

## Michael Stefanick

By Jackson Horvat

Video games have become a vital part of world culture. From providing millions of jobs to the creators, to joy for the millions of players themselves, video games have brought enjoyment to the lives of all ages. And for Michael Stefanick, this rings especially true.

“I loved gaming since I was a kid,” said Stefanick. As one of those classic cases of discovering passion at first glance, Stefanick explained how his father is the one who first introduced him into the world of gaming. This, however, may have been a mistake.

Michael’s father was very much an outdoors person. “He’s always like, ‘Mike, why don’t you come out and hunt with me?’ And I’m like, ‘Nope dad, I’m gonna, uh, I’m gonna play my games and you know . . .not do that,’” Stefanick humorously described the relationship. But he didn’t let the disapproval stop him from pursuing what he simply loved to do.

As the years went by, Stefanick noticed how well he fared when gaming with his friends. “I’d always just win,” proclaimed Stefanick. It became boring, and did not fulfill Stefanick’s need for a challenge.

Then, “I became friends with Bernat, Zachery Bernat,” states Stefanick. Bernat was right at the level of gaming Stefanick was, and the two started competing against each other all the time. But even as equals, the two eventually wanted an even larger challenge.

Stefanick competitively plays the popular fighting game, his favorite genre, Super Smash Brothers. It is this game, that the two friends decided to attend their first gaming competition for, the Youngstown Trials.

When first arriving, Stefanick explained their impression of the competition, “Wow all these people look really, really easy to beat. That was a *big* mistake on our part.” The tournaments break down as follows; there is the winner’s bracket, and the loser’s bracket. A player first competes in three matches in the winner’s bracket, and if you are to lose two, you’re out, and must work your way back up in the loser’s bracket. Both Stefanick and Bernat were beaten with ease at their first outing. But this only seemed to serve as inspiration.

“Just that drive of wanting to get good, keeps me pushing forward,” said Stefanick.

Since that first tournament, Stefanick was hooked. Ever since then, he has continued to play with Bernat, and still competes in many tournaments, definitely with more skill than the first, rude awakening he had had.

Stefanick explained how many individuals are able to make a living off of competitive gaming. However, it seems to apply only to games in which the company itself provides large sums of money to tournaments, and is not primarily community based, like Super Smash Brothers, Stefanick's personal game of choice.

When questioned if he sees himself being able to make a living off of this, Stefanick proclaimed, "I mean, I dunno! Probably not. I'm not pursuing it as a career, I'm just doing it as a hobby."

While a bit of a humorous note, this lead to where Stefanick hopes to head in the future with his passion. "See, I'm going into gaming to pursue as a career, yes. But I'm not the guy who likes to sit behind a computer and code all day," Stefanick explained, "but, what I wanna do is, I'm really good at speaking to people. I'm really good at communication." Stefanick plans to attend college as an Entertainment Business major, with, what he predicts, to be a double minor in Computer Science and Communication.

Stefanick admitted, "I've got a while to go." But he is forever grateful to the spot gaming holds in his heart, ever since laying his eyes on that first game way back as a little kid.

Gaming, Stefanick eloquently explained, "it's a drive that keeps me going."