



ESPORT GUIDE YOUTH AND STUDENTS



Erasmus+

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The Player

The Players Mind

One big piece in becoming a great esports athlete is to master your mental health. This is also one of the pieces of the puzzle that a lot of young aspiring esports athletes neglect and easily forget to work on. It's easy to become frustrated and to start projecting your anger towards your opponents or even your teammates.

Mia Stellberg is a sports psychologist that is now specialising in esports and have worked with professional CSGO team Astralis and most recently with OG:s Dota 2-team during their run at The International 2019 where they became historical by being the first team to win The International back to back. Stellberg refers to the importance of teaching players about controlling their emotions. She speaks about the importance of being rational instead of emotional when you compete in esports. By being rational you become more pragmatic and efficient ingame while Stellberg means that being (too) emotional can sometimes conflict with the game. To be emotional can sometimes be good in esports as in all other contexts.



When you're happy and "pumped up" being emotional can be something positive when things are going well in the game for you or your team. But with reacting to your emotions also means you react to, or become "tilted" during the inevitable times when things doesn't go as planned for either yourself or your team which often leads you to either doubt yourself or to take wrong decisions in game. Stellbergs point to try and be rational instead would help you to not get tilted so easily and to be the best possible version of yourself by being calm and collected during playing. If you are running high on your emotions you're more likely to become nervous or stressed which then affects your hand and eye coordination and reaction time which is essential factors to perform in esports.



Stellberg explains that emotions easily affects your game in a negative way. She also explains that it's important to work on your self-esteem as a person. To improve and work on your self-esteem isn't something easy to work on as a young aspiring esports athlete but it's nonetheless relevant when it comes to gaming and it's a good thing to know and think about during games. Stellberg explains that if your self-esteem isn't on the right level you become much easily distressed which means you get anxious and start to doubt yourself and your skills in the game. We have all at some

point during our matches started to doubt ourselves and question our ability to hit our targets or make smart plays. By knowing how our self-esteem affect our gameplay you'll have "keys" to use and to think about during the times when you question your ability ingame and by doing this you are being *rational* instead of being *emotional*!

With all this said we are all still humans and not robots. Emotions will always affect us in some capacity and sometimes you will get upset or angry while playing. But by being aware of what happens when you become too emotional will help you to deal with it and not to easily fall in to a destructive mindset and behaviour.



Another aspect that Stellberg speaks about is the importance of players well being. Stellberg speaks about how their well being is connected to the players performance in their game. A lot of aspiring esports athletes think that it's important to put in as many hours as possible to become better. One thing many do is that they look at the amount of hours the opponents or other players have in a game and how that dictates their skill level. It's true in some capacity but it also comes down to what you do with those hours in the game (one aspect of this will be discussed further down in this text) and Stellberg talks about the importance of balance in your life. She's strongly against to practice ten to twelve hours a day seven days a week, no matter what your profession, sport or hobby is. Stellberg talks about the importance of having a social life such as friends and perhaps boyfriend or girlfriend outside your time in front of your game. In the early days of esports many professional teams and players didn't have a schedule for practices which many times lead to fatigue and friction between players inside the team. Nowadays teams and players usually have a set practice schedule each day with around eight hours and with days off, just like a regular job! When you're young you also have to balance it all with your school and your education which also is very important to not neglect. It's easy to not take school seriously if you start to get some progress in your gaming career but remember that education is something that no one can ever take away from you and a career in esports might not last forever.

Another big aspect of becoming a better esports athlete is to learn from your mistakes. Playing matches hours after hours gives you some degree of experience and you do become better at the game, but to be more efficient in your progress you should always study your own games by watching replays - both individually and as a team. It's important to study your game from your team's perspective and from your own perspective. When you study your matches as a team you should always have a set of questions regarding how you performed as a team. Focus first on what you



The Players Body

The players general physical health and wellbeing affect their performance in-game. It is vital for every player to take care of all aspects of their physical health in order to stay competitive. A healthy and balanced body performs optimally.

Sleep, stress and exercise

Training and rest should always be in balance to reach optimal results. Bad habits of playing too late at night cause a vicious cycle where your daily rhythm is off balance and you do not get enough sleep. The Finnish national esports organisation SEUL recommends 8-10 hours of sleep every night. When we sleep less, the deprivation radically impairs our reflexes, hand-eye coordination, motoric abilities and ability to handle stressful situations. The largest part of our daily recovery from stress happens during. By sleeping less than the recommended amount you are giving the opponent a benefit in the game.

Stressful situation in games and how team members recover from the frustration are often decisive moments in the game, a calm and coordinated team will win more games than an emotional and stressed one. One of the most effective ways of managing



stress both in life and in-game situations is through exercise. By maintaining your physical condition your body is able to adapt in stressful situations more efficiently, this way you handle frustration better than the opposition and turn games more quickly and efficiently. Stress management is not the only key factor that exercise helps with, a first study performed on the effects of exercise on in-game skills in esports has proven that a regular exercise plan improves the players results. The exercise you perform does not have to be intense, even daily brisk walks maintain your condition and helps you keep in shape. Most importantly your exercise should be enjoyable so you can maintain doing it in the long run.



Nutrition and hydration

When playing it really does matter what you eat and drink. Healthy balanced meals evenly distributed along the day assist you in maintaining even blood sugar levels and remain focused. A diet consisting of salty snacks and caffeinated drinks will lead to poorer results in games as you are combating dietary fatigue with caffeine. Even though esports team can be sponsored by energy drinks, the players are generally not allowed to consume them because of their long term performance reducing effect and the amount of sugar they contain. Energy drink companies produce cans containing water so that the sponsored players can pretend to drink their product. When playing you should always drink water to keep hydrated.



Alcohol, drugs and tobacco

There are some urban legends in regards to how alcohol, drugs and tobacco improve your results in a game. Although certain stimulants like caffeine can provide a temporary feeling of improved focus in-game, the use of caffeine and other stimulants have no positive long term effect on results and can lead to lowered performance in the long run. Energy drinks contains large amount of caffeine and other active ingredients which have no proven benefits. Usually they also contain large amounts of sugar that will cause large fluctuations in the players blood sugar.

Alcohol causes reduced reflexes, blurred vision, impaired coordination and motoric functions. There is no reason to drink and play at the same time. Alcohol abuse is not a part of professional esports and professional teams do not tolerate players who drink heavily. Drug use is completely forbidden in teams. The effects of drug use is bad for your health and impairs your performance in-game. Stimulants that are prescribed by doctors are rumoured to be in active use in most professional teams. Such stimulants are commonly forbidden as doping and are a form of cheating. You should also be aware that the player is always personally responsible for knowing the current doping rules. Any perceived benefit that the stimulants have are not scientifically proven. You should never take any medicine that is not prescribed for you as treatment for a medical condition.

There is no doubt of the negative health consequences of smoking, it decreases your body's ability to transport oxygen to your heart, brain and muscles. Smoking decreases your performance overall and reduces your results in-game, any serious team will not approve of their players smoking.



The Team

Team building

In most esports games, a team of players must work together in order to win the game. If the players cannot cooperate, their team will lose even if each individual player has strong technical skills. This chapter will talk about team building and cooperation, and then we will connect this to communication skills in the next chapter.

How to adapt to the team

As a professional esports player, you cannot pick and choose your teammates according to your liking. What usually happens is that, when you have proven your skills, you get invited to join an already existing team. If you hope to continue playing with this team, you need to adapt to it - or, in other words, to fit in with the other team members and learn to cooperate with them. It is not the team that adapts to you, but you who have to adapt to the team.

One important task for finding your place in the team is to choose a role in the game. In many games, including League of Legends, Overwatch and DOTA, roles are connected to the choice of character, with team members choosing for instance tank, damage or healing characters. In other games such as Counterstrike, there are no special characters designed for particular roles, but each player still has to choose a role in the game (in CS they are called entry fragger, support, lurker and sniper). The crucial point about finding a role is that it has to be appropriate both for yourself and for the team: you have to be comfortable with the role you are going to play, and it has to be something that the team needs. If you like to hide in the background and make swift surprise attacks, you probably will not enjoy playing a tank character, and if there is already a healer on the team there may not be room for another.

As you settle into a role with your team and spend time practicing together, you and your teammates start getting to know each other better both inside and outside of the game. The end result of this process is that the team really works as a unit, where each player knows the strengths and the weaknesses of each of their teammates and has a good understanding of how their own skills fit in with the needs of the team. This understanding of how the team works together in a given situation is related to the concept of game sense or situational awareness, which describes a player's ability to predict how a situation in the game will play out. The important thing is that each player has an understanding of what the team requires from the player in any given moment. This includes the ability to predict what your opponents will do, but you should also be able to predict how your teammates will react in a situation, and what you can do to help them. When each player on a team has a good understanding of both the personalities and the skills of the others, it will come naturally to all to cover for one another's weaknesses, and the team reaches a higher level of cooperation.



Throughout your career as a professional player, you will probably join many different teams. Each time you join a new team, you will have to adapt to that team, and along the way in this process you will be developing your adapting skills - in other words, your ability to adapt to new teams, new people, and new situations. This is important for you in order to be attractive on the player market, because high-level teams don't have time for new players who take a long time to adapt. Adapting to different teams is a skill that players develop throughout their gaming careers.

Most aspects of team building depend on communication skills, which we will talk more about in the next chapter.

Communication

1. In-game

Since esports usually involves team games, communication is one of its most important skills. Good communication skills are critical for in-game success, and are also important for preparing for a game and debriefing after a game.

In-game communication is primarily about sharing tactical



information with your teammates. This means that you must speak up when you have observed something important that your teammates need to know about. It also means that you must remain silent when you don't have anything important to say, so that you are able to receive information you need from other teammates. In this way everybody in the team can improvise tactics based on shared information, and maintain an edge over the opposing team. If there is chatter and noise on the radio, you may miss out on important details, and your team will lose the game.

In this section we will look into several important aspects of communication. First we will discuss precision and efficiency. Here are two examples of efficient and non-efficient communication:

1. "Two stairs, one sniper – I am (either **pushing**, **holding** or **retreating**)"

2. "One person on the right corner upon the **stairs** and I think he is **reloading**, I'm not sure, why is he not flashed though?"

In the first example, the information shared with the team is precise and efficient. An experienced tactical team player will be able to use this information to improvise skillfully and maintain an edge on the opponents.

In the second example, communication is unclear and confusing. The sentence is too long and there is even an unrelated question added at the end. Even an experienced tactical team player would find it difficult to understand what is relevant here, and filter out the rest. With this kind of communication, your teammates have to make an effort to figure out what you are trying to say. Instead of focusing on what is happening in the game, they have to focus on what you are saying. This means that you are slowing them down and diverting their attention away from where it is needed.

thermore, long sentences with unnecessary phrases fill up the radio, so there is no room for your teammates to communicate. If one team member is babbling, this will drown out other attempts to communicate, and important information may be lost.

This brings us to another crucial aspect of in-game communication. To succeed, an esports athlete needs to be able to listen to teammates. The ability to listen to information from the team is as important as the ability to provide information to the team. A good team player can focus on his/her own gameplay while effortlessly monitoring and acting upon information from teammates.

As you develop your in-game communication skills, it will also be clear to you that some subjects are not appropriate for in-game discussion. We have already talked about the importance of not cluttering the airwaves with unnecessary talk that diverts the attention of your teammates. It is also important not to get involved in broader discussions of strategy and tactics, or to give critical feedback to teammates about their performance which may hurt the team morale. If you have suggestions for how to improve the tactical plans of the team, this is something you need to bring up when you are preparing for the game, not during the game itself. In the next sections, we will discuss how to develop communication skills in preparing for a game and debriefing after a game.



2. Preparing for a game

As the team prepares for a game, there are three important tasks to take care of. The first task is about evaluating the team's performance in the last game. The second task is to plan your tactics for the coming game. The third task is to raise the team spirit and facilitate a good mental attitude for each player. These three tasks are related to each other, but there is also some tension between them. If you are very critical of the performance of one teammate and express this criticism in an unskilled way, the effect may be that you lower this player's morale. What you want is to raise the team's performance for the coming game, but poorly communicated criticism may lower performance instead.

Communication is therefore an important skill in team preparations. In order to improve the team's performance, it is important to get both positive and critical feedback from each teammate. With constructive feedback, each player has a good chance to improve their performance and their morale at the same time. Toxic feedback, on the other hand, destroys morale and lowers performance.



Toxicity

Toxicity is the term for being counterproductive in your communication. It is natural that you sometimes feel anger and disappointment towards teammates when they make mistakes. The important thing is that you express such feelings in a way that helps your teammates to improve their game, rather than in a way that causes them to make even more mistakes.

To say that something is toxic means that it is like a poison that makes people feel sick. In the same way, criticism of teammates can be toxic in the sense that it makes them lose their confidence and play worse than before. It is better to say nothing than to say something which has a negative effect on their performance. The best thing of all is if you can give feedback in a way that helps teammates correct their mistakes, while boosting confidence and team spirit at the same time.

Toxicity is related to mental attitude. If you think you are toxic then you probably are. Being able to lose and have a bad game without “tilting” could be a tough challenge but is one of the most important traits an esports athlete can have. One has to understand that losing is always a part of the game, at every stage and every level – even professionals lose 16-2 because of their perception of “stupid mistakes, bad plays”. So get on and get used to it, and try to conquer your feelings towards losing by being positive, giving positive comments and be the personality that you would have been if you were to compete in a professional match.





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