“Not Only for a Celebration of Competitive Overwatch but Also for National Pride”: Sportificating the Overwatch World Cup 2016

Riikka Turtiainen, Usva Friman, and Maria Ruotsalainen

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Abstract

While the most popular forms of organised competitive digital gaming, also known as esports, have begun finding their place within and in relation to both mainstream entertainment culture and the field of traditional sports, their history is one of struggling to be accepted as 'true sports'. Partly because of this history, great effort has been put into the *sportification* of esports by presenting competitions in familiar ways adapted from traditional sports. In this article, we examine the process of sportification of esports in the context of tournament broadcasts. We analyse the Overwatch World Cup 2016 tournament, comparing its final broadcast to the 2014 FIFA World Cup's final broadcast, looking for similarities and differences in the areas of broadcast structure, commentary and expertise, game presentation, game highlights and acknowledgements, teams and players, and audience.

Keywords: sportification, electronic sports, broadcasting, Overwatch, FIFA

The most popular forms of organized competitive digital gaming, also known as electronic sports (eSports), have recently begun finding their way into mainstream entertainment culture. At the same time, eSports has also been searching for its place within and in relation to the field of traditional sports. In Finland, for example, the Finnish eSports Federation, Suomen elektronisen urheilun liitto ry (SEUL ry), was accepted as an associate member of the Finnish Olympic Committee in November 2016 as the first eSports organization in the world (International e-Sports Federation [IeSF], 2016; SEUL ry, 2016). Since then, several traditional Finnish sports organizations have also begun forming their own eSports teams and divisions (e.g., Hartikainen, 2016).

On various fronts, eSports has struggled with being accepted as a "true sports" (IeSF, 2016). To legitimize and enforce its image as an actual sport, great effort has been put into sportification of eSports—in presenting it in ways that are easily recognizable from traditional sports (Heere, 2018; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Thiborg, 2011). In this article, we examine the sportification of eSports in official tournament broadcasts, asking how the competition is framed as a sport in them. As our example case, we have selected Blizzard's Overwatch World Cup 2016, more specifically its last broadcast including the final match and bronze medal match. While many eSports broadcasts could have been applicable for our research topic and the analysis we conducted, we chose this one mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the authors were already familiar with the tournament and how it appeared to contain many elements of sportification. Secondly, it offered an interesting case where the competing teams were based on the nationality of the players rather than any other factor (i.e., eSports club), similarly to World Cup events in many traditional team sports. Having been released only half a year earlier, Overwatch was also a newcomer in the field of eSports, and the game's developers seemed to have invested in maximizing its eSports potential.

In our analysis, we compare the Overwatch World Cup 2016 final broadcast to the final broadcast of the 2014 *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) World Cup, aired by the Finnish national broadcaster, Yle. Our aim is to interpret similarities and differences between representations of traditional team sports and team eSports to decipher the ways in which the Overwatch World Cup 2016 is framed as a sports tournament in the broadcast. It is worth noting that our aim is not to evaluate whether eSports should be acknowledged as a sport or not (for that discussion, see Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012b) but instead to analyze the ways it is presented as such in our case example. Therefore, we are not intending a discussion about the philosophy of sport in the context of eSports (e.g., sport's relationship to play, games, and contests, and to the categories of contests that do or do not require physical prowess; see Guttmann, 2004) in this article. It is also worth noting that we use the term "traditional sports"—not to refer to ancient, uncompetitive sport forms but for other current, modern, mediated, and commercialized sport forms—to distinguish them from eSports. Finally, we note that we are not analyzing eSports in general or Overwatch as a game but rather their representations in the broadcast.

Theoretical Background

In their research paper on the growing professionalism in eSports, Mora and Héas (2003) have used the concept of sportification to refer to the process by which a recreational activity achieves the status of a sport. In sport studies, sportification is established to denote the process of turning a physical activity into a sport. In that context, most researchers have referred to Guttmann's (1978) typology of modern sport. According to sportification theory, all sports develop along similar patterns toward increased specialization, standardization, rationalization, regimentation,

organization, equalization, and quantification (Guttmann, 1978). Sport researchers have utilized this theory in several case studies concerning different modes of physical activity (e.g., parkour, break dancing, judo, and handball). In recent years, the discussion has expanded to look at the sportification process in various other spheres of society and social life—for instance, in popular culture and docusoaps such as *MasterChef* (Carlsson & Svensson, 2015). In this article, we use the term *sportification* to describe the process of presenting eSports as a sport. We are only applying the concept to situations where the sport-like presentation is active and intentional: It does not apply, for example, to coincidental similarities.

We approach eSports as a form of *media sport*. The current concept of media sport can cover all kinds of sport shown in the media (Turtiainen, 2012). However, some definitions may emphasize the roles of production, dramatization, and commodification of sport (e.g., Real, 1998). eSports is thoroughly mediated: The games themselves are a media form and played online, and the matches (generally played in a local area network) are always streamed online—in fact, it is not possible to spectate eSports without mediation (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Taylor, 2015).

One of the key factors in the growth of eSports has been the establishment of platforms such as Twitch.tv, which allow easy broadcasting and spectating of the games (Scholz, 2012; Taylor, 2015). Online streams have an essential role in both the presentation and consumption of eSports, and they are the primary way to follow the tournaments. Watching them in this way is significantly more common than following the games through television broadcasts or in person (Kaytoue, Silva, Cerf, Wagner, & Raissi, 2012; Taylor, 2012). Many of the players also stream their gaming, which allows them to earn additional income and to create and maintain large viewer bases outside the tournaments (Kaytoue et al., 2012). Because of the great importance of online streams in

eSports, a more in-depth analysis is required of the broadcasts, their composition, and their content to create a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

The Two World Cups: Overwatch and FIFA

Overwatch is a team-based first-person shooter (FPS) game published by Blizzard Entertainment in May 2016. By November 2017, Overwatch had already reached 35 million registered users (Activision Blizzard, 2017). The game combines elements of traditional FPS games with Multiplayer Online Battle Arena games, emphasizing team play (Irvine, 2016). The game world is set in the near future, where a peacekeeping organization called Overwatch has been shut down after a war against omnics (robots). The playable characters, referred to as "heroes," fall into four categories: offense, defense, tanks, and supports. One of the four modes available in the game is competitive mode, and its rules are generally followed in Overwatch tournaments—including the first-ever Overwatch World Cup.

The Overwatch World Cup preliminary matches started in September 2016 with 51 different teams representing their countries. Sixteen of these teams were either directly invited or worked their way through the regional qualifiers to compete in the final tournament held at *Blizzcon*, an annual game convention organized by Blizzard Entertainment, from October 29 to November 5. In 2016, the convention had over 25,000 visitors, and all the games of the Overwatch World Cup were also live-streamed, attracting millions of viewers from around the world.

It is worth noting that the teams representing their countries in the Overwatch World Cup were not selected as teams in traditional sport World Cups usually are. Instead of each country and its local eSports organization selecting the representative team, teams were assembled largely by votes

from the international Overwatch player community (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016). The members were voted from Blizzard's own selection of players, including not purely those with top playing skills (as defined by their competitive rankings in the game) but also lower ranking players who were active in the player community, such as popular Overwatch streamers. When the original nominees were announced, some of the playerbase criticized the tournament, calling it a "promotional event" instead of an "actual high skill competition" (Competitive Overwatch, 2016). This was indeed Blizzard's intention: The company described the tournament as "a community-driven exhibition of Overwatch players from around the globe" (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016). As such, the aim of the tournament was not to compete for the honor of being the most skillful Overwatch players or national team in the world but instead to promote the game and showcase both skillful players and important community figures. This aim was further illustrated by the fact that there was no monetary prize offered in the tournament. In being primarily a promotional event for a commercial game, the Overwatch World Cup significantly differentiates itself not only from the field of traditional sports (see Heere, 2018) but also from eSports in general. This also makes it an altogether more interesting target for our analysis: Is sportification strongly present in the broadcast despite the tournament not being as much about the traditional values of sports competition, namely, finding the most talented team of players?

The international football competition for men's national teams, the FIFA World Cup, has long-standing traditions. The competition, organized by FIFA, has been played every 4 years since 1930 (except in 1942 and 1946 because of the Second World War). The current 32-team final tournament is preceded by a qualifying process that lasts more than 2 years, involving over 200 teams from around the world (Formats of the FIFA World Cup final competitions [1930–2010]). Since 1934, the qualifying tournaments have been held within the six FIFA continental zones

(Africa, Asia, North and Central America and Caribbean, South America, Oceania, and Europe). For each tournament, FIFA decides the number of places awarded to each of the continental zones beforehand, generally based on the relative strength of the confederations' teams (*FIFA.com*, 2015a).

The 2014 FIFA World Cup took place in Brazil from June 12 to July 13, and the games played at 12 venues across the country. Each team played three group matches before the top two teams of each group progressed to the knockout round of 16 stages. A total of 98,087 hr of footage from the tournament matches was broadcast from Brazil. The in-home television coverage reached 3.2 billion people around the world, and the final match between Germany and Argentina reached 695 million in-home viewers with the total in- and out-of-home audience of the final match reaching over 1 billion. Additionally, there was more online coverage than in any previous FIFA World Cup, with 188 licensees offering coverage via websites, media players, and apps. An estimated 280 million people watched matches online and/or on mobile devices (*FIFA.com*, 2015b; Kantar Media, 2015).

Data and Method

We analyzed the official Overwatch World Cup 2016 final broadcast, including the gold medal match (South Korea vs. Russia) and bronze medal match (Finland vs. Sweden), as well as the 2014 FIFA World Cup final broadcast by Finnish national broadcaster Yle, including the gold medal match (Germany vs. Argentina) of the tournament. As the FIFA World Cup is played only once every 4 years, both tournaments were the most current available. For the FIFA World Cup, we were forced to pick a Finnish broadcast because of the limited broadcasting rights and our lack of access to international television content. "The universal language of football" consists of

transmediated discourses and practices shared by a worldwide audience, which Finns are a part of, despite Finland never having played in a FIFA final tournament. The international FIFA television stream was transmitted through national broadcasters. The Finnish broadcast was localized at some level, and the Finnish audience also recontextualized the broadcast by commenting on its content online from their local point of view (Salomaa, 2017). There are some social, cultural, and linguistic differences that feed into representation when comparing international and national sports broadcasts. They remain, however, outside of the scope of our analysis, as our aim is to interpret the sportification of an eSports broadcast (its structure and presentation) in general, not delve into sociolinguistic detail.

We chose comparative thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) as our method for the broadcast analysis. All three authors first separately analyzed the Overwatch broadcast, taking notes on the perceived similarities and differences in the broadcast compared to traditional team sports broadcasts. A list of expected sportified elements, based both on earlier research on sports broadcasts and eSports as well as our own initial expectations, was constructed beforehand to support the observation process. During the analysis, additional elements were added based on our observations. The perceived sportified elements in the Overwatch broadcast were categorized under six themes: (1) broadcast structure, (2) commentary and expertise, (3) game presentation, (4) game highlights and acknowledgments, (5) teams and players, and (6) audience. Next, the authors analyzed the 2014 FIFA World Cup final broadcast, using the aforementioned analysis themes as well as the initial findings from the Overwatch World Cup analysis as a base for observations. The FIFA broadcast analysis further supported our initial findings and the six themes formed during the Overwatch broadcast analysis. In the following section, we will present our findings for each theme, describing the similarities and differences in the Overwatch World Cup

2016 final broadcast compared to the 2014 FIFA World Cup final broadcast, while also analyzing the similarities and differences of these individual examples compared to the general fields of traditional team sports and team eSports.

Analysis and Results

Broadcast Structure

In her groundbreaking study on eSports in North American and European contexts, published in 2012, Taylor (2012, p. 209) reflects how "while traditional sports have spent years refining the actual conditions of play (including rules) to suit broadcast, e-sports is in its infancy in trying to translate gameplay within a televised frame." Much progress has already been made since then, and in 2015, Taylor (2015) described how both major eSports organizations and game companies were extensively engaging in various media production practices. The Overwatch World Cup broadcast analyzed for this study was professionally produced and particularly aimed for audiences watching the tournament from afar. As our analysis will show, the spectator experience was not unlike that of watching a more traditional sports broadcast.

Concerning traditional sports, television broadcasts have trained people to concentrate their attention on specific things and watch sports in a certain way (Birrell & Loy, 1979). The structure of the Overwatch World Cup broadcast is very similar to that of televised sports, clearly following its form and functions (Barnfield, 2013). There is a pregame show with a studio host and expert guests, and the slot before the match includes discussion between these experts: assessing teams' strengths and weaknesses, introducing top players, and predicting results. The purpose of the pregame interviews and replays of earlier performances in the tournament is to give a taste of the

excitement to come and create a competitive atmosphere. It also functions to build narratives around the teams and players (the characters) and establish a sense of familiarity for the viewers (see also Ryan, 2006).

During the Overwatch live game coverage, the elements most comparable to traditional televised sports are play-by-play and color commentaries, "half-time" studio analysis, statistics, and highlights. Goldsmith (2013, p. 59) has used the term *wraparound sportv* to describe these common elements of contemporary televised sport. Again, the match is followed by postgame interviews, replays, and prize ceremonies. The postgame elements retell the events of the game, adding the elements of plot and mimesis to the chronicle, deepening the narration in ways which are not possible while the game is still happening, due to time and other limits (Ryan, 2006).

All these elements are also present in the FIFA World Cup broadcast. For the FIFA World Cup, more broadcast time is given to content outside the game, and there is an additional 1.5-hr pregame studio before the match even begins. To build atmosphere, premade clips of the teams, including player interviews, are shown, and the previous performances of the players are analyzed in detail. Video clips from the 1990 FIFA World Cup final match (also West Germany vs. Argentina) are also shown, and old statistics examined, placing the current game on the historical continuum of the sport.

Commentary and Expertise

In the Overwatch broadcast, the role of an expert is primarily given to the analysts and casters of the tournament but also the reporters who introduce and interview the players. In traditional sports, analysts and other recognized experts are mostly former or current athletes, coaches, or other

officials in the field, and the Overwatch experts have similar backgrounds. Likewise, in the FIFA broadcast, the analysts and experts in the studio and in Brazil are former football players and coaches, current sports journalists, and casters. As a rule, the experts in sports broadcasts are required to be entertaining personalities and therefore good characters for TV. What is considered relevant in televised sports is not only what is said in the broadcast but also who is saying it (and how): The use of the accredited experts in broadcasting is a time-honored device, having originally developed as a solution to the problem of establishing impartiality (Hargreaves, 1986; Rowe, 2004).

Sitting at the analysts' desk in the Overwatch broadcast studio, there is always a group of four: three men and one woman. The studio and its experts are presented in a manner very similar to traditional sports studios (Figure 1). The analysts are even dressed in a way familiar from traditional sports broadcasts and their experts (see also Kolamo, 2018). In the FIFA broadcast, the experts are all men. Sports and sports expertise are strongly gendered. The Finnish national broadcaster Yle hired a female expert for the broadcast of EURO 2016 (men's football championship of Europe organized by UEFA): Top coach Marianne Miettinen was introduced as an analyst in the studio and as a voice-over during the games. This caused a social media storm among viewers who thought a female analyst lacked competence and credibility concerning men's football. The feedback posted on social media contained direct hate speech (Koivuranta, 2016). The Overwatch World Cup studio host and analyst Rachel Quirico (Seltzer) has also discussed the difficulties she and other women face in the eSports industry and gaming in general (*Growing the participation of women in eSports*, 2015; *Women in eSports*, 2015). Like traditional sports, eSports too is an arena for performing, enforcing, and maintaining hegemonic masculinity. This has been described as "geek masculinity," "nerd/geek masculinity," and "neoliberal masculinity": A new

form of hegemonic masculinity born from a combination of traditional masculinity, athletic masculinity, technological expertise, and gaming performance (Lockhart, 2015; Taylor, 2012; Voorhees, 2015; Witkowski, 2012a).

Figure 1. The World Cup studios: on the left, the Overwatch World Cup 2016 broadcast bronze medal match Sweden–Finland, and on the right, the 2014 FIFA World Cup final match broadcast Germany–Argentina (Yle TV2, Finland).

The four casters in the Overwatch broadcast are all well-known eSports casters with experience from various games and tournaments. Taylor (2012, p. 230) has pointed out that for the tournament casters, "part of their legitimacy comes from being known as dedicated gamers, from being committed to game culture and avid in their love of gaming." A sportscaster differs from a sports analyst by providing a running commentary (play-by-play commentary as a voice-over) regarding a sporting event in real time. Casters are rarely on-screen during the broadcast in traditional televised sports, but in eSports, they are a visible part of the broadcast and have played a prominent role in the development and professionalization of eSports. Due to the mediated nature of eSports, casters are sometimes even more visible and may even have more screen time than the players (Scholz, 2012).

The commentary produced during live sports coverage on television characteristically involves objective reporting of the game as well as subjective statements evaluating the state of the play. Sports broadcasts are "doubly encoded": In sports commentary, the representation is constructed by the speaker as well as the visual reconstruction of the original event (Barnfield, 2013; Marriott, 1996). Perhaps somewhat comically, live broadcast commentary practically describes for the viewers what they are seeing (Rowe, 2004). The commentary of an eSports match shares these functions of both presenting and evaluating the game (see also Rowe, 2004). During the games, the Overwatch casters speculate on the possible next moves and changes in the hero setups of each team, discuss the maps being played and the challenges they present, and share small pieces of information about the players and teams and their backgrounds such as discussing Taimou from Finland playing against the Swedish members of his home team EnVyUs in the bronze medal match. The FIFA commentary, on the other hand, contains plenty of historical references: statistics and memories from the previous encounters of "the two giants of the football family" (West Germany and Argentina) in the World Cup final (1986 and 1990). The stadium is bustling with "football legends" as the caster picks the ex-players out of the audience, like David Beckham and Lothar Matthäus taking a selfie before the extra time starts. The tempo of a football match allows more space for these kinds of less relevant details and background information to be present in the FIFA broadcast compared to the Overwatch broadcast (see also Kolamo, 2018).

In their commentary, the Overwatch casters utilize game-specific jargon: Terms such as "ultimate," "Nano Boost," and "Mei wall elevator"—referring to the actions and tactics available for the heroes in the game—are constantly used, and thus, the audience is expected to be at least somewhat familiar with the game and its terminology to be able to fully follow the commentary. In traditional sports, this kind of context-specific jargon is called "sportugese" (Rowe, 2004;

Tannenbaum & Noah, 1959). Similarly, during the final FIFA World Cup match, the caster uses football jargon as he, for instance, describes "Schweinsteiger's scissor tackle," says a player "sends a pass into the box," and mentions a substitute bringing "fresh legs" to the field. In the Overwatch broadcast, some expressions familiar from the commentary of traditional sports, such as commenting on how "both teams had a really poor defense, they were both completely ran through," are also present in the commentary, but general sports vocabulary and expressions seem surprisingly rare. Although at least once during the broadcast, a direct comparison is made to a situation from traditional sports: "The way Finland's been playing, it reminds me of watching an ice hockey game where a team's on a power play, and they just keep passing instead of taking shots." After the lost bronze medal match during an interview, Zappis, the captain of the Finnish team, also states, in his native language, "tori peruttu" (the square [celebration] is canceled), referring to a common way of celebrating sports victories in Finland. Along with the commentators, the eSports players also have adopted practices of sport discourse (re)production, which is one of the ways in which the players actively take part in the sportification process (see also Witkowski, 2012a).

Game Presentation

According to Rowe (2004, p. 179), a sports broadcast has its own visual grammar (see also Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Wenner, 1989; Whannel, 2002; Williams, 1977). This grammar is the key element adapted to eSports broadcasts in their sportification process and can be seen, for example, in how things such as replays are presented in a very similar manner in the Overwatch and FIFA broadcasts. The dramaturgy of a traditional sports broadcast also involves lots of *spectacle*

segments such as close-ups, instant replays, and slow-motion during the live coverage (Kolamo, 2013).

Different angles and points of view are central visual aspects of traditional sports broadcasts. The final match of the 2014 FIFA World Cup is played at the world-famous Maracana stadium that carries a lot of symbolic value for football fans. In the beginning of the match, the playing field is presented from a bird's-eye view, and the Overwatch tournament maps are shown in the same way before each game in the corresponding broadcast. In traditional sports broadcasts, the spectators can only see the view chosen by the broadcast team and the director, which—especially in team sports—leaves a lot of action outside the screen (Birrell & Loy, 1979; Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Hargreaves, 1986; Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1989; Whannel, 1992, 2002; Williams, 1977).

In the Overwatch broadcast, the game is mostly streamed from the first-person perspective of a player (more common), or from a spectator perspective, not focusing on the point of view of a single player but instead the general area of action (less common). This way of displaying the game differs from traditional team sports broadcasts, which are never filmed from the perspective of a single player, and from playing the game itself, which can only be experienced from a first-person view. In football broadcasts, the focus of the camera is usually on the ball—apart from special moments, for instance, when the TV audience has a close-up view of an injured player. In the FIFA broadcast, the injuries are actually a part of the watching experience, in contrast to the Overwatch broadcast, in which the "injuries" are more of a technical kind—like when the game is momentarily paused during the bronze medal match between Finland and Sweden because of technical issues.

In eSports, the audience is usually able to see more about the state of the game than its players are. This information asymmetry is one of the key differences in the way the game is presented to the

audience in eSports versus traditional sports (Cheung & Huang, 2011). During the Overwatch matches, the broadcast shows the direct gameplay stream but modified to display the information required to make the viewing experience exciting and enjoyable (for a contrary example, see Witkowski, 2012a). The audience is always able to see, for example, the hero compositions of both teams, including all the heroes' current hit points and Ultimate statuses.

Another major difference in the Overwatch broadcast compared to traditional sports broadcasts is that in the former, the players and the audience are seldom shown during matches. Rarely, one player is displayed on the broadcast screen, and both teams are shown every time a game ends, but apart from that, the players themselves are left invisible and are only displayed through their in-game heroes. Again, in contrast to traditional team sports, possible referees are entirely hidden from cameras. In the FIFA broadcast and televised team sports in general, the live audience has a major role. Spectators in the stadium reflect an image of sport-related emotions from celebration to sorrow (Kolamo, 2013). In the FIFA broadcast, the camera also picks up the referee repeatedly after his decisions, making him a media target together with the players, coaches, and audience.

It is worth noting that in the Overwatch broadcast, the game is presented in a mechanical manner, almost completely taken out of its narrative context. While Overwatch and its fictional universe have a rich narrative, which can be explored through the heroes' voice lines and the game maps—and is further expanded by comics, short animations, and stories beyond the game—the fictional universe is largely ignored or played out in the World Cup. The narrative context is only rarely brought up in the broadcast: in a trailer shown before the matches, in a person dressed as a game character during the award ceremony, and in the occasional remarks from the casters about the stories behind the tournament maps. While at first glance it might seem odd that the narrative

context and the (story)worldliness of Overwatch is largely ignored in the World Cup, it can be seen as a part of the sportification itself. Huizinga (1949) has noted that in the professionalization of play to sport, there is a tendency to lose a part of the sacred quality play has. This kind of demystification can thus be seen as an element common among different kind of forms of play which become institutionalized sports. McLuhan (1964) makes a similar observation when he discusses games as a form of mass media and cultural expression: He notes that there is something inherently contradictory about the professionalization of play into sports, as it turns play into a job for a specialist, while games as a popular art form otherwise offer us a way of participating in the full life of society.

Game Highlights and Acknowledgements

Showcasing the game highlights in the form of previews and recaps is a vital part of any sports broadcast, and eSports is not an exception (Kolamo, 2018). In the Overwatch broadcast, there is plenty of reminiscing about previous matches as well as speculating on the results of future games. The discussion is focused on individual players as well as the various play styles of different teams and the strengths and weaknesses related to them. For example, the casters note that Sweden has "probably the most balanced team," and that they "should have performed better than they have so far." Similar discourse is present in the FIFA broadcast, where the casters note that Argentina has difficulties executing their game tactics. In both World Cups, replay videos from particularly important game situations are shown in these situations and analyzed in a manner familiar from traditional sports broadcasts (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Game analysis: on the left, the Overwatch World Cup 2016 broadcast bronze medal match Sweden–Finland, and on the right, the 2014 FIFA World Cup final match broadcast Germany–Argentina (Yle TV2, Finland). Notice the similar use of arrows in both presentations.

In the Overwatch broadcast, two types of statistics are shown between individual games: "Hero Use Stats," presenting all the relevant numbers (damage done, kills achieved, number of deaths, etc.) from one hero played by one player in the previous game, and "Head to Head" (team vs. team) numbers from the previous game. As these statistics are shown on the screen, the casters usually comment them. This is a common way to share information in televised sports in general (Figure 3). In traditional team sports, in addition to head-to-head-like statistics, all-time records and high scores (between different players and league teams or national teams) are usually mentioned in the broadcasts. At least so far, there seems to be a lack of these kind of general statistics in eSports—probably at least partly related to the constant patching, which induces changes in the games, greatly affecting the power of individual characters and team compositions and making it difficult if not impossible to compare individual player performances between various patches. In the FIFA broadcast, statistics also show other interesting details not directly related to game points—for example, that the German midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger runs almost 14 km during the match.

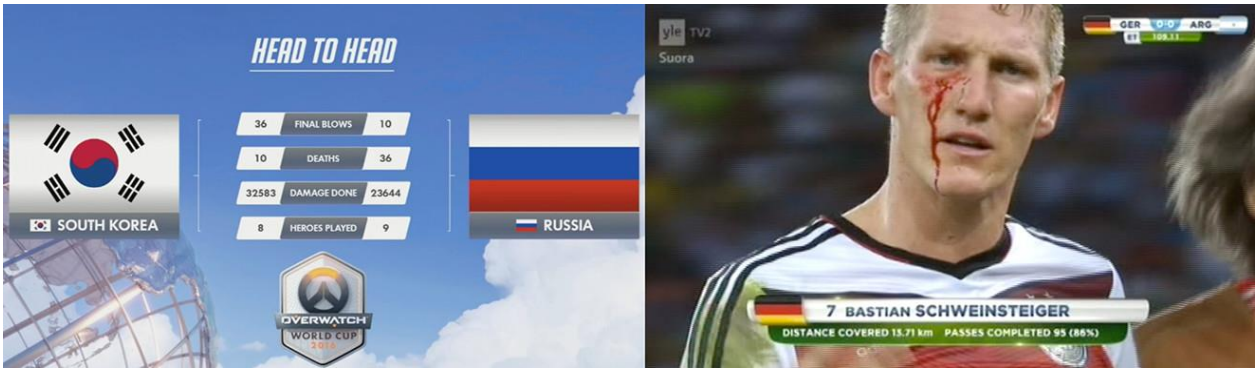

Figure 3. Statistics: on the left, the Overwatch World Cup 2016 broadcast gold match Russia–South Korea with head to head statistics, and on the right, the 2014 FIFA World Cup final broadcast Germany–Argentina representing one player's personal statistics (Yle TV2, Finland).

In addition to the gold, silver, and bronze medals received by the top three teams in the Overwatch World Cup, there are smaller, yet also valuable, acknowledgments made to individual players after each match. These are supported by the World Cup sponsor T-Mobile with its Most Valuable Player (MVP) Twitter vote. During and between the games, the sponsor ad for the match MVP vote is regularly shown on the screen, and it is also frequently brought up by the analysts and casters. In this nomination, the broadcast is again following the example set by the traditional team sports, where MVP is an institutional recognition (Kershnar & Feit, 2001). The traditional MVP ceremony is also a part of the FIFA broadcast, with Lionel Messi recognized as the best player and Manuel Neuer as the best goalkeeper of the tournament. The different kinds of trophies, medals, and other rewards shown and discussed during the broadcasts contribute to the creation of a sport show atmosphere and are an important part of the sports broadcast as a performance, creating a sense of festivity and anticipation (Randhawa, 2015).

Teams and Players

While the game itself of course matters, the players are often brought to the forefront of eSports media productions, acting as narrative hooks for the audience (Taylor, 2012). As with the broadcast

experts, the Overwatch players are also presented in a way familiar to us from traditional team sports, from the way they enter the competition area (by walking—or by running like team South Korea —to the "stadium" via a tunnel just like Germany and Argentina in the FIFA World Cup) all the way to their outfits (Blizzard-sponsored World Cup uniforms). Similar to traditional sports in World Cup context, the Overwatch players are not representing themselves as individual eAthletes or their "home teams," and as such, they are not allowed to wear their usual team uniforms or any sponsor logos not provided by Blizzard. The difference is, that instead of national eSports organizations, these outfits are provided to the teams by Blizzard, and by wearing them, the players are, in addition to representing their countries, promoting both the game and the company.

Before and after the matches, the players shake hands with their opponents as in traditional team sports. Although the players are not shown a lot—in fact, hardly at all—during the actual games, they are constantly talked about throughout the broadcast. The players are referred to by their in-game nicknames (gamer tags) and never by their real names. Player nicknames (like Lionel Messi alias la Pulga) are also used in traditional sports media and sports broadcasts, but in eSports, the players are only known by their nicknames. In fact, game names pose such an importance in the eSports world, which even the casters, analysts, and reporters are generally known as and referred to by their gamer tags instead of their real names. However, when the players or game experts are shown on-screen in the broadcast, both their game names and real names are visible to the audience.

As the teams are representing their home countries, nationalism is visibly present throughout both World Cup broadcasts. Before the Overwatch final match begins, reporter Alex Mendez

(Goldenboy) proclaims: “Here’s the thing: It has all come down to this. Three hundred players across 50 countries playing not only for your entertainment, not only for a celebration of competitive Overwatch, but also for national pride.” The topic of national pride (or potential shame) is also frequently brought up by the casters and analysts. Nationalism is not generally as strongly present in the world of eSports (see also Kolamo, 2018), where the teams often include members from various nationalities. It is, however, a common feature in traditional sports. A major international event, such as the FIFA World Cup, is almost inconceivable without national flags flying, national anthems playing, and athletes competing in national uniforms (more about nationalism in sports, see Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998).

In traditional team sports, each team member usually plays a certain role in the game: In football, for example, there is the goalkeeper and the different types of defenders and forwards, each player focused on a specific role and place in the field. In the Overwatch World Cup, while the players could change their roles as they wished during the game (within the limits set by their team’s strategies), most players have a hero or a hero type they are strongest at: For example, players who are particularly good at playing offensive heroes, such as Taimou (Finland), and players who excel on certain heroes such as Miro (South Korea) on Winston. Similar to traditional team sports, certain players are highly elevated in the broadcast commentary, which presents them as the heroes of their teams—and, at the same time, of their nations (about construction of mediated sports heroes, see Berg, 1998; Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Whannel, 2002). Russia’s Shadowburn is one of the Overwatch players praised by the casters, who describe him as a “next level Genji player,” stating that “if you can handle Shadowburn, you can handle Russia.” During the commentary of the FIFA broadcast, Germany is usually mentioned as a team, but regarding Argentina, the casters highlight the role of Messi, stating things like “Messi is with the ball against the slow German

defenders who are forced to just run around him." These kind of "virtuoso" players who are able to "somehow do 'more' with the field and situation at hand" than other expert players in similar situations, can be found in eSports and traditional sports alike (Witkowski, 2012a, p. 100).

The Audience

While the official data of the Overwatch World Cup broadcast audience are not available, there have been some studies focusing on the eSports audience and viewership on a more general level, arguing that eSports broadcasts are mainly watched by those who play the game themselves (Taylor, 2012; Taylor, 2016)—a notable difference compared to traditional sports audiences. In a survey conducted in 2015 among 888 people who watch eSports online, the respondents were 93% male and their median age was 22 (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). The FIFA World Cup, on the other hand, attracted audiences from children to seniors from all over the world (the largest audiences were in China, Brazil, and the United States), and 61% of the television audience was male (Kantar Media, 2015). The question of (e)sports broadcast audiences is closely tied to how the sports are presented. However, in this study, we are not analyzing the assumed broadcast audience but instead focusing on how the World Cup audiences were presented in the broadcasts.

In eSports, the roles of the live audience and the viewers watching the broadcasts somewhere else are, if not reversed, at least different compared to traditional sports in many ways. While in many sports the less significant games are mainly observed by local audiences and not broadcast to a larger audience, in eSports the situation is the opposite: The significant games have a live audience (in addition to being broadcast), while the less significant ones are usually "merely" broadcast. To some extent, the presence of a local audience can be linked to the growth of eSports: The more popular or important the matches are, the more likely they will attract (and be organized for) a

larger live audience. Historically, this has not always been the case: As with many traditional sports, eSports tournaments started as local occurrences, taking place in arcade halls, workplaces, homes, and LAN parties (Taylor, 2012). Following first the development of the Internet, and then the various streaming platforms, eSports began to be primarily followed online. This also facilitated the growth of the industry itself, as it not only brought the games to larger audiences but also enabled matchups between skilled players who before moving online would mainly play locally (Scholz, 2012; Taylor, 2012).

Online form also greatly affects audience participation. As eSports matches are often followed from distance, audience participation happens mainly through the interactive chat during the live-streamed events. The audience participation in chat includes comments on the game as well as "spamming" the names of the favorite players and different emoticons or words: For instance, the "kappa" emoticon when something funny happens in the game, or the word or emote "pogchamp" when a particularly skillful play is performed. The constant repetition of emoticons and words in the chat could be argued to serve a similar function to a live audience chanting songs or performing waves and tifos (fan-performed choreographies) in traditional sport games, and they are a significant part of the experience of watching a tournament stream live from afar. Audience participation in chats is a rather new phenomenon among traditional team sports, although, for instance, the Women's Rugby World Cup 2017 had matches live-streamed on Facebook, and interactive chat played an important role in the broadcasts. Live chat was also available in the Overwatch broadcast but unfortunately had been removed from the recordings we analyzed.

As mentioned before, traditional sports broadcasts involve spectacle segments such as close-ups—but the players on the field are not their only targets (Kolamo, 2013). Cameras are picking out

sports fans in their carnival outfits by cutting and zooming into the spectators' gestures and facial expressions. Television broadcasts are showing how "authentic and true sports fans" behave and position themselves in relation to the game itself and other fans but also the camera. In the Overwatch broadcast, the audience does not have as visible role as in the FIFA broadcast where the atmosphere at the stadium appears carnivalesque. But on the rare occasion when the camera is picking out the Overwatch audience, it is presented in the same way by concentrating on reactions such as cheering for a good performance. The live audience is also equipped with props used by traditional sports audiences, such as thundersticks. However, the audience does not appear to be waving the flags or wearing the colors of their national team in style of traditional sports audiences—which is also in a stark contrast to the way national pride is otherwise emphasized throughout the broadcast.

Conclusions and Discussion

We observed similarities in the Overwatch World Cup 2016 final broadcast compared to the 2014 FIFA World Cup final broadcast in the areas of (1) broadcast structure, (2) commentary and expertise, (3) game presentation, (4) game highlights and acknowledgments, (5) teams and players, and (6) audience. The Overwatch broadcast was clearly built following the structure of traditional sports broadcasts, which is a distinct element of sportification and a significant result of this study, and the broadcast was also following the conventions of traditional sports broadcasts in many individual elements under our analysis themes. Nationalism was a particularly strong element constructed and emphasized throughout the broadcast under many of the analysis themes, and we argue that nationalism and locality play an important role in both current and future sportification of eSports.

The differences in the Overwatch broadcast compared to the FIFA broadcast were largely related to the nature of the game as a digital and commercial product as well as to the Overwatch World Cup as a showcase tournament—the primary feature of which was to promote the game product and the company behind it. At the same time, this made it a particularly interesting target for our analysis, since as the results show, sportification was strongly present in the World Cup despite its nature as a showcase tournament for a commercial product. Of course, the inherent nature of eSports games as commercial products is perhaps the key distinguishing factor between them and traditional sports (Karhulahti, 2017)—and one that must always be taken into consideration when studying the similarities and differences between the two forms of sports.

It is also worth noting that eSports does not merely follow in the footsteps of traditional sports forms and their media presentation, but in addition to reinforcing the structures and practices of traditional sports, eSports challenges them (Witkowski, 2012a), representing all "the possibilities for (and limitations of) new forms of sports in this digital media age" (Taylor, 2012, p. 2). Furthermore, despite being the focus of this study, the sportification of eSports does not extend only to the media presentations of the sports, but it covers all "the extensive socio-material practice of play," as Witkowski (2012a, p. 12) puts it, including the embodied practice and performance of "doing sports" by playing (Witkowski, 2012b). Indeed, the mere act of "playing games competitively, in front of a crowd, represents the legitimisation of gaming as a spectator sport" (Taylor, 2015, p. 115).

Our study is particularly timely, since in January 2018, Blizzard has just taken its next step in sportificating Overwatch by launching the inaugural season of the Overwatch League—the first major global professional eSports league with city-based teams, structured similarly to traditional

team sports (Blizzard Entertainment, 2017). The central limitations of this study are related to our limited data: We only analyzed one broadcast of both World Cups. However, in our analysis, we were able to recognize many similarities in the two broadcasts, as well as highlight elements in the Overwatch broadcast familiar from traditional sports broadcasts in general, demonstrating the efforts put into presenting the Overwatch World Cup as a sport. As such, this study may be read as a starting point for a wider range of future research looking into the intersections of eSports and traditional sports. Based on this study, the significance of localizing eSports with the current emphasis on national or city-based teams could be one potential focus for future studies. Another important perspective could be to focus on the audience: For whom are eSports broadcasts constructed and who are currently watching? As the popularity and significance of eSports will continue growing, and the variety of digital and traditional sports and phenomena related to them will continue merging, there will surely be a need for further studies exploring these questions, among many others.

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