

- Leora Kornfeld: [00:08](#) Welcome to Now and Next, a podcast that looks at the ways technology is changing media and entertainment, and it's brought to you by the Canada Media Fund. I'm Leora Kornfeld. On this episode, Stephanie Harvey. She's originally from Quebec City. She's been named to the Forbes list of 30 under 30, to the BBC's list of 100 inspiring women, and she's a five time champion in her sport. Wait, you're saying, then why haven't I heard of her. That could be because her sport is playing video games, competitively, and at the highest possible level in the world. It's called eSports and it's a global phenomenon.
- Leora Kornfeld: [00:52](#) Not only is Stephanie one of the top female players in the world, she's a professional player, so she's got managers and agents and sponsors, and I can only imagine how many frequent flyer points she has. Oh, she also has a degree in architecture, a diploma in video game design, and she spent eight years as a game designer at Ubisoft in Montreal. With all of these things in mind, it shouldn't surprise us that Stephanie has a keen understanding of more than just playing Counter-Strike. That's the game that she holds the five-time championship for. She also really gets how the whole industry works, how the business side of things works.
- Leora Kornfeld: [01:41](#) So, we've got a lot to learn about what exactly is up in the world of eSports, how Canada's doing in relation to the global scene, and where things have yet still to go. In just a second we'll find out with today's guest, esports champion and I'm going to say all around cool role model, Stephanie Harvey.
- Leora Kornfeld: [02:02](#) Stephanie, you spend a lot of time on planes, don't you?
- Stephanie H.: [02:06](#) I do, honestly. That's funny you say that. I do.
- Leora Kornfeld: [02:10](#) What I want to know is if and when you strike up a conversation with somebody on a plane and they say what do you do, what do you say to to them?
- Stephanie H.: [02:18](#) Oh my God, I hate that. It happens on planes and in cabs, like in taxis.
- Leora Kornfeld: [02:23](#) Yes.
- Stephanie H.: [02:24](#) I always go very vague. For example, for planes I'll be like, or a cab, I'll be like I work in video games. Then if they say like oh that's cool and then they change subject, I know they know nothing about it and they don't care at all for it and that was it I didn't have to explain much. But if they go oh do you make the

games and you program, and I'm like no actually, and then it evolves. Then sometimes people are like oh yeah I've met programmers before or I've seen these competitions. This is when we can go a little bit deeper in what I do. But usually I leave it vague so that way they can move on with their life and I won't be upset.

Leora Kornfeld: [03:02](#) You've been pro since what, 2005?

Stephanie H.: [03:05](#) Yeah. Actually, you did good research. I have been pro since 05. It's like a long journey, especially since pro back then didn't mean the same thing as what pro is now. Back then you had peripherals, maybe like a jersey, and your contract was to make sure that you would pretty much be "loyal" to your team, but it didn't really mean anything and sometimes it would pay for your travels. That was what pro meant. But now it's completely different. If you think about your favorite sports team, it's probably exactly the same thing.

Leora Kornfeld: [03:40](#) And eSports isn't a new thing. It's been around for what, like 20 years or something like that, but a lot of people are seeing this year, last year, it's the year that it really broke through. Do you agree with that?

Stephanie H.: [03:52](#) Yeah. I want to say there was two major pivoting moments into eSports. There was the arrival of Twitch TV and I want to say YouTube Gaming. YouTube is a little bit earlier, but Twitch TV really kind of made eSports become mainstream. It was the TV of gaming where people could start to watch competition and it kind of legitimize the whole deal, where you had the TSN or ESPN of gaming happening everywhere around the world all the time.

Stephanie H.: [04:23](#) As far as what happened last year and this year, I think it was their arrival of Fortnite, which I think it was a perfect storm where the community was ready, the mainstream people were ready, kids were ready. Everybody was ready to have that moment where Fortnite became the game where sports athletes are playing it, and kids are playing it, and parents know about it, and it's breaking records so it's on TV and media for the amount of money people can win, or the amount of players playing it. All these kind of things kind of combined, how easy it is to watch it, and how easy it is to compete, and how 14 year-old kids were playing in the World Cup winning thousands and thousands of dollars in the game, qualifying online in their living room. I think that was also like a major turn.

- Leora Kornfeld: [05:13](#) How unusual is that? Do you think other games can use the channel of eSports to get to a mass acceptance like that?
- Stephanie H.: [05:23](#) Can other games do it? I also think they can. I think that we're going to see it again. We're going to see new types of games kind of rise. That's the goal. That's what we're looking for, because the more mainstream gaming becomes, the better all communities become. In the end we're all in this together. There's a battle, I want to say battle might not be the right word, but there is a fight that we do for recognition, for acceptance, to break prejudice and to break kind of the bad stigma that there is around gaming where for whatever reason it's the new devil, it's the new rock and roll. Video game actually from a lot of the studies disprove what people have been saying that you are more violent when you play games, that you're more antisocial when you play games, that you don't learn anything when you play games, and it's a waste of time.
- Stephanie H.: [06:15](#) All of that has been disproved in studies where you actually learn so many skillsets, multitasking, problem solving. I learned English through games. Yes it was school, but I maintained it and polished it and brought it to the next level with gaming because I have to interact all the time in English. For me, it was a chance to learn a second language, travel the world, meet friends everywhere that I still to this day visit when I can, make connections. Pretty much learned so many soft skills from teamwork to communication skills to leadership. Now, I'm really focused on having a healthy balanced lifestyle with my physical coaches, my mental coaches and everything that has to do with how can my life make me a better gamer, which means taking breaks, which means making sure I sleep well, I eat well, making sure I phase my emotion properly. All of that makes me a better gamer, which makes me a better human.
- Stephanie H.: [07:26](#) It's a lot of stigma. For some reason we still see a gamer being represented that people playing in their basement in the dark, which is so weird to me cause I've always played with my girlfriends like in the sun, like Mario Kart, like I'm the opposite of that. I've always promoted these kinds of values because I think gaming can be done in a healthy and successful way.
- Leora Kornfeld: [07:59](#) Were your parents worried that you were spending so much time staring at a screen with headphones on?
- Stephanie H.: [08:04](#) They would tell you not at all because I was always into everything, so art, had good grades at school. I was doing sports. I loved music. Yeah, there were summers where I was

way more into gaming than other summers, but then school started again and I went back to it. I always see it like gaming is part of your overall life. If you eat only broccoli, you'll be sick, but broccoli is good for you. I see gaming like broccoli, where if I only do gaming it's horrible, it's awful, but if I balance it with the rest of my life it is an enriching and beautiful experience.

Leora Kornfeld: [08:48](#) I want to talk about the eSports scene in Canada, where it has been growing. It's been getting more popular. It's been getting bigger dollar wise. The revenues are like four times what they were this year compared to like four years ago. But, it's still tiny. It's tiny, especially compared to countries in Asia where you have the gaming rooms on every block and some cities have what, tens of thousands of them, anyways. Since you've been involved in eSports, how have you seen things develop here in Canada?

Stephanie H.: [09:22](#) I think it's very recent that push for eSports. There was always small initiatives across the country, but most of them were community initiatives or school initiatives. Companies were a little shy in investment. I think even video games studios were shy on participating into that kind of flourishing sphere because it is risky, it is not that easy. Also, I think Canada is a market that hasn't been exploited, so we don't know if it can be successful kind of.

Stephanie H.: [09:55](#) We have superstars in Canada in almost all the games. We have pro players and Overwatch, League of Legend, Street Fighters, Smash, StarCraft, Counter-Strike, one of the best in the world, Fortnite, on all of these games. I think that's amazing because that means that Canada, as far as competitive, the competitive aspects, we're there. We show up. We can be, we can represent Canada on the top scene. It's just the matter of having, I think having the population understand that we're there. I think we still haven't breached a mainstream where we can support our Canadians. Most of the time we don't know they're Canadian citizens. We're just kind of citizen of the world, if I want to say. Most people think we're Americans, but most of the famous female gamers are Canadians.

Leora Kornfeld: [10:45](#) You have been living in LA for how long?

Stephanie H.: [10:48](#) I lived in LA for two years and I moved back recently to Quebec just because I missed being here. I love being here. I love being close to my family. I was in a gaming house for two years.

Leora Kornfeld: [11:00](#) Now what does that mean?

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- Stephanie H.: [11:02](#) Gaming house is where you live with your teammates and you kind of compete together and practice together.
- Leora Kornfeld: [11:08](#) Sounds like a reality show or something.
- Stephanie H.: [11:10](#) Kind of.
- Leora Kornfeld: [11:10](#) It's a reality show, but there's no cameras.
- Stephanie H.: [11:12](#) Yeah, exactly. I think for many reasons it was easier to do that. It was cost effective, but for me I think two years was enough.
- Leora Kornfeld: [11:26](#) I want to talk about the money side of the business, where the money comes from, where it's going, who's getting it, all of that stuff. It is about a billion dollar global industry this year, which sounds, again, like a lot of money, but then when you look at the game industry in general, it's like \$150 billion, so eSports is less than 1% of the whole business. It's like half comes from sponsorships, a quarter comes from broadcasters buying license fees, and about a quarter from tickets sold to live events, right, and merchandise. This is a very different economic structure compared to other sports or other performing industries. Why is that?
- Stephanie H.: [12:08](#) There's a lot of factor. I think that just because the ticket sales and the broadcasting rights are a little different. There isn't, like all the matches are not done in tickets, in stadiums and arenas, at places where people can show up and watch. Most of them happen online, so they're kind of "free" so you don't get any revenue from it. A lot of it happens on Twitch, which is, or any other platforms, but usually it is also free.
- Leora Kornfeld: [12:37](#) And Amazon owns Twitch, right?
- Stephanie H.: [12:39](#) Yeah. Also, for the spectators it's always free almost. For the companies, the money usually goes back to the companies making the tournaments, so not necessarily in the pockets of the players. It stays within who is investing. The tournament is doing a tournament and they're giving their broadcast rights to Twitch or Facebook, or YouTube, or Twitter, so the money goes in and out, but it doesn't go to the players because it just doesn't work that way in eSports. It's kind of interesting. Also, people own the game while nobody kind of owns hockey or football. That adds a layer of complexity where you can't just create a tournament in your basement if the company doesn't want you to.

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- Leora Kornfeld: [13:27](#) Oh, so you need their permission to do that?
- Stephanie H.: [13:30](#) For a lot of the tournaments. Not all of them, but a lot of the companies are really, really severe on if you can make a tournament or not. I think we haven't found the right way to monetize eSports.
- Leora Kornfeld: [13:44](#) Well yeah, how do ... You've been a professional for almost 15 years. Explain how you get paid, because this is, I mean this is what you do. This is your whole life.
- Stephanie H.: [13:52](#) I get paid from like 15 different people. I get paid for every contract I do. If I do a conference or if I speak in a school or I speak at a library, usually I get paid like that. I also get paid by my sponsors. A lot of them are main partners. They gave me like some sort of salary throughout the year. That's always, you don't know what's going to happen next right with those kind of incomes.
- Leora Kornfeld: [14:19](#) And plus you've got to have agents and managers and people who are negotiating these contracts on your behalf and then they're taking a percentage too.
- Stephanie H.: [14:26](#) Yeah. But to be fair, I don't think I would negotiate as good as my agent. He's earning-
- Leora Kornfeld: [14:33](#) He's very happy, very happy.
- Stephanie H.: [14:35](#) He's earning his share of what he's making me earn. Also, you have tournament's earning, which for some people can be a lot depending on the scene you're in. If you're in Fortnite, we're talking millions here, or if you're in Dota 2 just as well, but if you were in fighting games it's probably a lot smaller so you have to find other ways to do incomes, whether it's through broadcasting on Twitch, so ad revenues or-
- Leora Kornfeld: [15:04](#) Do you do that?
- Stephanie H.: [15:04](#) YouTube, yeah. YouTube revenues, ad revenues on Twitch, or fans subscribing to your page and supporting you. That's also a good amount of income. You can also have a salary if you're on a team. If you play for the Toronto Maple Leafs for example you get a salary from them-
- Leora Kornfeld: [15:20](#) You get a really good salary.

- Stephanie H.: [15:21](#) Yeah. It's the same thing in eSports. You deal your salary with these teams across the board. Sometimes you can get drafted or picked up by other teams and you renegotiate your salaries and whatnot. For players like League of Legend, that's how they make most of their income. It's really through the salaries, which I think average around \$300,000 a year. They're pretty good salaries for League of Legend. I think every scene has a different kind of a way of making money.
- Stephanie H.: [15:53](#) Me, it's all of that included and sometimes influencer work on social media, like Twitter or Facebook or Instagram. I think companies are shifting their spending towards these sometimes micro-influencer or big influencers. Even if you're a micro-influencer and you don't have a lot of people-
- Leora Kornfeld: [16:12](#) Oh yeah.
- Stephanie H.: [16:12](#) You can still make left and right like 200, 200, 200, and it adds up. That's why I started my own company to gather all of that and make sure that I was okay with the government of Canada.
- Leora Kornfeld: [16:30](#) There is this huge gender gap in pay because I looked at the numbers and it's something like for the guys, if in the list of the male top 100 players every one of them has made it says over \$800,000. Then if you look at the list for the female players, only 20 in the top 100 have made over \$25,000, and out of those ones two have made over \$100,000. There's like a massive gap there. Why do you think that is?
- Stephanie H.: [17:01](#) Well, the main reason I think is because we compete in the main competitions, in the same ones, in the same competitions and guys are just better at the moment.
- Leora Kornfeld: [17:09](#) They're better players?
- Stephanie H.: [17:11](#) Yeah. I think that's the main reason.
- Leora Kornfeld: [17:13](#) That's interesting. Objectively speaking you say that they are better players?
- Stephanie H.: [17:17](#) Because of the current demographic. What I mean is that there's a thousand guys for one girl competing, or maybe 10,000 guys or a million guys for one girl competing. Because of that, the chances of that girl being the best player in the world is really, really slim.
- Leora Kornfeld: [17:37](#) But you did it.

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- Stephanie H.: [17:38](#) To a certain degree. I was never like the top Counter-Strike player in the world. If not, I would be in that top 100 in the salaries.
- Leora Kornfeld: [17:48](#) What does it mean? You're a five-time champion in it. What does that mean then?
- Stephanie H.: [17:52](#) I played in tournaments where it was female only tournaments where I became a five-time champion over there. It wasn't mixed. It was really to promote female gaming and push forward female initiatives, kind of like incubators. There's maybe three or four tournaments like that a year across the board worldwide just to promote gaming and competitive gaming in a specific demographic, in a minority, which is female. I compare it to being a five time collegiate champion, right.
- Stephanie H.: [18:32](#) We have collegiate tournament because we want to promote basketball within college, right. We want to make sure they pursue their studies or whatnot and we just have these tournaments. We don't allow the NBA players to play in it, right. It's a little bit like that, these female events. They're made to kind of empower a specific demographic and allow them to pursue their dream and career on the sides, but also get some sort of recognition for their talents. I won five of those World Cups.
- Leora Kornfeld: [19:04](#) I feel like you've got a really strong grasp of like how the whole, all these little pockets, these different parts of the industry are working and also the business aspects of it. How do you see the overall industry developing from here?
- Stephanie H.: [19:20](#) For me, it's about making a career out of it from amateur to semi-pro, to pro, to retirement, to career opportunities.
- Leora Kornfeld: [19:30](#) Retirement, she's talking about retirement.
- Stephanie H.: [19:32](#) Yeah, but like what do you do after you're a pro gamer. That whole process where we don't support amateur right now. We don't support kind of semi-pro people where they have to do this full time. But they don't have the salaries of doing it full time. There's a transition where you take risks and you're on your own. Also, you're a pro, but are your pro for 10 years or 2 years because something happens, your games becomes irrelevant, or the money leaves that game, or for whatever reason, well for a lot of reason it's not like the NHL where you know, except if you have an injury, you know what your career

is going to look like, is it going to be a long career, short career, where do you put your eggs in the basket.

Leora Kornfeld: [20:18](#)

Right.

Stephanie H.: [20:19](#)

For me, honestly, it happens so many times where I, in a way I felt like I lost everything.

Leora Kornfeld: [20:26](#)

Really?

Stephanie H.: [20:26](#)

Like I left my team, or I got cut from a team, and I lost my salary, like bam from my team within a month. These kinds of things happen in eSports where you have a one year contract and you don't have a 10 year contract, or a 5 year contract. At the same time, you don't want to 10 year contract because you don't know where the game is going to be in 10 year, or if it's not going to triple in money. It's super tricky. There's very little stability. There's very little clear path. If you're a parent right now and your kid is interested, how the hell do you help him become pro. It's not like he needs to join this league and you know what to do and you go to parents kind of committees and you support your child when you can. It's so difficult. There's no clear path. Like we're still fighting to be recognized as a hobby. We have parents coming to me and like what can I do to help.

Leora Kornfeld: [21:33](#)

Okay. What do you tell them?

Stephanie H.: [21:35](#)

Well, I give you the tell them be there for them, learn about the game they're playing, learn about the rules, learn about the teammates, or understand the sacrifices your kid has to do when he has to, for example, practice around dinner time, like don't force him to not play for four hours because it's dinnertime and then homework. Try to work around him.

Leora Kornfeld: [21:54](#)

It's the version of the 5:00 AM hockey practices.

Stephanie H.: [21:57](#)

Yeah. Pretend he's playing soccer, pretend he's playing chess, or the violin. What would you do? Would you sit and listen to him play the violin and support him? Yes. Do the same thing. Would you watch his games if he had like soccer games? Do the same thing. Would you give him a lift or a ride if he needed to leave his school and go to his hockey game at the rink? Well, why won't you give him a lift if he needs to do this his match online to be able to qualify for a tournament. It's the same thing. You need to be there for him. Understand the world. Treat this as if this is an opportunity and this is a learning experience for him. Even if he doesn't become pro, he'll grow from being involved in

the community, just like really bad hockey player, soccer player, but that would still have a life changing experience just to be part of the team.

Leora Kornfeld: [22:50](#) Stephanie Harvey, thank you.

Leora Kornfeld: [22:52](#) And this has been Now and Next, a podcast brought to you by the Canada Media Fund. You can find us in all the usual places you find your podcasts. If you think you'd like to hear more episodes like this one, you know what you can always do, yep, you can subscribe. If you're liking what you hear on this podcast, two things to keep in mind. You can help us out by reviewing the show on iTunes. That's really a big part of how people decide what to listen to. And, you can find new articles every week on the CMF's trends website. The easiest way to find that is to Google CMF as in Canada Media Fund trends.

Leora Kornfeld: [23:32](#) That is it for now. Thanks for listening and I hope you'll come back next time for more Now and Next. I'm Leora Kornfeld.