

STORIES IN PLAY: NARRATIVE FORMATION IN SPORTS AND ESPORTS

Department:

English Language and Literature

Program:

PhD

Project type:

Dissertation

Project Co-Researchers:

Dr. Ken Hirschkop, English Language and Literature, Faculty Supervisor

JOHN YOON

Sports depend on narrative to function as media, but they are challenging to narrativize because they are very unpredictable. Narrativizing describes a set of loose practices which weave a coherent story from a disparate set of events or phenomena as a tool for making sense of the world. Yoon proposes a model for analyzing the narrative formation in sports broadcasts by tracking the live narrativization.

This project asks: How does the live narrativization construct a story if the ending is unknown? How does the narrativization balance its desires for narrative coherence and unpredictability?

Yoon creates his own multi-layered narrative model based on Roland Barthes' function-action-narration schema and applies this model to the National Football League (NFL) and the World Championship Series of StarCraft II (WCS) as two case studies of narrative formation in traditional sports and esports. The comparison of the narrativization reveals that both traditional sports and esports struggle to balance the desire to craft coherent narratives with the randomness of a live event. Yoon proposes that esports must fully embrace their unique digital features even if the digital nature of esports violates contemporary notions of what "real sports" are.

Interesting fact: Yoon says: "I've been a lifelong esports fan, so it was natural for me to study this nascent phenomenon through a narrative lens."