

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE INCREASING PROBLEM OF PLAYER BURNOUT IN ESPORTS

Opinion Esports | 📅 August 31, 2020 | 👤 Michael Jeong

Burnout is a prevalent issue in the esports industry. In order to remain relevant in their respective scenes, players must face an intense year-round schedule. This includes long practice sessions, constant travel and shifting schedules on a constant basis. Additionally, the more success a player achieves, the more they must compete, and the more stress they must put on themselves.

[Self-Care and Burnout in esports have been talked about](#), but not properly addressed or studied at large. The underlying causes are obvious to almost everyone, yet not much work has been done over the years to properly adress, mitigate or fix the issues.



BURN-OUT IN ESPORTS

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) as the following:

“Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job
- Reduced professional efficacy

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

WHO does not define burnout as a medical condition.

Across all esports, players generally play two or more official matches per week. On top of that, there are countless hours of practice and scrims in between. Additionally, for important tournaments or playoffs, there is the additional pressure and stress. Compared to traditional sports, the lack of strenuous physical activity means teams have less incentive to take breaks for the players’ well-being. A player’s career might last 6 or 7 years with only as three weeks of off time in that time period.

All of this contributes to an extremely stressful environment primed for burnout. The list of high-tier esports athletes who completely burn out is expanding almost daily nowadays.

WHO HAS EXPERIENCED BURNOUT RECENTLY?

Burnout was most recently at the forefront of discussion in Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO). Over the season, multiple players have stepped down from their team’s active rosters, citing burnout issues.

Both Lukas “**gla1ve**” Rossander and Andreas “**Xyp9x**” Højsleth of the Danish team Astralis stepped down in May. They named burnout as a critical factor in their decision.

Gla1ve said in his Twitlonger announcement:

“For a longer period of time I have had symptoms of stress and burnout. My teammates and the Astralis organization have tried many different things to help me out and overcome this. As it’s still going on, my doctor and I have decided that I need a break, and yesterday I have given a sick note to Astralis.”

Xyp9x also stated:

“I have sadly been feeling burnout/stress symptoms chasing me over many months. It’s time to take the necessary break to rest and find the motivation to get back to competing for Astralis. Everyone around me has done a great number of things in order to avoid it, and there is nothing that I would rather do than keep on playing without a break, but the time has come to take care of my health and therefore I have given in a sick note to Astralis.”

In League of Legends, players have often mentioned burnout and stress as factors that poorly affect their health and play level. G2 Esports captain Luka **“Perkz”** Perković spoke about it at length in an interview with Inven Global in January.

Søren **“Bjergsen”** Bjerg spoke in a DRIVE video by LoL Esports on how overwork and exhaustion had impacted his life.

Yiliang Peter **“Doublelift”** Peng had taken leave from play in 2017 and sat out most of the Spring split. In an interview with Yahoo Esports, Doublelift cited stress and burnout as the reasons behind his decision.

Burnout and the intense schedule have also contributed to player injury and psychical strain to wrists, forearm flexors, neck and back. Many players have increasingly dedicated fitness time to battle the body fatigue the extended practice sessions cause, yet much work on the fitness front has to be done to address the industry specific physical strains that occur.

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Gla1ve, Kjaerbye, GeT_RiGhT, shox, ALEX, JUGi, Bubski, fer, olofmeister, flusha and many more had health issues at some point.

Many players kept playing with burnout, depression, injuries, etc. and it shouldn't happen.

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WHAT CAN PLAYERS DO ABOUT BURNOUT?

Burnout is a difficult condition to combat, as it is challenging to diagnose. It is easily confused with everyday occupational stresses. Rather than attempting to address current burnout, it is best to handle burnout with preventative measures. The fundamental difficulty that esports players face is that the more successful a team becomes, the more likely the players will face burnout. The most successful and prolific teams must effectively compete for ten to eleven months, with only occasional brief breaks. And even during these breaks in the schedule, they still need to maintain form.

In an interview with HLTV.org, Kirill **“Boomb14”** Mikhailov of Natus Vincere said:


“It’s really difficult to achieve stability in CS. You can win a few tournaments in a row and then lose just one, leading you to think that you’ve become worse... In essence, the only team to have achieved stability was Astralis, and even then, that led to certain players experiencing burnout and taking leave as a result.”

Richard Lewis reported that the Astralis management was culpable for poorly protecting the players’ mental health. According to Lewis, the Astralis players had to threaten legal action to receive their sick leave. If teams cannot be trusted to protect the players, it may soon fall to third-party entities.

The Counter-Strike Professional Players' Association (CSPPA) has spoken repeatedly on the necessity of preventing burnout and protecting player health.

Counter-Strike Professional Players' Association

@CSPPAgg





We need to talk about mental health issues in professional CS:GO and esports


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The CSPPA negotiated for a month-long player break to take place in July 2020. While player breaks had become increasingly normalized in CS:GO, this was an essential step in formally negotiating for the break as a collective. The CSPPA additionally partnered with the University of Chichester and the University of Winchester to launch a survey into mental health in esports. It also implemented the CSPPA Mental Health Program for Players with Scandinavian esports team North.

TRUE CHANGE IS NEEDED

It is uncertain if the CSPPA will act as a good faith ambassador on the global topic of mental health, burnout, and stress in esports. The CSPPA has reportedly failed to act impartially previously on other issues. They have poorly handled the Flashpoint League problems or their recent World Rankings announcement.

While its initiatives are sound good, a truly impartial judge without allegedly biased intentions is needed to ensure players' long-term mental health in esports.

We are yet to fully dedicate resources to studying player longevity, performance and the strains a competitive career brings. While we are widely aware of the issues and the causes for players ruining their health both physically and mentally, we are yet to really do anything about it.

The first step in solving a problem is to recognize that it does exist.