

(Europe, Male, 24)

*What games do you play competitively, and for how long?*

Four to five years, I've played SMITE

*What type of game is Smite?*

It's a MOBA

*Do you play that on a team?*

Right now, no. I've been on amateur teams in the past, like that's how I started out. But I joined one team that felt really good that I could vibe with, and we got sponsored. So you do play with a team if you find one.

*Are you one a team now?*

No, I'm actually about to quit eSports. For this year I suppose.

*What made you decide to quit eSports?*

Well it's a change up. Right now, a lot of the people that play esports they go for full-time, but I always put my personal development first. So even when I was at peak of competition, like 2-3 years ago, I would be studying along my esports career. So there was always something going on; I never fully committed. That was a bit taxing and last year I went for the amateur league, which was good money but still allowed me to have my job on the side. But then I found it ruined my weekends, especially my social life, because I had big games on my Saturday, and it would be a personal warmup, into training, into talking strategies, into the game itself, which took up most of my day. I didn't like the time it had in my life, and I had no other choices in that esports so I chose to focus on work instead

*So it was taking personal time for yourself?*

Yeah. Also esports became kind of stressful because we used to be a team that used to be at the very top. We won four years of LANs straight and won the WC, and a lot of expectations were placed on us. I struggled with that for a while and it made me a very anxious person. There was a lot less in the amateur team, but still I enjoy myself more than eSports.

*Could you give me a brief run through of what your day was like when competing at the top level?*

Sure. At that time, I was going to uni, so I'd wake up at seven and go to the train to go to uni. Then I'd be back home at 3 in the afternoon, then I'd play, on a normal day, until 7pm. At that point, I'd join my team and we'd do scrims with others that go three to four hours. And if it was a good day I'd stream until midnight and broadcast for the fans, and then repeat that.

*So on longer days, you'd play nine hours of games?*

Yeah, if it was a good day of not losing too hard, and I was enjoying myself, then yeah it would take 9 hours.

*But on a bad day that would still be five hours?*

Yeah five. Sometimes I'd have uni work to do, so I'd wait until we met up as a team and just did those games.

*Did you have more practice as tournaments and matches got closer?*

So there was actually a terrible invention called double scrims. I exited the high level pro scene so it never affected me, but the pro teams, they have double scrims blocks. So one at noon, and one at the usual time slot, or earlier like late afternoon. But that would be two blocks of three hour scrims. So six hours of team practice, but people were still supposed to practice outside of that. I was never a part of that, and I don't think it's healthy. I think you need time, and your brain really needs to recover because it's very intense. Sometimes it goes bad because there are a lot of personalities involved. There would also be bootcamps every now and then where we would fly out to Germany or Poland and all train in the same room, but we wouldn't do much more than that.

*So when a tournament came up, would you have a longer routine at all?*

It would be the same. I guess it is also unique because when I was a pro, like a real pro, we'd fly out to the events. So by the time we'd have the game on Saturday, we'd already be in America or something and we couldn't practice, so we'd just wait and see how it goes. So it would be common practice that we'd go into without having played the game in a while. But with the amateur scene we'd just compete like usual.

*How much sleep were you getting?*

I would guess an average of six hours; some days get up early and shower others stay up longer and watching live streams.

*Was exercise or nutrition something you tried working into your daily life?*

That's a tricky one. I've never struggled with my physique, I'm a light build, I'd like to weight more. But especially nutrition around esports I'd try to have one big meal a day. Sometimes training would get in the way of that, but I'd always try to have dinner which would be after scrims, at 10, which is a bit late for dinner. And working out, I think the most I'd done as a month workout challenge, but it was unrelated. Just games and education.

*Have you ever experienced any physical pain that is related to esports at all?*

Uhm, not really. Thing is I at work now, that I'm not doing a lot of esports, I'm still using my hands a lot, but my hands are still feeling really good. Never had any pain for that whatsoever. My eyesight I consider to be very sharp, especially being around my other sport friends who have classes and are like 'ah I can't see' but I don't think that relates. I have started wearing the yellow shift one, and I've started playing DOTA and I don't do it professional, but at a high level. I find that game to be very stressful around having the eyes open, and also I get tired early, so I started using them a few months ago.

*Have you noticed it with other esports players?*

No. Eyesight yes, but I don't think it traces back to esports.

*Another part of wellness is mental and psychological. Do you think you've ever had extra stress or mental strains that come from esports at all?*

For sure, for sure, this is a big part. I don't even know where to begin here but I wish we had a mental coach, I wish it was a proper thing in esports, I wish people would look into that. For me personally, I was always incredibly shaky and nervous player. Before games I'd get ridiculously cold and couldn't eat anything. There was one time I tried to eat breakfast and right before the picks and bans, we had to pause the game so I could go in the back room and throw up. That was just, I guess, part of the routine. But even after the games, the immense stress of having to do it again, going through the entire process of the tournament series is so stressful. Another point is what drives you. Psychologically speaking I had a lot of bad points, like what kept me practicing. I'd come back from uni and I'd play ranked games against strangers online and if I lost or did bad, I'd say you can't take a break now you did bad, you don't deserve anything else you have to play another game. I wish I had replaced that sooner because it is a very unhealthy drive. Now I know my patterns and I can avoid myself and feel a lot better. I'm doing things for better good reasons and drive.

*What would you say is the biggest source of that stress? What drove that kind of stress?*

Self-inflicted, but, obviously as a pro player you'd watch your streams and see what people have to say, you want to see what people have to say, especially the good thing, like your fan cheering, the commenting and speaking good about you. And I got too attached to that where I'd get sad if they said bad things about me. I tried to have a reputation, a nickname [REDACTED]. My first season of professional play I had a kda of 28 while a normal one is like 5, for a moba. I had little deaths the way I played, so I got that nickname. Going later into my professional career, especially when I focused on uni more, I had less time to practice and performed worse and got kicked from my team. Seeing that crumble, from being undying to being the weak link, is saddening and it puts a lot of pressure on you, to keep up the high standards you set on yourself.

*So there's yourself, negative fan feedback. Were family and friend ever additional to that?*

My friends, even if they're not the most emotionally empathic people, they've always been around to support in their own way, and I'm thankful for that. My parents have always backed me up as well, so I'm good in that department.

*Support came from the friends and family then, not the esports organization?*

Well there's always people on the team you're closer too that you can vent to and talk to. But I had one guy, that goes back to when I was kicked from the team. There was one guy on the team that I had good synergy with, that I could always talk to. He basically said you have one more tryout, you have to play better. You have more chance and we'll see how it goes. I was at a bad time at that point, my gf had broken up with me too. So I went to a psychologist because it was overwhelming by everything, I'm being kicked and romantic life is bad. The psychologist told me to double down on my strength. So I told this guy I want to be better at my thing, and I want to show you guys. He said I don't think so, you should work on the new stuff. And the next day there's no tryout and you're just kicked right away. And I thought I had a solution to the problem but I didn't and that was sad. Because you have these emotional impactful connections on your team, and that kind of cut out for me at the end, which is unlucky. Rough day. Organization as well?

*Well you wished there was a mental coach, is there really any support on the team you're on at all? Do that have some network to point you to or do you have to find it on your own?*

Well I think back then I wouldn't be the person to reach out then anyways, but there was no offer for someone we could talk to anyways. Coaches are usually strategic or sometimes emotional keeping the team together, but they're not professionals. They're 18, 19 year old kids that are good friends with people on the team. They have no psychological qualifications to help anyone on the team, but sometimes they get lucky. I was really jealous actually when I saw the international last year and the winning team [REDACTED], they have an actually mental coach, like a psychologist. And they won the tournament, and after every match, win or lose, they came back looking refreshed, as if they had the best morning of their life. If that could be me, I wish I had a coach like that when I played.

*Is that tied to money do you think?*

Well [REDACTED] is a... normal organization is nonesports people making money, trying to get investments. But they're actually founded by the players, and they have plenty of money because they're sponsored by red bull and have one the internationals twice, and have countless millions from that. They have all the means in the world to ensure the best match performance

*Besides your experiences, based on everything you've seen, what would you say is the biggest health problem that esports players have to face?*

I think it being a sport where, the voice of the fans is such a big part of it. Because you have twitch chat, which doesn't care. Twitch doesn't give a fuck about you. It's just a bunch of anonymous nerds. I would assume any other sports, like football you have the crowd yelling at you. But looking at replays and chats, they're something else, they're really mean. And that becomes noticeable, it's not as easy to zone it out. But I've done that and it feels better when I can do that. I'm trying to think of one big health issue, but it relates back to gaming in general. Like escapism and why do we play games, and I play because there is nothing else. And steamers have a similar issue, wondering why I get up every day? Because I don't have anything else, because I have to do this

*What would think is a solution, or could help players in that situation?*

Give them some sort of psychological training. If you sign up to an org, if you sign a contract, you're going to start being a professional at least get some guidelines. Teach yourself how to deal with stupid fans, toxic team environments, deal with pressure. Have a starter course because it's very young people on the scene and I think they need it. It goes so fast too. Success comes rolling around, and then it's a lot to take in.