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Tutorial

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The New Olympic Generation: The Rise and Impact of E-sports

In October 2017, two E-sport team played in the Beijing National Stadium with more than ten thousand people in the stadium and millions of online spectators watching. Both teams were striving for one goal--the Summoner's Cup--one of the biggest trophies in sports. Lee Sang-Hyeok, who had already won three of the previous six League of Legends world championships, lost to the new rising team, Samsung Galaxy. Although he didn't win the Summoner's Cup, his achievements in the E-sport field will never be forgotten. Many dare to say that Lee Sang-Hyeok's influence in E-sport is like Michael Jordan's influence in basketball due to his achievements in the E-sport field.

In recent years, a new type of sport come to the public vision -- E-sport, also known as electronic sport or competitive gaming, is the competition between players using video games. E-sport has become an important component of video game culture. Almost every popular game has its own E-sport tournament. As more people start to play video games, more people come to watch and participate in E-sport as well. The popularity of E-sport is increasing at an incredible pace. E-sport tournaments are not only attended by more people and take place in larger arenas, but also attract many people who watch it online through live streaming. E-sport also has a great impact on the commercial market through the selling of video games and tournament tickets, sponsorship, and endorsement of popular E-sport

players. As E-sport becomes more popular, it has become a sport with greater influence than many Olympic competitions. Therefore my thesis is this: E-sport should be one of the competitions that is included in the Olympics because of its potential to bring greater influence and commercial benefits to the Olympics Games.

In this essay, I will explain how E-sport fits in as an Olympic competition. Then I will analyze the commercial influence of E-sport and its potential to help increase the revenue of the Olympic Games. Thirdly I will explain the Olympic spirit and people's stereotypical views of E-sport. Lastly I will compare the E-sport players with the athletes who participate in other sports.

In electronic sports, there are two basic elements: electronics and athletics. "Electronic" is its way and means, referring to the use of information technology as the core of the various hardware and software as well as the environment created by it to carry out this sport, which is similar to the corresponding equipment and venues in traditional sports. "Athletics" refers to the essential characteristics of its sports, namely, confrontation and competition. The traditional view of sport is that it holds these characteristics: physical activity, require skill, competition, and a level of stability with institutional organization (Funk and Pizzo 8-9). As a competition, E-sport is very similar to the traditional sports in these ways. "It is not the content that justifies whether something is a game or a sport, but the meaning ascribed to it and how it is experienced by players and or spectators: you can play anything and with anything, and any activity in life can become a sport or a virtual sport" (Pato and Remilllard 143). E-sport requires a lot of skills. Using the popular E-sport game *League of Legends* as an example, players have to process a large amount of information while playing the game.

Players need to know the cool down of the abilities (the counting down of the time for the use of an ability), the position of enemies and allies on the map, and the timing of the objective. And all of these happen in real-time in which ten players play against each other in one map. The in-game decisions and calls made by the players are all real-time and crucial to the entire game. The professional gamers commit large amounts of time to practice before they come to compete in the tournament. APM (action per minute) is a new E-sport term that has been created in recent years. APM is the number of actions completed in one minute in real time strategy games. The APM of a professional player is around 400-500, while the regular player has an average 50 APM (Funk and Pizzo 9). The actions in real time strategy games include selecting units, making orders such as attack and defend, etc. The game *Star-Craft* is known as a real time strategy game with high APM. *Star-Craft* has an average four hundred APM which is the highest APM among all real-time strategy games (Funk and Pizzo 9). The numbers of APM demonstrate the high standard of skill requirement in E-sport. E-sport itself is competitive in nature. While playing in the game, the players need to have fast reaction times to keep up with the pace. There are a lot of times during which the conditions require a team effort. For example, team communication and someone to make the right commands for the team. The requirement of teamwork in gaming is at the same competitive level with other team sports like soccer and basketball. Since there are always updates of new characters and environments, gamers need to keep up with the changes and make new strategies for the competition.

"Video games become sports when the culture that surrounds them becomes one in which they become a show that a group of spectators enjoys watching" (Pato and Remilllard

141). Just as other traditional spectator sports, E-sport shares the common characteristics of spectatorship and commercial benefits. For example, in the *League of Legends* world finals in 2017, there were twelve million more fans than the National Basketball Association (NBA) finals (Cunningham 2). These days the E-sport events usually take place in large arenas such as the Key Arena in Seattle and Madison Square Garden in New York City. The Beijing National Stadium, which was built for the 2008 Olympic Games, was occupied for the 2017 *League of Legends* world finals. As online live streaming has become more popular, E-sport tournaments now can be accessed easily through platforms such as YouTube and Twitch. During the *League of Legends* world finals in 2018, there were approximately 46 million online viewers who watched the games through thirteen different online live streaming platforms (Esc.watch).

E-sport also possesses similar traits of other traditional sports which have a level of stability and institutional organization. There are multiple professional video game leagues in different regions of world. For example, the *League of Legends* professional league in China contains up to fourteen teams and these teams have their own home venues in six populated cities in China: Chengdu, Chongqing, Xian, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. It also has the same seasonal system with a regular season and playoffs schedule just like the National Basketball Association in North America (NBA). The US government now considers E-sport players as professional athletes (Funk and Pizzo 11). Colleges in US offer millions of dollars in scholarship for students who participate in E-sport. Robert Morris University in Illinois was the first US university to offer E-Sport scholarships (Borowy and Dal 214). For E-sport players to compete, University of California-Irvine even build an E-sport arena to support its

E-sport team (Funk and Pizzo 10-11). Even more, some traditional sport have begun to invest money in E-sport in order to help the development of E-sport. "Sookju Park, E-sport business development director of the Philadelphia 76ers, indicated that NBA teams are entering the E-sport market-space to provide structure and content in a format familiar to traditional sport consumers" (Funk and Pizzo 8).

Many criticize E-sport by saying that it uses a computer, mouse, and a keyboard. However, many other types of competition in the Olympics also require helping tools just like E-sport.

> Various shooting disciplines, including pistol, rifle, and archery, feature on the Olympic Games program, yet integrate equipment designed to minimize the effect of body movement. The shooting jackets, pants, shoes, and gloves used in high-level shooting competitions are essential components for success in these sports. The inclusion of considerable levels of physical skill, aided by or in coordination with specialized technical equipment is a necessary component of sport, but the inclusion or even substantial contribution of a non-human component is not sufficient to reduce an activity to non-sport (Funk and Pizzo 9).

The technological products used by the E-sport players are just a tool for them in the competition like the gloves and pistol for the shooting competitors. The employment of the tools to minimize unnecessary physical work does not change the fact that it is a competitive sport. In addition, E-sport also includes physical activity although is small. The movement of the limbs, clicking of fingers, and the typing on the keyboard are all physical activities.

There are a lot parallels between traditional sports and E-sport: spectatorship, competitiveness, professional leagues, etc. "E-sport is a modern and highly-structured activity that requires physical actions of the human body to decide a competitive outcome" (Funk and Pizzo 9). Since E-sport possesses all the characteristics of traditional sport and its incredible rising popularity, it should be in the Olympics.

The E-sport market is tremendously profitable in game selling, tournaments, and other related commercial activities. Tickets sales of tournament games is the best example of the economic effects of E-sport:

> The 2013 *League of legends* Season 3 world Championship sold out the Los Angeles' Staples Center in just one hour. A year later, the same Championship attracted over 40,000 fans to a former World Cup soccer stadium in Seoul. The International 2014, a major *Defense of the Ancients 2* (*DOTA2*) also sold out in approximately 10,000 tickets at Seattle's Key Arena in an hour. Tickets were subsequently being sold on eBay for up to five times (US$500) the original sales price. (Borowy and Dal 206)

E-sport appears to be favored by many and different groups of people. The population of E-sport fans is tremendous and still increasing. Even the places for the traditional sports events such as Staples Center, Seattle Key Arena, and Seoul Soccer Stadium were occupied for E-sport events and filled with passionate E-sport fans (Cunningham 1). Ticket buying is a hard process for the E-sport fans since there are limited numbers of seats in the stadium. "The deeply felt emotional experiences of sports fans allow marketers to strike a responsive chord with consumers in an overcrowded consumer market" (Borowy and Dal 208). The limited number of tickets for sale leads to high ticket prices. The profit of these E-sport events eventually goes to the game company that engages in the market directly. With the profits brought by the E-sport events, the game companies are able to invest more into game development and innovation, which have the potential to bring more profit to the company. The profits of games and ticket sales give these game companies more fund to do better product. These game companies, despite size and funding, influence the market greatly by bringing more consumers into the gaming industry. Besides the direct profit toward the game companies such as ticket and game selling, E-sport also influences the market indirectly by supporting other relative businesses such as live streaming and the sale of game theme

accessories. Live streaming is a highly profitable business. The profits of the live streaming companies depend on the amount of audience they have. Due to the limitations for the fans to spectate the tournaments in the arena such as travel expenses and limited tickets, E-sport fans from all over the world watch the tournament online. The numbers of E-sport fans are tremendous when it comes to bringing in profits for the live streaming companies. A research done in 2012 suggested the economical deficiency of Olympic Games: In comparison with other mega-projects such as infrastructure and construction, the Olympic Games has a 100 percent rate of cost overrun historically, and the over costs are usually significantly larger than those mega-projects (Flyvbjerg and Stewart 3). With the great commercial influence of E-sport, it has a great potential to help reduce the cost of Olympic competition. The popularity is an important factor that can help the Olympics generate more revenue. In recent years, companies tend to have less interest of sponsoring Olympic Games due to its expansive deal and over restricted codes for advertisement (Garcia). Because of the high participation rate in E-sport, many big companies come to play the role of sponsorship. "Expanding participant and spectator markets have attracted major corporate sponsors, such as Microsoft, Samsung, and Red Bull, helping fuel global E-Sport industry revenues in excess of $350 million in 2016, with projected revenues of $696 million in 2017" (Funk and Pizzo 7). With such great commercial attractiveness, E-sport can help to draw more sponsors for the Olympic Games which can change the current situation of the Olympics sponsors.

Although gaming has already become a popular entertainment, even a profession in the world, many negative stereotypes are being held against it. One of the stereotypes that people have of gamers is that gamers are lazy and have no future goals. Some people believe that

playing video games is a waste of time and those who like playing video game must be goal-less in their life. However, they are wrong about the gamer's life attitudes. Many gamers are ambitious and goal-oriented. Owners of game production companies, managers and coaches of E-sport team, designers and engineers of certain games, E-sport players -- all of these people are gamers. Their interest in playing video games does not make them lazy and have no future goal. Instead, this hobby of playing video games gives them more passion in their profession. Because of the flourishing E-sport industry, more and more people who are interested in games and competitive sport participate in the E-sport field. Since this subject is so popular, the competition is very intense in the field. They need to try hard in order to stand strong in the competition. It is hard to find any of the negative stereotypical characteristics of gamers among these people. None of them appear as "lazy," "immature," or even "losers" as other people see them according to the stereotypical view. In a study called "The New Face of Gamers" conducted in 2014, one of the results showed that the gamers are actually more successful and more likely to become full-time employees (The New Face of Gamers). Therefore the gamer stereotype fails to properly interpret the gamer. The virtues of these gamers reflect the Olympic spirit: fair play and striving to be the best (The Olympic Spirit. BBC). In the E-sport industry, every gamer is striving for a different goal. Either to win a tournament as an E-sport player, or to fix an issue of the video games as an engineer, the gamers are striving to be the best in the fair competition of E-sport field. This fair competition benefit both the E-sport industry and the people involved in it. These gamers' Olympic spirit and contribution make E-sport a well-qualified nominee of the Olympic Games.

There is not much difference between E-sport players and athletes who participate in Olympic Games. The E-sport players, with their efforts and struggle, work hard to develop their skills in order to win the competition. They have been striving to surpass themselves and break through limits, pursuing their dreams, overcoming difficulties and challenges with no fear of pressure and failure. This spirit of the professional players does not belong to a normal person. Many players who have won the world-class E-sport competitions have conquered the hearts of E-sport enthusiasts with such willpower. Their influence in the world is no less than that of sports stars in other fields (Lee and Schoenstedt 39-44). For example in the *League of Legends* professional league, Lee Sang-Hyeok, who won the 2016 Mid-Season Invitational tournament and the Season 3, Season 5, and Season 6 World Championships, is the well-deserved first person in this professional field. This player, who is one with few words, has won three World Championships and has became the benchmark of greatness in E-sport field. Jian Zihao, the Chinese rising star, joined in the *League of Legends* professional league in 2013. He won the world championship in the mid-season invitational in 2018 and was selected as the member of the Chinese national team which won the gold medal in the 2018 Asian Games. The achievements of these two *League of Legends* bench-markers inspire millions of people around the world who have competitive dreams to constantly challenge and break through themselves. As a sports event, competition and confrontation are among the most basic characteristics. There are many kinds of classifications and events in E-sport, but the common core must be confrontation and competition. As a sport item, E-sport has a high degree of skill and regularity. The technical and tactical level of athletes must be improved through strict training and practice. Like other sports, the athletes of electronic

sports also need more than eight hours of hard training every day. Li Xiaofeng, a pioneer in the Chinese E-sport field, taught Chinese players about E-sport. At that time, their training environment and equipment conditions were relatively poor. Li trained day and night, and finally successfully opened the door of Chinese electronic sport to world-class competitions. His influence is evident all over the China. E-sport players need to master the basic skills of games, to have enough ability to analyze the game and version, as well as equip themselves with the ability to cooperate with their teammates. Basic skills of games include operation, reaction, awareness and other aspects. The ability to analyze games refers to the ability to adapt to different versions of games. The fast updating of rules for E-sport events, ranging from the changes of the games, to the upgrading of the versions, has a profound impact on professional players (Russell 1-13). If a professional player does not have the ability to parse games and versions, nor accurately grasp the strong tactics of different versions, he can only maintain short-term strength, and will gradually lose his competitiveness. E-sports are generally team games, which require the athletes to acquire the ability to cooperate with teammates, such as *DOTA2, Counter Strike: Global Offense, Overwatch, League of Legends*, etc. E-sports players need the same excellent qualities with traditional sports players. Professional players in E-sport have professional training equipment as a supplement and authoritative coaches as guides, just like traditional sport athletes. They need patience and perseverance in order to maintain their reaction and skills in the best state for the purpose of achieving good results in the competition. All the virtues that can be found in the Olympic athletes are present on the E-sport players. The similarity between athletes and E-sport players suggest E-sport as a great option for Olympic Games.

Some people may ask, what kind of game should be chosen if E-sport is included in the Olympic. The best options for E-sport in the Olympic are highly competitive and popular games. The popular team games such as *League of Legends* and *Overwatch* are good choices. These type of games have a good fan base which can bring huge commercial benefits and viewership to the Olympics. Since these games have been developed for a long time period, they are mature enough to ensure the fairness for all the players who are involved and that the performance of the players come directly from their skills. Even more, these types of games which require a lot of teamwork will also accomplish the educational purpose of teaching the younger generation the importance of cooperation. Indeed, E-sport has just completed its first step to become an official Olympic sport. In February 21, 2019, An organizer of Paris Olympic game at 2024 proposed that breakdancing should be include as a new sport in the Olympic program (Church). One of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) statements read that they are striving to make Olympic more "youth-focused" and include sports that are "universal and popular" (Church). If breakdancing which is such a young sport will be included in the Olympic Games, there is no reason to not include E-sport which is so popular among the young people in the world. E-sport was included as a demonstration at the 2018 Asian Games in the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang. "The Asian Games was a trial run for E-sports to be included as an exhibition event at the 2024 Olympics in Paris, which will follow another outing at the next Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in 2022" (Reed). It is within reason that E-sport is a future popular sport just like soccer and basketball today. The video games that were included in the Asian Games were the "globally popular arena battle games including *League of Legends* and *Arena of Valor*" (Reed). However, some

video games that do not require teamwork are also good choices for the Olympics. For example, *Star-Craft* only requires two players to play against each other. The relevant tournament of this video game started at the beginning of the 2000s. The popularity and the level of performance of this video game makes it an attractive option to be included in the Olympics. Overall, these well developed and highly competitive video games are good considerations for drawing more benefits to the Olympics both commercially and educationally.

From multiple perspectives, E-sport has a great potential to become as influential as the traditional competitive sports. The similarities between E-sport and traditional sport allow E-sport be accepted easily by society. The employment of new technology and designs also attracts more people to become fans of competitive gaming. The E-sport athletes have great characteristics due to the competitiveness and challenges of an E-sport career. Instead of having the negative effect according to people's stereotypical mindset, E-sport actually helps people build characters that make them more successful in life. In the future, the flourishing gaming industry will continue to bring more benefits to the market. More E-sport players and E-sport related jobs will appear. With this rapid growth rate of popularity and fans, E-sport's influence may someday surpass the influence of traditional sports. It is a wise choice to include E-sport in the Olympics so that the Olympics can keep pace with the growth of society and enlarge its influence. The influence of E-sport will bring huge commercial benefits and spectators to the Olympics which will help to reduce Olympics' over cost and fix the problem of sponsorship. Therefore E-sport should be one of the competitions that is included in the Olympics because of its potential to bring greater influence and commercial

benefits to the Olympics Games.

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