WNOP episode 117 – 26th of February 2018

How much money is earned in esport and how to make a career there? Let’s ask Wiktor “TaZ” Wojtas – former leader of the Virtus.pro team.

Shownotes: http://jakoszczedzacpieniadze.pl/117

This interview with Wiktor „TaZ” Wojtas was conducted by Michał Szafranski – Polish blogger and podcaster – on 14th of February 2018 – week after TaZ was benched by Virtus.pro.

Video (2 hours 19 minutes): http://fin.ninja/TaZ
English transcript: http://fin.ninja/TaZ-PDF

Podcast and shownotes (in Polish): http://jakoszczedzacpieniadze.pl/117


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This is the "More than money saving" ("Więcej niż oszczędzanie pieniędzy") podcast – episode 117. Today I am talking with the most charismatic Counter Strike player in Poland about the behind the scenes of esports and his career.

Hello and good morning! Welcome to the 117th episode of "More than money saving" ("Więcej niż oszczędzanie pieniędzy") podcast. My name is Michał Szafrański and on my show I’m introducing clear and proven ways to multiply savings. I tell how to spend money sensibly and how to courageously pursue passions and dreams. If you are looking for a bit of financial and emotional stability in your life, this is the podcast for you.

Hi! I like to surprise you and to expand your horizons. My today’s conversation will be like entering the terra incognita, an unknown land. Especially, for all of you who are not interested in computer games and the so-called esport – a computer games rivalry.

The biggest esports event in Poland, the Intel Extreme Masters in Katowice, is currently underway. And this weekend - the finals of the Counter Strike tournament will be held. 16 teams from all over the world will compete for victory. Among them, the most famous Polish team Virtus.pro. The total prize pool is half a million dollars, and the winner will win half of it – exactly $250,000.

My guest today is Wiktor Wojtas, know better under his nickname TaZ. Until recently, he was the leader of the Virtus.pro, but was sidelined from the team just two weeks ago. We talked shortly after the breakup with VP and will also refer to it briefly.
In my personal opinion, TaZ is the most charismatic and successful Counter Strike player in Poland. Suffice it to say that he has so far devoted 19 years of his life to this game and together with the VP team he has won many competitions around the world – including the World Cyber Games in 2006 and 2011. In 2014 – as the captain of the Virtus.pro team – he triumphed at the Intel Extreme Masters in Katowice. For years, he is considered one of the world’s leading CS players, and at the same time – the oldest. And although he has been prompted several times to retire from esport, he continues to prove that he is still a valuable pro player.

We talk about the passion for the game, about his way to the first and subsequent winnings, the behind the scenes of esport, the resources and organization of professional teams, the big contracts available only to the best players and finally, about the pros and cons of an esports career and players’ psyche.

I invite you to listen to our extensive conversation.

Michal: Hello Wiktor.

Wiktor: Hi.

Michal: Please introduce yourself to the viewers and the listeners. Say a few words about who you are and what you are doing.

Wiktor: My name is Wiktor Wojtas. People are more likely to know me under my nickname “TaZ”. I’ve been a part of the esports scene and played for many different teams for years now, nineteen to be exact. My last major team was Virtus.pro. This is quite fresh news, but currently I am a freelancer.

Michal: So you’re not on the team anymore? Or are you on the team, but you just don’t play?

Wiktor: Officially, I’m still a Virtus.pro player, but we will see what the next coming days, maybe months bring. Will I be on reserves or maybe I will be doing something else? I’m still thinking about it and I’m also in negotiations with the organization.

Michal: Great. What is esport? How would you explain it to the people who don’t know what esport is?

Wiktor: Esport is basically electronic sports. There are several games across different platforms and few types of events in which you can participate. Personally, I play Counter Strike. It's a shooter with tactical elements. We always liked to say that it's a military-strategic game. That was in the old days. 5-6 years when you said on TV that you play shooters, everyone was like: “What do you mean shooters?”. There was no way for us to promote it. So we’ve had to call it differently.

There are also many other types of games. We have real-time strategy games and there are sports games such as FIFA. There are games like Starcraft, this is a 1 vs 1 strategy game, it’s
huge in Korea and Starcraft players even advertise chocolate on TV. There is a lot to choose from for any young gamer.

Michal: So you started by playing other games, or did you start with Counter Strike? How was it exactly?

Wiktor: It all started with Counter Strike... although, actually it was Quake. But only because my older brother made a LAN connection with his friends in our block of flats and sometimes they let me play. I was a total noob then. If I may use this term.

Michal: Please, feel free to use professional terminology.

Wiktor: I was a total noob then. I watched my brother play thinking "That is so cool", being able to play with someone else. The game didn't really matter. It was more about "Wow, there's someone I can fight with, have a duel here". That's what I was interested in. Even so, I was terribly afraid during my first game. I went to an internet cafe with my brother, he played a tournament there, and I just sat down and wanted to play badly. And I remember, as if it was today, that the player I played against was nicknamed "Pucus". I still have nightmares about it. I won the match by one frag, and I was so shaken up that I still feel it today. And I still remember his nickname, this is something amazing.

The emotions I felt during my first match were huge, but this adventure with Quake did not last long. I played for a month, two months maybe and then Counter Strike came out. My friends took me to a cafe and I saw this game for the first time. So I sat down and started playing. Of course, the owner of the cafe shouted at me, because I was the only one who had no idea how to play and just stood there not knowing what to do with himself. Additionally, I kept changing all the settings. And when I changed my settings it changed walking or shooting for everyone, or something like that. And he said, "What idiot keeps changing that!? Who is responsible?" Well, I raised my hand up. Those were my beginnings and I have to tell you that I remember those days quite well.

Michal: You got fascinated by it. Did you say it was nineteen years ago, so 1999/2000?

Wiktor: Yes, around that time.

Michal: Seems like ages ago. Are you not bored with the game at all?

Wiktor: There are moments of crisis, but I think it's normal and can happen at anything you do. Especially, if you are a person who strives for perfection as I do. I really don't get tired when I have to train a lot, because I always think about the bigger picture. About the goals I want to achieve. So it never bothered me. Of course, there were bad times, but these were related to the fact that I am also a "climate beast". I need to have the right atmosphere to be 100% in the game and on the team. If there is no right atmosphere, you can say that all the time that I devote to training is wasted, because I feel restrained. I need to feel free. If I don't, then ...
Michał: It all seems forced.

Wiktor: That's why when I trained alone, or during all these years I played on these different teams, I really had a lot of fun. Especially during tournaments when there's competition. Getting to know many different people from around the world, learning English. Generally speaking, electronic sports had a lot of influence on my personal development. Not only getting to know the world, but also my intellectual development. I have really learned a lot. I have learned a lot about people, I have learned the language, defeated my stage fright in front of the camera, and also my stage fright before the tournaments. These things didn't come naturally to me. I was not like that from the beginning – like sitting here and smiling and laughing: "Yeah... Let's have a casual talk", no... This is the effect of these nineteen years of training.

Michał: Exactly – training. When did the hobby become your work? When was the moment you finally realized that playing Counter Strike was no longer just entertainment? Probably not a money related moment, because believe that money appeared later on. And not related to the fact that you were good enough to compete.

Wiktor: It's not that simple... and actually I had to decide very early on whether I would follow the path: studies, apprenticeship and becoming an attorney or a counselor, or maybe I would start a career at esport. The most serious decision I made was when I said: “Okay, I will not continue my studies because I believe that electronic sport is the future. This is where I see myself”. But even before that, even during my secondary school, I had to make those hard choices. I was playing tournaments and had problems to catch up because of continuous absences. And on top of that I had to explain to my teachers that I was away playing computer games. Imagine that it was 12, or maybe 13 years ago.

Michał: Year 2003/2004, first success, right?

Wiktor: No, we had our first success in 2005. It was when we won the SEC, or Samsung European Championship, and it was our first major success. But before that happened, I had a decision to make: “Right, am I really good enough? Do I have any potential to make money by playing games in the future? ” Because you know, education, good grades had great influence on my well-being and even my self-esteem. I was a guy who really hated being last. I always wanted to be in the lead and if, for example, the only thing I could afford in maths was a D, then I thought: "Wow, this is really bad." And it wasn't because I had problems and I couldn't deal with them, but rather because I couldn't spare any time for them. Because all my time was devoted to playing a computer game that made me happy. It was 90% fun, joy, but the remaining 10% in my head was like: "Okay, that's the future". I already knew that Starcraft was becoming popular. But I became more interested in CS only because it turned out I could get a discount for being on the team at the internet cafe. If I played well and got on the team I could pay 3 PLN instead of 5 PLN or even play for free.

Michał: 3 PLN per hour?
Wiktor: Yes, per hour. Initially, I paid 5 PLN, then when I got on the team it was 3 PLN. But later on – a guy nicknamed "Yak44" – I remember his name was Jan Bużko – really cool guy. When he saw that I was good enough to be on the team, he said: "Okay, you can play for free, you’re the best at this cafe, you can play free of charge." I thought: "Wow, this is my first success." I was really happy about that and immediately told my parents.

Michal: When was it?

Wiktor: Long time ago, 2001 maybe? I’ve reached my level quite quickly because I was devoted and really wanted to become the best. Whatever I did... I always wanted to best. And if I couldn’t achieve this level of motivation at school: I thought: "Alright, devote yourself to CS". That was the time when I found out about tournaments in the States. Tournaments where you can play for big money. These were the times of NIP and X3, I can’t even remember this team... incredibly strong. And that’s when I really started to really get interested.

Michal: What kind of money you could win at such tournaments?

Wiktor: It was probably around 10,000 or 15,000 USD or Euro and I’m not entirely sure if it wasn’t a prize pool. It’s possible that it was the prize pool.

Michal: Prize pool, meaning amount to be divided between several teams.

Wiktor: Yes. The main prize was maybe 7,000 USD and these were the big tournaments.

Michal: Quite different time and money, right? How big are those top prizes in CS nowadays? 500 thousand USD? I’ve seen a prize pool this big quite recently.

Wiktor: The largest prize pool currently, when it comes to games in general, is of course at The International, where these pools reach tens of millions of dollars. However, the biggest CS tournament at the moment is WESG. It’s a tournament organized in China. It is the successor of WCG, and WCG was once a computer games Olympics.

Michal: World Cyber Games.

Wiktor: It was such an honor to be there. To play, to win any kind of prize. "Wow, great, awesome!". That’s what everyone was playing for.

Michal: You’ve won the main prize at WCG in 2006?

Wiktor: Yes, it was in Italy. I even remember giving an interview in English. It was amazing. What a huge leap. I was looking for the interview recently but couldn’t find it. I really wanted to see...

Michal: How bad your English was back then?
Wiktor: I just really wanted to show the rest of the guys from the team. Show them – “You need to do interviews”. There was this reluctance towards interviews. Because of our bad English, because we thought people would judge, the rest of the world would see and it would make us look bad. But I wanted to show them it’s okay, we should do it anyway. On the other hand, one person should not give interviews all the time – people get bored. It becomes less interesting, because one person can only have so much to say. But I sidetracked here. When it comes to the prize pool in China – the WESG, can’t remember the full name – it is 1,8 million dollars. 800,000 dollars for the winners.

Michal: At Counter Strike?

Wiktor: Yes. This is really a huge leap. And this prize pool, just thinking about it, it destroyed us mentally at the beginning of last year. It was something that could potentially change our lives to a large extent. Winning 800,000 dollars, you divide it into six, part for the organization, part for the coach. But there’s still a lot of money left for you. You can buy an apartment for it. It was a lot to think about, a lot more than before. And I think it was the first time when I thought about the money, “Wow, it would be great to win that kind of money”. I’m sure it affected me in a way at the later stage of the tournament.

Let’s return to these prize pools and what we played for all those years ago. Many people will not know that, but when I started, we played for laser mice. I mean optical mouse. I’m sorry, we used ball mice back then. When I started to play, there were no optical mice yet. We played with ball mice.

Michal: I remember playing Quake with one of those.

Wiktor: You had to remove this ball, you had to scrape all the dirt that it collected from the mouse pad, put the ball back, blow, close it, there it is! Great! And it was so heavy that if you threw it, it would make a hole in the wall. There were tournaments where teams could have six or seven players, and only five optical mice were to win. I remember a situation when we played with the guys. I still played with my brother on the team, he played for a while, and we played for optical mice. Five mice that we somehow had to split equally. Well, we finally sold these mice and divided the money. At least that’s what I remember wanting to, I do not remember how it turned out. But, you played for the fun of it. But these prizes... wow. It really was: "Wow – an optical mouse".

Michal: Yeah, these were the times when you played at internet cafes and few people had decent computers anyway...

Wiktor: In fact, there weren’t too many computer stores either. The prices were huge, and there was no money to spend. We were still kids and we didn’t make any money to buy a mouse for 200 zlotys. It was really a big expense. I can say with confidence that it was all about the passion back then... money, I only started to pay attention to during the last year, when we achieved this 3 year period of stability at Virtus.pro. We signed a 4-year contract and I thought: “Now I can finally breathe”. ...
Michał: "Now I can relax." In a moment we will talk about these times, because I really want to ask you about how much money can be made in esports when you play for the top teams. But I still want to go back to those times when you started. I wonder, how your parents reacted to you playing and when was the moment when they actually saw that it was something that could be your profession?

Wiktor: I had it easy when it comes to my parents. They really supported me and they had a lot of faith in me. From an early age they wanted to support me and my decisions even some of my whims. Obviously, everything had its limits. There were some unpleasant situations, but they really tried to raise me in the best way possible, and I think they did a great job. At least I really like it – I’m very grateful. But when it comes to my constant playing – my mom was not happy with my grades.

Michał: Like the D in maths.

Wiktor: Well, it was nothing to be happy about. Of course, there were other things I was good at. An A in physical education – that’s something. Especially for a gamer. But my grades were not a real issue. At least not until secondary school and high school, when esports started to develop so fast that I was already looking 10 years ahead. Even during interviews I was saying that in 10 years we’ll be playing for millions of dollars. I was absolutely convinced of that. But it wasn’t about the money back then.

And that makes me appreciate my parents and their approach even more. There was no money in it yet. I wasn’t coming home from a tournament with a fat paycheck and a suitcase filled with millions and saying: "Look mom! It’s worth to support me.", no. My parents knew I was passionate about it, that I really want to achieve something and I’m good at it. It brings me joy, I can develop my skills, why should they disallow? It was really important to have that kind of trust and approval. My dad, who had to get up at 3 in the morning, go to a whole seller to get merchandise and was coming home after 6 would very often pick me up from the cafe at 11 or 12 so I didn’t have to come back alone in the evenings. Sometimes he had as much as 3 hours of sleep. All year long, day after day. It was 45 minutes from my house. I was going there by bus and he would pick me up later on. Huge sacrifice and support. I wouldn’t be where I am today without all of their help.

Michał: It’s great to have such parents. I wonder if I would be a kind of father that allows the child to play without any limits? I wonder if there’s a moment when you finally realized yourself – because I know that it fascinated you and so on. And you said you had that moment in college when you really had to make a difficult decision. Was it rather a smooth transition to the world of professional Counter Strike, or was there such a moment that you would consider a breaking point?

Wiktor: You know what? I don’t think there ever was one, because I never really seen it as going pro. When you asked me: when it stopped being just for fun and it became about the money? Never… If I had to play just for money… I wouldn’t… I wouldn’t even feel like launching the game. If you have to play, you don’t want to play. It’s like going to work. That’s how I see it. Now that I have a child – "Yes kids, okay, you have to go to work to make money
and support your family” – I finally see it. After all these changes I realized I need money to support a family. Before it was all smooth sailings and a lot of fun. My wife is showing me a lot of support though and when I say: ”Let me do that”, she says: ”No, sit and play”.

**Michal:** She understands that what you do is important.

**Wiktor:** Yes of course. She sees what I do and knows that it is my passion, that It’s my life. I really... For me, electronic sports is love. I have often joked that in my heart Counter Strike is first, and then my wife. This is something amazing. I just love electronic sports. There’s nothing else to say. Money, yes it’s great, that it’s developing. This is something I wanted to from early years. I then imagined how the whole ecosystem might look like... what some things looked like, but it wasn’t something that I would take for granted. I suspect that you have questions about that and I’m sure we’ll get to that and everyone will understand.

**Michal:** We’ll get there, great. Okay, I’m not tormenting you with more questions about when your hobby turned into a job, because it seems that this moment really can’t be determined. Speaking from my own experience, I know that I had to mature for many years and today if someone asks me: ”What was your breakthrough moment?”, I know that the breakthrough was a traumatic accident when I really had to think about the future. Still, when talking about things such as blogging or recording podcasts, this is something that I wanted to do since somewhere around late childhood.

Well, let’s move on to what I think is going to be the most interesting part of this conversation. Let’s talk about the earnings. But before we talk about earnings, let me ask you a question about whether earnings can be destructive? The big money that is in Counter Strike today, because you said yourself that they had such an effect – destructive in a sense – to the psyche during the WESG tournament. Do you see the negative side of the fact that there is more and more money in esport?

**Wiktor:** I think that, just as in any other field where money comes too easily, or when there’s too much money at an early age – it can be destructive. You really have to mature to it. This responsibility doesn’t come from nothing, we are developing constantly. I just realized this now. Obviously, I was not running around throwing money away left and right, I was thinking about the future. But that’s only because I come, unfortunately, from a different era of esports. An era when it was barely shaping and a lot of people tried to lie to you. There was a lot of crooks, lot of lies, the contracts were bad. Very often, me and other players did not get their wages. We played for half a year without getting paid. We played one year for descent wages, and the next year for nothing. For example: our employer, who paid us a lot at MeetYourMakers went bankrupt. We were left without an organization for the next 6 months or a full year. But we needed to stay focused and motivated to continue our training. Our motivation was: “We have to win tournaments”. We had to win big, otherwise we wouldn’t be able to play, because of our age.

I come from an era where I had to learn to treat my earnings with respect. The winnings also. It also taught me a lot about people and that’s why the money will not destroy me. I don’t feel their influence on me. Okay, the money gives security, period. Security, nice, a lot of fun,
but mostly security. When we think about recent times, the money is amazing. We’re talking wages at a semi-pro level that could reach 5000 to 40,000 dollars a month on a professional level. And it is only going to get better. We are yet to see the biggest brands at esports. You don’t see Mercedes...

**Michal:** It’s happening.

**Wiktor:** Yes, but you don’t see brand logos such as Coca-Cola, Mercedes, Snickers or others on t-shirts. They don’t sponsor any teams yet. But when they will... huge... huge money will appear. I suspect that the ecosystem will evolve and we will have professionals who will be able to advise and educate younger players and tell them: “Okay, so this is your contract, your earnings are such and such, but you also have a large responsibility, and your responsibilities are this and that.” And they will be able to somehow properly educate this present youth, which, unfortunately, or fortunately (unfortunately I guess) wants everything “now”. They believe that they deserve it and it should be handed to them right away. I’m saying it in general, I’m not aiming at anyone in particular. That’s how our world is functioning at the moment.

Remember how it used to be. If I wanted to watch a show, I couldn’t go to Netflix and watch the whole season. No... It wasn’t like that. At 6PM on Wednesday there was a particular show, show lasts 40 minutes "MacGyver", for example. Well, you had to wait for it... Okay it’s Wednesday, you’re sitting, the homework is done, you are watching it. Okay, so when is the next episode? Next week, on Wednesday. And this is how we learned to be patient, we knew that nothing can happen right away. However, nowadays everything is available “now”. When you have money, you can have access to everything you want and that’s life today. There’s a lack in education in my opinion. In all organizations and generally young people are not being taught to be patient. Ranges – yes. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, it’s not only the money that is destructive, but also popularity. The way electronic sports and the Internet changed our global ecosystem can’t be expressed in words. This is a new world that we need to adapt to very quickly. Because this youth right now, those people who are now 14-20 years old, and a bit older, they are already living it, and we – people in their thirties – who didn’t even want to be interested in it, we have to catch up. It’s a race! We’re not the ones in charge anymore. Oh no! Soon, the youth will take over everything because they present a completely different attitude, different understanding of the world.

**Michal:** It’s happening as we speak. That means you, NEO, you are considered dinosaurs of e-sport. Few years ago, when Virtus.pro formed, there were doubts whether CS 1.6 players like you can come back and play at the same level in CS:GO.

**Wiktor:** Actually, many stereotypes were broken at that time, because we did not just enter and people were wondering: "Okay, but are they still able to play good being this old?", but also, as a Polish team we represented a Russian organization. It was, in my opinion, a major breakthrough, a "it’s not allowed" and "they shouldn’t" taboo breaker. And as it turned out, we could work together, we could cooperate. Now look at what’s going on in the world, there’s so many international teams where every player is from another country. It’s beautiful.
Michał: Gambit was a great example of a melting pot.

Wiktor: Yes, and what about FaZe, mousesports, OpTic? I’m really happy that teams like that exist. That’s how esports move forward. It’s not just about “Gimme more money, more money.” – no! It’s about variety, more teams, more varied teams, more amazing stories, like SK Gaming. That was incredible. Just as we had to fight, win tournaments to make ends meet, SK Gaming share a similar story.

Michał: The Brazilian team.

Wiktor: Yes, the Brazilian team. In Brazil, CS did not grow at all. They did not have any opportunities to train properly there and to play somewhere abroad. So Gabriel Toledo – “FalleN” figured that they need to raise money. Then they had Gamers Academy, which is a kind of school for players. And from the money they collected there, plus perhaps from some donations, he flew to the United States with the team to try their hand at various leagues and tournaments. Look at where they are now.

Michał: Yes, one of the world’s top teams.

Wiktor: Personally, I think this is a beautiful story. And it seems to me, that they largely owe their success to the fact that “FalleN” was still young when he did it. The players were also young, but they owe him so much. Their roots, where they come from, caused that they could really handle the money well. It didn’t destroy them. And the success did not affect them, because they will always remember where they came from. They started from nothing and they were training in terrible conditions, sitting back to back and in a room where there was at least 30 degrees of heat. So the guys really know what it means to work hard and that’s why they will be successful until one of them says “I’m sick of it and I want something more”. Well, that’s a beautiful story.

Michał: Okay, let’s talk about how the whole Counter Strike scene is organized, how it looks from behind the scenes. You said – there are teams, there is an organization. For people who are not at all aware of how it works, how would you say this structure looks like?

Wiktor: When it comes to team structures within an organization, I think that the standard is that there is a team and there is a coach.

Michał: And a team, is five players.

Wiktor: Team is five players and, usually, a coach. Now we also have analysts who simply analyze the replays of opponent games and prepare various tactics, they also tell the players what to expect from their next game.

Michał: Those analysts. Is common to have them on the team?
**Wiktor:** Yes and what's more... what always amused me. Some teams want to have two coaches on the server during exhibition matches. Obviously, one coach oversees the team and the other one... well... he takes notes on how the opponents are playing.

**Michal:** The second coach oversees the opponent.

**Wiktor:** Unfortunately, during sparring games, it’s impossible to avoid playing against a team that in a weeks’ time you might meet in the final game of a tournament. This team will know everything about you, and you will know everything about them. That really complicates things, more than you can imagine. There’s no pure game like “Wait, I’ve got a new strategy to surprise you with”. No. It’s very difficult to surprise your opponent. Obviously, you can hide some of your tactics from that opponent, another tactic from a different opponent and so on. But the truth is, each team has one favorite tactic that works. If the game doesn’t go the right way, they use the tactic that works best. And if you reveal it during training, it makes things even more difficult. More creative teams are very often the winners. That is a fact. The winning team is the one that was bold during the decisive moments. But, let’s get back to the structure...

**Michal:** Wait. Before we go any further, I want to ask you about the role of the players on the team. Is there any form of division? For example, we have five players, each of them is a specialist in some area, or is each player universal? I know that it could be different for each team, but how was it like in Virtus.pro?

**Wiktor:** In general, I think the whole system should be based on the fact that the players are universal. Certainly, it will help a lot when creating a team. Because no player will be on an position that he doesn't like, and he will not be forced to perform tasks that don’t suit him. However, in the real world, each of us shows different behaviors – one person is more passive, the other person is more aggressive, he likes to act more. Others prefer some actions are done by others: “I will wait, I will do what’s mine…”

**Michal:** So at least the first, opening actions, are done by others.

**Wiktor:** Exactly, someone else will do something, I'll wait, I'll do mine in a moment. I'm not just taking about the game here, and it's not about the: "Oh, I don’t want to ruin my stats, I don’t want to get fragged.” No, I’m talking about real character. We all represent different character traits and we feel better in certain roles. If you assign someone to a passive role and in real life this person has ADHD and likes to be constantly on the move, you’re not just hurting the person, you’re hurting the whole team. Of course, he could do well on this position, but will never be able to reach his full potential. When it comes to roles... one role is quite obvious. The sniper. Many teams have three or four players who are good with the rifle, because there are several positions on the map that they need to cover. It’s best the one to cover it is a sniper. That allows for greater distance covered, leaves more time for rotation and allows for more risk on the other side.

**Michal:** Rotation meaning position change. Moving from one bombsite to the second bombsite.
**Wiktor:** Yes, exactly. I think that that it's easy to understand. Sure, there is also a leader, he is in command. There are people responsible for first contact, the first so-called "picks" during the round. There are also people responsible for throwing the right grenade, when they don't go in first, support, you might say.

Since we are on the subject of roles. It’s often said, that you can’t play well if you’re a leader. That’s not true! Look at "FalleN" from Brazil, who, despite being the commander, is still one of the best, if not the best, sniper in the world and is among the best players in general. Next, someone will say: “You can’t have good stats if you are passive and wait”, but there's "coldzera" who is currently the best player in the world. And I could name other players, and not just players from SK Gaming. There is also a player from Ukraine, "ange1", who is a leader and a great individual player. He has a well-organized team and it works great. There are players who play support and still are great players. So for me roles... yes, they are necessary if a team is supposed to work well. Everyone should know their job on the team and don’t block other teammates.

But it is really a matter of sitting down and discussing it with the team so that everyone understands what is more or less expected from them, but you shouldn't block or close paths. You can see on the example of other teams, that nowadays, aggressive and risky play-style is rewarded. I would even call it stupid, but the reward is greater than the risk. That’s why players are not afraid, and it seems to me that the teams have already developed a system for such occasions: "Ok, we can afford to lose one player, we can manage being four”.

**Michal:** Yes, at least "We might get some info".

**Wiktor:** Yes. And this is a matter of mental attitude. We can go back to the structures. Psychological attitude must be appropriate. Many teams hire mental trainers, who instruct players on how to act and play under greater pressure. And it actually helps a lot. Ninjas in Pajamas – they struggled last year. They had mediocre results so they hired a mental trainer who organized their time outside the game itself. He also supervised how they communicate on TeamSpeak.

**Michal:** A voice chat communication system.

**Wiktor:** A little bit like Skype. He supervised their communication to make sure the information they share is clear. No confusion, no complaints, no emotions. Just fast and clear information that does not disturb hearing inside the game.

**Michal:** And at the same time, the information should be useful.

**Wiktor:** Yes of course. Making this information brief and concise requires work. Because it is not just that the sender has to “compact” the message, the other players who receive this information also have to “decipher” it accordingly. This is a job, and that’s alright, because they almost immediately, probably two weeks after hiring this coach, won IEM Oakland, which is one of the largest tournaments in the States, with a pool of around $400,000. And
they were going through a bad time then, so it’s nice to see that it works in some way and can help. Later, of course, they started to play a lot worse, but it seems to me that these are just perks of the job. If we make a small change that proves to be successful, we immediately think to ourselves: “Wow, it really worked? Great, now we just keep doing the same”. You’re not really sure how to keep it up. Truth is, you have to continue to work on yourself and this success can come back soon.

But alright, we have mental coaches and sports psychologists also start to become a part of the scene.

**Michal:** When it comes to Polish teams, are all those people – psychologists, mental coaches – a standard, or is it something unorthodox?

**Wiktor:** From what I’ve heard, AGO Esports is structured similarly to a professional football club. But that was expected to happen, since the owner is a former co-owner of Legia Warsaw football club. We didn’t have to wait long for it to happen.

**Michal:** It’s more like in regular sport.

**Wiktor:** Yes, and I’m glad that this is the way this is heading. I’m not sure what good will it do to have the same patterns used in football or any other sport. But, we need some form of trials. Regarding sports psychologist I assumed that I do not need any help. But why not talk to someone and see if it can help me get even a little bit better? And that’s why I took advantage of this opportunity.

There were talks at Virtus.pro to implement that sort of mechanism. I’ve had several meetings with a sport psychologist because I was curious about it. And I can tell you, from my perspective, it’s nothing more than a nice chat and a boost of self-esteem. It’s all about believing in yourself and to reduce the impact of stress during matches. Other than that, it’s a regular conversation. I’ve never seen a psychologist before that, and never discussed life issues, but it could really have a positive effect, especially on the young players. But there’s this sort of a barrier. What if the others will think: “Ah, you’re seeing a psychologist – that means you have a problem.”?

**Michal:** Means that I am flawed.

**Wiktor:** Yes, “Something is wrong with me. What will my teammates think? They will laugh. This is bad.” No, you can’t think like that! If we want to create a professional environment, we need to abolish this stereotypical way of thinking, leave it all behind.

**Michal:** Alright, we have: a team, a coach, we have specialists who work on improving the quality of our game and our psyche. Any other people?

**Wiktor:** Regarding the structure, the game itself and the players I think that’s it. At least, I have no further knowledge on other aspects. You also need people who manage your travel and organize your trips. These are the responsibilities of a team manager at Virtus.pl. Kuba is
both: a coach and a manager. There are teams that have different people for those roles. We often see at tournaments – three people plus team. A manager, a coach and a sport psychologist or mental trainer, whatever you want to call it. Other than that, it's good to have a crew that takes pictures and records videos. A manager is not enough. In the age of internet, where it’s all about Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Twitch you need a professional crew alongside the team. A photographer who captures the best moments. It'll engage your followers more than just a selfie taken with your mobile phone. It’s really cool and gets the crowd excited. Comments, discussions with the supporters – our fans, it’s so great I think that requires a more professional approach. We should improve this contact, this communication. It’s our responsibility. After all, we are public figures, celebrities, and we are considered sort of... idols?

**Michal:** You shouldn’t be afraid to use this word... you are.

**Wiktor:** We influence other people to a lesser or larger extent. That's why I would like it to look nice. Many teams have a photographer present at tournaments, a camera man that goes around a records videos. Of course, you had a chance to see Virtus.pl having a go at it and that’s really great. Question is: how do we want to present ourselves? Do we want the “easy going” approach or a “serious” approach?

**Michal:** It's more a question of PR.

**Wiktor:** Yes, it’s a matter of PR and we also need PR person at an organization.

**Michal:** On the organization level, not on the team, but higher.

**Wiktor:** It should start on the level of the organization. At the moment, we just have the crew and that’s it “Fly for the tournament”. 10 people. Set the budget, give us the money. That’s a different issue though. Personally, I think the worst thing is not having a PR person, who would educate the players on what’s right or wrong. Not just for the team, but for the organization, for the brand, for themselves, the players and their future. Things do not get lost on the internet. It's not like, if we do something stupid today, then in 20 years: "Ha, nobody will remember that I did something bad". It all stays on the web. Our every word, every comment, text, our every action.

**Michal:** And our acting up.

**Wiktor:** Exactly, and what we should do is to acknowledge: “Okay, these are my actions and I’m taking full responsibility”. Second thing is, I should think before I act, before I write something or say something. You really can’t expect a lot from people aged 14-20… I don’t know, even 24 or 25… Well, no... I thing I would expect something out of a 25 year old person. But it’s an age when we are still maturing and we might regret a lot of things we do or say. But if it’s on the internet and the player psyche is weak, he’s easily distracted by those unpleasant incident... he’s done... gone. Not just done as an individual player, but also as a public figure.
Michał: You mean his image is ruined.

Wiktor: Yes, and that’s why it’s important to have a PR specialist. That kind of person can really boost your confidence, help you make the right decisions. Because if you make the right life choices, your game will also be affected. That’s how it works. If I go to a gym and train hard for a year and felt great with my body – that would make me proud. It’s the same with your game, however absurd it sounds, I will play better, because I’m more confident. If I’m confident, I will play at my maximum capabilities. That’s why PR is important... and a person to educate the players. But like in a movie, where a person walks out to talk to the press: “Good morning, I’m here to answer all your questions”. No. It has to be a person who will carry the whole organization on their shoulders, the PR, the education. And the players need to be aware, that this is for their own good. So, a PR person. CEO is also important – a person in charge of everything.

Michał: Wait, let’s go back. We were talking about the team and the organization. Now, please explain what is the role of a team and what is the role of an organization. The team is supposed to play and win, right? What about the organization – is it just the financing party?

Wiktor: It is the financing party, it’s also responsible for attracting sponsors, but really – it’s responsible for monetizing the team. There’s no team without the organization and no organization without the team. If you want to have a team, you need an organization, you need that structure.

Even if you have five players ready to play, you need to form an organization. You need this if you want to get money from sponsors and investors, because they know: “Okay, that’s how it works, I understand”. Nobody will say: “Wiktor, here’s a million for you”, “But how?”, “Go on a tournament”, “Well, thanks!”. That would be beautiful, and I would definitely be more excited about esports. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work like that. Organization monetizes on all the actions that the team does.

PR is really important, also sending the team away on tournaments. Choosing the right tournaments – in the past, players decided on which tournament to go on, but I think it’s better if the organization makes that decision. From a business standpoint, they should know what’s best for the team. Agree with the players on: “Which tournament you should start with this year”. It’s bad if your first event, after two months without real action is a Major tournament for example.

Michał: Major, meaning?

Wiktor: The most important tournament of the year. It’s good to play one or two smaller tournaments. Play for 150,000 dollars first, another one for 100,00 and finally take part in a Major, where the prize pool is 1,000,000 dollars. It gives the players a chance to warm up, fix their mistakes, work on the things they did in training and that’s where you see the beauty of the game. First tournaments during a year are always the worst, that’s why it was so bad that the Major in Boston the first one this year.
Michał: When was it, January right?

Wiktor: January. And it was a pain. It would be great if there was another tournament before. That's why, I think, no one paid attention to the qualification stage, where teams were playing for eight spots at the main tournament. Those qualifications took place a week before the Major. Meaning only 16 teams had some sort of a warm-up before the main event. Two of those teams played in the final. But, that's what happens when you have more time to adjust to the screens, the computers. They had a chance to train there for five days and additional three days before the Major. It was like a bootcamp for them. I think, bootcamps are really important before big tournaments – they can really get you in the tournament vibe: “Okay, something big is coming up, that's why we're here”. Even if it doesn't improve our game, it will definitely improve your mentality. Just being around your teammates helps a lot, and makes you realize that something big is about to happen and you focus. There's no more coffe breaks, no chats with your parents, girlfriends, wives, no text messages no phone calls – no nothing. Everyone is focused on what’s important. It's up to the organization to organize bootcamps. Obviously, it should be agreed with the team first. I'm sure I omitted something, but I'm sure we'll get to it later on.

Michał: Let's talk money. You said that a Counter Strike player can make from 5000 to 40,000 dollars per month. Were you talking about Polish teams, or top international teams? Is the rest of the world making more money? Is there a salary gap, are we making less money?

Wiktor: The rest of the world is making more money for sure. We're still far behind, but we're catching up. There's a lot of interesting investments in Poland, a lot of foreign brands that want to invest money and sponsor Polish teams, and that's awesome.

There’s Kinguin and it’s prospering quite well. We also have AGO, that will continue to develop and prosper. There’s also PRIDE that started from nothing, and are where they are right now. I don’t think they are making more than a semi-pro teams, but they continue to develop in a very fast pace. And what they are making is still good for Polish standards. Virtus.pro, of course. Investor from Russia, highly developed organization. One of the best organizations in the world. That’s our polish elite.

Then there are teams of famous youtubers like Pompa Team. Also Codewise Unicorns – they seem really nice. They did a great PR stunt, the charity for Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy. I think they managed to collect around 4000 zlotys. I really appreciate the fact, that teams that don’t have any real money manage to do things like that. They are everywhere, they fight for every inch, every penny. They might not make a lot of money right now, but I’m sure it will all be worth it in the end once they go pro. They are learning the basics at the moment: “We made 1 zloty, let’s use it wisely”. It’s harder to learn when you have millions...

Michał: To learn how to spend it wisely.

Wiktor: That's right. That's why I’m happy there are organizations that support young talents. As I said before, this youth wants everything “here and now”, the more the better. It's the
same with wages. It’s hard to maintains some of the players, but that’s a different story. It’s hard to grasp.

Michał: And to fully control it.

Wiktoria: But as I said, moneywise Virtus.pro is a world class organization and the wages are also world class. Regarding other organizations – I don’t have all the information, but at least one team is playing for the lowest wages and I’ve no clue about the rest. I mean, I know something, but I’d rather not tell.

Michał: That’s fine. Right, another thing that I find interesting, and I’m sure the people who follow esports will also be interested in... How do you split your winnings? Does the organization gets a bigger cut, or the players? What are the proportions?

Wiktoria: It’s actually a very individual matter. It all depends on the contract. I encourage – read your contracts! It’s high time that young people who signs contracts, wants to go pro, earn a lot of money, learn to read their contracts properly. It’s best to show your contract to a lawyer, who will say: “It’s good, it’s bad”. To be clear: the contracts we signed were very one sided. According to our contracts we put all our trust in one person who manages the whole company, the whole brand. And I don’t mean the CEO, I mean the actual owner. We have a lot of faith in Anton.

Michał: Anton – the owner of Virtus.pro.

Wiktoria: Yes, Anton Cherepennikov, the owner of the Virtus.pro organization. We have a lot of respect for each other and that’s why we could trust him. At least that’s what I think, who knows. Maybe one day, just as when we discussed the internet, I will have to eat my words. Hope not. Anyhow, I don’t suspect the rest of the players in the world read their contracts in full. There are of course teams such as Astralis, where the players own the team – they’re shareholders. So I imagine the contracts are well constructed.

Michał: Now that’s interesting. A team that belongs to the players.

Wiktoria: Indeed, this is a team that belongs largely to the players. Obviously, there are some other investors and people who are in charge, but you would have to ask them for details. They are very open and like to talk about everything. They don’t hide anything and openly speak about their earnings and how it looks in Denmark. And Denmark is not nice, I mean... it’s awesome... but the wages – you need to give 60% or 70% to the government, so that sucks. At least here in Poland it’s much better in that regard so it’s worth to pay your taxes to not get in trouble.

Contracts need to be read. Currently, they are formulated in such a way that they are one sided. There are a lot of sanctions and paragraphs regarding what the player can or can’t do. But there are very few sanctions regarding the organization. Meaning: “If something bad happens, what can the player do about it”. The worst is when it comes to transfers, because the rates are sometimes crazy.
Michał: Can you elaborate? What do you mean?

Wiktor: Transfers in esport work in a mysterious way because a player that makes, let's say, 5000 dollars or euros per month can be bought-out for 100,000 or 300,000 euros. And his contract is valid for one or two years. If you calculate how much the contract is worth, it's really absurd. So it's more about keeping the player on the team, rather than an open discussion: "Alright, so... you want to leave the team?". "Yes", "Okay, but our team will not do very good with the current lineup, so let's talk". We go, we talk. It's not like that. It's more like: "You can't leave the team", "That's how much you need to pay", "If someone pays enough you can leave. Otherwise, you need to stay". It worries me, that there's nothing about some form of a rational buy-out rate. It's a bit like football, the rates are similarly ridiculous. Messi is what? Billion dollars?

Michał: The question is, how much does he earn per season?

Wiktor: The sell him for one billion, good lord! It's absolutely crazy, am I right? Wow. Not a million, a billion, that's a lot of zeroes. That's what I heard, but I might be wrong. I'm not up to speed with football recently. You know, Counter Strike is my whole life. But things are about to change a little bit, there are going to be transfer windows introduced in some leagues like ESL. So there'll be limited time for transfers.

Michał: Those transfer changes will similar to the NBA for example. You have a transfer window and that's it.

Wiktor: Exactly. The season is over, and the transfer window is open. It closes one week before the next season starts and that's it. This is also the time for negotiations. If someone wants to negotiate that is. I really hope it will evolve in the future. But even not, it doesn't look bad.

We can't say it's bad, because there were some fair transfers. Like the one of a player from Bosnia to FaZe Clan. That worked well. In the end they paid around 150,000 or 200,000 dollars, but the negotiations started from a million or half a million. Okay, he's one of top players in the world so I get it. We're talking about NiKo. They reached a conclusion, it worked well. FaZe is an organization of American youtubers and that's really cool. Okay, so they buy all those players, they have those top players in the world – but I take it with a pinch of salt.

Michał: Why is that?

Wiktor: Because the level is very even and I think that there's a huge "talent pool" out there. Even in Poland there's a lot of rough diamonds that are worth to be checked out and approached. That's all it takes to have a second olofmeister or NiKo. Obviously, I'm talking about skill here. There's still the question of psyche and the ability to play at big tournaments with big prize pools, where a player can finally proof his worth. So that's really cool. And it's also cool what FaZe just showed: "We want this player – we buy him" and they did.
Also OpTic, another team of youtubers. Although I think their owner was a Call of Duty player. They are very active on YouTube now. Their public, their fans. The contact with the fans in the States is incredible and that allows teams such as FaZe to make that kind of transfers. It allows OpTic to do the same, because they have an amazing contact with their fans. A fan is not just a person who will donate a 100 zloty per month. No! It's a person who is highly invested in the organization. If the organization takes interest in the fan he will follow it on social media and during live events. If the fan sees "It's nice that the organization noticed me and creates this awesome content for me to watch. I will support them too" and the "donate" button just clicks itself basically.

Michal: That's one thing. Another thing is that, by building a community it's so much easier to attract sponsors.

Wiktor: And that's what it's all about. And they realize it. In he States everyone knows that. That's why there's so much of everything when it comes to YouTube. This popularity is unreal. We do have some impressive transfers in Europe. From the top of my head: mousesports just did a cool transfer, HellRaisers also. Virtus.pro is trying to make a cool transfer. Maybe we have something to look forward to.

Was there ever anything like that here in Poland? Yes, but on a smaller scale, and I don't follow it to be honest. I'll have to look into it... I mean, when I have more time to spare. I blame myself for not being up to speed with the business side of things, but I was more focused on playing Counter Strike. I realize that it's a very interesting subject though. A lot of things can be done. It is still an open book, and we can have a lot of influence on what's next. Especially experienced players who know how everything looks like on the inside. We will see what the next few months bring.

Michal: We started off from things regarding the prize pools.

Wiktor: And I didn't even mention them.

Michal: No, you didn’t, but the conversation took a nice turn. I just wanted to remind you, to tell us how it really looks like.

Wiktor: Generally, the money is divided between the players.

Michal: Everything is divided between the players? Let’s say, the whole 100,000 dollars.

Wiktor: You have your five players, you have the coach – he also gets a cut. Depending on the team it’s a bigger or a smaller cut. All depends on his involvement. And a percentage of the prize also goes to the organization.

Michal: How big of a percentage?

Wiktor: That depends on the organization. Some might want up to 40%, others take 10%. There are no clear rules for that. It all depends on how much the organization invests and...
where it is looking to monetize. Where they are looking to cash in on their investment. They might look for it in prizes and the success of the team. Okay, that’s one way to do it, but I would not encourage it. Teams play on similar level and I think the best place to look for money is good PR. A nice presentation of the players, creating stories, narratives surrounding the players. Creating interesting video content. Not necessarily interviews: “What can you tell us about the game?” “What can you say about this map?” No. We, the supporters... Yes, I’m also a fan, I watch games, I enjoy it a lot. I love to watch how the games play out, what kind of tactics the players use and what will they write. Sometimes they are having a go at each other and that’s fun, very real. As fans, we can follow, we can write something. That’s the power of internet, we can have our own opinion on a matter and take part in a discussion. When GuaridiaN writes something to s1mple or s1mple with k0nfig – we can give our own opinion on that. Maybe it will spice the conversation up, maybe not, maybe it will not even be noticed, but it’s really cool to have that contact.

**Michal:** So 10-40%. Can we assume that this much money goes to the organization?

**Wiktor:** Yes, I think it’s safe to assume 10-15%, because some players want to win tournaments and the others are more like: ”Wow, so we have a million to win, but if we win we only get 600,000?”. ”Only”, because going from 1,000,000 to 600,000 – you can say ”only”. It’s better not to take away that much if you want to motivate the players. Because, let’s face it, money is always a good motivator. It’s just one of the prizes. There’s the win itself, there’s prestige, and there’s money. Money that we can use later on, money that is necessary for us to keep playing and to survive. It wouldn’t be possible without money. So prestige and monetization.

For me medals are extremely important. I don’t understand why at a Major, a tournament where there are hundreds of thousands in prizes, they don’t give medals. And I don’t mean making a medal that is in fact a piece of gold painted piece of metal. No, this medal should have something extra. So much money goes into esports, they really should be ashamed that there are no medals.

**Michal:** There’s just one trophy for the winning team and nothing more.

**Wiktor:** What really raises the prestige? The fact that I won and I can take a photo with this beautiful medal that I’m so happy to have. I remember those medals we won at WCG. The 60,000 dollars we also won – I was not thinking about it. I was so happy with the gold medal. I drove to the airport with that gold medal on my neck because I wanted everyone to see that I have it. But that’s in the past. I start to think that electronic sports are becoming more about the money, then prestige and somewhere at the end: a piece of something to hang on your neck, but ”What the hell is that anyway, I’ll just throw it away”.

**Michal:** Isn’t that because young people who enter esports do it mainly for the money? Money is the main motivator? It didn’t use to be like that.

**Wiktor:** I really hope not. I really can’t tell you why, and what is the real motivator right now. I just know that I had my motivations when I started, and now that I think about it, it was a
lot better back then. Money should be something extra, an incentive: "Wow, I can afford to buy this or that", and you should go around thinking: "I want to be the best there is, and I believe I will". Hard work, dedication, sacrifice. The key word being “sacrifice” – there’s no success without it. I think that every legendary figure in sports underlined the importance of sacrifice. Let’s not fool ourselves, sacrifice also means there will be less or no money to start with.

**Michal:** It’s like playing the long game. If I invest today, than someday in the future I can reap what I sow?

**Wiktor:** This is nothing but an investment in yourself. We invest in ourselves, not money, but time and commitment. If we do, we will get results. Of course, the results can come very quickly. After a week, after two months. But they can also come after a year, after two. One player can be mentally adjusted and all he needs is a team to start to shine. Another player needs to go through a lot more. Talent is not enough, he needs to play at a tournament, get defeated, mess up, deal with it. Really screw up in several games and then he will start to shine. It is different for everyone.

**Michal:** Tell me Wiktor, what did you have to sacrifice?

**Wiktor:** I can easily say – my whole life. I invested everything there is. I had amazing friends, a fun crew, environment that grew up in since I was little. I used to go out to play basketball with the people from the neighborhood. It was a fun life. Regular childhood. I really enjoyed it, but the moment I got fascinated with Counter Strike I had to make a decision to invest all my time in it. If I wasn’t playing – it’s midnight and I’m not playing, someone else in the world was playing, training. When I was asleep – someone was training. So all the time I had, all the time I was awake. I assumed that with my dedication and commitment, if I use that time on training there will be few people who play more. And that, I presumed, that had to give me an advantage.

And I still believe that all the time invested, all the sacrifice... if you dedicate yourself completely. You are focused and give a 100%. This will bring results. It’s not a waste of time. Being talented, having an opportunity to play tournaments, having a good team – that’s a lot. It’s important to have a crew to play with, because Counter Strike is not an single-player game. You need the right people to play with, with good attitude, create some good tactics, have a good day. So many variables, but the time you invest in yourself will always give you more stability.

**Michal:** Increase your chances.

**Wiktor:** Maybe it’s funny, but that’s just me. A lot of people thing that if you play a lot, you will get a lot better. I assume, that if you invest a lot of time in the game – you become more stable.

**Michal:** The game will become more predictable.
**Wiktor:** You will play with more confidence. You will not become a superstar, no. But you’ll have that stability. Sort of confidence in your head, you’ll keep it steady. That’s it. That’s what I think. It’s really important to keep your skill at a steady level while training. Also to understand the range of your talent and skill.

**Michal:** I want to return to the financial and organizational aspects. We discussed that the organization takes care of all things related to business. We discussed how the prize money is split. What else can the players do to make money?

In fact, let me divide this into two questions... There are those additional activities like selling your image. Some players are also streamers, a lot of players tries to make some money “on the side”. I’m interested in your opinion on whether a player is free to do other things, or does the organization somehow limits his freedom? That’s one thing. The other thing is: what about getting sponsors? Is it up to the organization entirely, or players have a say in that?

**Wiktor:** I’m laughing because I was just about to tell you a thing about the image, while you were asking your questions. When we sign a contract with the organization, our image is a part of the contract. The organization is free to use our image.

**Michal:** So it’s predetermined by the contract.

**Wiktor:** Yes, when the player is bound by the contract he needs to do the things that are mentioned in the contract between a sponsor and the organization. He has to fulfill whatever deal was between those two sides.

**Michal:** Does the player have anything to say in that matter? For example – Pasha was featured in a Media Markt advertisement in Russia – was it something he was obliged to do? Could he choose which commercials he would be featured in or not?

**Wiktor:** He had to do it. He had to do those exact commercials, but he did have some choice. Choice regarding the date of shooting I think. The dates were selected so they would not coincide with any of our responsibilities. It’s not like: “Hey, when do you want to shoot the commercial?” They just have a list of suitable dates and they choose the one that is the best. Some companies are easier to work with than the others, that’s another thing to remember. The player has some influence – smaller or bigger – on the how the commercial will look like, and the date of the shooting. But that’s one of our duties, if a contract says that there will be commercials with a particular player, this player will also get paid for it. Not just for being a good player, but for promoting the product or a brand. Considering the reach and popularity, It’s no surprise there are deals like that.

**Michal:** The brands are simply interested.

**Wiktor:** But to answer your questions. When it comes to the player limitations, it depends on the contract. That’s why I said at the beginning: “Read, read, read”.
Sometimes there are paragraphs saying that a player is free to sing some individual contracts regarding certain things. But the organization can impose some limitations. For example: computer equipment and gear is supplied by one partner and you have to use it. Sometimes there’s no partner and if you want you can find one willing to support you and sing an individual contract. It’s really up to the organization and how the contract is constructed, how both sides agree on it.

In our case, it varied. Virtus.pro had the type of approach where they would want us to trust them completely when it came to sponsors and brands. In time, it changed and we were able to secure some individual contracts and that was really nice. We, as individual players, also generate reach. We endorse a lot things with our image, it’s good for the organization and the players. If the organization is able to make money out of our image, and at the same it doesn’t restrict us from signing individual contracts and side deals, it really motivates us. Let’s face it, we’re not going to remain young forever, and will not remain on top. So if the organization signs a 2 year deal with a brand that will pay very little money over the course of the next 2 or 3 years, and the players is not able to sign any individual contracts, even though his brand and the whole scene is evolving five times faster, then the player is on a lost position. He doesn’t just lose money, but also motivation, because that contract is bad for him.

I’m not really sure about other organizations, I hear things, but I’m not able to confirm any of the information. But that shouldn’t come as a surprise. Contracts prevent you from sharing that kind of information and you have to respect that.

Michal: Of course. You said that you really should read the contract carefully... I wonder, do players have any agents. Is that a common thing to have someone represent you in front of the organization?

Wiktor: No. There are no agents, but I think it’s just a matter of time and a necessity. This is what I was talking about, those contracts, individual deals, transfers, terms of leaving the team, terms of joining a team. In other sports, when you sign for a team you get a bonus. There’s no such thing here. It’s common for football players to get a part of the transfer fee when he is sold to another team.

Michal: They also have some profit from merchandise like shirts.

Wiktor: Exactly. And these terms are negotiated by an agent. Speaking from my own experience, as a professional gamer, there’s very little time to go over the contract, ask for a meeting, plan it accordingly.

Michal: Negotiate the term, plan a strategy.

Wiktor: Yes. To be honest, there’s really no negotiation, it’s just: “Let’s go with the flow”. Alright, so I know more or less what’s this all about, I planned the things I want to say. But let’s face it – the organization, or a representative of the organization is the one in control, because he has an actual idea about business. And he will always be prepared for any type of
negotiation. It’s not a casual conversation: “Hey, what’s up? Would you like some coffee?”, what you sign will be binding for a period of at least a year or more. That’s why the other person is always prepared and the player is just thinking: “I really want to earn that kind of money”. Period. Doesn’t think about anything else. And there are so many things to think through, to talk about, to go over, but we had no idea about it being young. We didn’t realize, but this is esport... Here pro players in League of Legends – the most popular game in the world – are 15-16 years old.

**Michal:** Unless they have smart parents and advisors, they will sing unilateral long-term contracts. By the way, how long are the contracts? Like yours with Virtus.pro? Can you even tell us?

**Wiktor:** Yes, it was official that our contract with Virtus.pro is binding for a period of four years. The length depends on many factors. Depends on how well we know the organization, what are the long-term plans of such organization and the players. Do the players like the organization, do they like other teammates. A lot of variables, but a yearlong contract is a standard.

This is also changing, a two year long contract is becoming more popular. It leaves some room for re-negotiation the terms of the contract after the first year. I think it is important that these contracts are signed for a longer period of time. They should be at least 3-4 years long. It has a lot to do with the sponsors, not just those that already have a contract with the organization, but also those the organization wants to sign. Sponsors, investors, big brands, companies will not be interested in a team that might fall apart after a year or will change its lineup. Especially when the brand of the organization is weak. There’s a lot of things that bother me, for example: why aren’t any of the big brands present? It’s totally doable with the current reach. I find it hard to believe that brands like Coca-Cola or others that I keep mentioning, car brands, soda brands, candy brands, are not interested. It’s just impossible.

**Michal:** They start to take notice, even in Poland. One of the banks just became a partner or a sponsor of one of the teams. It’s all starting to head in the right direction.

**Wiktor:** I think that it’s a question of what we can present to the interested party, what kind of plan we have. I mean, our plan for the organization, the future, our current reach. If it is improving and what are the trends. If the interested party has some smart people, they will see that in three or four years there will be nothing left but breadcrumbs for those who want to invest in esports.

**Michal:** Or the investment will have to be a lot bigger in those three to four years. One more question popped in my head regarding money. Is there a sense of solidarity among the teammates? Are you all getting paid the same, or is that negotiated individually?

**Wiktor:** It also depends on the organization. At some organizations, players negotiate individually, and there are teams where the players negotiate as a team. I always preferred to negotiate as a team. So that every player earns the same amount of money. There is five of us on the server and we all have different roles, but each gives his 20% towards the win. That’s
what I always assumed. We are currently at a point where not just the skill of the player, but his reach and popularity is taken into account. That also should be somehow rewarded. This was not a job of a PR specialist after all, but of each individual player. The player made himself popular and since he represents the organization it should be somehow monetized. Awarded. That’s what we were aiming at Virtus.pro and we wanted it to work during those four years. I think it is close to what we wanted, but there is still room for improvement. The contracts could be better for both sides, but we are still learning the ropes. Electronic sports are new phenomenon for everyone, and even from the business standpoint, there’s a lot that we need to learn. The legal part needs to be regulated, there are situations where we don’t know what to do, there’s a lot of holes.

**Michal:** And nuances. What do you think was the biggest positive change in esport over the past decade?

**Wiktor:** There’s a lot of good changes.

**Michal:** Go on.

**Wiktor:** Players being very active on social media is a big plus for starters. It really helped a lot.

**Michal:** Shortening the distance between the players and the fans then.

**Wiktor:** Yes, and also the number of fans really grew thanks to social media. I have to admit, that League of Legends really helped the popularity of esport. Riot Games – the people who created the game did it on such a global scale, that all those people who had their backs turned on electronic sports, turned around and realized there’s a big bomb heading their way and they need to react. You’re either in or you’re out. That’s how it looks. League of Legends changed a lot in the way people view esports. DOTA 2 also, The International – a tournament with millions of dollars in the prize pool. That turned a lot of heads and people started to wonder: “Wow, this looks huge, it’s really global”. Counter Strike on the other hand, was always a game fueled by the fans. Fans that really enjoy watching it and Valve allowed them to do so.

**Michal:** Valve, the developer of the game.

**Wiktor:** Yes, Valve, the developer of CS started to invest their time and probably money, because I’m sure they made a lot on those “skins” and “weapon cases” they introduced to the game. Money is money, nobody does anything for free.

**Michal:** A small digression Wiktor, for those who are not familiar... Counter Strike is a type of game that you used to buy from the developer in a single transaction. You only paid once. But that business model of the developer Valve has changed. At the moment, you still pay for the game a little bit of money, couple of euros. And what does the developer really make money on? On selling upgrades. On one hand they give away weapon cases with upgrades and on the other hand, there are microtransactions that were introduced so we can buy a
nicer looking weapon, a different weapon. Different looking weapon – but not improved in any other sense.

**Wiktor:** Skins.

**Michal:** Skins and other refinements.

**Wiktor:** You basically can paint your weapons in any way you want, and that’s what the microtransactions are for...

**Michal:** ... and on a global scale, that means colossal money.

**Wiktor:** Regarding your question about what had the biggest influence on the development of esports... microtransactions had the greatest influence on the evolution of electronic sports and the possibility to bet money.

**Michal:** Gambling, to put it simple.

**Wiktor:** Gambling really helped with the popularity of esport. Unfortunately, gambling is not a good thing, but it helped esports grow and become more popular. Those two things had a great impact for sure, and the developers of those three games I mentioned earlier, they really did a great job. Finally, somebody invested their time and money in a game that they created for the purpose of competition. These games were created to compete. The tournaments are for people to play against each other, to compete. These developers invested money and time, and that’s why we can talk about electronic sports on a global scale.

**Michal:** Few days from now Intel Extreme Masters will start in Katowice and I wonder, because you won in Katowice several times I think... Was it 2014? How is it to play a tournament in front of local fans? Is it fun, more motivating? Or maybe, on professional level, it doesn’t matter whether it’s Boston, Cluj-Napoca or Katowice?

**Wiktor:** To be honest, it’s more motivating and more stressful at the same time. Fans have some expectations when we play at home. We play in front of a great audience that is cheering for us with all their strength and heart. There’s a lot of pressure on the them, we need to be at 100% and really try our hardest to win. Obviously, that win in Katowice, this Major, that was something incredible. The audience, tears in our eyes, it was surreal. An amazing experience.

**Michal:** That was the very beginning of Virtus.pro as a team.

**Wiktor:** Yes, it was the beginning and the big win came fast. Too fast in my opinion, but still... great memories. But it was similar in the following years when we lost in the semis, I think we lost twice in the semis, we were heartbroken. Once, when we lost w Fnatic we didn’t even want to show ourselves if front of the fans. We were destroyed.
Michal: But you did show yourself later, you went out on the stage, said a few important words while the audience was booing the winners.

Wiktor: That was Cologne, you’re talking about Cologne. That was different, I can tell you in a moment. But when it comes to Poland… your heart just can’t take it sometimes. To go out and thank the fans. The shame. We undergo a lot of pressure and stress, because we know how many devoted fans we have. Sure: “They are devoted, so why don’t you go out and sign some autographs, say thank you?”. It happened once, when we just couldn’t get ourselves to go out. We were hurting a lot. We knew that we failed, and we wanted to hide.

But Cologne was a different situation, I really realized this just recently. Before I was like: “I don’t like this team, I don’t support that team, hope it goes better for us”. And that was a breakthrough moment for me. I just stood there thinking: “Damn, why to these people hate those players so much? They’re winners. The only thing they did is that they played very well and defeated everyone”. And then it struck me. It shouldn’t be like that. A legendary team… Not just any team, no. A legendary team, legendary player with the highest number of trophies – olofmeister, was booed by the whole stadium, not just Polish supporters. They were booed at because they won? And you know, I walk out there… it was stupid now that I think about that. I walk out while olofmeister is giving an interview. Guy is a legend, he just won a tournament, he played really well for the whole year, two years even. And here comes TaZ, me… we lost, I wasn’t really playing well. And I had that thought that when I take that mic, the crowd will go silent. When I think about it now, it was really stupid, like: “Wow, what were you thinking?”.

But I was in some sort of a trance. I just walked out and addressed basic human emotions, to show respect to the winners. I was just in a deep shock. You couldn’t really tell, but I was shocked that after 3-4 seconds it became silent and olofmeister could finish the interview. Honestly, I was so surprised. Even though we lost, I felt very uplifted by how the supports changed their behavior. That we had their respect. Us, being public figures, we need to earn that respect. In the way we act, in what we say. It all reflects on how they see us. The people that are cheering for us, or another team.

Michal: I think it’s worth mentioning, this big responsibility that you have. This respect that you get from your fans. You are responsible for showing them what is the right way to behave. What you did in Cologne, walking out, taking the microphone from the person doing the interview and saying: “These are the winners, respect them, respect him”. That was absolutely incredible, a wonderful moment. When I look at your entire career, this was one of the defining moments. You know, there’s a lot of matches. But moments like this… I think we only get so few chances in our life to act accordingly in key situations. What you did back then really shows your character. I’m saying this as a fan. These defining moments are the ones you remember, and I think… considering your emotional state at that moment of painful loss, in a really prestigious tournament, to come out and do something like that… respect, huge respect Wiktor.

Wiktor: It was an incredibly tough game for us, because we had a huge advantage, and we lost despite this.
Michał: I think you really lit up the place. The whole stadium in Cologne loved you for the way you started the match.

Wiktor: I believe that our team always had really lively fans, because we were a lively team. Very emotional. When we were out there, we tried very hard to show the same kind of love to our fans and we were really putting our hearts into it.

Michał: Another really important thing. You mentioned it before, working on your image as team, not just as an individual player. You’ve played with each other under one organization for four and a half years. There’s no other team like that in the world, no other team that wouldn’t make any changes. Safe to say, you’re truly one of kind. It’s something that makes people love you as a whole... but also hate when you’re losing.

I’ll digress for a moment here, for the sake of people watching us, but mostly watching you. When I look at Virtus.pro play, after you were “sidelined”, I watched the last two games, yesterday and the day before, and a part of me was: “I hope you lose guys. For grounding TaZ”, and other part of me was: “Nice, great that you are winning”. Honestly, that’s how it was, and I think that a lot of fans are going through the same emotions right now. In a way, we want “our team” to win, but at the same time we know it’s not really “the same our team”, because there are some changes. I can still root for them, but I also see the whole picture.

Wiktor: I used to think like that: “Okay, time for a change”, or if someone was kicked out “You kicked me out, I hate you!”. But now, even with Katowice around the corner, I see no joy in thinking: “I hope they fail, hope it goes bad for them and they see the mistake they made” – no, I really don’t. We had something good, it ended, something new will start. I just think about the great four years we had. For years that we’ve been there for each other and the fans. It’s a start of something new and that’s fine. It’s a new chapter in life for me, but Virtus.pro as an organization is still there. There are still four players that everyone cheered for there. I just wish it remains like that. It’s really important, especially now, when Michu joins the team. He’s on loan at the moment, he’s a young player and I don’t want people to boo him out and be unhappy, because I’m not on the team anymore, no! I just wish it stays the same – for fans to cheer for Virtus.pro and for our Polish team to win.

Michał: The only Polish team in Katowice.

Wiktor: I was really hoping that AGO would qualify for the tournament, so we could cheer for two Polish teams. AGO didn’t make it, we cheer for one. Pure and simple.

Michał: Exactly! If you could summarize and tell us, what was the toughest emotional moment in your esport career so far?

Wiktor: I can think of two stages in my career that were really challenging. First one was in the days of Counter Strike 1.6 when we had problems with our finances, the organization, the team, an overall bad atmosphere. A real rollercoaster. It was hard, but we all knew why we are playing. We were “tournament beasts”, we played as if our lives depended on it. We had
to win tournaments to continue doing the thing we love. And all those other things that were happening on the team, in the organization, the fact that we had no money to live, we put those things aside. The most important thing was to win the tournament. We did everything in our power to achieve that goal. Including going to bootcamp, where the conditions were way below “wow” comparing to current conditions. It was a hard time, but it really helped to shape my character. Our characters. Every player felt it differently, but it was a real experience booster. The other challenging stage was Virtus.pro.

At that time, I really wanted to put the past behind. I wanted for everyone at the team to feel peaceful and happy and to prove, that you don’t need to make changes every half a year. In fact, that was our philosophy from the start. I never wanted to make any changes. But in fact, we did two changes. First one when we parted ways with Mariusz (Loord) and Kuba (kuben), it was also when Jarek (Pasha) was done playing and me and Filip (Neo) were about to start playing League of Legends. It was really hard, because we had no idea what the future will bring. Me and Filip were playing League of Legends and I was convinced that this was the right thing to do. I was trying to make Filip understand that too, because 1.6 had no future. The moment we all parted ways was not a moment when we said: “Okay, time for a change”. It was an honest moment when we decided: “That’s it, the Golden Five is disbanded, we need to go our separate way, because we really don’t know what to do”. And after that, after making that decision, I was playing for over a month, day after day, 10h straight, with all those young Polish players to see if I can scout any talents.

Michal: But it was League of Legends, right?

Wiktor: No, it was CS. After playing League of Legends for a while I decided to go back to CS, we believed in that game. But it was tough, the future was unclear. We had no idea what would happen next, if we can achieve that same kind of success playing a different game. We decided to stick with CS. It really was the hardest moment of my career, there was nothing to look forward to. I really couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel and made most of my decisions going in blind. I was the only one that still played CS, because I thought that if the developer who released DOTA 2, Team Fortress and Counter Strike, now announced SC:GO, and keeps on fixing something, updating, upgrading”. And in the meantime, those microtransactions arrived and had a real impact on the popularity, I thought: “Alright, they are going to do it!”. Period.

Michal: An act of faith.

Wiktor: Act of faith, it was an act of faith in the developer Valve, nothing more.

Michal: Great! That decision really paid off.

Wiktor: You know, at that moment in time, very few people, tournament organizers, would say: “Stick with CS”, everyone was saying: “Start playing LoL”.

Michal: Everyone thought CS was finished.
**Wiktor:** Most thought CS was finished, everyone said: "LoL is the bomb, play LoL. It’s going to be great, there’s money to be made, that’s the future".

**Michal:** You played LoL for a while, yet you decided to put your trust in CS. I wonder, other than this act of faith, was there anything else that helped? Something that led you to believe that this is a good idea. Was there something that kept you convinced CS is worth sticking with?

**Wiktor:** The only thing I had was my whole history, all our achievements as Counter Strike players. I was told, that if this is going to happen, if it’s going to be big, if CS:GO is a hit, then our brand would help us to find an organization, and at that moment we were playing for half a year without making any money. We played CS 1.6 for the last six months or longer, eight or nine, without making money, without any income... living on our savings. We were playing tournaments, we had an organization, there was no other organization, no other possibilities. It was really hard and the only thing that kept me playing SC was my brand. Even though I was quite good at LoL – that’s people told me anyway – I had nothing more.

**Michal:** You would have to start from scratch.

**Wiktor:** Nowadays, there’s a lot of great League of Legends players, but only few of them get their chance to go pro. I think that it would’ve been the same back then. I believe that the risk was greater than with CS. And that’s why I decided to stick with CS. But on the other hand, maybe I was just afraid of changes, just as I am now. A certain chapter is finished in my life and wow, I just realized how big of a change that is going to be. But really, we, humans, we really hate changes. If it’s all nice and cozy, we don’t like to change where we stay. If we feel comfortable, why change it? Some individuals are willing to take that risk, and they’re the ones who are successful. But in general, if it’s good, why change it?

**Michal:** You’re 32 years old? Am I right?

**Wiktor:** Will be this year, I’m still 31.

**Michal:** Still 31, will be 32 soon. Tell me, when do you think you’ll stop playing CS?

**Wiktor:** It’s a tough question, because I really want to play CS for as long as possible. There’s still many challenges ahead of me, a lot of things I would like to change, things I don’t like. I don’t like the aftertaste of my departure, of my game, me as a player. It’s not what I was working on my whole life, my whole career, it’s just the last three and a half years, one and a half year exactly. I don’t want the last one and a half year or two years to have an impact on my whole career. That’s one thing I’d like to change, and I know I can still do that. I told you at the beginning of the interview that I love electronic sports, that I love to compete. Thinking that I’m burned out, that there’s no fight left and so on is completely wrong. I know that if I’ll able to find a group of people focused on winning, with the right kind of DNA, the dedications, the skill, and we do have that kind of players in Poland, I know, that success will be at our fingertips. This change in my life is not going to be something that will bring me down, it’s that important moment that I need to use for motivation. I never had
problems with being motivated, but this should provide an extra kick: “No! You can’t give up now. Turn it around at make as much as you can out of it”. The question of my next step, which door to open, I know I want to play. I want to win the next Major! I can already imagine it. I’m ready to work for that. But we have to wait and see.

**Michal:** Many doors are open for you at the moment, there’s so much for you to choose from in terms of your career. I wasn’t asking because I have no faith in you. I have a lot of faith in your skill. I don’t need faith – your results speak for themselves. It’s natural for athletes to retire, and we all know that it’s bound to happen at some point. I mean, playing at the same level and keeping in shape is not something that is physically possible to do your whole life. Of course, esport is a bit different, but even I can tell – and I’m a bit older than you – I was a lot better at CS 10 years ago.

**Wiktor:** I used to worry about that a lot: “Okay, this is going to be my final year. No maybe this year”. But look at current athletes, at what age are they achieving the best results, even in UFC. A fighting sport, where timing, reflexes have to reach an absolute peak to win a fight. When’s the best time for them? Around 28-29 years of age. It’s the combination of speed and experience. Similar with hockey goalkeepers, they need perfect reflexes to catch that puck – their top form is in their 30s’. Same in football. When reflex and experience is important and not just stamina and athleticism, then we see that being 30 is not bad at all.

There’s one other thing. There’s a great responsibility resting on my shoulders. The moment I “put my mouse in the drawer” and say “enough”, is going to be a moment when a career span for esport players is going to be set: “Okay, so at esports a career last from-to”. You know where this is coming from? I’m one of the oldest pro-gamers, but let me tell you, I’ve seen very few players who would have more fight in them, and be more competitive than I am. If that flame burns out, it’s going to be very hard for me. It’s not about skill and achievements but that competitive spark. I know, that the moment I say “Enough” is going to be moment when an esport career age limit is set.

**Michal:** A benchmark. Did you ever thing about what’s next? What happens after you’re done with esport?

**Wiktor:** I was thinking about it recently and I remembered a funny situation from 2016. I had a conversation with the owner of Virtus.pro, who suggested that maybe it’s time for me to stop playing, that maybe I should start doing something else, that’s a good time for me to switch sides. And I said: “Trust me, we’re going to win more tournaments, just wait and see.” And we’ve won two big tournaments I think. He also mentioned it later in one of his articles. I think there’s a lot of to be done in esport, a lot of things to be discovered, all those different roles that we were discussing. I would like to do something related with raising awareness about electronic sports, to show the public how huge it is, that this is the future. That’s what I see myself doing. Not raising awareness of the players but raising the awareness of the society, the fans. Maybe I could work for one of the bigger leagues. Or maybe organize things. A lot of those positions do not exist in electronic sports yet, they have not been created. They are necessary but are not there yet.
The time has come when big brands want to enter electronic sports, investors who want to invest money. They know a lot about business but have no idea about electronic sports. Okay, maybe they have some idea on how to make money out of it but have no idea how things work on the inside. Trust me, I know what I’m saying because people who are in charge of some teams switched careers from business or regular sports like football, hockey, basketball. They very often have a completely different idea about espots and realize how different it is. We need business education for the players, so when they reach my age or become older, they know how to run a team, start an organization, how to advise the investors, these are the possible jobs that they might do. Big brands want to invest, It’s the future. We need people and business partners who would navigate big brands through the unknown territory.

**Michał:** What do the players think about those big, prestigious brands and their interest in esport? What do you talk about among yourselves when you see a Mercedes or Audi logo on SK Gaming t-shirts?

**Wiktor:** Astralis had Audi for sure.

**Michał:** SK has got Mercedes then?

**Wiktor:** I’m not sure that happened yet.

**Michał:** No? I’m sure I’ve seen Mercedes somewhere... well, never mind, Audi is there for sure.

**Wiktor:** I know FC Koln signed a partnership deal recently, but I don’t think it’s with Mercedes.

**Michał:** Okay, but Audi was there for sure. Do you talk about it at all?

**Wiktor:** Yes, it’s being discussed, there are questions: “What do you get out of it guys, how does that work?” Those big brands are just getting a feel for the market. It’s just research. They’re not investing millions saying: “Here you go!”.

**Michał:** So the players do not own those Audis yet, right?

**Wiktor:** No, from what I’ve heard they do not own them, they just get some discounts, so it’s not very impressive when you think about it. But that’s how it works for now. Those big brands are just browsing at the moment, they don’t want to spend much before knowing what’s it about. It’s very much related to what I said earlier – those brands are not necessarily interested in hiring a partner or an advisor who know a thing or two about esports. They rather go in alone: “Alright, let’s check this out, let’s learn”, because that saves them money, but they lose time. The question is: will they learn in time, or will it be too late. But it was a breakthrough moment when Astralis announced: “Look, we got Jack&Jones, a clothing brand and Audi”, that was big, you have to say “wow”, for sure. It proves something. it’s a good start. And you need to start somewhere.

**Michał:** Someone needs to go first.
**Wiktor:** And that, I think is the right approach. Despite big money being poured into Astralis they can still stop and think: "Okay, let’s work with those partners a bit slower". It’s great.

**Michal:** Organizations or teams such as Astralis – that we said belonged to the players – they need to build their professional image and those prestigious brands really help to place them somewhere above those teams that have smaller, weaker brands as partners. It really makes a difference.

I wonder if you can tell me if those current players, who make more and more money, what do they do with it? I mean, do they realize that one day this will all be over? Just as if they were regular athletes, what their esport career will finish at one point, and the money they are making now will have to last them for the rest of their lives? The retirement age of an esport player is definitely lower than the one of a regular working person.

**Wiktor:** I assume that there is this awareness among players, even the youngest ones, that this money should not be wasted. In sports, whether you’re a football player or a basketball player, there are things for you to do after you retire. There’s a path you can follow, you can be a coach, you can work at a TV station as a specialist, a commentator. There are many options to choose from, and if you have a head on your shoulders you will manage just fine. In electronic sports it’s still an uncharted territory, we still don’t really know, what our possibilities are after we’re done playing. Everyone is saying “analyst, coach”. Well, okay...

**Michal:** Not everyone is qualified.

**Wiktor:** ... our options are limited and that’s why a lot of young people are saving money for sure, thinking: “I have no idea what comes next”. Not necessarily: “I want to save, there’s no point in spending it all”, but rather “What if something goes wrong?”. I think that’s the right attitude. I’m making big money, I should put some on the side just in case. That’s the way young people think.

**Michal:** That’s great. Wiktor, is there anything you regret regarding your career? Is there something you wish happened differently?

**Wiktor:** I suspect that If things went differently, I would not even be where I am. Considering I was always a short-tempered person, and my attitude was "I want to win, let’s do everything we can to win, sacrifice everything." It was really selfish, I was really success oriented. If I had changed that... I wasn’t always like that. I tried to change my attitude, once I was like: "Okay, we’re winning, and I always have to win", other times I was: "We’re winning and I’m trying really hard and sacrifice everything to win". I could easily say I regret this or that, but that shaped me, and I’ve learned a lot. Finally, at age of 31 I can say that I understand some things, I understand my actions and the actions of other people. I feel that my whole life, this last 19 years so far (I hope it’s not the end of my esports career), it gave me so much experience I wouldn’t change a thing. I regret some words I might have said, some individual words spoken in anger, but that’s life. When it comes to my decisions, I regret nothing. I just need to learn from it.
Michal: Great. Let’s try a different thing. You said you have a lot of experience, that it made you who you are. Knowing what you know today, if you had a chance to go back in time, let’s say 10-15 years and to meet the past version of yourself, what would you say to the younger Taz?

Wiktor: I would probably say one thing. Something I didn’t know for a long time. That a lack of decision equals not taking any action. I advise myself that it’s better to make decisions and learn from them, then regret doing nothing, or not trying something.

Michal: Does that mean that “not making a decision is also a decision”?

Wiktor: Yes, it’s something that I didn’t realize for a very long time, something I had learned. I have to admit, a lot of those things I had learned from Anton. The owner of Virtus.pro. This man became my mentor, even businesswise, I’m really grateful for the opportunity to go on this adventure with Virtus.pro. It’s really uplifting that he allowed us to learn from our mistakes instead of turning them against us. He used them to educate us. He’s a really classy person. And I’m really glad we had a chance to get to know at least one such owner personally! Because over the last 19 years we always had problems with organizations or company owners. It was so difficult to trust someone.

Michal: How did you meet Anton?

Wiktor: That’s actually a funny story, because I met Anton on a party, where I was just saying how I should stop playing CS and start playing LoL as I was advised to do. He and his team were celebrating their win at DreamHack, I think they defeated NiP. Anyway, they were celebrating something. Anton was really happy and he said: “if you say: “for mother Russia”, I’ll buy you a beer, and I said: “No, I won’t say that. I can say – for Poland – and I’ll take that beer, but I won’t say you asked.” And that silly situation, their celebration, that’s how I met him for the first time. But I really got to know him, and formed my opinion on him, when we were discussing my possible transfer to Virtus.pro... we just talked. It was just chit-chat, my word, his word. There was no real interest back then.

If Virtus.pro hadn’t signed us when they did, we would not have a team. We would not have an organization and we would have to play for free again. In our situation, we could not afford to play without earning money, especially Jarek (Pasha) couldn’t. Me and Filip (NEO) were not too young either, so that would mean the end of us. It’s possible, or maybe we would handle things somehow, found an organization, continue playing and it would be great, who knows? But at that moment Anton said: Okay, win this tournament, and we will talk”, because I talked with him at a tournament. And we won, and we started to celebrate: “That’s great, we’re going to sign a contract, we’ll be paid...”. It was less than thousand euro and we celebrated, it was wonderful, great. Turned out, the CEO of Virtus.pro decided to sign another team, not us. He thanked us, and said they’re signing a different team. I sat down... Wow. I wrote to Anton: ”So that’s how much your word is worth?”. He wrote back: “Wait”. Half an hour later he called me on Skype and said: “Welcome to Virtus.pro”. That’s it.
Michał: Great story.

Wiktor: The CEO was fired. That made me realize that: “We entered a world, that we didn’t have chance to see before. A world where a man’s word is actually worth something”.

Michał: Amazing. What did Anton teach you, because you said you treat his as your mentor? Did you learn a lot from him?

Wiktor: There was a lot of really situations when we were maturing as people of business. We really didn’t understand the business part, the money side of esport before. We played, because we loved the game and we just focused on that. And I’m taking about a period of 4 years back, not very long ago.


Wiktor: I’ve been playing games for 15 years, because it was fun, but I was never interested in the business part. There was a lot of character defining moments for him and for us. Once this side took less, the other time another side took less and the other way around. Regarding money, we had some big offers from the United States, really big, but after discussing it with the team we decided to stay, because we finally have a person with character in charge. A person who we can build our brand with, we can think about the future. There was a lot of great moments, he told us many things. I can’t really mention them publicly, these are his private stories, but he shared those with us. His business experiences also, just to make us realize certain things we didn’t understand. When I did something wrong when it came to money he didn’t say: “Now you get nothing”. No, he educated us, he explained things. It doesn’t happen very often. That’s priceless. This is a man, who’s got everything, he’s a multimillionaire, one of the most prominent young businessmen in Russia, and he still has time to educate us. Wow.

Michał: A gift from heaven, right?

Wiktor: Yes, wow!

Michał: Exactly. We’re going to wrap it up Wiktor, but before we do, I have one more question I want to ask: what do you expect from your fans, what can they do for you? Is there anything particularly important for you at the moment?

Wiktor: To cheer for Virtus.pro in Katowice.

Michał: I think, that’s guaranteed.

Wiktor: That’s all.

Michał: Where can we find more information about you, if someone wants to find you, your social media profiles etc.? For those who are not your followers yet.
Wiktor: They can find me on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Michal: I will attach links to your profiles.

Wiktor: I’m sure you’ll find me. And if not, enjoy your life, and don’t bother yourself with that bearded guy.

Michal: Thanks a lot, Wiktor. Thank you for your time.

Wiktor: Thank you for having me, it was really one of the nicest conversations.

Michal: Thank you.

Wow! Thank you Wiktor for accepting my invitation.

I have to be honest, I’m a huge fan of TaZ and our conversation seems like a completely unreal experience. It was amazing how such a renowned player can also be so approachable and modest. I am even more impressed than before we had our conversation. I hope that TaZ will soon find a worthy place on the esports scene and will continue to surprise us with his strive for perfection and competition at the highest level. That’s what I wish for.

And although the era of the golden five – the legendary Virtus.pro lineup – is over, we encourage you to cheer for the Polish team. May this week’s tournament at IEM in Katowice prove that this was in fact, a change for better. Go Go VP! Lots of headshots!

Let me remind you can find the notes and a transcript of this podcast episode here – http://jakoszczedzacpieniadze.pl/117

If you’re planning to visit Spodek in Katowice this weekend, look around carefully. Maybe you can spot me in the crowd Friday to Sunday.

In the meantime, thank you for your time and I wish you all the best in lifting your financial goals to a higher level. See you later!