A CURRENT COMPARISON OF E-SPORTS & TRADITIONAL SPORTS, “PLUG ME IN COACH!”

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ABSTRACT

Through interviews, research and a theoretical framework, this study examines “e-sports”, or electronic sports, and considers whether e-sports should be categorized as a sport and its players categorized as athletes. E-sports is the term used to describe professional/competitive video games. In the present study, discourse analysis used two primary interviews from two participants – one involved in e-sports, the other in traditional sports. The study used literature to compare the different aspects of both e-sports and traditional sports and noted where the two overlapped. Additionally, this was backed with existing literature and the theoretical framework of play theory to provide insight into sports entertainment. Results revealed interesting first-hand insight on the future of e-sports and in what way traditional sports fit into the equation. By isolating the terms “athlete” and “sports” as a basis for analysis, the traditional and current definitions can be fully understood. The research also revealed that like play theory, both traditional sports and video games originated from a common place – play, and it is because of this similar trajectory, they are what they are now.

This study offers novel insight into how the distinction between traditional sports and the characteristics of athletes has become increasingly unclear; thus, with the amount of overlap between the two, traditional definitions, are changing and moving forward, and as a result, all sports and all athletes will be looked at through the same lens.

Keywords: play theory, e-sports, traditional sports, athlete, sport, discourse
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

With the world changing every day, it is only logical that the versions of entertainment shift as well. Thus, it is important to qualitatively explore the commonalities between e-sports and traditional sports to answer the stated research question. Traditional sporting events have been able to hold onto their fan base for centuries, but with technology, the sports industry has increasingly grown and continues to rapidly expand. Many people are unaware of the alternative world of sports, more specifically, e-sports or electronic sports, and how it is growing at an exponential rate (Szablewicz, 2015, p. 259). An e-sport is, “a competitive tournament of video games, with professional gamers and an audience of some kind” (Dictionary.com, 2000). Near the beginning of the 2000s, e-sports became extremely popular with PvP – player vs player competitive games. This PvP popularity boom caused a considerable surge in the gaming world in terms of competitive gaming and the professional gaming scene (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2254). E-sports have come to not only rival but also emulate the familiar world of traditional sports, with baseball, football, and basketball now on a level playing field with many competitive e-sports. Reasons such as athlete salaries, sponsorships, world tournament events, and viewership numbers, to name a few, prove that e-sports can be at the same level as traditional sports. E-sports have had the opportunity to build on an existing and successful foundation and adapt to thrive in our
technological world. It is important to note a possibility of newer generations’ mentalities and changes in interests, which could aid in the extreme popularity of e-sports. Therefore, this research is valuable because of the ever-changing landscape we live in today. E-sports may become the new sought-after profession in the same way children sought to become traditional sports stars. There is a possibility that children from newer generations may look up to e-sports athletes.

Ultimately, although there has been an incredible increase in popularity within e-sports, there is still a need for academic research to look at the commonalities between e-sports and traditional sports. Thus, it is important to pursue and examine the literature with regards to e-sports to help validate e-sports as a sport and for players to be considered athletes in their respective worlds. Specifically, the research will compare different aspects of traditional sports and e-sports, and will thoroughly examine what an athlete is, highlighting the parallels between the two. The literature and past research will also help to highlight that e-sports and e-athletes are changing the very definition of the two in a way that could validate both enough to be considered sports and athletes. The research and analysis will be grounded in aspects from Huizinga’s play theory, which introduces the idea of “subjective play”, enjoyable activities, the expression of play for the self and the attachment to play culture (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). What is also interesting about Huizinga’s theory is that “play” is normally considered unproductive, which proposes that e-sports may, in fact, be more than play (Stephenson, 1988, p. 45). The world is changing slowly and there is always possibility for a paradigm shift towards e-sports being accepted in the same way traditional sports are. E-sports have successfully created a platform which was built from the existing foundation of traditional sports.
Interview data and existing literature can determine whether e-sports should be taken seriously by the mainstream public. The interview data and literature will also show if a possibility that e-sports may have changed the face of sports and will continue to move forward exists. The overlapping characteristics between traditional and e-sports will determine whether e-sports has cemented itself in the same realm of traditional sports.

This analysis seeks to find evidence to support the claim that e-sports have been solidified as a sport in the traditional sense, and thus, make a case for players to be considered athletes. A key component to this research are the similar characteristics found between e-sports and traditional sports, proving a level playing field, electronic or not.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the review of the literature, two main sections will be discussed. The first section will focus on the history, background, and current standing of e-sports. Additionally, since there are three games that lead the e-sports scene – the top game being League of Legends (LOL) – this section will also focus on LOL. The second section will focus on the comparison between the characteristics found in literature and other data, and between top e-sports and traditional sports. These sections will provide the research and data that supports the premise that e-sports have rightfully gained acceptance in the sports industry.

E-Sports

The Beginnings - History, Background & Current Landscape

E-sports, or electronic sports, have been in a relatively lucrative state until recently; however, the origins stem back decades. Early e-sports were embedded in gamer culture, a booming economy, and competitive and promotional growth (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2255). In the 1980s, the idea of gaming was still new, and therefore, misunderstood. However, what was understood by those fascinated with the culture was the potential that was there, the “experience economy” (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2255). With the rise of competitive arcade games came a future in which all games could be played competitively. Based off financials alone, arcade games were generating billions,
and that was from using quarters (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2260). Arcades were places of cultural variety and acceptance at a time where gaming was still considered a waste of time (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2260). Currently, there are careers and organizations built on e-sports, which contradict that claim. E-sports used the Olympics as a basis for the growth in competitive participation and competitive viewing (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2261). It became clear, especially with the “professionalization of gamers, that acceptance of gamer culture and competitive gaming as experiential consumer events, was growing” (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2268). Professional gaming has grown exponentially from where it started (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2270). It has moved from being considered deviant to being a sought-out spectacle (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2270). E-sports have grown using the foundation from traditional sporting events, allowing the gaming community to develop the fandom required to keep these competitive events thriving.

The current landscape of e-sports is quite vast in terms of the games that are played professionally for prize money. Super Smash Bros. Melee is still a top spectator e-sport, regardless of its release of over a decade ago, reaching nearly 1.5 million online viewers during tournaments (Gibson, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, newer MOBAs (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) games have exploded within the e-sports scene, including other genres such as, MMORPG’s (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, FPS (First Person Shooter), etc. (Gibson, 2017, p. 10). The top three games, based on vieweshhip, prize money, and popularity, are Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, DOTA 2 and League of Legends (Gibson, 2017, p. 8-10). These three games have managed to dominate and put e-sports on the map, financially, being accepted and for
entertainment purposes. From an entertainment standpoint, each has had an impact as far as fans and viewership go. Counter-Strike: Global Offensive or CS GO, can generate up to 46 million online viewers a month (Gibson, 2017, p. 8). Considered one of the first MOBAs, DOTA 2 or Defense of the Ancients, tops the lists for prize money and falls slightly short of overall viewership compared to League of Legends (Gibson, 2017, p. 9). The current number one e-sport, in terms of viewership and players, is League of Legends. In 2016, the game had 100 million active players every month, and the sheer magnitude of those numbers is impressive (Gibson, 2017, p. 10). While these three games may be leading the charge, there are numerous others being played professionally, helping e-sports become more widespread and understood.

League of Legends - History & Background

The top e-sport is currently League of Legends (LOL), which is a fast-paced online game that falls under the MOBA category (What is League, 2017). LOL has been around for eight years and continues to become more successful each year. The founders of the game, Marc Merrill and Brandon Beck, worked together to create the MOBA powerhouse that would come to rule the next decade of e-sports and competitive gaming (League Wikia, 2017). The concept of the game involves five players on each of the two teams (the red team and the blue team, with a total of 10 players) who control five champions and try to destroy the other team's nexus (League Wikia, 2017). The 5v5 game mode is played on an arena called, Summoner’s Rift – the map used for competitive events (League, Wikia, 2017). The players, known as summoners, can control a champion of their choosing within a specific role, to fulfill the team's needs (League Wikia, 2017). The aforementioned description was just a slight introduction to
League of Legends, throughout the rest of the literature review the comparable characteristics between this e-sport and traditional sports will be discussed.

**Competitive Gaming, Online Gaming & E-Sports**

Competitive events are becoming increasingly focused on the viewing pleasure and idea of the spectacle for fans. E-sports is no different in that media has transformed sports into a commodity for and by the consumer (Szablewicz, 2016, p. 260). Overcoming negative connotations is something gamers have had to deal with since the inception of e-sports (Szablewicz, 2016, p. 264). Until very recently, e-sports were not recognized, but are becoming encouraged through other digital means (information tech, computer science, etc.), especially in countries in Asia (Szablewicz, 2016, p. 265). Many aspects of e-sports – not realized by many – parallel what most know about traditional sports. Szablewicz (2016) highlights Shen’s study (2011) which found the following:

E-sports is very different from online gaming, but people always tend to see them as the same thing. The great competitiveness which requires sophisticated strategies and quick reactions within a certain period of time makes e-sports worth watching just like other sports events, but online gaming is only self-indulgent and time-consuming. (Shen, 2011; Szablewicz, 2016, p. 265).

Video games come in many varieties and provide something for everyone, in the same way traditional sports and media do. All video games share certain qualities. Overall, they are all interactive and have an end goal or task (Jansz & Martens, 2005, p. 336). The world of gaming is appealing because players can control virtual characters and
objects throughout the storylines and goals (Jansz & Martens, 2005, p. 338). The allure of video games is due to the idea of escapism and the ability to take the mind off everyday life – which is less in control – and focus the mind on gaming, in which the player has almost full control (Jansz & Martens, 2005, p. 338).

Where speculation falls short, research is necessary to clarify certain aspects of video games and e-sports. It is important to “resolve some of the confusion about the meaning and impact of video games, we believe it is important to study how players’ perspectives reflect broader cultural rhetoric” (Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche, De Wever, Soetaert & Valcke, 2016, p. 1734). The perspectives from those who play games and those who watch are invaluable to understand the connections to other sports. The terms of communication for gaming allow for cultural rhetoric to establish what it means to be part of the gaming community (Bourgonjon et al., 2016, p. 1734). It is the personal perspective and communication that could help propel the world of e-sports into mainstream acceptance. Gaming can be powerful in that it allows players to let go of any daily emotional and intellectual stress (Bourgonjon et al., 2016, p. 1742). Consequently, it is possible to assume that e-sports and competitive gaming, even for fans, has extended the notion of escapism, allowing them to share that with gamers.

It is important to highlight what players learn from gaming as well. Regardless of level – whether easy or complicated – knowledge and morals that can be gained from gaming. Players like to share what they have learned, or continue to learn, each time they play (Bourgonjon et al., 2016, p. 1742). Additionally, gaming also imparts rules and expectations, more so on a professional level, that allows structure and a solid foundation to be built (Brock, 2017, p. 3). While professional gaming has been around since the late
80s as stated above, it has recently become a career path for many in their late teens, going into their twenties. Players practice vigorously in the same manner athletes do in traditional sports (Brock, 2017, p. 3). There are certain qualities listed within Brock’s article that highlight Caillois’ qualities of play, which relate to e-sports and. Caillois (2001) states the following qualities of play:

The need to prove one’s superiority; the desire to challenge, make a record, or merely overcome an obstacle; the hope for and the pursuit of the favor of destiny; pleasure in secrecy, make-believe, or disguise; fear or inspiring of fear; the search for repetition and symmetry, or in contrast, the joy of improvising, inventing, or infinitely varying solutions; solving a mystery or riddle; the satisfaction procured from all arts involving contrivance; the desire to test one’s strength, skill, speed, endurance, equilibrium, or ingenuity; conformity to rules and laws, the duty to respect them, and the temptation to circumvent them; and lastly, the intoxication, longing for ecstasy, and desire for voluptuous panic” (Brock, 2017, p. 4; Caillois, 2001).

Many of these qualities can be directly related to gaming, however, they can also be related to traditional sports and other aspects of life. Caillois list of qualities prove how similar e-sports and traditional sports are, thus promoting the positive foundation and relation gaming can have on other areas. Gaming requires extensive mental concentration to fully devote oneself to the task and goals at hand (Adachi & Willoughby, 2012, p. 156). Gaming is normally recognized as a solitary action, however, many games – especially in the present – promote positive social and communal aspects
The common representations of gamers tend to overlook the statistics which show approximately half female-half male, and a mix of age ranges and ethnicities (Chess, Evans &. Baines, 2017, p. 37-38). The term gamer, therefore, represents a range of individuals. This begs the question: what does a gamer look like? (Chess et al., 2017, p. 39). When gaming started gaining traction, professional and recreational gamers were labeled and stereotyped due to depictions found in television and printed media (Chess et al., 2017, p. 40). This negative stigma still holds true today, thus it is important for research to demonstrate the diversity that is common within the gaming industry (Chess et al., 2017, p. 40).

The Athlete - E-Athlete vs. Traditional Athlete

What makes an athlete? Are there characteristics, abilities or other factors that determine if an individual can be considered an athlete, aside from playing a sport? Simply put, an athlete can be defined as, “a person who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports, or games requiring physical strength, agility, or stamina” (Merriam Webster, 2017). Considering the traditional definition of an athlete, a partial overlap into the world of e-sports is evident because of the words “games” and “stamina”. E-Sports Team Dignitas manager, Michael O’Dell, explains, “There is still a perception in the UK that gamers live in the basement and it really pisses me off” (East, 2016, p. 1). When looking at top professionals in e-sports, most are physically fit. Like in traditional sports, being physically and mentally fit is always a benefit when it comes to e-sports (East 2016, p. 1).

The perceptions managers and coaches have with regards to their players compare to those of a traditional sports team. Management wants healthy players who are mentally and physically prepared. This is reinforced by what it means to be an athlete in the
traditional sense. While it may not necessarily require the same amount of physical strength, it does not make it any less crucial for e-sports.

Competitions that athletes take part in are mostly hosted in large cities with high populations and high community interest (Apostolou, 2015, p. 152). With Los Angeles being the hub of professional League of Legends, interest peaks around the area but will fluctuate internationally. There is more to competition for the athletes as they see the value in it themselves. If the most important factor for athletes was physical fitness then many sports would cease to exist as they could just engage in activities which promote that (Apostolou, 2015, p. 155). One point to make the case for e-sports is physical exertion, which is important as it creates another similarity to traditional sports. It is stated that intensity of exercise is determined by metabolic rate during the exercise (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2), therefore, proving how playing e-sports competitively affects metabolic rate is necessary (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2). During e-sports competitions and training, many e-sports athletes exhibited signs that could be considered physical exertion, especially in high-pressure tournament matches (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2).

While winning may be a factor, it should not consume an athlete's mind, and for good reason. Athletes focus on competitions by putting effort into playing at their full capacity. Kane and Spradley posit that the key element for an athlete should be to focus on skill. There is a clear divide in both e-sports and traditional sports in those who play for fun and professionally (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2). Professional gamers must learn different skills and techniques to elevate their skill cap (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2). Those who participate in competitions are usually predetermined in finding a solid team to pursue the common end goal – winning (Apostolou, 2015, p. 156). Finding a team to
share a common goal with provides structure and a support system for the athlete and helps to open communication. This is important as teammates support each other before and during competitions (Apostolou, 2015, p. 168). Currently, e-sports teams are extremely common with the North American League Championship Series, hosting ten professional teams (Leaguepedia, 2017). Moreover, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Australia host a combined 102 professional League of Legends teams (Leaguepedia, 2017). Furthermore, the team aspect is crucial for the top three traditional sports. Since part of the definition of an athlete indicates competing for entertainment or prizes, this allows e-sports athletes to qualify in this regard.

Alone they are athletes, teammates can provide an additional foundation for support whenever necessary. When athletes feel there is a force that could alter their abilities in competitions, their mental state can become compromised (Harrison, Lawrence, Martin & Stone, 2010, p. 133). Depending on which sport an athlete plays, as well as the life path they have gone down to pursue it, support for an athlete can be difficult to obtain. Richard Cowden states that athletes who constantly strive to become better through perseverance are considered strong, emotionally and mentally (Cowden, 2016 Gucciardi, Hanton, Gordon, Mallett, & Temby, 2015). With mental and emotional fortitude invaluable to them, athletes are constantly waiting for that recognition. The concept of mental toughness is interesting because “athletes tend to approach and respond more adaptively (i.e., with control, confidence, and constancy) to challenges or adversities they are confronted with to produce more favorable outcomes (e.g., successful performances)” (Cowden, 2016, p. 738). This can apply to many places or activities in life, but the term mental toughness seems best suited to athletes. Depending on certain
situations and age ranges, mental toughness may fluctuate, depending on the environment (Cowden, 2016, p. 739). When athletes participate in different sports, the definition of mental toughness changes. Athletes tend to be labeled with characteristics that are unique to them, one being emotionally intelligent. Mental toughness and emotional intelligence can enhance one another (Cowden, 2016, p. 739). Because being able to control and understand emotions is a necessary factor for an athlete’s success, emotional intelligence is an extremely important characteristic for them to have (Cowden, 2016, p. 739).

Emotional quotient or EQ points to better mental conditions, cautious play-style as well as a different perspective during competitive events (Jason, 2016). Emotional intelligence is a common ground between e-sports and traditional sports as they both must keep emotions in check. It is assumed that athletes who have more mental toughness may be better at handling emotions and coping with them after experiencing a challenging situation (Cowden, 2016, p. 740). Another aspect is that athletes who display mental toughness may be able to influence competitive outcomes by coping and understanding these emotions (Cowden, 2016, p. 740).

Communication within the gaming environment is also considerably better when emotions are kept under control, which in turn raises chances of winning (Jason, 2016). Athletes must be able to cope and control themselves internally vs. externally, as internal issues are what they can control. Coping is a way for these athletes to handle extreme amounts of emotion, more so than they believe they can (Cowden, 2016, p. 740). In e-sports managing or coping with emotions is imperative. Controlling excitement after a successful play or the negative emotions from a bad day in the game is all put to the test, particularly on stage (Jason, 2016). This can stem from most athletes being so concerned
with performance trying to optimize what the body needs, and demands are not met (Kerr, DeFreese & Marshall, 2014, p. 1). Being pushed to the limit is common in the world of sports and with athletes which makes coping a necessary strategy. As athletes start playing at increasingly younger ages, it becomes more important to research and consider how participation in sports affects their long-term health (Kerr et al., 2014, p. 1). This also can be used to look at different levels, or mindsets of athletes. Athletes who can push themselves and manage to cope with the added pressure, are considered of higher status because of the emotional control and capability they possess (Cowden, 2016, 741).

It seems that more of the emotional and mental capabilities present in an athlete create the defining line. Emotional intelligence can act as a great force on mental toughness and the overall performance and capability of the athlete (Cowden, 2016, p. 745). Parallel to e-sports, emotional intelligence is used to develop synergy with team members by recognizing faults or positives in each other’s play in a professional manner (Jason, 2016). Physical and mental fortitude play a substantial role in athletic and competitive events and organizations. Top tier athletes train for hours, specializing in their positions to attain a higher skill cap (Kerr et al., 2014, p. 1). This places athletes into different brackets, establishing models for others to try to attain as well as look up to.

In scientific research, organisms and specimens are studied from multiple aspects. Athletes can be seen in a similar fashion. As people, we are similar, however, athletes are looked at differently. To be a model, “the organism becomes standardized and circulated such that a community and ‘moral economy’ develop around the organism” (Ankeny & Leonelli, 2011; Johnson, 2013, p. 879; Kohler, 1993, 1994; Leonelli, 2007). The premise being those model organisms have no exact path most of the time, but rather are sculpted
to become what they are (Johnson, 2013, p. 879). Similarly, athletes can be sculpted into better athletes as they progress not excluding genetic factors from the equation. Athletes and elite athletes provide their own specific advantages when studied scientifically, allowing for better research and more explanations (Johnson, 2013, p. 886). Since many do not consider athletes “normal” people, they can explain certain aspects within an environment much differently than non-athletes. Athletes notice and hold onto certain characteristics they find important to themselves and their sports (Payne, Bredthauer, Martin, & Merrell, 2016, p. 304). These characteristics and qualities can come from their sports and environments, which can change and shape their personalities. Athletic programs could benefit from helping athletes with character building, team bonding and other opportunities (Payne et al., 2016, p. 305). These appear as positive traits that athletes can hold onto throughout their competitive careers and lives. To pursue positive after-effects, the environment must be properly balanced with expression, joy, and positive emotional release (Ogilvie, 1979, p. 49). This ties into coping, emotional intelligence, mental toughness and many other factors for athletes involved in sports and competitive environments. Athletes must be well rounded and have a higher grasp on coping with stress and problems compared to non-athletes, hence separating a “normal person” (a non-athlete) from an athlete. The connection to e-athletes and e-sports are the overlapping characteristics. There are aspects of traditional sports which appear very similar to e-athletes and e-sports, to see the connections, it must be accepted as an overlap between the two.
**Viewership and Diversity**

Like traditional sports, e-sports have a diverse, worldwide audience. By appealing to a broad range of ages, ethnicities, and cultures, gaming has become a worldwide phenomenon. Worldwide audiences provide motivation for players to win for their fans and their hometowns (Taylor, 2016, p. 115). E-sports offer methods of connecting for gaming companies, since their audiences are fascinated a lot more with digital sports than with traditional sports (Taylor, 2016, p. 116). Along with gaming brands and team followings, social media platforms have become a key component in spreading e-sports (Taylor, 2016, p. 116). Streaming platforms, along with public spaces, have shown the increase in popularity as numbers of players and content creators rise every day (Taylor, 2016, p. 117). Countries and their respective citizens treat successful athletes as prized possessions, and many idolize them. Specifically, the Olympics help us understand the development of the sports model wherein mass audiences are comprised of both live and mediated fans for sporting events (Borowy & Jin, 2013, p. 2259). Sports segments devoted to athletes and their teams continue to be prevalent with the news and media (Apostolou, 2015, p. 52). Since a heavy focus on competition and athletes still exists, athletes continue to be an everyday focus within media outlets for people of all ages. Since technology has evolved into several viewing mediums, sporting competitions are airing more often than ever.

A look at the three largest traditional sporting organizations will help in comparing viewership numbers and determining exactly how e-sports fares in comparison. In 2016, the National Football League (NFL) averaged around 16.5 million viewers for their games (Rovell, 2017, p. 1). The NFL’s largest game, the Super Bowl,
grossed around 111 million viewers in 2017 (Otterson, 2018). In its 2016 season, Major
League Baseball (MLB) grossed 2 million viewers on opening day, which grew to 7
million for playoffs, and 23.4 million for the World Series (Statista Average MLB, 2016).
Additionally, the National Basketball Association finals average around 20.2 million, and
the average game can range from 1.6 million to 3.5 million (Statista Average NBA,
2016). When compared to League of Legends (LOL), the difference in viewership
numbers is significant. During the World Championship of League of Legends, 14.7
million concurrent viewers tuned in to watch (LOL esports, 2016). In its opening week in
2016, League of Legends peaked at 428,493 viewers, averaging around 270,000 (Riot
Games Twinge, 2016). When referring to average viewership per game, the viewership
numbers are noticeably different, however the World Championship numbers are
competitive when compared to the viewership numbers of the top three traditional sports.
A look at the total viewership of the LOL World Championships leads to an interesting
discovery: daily unique impression, or unique viewer, during the World Championships
was 396 million (LOL esports, 2016). As LOL is not broadcasted on television networks,
all viewership was online. The FIFA World Cup alone grossed approximately 280
million unique watchers viewing the event online or on a mobile device (FIFA, 2015).
When looking at the numbers on the same viewing source we can see how the numbers
are extremely close.

**Economic & Educational Aspects – E-Sports & Traditional Sports**

Economic potential and viability further render e-sports legitimate as traditional
sports. The economic potential is the massive driving force behind e-sports, along with
the latter’s extensive fan/player base (Taylor, 2016, p. 125).
the fastest growing industries, it inevitably becomes an attractive form of entertainment to which many gravitate – this in turn generates money, proving to be a lucrative industry (Adachi & Willoughby, 2012, p. 155). The more complicated e-sports organizations and their games become, the more investment in finance and player base will be needed (Donaldson, 2015, 17). With the support of the fan community behind it, the status of e-sports has grown significantly. With community support comes the demand for more possibilities for any sports organization. In some cases, support comes in the form of sponsorships, whereas in other cases, it can be through scholarships and support from educational institutions. E-sports is becoming increasingly recognized on multiple campuses for its emerging financial advantages and increased popularity (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 3).
Table 1. Colleges with Collegiate E-sports Programs, Provided by ESPN.com.

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<td>Kentucky</td>
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<td>College of St. Joseph</td>
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Correspondingly, e-sports programs are also emerging at colleges and universities. In 2014, the first collegiate e-sports programs were developed and have since grown to around 50 programs, with more in development (Morrison, 2017). Similar to the NCAA, the National Association of Collegiate e-sports has their own acronym – NACE – and all regulations are analogous to the NCAA which state that the institutions involved must be fully accredited and be officially endorsed by the school they represent (What is Varsity E-Sports, 2017). There are also e-sport-specific scholarships, however, these are controlled by the institutions themselves and not by the NACE (What is Varsity E-Sports, 2017). While the NACE is nowhere near the level of NCAA, its vast expansion within the last year is indisputable (What is Varsity E-Sports, 2017). This is yet another similarity between e-sports and traditional sports. Years prior to the rise of e-sports, there was no financial future in video games – at least for the player side; that could not be more different now (MMO Games, 2016). At the inception of most traditional sports, they were not initially expected to grow into what they are today – this is true of e-sports as well, and should be viewed as such. It is also clear from investing organizations such as the NBA (Simic, 2017).

**Traditional Sports: Organizations, Psychology, Fandom, Child & Professional Play**

To further bridge the connections, we must simplify the definition of sports. A sport can be defined as, “an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment” (Merriam Webster, 2017). Per Cranmer and Myers, sports teams are organizations, incorporating athletes into competitive environments and studying and defining interactions (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 100). Communicating with one another is an extremely important
factor for all people within an organization to establish productive relationships (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 101). Communication is common among team sports, especially when players are constantly together, and a common goal is pursued. Within sports organizations, player-coach connections are evident in the constant communication between them to further team understanding and success (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 101). Types and forms of communication also vary depending on the sport as well the environment the organization is in (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 101). Additionally, organizations share features including “a collection of individuals and groups, goal orientation, deliberative structure, deliberate coordination, and identifiable boundaries” (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 101). With each of these in common for any sports organization, it can be easy to see parallels between them. Furthermore, within these organizations, players and coaches are easily identified by jerseys and actions (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 101; Chelladurai, 2009; Quarterman, 2003). The presence of formal and informal leaders is another similarity between multiple sports organizations and platforms (Cranmer & Myers, 2015, p. 102). The concept of sports teams as organizations did not happen suddenly, it was a process many players and coaches went through to progress sports as a whole.

Much of the research surrounding sports and athletes is due to the high emphasis that was placed on competitive sports and tournaments after the Cold War (Gee, 2010, p. 387). One area of study that gained traction was sports psychology. This slowly became a very prominent part of sports organizations (Gee, 2010, p. 387). Important aspects of organizations such as the satisfaction level of athletes and coaches, and how this affects the organizations and competitions can be discovered through sports psychology.
Sports psychology has allowed for the understanding of mental, emotional and physical performance and how each of these factors feeds and connects to the other (Gee, 2010, p. 387). Core performance aspects of sports organizations went unstudied for a long period of time. Even what could be considered minor aspects of the organizations would have had no relevant productive explanation. The way performance is analyzed from a young age is through mental and physical attributes using methods ways specific to competitive sports (Lorenz, Reiman, Lehecka & Naylor, 2013, p. 542). A common theme among traditional sports organizations is that each requires a different yet higher standard of mental and physical capabilities. This ties into the psychology aspect – if athletes within traditional sports hold a higher standard, many might be resistant to hearing their flaws and being viewed negatively (Gee, 2010, p. 388). As the psychology of sports organizations demonstrates, highlighting negative aspects can be a method for improving a player’s performance. Within traditional sports, the psychology behind it caused a type of paradigm shift of sports psychology to focus on negatives and positives.

In the current landscape of traditional sports, there are various aspects beyond only the internal workings. For example, owners of organizations realize there are so many pieces to attaining and maintaining fans and interest (Meehan, Nelson &, Richardson, 2003, p. 563). Among the most important driving factors in traditional sports is fan interest, as people love to watch sports and owners want that to continue (Meehan, Nelson &, Richardson, 2003, p. 563). In parallel, e-sports audiences are growing with each event year after year in terms of fan viewership (Elder, 2017). The idea of spectacle and being able to watch and be connected to a team is crucial. Traditional organizations
need to ensure there are rules in place in order to provide a better fan experience, which means no clear domination based on unreasonable circumstances (Meehan, Nelson & Richardson, 2003, p. 563). These organizations cater to those driving a large portion of their business, which are the spectators (fans). Certain attributes are applied across a league to steady and or grow fan interest, season competition balancing and uncertainty of who will win games (Meehan, Nelson & Richardson, 2003, p. 564). When fans can correctly predict winners time and time again, it can only be assumed that interest will fade. Spectators and fans hold much of the power in the current structure of traditional sports when it comes to the economical aspect of the organizations. A major way sports organizations profit is by having fans willing to pay for the commodity and entertainment they are supplying. In general, the world of sports is a massive driver for economies when it comes to business, jobs, and taxes (Mishra, Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2016, p. 212). As spectators can be monetized, fan involvement increased with the introduction of fantasy leagues, which apply the same feeling of competition and allow the fans to connect further to the sport. Thus, “fantasy sports have exploded in popularity because of the cultural convergence” (Halverson & Halverson, 2008, 286). With fans becoming a crucial aspect in all sports, it makes sense for sports organizations to give them a chance to get closer to the action. These fandoms tie into the competitive nature of the sports themselves (Halverson & Halverson, 2008, 287). It is important to try and understand the complete dynamics of and between the fans and the sports organizations with whom they associate (Halverson & Halverson, 2008, 287). Traditional sports have their unique aspects, when these are examined the pathways of comparison to e-sports become more visible.
Participation in sports is driven by many factors, which can also change with age. Participation in sports is can refer to a combination of behaviors, actions, and environment (Skille, 2005, p. 308). At a young age, a person will learn what they like and dislike, which can determine the sports they become interested in. Habitus, a noteworthy term used to link social and cultural magnitude is used to look at group culture and the individual assessment of a culture (Skille, 2005, p. 309; Bourdieu, 1978, 1984). Different cultural expectations and social factors can all affect which sports are the dominant and which are the deviant (Skille, 2005, p. 309). Even the personas of athletes within the dominant sports can be a factor when looking at cultural impact. Players with star-quality can easily promote the growth of a sport with their out-of-game actions as well, which will automatically draw fans of the sport to them (Ormiston, 2014, p. 342). For example, Soren “Bjergsen” Bjerg, a well-known player on the league of Legends roster for Team Solo Mid boasts 1.23 million followers on Twitter, compared to Clayton Kershaw, a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, who has 376,000 followers; Lebron James, a star NBA player, who has around 40.9 million followers; and soccer or football star Cristiano Ronaldo, who has 70.2 million (Twitter, 2017). While Soren Bjerg’s numbers are not as high as the top athletes of other global sports, it still makes a comparison point for e-sports and it’s following on social media and culturally. Youths who are testing the waters with sports, both as players and fans, are affected by star-players because of the natural connection they make with their fans. When a culture is brought into a child's life and strengthened, it can establish lifelong fandom, participation, and love of a sport (Skille, 2005, p. 310). The culture of traditional sports is strong and embedded into societies worldwide, thus becoming a part of most people's lives. However, the world is
evolving with each passing day. In the case of traditional sports and the addition of technology, a paradigm shift into a new world of sports emerged: e-sports.

Theoretical Framework - Huizinga’s Play Theory

The concept of e-sports and traditional sports started closely with aspects of Huizinga’s play theory. As stated earlier, play is normally unproductive, leisurely, and at many times an “interlude” (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). Gaming started in this way too; it was not competitive until an expert gamer realized there was something to compete at. This can be similarly attributed to traditional sports. Before there were money, sponsorship, or contracts, every sport was a game and was played for entertainment. The entertainment aspect is what stood out in Stephenson's book, the idea of pure entertainment and joy and how games are where people found so many positive emotions (Stephenson, 1988, p. 3). However, this can change once rules and other restrictions are incorporated into the activity. Therefore, when "subjectivity" plays a role, is it still "just a game"? (Stephenson, 1988, p. 3). The connection of play and culture is also significant, as culture depicts how games and play are both treated and viewed (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). Before Huizinga's introduction of subjective play theory, games and play were examined by scholars as meaningless, a waste of time, and of no benefit to life (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). Where Huizinga stands is more in line with playing and games promoting and strengthening aspects of culture and teaching loyalty, competitiveness and overall patience (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). The distinction of play is interesting because it involves finding the line between seriousness and enjoyment. Play involves certainty, in which participants should always be having fun (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). This application of play may still be evident with e-sports and traditional sports players or may
now be a thing of the past. There are also aspects of play which can be directly applied to the highest level of competition as well. A “surreal” experience, or the feeling of complete immersion in the activity, is at the very essence of play, and occurs in sports and games (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). It is possible that these aspects point to the legitimacy of e-sports, because of the shared similarities with sports.

In addition to Huizinga, the book Man, Play and Games by Roger Caillois can be used to clarify the foundation of all games and play. Caillois defines play as “a voluntary activity that occurs in a pure space, isolated and protected from the rest of life” (Caillois, 2001, p. 6). Caillois also points out the further broken-down sections of play free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and make-believe (Caillois, 2001, p. 9). This will be examined further later in the study using evidence from the interviews. Caillois used the term “agôn” which encompasses games which are competitive in which chances are artificial (Caillois, 2001, p. 14) This is important as it is applicable to both traditional sports, such as baseball or football, and e-sports, such as League of Legends or Counter-Strike.

This research study, along with Huizinga and Caillois, will add internal industry opinions and thoughts on the changing landscape of the sports world to the existing literature and findings. This research study will shed light on a concept that has not been proven to date, and while this study on its own would not prove it, it would strengthen the argument for it. With the research question being pointed at e-sports becoming recognized as a sport and the players as athletes the foundation of any sport was being a game, and before that play leading us back to the foundation that both originated.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: DISCOURSE THEORY & RESEARCH DESIGN

This section will provide the methodology of this study using discourse theory, which can be defined by Foucault as the “idea that language is simply a reflection of reality and prescriptive notion that the world—including the social world—is constituted within discourse” (Leitch & Motion, 2005, p. 2). The approach will be applied when collecting primary data through interviews & video, all while tying into play theory & discourse theory. Using these methods, theory, and literature, the research question will have a clearer answer on the validity of e-sports and will hopefully open new opportunities for research as well. The sample population for the interviews will involve those in the industries of either e-sports or traditional sports. Adults over the age of 18 will be used for the interviews, regardless of gender. While this is a convenience sample, it will nevertheless ensure accurate and relevant information concerning e-sports and whether it has changed traditional definitions. Looking back at the question being asked it is necessary to discover insider knowledge about e-sports and traditional sports. The data will help us answer the question of whether e-sports have solidified themselves as a sport in the traditional sense and made the case for players to be considered athletes.

Research Approach – Artifacts (Interviews)

There will be in-depth interviews with people directly involved in traditional sports organizations, as well as people in gaming and e-sports. These interviews are
conducted either over the phone or face-to-face in order to gain an understanding of what
the opposite industries thoughts are about whether e-sports have solidified themselves as
a sport in the traditional sense and made the case for players to be considered athletes.
Questions will be asked concerning their introductions into their sports, as well as their
thoughts on how sports and athletic definitions have changed and adapted. It will be
beneficial to obtain information which directly correlate how athletes feel about what
makes an athlete, what makes competitive events so popular and how fans have become
so involved in the sports as well.

Interviews

The primary research is gathered through two separate interviews with former
professional e-sports player and coach for Gold Coin United, Yoonsup Choi and
professional baseball player in the St. Louis Cardinals, Patrick Wisdom. These interviews
are crucial for an insider approach and real-life comparison to go with our researched
comparisons of traditional sports and e-sports and play theory foundation. The interview
questions and consent forms are in Appendix A.

Procedure

The interview with Yoonsup Choi was conducted on November 2, 2017, via
phone, was conducted by the researcher. The interview lasted approximately 30 to 35
minutes, and was recorded and transcribed afterward. The interview with Patrick Wisdom
was conducted through messaging and emails spanning a few days. Both interview
transcripts are located in Appendix B for purpose of review.
Measures

The purpose of the interview and its questions were to add another layer of comparison to e-sports and traditional sports. By hearing the answers of those within each industry allows another research aspect that applies directly to the world of sports. The question was designed to focus on the thoughts of what it means to be an athlete, play a sport, and whether the line is becoming or can become blurred. The different viewpoints that Choi and Wisdom have are relevant to the already differing viewpoints on e-sports and traditional sports.
CHAPTER 4

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Interview 1 – Yoonsup Choi

The interview with Yoonsup Choi was conducted on November 2, 2017, via phone. Choi’s interview lasted approximately 30 to 35 minutes and was recorded and transcribed thereafter. The transcription can be found in Appendix B.

Before conducting the interview, the possibility of bias is anticipated on the part of the interviewee on her industry. Since the assumption prior to the interview was that there is a least “a change” in the traditional sports landscape, what is changing is if the change is deserving is what is up to the interpretation of the interviewees.

It was clear throughout the interview the interviewee and interviewer were both comfortable talking about e-sports, and how it has been growing tremendously in the last 5 years. Choi is passionate about the e-sports industry, which is the reason he initially agreed to the interview. He believed it is beneficial to propel something with research – in this case, e-sports. Choi’s narrative began with in-depth knowledge of e-sports as he has been involved in it his whole life. Previous assumptions, also noted in literature, describe gamers as anti-social, but as the interview progressed another conclusion was formed: he was the opposite of the subjective view of a gamer.

The recurrent themes of athletes, sports, viewpoints, and e-sports allowed Choi to openly state that he considers those in competitive gaming athletes, while also stating
there are other parallels with traditional sports evident in e-sports. Choi mentions that franchising is beginning to be an option for League of Legends and Overwatch. He states there is a move towards regional teams and the possibility of home teams and away teams in the e-sports realm.

The Athlete & Viewpoints

Since Choi is both a former coach and current player, he provided opinions from both perspectives. Choi states, “I feel like the players are definitely athletes. They invest time into it like an athlete, they train like an athlete, they get paid like an athlete, they perform like an athlete, and they compete like an athlete. I mean, to me, there isn’t a difference, so if you want to be picky you can call them an “e-sports athlete” (Choi, 2017, Interview). This supports the idea that in both e-sports and traditional sports there is a clear divide between those who play for fun and professionals who hone their skills every day (Kane & Spradley, 2017, p. 2). It is evident that lines are becoming increasingly blurred in regard to the characteristics that define what it means to be an athlete.

While Choi states e-sports is not as “physically limiting” as traditional sports, he does not disregard the hard work e-sports requires to get to the top. He mentions that professionals today envisioned a much different future. Choi informed me that, “a star League of Legends player, Reckless, was an aspiring professional soccer player, playing religiously. Then he got injured and hurt his leg/foot and his outlet for competition went into League of Legends, and he eventually went pro” (Choi, 2017, Interview). It became one in the same for “Reckless”. As a player, he practiced vigorously in the same manner he did for soccer, which parallels what Brock states about excelling at anything because the same training is put in no matter what sport or event (Brock, 2017, p. 3). Even with
the players/athletes, there are parallels between e-sports and traditional sports with outlet for competition and training. According to Choi’s coaching viewpoint, Choi reasoned that, “it’s not humbleness but willingness to learn from others, player and coaches” (Choi, 2017, Interview). As League of Legends is constantly changing, it makes sense for humility to be an outstanding quality in an e-sports player (Choi, 2017, Interview). There are certain qualities that make an athlete great and the same can apply to e-sports players. While it’s hard to pick something, a player needs to be a great player, Choi emphasized the importance of a player’s willingness to learn and adapt to change (Choi, 2017, Interview). As mentioned in the literature, Richard Cowden states that athletes who constantly strive to become better through perseverance are those who are considered strong, emotionally and mentally (Cowden, 2016 Gucciardi, Hanton, Gordon, Mallett, & Temby, 2015). These characteristics support Choi’s point of view as well as his definition of what makes a great athlete. Choi then concludes that of e-sports is not based on physical strength but based on one’s mindset and how they treat practicing alone and climbing through the ranking system within the game. climb through the ranks. How you treat these games also translates to teams wanting to pick you up” Choi, 2017, Interview). Tying in with Cowden’s theory, emotional and mental strength are key in what defines a strong athlete.

Choi reasoned that e-sports doesn’t come without its challenges of acceptance as well. When asked about generational viewpoints on e-sports being sports and the players athletes, he explains, “I think for the older generation it’s going to be really, really hard for them to view e-sports as a traditional sport in the same sense they basketball of football since they didn’t grow up with it” (Choi, 2017, Interview). With most of Choi’s
statements supporting Huizinga’s, play is still seen as unproductive, leisurely, and many
times an “interlude” (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). This may be part of the reason it is
difficult for older generations to see the current reality of e-sports. Choi emphasized that,
“with the baby boomers it’s a foregone conclusion, for generation X it’s a maybe, but I
think millennials and the generation after us, generation Z, there are going to start
viewing them as athletes” (Choi, 2017, Interview). There is no doubt in Choi’s mind of
the possibility of becoming e-sports athletes and thriving in a professional scene. As for
traditional sports, Choi feels that newer generations will have star players they look up to
from a young age. Choi concludes by stating a change in views on e-sports being a sport
and the players being athletes it is very possible.

Past & Future

When looking at the past five years of e-sports and comparing it to the next five
years, Choi explains the difference is significant, stating, “the player and coach salaries
are about 10 times roughly what they were 5 years ago”. While the exact number is
unknown, the prospect of e-sports as a lucrative career could possibly change public
perception of “gaming”. There is also an increasing amount of financial investments
within e-sports. With so much at stake economically, there is immense pressure on
organizations to perform (Choi, 2017, Interview). With video games becoming one of the
fastest growing industries, it makes sense for people to gravitate towards it for
the e-sports facilities, environments and management have surpassed expected growth,
there weren’t even coaches for teams 5 years ago and now these same teams have head
coaches, psychologists, catered foods, sponsorships, you name it” (Choi, 2017,
Interview). The overlap with traditional sports is therefore clear: e-sports have all the benefits of traditional sports.

The next five years can allow for even more overlap between traditional sports and e-sports. As briefly stated above, Choi’s perception of the future of e-sports corresponds to that of traditional sports. When asked what is in store within the next five years for e-sports, Choi responds by saying, “current growth is unsustainable, I don’t think salaries will grow 10 times what they are now, haha. Eventually, there will be a plateau, but it needs to finish growing as well” (Choi, 2017, Interview). Since E-sports have seen tremendous growth, it is possible that by the time e-sports peak financially, the financials will compare to those of traditional sports. Donaldson stated that the more complicated e-sports organizations and their games become, the more there will be a need for investment in finance and players as well (Donaldson, 2015, p. 17). This supports Choi’s following statement, “I think the franchising of both Overwatch and LOL if that is doing well then other games and developers will take notice to the leagues. In the next 5 years, I expect salaries to continually grow, I expect there to be player caps, player unions, coach unions.

One thing that both League of Legends and Overwatch are trying to do is establish both leagues as regional leagues, competing in cities all over the country” (Choi, 2017, Interview). As stated previously, competitions athletes take part in are mostly hosted in large cities with high population and high community interest (Apostolou, 2015, p. 152). This could mean regional teams for multiple e-sports and as Choi asserts, “I’m thinking more regarding NFL, like travel. RIOT & others wanted teams to have stadiums and be able to house other teams when introducing franchising”
(Choi, 2017, Interview). Having home and away teams and games in e-sports furthers supports the traditional sports model. With confirmed financial support it seems that e-sports following a similar model is not far from happening.

Following Choi’s interview, it was clear he had confidence in what the future holds for e-sports. With regards to the current study’s research question, Choi believes e-sports and its athletes are beginning to be considered “sports” but the public’s perception is holding it back (Choi, 2017, Interview). The negative stigma of what makes a “gamer” may have to change. Choi shares this viewpoint with Michael O’Dell. Odell stated, “There’s still that perception in the UK that it’s gamers in the basement and it really pisses me off” (East, 2016, p. 1). As it stands, there are still external hurdles that must be overcome to solidify e-sports within the traditional sports industry.

**Interview 2 – Patrick Wisdom**

The interview between Patrick Wisdom and myself, Anthony Tyre, was conducted throughout the week of November 2nd – 9th, 2017, via messaging and email. The interview was transcribed and can be found in Appendix C.

**Past & Future**

Patrick Wisdom’s unique standpoint from a professional baseball player, provides a traditional sports perspective. When asked about traditional sports in the last five years, Wisdom highlighted the way in which traditional sports bring people together and who they allow for a competitive outlet (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). He argues that traditional sports make some more physically competent as well, which is an interesting perspective (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). He also argues that participation in traditional has risen because of movements such as “Get out and Play” (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). When
comparing e-sports in this regard, there are no organizations which support and encourage kids to participate in e-sports.

When looking to the future of traditional sports, Wisdom foresees obtaining more youth and adult participation in community leagues (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). This view, in his opinion, is due to the urgency of getting more people outside and active. Traditional sports have a history of being familiar with their very nature, due to them being around for so much longer than e-sports. Since this is the case Wisdom sees this as aiding the future popularity of traditional sports. Wisdom also mentions the technological advances that have had a direct effect on traditional sports and how that has added a positive lift to the popularity of traditional sports (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). This is an interesting point because e-sports was born out of technology and has needed it to thrive, traditional sports have adopted technology to enhance the fan entertainment and to add new and better advancements to the games themselves. In a way, they have both maximized their technological aspects to enhance their individual strengths. Wisdom sees these changes as positive and a move in the right direction for traditional sports.

The Athlete & Viewpoints

With traditional sports being a prominent part of Wisdom’s life, his perspective on e-sports becomes even more valuable. When discussing the popularity of e-sports, Wisdom states e-sports are at the forefront of indoor activities, and adds that with these life-like games, e-sports provide players with a sense of competitiveness without having to be physical (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). With regards to what he considers athletes to be, Wisdom states, “A common theme is they have physical and mental prowess.
Physically attributes of an athlete can vary on who you ask. I personally believe that for someone to be an athlete, they have functional strength, agility, and cardiovascular ability. They can adapt to the sport they are playing. Mentally they understand their environment and the game they are playing” (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). According to Wisdom, adaption, functionality and physical and mental prowess are key attributes of an athlete. While these are what he believes are the characteristics, he also realizes someone can be an athlete outside of traditional sports.

With regards to public opinion, Wisdom asserts that e-sports has the ability to redefine what is meant to be an athlete (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). Certain beliefs exist which can hinder support for a sport or game. Wisdom posits it may be related to not finding joy in the sport, or to the “agenda” said sports or e-sports organizations are supporting. It becomes a personal stigma unique to individuals and their viewpoints on sports in general many times (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). From Wisdom’s perspective, reasons for not supporting e-sports could stem from the continual exposure to TV/computer screens and how this is perceived as negative (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). Wisdom states e-sports can support a sedentary lifestyle when abused; however, he is a supporter of mixing traditional and e-sports (Wisdom, 2017, Interview). When asked the research question directly, Wisdom stated, “I believe e-sports should be classified as games rather than sports because e-sports do not demand any physical prowess. E-sports are contributing to a virtual world through a console. It may be mentally engaging, but I don’t believe that makes it a sport” (Wisdom, 2017, Interview).
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS – COMPARE & CONTRASTING

After interviewing Yoonsup Choi, a former e-sports player and current coach, and Patrick Wisdom, a professional baseball player, an abundance of information that can be further discussed.

Choi discussed the future and current landscape of e-sports – something he experiences daily. Wisdom examined e-sports through his traditional sports perspective. These interviews established where e-sports and traditional sports overlap and where common ground was found. Both Choi and Wisdom presented interesting points about what it means to be an athlete and what characteristics make an athlete. Choi stated that from his perspective, the most important aspect was humbleness, mental fortitude and the ability to adapt to situations and changes. Wisdom mentioned that both physical and mental prowess notes are important. Additionally, Wisdom mentioned functional strength is also necessary. The overlap with mental fortitude is where these are important aspects highlighting the commonalities e-sports shows to traditional sports.

In discussing public viewpoints and the future of their respective industries, Choi and Wisdom held similar views. Both Choi and Wisdom mentioned that the future of sports relies heavily on the younger generations. Choi mentioned younger generations will start to see e-sports players as athletes playing a sport because of them growing up with the current landscape of e-sports. Wisdom stated that popularity with traditional
sports will continue due to the support of movements encouraging the younger generations to go out and play. This ties in with Choi’s comments about older generations and their resistance towards e-sports. Wisdom agreed that certain members of the public have a stigma which may be the reason for their hesitation in supporting a game/sport/activity.

With regards to what e-sports players are doing in the current landscape, Choi noted there is not enough public knowledge about the training they take part in. He added that perhaps if the public was privy to players’ lives outside of gaming, the stigmas around them would change. While Choi and Wisdom may disagree on the solidification of e-sports as a sport and the players as athletes, they still find common ground on crucial points, which is the premise of the current study and literature.

Theoretical Framework - Comparing/Contrasting Characteristics

E-sports is a version of traditional sports, which have been around for over a century and a half. Through interview data and literature, this study examined whether e-sports should be considered sports and players athletes. Within this study, countless examples of overlap between e-sports and traditional sports were examined. The next section will discuss the overlapping statements from the two interviews and the theoretical framework of play theory. The goal of the following section is to solidify claims made within the interviews and provide foundational support through Huizinga’s play theory and other research from the literature review.

Play Theory Application

Play theory can apply to so much more than just basic games, which makes it extremely relevant to the discussion of changing traditional definitions. It is important to
realize that relating common foundations and starting points is the best way to make comparisons between e-sports and traditional sports. The connection between play and culture is also significant, as culture depicts how games and play are both treated and viewed (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). This is an extremely important aspect of this study because culture depicts a certain stigma.

It is possible that the labels provided culturally are a major hurdle for e-sports to solidify itself as a sport and its players as athletes. For many, video games are not sports because they are labeled as “games”. While the outsiders may label something as a game, those within the industry call it their job. It is important to realize that play theory can break down these existing predispositions and explain e-sports and traditional sports for what they are – enjoyment. It states that a certainty involved in play is that whoever is playing should always be having fun (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). Now, this becomes interesting, because of the idea that sports are entertainment for many and a job for some, is it always fun for the players? This compromises the statement from Stephenson but also allows for a different take on it, that e-sports and sports have evolved into much more than playing which also equates to not always having fun. More importantly, for both fans and players the experience is sometimes surreal. A surreal experience, being completely immersed in the activity is the very essence of play when it comes to sports and games (Stephenson, 1988, p. 46). This experience has changed what is viewed as play and games. Since the current state of e-sports embodies many qualities found in traditional sports, it has allowed it to become a spectator sport (Taylor, 2016, p. 116). This similarity is crucial for e-sports as it proves that it follows the same trajectory as traditional sports.
Huizinga’s own definition of play is, “a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain limits of time and place according to rules, with feelings of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is different from ordinary life” (Stephenson, 1988, p. xiii). It is evident that when looking at the broken-down view of Huizinga idea of play, it applies to the beginning and current landscape of all sports, e-sports included.

Looking at aspects from *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois offers insight into the overall label that games fall under. League of Legends would fall into similar categories that baseball or football would. As previously stated, this covers games in which there is always a “question of rivalry which hinges on a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.) (Caillois, 2001, p. 14). These qualities can bridge the gap as they are not mutually exclusive to traditional sports or e-sports. Both take advantage of all aspects mentioned by Caillois. Another area of overlap strengthened by Caillois is the idea behind the escapism of games, the point of play no longer being play. Caillois states, “What was an escape becomes an obligation, and what was a pastime is now a passion, compulsion, and a source of anxiety. The principle of play has become corrupted” (Caillois, 2001, p. 44-45). This precisely is what moves e-sports into the direction of being accepted in the same realm of traditional sports. Seeing a sport as play keeps it at a different state, once play is corrupted or changed it becomes something else, in the case of e-sports it is no longer play by using Caillois example of escape to obligation, which aids in cementing its place next to traditional sports as it is once again a parallel. What happens when play isn’t play any longer, the existing activities or sports grow into businesses, financial ventures, jobs and more.
Stephenson mentions Schwartzman, who suggests that play is unstructured, humorous, etc., but in turn that now separates what e-sports can be known as (Stephenson, 1988, p. xiii). In reference to the interview with Choi, he posits that e-sports have now become structured, and with structure comes a necessity for seriousness. With so much financial backing and investments, e-sports have made its case for having a serious impact on sports entertainment and what it means to “play” a game. Stephenson also notes that playing is synonymous with “pretending” – stepping outside normal duties you would have in the world, away from responsibilities (Stephenson, 1988, p. 47). Traditional sports athletes have their everyday duties just like e-sports athletes do. This is yet another similarity between the two. When a non-athletes play baseball or League of Legends, they can step away after playing, whereas traditional sports and e-sports athletes treat their “play” as an everyday responsibility.

According to Stephenson, Huizinga, and Caillois, referring to e-sports as play cannot be further from its current landscape, especially with play being an interlude in the day (Stephenson, 1988, p. 47). Interlude meaning mostly thought of as a break in the normal schedule of the day. When e-sports becomes a part of one’s life, it becomes on par with traditional sports.

Relating play and athletes can be rather difficult when examining play theory because the term athlete seems much more serious compared to the word “play”. The characteristics of an athlete can differ slightly from coach to player to person but there are always similarities. Choi stated that willingness to learn, humbleness and strong mentality is what distinguishes an athlete from a non-athlete (Choi, 2017, Interview). Cowden points out that athletes who constantly strive to become better through
perseverance are considered strong, emotionally and mentally (Cowden, 2016, Gucciardi et al., 2015).
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

In this study, the distinction between play and games, games and sports, what it means to be athlete and what constitutes a sport has been discussed. Play theory, on a fundamental level, helped explain why e-sports – at the highest competitive level – is on par with traditional sports. E-sports players utilize video “games” in the same way a pitcher playing a baseball “game” would. Play theory challenges traditional sports and games to examine their history. There is no disputing the foundations of play and games, but they are still important to examine as these same foundations explore commonalities for sports and e-sports. It is therefore crucial to examine traditional definitions and foundation using primary and secondary research to back these claims.

Sports and the entertainment industry have changed. Through interviews and secondary articles, this study showed the immense amount of overlap between traditional sports and e-sports. E-sports have shown a progression within the last 5 years that hasn’t been evident even looking at the traditional sports history. The rapid growth and progression of e-sports may have helped with the reluctance some feel towards its acknowledgment. Through research and theoretical applications, this study helped to solidify e-sports as a sport in the traditional sense, and gamers as athletes.

Through interview data and presented literature, it is evident e-sports and traditional sports share many similarities. With financial and viewership growth as well
as the increasing complexity of internal operations, it is nearly impossible not to take notice. Traditional sports have been around for centuries, while e-sports only a decade and a half. Despite this, e-sports have gained tremendous momentum, reminiscent of traditional sports.

E-sports started as nothing but a game with a few players. Now it has grown into a multimillion-dollar industry, supported by college athletics which provides financially stable futures for people all around the world. The same can be said for the traditional sports. This study shows that from the research and examples presented within, it becomes more difficult to find differences between the two. So, while yes, in e-sports a game is “played”, it is imperative to recall that in every other sport they “play” in a similar manner. By applying methods to this study such as interviews, articles, literature, and theories, this study answered the proposed research question: have e-sports solidified themselves as a sport in the traditional sense and made the case for players to be considered athletes. This study has found that e-sports are their own entity with roots in tradition, and with characteristics overlapping traditional sports, their existence as a sport and their players as athletes cannot be ignored.

**Limitations**

As is the case with all research, there are limitations that must be accepted and noted. For this research study, the limitations came with the small survey sample size and a limited number of interviewees. Limitations were also encountered in the type of research conducted within the theoretical framework. Since the approach used discourse theory through interview and video artifacts, the interviews provided the new data. All other data presented was from past research and theories. In this type of approach, staying
objective and allowing the data to speak for itself becomes difficult. Since discourse and play theory is applicable to this research, it allows for commonalities to be discovered when other researchers use similar theories and approaches. Although applying specific theories can aid in collecting more detailed data, it also allows for bias and loss of subjectivity.

Further Research

Since e-sports is a relatively new addition to the sports and entertainment industries, there are many possible ways this research could be further studied. Quantitative surveys could be conducted to present numerical data to support certain aspects of e-sports. Additionally, scientific studies could help determine the overlap between e-sports and traditional sports by conducting physical and mental tests. Research from this study could also be directly applied to a lab study meant to cross-examine certain characteristics that embody an athlete. These would have to be measurable, and include reflex time, mental dexterity, stamina, etc. Moreover, conducting further research on the public opinion regarding e-sports could help determine a more comprehensive analysis of how different generations view e-sports. This research study examined the ways in which traditional sports and e-sports overlap. Furthermore, it confirmed that e-sports players are much more than just gamers.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT & INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

California State University Fullerton
Informed Consent Form for those involved in the e-sports/traditional sports industries
Anthony Tyre
California State University Fullerton
Michael McAlexander
Have e-sports solidified themselves enough to be recognized as a sport? Version 1

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:
• Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)
• Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet
Hello, my name is Anthony Tyre and I have selected you to participate in an interview regarding my research project. This research project is concerned with e-sports and traditional sports and how e-sports has earned its status as a sport through existing data and similarities between the two. If at any point you have any questions or would like to talk to anyone about this, please feel free to. Questions can be asked at any point during this process.

Purpose of the research
E-sports has been a booming industry within the last decade, with many aspects of it building off the foundation of traditional sports. I am conducting this research to collect data that will help prove e-sports belong in the same category as traditional sports. Since this is the end goal, I am looking for people involved in either e-sports or traditional sports to get an inside opinion on this question: has e-sports solidified itself as a sport when compared in the traditional sense? Hearing the thoughts from those within the industry will help provide data that is extremely valuable to the research being conducted.

Type of Research Intervention
This research will involve your participation in a short but in-depth interview that will take 35 minutes or less of your time.

Participant Selection
You are being invited to take part in this research and interview because your experience and career within your industry (e-sports or traditional sports) can help contribute to our understanding of inside opinions and thoughts on this subject.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, nothing will happen to you and nothing will change. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind later and stop participating, even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures
A. I am asking you to help me learn more about e-sports and traditional sports and the relationship between them. If you accept this invitation, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding e-sports, traditional sports, and related topics.
B. The questions asked in the interview will be mostly related to your opinion and thoughts on both e-sports and traditional sports. Questions related to thoughts on changing mentality, current public thought, personal thought and your own industry knowledge. While these questions ask for your opinion and personal thoughts, you do not have to share anything you feel uncomfortable with in any way. These discussions will take place over the phone, in person or through email with you, the selected interviewee, and myself the interviewer.

Duration
This interview, while in depth, will not take up very much of your time. At most, 35 minutes of time would be set aside for the interview barring no outside delays. Once the interview is over, there is nothing further required of your greatly appreciated time.

Risks
There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any questions or take part in the discussion/interview/survey if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Benefits
There will be no direct benefit to you other than some new thoughts upon leaving the interview, but your participation is likely to help the research and data achieve something it could not before.

Reimbursements
You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Confidentiality
The information from this interview will be put into a research paper. The information that we collect from this research project will only be for this research
project. Any information about you can have a pseudonym instead of your name if that is requested. If any information is deemed too personal or sensitive to be written in the final research paper, you can withdraw it at the end of the interview.

Sharing the Results
The results of this interview will be put into the paper that is being written on this subject. If anonymity is requested, it will 100% be granted. If there is any information you feel is too sensitive to include in the paper, you can withdraw it at any time. The paper will be completed around November-December of 2017. At that time, you can receive a final copy in which data from this interview will be used. If this is not okay with you, please let me know at this time.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and choosing to participate will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in any way. You may stop participating in the interview at any time you wish without being affected. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact any of the following: [Anthony Tyre, atyre21@csu.fullerton.edu]

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by [Cal State Fullerton IRB], which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact irb@fullerton.edu.)

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent
This section must be written in the first person. It should include a few brief statements about the research and be followed by a statement similar to the one in bold below. If the participant is illiterate but gives oral consent, a witness must sign. A researcher or the person going over the informed consent must sign each consent. Because the certificate is an integral part of the informed consent and not a stand-alone document, the layout or design of the form should reflect this. The certificate of consent should avoid statements that have "I understand...." phrases. The understanding should perhaps be better tested through targeted questions during the reading of the information sheet (some examples of questions are given above), or through the questions being asked at the end of the reading of the information sheet, if the potential participant is reading the information sheet him/herself.

I have been invited to participate in research about e-sports and traditional sports.
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. 
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent
I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability, made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done.
I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual and their consent has been given freely and voluntarily.
A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

E-Sports: Changing the Definition – Interview

NOTE: These questions will be asked in a different manner depending on the interview tone and industry said person is involved in. They will also be informed of basic information about e-sports if they do not know what e-sports are.

1. What caused you to be interested in your current industry?
2. What are your thoughts on your industry (sports or e-sports) and how it has changed or not within the last 10 years?
3. How do you believe your industry will change within the next 10 years?
4. How much do you know about the opposite industry?
5. Do you believe there is a changing mentality about sports in general?
6. Have you noticed changes in public opinion on e-sports?
7. Would you say that e-sports can change the way our society views sports and athletes?
8. What would you say holds the public back from supporting a sport/game and recognizing it as that?
9. What makes a person an athlete?
10. Is it possible to be an athlete and not play a traditional sport?
11. Do e-sports deserve to be called a sport and the players athletes? Why?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT 1

Yoonsup Choi

25 years old, Male

Former e-sports player and current coach of Gold Coin United.

Anthony: I really appreciate you taking time out to conduct this interview. The e-sports scene is a bit harder to gain access to than I would have thought.

Yoonsup: No problem, I usually don’t do interviews but when it comes to high school and college, I try and help out.

Anthony: So basically, to give you some background information, I am writing about traditional sports and e-sports. It is structured as one thing applying to traditional sports and then comparing and overlapping characteristics with e-sports. My end questions are seeing whether or not e-sports has solidified itself as a sport and the players as athletes. So, with this interview, I wanted to get those involved in the industry (both sides) and then analyze the interviews and thoughts and apply it to my research. So, let’s get right into it.

Yoonsup: Okay, sounds good.

Anthony: What are your thoughts on the e-sports industry and how it has changed within the last 5 years?

Yoonsup: Within the last 5 years, we have seen an influx of financial support. Player and coach salaries are about 10 times roughly what they were 5 years ago. With so much being at stake, investor-wise, there is a lot of pressure. E-sports facilities, environments and management have all leveled up so much. There weren’t even coaches for teams 5 years ago. The teams have head coaches, psychologists, catered foods, sponsorships. Recently Geico sponsored TSM. E-Sports just has been changing and moving so quickly.

Anthony: How do you think e-sports will change within the next 5 years? Do you think it will continue to grow on the same path or do you see a plateau?
Yoonsup: I mean, current growth is unsustainable, I don’t think salaries will grow 10 times what they are now, haha. Eventually there will be a plateau, but it needs to finish growing as well. I think the franchising of both Overwatch and LOL, if that is doing well then other games and developers will take notice to the league. In the next 5 years, I expect salaries to continually grow. I expect there to be player caps, player unions, coach unions. One thing that both League of Legends and Overwatch are trying to do is establish both leagues as regional leagues, competing in cities all over the country. Those things are on the horizon, they are not guaranteed it’s what teams and developers are pushing for, and we will see how it goes.

Anthony: Interesting, similar to how there are regional servers for League of Legends where teams would represent their region and then play in a tournament? Is that what you’re saying?

Yoonsup: I’m thinking more regarding NFL, like travel. RIOT wanted teams to have stadiums and be able to house other teams.

Anthony: Yeah, it would even be emulating a traditional sports model in the sense of traveling to play. Interesting. Do you think there has been a shift in traditional sports compared to e-sports popularity?

Yoonsup: Um, I’m not sure what the growth level for traditional sports is, to be completely honest, but I cannot imagine e-sports being outgrown by traditional sports especially when traditional sports size is probably bigger. But e-sports is consistently growing. There are new games coming in and we are reaching for new fan bases. Also in the recent 5 years, we are just starting, we are explosively growing. Current growth e-sports is bigger, but I don’t think that means it will continue to be bigger than traditional sports.

Anthony: One of the things you pointed out is the financial growth, it still does have areas of growth to be at the same line salary and economically when looking at traditional sports. Have you noticed more people outside the e-sports scene viewpoints changing about e-sports?

Yoonsup: For me personally, it’s hard to say because I live in the niche market of e-sports. I mostly interact with those in e-sports and we are all very approving of e-sports. Think of how high the salaries and how much support it’s getting from sponsors, also things like E-League. Also, where it has been put on TV, or articles are written, for example the article about “Faker”, New York Daily wrote it. When it’s being brought to the public more and more I do see the general view on e-sports slowly changing. If people are making insane amounts of money and people see what it takes to compete at that level.

Anthony: Yeah, interesting. That is what kind of sparked my interest in this is the notice it has gotten. So, the next question would be that since e-sports has been moving towards the mainstream media do you believe e-sports has the ability to change societies views on
what playing a sport is and what it means to be an athlete? You get a unique perspective because of being a player and coach.

Yoonsup: I feel like the players are definitely athletes. They invest time into it like an athlete, they train like an athlete, they get paid like an athlete, they perform like an athlete, and they compete like an athlete. I mean, to me there isn’t a difference, so if you want to be picky you can call them an “e-sports athlete”. As for general public perceptions of sports and e-sports, I think for the older generation it’s going to be really, really hard for them to view e-sports as traditional sports in the same sense they view basketball or football since they didn’t grow up with it. With the baby boomers, it’s a foregone conclusion, for generation X it’s a maybe, but I think millennials and the generation after us, generation Z, they are going to start viewing them as athletes, you’re going to see them have friends who are e-sports athletes. They will see first-hand e-sport athletes that they look up to. So, for the new generations it’s definitely possible.

Anthony: Yeah, interesting point. Before e-sports were a “thing”, its popularity and financials have propelled it. In a sense, we are seeing the parallel of wanting to become a professional e-sports athlete the same as an athlete as a traditional sport.

Yoonsup: One thing that’s really great about e-sports is that it is not as physically limiting as traditional sports. The barrier for entry is much lower. Depending on what body type you are given at birth it might not be competitively viable for you to play certain sports. With e-sports you are not limited by your body type, you are put on ground zero. E-Sports is more welcoming that traditional sports in my opinion.

Anthony: Yeah, any person has the ability to put in the time they want, as long as they can play they can make it to the highest level in the game. That same person may have wanted to go a different path, possibly through traditional sports but have found another outlet for their competitive spirit. It allows a different route.

Yoonsup: It’s really common in Europe where the e-sports player Reckless, he was an aspiring professional soccer player, playing religiously, then he got injured and hurt his leg/foot and his outlet for competition went into League of Legends, and he eventually went pro.

Anthony: Yeah, that’s a great point. I think lastly since you were a coach you got to see a different perspective. There are athletes, and there are great athletes. So, as a coach, what put someone over the middle of the pack e-sports player?

Yoonsup: In e-sports it’s not humbleness but willingness to learn from other players and coaches. Also, because the game is always changing with patches, it’s not like football or basketball where the game is the same. The game League, gets patched and constantly changes. It’s hard to pick something that player needs but willingness to adapt to the change and learn that is what is important in my eyes for a player.
Anthony: Interesting, something else interesting that I want to get your take on is the environment League of Legends players are in before joining a team is a “solo” environment unless you are playing with friends. This is a bit different from traditional sports where you are always interacting face to face with a team even from a young age. Would you say that this difference is difficult for an e-sports player to overcome? Was it easy for some and hard for others?

Yoonsup: It depends on the individual. That’s a hard one to answer, it really does depend on the individual. Some people take a lot away of playing on their own, they can learn from it, others just play and play. E-Sports isn’t based on physical strength it’s based on your mindset and how you treat those solo games climb through the ranks. How you treat these games also translates to teams wanting to pick you up.

Anthony: Yeah, one other thing that does separate is that. Tying this back into the perception of a gamer, if people learn all of these characteristics and learn what the e-sports players do, and that it is similar to what traditional sports athletes do. So, my last question has to do with my overall research question. Since you have been involved in the last 7 years of e-sports, do you yourself see it as beneficial for the players to be considered athletes?

Yoonsup: Of course.

Anthony: So, to tie in my research question, do you think e-sports has solidified itself as being in the same caliber of traditional sports and the players as athletes?

Yoonsup: It’s getting more and more, I don’t think it’s that yet. To a stranger looking in seeing the e-sports players as gamers, kind of like eating Doritos and being fat and lazy, it’s completely different and it is a lot closer to athletes.

Anthony: Great, well this has been very much appreciated. I really want to propel academic research on e-sports, so you helped me a lot with this since you are involved in the industry. Thank you, I really appreciate it.

Yoonsup: No problem at all!
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT 2

Patrick Wisdom
27 years old, Male
Current professional baseball player, St. Louis Cardinals organization

1. What are your thoughts on traditional sports and how it has changed or not within the last 5 years?

**Patrick:** I love traditional sports, it’s a great way to gather friends and family together, a fun way to stay active, and gives people a competitive outlet. I would argue that traditional sports make someone more physically competent. I believe traditional sports are at an all-time high in popularity. The high popularity is a direct relation to the social media outlets and technical advancements to provide live updates to any and all traditional sports around the world. Individuals are able to check in on games happening around the world at all different times. I believe traditional sports have changed for the good and have seen an increase in participation. I also believe there has been an increase in participation because of the “get out and play” movements by traditional sports.

2. How do you believe traditional sports will change within the next 5 years?

**Patrick:** I foresee traditional sports continuing to move in the direction they are going. Obtaining more youth and adult participation in community leagues. I would argue this because I believe there is an urgency to get people outside and active. Traditional sports are generally a familiar space for individuals and I believe they will gravitate towards familiarity when choosing an activity.

3. Do you believe there is a shift in traditional sports popularity as well as e-sports popularity?

**Patrick:** I touched on this in the above questions, so I’ll talk about e-sports in this questions.

E-sports have been on the forefront of inside activities. Technical advances have been able to create “life-like” images, sounds, and games. I believe e-sports have given individuals a sense of competitive advantage without the physicality. The accessibility to
most traditional sport video games is tremendous and I believe that has grown e-sports popularity. Individuals are able to play any traditional sport on any given game console. Not only can they play traditional sports, but they are able to play extreme sport games, war games, brain games, and fantasy style games. I believe this variety of games have given participants a sense of joy because they can participate in activities in the e-sports world that they may not be able to participate in the real world. I would argue this draws more individuals to participate in e-sports.

4. Have you noticed changes in public opinion on e-sports?

**Patrick:** The only drawback I see with e-sports is the TV/computer time. This causes some resistance from people because they don’t want their participant sitting and staring at the TV/computer for hours at a time. People should be more involved in outside activity to promote good health. E-sports can support a sedentary lifestyle. However, I support a good mix of traditional sports outside and e-sports.

5. Would you say that e-sports has the ability to change the way our society views sports and athletes?

**Patrick:** I would say that e-sports has the ability to shape public perception of athletes because the e-sports player is able to play with said athletes and create a fantasy team or league. I believe that gives the e-sports player a sense of understanding of the athlete they choose. So, I believe e-sports can promote a positive image of the sports and athletes by adding the “personal connection”.

6. What would you say holds the public back from supporting a sport/game as a whole and recognizing it as that?

**Patrick:** I would say someone’s beliefs can hinder them from supporting a sport or game. Sometimes it could simply be the individual doesn’t find joy in that certain sport. It could be the “agenda” that sport is suggesting or supporting (i.e. the NFL). I would say it’s a personal stigma whether the person likes or dislikes a sport.

7. What makes a person an athlete?

**Patrick:** I’ve heard many definitions to describe what an athlete entails, and all of them are slightly different but have a common theme. That common theme is they have physical and mental prowess. Physically attributes to an athlete can vary on who you ask. I personally believe for someone to be an athlete they have functional strength, agility, and cardiovascular ability. They are able to adapt to the sport they are playing. Mentally they understand their environment and the game they are playing.

(I can write all day about different definitions of athlete.)
8. Is it possible to be an athlete and not play a traditional sport?

**Patrick:** I think this goes back to how you define the term “athlete”. But I would argue that someone can be an athlete and not play a traditional sport. For example, weight lifters, extreme sport participant, and the “average person” who loves to engage in physical activity but not in a team setting could be labeled athletes. I honestly think it depends on how you define “athlete”.

9. Do e-sports deserve to be called a sport and the players’ athletes? Why or why not?

**Patrick:** I believe e-sports should be classified as games rather than sports because e-sports do not demand any physical prowess. Esports are contributing to a virtual world through a console. It may be mentally engaging, but I don’t believe that makes it a sport.
REFERENCES


http://leagueoflegends.wikia.com/wiki/League_of_Legends


