

6 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING A PRO GAMER



TOM "TSQUARED" TAYLOR, FROM MAJOR LEAGUE GAMING (AS TOLD TO NEIL JANOWITZ)
 PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT HAMILTON
 ON TOM: SHIRT BY D&G DOLCE & GABBANA; JEANS BY H&M



1. EVERYONE IS WELCOME. "There are 16 pro teams in MLG, but you have to win to keep the tag. Most events have two brackets, amateur and pro. As many as 256 teams—four guys to a team—can enter the amateur bracket. If you finish in the top 16, you advance to the pro level and start to earn points. The 16 teams with the most points get to be the pros at the next event. I've been pro since 2003."

2. WE STICK TO OUR STRENGTHS. "My team, Str8 Rippin, competes in Halo 3, which is like the Texas hold 'em of MLG. Everyone has a specialty. Eric 'Snipedown' Wrona is good with a sniper, Bryan 'Legit' Rizzo handles objective work, such as capturing the flag, and Kyle 'ElamiteWarrior' Elam can do it all. I'm the oldest, at 21, so I try to lead."

3. PRACTICE? YEAH, A BIT. "My teammates live all over the country, so sometimes we fly to meet up. We practice by scrimmaging against other teams on Xbox Live anywhere from eight to 16 hours a day. But we've played together so much, we know how to win. It's mostly a matter of outsmarting the other guys."

4. PRO GAMING IS FLUSH. "Str8 Rippin is sponsored by Dr Pepper, and I'm sponsored by Panasonic. In addition to the money, they fulfill our needs for stuff like new equipment and hotel suites. But that's icing on the cake, considering the travel stipends MLG gives the pro teams and the money we make from tournaments. First prize at the national championships in Vegas will be \$100,000. If you're good, you can easily make six figures."

5. THE FACE OF GAMING IS CHANGING. "Most MLG players don't fit the stereotype. For one, we're athletic; I try to stay in shape, not just for appearance and health reasons but for confidence when I play. There are also more female gamers. Bonnie 'Xena' Burton was first. She proved girls could compete with guys. And she's great in interviews."

6. WE DON'T CARE. "I'll let other people debate whether or not gaming is a sport. I know it's a competition that we play at a high level against other people who are just as skilled. Ultimately it's a game, just like basketball and football are."

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