that has not subsided (for instance, scholars such as Neil Postman lamenting the loss of “face-to-face” communication in the era of the internet). These two types of panics have largely defined negative discourses based on digital game play. Regardless, most studies have found results to be inconclusive. Even early investigations such as the one by Ellis (1984, p. 60) found that “a relatively few arcades, by attracting troublemakers and/or facilitating troublesome behavior by young persons, seem to be able to establish in the minds of the public a connection between video arcades and drugs, prostitution, theft, vandalism, violence, and truancy.” Despite reports suggesting that arcades were not the cause of deviance, this moral panic would persist throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In the face of these negative indictments, some companies embraced the associated connotations in an attempt to sell a ‘cool’ and ‘trendy’ experience. Kline et al (2003, p. 155) make reference to early 1990s business practices within gaming where the major hardware producers, especially Sega, would spin accusations of overt gratuitous violence and morally suspect practices aligned with gaming to their advantage by building ‘an outlaw pitch to teenagers.’ The resultant games featured at arcades caused widespread international panics owing to the combination of overt violence and arcades ‘as uncontrolled spaces in which young people congregated.’ Sheff (1999) also discussed the success of the gaming industry in the face of sustained negative discourses based on video game arcades. Communities from all regions of the U.S. – from New York to California to Florida – were passing ordinances restricting gaming at arcades throughout the 1980s and 1990s

The condemning of arcades as problem sites was international in scope. In Japan, arcades in the mid-1980s began to be described with ‘the three ks’ – kurai,

kitanai and kowai, meaning dark, dirty and scary (Hamilton, 1993). The situation was similar in Hong Kong, despite the fact that popular arcade fighting games like *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters* resulted in audiences manipulating the Japanese import into a socially and economically significant cultural hybrid¹⁷. Su (2006) declared that the “image of game centres perceived by the officials, teachers, parents and the press was relatively negative, associated with smoking, excessive noise, gang activities, and drug dealing.” Consequently, gaming at arcades came to be considered as entertainment for lower classes and uneducated males. In Malaysia, the backlash was more severe. Legal action began against video arcades that also promoted gambling in the 1990s, including a ‘mass demolition of illegal video game slot machines’ to squelch public concerns over the government’s apparent stagnation on enforcement. One Member of Parliament who led the campaign was quoted as saying “I take this matter very seriously as I do not want schoolchildren and teenagers in my neighbourhood to play truant and indulge in moral misconduct” (Pa’wan, 1997). By 2001, the Malaysian government was ordering all video game arcades to be shut down by the end of the year in response to increasingly negative public opinion of gaming¹⁸. Malaysia’s Deputy Prime Minister asserted that arcades were a ‘dangerous and large social problem,’ and the country’s

¹⁷ Hong Kong youth culture accepted the Japanese games, but they were localized and this hybridization mixed the games and local culture. The character designs in *King of Fighter* particularly influenced youth street fashion styles as players began to dress similarly to the characters in the game. Furthermore, arcade game culture was alleged to have promoted new ‘combat game-related jargons’ especially among the lower classes (Ng, 2006).

¹⁸ This was mainly under the general impression that arcades were endangering youth. The decision to rid the country of arcades happened “amid claims by many parents and government officials that moral values have plunged among teenagers and young adults. Some academics blamed the increasing popularity of violent video games for a surge in school crimes last year, including stabbings and students setting fire to classrooms. They also said arcades cause teenagers to skip school and waste their allowances. Meanwhile, police argued that many of the dark, smoky game centres function as a front for gambling and money laundering” (Yoong, 2001).

most influential newspaper compared the movement against arcades to a jihad, portraying arcade goers as victims in need of saving (Yoong, 2001). In Venezuela, the more recent attempts at banning violent video games, which put arcades and PC cafés in danger, were applauded by some, but considered as a ‘public relations stunt’ by critics as a response to the country’s extensive violent crime problems. Lawmakers there have argued that the alarmingly high murder rate could be lowered significantly by preventing access to such games (Toothaker, 2009).

Compounding the setbacks caused by the moral panics, during the late 1980s, arcade culture began to rapidly lose popularity. Accounts chronicling this slowdown vary, but Kent (2001, p. 176) writes that as early as 1982, the decline of arcade centres was already becoming apparent. Large arcades were disappearing as their owners continued to purchase new equipment and machines, hoping that business would return. However, as with the home console market at the time, which resulted in the sudden video game crash of 1983, the arcade industry was becoming saturated and growth slowed significantly. Investors who had recently set up arcade businesses began to rapidly lose money, forcing the closure of many arcades.

The late 1980s downturn was reversed by a massive resurgence owing largely to the success of a single game in the early 1990s. As opposed to the space-shooters and action-puzzle games that defined 1970s/1980s arcade play, the late 1980s and early 1990s brought with them *Street Fighter*. The series’ second instalment, *Street Fighter II* (1991) has been labeled the game that saved arcades, or at least slowed their decline (Carle, 2010, p. 156). One of the series’ main innovations was its drive towards fostering direct conflict between players, as opposed to promoting conflict based on scores or in-game rankings. In his history of the series, Carle (2010) describes this shift well: “[Previously] the competition was for scores, and getting one’s name at the apex of that glowing list on the “game over” screen was the desired reward for hours of practice. The whole notion of the three-letter slug was to invite competition between gamers; and in a cash business, competition meant coins... In 1987, with the release of [the first] *Street Fighter*, gamers were finally given the opportunity to measure themselves against one another live, mano a mano” (pp. 25-26).

Su (2010, p. 1) also emphasizes that with *Street Fighter*, the arcade became a social space in which a player's reputation was put on the line: "establishment of this genre of video games brought about a new wave of competitive gaming. Competition used to mean vying for the top of the scoreboard... SF2 allowed one to claim superiority by simply saying, 'I beat you.'" The series brought about a second golden age because of its head-to-head competition which would revolutionize game design, slightly offsetting the encroachment of home console gaming. In some Asian countries like Japan, fighting games in the early-mid 1990s, including *Street Fighter 2* and *Virtua Fighter*, became so popular and the competition so heated that professional gaming instructors began to charge for classes so that players could excel against others. By attempting to further institutionalize the fledgling sport of digital gaming, these instructors were among the first to offer a new kind of structured education based on gaming, much like sports instructors did in European schools in the 1800s. This also seemed to foreshadow an emerging Asian gaming culture in which location-based gaming would take off at an exceptional intensity.

Although many seemed to paint a generally optimistic portrait even into the late 1990s¹⁹, the renewed prosperity of arcades would not last long. After the early 1990s resurgence of public gaming, similar criticisms of market saturation were levelled at the industry; however, developers took more of the attack than exhibitors this time around. Due to the fervent success of *Street Fighter*, an excess of "me-too" copy-cat games

¹⁹ Wolf (1997, p. 11) saw that stand-alone arcades were still "keeping pace" as they moved into more realistic 3D settings, while Stafford (1999) identified the popularity of arcades within a theme park, where he interviewed amusement park workers, one of whom cautions that youth are increasingly becoming less interested in conventional attractions at the carnival, and are instead spending more of their time at arcades that have entered the fair in recent years. At Vancouver's Playland amusement park (one site of his study), the "Nintendo Power Zone," known as the "Interactive Game Pavilion," was quickly becoming the major draw for young patrons of the park even at this late point.

were created attempting to emulate the success. Furthermore, the global panics about youth playing digital games in public recurrently contributed to arcade closures or the inability for new ones to be built. The increasing saturation of poor-quality fighting game clones in arcades, persistent moral panics, and quickly increasing console and PC technology were all factors for game developers pushing towards the privatization of video game platforms. The fact that developers were jumping ship en masse all but guaranteed the fate of the arcade gaming sector. This was especially true as several companies began to release advertising with explicit encouragements for gamers to avoid the arcades.

3.3. Going Home: The Console Movement

Although the first video game was one created for a television, the primordial gaming culture spread throughout arcade centres, and the subsequent digital gaming industry flourished under the banner of public gaming. However, even the first commercially successful arcade game, Atari's *Pong* (1972), was not exempt from disruption attempts. Ever since the games industry was popularized in early-1970s arcades, there was always a concerted effort to bring the experience home. As early as 1975, game companies tried to translate public venue success to the private home setting²⁰. Kent (2001, p. xiii) pinpoints 1980 as the year that the "practice of selling home versions of arcade hits is started." The trend of adapting arcade games for the home market seemed innocent enough. Players could still retain the authentic, technologically superior game play experience by visiting the arcade, and this truth kept the arcade industry alive throughout the 1980s. However, the 1990s were different.

²⁰ After its success at game centres, Atari developed a home video game system based on *Pong* (Wolf, 1997, p. 14).

Prior to the '90s, the gap in technology between consoles and arcades was too great, preventing a faithful conversion of the arcade game. It was in this decade that the gap disappeared, and *Street Fighter 2* was the game that erased it. For some commentators, the *Street Fighter* series has served as a “canary in the coalmine” for gaming, changing based on differing market demands over time. Carle, for instance, describes the series as having “launched the fighting genre, introducing dozens of new concepts in gaming, revitalizing the arcade, caused an explosion in console sales, served as an ambassador of Japanese culture and anime, paved the way for female heroes like Lara Croft and competitive games like Doom, and inspired products that have impacted all forms of entertainment” (Carle, 2010, p. 18). Of particular note here are the assertions that the series revitalized the arcade, but also created a large increase in console game sales²¹. In effect, this unwittingly caused a major haemorrhage of players from public arcade gaming to private home play. Carle later states that *Street Fighter 2* “was the closest a home console game had ever come to looking like an arcade game. Super Nintendo is where you really saw the console world catching up to the arcade world” (2010, p. 159). The acclaimed graphics of arcade games had been transferred to the home experience, allowing players to spend a set \$50 or \$60 and play a game endlessly as opposed to having to insert a quarter or two for what often amounted to only a few minutes of play.

This may seem to suggest that arcade gaming’s downfall in the mid-1990s was primarily due to the draw of enhanced console and PC gaming technology. However, gamer preference was not the only factor directing this conversion. By looking at the games and marketing put out by companies during the mid-1990s, we can see how game corporations also redirected consumers away from arcades. In their analysis of

²¹ Also of consequence here is the claim that the series acted as a forerunner to popular competitive Western games, something that will be assessed in greater detail in chapter 4.

video game advertising during the 1990s, Kline and de Peuter (2002) examined hundreds of pieces of promotional material. One of the trends they found was that companies would increasingly attempt to steer game fans towards consoles by promising arcade-quality gaming at home. One of the best examples is Rare Ltd. (also known as Rareware), now a subsidiary of Microsoft Game Studios. Before moving to Microsoft's Xbox, however, the company was a third party licensee for the original NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), and produced dozens of games for that console. The company developed a number of popular arcade games as well, perhaps the most commercially successful and well-known among them being graphic fighting game *Killer Instinct*. In the same year that the game was released to arcades (1994), Rare became a second-party developer for Nintendo, who bought 49% of the company (McLaughlin, 2008). Nintendo was only somewhat involved in the arcade business, and subsequent promotional materials from the new Nintendo-Rare partnership disparaged gaming's arcade sector.

Rare and Nintendo even turned to subtly suggesting that the arcade era was over in their games. In the opening sequence to Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* (1994), we see an aged ape playing music through a phonograph. As it turns out, he is Donkey Kong himself – he was the star of the early 1980s *Donkey Kong* arcade games and is now the grandfather of the “new” Donkey Kong in the *Country* series. As the elder Kong plays his tune on the antiquated machine, which sits atop the famous red construction beams that the original *Donkey Kong* game took place on, the pace quickens and new instruments are introduced as a stereo falls from the sky knocking the phonograph away. The new, redesigned Donkey Kong follows, knocking the elder from his perch as he dances to the music and the simple old construction site transforms into the canopy of a tropical jungle. Besides building on the ‘outlaw pitch to teenagers’ marketing tactic, and likely latent to most that saw it in the mid-1990s, this scene is a visual representation of one of the most important turning points in the history of the digital games industry. The sequence shows the introduction of a new type of paradigm for the industry, and throughout the rest of the game, Cranky (the moniker given to the elder Kong) nags at Donkey Kong about how things “used to be” and how spoiled gamers of the new generation are. In many significant ways, Cranky was representing the location-based play paradigm, while the redesigned Donkey was a doppelganger for the future of

gaming. The transition from the top of the level that Donkey Kong arcade players played on to the graphically impressive new world was meant to suggest that old arcade sensibilities were making way for a new generation of game play. In fact, Rare and Nintendo did not stop at veiled suggestions that the arcade way of playing was receding.

The following year, *Killer Instinct* (1995) was ported to the SNES (Super Nintendo Entertainment System). The promotional material put out for the game by Rare and Nintendo further demonstrated how game developers were shifting their priorities to the home console market, where the razors and blades (consoles and software) interdependency necessitated singular promotion of this dynamic. One commercial for the game was set in a first-person perspective (perhaps symbolic of the viewer), where all that can be seen in the immediate vicinity of the commercial's protagonist is a fully-revved chainsaw. The chainsaw continues moving towards an isolated arcade cabinet, and the game's and Nintendo's logos are briefly seen as the saw tears through it. "It's everything you love about the arcade game" exclaims the narrator as the man carrying the chainsaw kicks over the now halved cabinet, "cut down to size." The man produces a SNES from inside the cabinet, implying that the technology powering the arcade was now available for the home market.

Another *Killer Instinct* SNES commercial had children in an (implicitly) profanity-laden state of disbelief upon seeing the SNES version of the game, with one child excitedly exclaiming that "It looks like the [bleep] arcade!" The fact that a company would go to such lengths to discredit its merely year-old game – and, at the same time, possibly alienating this fanbase – goes a long way in showing the cut-throat nature of the digital games market at this time. The political, social, and economic conditions during Nintendo's rise have been covered extensively by Sheff (1999), but it is important to note that in the 1990s, in addition to renewed competition from arcades (again, largely owing to *Street Fighter* and subsequent games), Nintendo was facing stiff competition from Sega and later Sony in the video game hardware market. The concept of intellectual properties appearing exclusively on their home consoles was adopted and perfected by Nintendo, so it is not surprising that ads disparaging arcades would be generated. Interestingly, both of the aforementioned commercials also ended with the narrator rhetorically asking "who needs a new system?" presumably as an attack geared towards both the arcade and competing consoles.

The growing prosperity of home consoles at the expense of arcades could also be seen in the changing nature of televised eSport shows. As noted, during the 1980s television shows featured pro arcade gamers competing. In the early 1990s, however, similar shows began to emphasize the consoles. In the early 1990s, Australia and Canada both aired competitive video game television shows aimed at and featuring children and teenagers. Seven Network's *A*mazing* (1993-1998) from Australia is well-known because it is often attributed as being the first regularly televised eSports program (Jin, 2010, p. 65). In Canada, YTV aired *Video & Arcade Top 10* between 1991 and 2004, a run far longer than other eSports programs in the West. The show pitted four youth against each other in a variety of games²² in which players had to amass the most points, reach further in the game than the other contestants, or collect the most of something (the stipulations depended on the game). Show sponsors included game companies like Nintendo, consumer electronics corporations including Casio, and various organizations dedicated to youth initiatives (for instance, one prize was a free visit to the Ontario Science Centre). These synergies coincided not only with heightened levels of competitive gaming, but were a timely response to the overall growth of gamer culture in the early 1990s.

More particularly, Nintendo's cooperation with *V&A Top 10* was not surprising. Only a few years prior to *Video & Arcade Top 10*'s initial airing, Nintendo released the full-length feature film *The Wizard* (1989), which depicted children traveling to California so that they could compete in a Nintendo tournament. Beyond introducing eSport to Hollywood and a new entertainment medium, the film is significant in that it was so blatantly embedded in anticipated synergy windfalls. Sheff claimed that the film "was less a piece of art than a one-hundred-minute advertisement for Nintendo that millions of

²² Although arcade games were featured at times, as the show went on the games being featured were increasingly console games.

families paid to see” (1999, p. 4). Nintendo cleverly snuck into the film the first footage of its new game, *Super Mario Bros. 3*, as the last (secret) game that the film contestants had to face off in. The movie was ready four months before the game was released, creating unprecedented hype, and, according to Sheff, the excitement for the footage was far greater than that for the film itself: “[this] promotion for ‘Super Mario Bros. 3’ proved more valuable than any paid advertising ever could” (Ibid, p. 190).

Nintendo’s early involvements with eSports did not stop in the cinema. In 1990, Nintendo went around the U.S. on its “Powerfest,” a World Championships of gaming tour. The company promoted the event as the ultimate showcase of professional Nintendo gaming at a time when the country was gripped with “Nintendo Fever.” Leading up to the Powerfest, Nintendo hosted a nationwide gaming competition in thirty cities over the course of eight months, bringing top gamers together to face one another at the local and then regional level (Sheff, 1999, p. 191), much like the early arcade contests as well as later international tournaments. The grand finale was held at Universal Studios in California, and commemorative *World Championships NES* cartridges that were handed out to finalists now sell for thousands of dollars on eBay. J.D. Turbeville (1990) was a competitor in the 1990 Powerfest, and in his memoir of the event, he conveys the excitement of a young gamer making it past the first qualifiers. Interestingly, the initial stages of the tournament retained a player-versus-machine convention that was representative of eSports in the arcade era: “It wasn’t you against the competition, it was you against the baseline score of 195000 set by the tournament committee.” Although later stages of the tournament featured players competing directly against one another (Turbeville even parallels the experience to the one seen in *The Wizard*), such an eSports tournament, where player-versus-machine conflict pre-empted player-versus-player competition, is illustrative in demonstrating the changes that happened in the arcades as well as gaming overall between the early 1980s and late 1980s/early 1990s.

The combination of all these factors created a new collapse in the arcade sector. While the increasing console and PC technology attracted gamers who already wanted to play at home, game companies encouraged such an exodus by shifting their emphases towards console game production. The moral panics only solidified the downfall. However, a decisive dissimilarity was soon evident between earlier public

arcade gaming recessions and the one in the early-mid 1990s. Whereas the relatively slow 1980s decline in arcade gaming was largely a North American development, the 1990s withdrawal of the sector was international in scope. Writing about this corrosion, Kent (2001, p. 582) noticed that “The drop in the Japanese game market started so slowly that few people saw the shift take place. Just as the American arcade business started drying up in 1982, Japanese arcades showed signs of distress in 1998.” By 1999, Japan’s largest and most visible arcade company, Sega, began closing arcade centres. By 2000, the company even began to close some of its “flagship Joypolis virtual theme parks,” followed by similar closures by arcade giants Namco and Taito in 2001.

The collapse of arcades during the 1990s can be quantified by analysing the number of arcade machines being produced by major game corporations. The following discussion therefore maps the manufacturing output of the five largest arcade game companies (Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, and Taito) in order to determine exactly how and by what measure arcade *production* was impacted by these adverse developments. These companies were selected because they were the largest producers of arcade machines between 1981 and 2010, and were in operation from at least the early 1980s until 2005, when the decline became most apparent²³. They also specialized in video arcade games, as opposed to, for instance, pinball or redemption machines (although there is overlap, of course). The list of games was compiled from

²³ Not all major corporations that were involved with coin-operated gaming were included in this examination (notable omissions include Atari, Midway, and SNK). However, companies that became radically altered or defunct during the period of the study, such as Atari and Midway, did not fit the parameters of the case study, and if they were producing arcade machines, the manufacturing patterns were remarkably similar to the ones observed in the investigation. Country of release was not noted for each machine, but since cabinets usually have centralized assembly and are then exported, this plays less of a role on production than would otherwise be deemed significant.

International Arcade Museum's Killer List of Video Games (www.arcade-museum.com), a comprehensive resource chronicling over a century's worth of coin-operating gaming machinery. Over 1,500 coin-operated titles were manufactured by these five companies over the last 30 years; Figure 3 shows the cumulative number of cabinets released by these corporations in five-year instalments. The chart confirms that production remained relatively steady through the fall and rise of the home video game industry (mid-to-late-1980s), and through the 1990s as well. However, after this point, the manufacture of coin-operated games drops off dramatically. The amount of arcade games released by these five corporations was more than halved, from 341 in 1996-2000, to 151 in 2001-2005. In the subsequent five-year period (2006-2010), we again see that production is more than halved, to only 69 units.

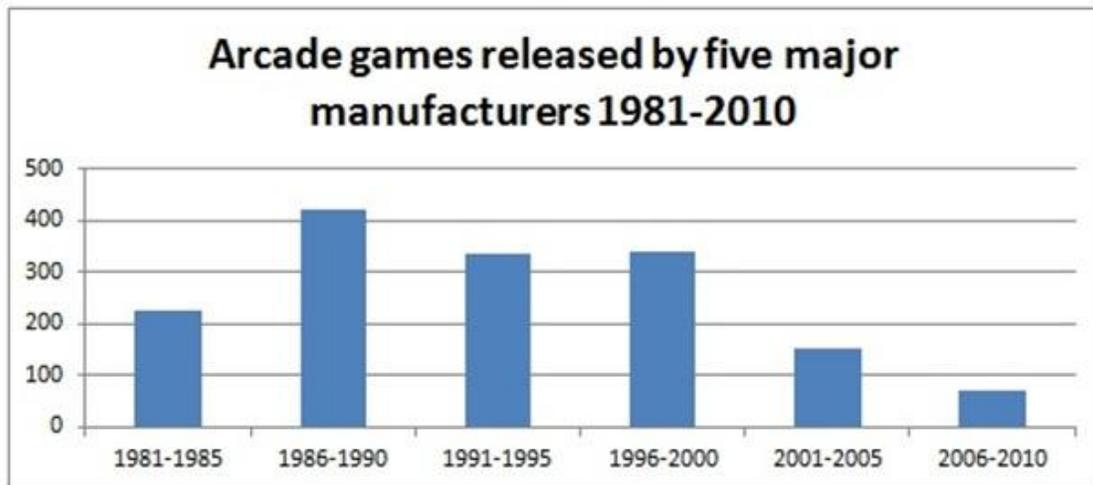


Figure 3. *Total arcade games manufactured by Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, and Taito in five-year instalments, between 1981-2010 (inclusive).*

Looking at these releases on a year-by-year basis and at each company individually, we see the same trends (Figure 4). By 1999-2000, four companies were already producing significantly fewer arcade games, although SEGA pressed on – albeit in a reduced capacity - presumably in its attempts to sustain synergies. These synergies were primarily occurring between its game production and location-based entertainment divisions that offered another promotional vehicle through SEGA's involvements with

Playdium (Kline et al, 2003). Although SEGA lessened its ties with Playdium after the latter's acquisition by Starburst Coin Machines Inc., the company did not entirely cease in the arcade sector. Interestingly, Konami's most successful year in terms of games manufactured was in 2000, followed by a strong 2001. Much of this triumph, however, was due to the new Bemani (the company's music and rhythm games) craze, led by *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Beatmania*. Regardless, by the middle of the decade it was evident that all five of these former arcade giants were experiencing a massive decline in the coin-operated sector.

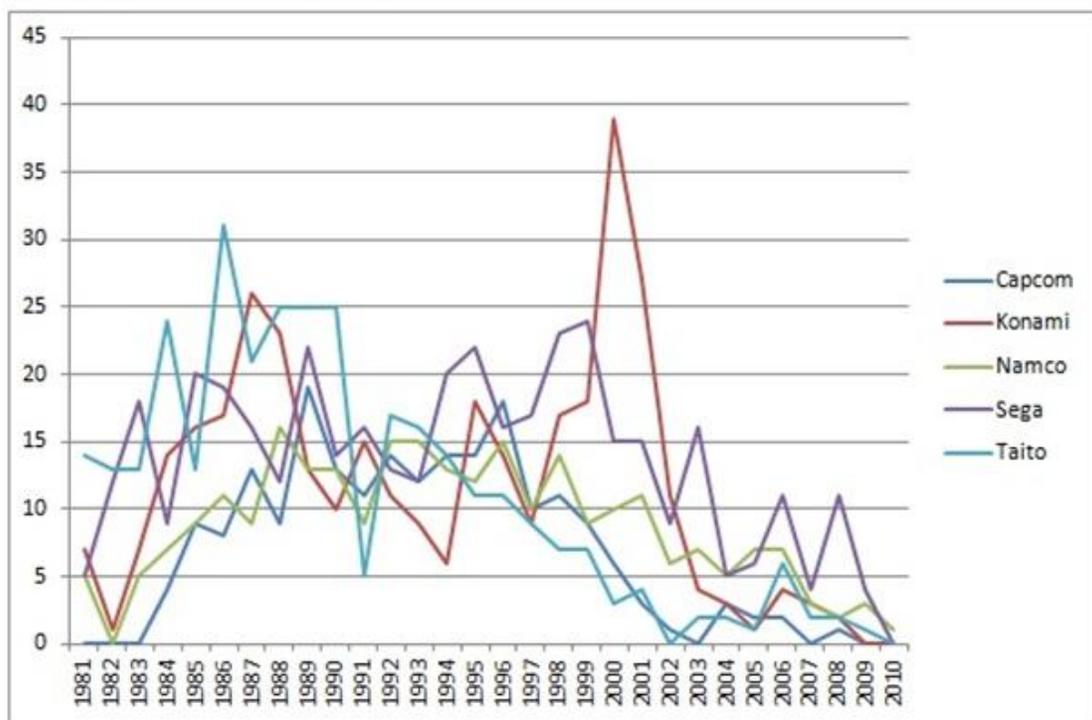


Figure 4. *Coin-operated titles released per year by Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, and Taito.*

It is also important to factor in lag when examining the above charts. Even during years of decline (for instance, the late 1980s, during which the most machines were produced on average, or during the late 1990s), companies seem to have continued to produce a large number of coin-operated machines for arcades. In both cases, the public play sector was coming off successful moments in its history (the first

and second “golden ages” outlined above), perhaps lulling companies into a false sense of optimism when it came to market outlook during these years. As we have seen with the last three decades of arcade machine production among five leading international corporations, much of the focus in the digital games industry turned away from location-based play and towards home entertainment. However, it is important to note that the observed reductions were a response to the changing cultural and economic perceptions of gamers towards the arcade which culminated in a vastly reduced market.

3.3.1. Changing Characteristics of Public Arcade Play in the 2000s

The migration of both consumers and developers towards the home market was taxing, especially for the once dominant sector. Fighting games were rooted in people wanting to compete and flaunt their skills to a crowd, so “The genre was really in trouble when arcades up and vanished in North America and Europe... It really depended on people wanting to go and compete, smash opponents and show off” (Alexander, 2009). Because of this departure, the *Street Fighter* franchise became merely a relic of its former self in the public space, with Capcom beginning to focus more and more on the home market. The company’s senior director of communications Chris Kramer explained it as there essentially having been “no way for people to really come together and compete” (Ibid). For about a decade, the franchise “lay dormant,” until competitive play cycles established in the arcade were successfully translated to the online space (in fact, online services on contemporary consoles have names like “XBOX Live Arcade”). However, Capcom’s decision not to release *Street Fighter 4* (2008) for the U.S. arcade market was a heavy blow to the contemporary arcade community, and has reinforced the company’s distrustful stance on the possibilities of renewed mainstream approaches to public gaming (Williams, 2009).

Although the predominant arcade genre of the early and mid-1990s was all but eradicated by the turn of the millennium, Figure 4 showed that Konami was able to not only sustain the development of its arcade machines during this tumultuous time, but also doubled output at the turn of the millennium. The reason for this was that they had discovered a new public gaming market that was ready for a new way of interacting with the arcade. “Bemani” is the name of Konami’s music and rhythm video game division, representing popular games such as *Beatmania* (1997) and *Dance Dance Revolution*

(1998), as well as subsequent iterations. Chien (2006: 33) notes that this type of gameplay was pioneered by carnival and amusement park games such as *Whac-a-Mole* (1976), and like many others, attributes the Bemani craze as being instrumental in briefly revitalizing arcade culture once again. One of the main ways that the newly flourishing genre was able to create new prosperity for the arcade sector was by attracting an active female audience, something that had always been lacking in the masculine competitive arcade spaces of the 1980s and early 1990s. It also blurred the concept of agon in the public gaming space as many players unexpectedly approached the game competitively. In fact, *DDR* contests were frequent and players became obsessive in their desires to be considered top players in the various Bemani games.

Dance Dance Revolution and its sequels became so successful, in fact, that they “not only buoyed the flagging arcade business, but a home version launched in 2001, filtering [the series] into the mainstream... Three of the top seven best-selling PS2 games in 2003 were variations of *DDR*” (Bulik, 2004). Of course, we have seen what happens when eager games producers port their arcade hits to the home market, and the consequences were no different for Konami. By 2004, Konami stated that no more arcade versions of *DDR* were to cross the ocean into the U.S. market, as “With about 2,000 machines already here, and because the arcade game died a fad death in Japan, Konami’s arcade division won’t be upgrading the machines again” (Ibid). Regardless of its meteoric flash of popularity (as Figure 4 shows, Konami’s machine output dropped significantly in 2001-2002), the game did much to change perceptions of gaming culture. Instead of sedentary players at a cabinet, the Bemani stint showed gamers as public performers (Chien, 2006), dancing before a screen and flashing lights, beating on drums or playing a guitar connected to the cabinet.

Because of the declining fortunes of conventional arcades, and because of the casual appeal of the Bemani games, the public gaming business looked into turning former arcades into more general sanitized family-oriented game spaces (along the lines of Nolan Bushnell’s *Chuck-E-Cheeses*). In the early 1990s, game companies began to build their own broadly termed public ‘amusements businesses.’ Sega in particular took the lead in Japan, the U.S., and Canada. Gigo, a popular video game arcade in one of Tokyo’s most popular nightlife districts, was one of the first to target older youth audiences as well as families. It was more than just an arcade; Gigo also featured a

sports bar, karaoke, and a mock casino to attract broader audiences. By 1992, Sega was installing such an arcade in Las Vegas, the first of ten in the U.S. and Europe that were to open by the end of that year. This would be followed by 25 'virtual reality theme parks' with the goal being "to 'transport' [players] into the game world" (Hamilton, 1993).

Already building amusement centres in Japan, Sega formed an alliance with Playdium in order to further its reach into the North American market in 1993 (Kline et al, 2003). Unlike the dark, squalid arcades that were so ubiquitous during the 1980s (not to mention causing the moral panics), Playdium arcades were vibrant, lively, and massive. With 40,000 square feet of game space and a cost of \$18 million to build, this arcade was capable of holding 8000 people per day. According to Stafford (1999), "the Playdium also represent[ed] the pinnacle of game equipment." Kline et al (2003, pp. 229-32) analyzed the Canadian-based Playdium arcade chain by emphasizing its intended synergy effects, namely as a site for the combination of the arcade and the appeal of a Disney-like amusement park (the Playdium brand was conceived when its founders noticed a gap in leisure space, somewhere between traditional arcade centres and more large-scale theme parks). Play centres were created in several of Canada's major cities, while Sega provided the games for the venue in a synergistic relationship that was to redefine the arcade experience. Opening in 1996, the first Playdium saw more than one million visitors attend the venue in its first year, bringing in over \$6 million. The enterprise was poised for success, as "Game theme parks are by now almost standard in mega-shopping complexes... Interactive games are thus becoming a key component in the new complexes of consumer- and entertainment-oriented space" (Ibid, p. 232).

The Playdium model represented a shift away from prior notions of arcades. The new chain attempted to be more family-oriented and integrated into the mall experience as a more general entertainment centre, emphasizing large machines with attached peripherals, and new ways to play interactive games – namely through greater immersion via virtual reality technologies and elaborate capsule-like machines. The Playdium prototype was considered as one with much potential and was backed by significant marketing hype, but the anticipated results did not really come to fruition. While these locations attempted to cash in on the 'wow' factor of a high-end public gaming spectacle, they failed to regenerate the enthusiasm for public play as

exemplified by the arcades. In February 2001, the company filed for bankruptcy protection (Kohane, 2006). This reminds us that business models are not always successfully forced upon an unassuming public; instead, the Playdium represented that success in the gaming industry is a constant reimagining based on market conditions and fan expectations.

Additionally, the business model did not resonate with competitive gamers and the fan base had not developed as well as the company had hoped. Soon after, centres began to close. The Burnaby Playdium, housed in an entertainment section of Metrotown Mall (the largest in British Columbia), was shut down in January 2005 due to increased rents, a failure to update their machines from old versions (which resulted in disapproval from fans), and further advances in console and PC games. A year prior, in May 2004, Playdium closed its West Edmonton mall (the largest mall in Canada) location after having been open since 1998, an investment that cost \$12 million (Le Riche, 2004). The president and CEO of Playdium Corp., Cal Haverstock, reiterated that a primary force threatening public play spaces was “the explosion of home-based GameBoys, Xboxes and PlayStations,” demanding that in order to attract more customers, the public venues had to offer something unique and inviting (Kohane, 2006). This was echoed by Detlev Zwick, then assistant professor of marketing at York University’s Schulich School of Business, who claimed that while the original arcade boom flourished because the games were reminiscent of a multiplex experience similar to multi-screen movie theatres, “The technology of home gaming combined with wide-screen television now fairly equates that offered by location-based entertainment centres (LBEs). It’s part of the ongoing home-cocooning trend” (Zwick in Kohane, 2006). Currently, there is only one Playdium location still standing, in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

3.4. Conclusion

On February 26, 2011, a pillar of public gaming ceased its operations. Chinatown Fair, a video game arcade located at 8 Mott Street in New York City’s Chinatown district, closed after over five decades of business. The space was renowned both locally and internationally as one of gaming’s most distinguished public

spaces, and the conclusion of Chinatown Fair's long history reinforced the lengthy trend of defeat within the public gaming sector. Beyond community, another key factor in popularizing this particular arcade globally was the fact that it was where many professional gamers first began to practice. One of them, Henry Cen, who also worked at CTF, is opening a new public gaming space, but here we can see the changing nature of contemporary public play venues. It is being labeled as "the opposite of the beloved old venue ... Instead of a crowded warren of consoles, perfumed by three decades of adrenaline, it is an antiseptic space decorated with nothing more than white Sheetrock... [it] would not be an arcade in the usual sense. It would be a showcase for fighting games and their star players, a way to advance the sport" (Kaminer, 2011). The closure has been seen as a "final nail in the coffin" of arcade culture for many fans.

This chapter has tracked competitive gaming from its 1980s roots in arcade spaces, all the way up to what those spaces represent in the present day. I have been using eSports and competitive gaming more generally as a major case study in a broader discussion of promotional event-based marketing in the digital games industry. It has looked at the dissolution of the arcade as the preeminent location-based play sector and business model from the perspectives of competition, a consumer tendency towards private ownership as opposed to public pay-to-play conventions, and outright promotional efforts to highlight the benefits of console gaming. By the turn of the millennium, arcade centres were rapidly becoming less populated and companies were producing fewer machines. The next chapter covers the conceptual frameworks of event marketing and opens the discussion to how events and public gaming exist in networked PC-based settings. It starts by examining where much of the former arcade-going audience has migrated to before talking about what agonistic public gaming has become in South Korea and the U.S.

4. The Networking of Public Gaming

4.1. From Arcade to PC Café

In recent years, many news outlets, scholars, and game developers have been commenting on the much amplified relevance of eSport not only as a new sporting event in the experientially-driven media age, but as an increasingly important constituent of the overall gamer culture. Reports to this effect abound, such as technology site *PC World's* December 2010 article, suggesting that 2011 will be the 'Year of eSports' (Miller, 2010). When we look at the online viewership statistics for pro gaming events in late 2011 for Major League Gaming alone (Figure 5), it would seem that the upstart sport is in fact rapidly gaining momentum. Despite only covering five months, each event saw major increases in peak concurrent viewership and hours of online video consumed.

Table 1. Audience statistics for Major League Gaming's 2011 Season.

Metric	Columbus June 3-5	Anaheim July 29-31	Raleigh August 26-28	Orlando October 14-16	Providence November 18-20
Peak Concurrent Online Stream Viewers	117,000	124,592	138,000	181,000	241,000
Total Hours Video Viewed Online	2,264,455	2,580,051	3,055,089	3,233,101	3,600,000
Total Countries Viewed Stream	164	171	173	163	200
Stream Views	22.5 million	35 million	NA	NA	NA
In-Person Attendance	16,000	20,000	15,000	15,000	16,000

Note. Data from MLG Fact Sheet 2011.

If the 2011 statistics are an indication of significant growth, the trends for the 2012 events demonstrate an even faster growing product. The number of peak concurrent viewers jumped from the record-breaking 241,000 in 2011, to 437,000 at the MLG 2012 Spring Championship event in Anaheim, California, and again had a live attendance of 20,000. The three day event was also witnessed by a record 4.7 million unique online stream viewers (Georges, 2012a). This chapter examines how the PC became the platform of choice for many competitive gamers since the mid 1990s, and how competitive gaming in the 21st century has positioned the internet as a critical distribution platform for the witnessing of not only eSport, but sports in general.

Many commentators consider eSport to be synonymous with these massive public gaming competitions where thousands attend and millions follow the competition online, whether on league websites or on dedicated streaming services such as *TwitchTV*. Furthermore, many are suggesting that eSport is only now becoming popularized in the West with attention-grabbing titles such as “StarCraft II and the Rise of American Pro Gaming” (Georges, 2012b). Others, however, relate the rise of U.S. eSport to the mid 1990s. When asked about his chief contribution to the gaming industry by *Computer Gaming World* prominent designer and game industry celebrity John Romero responded by noting the stage was set a decade and a half ago :

Co-creator of the first-person shooter? Designer of *Doom*. Myself, I [might] add pioneering death-match and the rise of e-sports. The e-sports connection isn't as well documented, but I was talking about death-match as a sport back in '95. We even discussed creating official leagues well before people started using the word 'clan' and forming their own groups. (Elliott, 2009, p. 32)

In this chapter I argue that these defining characteristics of contemporary eSports emerged during the “second phase” of eSport history as gamers and game designers increasingly migrated from the arcades into the networked computing environment. My examination of this historical phase of eSports emphasizes the importance of the improving computing technology, multi-player game designs and creative input from the gaming communities in laying the new foundation for the current boom in eSports.

Fuelled by the introduction of affordable personal computers with ever-improving graphics and sound capacity, joysticks and networking in the 1990s, the PC began to compete with the console in the home gaming market. While the gaming console was a dedicated platform the networked PC had multiple uses including homework, hobbies, business and email as well as providing access to 'arcade' quality games. A number of PC games during the 1990s began to catch up to or exceed the sales of popular console games; *Myst* (1993) sold six million copies, for instance, while *StarCraft* (1997) has sold 11 million. Given the growing range of applications available on the PC, not only were networked computers introduced into libraries but were also made available for rent. The clusters of PC terminals with modems allowed people to email and post on bulletin boards when they travelled about the city. Recognizing the growing importance of the PC, the first computer café originated in San Francisco in 1991, with the intent to "bring together two very different social milieus. The premise of the idea [was to] Create a network that allowed the well-heeled home user to connect with the young hipster crowd that frequented the smoke filled coffeehouses in the San Francisco Bay Area" (SFnet, 2011). SFnet acted as a catalyst for similar business endeavours. Soon a rival to the arcade, the internet café began to appear in city centres offering public access to the networked computers for an hourly price – mostly used for email but also with games and other applications available. These new businesses recognized the role that networked computing would play in a mobile society where people would not always have their computer with them. Although initially attractive for travellers, with the growing popularity of PC games these public portals to the online world also began to compete with the arcade as sites of 'infotainment'. By 1994, with a growing number of online games available internet cafés began to spread, including in the U.S., Canada, and more advanced European countries.

With the growing market for PC applications, game designers also began to improve the quality and diversity of games available on the PC with novel game designs like *Tetris* and *Myst* in the 1980s and 1990s. *Myst* was released – and a part of – a series of games in the early 1990s that were considered more adult-oriented than their predecessors. However, as opposed to popularizing a new genre (as with networked FPS) or relying on excessive violence, the conventions that *Myst* relied on were the expansion of the puzzle and adventure genres, emphasizing the potential of gaming to

be considered as artistic and intellectually challenging. Furthermore, it was one of the first games to attempt to remove or hide various features of a game's interface in order to render the experience more immersive and less 'game-like.' Popular arcade games like *Mortal Kombat 4* (1997) were also released and quickly ported to consoles like the Playstation and Nintendo 64, as well as the PC. But the key advantage of the PC was its communication capacity through the modem. During the early-to-mid 1990s, id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), *Doom* (1993), and *Quake* (1996) popularized the first-person shooter genre in the same way that *Street Fighter* did with two person gaming at arcades and on consoles, but with a difference. Now using the modem, two players could play against each other (seeing both avatars on their own screens) even though they were physically separated. The newly enabled ability to compete with many other players on a network in a graphically immersive violent game solidified the series within early eSport history, and the game is widely known to have introduced the term "deathmatch"²⁴ into gaming as suggested above. The result was a large-scale adoption of the game to the point that millions of people were playing it (it was also the bane of many employers as workers would frequently crash servers by playing it).

The 1980s and 1990s were critical as PC gaming companies initiated a number of game design conventions whose legacies would be implemented into other games – on console, PC, and mobile – for decades to come. Besides popularizing first-person shooters (the first popular console shooter would not come about until 1997's *Goldeneye*) and intricate puzzle-adventures like *Myst*, other series revolutionized other aspects of gaming. The *Ultima* series, for instance, pioneered a number of now-

²⁴ A deathmatch is a digital gaming contest that is structured by an "everyone for themselves" mentality. There is no formal or necessary teamwork, and unlike fighting games in the 1990s, the competition can comprise more than two players. The goals of a deathmatch are typically to gain as many kills as possible, or to outlast the other competitors. This has become the primary play format for a number of genres, but especially the FPS.

ubiquitous elements among role-playing games, such as using parties for combat (instead of a solo hero) as well as the graphical 'tile-like' appearance of the gaming map. In the 1970s through to the 1990s, the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (MECC) produced a number of 'edutainment' titles that were instantly popularized among schoolchildren in Canada and the U.S. such as *The Oregon Trail*, a text adventure first released in the early 1970 that saw players attempt a mid-19th century trek across America, and *DinoPark Tycoon* (1993) which was among the first popular business simulation games. The fact that these games were prevalent in many public schools allowed young students to become accustomed to playing PC games in public settings. 1989's *SimCity* helped in creating a simulation genre that was more open-ended in terms of goals, and these titles did much in paving the way for massively popular simulation-based games like *The Sims* (2000), which is still the best-selling PC game to date. Other games in the 1980s and 1990s were crucial for popularizing first-person shooters prior to *Doom*. Although they did not feature the perspective of a gun-wielding human, wireframe games like Atari's *Battlezone* (1983) and Peninsula Gameworks' *Spectre* (1991) used the now familiar first-person perspective in a futuristic 3D battlefield through the use of tank combat. These new games and genres ignited a large population of PC gamers that became insatiable consumers and looked for new ways of not only playing games, but playing together.

Alternatively gamers found that they could link their computers directly in what they called LAN parties (gatherings of PC gamers who would bring their own computers and set up "local area networks" for play in a centralized location). Although at first casual get-togethers among friends, groups began to organize public occasions for networked and multiplayer gaming. Beyond offering an open space for the gathering of like-minded players some of these events styled themselves as tournaments complete with sponsors, prizes, and an audience. The largest of these LAN events would offer places to sleep, catering, and even security. Many of the crucial formative elements of public play (social interaction, competitive gaming, community) were thus successfully transferred from arcades to public PC gaming settings. Jansz and Grimberg (2009) looked at three recent LAN gatherings in the Netherlands, with the goal of ascertaining why players enjoyed these events, and what drove them to be fans of particular game genres. The authors of the study noted that competition was the most important motive

for gamers, since almost all of their interview participants highlighted this feature as the reason they attend and play. They note that players would participate and endure hardships such as carrying their heavy machines to and from events because they could meet other players. One participant of the study, when discussing his gaming achievements against other players, stated that “It really is about something, you must prove yourself. It’s really about honor” (Jansz and Grimberg, 2009, p. 27). This response builds on the rhetoric of “winning” and “losing” that became prevalent with competitive arcade games, so the claim that LAN events function as successors to arcade spaces is reinforced through this account. Furthermore, Jonasson and Thiborg (2010) identifying that there has been continual growth when it comes to LAN events; the record for most attended LAN gathering jumped from 5,852 in 2004 to 10,544 in 2007. The record has again been broken, and as of 2012, the world’s largest LAN event included almost 21,000 participants as well as 1.6 million unique online stream viewers (DreamHack, 2012).

The emergence of LAN parties is significant because many PC gamers also had programming skills and they began to not only crack and pirate, but modify, add to, and personalize the games. The amazingly popular *Doom* introduced accessibility in the creation and use of fan-made modifications (“mods”) into gaming that could not be done on consoles for instance. This elevated level of community innovation and involvement in particular favourite games soon produced myriad outcomes including the creation of fan-driven LAN events, in-game mods and add-ons, and the formation of teams who competed together. Among the best known examples of consumer-driven revolutions in gaming is certainly *Counter-Strike*. In 1999, two students from Simon Fraser University and Virginia Tech released a mod to Sierra’s popular *Half-Life* (1998). The FPS was a tactical squad-based reimagining of the game’s engine, where terrorists faced off against

counter-terrorists. The mod became instantly successful and the amateur developers were recruited by the *Half-Life* developer the following year. Significantly, *Counter-Strike* has persisted as one of the most significant FPS games within eSport, despite its age.

Quake was similarly significant for the development of both gaming and eSport. Fans of the game would generate an online community of competitive gamers who organized around a new form of competition - "Speed running"²⁵. Players would compete with each other to see who could finish a level on the hardest difficulty the quickest, then compile a video of each stage's best run into one entity that showed the game being cleared at an almost inhuman pace. Subsequent competitors would then challenge these times, ever decreasing the overall run time. Initially, players had to download the video file into their copies of the game to see the speed run, an indication of the kind of 'double mediatisation' that defines the PC eSport era - the 'sport' encompasses both the competitive elements (the game) as well as the media platforms that allow subsequent witnessing (in this case, the video taping of spectacular feats). In this sense the internet became not only a platform for online multiplayer gaming, but a communications medium among players. Eventually, speed runs were exchanged

²⁵ Interestingly, speed running as a form of competitive gaming was – and has been – a reimagining of the kind of eSport that arcades were known for. Players would compete against not only other players (i.e. who can clear the stages the fastest), but also against the computer (the primary competition was against various elements of level design and artificial intelligence). This was precisely what popularized initial eSport in arcades, and the continued popularity of speed running to this day is indicative of sustained differences within competitive gaming. What differentiated competitive arcade gaming and speed running on PC and consoles was the nature of identifying high scores. When arcades were popular, players would go to a public space to see the high score list. However, with the onset of networked computing, pro gamers now circulate not only their scores/times, but the mediated process of getting to that point as well – these players spread the media of their achievements online. Therefore, in addition to competition, the popularity of speed-running demonstrated the increasingly mediatized element within eSport culture – players were not only interested in competing, but in recording and sharing their feats as well.

(often through p2p networks) via various downloadable video files that could be played on computer media players. In the 2000s, online video uploading sites such as Youtube became popular among speed runners, and most recently, speed run communities have been using online streaming sites such as *TwitchTV* to record record-breaking speed run attempts live. The speed running case as a component of eSport in general is significant as the community rapidly integrated various emergent distribution methods into disseminating its products – from p2p video file exchange to uploads to online streaming, a representation for the changing nature of the confluence between gaming, sport, and play within the experience economy.

Many gamers began to take advantage of this networked technological infrastructure as a new way to play in PC cafés as well – an alternative to the LAN party. Not only was the PC gaming industry soon competing with the emergent home console market but the PC cafés, with their networked technologically augmented gaming systems began to compete with the arcades. Similar to LAN events, many of the most skilled PC gamers would attend these local spaces to meet other gamers playing at high levels, and subsequently form gaming clans (much like sports teams, except for the explicit purpose of competing in team-based digital games such as *Counter-Strike*). The outcome was that both the gaming community and the PC gaming industry began to see the future of online gaming through the lens of the popular first person genre of networked players whether in the local cafés or at LAN parties. In this dynamic environment the first pro-gaming leagues began to form in the late 1990s in the U.S. and Korea, where league owners and stakeholders soon re-implemented conventions that were associated with traditional sports – sponsorship, professionalization, audiences, product synergies and media coverage. This business model of the mediatized cyber-sport spectacle would become a fundamental component of the growth of the overall gaming industry as the re-emergence of eSports positioned the personal computer at the centre of these business models.

4.2. Early eSport League Formation in the U.S.

The immense popularity of first-person shooter games in the mid-1990s resulted in a resurgence of public play through LAN events and PC cafés, and soon gamers

desired structured outlets for their competitive gaming. As early as 1997 (the year before *StarCraft* was launched), the first professional digital gaming leagues were being formed both by individual entrepreneurs and interested corporations. In June of that year, the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) was founded in Dallas, Texas. Founder Angel Munoz describes the origins of the League: “The initial idea of the CPL was similar to a particle accelerator that smashes its protons at full speed. A few of the random things happening at the time that served as initial propulsion were a growing number of local LAN parties, E3 1997 hosting a game tournament offering John Carmack’s used Ferrari, and online competitions were growing exponentially” (Wen, 2007). Outfitted with a logo that took a visual cue from Major League Baseball’s iconic design, the CPL ran tournaments for several years²⁶. By 2005, the league was traveling to ten international locations and pushing a finale in New York that was televised by MTV. A similar tour took place the following year, and the CPL announced that it was creating subsidiaries of its brand for various countries (such as CPL China, Australia, Korea and so on). Kane (2008) followed two prominent teams in the CPL, CompLexity and Team 3D, as their rivalry unfolded in the context of *Counter-Strike* clan competition. While CompLexity was depicted as a high-level team owned by a passionate lawyer attempting to create and finance a professional gaming squad, Team 3D, the top ranked clan, was methodically run by a businessman and was already very well sponsored. While the book suggests a bright future for eSport, by 2008 the league was shut down citing increasing competition from other gaming leagues, the economic downturn, and the fragmentation of the sport. In a 2010 press release by former CPL parent group

²⁶ Interestingly, later eSport leagues also “borrowed” from the logo design of the MLB. Major League Gaming (2002-present), for instance, not only adopted the aesthetics of the design, but also took a cue from the baseball league through its name. This follows a long tradition of several U.S. based sports leagues, including the NBA, using the general logo template first used by MLB in the 1960s.

NewWorld, it was announced that Singapore's WoLong Ventures had procured "all of the international trademarks, logos and intellectual properties for both the CPL and CAL (Cyberathlete Amateur League), in addition to other related assets" (NewWorld, 2010).

Months after the CPL was inaugurated in 1997, the AMD Professional Gamer's League (PGL), named after the American semiconductor company, was launched with over \$2 million worth of sponsorship revenue based on its affiliations with San Francisco's Total Entertainment Network, Dockers, Creative Labs, Logitech and various Ziff-Davis media properties, such as *tv.com*, *Computer Gaming World*, and *GameSpot*. Featuring two initial games (id Software's *Quake* and Westwood Studios' *Command & Conquer: Red Alert*), the league was modeled on professional tennis (Jensen, 1997). The process for becoming involved was as follows: potential competitors signed up for a \$9.95 fee, and competed in open qualifiers until the best players were selected for league play. Playoffs took place in the month following league play, and the finals would take place "at an entertainment software retailer venue in southern California," where the gamers would compete for \$250,000 in cash and prizes (Ibid). Upon partnering with the PGL, the aforementioned sponsors were ensured exclusivity in their categories, and various cross-promotions among the content providers that were also affiliated with the league. The first PGL finals were held January 30-31, 1998 at Seattle's Sega GameWorks arcade, and a new season followed almost immediately. In the first half of 1998, the qualifying field for *Quake II* consisted of 1,500 gamers. The finals were held at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Atlanta, Georgia in front of approximately 150 spectators, and the finalists again competed for \$7,500 as well as thousands worth of prizes. One gamer, Dennis "Thresh" Fong, who, at 21 years old was known as "the league's Michael Jordan," earned close to \$100,000 and won a Ferrari (Brown, 1998). In 1999, PGL staged a championship tournament at XSNew York, a 20,000 square foot arcade in Times Square. *StarCraft* was the featured game, and the cash winnings grew to \$10,000 (Hesseldahl, 1999). The league even had aspirations of appearing on cable TV channels due to anticipated growth. However, both the CPL's and PGL's positions as core U.S.-based leagues were lost only a few years later.

While many have considered American professional gaming leagues such as the PGL and CPL as early pioneers in the realms of networked public gaming, a number of commentators and fans have gone as far as to suggest that these leagues were

detrimental to the growth of public competitive gaming. When U.S. eSports changed its capital from Ottumwa, Iowa (home of Twin Galaxies) to Dallas Texas (home of the CPL), many were optimistic about the shifting competitive gaming landscape in the U.S. However, a mere ten years after its inception, the CPL had already become defunct. Marc Turner, Editor in Chief for popular eSports website *GotFrag*, wrote a scathing critique of the CPL in 2008, asserting that the organization had done more harm to U.S. professional gaming than good. Turner notes that the CPL's decision to switch from the *Quake* series to *Counter-Strike* alienated a significant portion of the fanbase, a turn of events that "would be the start of Angel Munoz and the CPL's rocky ride with the eSports community and one that would build to a glorious peak and fall hard from grace." Turner points out that the League began to decline in 2004-2005, following several years of success, where early indicators included cancelled tournaments and further changing of games. Turner recalls that "The community that had taken the CPL from 200-300 attendance in the early days to the millions of fans world-wide, felt abandoned and unappreciated," and because of the constantly cycling games as well as increasing competitive gaming on networked consoles, professional PC gaming in the U.S. declined rapidly. The CPL's problems were compounded when, after noticing the disgruntled audience, sponsors began to pull out. A number of employees left the CPL to form another U.S.-based league, the World Series of Video Games, taking some sponsors as well. This led the CPL to sign a partnership with Sierra Entertainment, which became a sponsor for the 2007 CPL World Tour. The eight month long tour, touting a \$300,000 Grand Prize finale in New York City, controversially used two Sierra games, *F.E.A.R.* and *World in Conflict*, which had not even been released yet (Boyer, 2007). This development further alienated the community, which was still accustomed to competing in *Quake* and/or *Counter-Strike*, to the point that some of the best known gamers and teams refused to attend (Turner, 2008). Compounding the problem of a greatly weakened community, the companies that sponsored the league, Turner argued, were left feeling adverse to the prospects of supporting future U.S. eSport.

Following the tribulations of the CPL, U.S. satellite broadcaster DirecTV nevertheless announced that it would inaugurate yet another league, the Championship Gaming Series (CGS), a further attempt at market synergies and cross-promotion. After a successful first year in 2007, the league expanded internationally, picking up media

partners such as Britain's Sky Broadcasting, STAR Asia, and IGN Entertainment. Online qualifiers would determine the make-up of teams from North America, Latin America, UK, Europe, Middle East, Asia and Australia (Tarr, 2007), and the league would continue to adopt the conventions set before them by the international sports community and the World Cyber Games. Featuring stylized and region-specific team names like the "Chicago Chimera," "Mexico City Furia," "Singapore Sword," and "Dubai Mirage," the league took an unmistakable cue from professional sport. The two major *Counter-Strike* clans mentioned above also formed teams in the CGS, the "Los Angeles Complexity" and the "New York 3D." The team managers likewise had fanciful nicknames, and scouts would be present at contests in major cities in advance of a player draft where gamers would be recruited to these teams. Each team had ten players who excelled at different games. The League featured a surprisingly broad range of gaming genres including first-person shooter (*Counter-Strike*), fighting (*Dead or Alive 4*), sports (*FIFA*), player-versus-player based on massively multiplayer online (*World of Warcraft* arena), and racing (*Project Gotham Racing 3* and *Forza Motorsport 2*). Notable by its absence is real-time strategy, including the kingpin of Asian eSport, *StarCraft*. However, by the end of 2008 the league followed its predecessors and had perished.

4.3. The Rise of PC cafés in South Korea

Meanwhile, in Korea, eSport and PC cafés, known locally as *Bangs*, became a cornerstone of society unlike anywhere else. To illustrate the point, in 1997, there were only about 100 PC cafés in Korea. However, by May 2002, this number had swelled to 25,000. More recently, it has been stated that there are 20,000 PC cafés in Seoul alone (Hjorth and Chan, 2009, p. 3), and they bring in over a million people each day

(Schiesel, 2006). A recent analysis of the Asian Internet café industry by Pearl Research found that revenues will total more than \$19 billion dollars in that region alone during 2011 (Jenkins, 2011). The report also stated that among the 350,000 PC café businesses in Asia, several of the larger centres contain more than 200 machines²⁷.

Public PC café gaming in Korea perhaps inadvertently started a whole new profitable sub-industry in professional gaming. From practice and recruitment in local gaming spaces, to competitions where players are seated on a stage, competing in a game shown on a massive monitor for the audience to see, eSports could not exist the way it does purely in a networked intangible space. Again, the eSport industry is fundamentally dependent on the fact that it is a public, visible industry. In Korea, despite the formidable rate of broadband penetration, many gamers still prefer to play in PC cafés.

There have been several explanations for the unprecedented rate of adoption towards location-based networked competitive gaming by Korean youth, including:

1. Government policies and laws that were favourable to and subsidized new technologies, especially those involved with the Internet, which has become a fundamental basis for the growth of eSports and the game industry. The Korean government explicitly endeavoured to make Korean technology-driven businesses the cornerstones of the national market. An important step in this process was enacting the “Long-term Promotion Plan of the Game Industry” in 2004, with the goal of increasing Korea’s market size in the sector to \$10 billion, and employing 100,000 people. The Korean government spends over \$100 million annually to promote, research, and develop the industry (Hua, 2006).

²⁷ The PC café industry has even inherited negative connotations that formerly hounded the global arcade sector.

2. Historical animosity between Korea and Japan. Until 1988, Japanese products were banned from entering the Korean market, and after this point imports were heavily taxed (Jin, 2010). This prevented the vast majority of Korean gamers from gaining access to Japanese consoles which were immensely popular internationally, such as the Nintendo Famicom, Super Famicom, Game Boy, and Sony's Playstation. Korean gamers therefore adopted PC gaming as an alternative. Additionally, these early consoles could do only one thing: play digital games. In Korea, this fact was used as an excuse to label game machines as "expensive toys" and in a culture where parents push their children to study heavily, these factors combined to limit console penetration (Schiesel, 2006).
3. The rapid implementation of new technologies, which is related to the above governmental supports. Korea's rate of broadband penetration per capita is widely known to be the highest in the world, largely owing to the aforementioned policy interventions. As a result, not only did Korean gamers have more readily available access to the emerging field of online gaming, but they were more comfortable and familiar with the associated technologies as well (Jin, 2010, pp. 51-55, Rossignol, 2008, pp. 63-64).
4. Similar to (1), extensions of military exemption programs. In Korea, service is mandatory; however, as with the various eSport and high tech promotion policies, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism enacted policies to promote industry. In the mid-1990s, the government permitted some game programmers and engineers to serve in private game companies instead of in the military, which was later lengthened to include professional game players as well, which became an incentive for many gamers (Chung, 2009, p. 62).
5. Space constraints in urban Korea. Like Japan, Korea is a relatively small landmass that is densely populated. One Korean PC bang owner noted that while the U.S. has a lot of open outdoor space for the population to engage in sports, this is not the case in Korea: "[In Korea] there are very few places for young people to go and very little for them to do, so they found PC games, and it's their way to spend time together and relax" (Schiesel, 2006).

Furthermore, the fact that over one third of Korea's population plays online games, coupled with the willingness of a significant segment of this population to devote immense portions of their time and energy to public competitive gaming is indicative of why the market prospered. Interviewed by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, one executive at Seoul's International Cyber Marketing told the publication that "In Korea, many people study so much, spending 10 to 12 hours each day studying for the college entrance examination... That's the kind of attitude they're accustomed to. So they can practice games for 12 hours a day" (Hua, 2006). Significantly, PC bangs in Korea and around

the world adopted the precise functions that the vanishing arcades emphasized as their trademark. In other words, PC businesses became places where gamers would come together not only for community and socializing, but for proving themselves in a public space – the cafés assumed the role of being the public face of game play.

While modern eSport is considered a highly organized, corporate-driven endeavor, it also “sprang spontaneously from below” (Huhh, 2009, p. 108). In other words, the initial foundations for the growth of modern eSports were small *StarCraft* tournaments that were held in these PC bangs²⁸. In the midst of a government advocating favourable technology policies and following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, Blizzard Entertainment, a computer game company founded in Irvine, California in 1991, released *StarCraft* (1998), an online real-time strategy game. This game would change Korea’s political, economic, and cultural landscape as many unemployed youth began to meet at PC cafés to compete in the game. Beyond inspiring the development of the local games industry, *StarCraft* enthusiasm erupted to the point that location-based gaming became significantly more viable in Korea.

Although Blizzard Entertainment had established its own online games matchmaking service, termed *Battle.net*, in 1996 with the release of its *Diablo* game, many *StarCraft* players nevertheless preferred to compete in local tournaments at PC cafés; these more humble competitions, where players were driven by “sharing the same physical and cultural environment,” were where eSport really emerged in its current form (Huhh, 2009, pp. 108-09). Despite the ability to play at home, the social space of the café is still regarded as significant: “The king-of-the-Town motivation of arcade gaming is

²⁸ This mirrors the growth of both historical sport and arcade-based eSport in the U.S., where grassroots tournaments were first held by local arcades before experiencing rapid development through Walter Day’s Twin Galaxies leaderboards and subsequent growth nationally.

still prevalent in local matches of *StarCraft*. Even today, the professional gaming leagues (“pro-leagues”) still hold their preliminary elimination contests in *PC bangs*... The ongoing popularity of *PC bangs* demonstrates the significance of the offline social setting in maintaining online game play” (Huhh, 2009, p. 109). Although the gamers that have already become professional players are relegated to dormitories (often termed “training camps”) to focus their game play for competitive levels, recruitment often begins at the PC bangs

Recounting his experiences of the gaming industry and culture in three distinct cities (London, Seoul, and Reykjavik), Jim Rossignol (2008) attempted to identify and illustrate the “modalities of play and game communities” that represented each region. Writing about his experience of entering a Korean PC Café, Rossignol muses:

This was where Korea’s gaming culture was being defined—in social venues, such as bars that sold caffeinated soda, posters, and lots of gaming time to their hordes of customers. While Western gamers stay at home to play on their expensive Japanese consoles, the Koreans go out in search of a seat in a “PC Baang,” one of their dedicated PC gaming cafés. A rented PC, a game of multiplayer kart racing, and perhaps a sly cigarette in the smoking section—these were the main ingredients for a typical evening. The combination has inspired a vibrant, youthful culture, where people go gaming to meet potential partners... If the Koreans wanted to escape from the looming cellular apartment blocks, the uniformly silver sedans, and the gray, gray coastline, then they had found the ideal place—colorful, social, affordable, and filled with play. It was as if the roles of our bar culture and our Internet cafés had somehow been reversed and exploded. (Rossignol, 2008, pp. 60-61)

Woo Jong-Sik, president of the Korea Game Development and Promotion Institute explained that in Korea, gamers would rather play against each other than alone against a computer, and Schiesel (2006) elaborates that in many cases players would rather not

play at all than play by themselves. Significantly, he identified that “It started out that way in the United States too. But as game arcades with their big, clunky machines started disappearing in the 1980’s, gamers retreated from the public arena and into their homes and offices. In the West gaming is now often considered antisocial.” This identifies a crucial formative prerequisite for the overall success of eSport – namely that certain social and political elements must be in place if it is to thrive²⁹.

4.3.1. Korean eSport becomes National Sport

During the late 1990s in Korea, the aforementioned favourable conditions began to amalgamate, resulting in the fusion of public location-based gaming, corporate sponsorship, and mediated spectacle. Although the U.S. and Korean eSports industries appear to have grown and evolved in different ways and for different reasons (Wagner, 2006), the rise of the “star player” is a common element whether at PC bangs or at LAN events. The significance of establishing a competitive system that rewards the best players with celebrity is important as it allows companies to strategically align themselves with popular players through sponsorship deals, facilitates the mediatization of the activity, and lends a convincing voice to the overall professionalization of the activity through the infusion of capital, as well as bestowing legitimacy. The similar

²⁹ In this regard, China could be the next major eSport market. The country has set up several thousand PC cafés, boasts a statistically immense population of digital gamers, and shares many of the factors that encouraged eSport to succeed in Korea. For instance, approximately 95% of all games played in China are played on computers (Rossignol, 2008, p. 80). What this says is that although much of the West is heavily invested in gaming with consoles and physical merchandise, the rising Asian economies have transitioned more smoothly into the experience economy, consuming the experience over physical products more readily. Gamers in Korea and China do not necessarily value ownership of a game, only access to it. It is no surprise, then, that the Asian markets so readily adopt free-to-play/use products that are based on microtransactions as opposed to paying a steep fee for a completed product.

nature of the “star” gamer in both 1980s U.S. arcades and 1990s/2000s Korean PC cafés becomes more evident when comparing the two narratives below, the first being a description of the famed local arcade gaming pro, and the second of the networked PC gaming celebrity:

During the height of arcade popularity, each machine had its own star. Murmurs would travel around the joint when he would take the joystick, and an awed crowd of fans would gather to watch these video athletes. (Carle, 2010, p. 25)

Park and Jang came up through the stable system but today spend most of the year playing as salaried imports on foreign teams. When they walk into a cyber café--or "PC bang" as they are called in South Korea--customers crane their necks in astonishment. As they log on to play a game under their professional identities, other online players, unable to see that it is really them, deluge them with disbelieving, jeering ripostes. It's a bit like showing up at your local tennis court and announcing that you are Rafael Nadal. Only that you really are. (Fitzpatrick and Comiteau, 2008)

It is important to note several features of these quotes. First, both arcade and PC café are sites of community and competition. Secondly, the fact that these players are known for their *public* gaming exploits in-person and among an audience is significant. Finally, the evolution of public agonistic play in these examples is illustrative of the changing scope of the endeavor. Carle notes that each individual machine was associated with a local star player. However, as we see in the latter quote, the contemporary eSport player is renowned owing to the fact that his or her achievements have taken place in a networked regional or global space.

Soon, these professional celebrity gamers³⁰ began to acquire partnerships with interested corporations, who believed that by collaborating with the gamers, their huge fanbases would heed the promotional ‘advice’ of their idols. Samsung, one major sponsor of eSports events globally, found that in Korea alone, there were 240 professional gamers and the top five teams were making over \$2.2 million U.S. in endorsements and sponsorships (Lewis, 2007). Jin (2010, p. 88), using data from the Korea e-Sports Association (KeSPA) notes that the number of professional gamers rose from 131 in 2001 to 450 in 2008; the number of semi-pro gamers rose from 49 to 500 in the same period. Seoul has become a “gaming mecca,” where competitive gamers from around the world converge with the goals of becoming the preeminent players of their games, complete with all attendant comforts including masses of fans, fame, and the possibility of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Korean electronics and telecommunications giants such as Samsung and SK Telecom, as well as media companies including MBC have joined an international list of corporations sponsoring and supporting eSports, which includes entities in various sectors, such as the food and

³⁰ Although the “eSport celebrity” is easily most associated with Korea and *StarCraft*, popular accounts of Western professional gamers have adopted the associated conventions of rivalry, sentiment, and hyperbole in the discourse of the competitive gaming star. While perhaps necessary for captivating storytelling, the oftentimes exaggerated connotations of good versus bad and underdog versus champion in the media’s reporting on eSport have been commonplace since eSport began in the early 1980s, and are an important selling point for competitive contests. The vilification of one side in popular media – whether explicit or otherwise – has ranged from documentaries (for instance, *The King of Kong* (2007) depicts the recent attempts of gamer Steve Wiebe to top the arcade record for *Donkey Kong*, held for decades by the seemingly malevolent Billy Mitchell) to books (Michael Kane’s *Game Boys* recounts the struggles of fledgling underdog *Counter-Strike* clan CompLexity against the empire of Team 3D, run by an apparently conniving and shady businessman). These two accounts are also interesting when juxtaposed as they outline the two different phases of eSport quite well; in the case of *Donkey Kong*, Wiebe and Mitchell almost never meet despite competing for the same digital prize (owing to the fact that the competition was for a high score), whereas with *Counter-Strike* the two teams met regularly to compete in player-versus-player combat at LAN events and other tournaments.

beverage industry (Coca Cola), personal care (Gillette), and clothing (Nike). These businesses contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars (or more) to be associated with the spectacle of eSport, and Jin notes that one “cannot look anywhere without seeing a bright, flashy sponsorship logo on the wall, or worn on a jumpsuit by the pro-gamers” (Jin, 2009, p. 29). Chang Ki-uk, manager of eSports mega sponsor KTF, acknowledged that involvement made a lot of sense for the company (Scanlon, 2003); due to the large proportion of the Korean population playing online games, KTF, like many others, saw substantial marketing opportunities, especially because eSports fans are also consumers of high-tech products and content.

One of the primary drivers of this rapid expansion of the gamer celebrity and associated sponsorship, as it was with the arcades, is the beginning of eSport-television synergies in Korea. Despite the considerable popularity of *StarCraft* and other competitive online games since the mid-1990s, the initial success of televised eSport came as a great shock to producers. Following the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, television operator OnMedia, like many others, began exploring options for low-budget productions. One of the results was that the company screened several games of *StarCraft*, something that was considered “something of a joke” and “a slightly shameful cheat,” even within the company airing it (Fitzpatrick and Comiteau, 2008). The initial airing took place on the cartoon network “Tooniverse,” and eventually led to the creation of one of two devoted digital game show television channels. Competitors were outfitted in unique and oftentimes extravagant uniforms and costumes, and the broadcasters hired live play-by-play commentators. Viewership more than doubled between 2000 and 2003, from 3 million households to 6.5 million (Fong, 2004).

Because the highest level of play is televised and broadcast on the internet, the amount of public gaming in PC cafés also increases. Gamers who see revised strategies on television or on the internet return to PC cafés in order to try them out for themselves with friends (Jin and Chee, in McCrea, 2009, p. 190), enabling a cyclical sequence of events whereby public gaming venues reinforce the eSport industry and vice versa, confirming that intended synergies have become realized in this case. This is largely facilitated by Korean gamers’ preferences when it comes to the way they access their game play. In the Western market, gamers prefer to own copies of the games they play, whether through purchasing physical copies or digital ones.

Conversely, in much of the Asian market (and especially in Korea), gamers have traditionally avoided ownership; “Korean gamers don’t usually wish to own games, only to play them,” as Rossignol (2008, p. 65) put it. As a result, Korea has proven to be more driven by and conducive to experiential consumption than other markets, and this has been evident in government policies, consumer habits, and in retail. Rumas (2007) notes that in Korea, game retailers are practically non-existent. In Yangju (population 200,000), a suburb of Seoul, he observes that there is no dedicated game store in the whole city. In nearby Uijeongbu (population 450,000), he records one store selling games, but it is merely “one fledgling shop in the dark recesses of an underground mall.” The primary reason for this is the PC cafés; because of their abundance throughout the country, the availability of a high numbers of games, and the fact that subscription fees for the games are oftentimes already paid for, they are an attractive choice over ownership, where consumers can play for a dollar or two per hour, or purchase a membership to their café of choice. This is one indication of the shifting mindset towards the experience economy. Instead of concentrating funds on tangible goods as has historically been the norm, increasingly greater proportions of expenditures are being spent on immaterial commodities. In the entertainment industries, much of this intangible expenditure occurs on experiences, events, and fleeting services.

4.3.2. *Aspirations of Sportization: Conflicts between Institutionalization and Subversion*

While early modern sporting events were used to produce mass audiences both for participation and spectating, the introduction of capital as a driving factor for athletes and teams quickly became problematic. Soon the ideological aspects of organized sports’ rebirth, such as integrity, fair play, and amateurism, were in conflict with the rising corporate financial elements that promised large sums of money, fame, and influence for those who could rise above the others. Throughout the 20th century, fears that ‘a multitude of deviations,’ including cheating, violence, and chauvinism, were diluting the competitive spirit in sport and especially the Olympic Games resulted in drives to increase awareness through organizations such as the International Association of Sports Press and the International Council of Sport and Physical Education, as well as the International Fair Play Committee which was established in 1963. This institutionalization process within the Olympics arguably crested during the 1980s when

the Olympic sporting ideals of fair play were officially reaffirmed by the IOC (Grosset and Attali, 2011). The continuing attempts to ingrain an unwavering set of moral guidelines for international sport joined the governmental supports in positioning sport as one of the core features of societies globally.

Despite becoming a competitive mega-spectacle of Korea's evolving experience economy, one of the most prevalent questions when it comes to professional gaming remains: "but is it a sport"? To that effect, Korea has done much to push eSports in that direction. This section will continue the discussion on professional gaming in Korea by looking at two major threads in the 'sportization' process. The first is how national institutions have attempted to imprint an air of legitimacy through the creation and promotion of centralized organizational agencies for "fair gaming," in the same way that had been done for conventional sports. These agencies vouch for the credibility of eSport by likening it to these established sports, and argue that eSports could be a major component of the future of public embodiments of entertainment and spectatorship. The second thread is the idea of 'subversion.' While the games industry, Korean government, players and fans strive to foster an environment in which eSport is portrayed in a positive light in the drive towards mainstream international acceptance, the breaking of these principles is seen as a counterforce. This section looks at one well-publicized instance of fraudulence in Korean eSport to suggest that while the competitive gaming business model is central to the gaming industry, opposing and counterintuitive actions are putting this model in danger. In other words, there are two repelling aspects at work, and proponents of eSport wish to minimize the subversion of their standards as they have identified that the idea of professional video gaming as a sport is a 'hard sell' to most people. On the other hand, the nature of the transgressions observed from the scandal go a long way in demonstrating that sports and cyber-sports are really not that far removed from one another.

A formal system (the Korean Pro-Gamers Association) was soon put in place to seek out and "groom potential champions by coaches and talent spotters," much like in professional sports (Fong, 2004). Furthermore, for over ten years, KeSPA (Korea e-sports Association) has functioned in somewhat of an administrative capacity for Korean eSport, having "furnished an infrastructure comparable to any other sports" and establishing standards for eSports around the world. The Korean Olympic Committee

designated KeSPA as the “recognized organization” for Korean eSports, with KeSPA interpreting this as one indicator that eSports are becoming recognized as authentic sporting events (Korea E-Sports Association, 2011). The organization's website lists the following objectives among its mandates:

- Supporting e-Sports (Various pro/amateur competitions), Selection/Dispatch of national teams to international competitions.
- Furnishing/Operation of infrastructure to activate e-Sports, such as e-Sports stadiums and game museums.
- Operation of pro-gamer registration system.
- Formulation of standards for Official game competitions and screening systems.
- Teenage game culture promotion business, such as Teen & Family participation programs and Game Character Festivals.
- Hosting of national e-Sports matches.
- Game-related international interaction business.
- Hosting of seminars, symposiums and expositions to support development of outstanding games.
- Protection of pro-gamers' rights, training sessions.
- Business related to game broadcasting contents.
- Others, necessary for the purpose of the association

This framework for development would be exceptionally familiar to those examining the founding principles of the guiding organizations of other sporting events and organizations historically, especially the Olympics. In both the cases of KeSPA and

its antecedents in the support of unique sports in prior years, the goals have usually focused on the promotion of the activity beyond its acknowledged markets and regions, and the structuring of the sports to conform with governing regulations for acceptance into major international sporting events and institutions (for instance, the well documented attempts of various sports including snowboarding, kite surfing and so on to be recognized as Olympic events, or of mixed martial arts or parkour to be accepted internationally). Cumulatively, eSport promotional agencies have driven the attempts towards the professionalization of competitive gaming³¹.

On an international level, the acknowledged leader in eSport promotion is Korean-founded *World Cyber Games*. The Games' CEO and President, Hyoung Seok Kim declared that "2010 marks 10 years of World Cyber Games, in that time we have brought together more than 10 million people from 90 nations to celebrate the achievements and triumphs of nearly six thousand players" (World Cyber Games, 2010).

³¹ Similarly, Rambusch et al (2007) examined the professionalization discourse within eSport in their analysis of agonistic gaming centred on first-person shooter *Counter-Strike*, one of the most popular competitive games ever made. The authors of the study interviewed over 30 competitors at the 2007 *World Cyber Games* held in Monza, Italy, and due to the nature of the *WCG*, this meant that these players were the best from their respective countries. The authors were able to determine that the two most common and prevailing discourses among players and in community discussion forums were also based on professionalism and athleticism: "The professional identity is expressed in the concern of the community to come off as *serious, dedicated and mature* with a clear *goal* and *vision*: to turn CS into an accepted sport with chances for practitioners to make a living from playing the game. Appeal to *excellence, physical fitness, endurance, practice* and *hard work* constitutes the basis for a discourse of athleticism" (p. 161). In chapter 3 it became clear that ever since eSport began in arcades during the 1980s, participants have always desired public acknowledgement of their activity, and appeals to the developed professional state of the competitive community have run parallel to associations with already-accepted forms of competition (sports) in an attempt to situate the established as merely a precedent for the novel. This conscious drive towards legitimation is not new for competitive gaming, although it may seem to be – it has merely migrated from one physical space and its community (the arcade) to another (computer gaming).

Beyond acting as an international forum for the promotion of eSports globally, the annual WCG is a hotbed of corporate marketing, investment, and synergy. In 2010, Samsung, the event's main sponsor, demonstrated products that were focused on the spectator demographic (a new 7-inch Galaxy Tab, a new monitor and cell phones), donated \$122,000 worth of computer monitors to the Los Angeles County Education Foundation to encourage technology education, and purchased carbon offsets to cover "everything from the electricity used at the tournament to the airline emissions of the players traveling from all over the world" (World Cyber Games, 2010). This latter action netted the company Carbonfund.org's first ever Corporate Climate Leadership Award, making it clear that large-scale public events in the gaming industry are also becoming targets of social cause marketing as a major form of promotion.

Besides the intent to globalize, both KeSPA and the WCG emphasize player conduct. The eSport community has constructed a narrative whereby competitors – and especially those sponsored players who represent both the sport and business sponsors – have two fundamental obligations. First, these gamers are meant to exude positive images of health and fitness, as promoters of other sports strive to do with their athletes. Secondly, professional gamers and those competing at the highest levels are expected to show what is considered proper etiquette, manners, and lifestyle choices. This supplements the persistent dialogues of a maturing industry, and in many ways, these encouragements (and in Korea, requirements) are part of a concerted effort to establish eSports as not only a legitimate industry, but one that mirrors professional sport. Most importantly, adhering to these expectations is significant because pro gamers are not invisible celebrities – their images are as ubiquitous in Korea and on fansites as the most popular actors or singers are in the West.

In these efforts to regulate the public images of the professional players, game team managers set out a number of restrictions on players. In analysing this component of the "star-making process," several authors have outlined various facets of these attempts. Jin (2010, p. 97) writes that "Because the images of the pro gamers affects the images of companies and the sales of the goods of those companies, corporations train pro gamers not only as players but also as good people to be respected." Among the most common restrictions and conventions professional gamers endure are hot, un-air conditioned dormitories (to avoid muscle cramps) and disallowing sweating, getting

angry, smoking, or drinking alcohol. Some teams also prevent the professional gamers from dating, and enforce mandatory physical training in deference to their status as athletes and stars (Jin, 2010; Hua, 2006; Schiesel, 2006). Such rules existed even in the U.S.; for instance, the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) enacted a drug and alcohol policy for its competitors. League creator Angel Munoz explains that “The CPL has had a drug policy for years, but now also has the right to test competitors... it’s important that we establish the standards that should guide the sport in the future... I’m convinced this policy will help us protect the equality and image of the sport by establishing an attitude that strives for fair play, ethical behavior and integrity” (Wen, 2007). For Rambusch et al (2007, p. 161), these discourses based on professionalism and sport go so far as to transform computer game playing into work. However, despite their attempts to regulate players’ actions and behaviors, subversion, whether intentional or not, has become a costly problem for many eSport promoters.

While the eSport communities strive for professionalism and recognition, several have noted the carnivalesque nature of these professional gaming competitions. Rossignol (2008, p. 58) describes Korean eSport matches as follows:

To a fanfare of Asian nu metal and the sound of a thousand screaming fans, a young Korean man entered a dazzling arena. Like an American wrestler at the heart of a glitter-glazed Royal Rumble, he strode down a ramp toward the stage. Adorned in what appeared to be a space suit and a large white cape, he stepped out to meet his opponent on the stadium’s ziggurat focus. Amid a blaze of flashbulbs and indoor fireworks, he clambered up the steps, to be exalted by the thronging crowd.

Jin and Chee (2009, p. 29) similarly write that “With drama similar to that of professional wrestling matches and live color commentary, the *StarCraft* tournament ... ends with team members of the losing side weeping—all to be rehashed shortly after on game news websites like Ongamenet.” Likening the atmosphere of an eSport event to that of professional wrestling, known for being scripted and colloquially “fake,” is telling. While these and other authors are not necessarily referring to the outcomes of the matches, their comparison reminds us that everything else is carefully planned – the hype, setting, and even fan and player reactions are all manufactured in part due to the promotional needs of sponsors and hosts of the event, but also in part owing to the need to retain the cyclical nature of the spectacle of the “star-making system” of eSport. This “professional

wrestling” analogy can be taken even further upon examination of some of the core values of (e)sport. Both the sport and eSport industries have promoted honourable ideals including sportsmanship, positive lifestyle choices, and playing by the rules. These associations have resulted in sport adopting something of a positive social view historically. However, despite these expectations, “we have seen deviant behaviour like doping and different types of cheating, exclusion and hooliganism within sport” (Jonasson and Thiborg, 2010, p. 287). Despite the attempts of organizations like KeSPA and WCG to promote positive ideals within eSport (namely contests based on fair competition), the same kinds of problems infest the business of professional gaming.

While the vast majority of discourse on cheating in gaming pertains to in-game fraudulent behavior, one of the most noteworthy and sensationalized instances of subversion took place both in and out of the digital game space concurrently. The spectacle of eSport is dependent on several things, including professional players and teams, corporate sponsors, and an ardent audience. However, because eSport endeavors to be considered a legitimate sport in the vein of soccer or baseball, one necessary condition to the operation of eSport – and a critical component of the spectacle and drama of its business model – mirrors that of sport. Professional wrestling is not considered a sport, despite meeting various attendant criteria such as physicality, because the outcomes are predetermined. Instead, it becomes “sports entertainment.” Similarly, any appeal towards eSport being a legitimate sporting event is dependent on the outcome being determined through the match, and not prior to it. In Korea, when it came to light that a number of professional gamers were fixing matches and engaging in illegal betting, a scandal erupted that was likened to the 1919 “Black Sox” scandal, where a number of Chicago White Sox players were attempting to throw matches during the World Series (Pigna, 2010). Several of the pro gamers, some of whom were

exceedingly popular, were publicly shamed and forced into retirement. The offenses included intentional loss of matches and the leaking of replay files to gambling groups, and was so widespread that it included players that were still in competition, retired players, and coaches. In the end, sixteen people were charged, including 11 pro players and three brokers³². The three brokers reportedly offered players between \$2000 and \$6000 U.S. to throw their matches (Quillen, 2010). Interestingly, despite the initiatives of organizations such as KeSPA and the WCG to maintain a clean image, eSport organizers in Korea were supposedly aware of the match-fixing, having attempted to resolve the problems before considering “the possibility of co-existing with the illegal betting sites” (Pigna, 2010).

On the Team Liquid website (one specializing in a competitive *StarCraft* community), the various perpetrators were identified while the investigation was ongoing. Among the brokers were a gaming academy owner, soccer pro, and a gangster. Beyond being significant because of the accurate identification of those involved – Korean law protects the identity of anyone with ongoing legal concerns (Quillen, 2010) – the fact that there was a concerted effort within the community to out the offenders is significant. This case demonstrates that the promotion of ideals borrowed from “idyllic sporting” is not only strictly encouraged and enforced by various governing bodies, but

³² Again, this is yet more evidence for proof of the analogy and comparison to sport, with public gaming celebrities putting into question the ideal of fair play that had been institutionalized by KeSPA and the WCG, among others. Similar events would transpire only two years later at the 2012 Olympic Games, where, in what has been called the first ‘mass disqualification in Olympic history,’ eight badminton players were kicked out of the Games for intentionally trying to lose their matches for more favourable match-ups in subsequent brackets. In line with the Olympic ideal, the competitors were removed for “not using one’s best efforts to win a match” and “conducting oneself in a manner that is clearly abusive or detrimental to the sport.” Shortly after, a boxing referee was expelled for not scoring knock-downs and ‘fixing’ a qualifying match as Olympic and sport organizers scrambled to reaffirm to the public that the sporting ideal was indeed still intact.

by the eSport community as well. What the scandal represents is not only a transgression against the intended transferring of the sporting ideal as represented by KeSPA and the WCG, but an event that also put in jeopardy the potential for the eSport business model to successfully be accepted by international mainstream audiences. The scandal was one that had precedents in conventional sports, but was propagated as a sport-like indiscretion that was carried out through an inherently mediated public setting. Public gaming subversions within the realm of agonistic play are especially potent because their effects percolate out of the game space. The explicit problem with the professional gamer case is that a relatively large network of those involved in eSports engaged in acts of deception that countered a fledgling, internationalizing activity. The very core of what guides competition and sport was undermined despite all of the conditioning and education programs by KeSPA and others. Korean eSports promoters groom their star players to be role models and 'gentlemen,' and this major turning point, they claim, has damaged the leagues, sponsors, broadcasters and even country.

4.4. Public gaming transformations in the U.S. – 1990s-2000s

The match-throwing scandal represents digital gaming subversion in its most sensationalized form. It cast a negative light on a growing cultural activity, but observers are still unsure about the extent of the impact beyond the Korean market. While some have claimed that Korea may become a precedent and prototype for future popular cultural on a global level with its large-scale adoption of both broadband gaming and eSport (Schiesel, 2006), others have doubts. Rossignol (2008) notes that despite the existence of eSport in the U.S. market for a number of years, the focus and audience are different. In the Western eSport markets, First-Person Shooters are by far the most popular competitive game genre, but the followings of the most talented players are negligible when compared to Korea. Rossignol concludes that the formative factors for gaming to have flourished as it had in Korea do not exist in the U.S. or European markets. Consequently, he "believe[s] that Korea's televised Star-leagues reflect a cultural singularity within Korea, not an indication of where global gaming will go in the future" (2008, p. 73). Angel Munoz, founder of U.S. Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) also ascribes the difference to lack of support in the U.S.: "Another important

factor in the growth of professional gaming in South Korea is the recognition and support of the Korean government. This gave the sport legitimacy that we simply don't have in the USA" (Wen, 2007).

This assessment is largely mirrored by Kim Byung Kyu, a senior manager at Korea's Shinhan Bank, a sponsor and host of eSport leagues. He has stated that "When I'm in the U.S., I don't see games in public... The U.S. doesn't have PC bangs. They don't have game television channels. What you see here with hundreds of people cheering is just a small part of what is going on with games in Korea. At this very moment hundreds of thousands of people are playing games at PC bangs. It's become a mainstream, public part of our culture, and I don't see that yet in the U.S. In this regard, perhaps the United States will follow and Korea will be the model" (Schiesel, 2006). Although he is more optimistic for future prospects of the export of eSport, it is nevertheless identified that there are substantive cultural differences between the two nations that may never be synchronized. Lopez (2007) also extends this discussion, but is more ambiguous in offering a wholesale rejection. He assesses that televised eSport will be unsuccessful because the audience is not really in place, but online and broadband viewing by U.S. audiences has been a significant component of overall global eSport viewership. Nevertheless, he cites a partnership between the World Series of Video Games (now defunct) and U.S. broadcaster CBS whereby highlights of various tournaments will be shown to television audiences.

Regardless of the absence of a large-scale eSport audience on traditional media, the various early U.S. leagues such as CPL and PGL set the stage for a relatively small yet dedicated demographic following for professional gaming. A major acknowledgement of the growing U.S. market for eSport took place in 2008 when SteelSeries, a Danish developer of high-end gaming accessories, entered the North American market. The company had been a significant supporter of professional gaming in Europe and Asia, and consulted the best players in the world when creating their various mice, headsets, keyboards, and mats. The comparatively expensive gear the company made had always been marketed towards serious players; SteelSeries consults with 250 teams around the world and participates in over 800 events annually, and the company's equipment was "used by seven of the top 10 first-person shooter gaming teams around the world" (Laposky, 2008).

The adoption of SteelSeries gear by top shooter clans created substantial demand for the products in the U.S. In the wake of the troubles of the U.S. professional gaming leagues, the introduction of SteelSeries' products reassured pro players and fans in the U.S. Further reassurance for Western eSport has come in the form of the creation of the North American Star League (NASL), as well as the recent entry of major U.S. media brand IGN Entertainment through its creation of the IGN Pro League (IPL). Despite the precarious history of eSport in the West and the challenges that are being faced, the industry is optimistic, with 2011 even being dubbed "The Year of eSports" as mentioned earlier. Commentator and former professional player Marcus Graham describes recent growth in terms that are reminiscent of Angel Munoz's (see above) analysis:

What I think has happened is timing—like, 18 planets are aligning all at once. What are the planets? One is the live streaming sites. Another planet is Street Fighter, and the exposure it gets. Yet another is StarCraft II. Small planets like Quake Live are sharing in the limelight from the big planets. And so this giant vortex is forming, where each community is getting involved with each other community, there's a lot of cross-pollination going on, a lot of streaming going on.

The other thing is awareness. People know, now, that you can come online and watch a stream. We'd do a big event, promote it for two months, but there wouldn't be another one for six months. Now I guarantee you that every weekend, I can turn on my Ustream and watch some Street Fighter or some StarCraft. (Miller, 2010)

Although uncertainties persist, the future of eSport in the West seems more forecastable than ever. Advances in online technology over the last decade have resulted in the proliferation of live online streaming, which has become an increasingly popular tool not only for event promotion, but self-promotion as well. However, despite having been rapidly adopted by eSports communities, the same technology has been seen as potentially causing interference for the sports-television nexus.

4.5. Prognosis for the 21st Century

The growth and expansion of the mediated sports event as a commercial business model during the post war years has been noted in chapter 2. I also noted that

the emergence of sports event marketing became a defining feature of the contemporary experience economy as exemplified by the Olympic Games. Sporting events act as the fulcrum of a constellation of marketing campaigns (televised plus online) including star appearances by popular public figures, sponsored events and the making of hugely expensive commercials that make their debuts at the events. In this regard, Jhally (1989, p. 80) has suggested that “Professional sports depend on two kinds of commodity sales, the relative importance of which has shifted historically. First, they sell tickets to fans who come to see the live event. For the first 30 years of [the last] century, the role of the media was basically to act as publicity agents for sports, to get people into the stadiums... Second, professional sports sell the rights to broadcast events to the media. Historically, this has become far more important... and is the basis of the claim that the broadcast media have transformed sports.” Yet the road to the global sporting spectacle was not a simple or direct one. Redhead (1998) noted how the awarding of the 1994 World Cup revealed a tension between media spectatorship and fandom, concluding that the fact that soccer’s biggest event went to a country (U.S.) where the game was hardly relevant to the public reinforced the idea that the spectacle was being diluted. For him, the “disappearance” of a physical, active fan in the stadium as the primary driver in favour of the audience gazing at television screens signals a major turning point in mega-sporting events. The division of fans and audiences, players and consumers of play experiences grows ever farther apart, best exemplified by the fact that major soccer clubs have been amending their business strategies so that live paying fans are no longer required for such companies to prosper economically (Quinn, 2009; Redhead, 1998). In a similar line of argument, Rader saw the process but in reverse – aspects of television viewing were being absorbed in the live event:

By 2000, the experience of attending a major sporting event had changed radically as well. Operating on the premise that the game itself could not hold the fan’s attention, professional and college sports filled every moment of the fan’s time with an unending profusion of images on big screens and a deafening infusion of prerecorded sound. Fans found themselves bombarded with loud music, big-screen replays, and big-screen commercials...Almost nothing in the experience of the game went unmediated. In vital respects attending a game resembled more and more what one saw on television, except that the music and ads were much louder. (Rader, 2004, p. 241).

As commentators point out in many cases online media (blogs, bulletin boards, Youtube) supplement as well as rival mainstream media (Marshall et al, 2010). The 2008 Beijing and 2010 Vancouver Olympics preoccupied the global television industries, but participatory new media as well which competed with the commercial media flow. Perhaps the Super Bowl best exemplifies this blending of commercial and independent media streams: the witnessing of Super Bowl advertisements has become one of the most anticipated components of the sports spectacle, but so too they are equally promoted online by sites dedicated to anticipating and commenting on not only the game and the players, but also the commercials. Old spices' viral "Smell Like a Man" series of commercials featuring former NFL wide-receiver Isaiah Mustafa not only indicates the synergies between the TV and public sports events but additionally the integration of digital advertising and social media into the mix (Baute, 2010; Reiss, 2010). The virally popular set of commercials were first introduced at the 2010 Super Bowl, and soon were parodied across the internet, and became a popular meme. Significantly, the ads introduced a new element to traditional marketing methods with online interactive continuations of Mustafa, in character. Fans of the advertisement could post responses and comments on social networking sites such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, and Mustafa would answer in real time, in a bathroom (one of the settings of the commercials). Old Spice then posted these responses – close to 200 of them – on Youtube. Within 36 hours the replies alone had been viewed over 23 million times. The minimalistic nature and interactive aspect of such advertising has, according to many observers, revolutionized marketing in the internet era: "These guys are for the first time, in a massive way leveraging the power of all major social networks and completely decentralizing the efficiency of the delivery platform" (Wiancko, 2010).

The emergence of online media competes with mainstream media for viewers, and with this in mind, scholars have predicted that television coverage of major sporting events may be endangered by various aspects of online media. For instance, digitalization and the increased capacity of channels globally were considered to potentially challenge the Olympic Games as a media event because of the increase in possible entertainment choices for the consumer (Rivenburgh, 2003). Others asserted that sport would adapt to the changes and thrive in the new media environment, having determined that this new media will likely function as an adjunct to traditional models of

disseminating sport events. Boyle and Haynes (2003) noted that sports were significant within the convergent economy, bringing together existing audiences and new media platforms and delivery systems. Many scholars are now turning towards examining how these new media technologies in web 2.0 are impacting the sports-television nexus. Real (2011) has argued that television and sport have and continue to work together exceedingly well despite potential challenges from new digital media. In fact, he suggests that the “television-centric McLuhan [Gutenberg] galaxy” put television in the middle of modern societies, particularly in the U.S. However, he also notes that “these galaxies have now been replaced by ‘the network society’” (Real, 2011, p. 36). Rowe (2011) similarly states that “one medium, television... towers above all others when imagining sports,” but he is cautious by suggesting that the replacement for television’s hegemony in the monopoly of sporting events “is by no means yet installed” (Rowe, 2011, p. 94).

For conventional sport, the television-live event nexus quickly became the most potent and financially beneficial, and this is likely to continue. However, for eSport, as a new sporting event and an activity not supported by Western governments, entry into television has proven difficult and in almost all cases disastrous. What we are seeing now is a new digital viewership model of content distribution, where admission to spectatorship is oftentimes free of charge, yet connected to many ancillary components that further promote industry products and services. For instance, tickets for the Championship Gaming Series and other leagues were complimentary, and now many eSport entry tickets are bundled as part of the price of an admission to a more general event, such as a major industry expo event like E3. In many cases, online streams have likewise been accessible free of charge, and now North American eSport is heavily tied to and dependent on online viewership. The migration of eSports towards an Internet audience – both in Korea and internationally – was smooth and felt natural. The audience for eSports was already connected to and knowledgeable about new technologies of content dissemination, including the Internet; statistically significant demographics of the traditional sports audience are still firmly rooted in traditional content broadcasters such as the radio and television, and providers have found this transition to be slow. As a result, the “king of the arcade” mentality was able to successfully morph into a more regional hierarchy, before becoming an international

internet-enabled spectacle, where the highest levels of agonistic gaming are still public in nature, being contested in real-time to capacity audiences oftentimes numbering in the thousands, but the exploits of these top-tier players have become mediated and embedded in a synergistic political economy.

Two major factors based on online content dissemination within eSport have proven especially beneficial. First, the fact that competition and practice occurs online means that access to a global pool of talent at any given time is not out of the question for aspiring contenders. The fact that the sport is inherently mediated may have in fact added to its quicker online adoption compared to conventional sport in more ways than one. Beyond intimate familiarity with the online medium among gamers and fans, the fact that this sport is contested through the media with a global reach has allowed for the ability for leagues to more easily be internationalized. While the NFL, NBA, and NHL are North American leagues, for instance, the Championship Gaming Series featured teams from around the world – a reflection of both the league’s formation during the globalized online media era and owing to the very nature of the new sport. Although eSport finals play out in a physical setting, like other sports, preliminary online competition occurs in a globally networked online space and this has been a formative factor for the building of an international set of leagues. In other words, gamers are not bound by physical distance boundaries like conventional sport athletes are.

Secondly, the fact that eSport has now become synonymous with the internet has allowed the everyday amateur gamer to potentially become a superstar. Anyone with a decent computer and internet access can now register for an account to a streaming website, especially one like *TwitchTV* that explicitly fosters a conducive environment for aspiring professional gamers. It is not uncommon to log into an online game such as *World of Warcraft* or *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and see players advertising their online streams in the games’ chats. If the player is skilled enough, has a particularly endearing personality, or has mastered a niche aspect of a game (or even all three), in time they could cultivate a substantial fan following after building their own personal brand. Potentially, this could fast-forward their entry into the eSport star system, where instead of hoping for corporate intervention through sponsorship and increasing exposure, players could market themselves through web 2.0 media. With enough of a viewership the player could collect advertising revenue as well, reinforcing

the cyclical eSport spectacle whereby instead of an exclusively public presence, a player could build him or herself up online, and attract a fanbase and subsequent sponsors. This may lead to invitations by eSport event promoters to compete in major in-person tournaments. This process exemplifies the shift of eSport towards its current position as being archetypal of the virtual experience economy model³³.

A good example of players using both social media sites and online streaming to popularize their in-game competitive exploits could be seen through the game *World of Warcraft*. The exceptionally popular MMO is significant as it has competitive elements (the 'arena' player-versus-player mode has been featured at numerous tournaments, including the WCG and MLG) as well as a large devoted fanbase of over 10 million active subscribers. One player who has become prominent in the *WoW*, Youtube, and gaming communities goes by his in-game name, 'Athene.' Boasting himself as the 'Best Gamer in the World,' Athene attracted a large community following by posting his PVP encounters online. As of June 2012, he has more than 617,000 subscribers on Youtube, with more than 340,000,000 video views. Another *WoW* player, known as 'Swifty' has over half a million subscribers over a number of channels, and has been sponsored by gaming peripheral company Razer after contacting the company for a partnership request. These gamers are part of a new breed of sports and entertainment celebrities who are relying less on initial corporate endorsement and instead are using the internet

³³ While seemingly a new process owing to contemporary technologies, the ability to brand oneself prior to outside sponsorship is as old as business itself. For the eSports star, this is a continuation of the self-commodification that took place in arcades and PC cafés, where players would gain reputations on a small scale prior to attracting the attention of scouts and recruits. Like in other industries (but namely in business, sports, and entertainment), this creates a symbiotic relationship in which the local/grassroots is an inextricable part of the overall corporatization of a massively spectacularized event, whether it is an agonistic contest or a musical concert.

to commodify their own personal brands and offering a greater degree of involvement with the audience through new social media outlets.

The benefits of players broadcasting their exploits at any time are not limited to those aspirants who are playing on screen. This offers a resource for gamers to learn how to excel as well. Additionally, the streaming of eSports also helps smaller gatherings get exposure in the lead-up to a major competition. Many smaller practice sessions and tournaments now stream their contests weekly. In my research for this project I attended a weekly gathering of fighting game players (the featured tournament game switched between *Street Fighter 4* and *Marvel Versus Capcom 3* every week). This took place at a small shop selling trading cards and board games; the shop was deceptively small as behind two doors, a large storage area housed approximately 60-70 people, where half were engaged in the card game, *Magic the Gathering*, and the others were playing the fighting games on seven standardized Asus HDTVs³⁴. Coupled with the all-too familiar pizza and pop combination that has been ubiquitous among public gamer gatherings, posters advertising “The Road to Canada Cup” and an upcoming tournament/launch party for the release of a new game, *Ultimate Marvel Versus Capcom 3* round out the aesthetics of the gamers’ nook. After a few hours of free play a tournament begins among the 30-plus gamers in attendance. Three of the televisions are reserved for the round-robin tournament, while the rest are for practice. The play on one of the monitors is being streamed live on *TwitchTV*, with two commentators remarking on the action.

³⁴ Interestingly, this suggests that companies could appeal to competitive gaming communities as a new marketing strategy targeting “professional-level equipment.” Competitive players often purchase the same set-ups (televisions with the same input lag and refresh rates, joysticks, even consoles) in order to best recreate the standardized tournament experience. Both tournament players and hopefuls are therefore more inclined towards using the same gear.

When I interviewed Kelvin, a long-time fighting game fan and tournament competitor who was at the event, I asked whether he thought it was important for venues to be streaming local tournament on *TwitchTV*, and what significance it might hold for the overall fighting game community. He responded that “There’s a little more anxiety while you play but... it’s good nowadays because back in the day it was really hard to get footage of really good players playing, just because you would have to be really into the community to find those videos. But now it’s so easily obtainable that the people who are competitive, anyone can be competitive.” Much like in Korea, where hopeful future eSport stars watch matches on television to apply the newest pro-level tactics into their games, tournament players are also turning to online streaming in order to analyze what the competition is doing. Another pro gamer declared that the online space has helped him improve: “I do actually look at combo videos made by pro-level or something that, anything that I haven’t seen and I also look at tournament level on streams. I know there’s weekly events for my game, *Marvel vs Capcom 3* that they have weekly Wednesday events or tournaments and I’ll kind of look at it, look at the characters that I play and see ‘oh, what are they doing differently?’ What kind of mindset are they having at that time, and kind of see if I can get pointers from the level of play there.”

Although many of the tournament players seem to lament the loss of public gaming centres (namely arcades) as points of community and competition, these same players acknowledge that online is the future of agonistic digital game play. One player, “John”, noted that when he started competing, everything was recorded on a camcorder and uploaded to a website. Now, however, he states that streaming sites are “more like the new television – people would just sit there for hours watching it and because they aren’t at the tournament, they are still able to witness all the crowd and all the emotions people can show.” One ardent eSport fan I talked to mused about the impact of streaming within the overall corporatization of eSport: “I think a lot of companies are just now starting to realize exactly how many people can tune in to watch these streams if they’re done online and even when they’re done at live events like the MLG or the WCG and they stream these events and thousands of people tune in to watch them. And so more and more companies are going to begin to realize that they could easily sponsor a team for relatively little money, especially compared to major sports like football and baseball. It’s pennies on the dollar compared to their million-dollar contracts with them.”

Indeed, many major companies are now beginning to coordinate their eSport sponsorship with online teams and players, and many others are exploring the possibilities for returns on potential investments.

As eSport has moved towards online streaming, so too has the gaming industry. Increasingly, major gaming events are becoming available digitally, whereby those who cannot attend can still attain the experience albeit in a mediated format. For instance, many E3 exhibitors and promoters now have interactive web-based applications that allow a viewer to traverse a replicated show floor online. While this is usually free, at other times it comes at a cost. For example, those not able to attend Blizzard's annual Blizzcon event could purchase a digital show pass³⁵, promising the complete experience of being able to see the plethora of new products, branded experiences, and heavily marketed company imagery. We also see online streams as adjuncts to a product, or even offering a preview for fans. *Video Games Live*, a traveling video game symphony, has recently adopted this growing model of promotion, offering free shows on *TwitchTV*, as well as virtual "meet-and-greets" with the show's producers and performers. At these latter events, for instance, the event's producers and creators ask the viewers – whose numbers and statistics they can track – what games they would like to see featured at the event, make major announcements, and ask for feedback on the show (in effect, free consumer research).

The online dissemination of game industry event and experience viewership has witnessed widespread adoption over the last few years. However, it is through eSport

³⁵ For fans who could not afford the \$175 (in 2011) ticket or were not lucky enough to gain admission, Blizzard offered "virtual tickets." Priced at \$39.99 USD, the tickets offered "comprehensive live coverage of the event" through the *BlizzCon* website. This new financial strategy promises the experience of a live event albeit mediated from a distance. This suggests a new kind of participatory community that while mediated through the internet, is still grounded in something that is taking place in real-time, in a physical location.

that such technologies first became popular among the game player base; in this sense, we can see one instance of how eSport has significantly contributed to the ever-expanding business models of high-tech industry. Competitive gaming has indeed helped to demonstrate the changes in the gaming business overall, and if these trends are to suggest anything, it is that the live event model is in the midst of fundamental changes through digital technologies, especially the internet. Despite largely being the domain of eSport, online streaming sites such as *TwitchTV* are also becoming frequently adopted by more broad interests in the gaming industry. In sum, current online models of event marketing for eSport promoters offer a glimpse into future practices when it comes to the changing nature of event promotion in the digital experience marketplace.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined what I term the “second phase” of eSport, which is defined by online, networked competitive gaming and increasing levels of commercialization, media representation, and corporate involvement since the mid-1990s. This in turn has led to accelerated professionalization, as well as closer similarities to the structuring of conventional sporting events and business/organizational models. A consequence of this is evidenced by the visibility of celebrity players, higher awareness for young aspirants of this career path, and a more pronounced illustration of spectacular media-sport experiences when it comes to the digital games industry. While these transitions began in the U.S. with PC eSport leagues beginning in 1997, it was in Korea during this same time where the various prerequisite social, political, and economic factors came together to provide a suitable infrastructure for eSport to succeed as a major national industry.

The consequences of these approaches have been made clearer over time. Scholars have progressively discussed the political economy of eSport and its future consequences, and the movement has garnered considerable attention in recent years. The widespread attention that eSports has received, in addition to proponents’ drives to associate the new activity with traditional sport as well as the high levels of sponsorship and corporate affiliation have led to an intensified dialogue questioning whether professional gaming represents a new prototype for sport in general. Those associated

with eSport in the West have continued to point towards spectatorship, celebrity players, structure, and broadcasting as indicators of legitimacy, with early leagues (CPL, PGL) having even planned to petition the U.S. Olympic Committee for recognition (Goodale, 2008; Robbins, 2002). Propositions calling for eSport to be recognized as an official sport have even reached the U.K. (Millington, 2006; Stuart, 2008).

5. Conclusion

I have situated eSport, which has been defined as public digital gaming transformed into marketed agonic event, at the confluence of sport, the rise of the computer and video games industry, event marketing, and the experience economy. Competitive digital gaming is a response to historical arrangements of play, games, and sport and has demonstrated what happens when these foundations assume a form of competition that is carried out through media platforms. More broadly, the growth of competitive gaming has illustrated the various promotional elements of event-based marketing in the digital games industry as one major instance of the rise of the experience economy. The transition of eSport from a local, in-person contest to a global, online networked spectacle has also served as a reminder of changes in traditional sports models of marketing and viewership. McLuhan has noted that “The games of a people reveal a great deal about them. Games are a sort of artificial paradise like Disneyland, or some Utopian vision by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives” (1964, p. 238). In much the same way, analyzing contemporary digital games through eSport can tell us much about where mediated competition is heading. Consequently my research has examined questions including: when does public gaming become eSport?; what are the allied components of the eSports model?; and how have anticipated synergies factored into the increasing mediatization and professionalization of competitive digital gaming? It has also looked at eSport as merely one component of promotional public events in the digital games industry. eSport joins other major events like trade shows, fan festivals, and smaller grassroots events like cosplay contests and internet-enabled meetings (for example as facilitated through *meetup.com*) in combining to establish a robust physical component of game marketing and gamer culture.

Many scholars have thus far only considered eSport in its recently transformed online, networked model; my contention has been that histories attributing the origins of eSport to the 1990s and PC gaming have been misguided, and that the necessary formative elements preceded milestones like *Doom* in the West and *StarCraft* in Korea.

I have also argued that these attributions are flawed because they often neglect the fact that both early gamer culture and the beginnings of organized competitive gaming originated in the public space. Gamers embraced public play and competition as a tool for agonic community development. Furthermore, digital games have been seen as ideal products of Post-Fordist, postmodern promotional capitalism (Kline et al, 2003), and have settled into a position as a core commodity of the recently identified experience economy. However, they are also indicative of a type of double-commodification in the market, as players experience both the game play as well as the ensuing witnessing of professional competitions. In contrast to many traditional sports, the experiences for sale are far more multi-faceted and participant driven.

eSport has become undeniably significant both as a part of gamer culture and as a new competitive spectacle of the experience economy. Agonic play based on digital games has proven to be a popular cultural activity among youth, and has also served as a hotbed of industry marketing and promotion. However, it has also been crucial in influencing game development. Professional gamers are often recruited to test games that are anticipated to be used for tournament play (for example, the forthcoming *PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale* fighting game), and tournaments are often used by game developers to gauge how balanced the combat of a game is at the highest levels of play (Drake, 2011). These examples follow a long history of the blurring of consumption and production practices in an already highly interactive medium. eSport is also important as a topic of study as the model has been adopted from sports and play is transacted through a digital technology. In other words, the sport is 'doubly interactive' as well, since it is not only contested through the media, but disseminated through digital mediums like the internet, something that has not transpired in the same ways with other sports. In this sense we observe in eSport a new mediatisation which is not dependent on standard television broadcasting. Instead, the gaming industry is consolidating new forms of distributing the witnessing of public competition within the experience economy through new digitized notions of event marketing.

As all "sports" are competitive by definition, it is interesting to analyze the dialogue of eSport promoters in associating public gaming with these model forms. While some have allowed for the idea of non-competitive games (Guttman, 1978) others have stipulated that for something to be a game it must have agonic elements.

Upon further examination, it becomes clear that all digital “games” (as opposed to say, simulated digital environments without set goals) have some kind of competitive aspects. This thesis has examined how, when combined with a public setting and other factors (score keeping, a set of rules, an ongoing discourse based on competition) digital games assume a new kind of role in eSport. While this thesis was originally to consider “public gaming” in various manifestations, it quickly became apparent that forms of public gaming are almost inevitably part of the culture of eSport. Further reinforcing the argument that sport was used as a foundation for competitive gaming, along with eSport came several new high-tech job groupings paralleling ones seen in sports. Jin (2010, p. 77) identifies that the popularity of eSports has created “new job categories, including professional game players, game casters, game commentators, and observers who catch interesting moments to show to the television viewers, comparable to cameramen in sports broadcasting.” This suggests not only a growing entertainment niche, but also in some places a growing driver for economic and professional growth.

But despite the success of eSport, a number of issues and setbacks have dented its growth. Beyond negative perceptions towards public gaming, claims of gender inequalities and addiction have persisted to mire professional gaming. Various authors (Jin, 2010; Hjorth et al, 2009; Taylor et al, 2009) have drawn attention to the palpable absence of female players in eSport, largely resulting from the construction of public space gaming as overly aggressive and masculinized. As we have seen, public gaming is a critical formative element for most of eSport (everything from having a presence in Korean PC cafés, or being expected to compete at physical arcades when it comes to high-level *Street Fighter* play), and hesitancy to enter these spaces oftentimes precludes participation. The dialogue associating professional gaming with conventional sport has also limited involvement in this regard. Furthermore, adding to the general alarm about digital games that has constructed a broad international fear of gaming’s effects on youth, the controversial issue of game addiction has impacted competitive play. Outside of the instances of gamers playing non-stop for days to their deaths in Korea and China, the ambition to become the best gamer has also ended tragically in the West. The case of Canadian teenager Brandon Crisp has been well-publicized. The 15-year old from Barrie, Ontario began to obsessively play first-person shooter *Call of Duty 4*, and unbeknownst to his parents, attained a high rank on online leaderboards for the game.

To maintain his standing, Crisp had to compete frequently. However, upon having his Xbox taken away, the teen ran away from home (in the early days of the investigation, it was rumored he had run off to join a professional gaming league), only to be found deceased from a fall a few weeks later. The story was covered by Canada's national public radio and television broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). A one-hour special was featured on *The Fifth Estate* that examined the incident, and largely implicated the industry for promoting self-destructive behaviours. Although many in the gaming community, including players, developers, and journalists have publicly contested the conclusions of the investigation (The *Toronto Sun's* Steve Tilley famously labeled the report "Lazy, cheap and disappointingly one-sided"), the report added to a decades-old narrative associating gaming with violence and defiant behaviour. One of the areas that was targeted by the report and subsequent examinations into the incident revolved around the marketing and promotion of the industry. Coupled with the formative factors that have not been present in the West, the panic raised concerns not only about digital game play, but about competitive gaming in particular. This resulted in yet another hurdle for proponents of popularizing eSport in the West, suggesting that numerous consequences of the rise of eSport need to be investigated further.

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