One thing about the arcade scene and competitive gaming back then that fascinates me is that it was almost completely embraced by the public. Every one of the players interviewed described the arcade as “the place to be” at the time. It was totally normal for people to spend their free time there. Moreover, the pro players/world record holders were looked up to by everybody. They gained a lot of notoriety, being recognized on the streets, being interviewed on TV, photographed for LIFE magazine, etc. Today gaming has a lot more negative stigma attached to it. People who spend all of their free time playing video games are considered to have no life. And a lot of the public reaction to pros making a living off of playing video games has been very negative. People think that it’s stupid and that anybody can do it or that it has no entertainment value. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a pro gamer going on TV to be interviewed or getting any kind of verification from outside of the eSports community for that matter.

In a lot of ways, this documentary reminds me of how super smash bros came into its own as a competitive game. It’s hard to really compare Arcade games to the online games that we largely associate with eSports today, but smash rose to popularity under more similar conditions. Super smash bros melee was released in 2001 and within the next few years it started garnering serious attention. When the game came out mass media and the internet were just starting to develop into what they are today, so a lot of competition stayed local. Much like the pros at their own arcades, a lot of people in their regions thought that they were the best at smash. Soon enough the community started organizing tournaments, and some real rivalries started to pop up. Ken on the west coast and Azen on the east. To this day, due to the lack of online play, there is actually a difference in styles between west and east coast players.

The beginnings of a competitive scene began to show up during the arcade era, and in a lot of ways it resembled the scene today. I would attribute the biggest downfall of competition back then to the lack of mass media. Today it is very easy for just about anybody to stream whatever they want, and just about anybody who’s interested can see it. Back then, the tools just weren’t around for it to succeed. However, there is a lot of things I notice to be the same. The man commentating the video game championship was essentially the same as the commentators today. They tried to take the competitions around the country, and while it failed miserably, it reminded me a lot of MLG in its early days. MLG has been replaced by a lot of other more successful organizations (probably for the best), but it was an important start to eSports taking hold.