Digital Athletics in Slovakia

Michal Kabát

There is quite a rich history of competitive games being played on various levels in Slovakia. There were dozens of semi-professional teams in various games and even some professional organizations when eSport started to make waves. Now, just a few years later, most of them do not exist, as they were mostly run by teenagers that had to get a more 'serious' job and stop playing or organizing events. However, some have survived and many more are now starting again, as eSport is starting to be taken seriously on an economic level (Chart 1) as something people enjoy not only playing, but also watching.
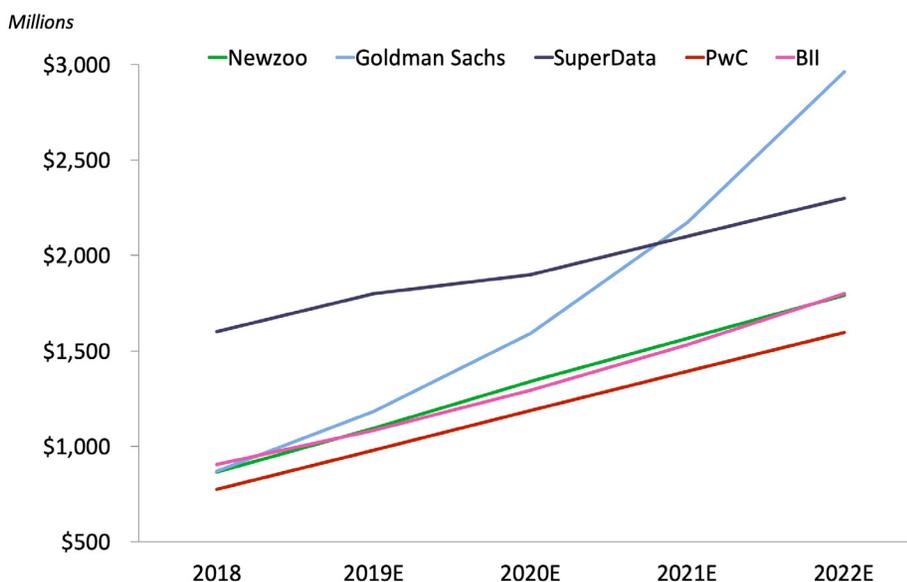

Chart 1: Global Esports Revenue Projections Through 2022

Source: REYES, M. S.: *THE ESPORTS ECOSYSTEM: The key players and trends driving the red-hot, fast-growing esports space that's on track to surpass $1.5 billion by 2023.* [online]. [2019-12-09]. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-esports-ecosystem-2019-11>.

All this falls well in line with Gartner's hype cycle that suggests there is always much media buzz at the beginning and after expectations peak, there is always a fall in inter- est followed by a slow but steady rise into the mainstream. If we take a look at the local gaming scene, there is already a lot going on and there is more to come. As you may have already read in our last issue, the national eSport association (saes.sk) has been formed and we should see some official national representation teams in selected games compet- ing at international events. Meanwhile, many semi-pro teams are forming and looking for funding. Many already compete in Czech(oslovak) or international leagues. There are also many local tournaments and even the Slovak national eSport championship offering titles in eight games.

Recent developments in order to systematically improve the chances of success for Slovak players are also happening at the university level. In September, the local division

of the Czech based eSport agency Lancraft announced the first Slovak university league under the name UniCup. Its aim is to help develop teams that will stand together to fight through semester-long winter and summer seasons that will lead to public finals held in Trnava during the UniCon and Game Days festivals. In November 2019, the qualification phase of League of Legends has started and organizers promise to add more games soon. The first round of the league started with 30 teams from 10 Slovak universities.[1] One of them, the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava is also offering students the chance to earn credits for training and competing in tournaments.[2] We hope that this trend will catch on and spread to high schools, so that we can soon see more talents representing our country at an international level.

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Game Days 2019

Ivan Rokošný

Game Days is the one and only Slovak international digital-game festival. This unique event highlights innovative digital games that have artistic value, and focuses on their comprehensive presentation. From May 30 to June 2, 2019, Nádvorie, the Place for Contemporary Culture in Trnava, Slovakia, hosted this event bursting with talks and presentations by prominent digital game developers from Slovakia and abroad. The festival's aim is to raise awareness about digital games and spread information about new exceptional games under development. It is also a platform that promotes networking among professionals from the game development industry. Prominent figures from the Slovak and international game development sector presented their invaluable experience with progressive digital game creation to industry professionals and the general public.

The festival program took place in the facilities of Nádvorie. Presentations, talks and workshops took place in the lecture halls; the co-working space hosted the game jam and the hackathon. Concerts and other accompanying programmes took place in the exterior. The unique extensive basement space with beautiful brick arches served as a gallery for exhibitions and installations, one of which introduced Czechoslovak historical games on anti-regime resistance. As promised by the organizers, exhibitions by digital game scientists were also an important part of the festival. Competing creatures fought for victory in a big digital game quiz, curious fans tried out rare Slovak retro games from digital gaming's prehistoric times, and the program also included fun and bizarre things such as cre-

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1   VOBECKÝ, L.: *Unicup – univerzitní e-sportová liga v polovině skupin.* [online]. [2019-12-09]. Available at: <https://www.lancraft.cz/Clanek/39/unicup---univerzitni-e-sportova-liga-v-polovine-skupin>.
2   For more information, see: *Na TEDI začali vyučovať elektronické športy. Študenti vytvorili aj prvé súťažné tímy.* [online]. [2019-12-09]. Available at: <https://fmk.sk/e-sporty/>.

ating games in Power Point. Game developers also had an opportunity to showcase their work in progress during the Pitching Session. Their projects were assessed by an expert jury consisting of designers, producers and distributors. At night, the festival turned into a party featuring concerts and DJ sets by digital game music producers.

This year's Game Days focused on 'Gamers with Disabilities'. Accessibility in digital games for impaired gamers has evolved in recent years. One of the speakers to enlighten visitors on the subject was Sightless Kombat, a gamer who exploits the world of digital games while being completely blind. Bryce Johnson, who encouraged the development of inclusive design projects for disadvantaged players, also came to Trnava to report on the development of features and hardware for disadvantaged players. Game Days 2019 was prepared by the Slovak Game Developers Association (SGDA) in cooperation with the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava and the Trnava Game Guild. SGDA, aiming to highlight exceptional digital game projects, presented the Slovak Game of the Year 2018 award and the winner was *Shadows: Awakening* by Games Farm.

The European Conference on Game-Based Learning 2019

Sue Nugus

The European Conference on Game-Based Learning (ECGBL) is an annual conference attracting people from all corners of the globe who are interested in the current research into games-based learning. Now in its 13th year the conference has previously run in the UK, France, Austria, Norway, Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Germany. This year 250 people from 30 different countries participated in the conference in Odense at the University of Southern Denmark.

Enlightening keynote presentations were given by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen from Serious Games Interactive on the topic of Social Gamification in Blended Learning Games and Helle Marie Skovsbjerg from the Design School Kolding who spoke about Playful Play-Design: Balancing Danger and Safety in Children's Full Body Play. Academics representing a wide range of GBL related topics presented their peer reviewed research on topics ranging from games-based learning and 21st century skills to gender sensitive games-based learning and games-based learning with human movement interaction. The proceedings of the conference are published and indexed by Scopus and Clarivate Analytics Web of Science. Participants were also entertained by an interactive session on LEGO Education in collaboration with the LEGO Foundation.

The final rounds of 7th International Serious Games Competition was also run during the conference. There were three competition streams this year for fully developed games, games under development and for the first time a category for student developed games. The winners of the three competitions reflected the importance of both digital and non-digital applications for GBL with the overall winner of the fully developed game being Bilgen Demirdaş from Turkey with her game, *Master of Numbers*, a maths and strategy game using tokens and cards aimed at secondary school children. In the games in

development category there were joint winners with an innovative board game for raising awareness in young people of the issues faced by Coventry's rising homeless population called, *Homeless Monopoly* by Jackie Calderwood from the Distruptive Learning Media Lab at Coventry University in the UK and a digital card game to teach problem solving and maths concepts to primary school children called *Maths Duel* by Pierpaolo Dondio from the Technological University, Dublin. The student competition was won by students from the University of Ulster with their board game, Solar Race, that utilises Amazon Alexa as a quizmaster to teach primary school children about the solar system.

ECGBL 2020 is being hosted by the University of Brighton in the United Kingdom. More information about how to submit a paper to the conference and how to participate in the Games competitions is available at www.academic-conferences.org/conferences/ecgbl/.