

Gotta Win'em All: How Expert Play in the Online Community of Smogon Changes Pokemon

by

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ABSTRACT

The way that people play games has changed. This is especially true for both highly competitive games and online games. Expert play, a category of play undertaken by players who have a strong understanding of the game they are playing and are trying their best to excel at, is particularly affected by this phenomenon. Research has shown that many players now use online communities to support their play, and that these online communities influence the way expert play is conducted within a game. This thesis looks at one online community which is particularly influential to the game of Pokémon: Smogon. It will attempt to uncover the methods by which Smogon influences the play of Pokémon. Additionally, it will look at how gameplay changes when players are familiar with the online community and use that familiarity to enact a very specific type of expert play. To that end, it will also be examining Smogon's sister website, the Pokémon battle simulator Pokémon Showdown.

This thesis undertook a thorough examination of both Pokémon Showdown and Smogon, showing the differences between their structure and that of the traditional way of playing Pokémon. A close reading of three players playing Pokémon Showdown, each with a different skill level and familiarity with Smogon, shows the different ways that expert play is affected by familiarity with Smogon. More experienced Pokémon Showdown players appear to have a greater understanding of the ways that others play the game, an understanding which can be gained through familiarity with Smogon and the content that it produces. It appears that expert play is heavily influenced by the relationship that players have with online game communities that support their game, changing the way that players think about their game and the techniques they use in play. Further research could act to identify the extent of the influence that online game communities have over the games that they are created around.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

Pokémon is a worldwide media empire. What started as a game for the Nintendo GameBoy has become the largest grossing media franchise in history when including the sales of all of the movies, toys, games, trading cards and other merchandise (“List of highest-grossing media franchises - Wikipedia”). Pokémon is prolific as a video game series, with over eighty different games created (“Pokémon Video Games | Pokémon.com”), one of them counting amongst the top ten best-selling games of all time (Sirani). It is massively popular; its characters are recognized all over the world and hold major cultural significance. This is especially prevalent in Japan, where Pokémon was created. Pikachu, Pokémon's flagship character, was Japan's mascot for the 2014 Football World Cup (Gaston). Looking at the variety and sales of the Pokémon games, the swathes of cultural artefacts that have been created for it, and the popularity of the long-running anime and its accompanying movies, it is clear that Pokémon has changed gamers and gaming.

Pokémon fandom spans ages, generations, and continents. This fandom includes a wide variety of special interests, ranging from art to cosplay to video game mods to competitive gaming. This diversity of interests in a large fandom is described quite well by Henry Jenkins (142). The breadth of the Pokémon fandom means that its many varied groups of fans can see Pokémon in many different ways, and interact with the object of their fandom in just as many different ways. The academic study of Pokémon has existed nearly as long as the franchise itself due to the rapid rise to fame it experienced soon after its inception. Pokémon became a well-known topic of study not only in media studies, but in a variety of different fields — everything from analyses of the phenomenon of Pokémon to close readings on how Pokémon shapes environment perspectives (Tobin 4; Bainbridge 400). The breadth of the different studies conducted on Pokémon in Tobin's *The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* reflects this diversity. One can draw a picture of the many things Pokémon can mean from those studies. Sefton-Green's study of how younger children interact with Pokémon shows that children have a complex relationship with Pokémon as a text and as a strategic game. On one

hand, they try their best to learn and execute the strategy of the game; the goal is, ostensibly, to become a Pokémon master (Tobin 142). On the other hand, mastery does not necessarily mean becoming the best battler in their social circle, as there are many other goals based on collecting and befriending Pokémon, though these goals are more “unfocused” (Tobin 149).

In some ways, the academic pursuit of Pokémon mirrors the fandom of Pokémon above; Pokémon has become so prevalent that the research done on it has splintered into dozens of different groups. This thesis focuses on Smogon, a group within the online competitive Pokémon community, which is a small subset of fans’ varied practices. Smogon imagines Pokémon in a very different way from the larger Pokémon fandom, and as such, how it interacts with the game of Pokémon is very different from most Pokémon fans. This thesis explores how Smogon changes Pokémon through expert play, and, in a more general sense, how competitive game communities affect the games that they play.

I identify as a fan of Pokémon, which is important because my insight into Pokémon does not only come from my position as an interested academic, but also from my experiences and expertise as a fan. I got my first Pokémon game when I was eight, and after spending three days looking at the manual and deciding what the best starter was, I picked Bulbasaur (a choice I defend to this day). I have played Pokémon on and off my entire life, followed the anime throughout my childhood and into my adulthood, bought many, many Pokémon cards, and can still name the majority of Pokémon by sight. I have dedicated much of my time to Pokémon, and the fact that Pokémon is part of my life will be apparent in my research. It is for this reason that I turn to Henry Jenkins’ work on the idea of the aca-fan in order to properly position myself as a researcher to this object of research (4). I play the Pokémon battle simulator Pokémon Showdown, I read threads and Strategy Pokédex entries on Smogon as well as other message boards, and I still interact with the object of my study (Jenkins 5). I am not the most skilled player, but I am certainly competent and experienced enough to understand the differences between battle systems, the ways that the Teambuilder works, the reasoning behind bans, and the strategic thought that goes into the Strategy Pokédex entries — terms I will describe in greater detail later in the thesis. My fan knowledge is important in the way that I approach this subject, as it gives me unique insight into the background of my object of study. On the other hand, it is also important that I acknowledge my biases arising from my familiarity with Smogon, as it can have a negative effect on my research as well. I do so here, but I will also point out my biases throughout the

thesis where relevant. Though my experiences are personal, they can act as the personal experiences of at least one player. I will be clear when I am drawing on my own personal experience in my writing as opposed to theoretical work.

Regardless of how much someone may like Pokémon, it is difficult to ignore the ways that Pokémon is ethically problematic. There are the obvious parallels between Pokémon and the capture of wild animals, including comparisons with dog fighting competitions. This topic has been the subject of intense discussion and has even inspired parody games such as PETA's *Pokémon Black and Blue* (2012). Pokémon itself has addressed some of this criticism in the themes of the game *Pokémon Black and White*, where one of the main antagonists claims that, "Pokémon are subject to the selfish commands of Trainers" and that, "We must liberate the Pokémon!" (2010). It is later revealed that this character does not truly believe in these ideals, but it remains that these views are considered important enough by both Nintendo and Game Freak, the publisher and developer of Pokémon, respectively, to be addressed within the game. This conversation is complex, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to truly address all of the underlying concerns present within it, but it is possible within this thesis to examine the different ways that Pokémon are treated in the many incarnations that they exist. Pokémon, in the abstract, are highly intelligent animals that have a form of close partnership with humans which is somewhat analogous to that of domesticated animals. However, the relationship between humans and Pokémon in the fiction of the Pokémon world goes beyond simple subservience; rather, "Pokémon do not rest at their trainer's feet in domestic resignation, but act alongside them. In this scene of human and animal interrelation, it is not only the animal that is changed" (Wallin 161). This concept of reciprocative change is put into a more specific context by Porcher and Estebanez, with their concept of shared work between humans and animals. They contend that "[o]ur relations with animals are not primarily founded in domination ties, but in the freedom offered by shared work" (24). At its best, the relationship between Pokémon and humans is a true partnership, domestic not in the sense of a wild thing being broken and made civilized, but domestic in the sense of two entities coming together and creating a home, something that is shown in the anime with Ash's mother's Mr. Mime, Mimey, acting as a member of the family ("It's Mr. Mime Time"). At its worst, the relationship between Pokémon and humans see Pokémon ceasing to be beings in their own right; they are acted upon as tools and become biotechnologies (Porcher and Estebanez 17). Though there are certainly other issues present with how

Pokémon are represented, this thesis examines the ways the changing relationship between Pokémon and humans across different incarnations and representations, and how that relationship is further affected by the presence of expert play in a competitive fighting community. Chapter two explores the range of ways Pokémon are represented as partners to tools used for fighting in the anime, the official line of Pokémon games, and Pokémon Showdown.

One important note for the scope of this thesis is the Pokémon games to which this thesis refers. There are many Pokémon games, ranging from *Pokémon Pinball* () to the fairly recent and wildly popular *Pokémon Go!* (), and not all of these games share the same mechanics. This thesis will be looking at what many, and certainly the Smogon community, consider to be the main line of Pokémon games. This list excludes all of the spin-off games or other games which feature Pokémon characters. Many of the games in the series were released as pairs, with each of the two games offering different varieties of Pokémon for players to catch. These pairs are noted together in this list. The main series of Pokémon games is made up of *Pokémon Red and Blue* (1996), *Pokémon Yellow* (1998), *Pokémon Gold and Silver* (1999), *Pokémon Crystal* (2000), *Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire* (2002), *Pokémon FireRed and LeafGreen* (2004), *Pokémon Emerald* (2004), *Pokémon Diamond and Pearl* (2006), *Pokémon Platinum* (2008), *Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver* (2009), *Pokémon Black and White* (2010), *Pokémon Black 2 and White 2* (2012), *Pokémon X and Y* (2013), *Pokémon Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire* (2014), *Pokémon Sun and Moon* (2016), *Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon* (2017), *Pokémon: Let's Go Pikachu!* and *Let's Go Eevee!* (2018), and *Pokémon Sword and Shield* (2019). Though the mechanics of these games are not identical, all of them bear enough of a resemblance to be considered as a group, with notes as to their differences only where necessary.

Smogon

Smogon is a fighting game community - a small subset of Pokémon fandom that has many highly codified ways of interacting with Pokémon. Smogon is an online community that focuses on the competitive aspects of the main line of Pokémon games. While Pokémon is a game marketed to and played by younger fans, Smogon represents a much more adult

understanding of the games. The existence of Smogon within the Pokémon fandom can be seen as an intrusion, or in the words of Jason Wallin:

“... Pokémon have come to figure in all the characteristics of a mythical childhood. This is to say that Pokémon are not simply cute, but figure in the polymorphous, metamorphic, and animist qualities of childhood fantasy that... is now annexed by the world of adults.” (160)

Smogon is certainly a different approach to playing Pokémon. Unfortunately, due to its focus on winning above all else, Smogon may not be the most welcoming place. In some ways, Smogon echoes Gee and Hayes’ findings about ones of the more elitist Sims fan sites: The Sims fan site, ‘More Awesome than You’, “failure to accommodate a wide diversity of skills and backgrounds, and its treatment of newcomers, make it by our definition not a nurturing affinity space or, at least, only a partial one.” (31) Gee and Hayes’ concept of affinity spaces is important, and will be touched on later in this chapter. Smogon does have some policies in place to be helpful to newcomers, such as their mentorship programs, as well as the Rate My Team threads that are designed to give feedback to players trying new things, but that feedback can be at some times overly critical and dismissive of other opinions. The elitism present in Smogon will be further discussed in chapter three. While Smogon’s ultra-competitive take on Pokémon runs somewhat contrary to the more relaxed gameplay of the main line of Pokémon games, the history of the community is not so counter-cultural.

Smogon came into being from a loose association of fans who were passionate about creating a competitive Pokémon community. As a community, Smogon wears many hats, so to speak. Not quite as many as the *Team Fortress 2* community, but still, a lot of hats (). Smogon is a website dedicated to Pokémon, but it looks at Pokémon through the lens of how best to excel at player versus player competitive play, rather than how to play the main line of games themselves. Smogon is one of the largest competitive Pokémon communities on the internet, and it has existed in some form since 1999, with the website being created in 2004 (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”). The Smogon website acts as a strategy discussion board; a repository for knowledge and gaming capital about Pokémon; an editor for that repository; the editor and publisher of its own web magazine; and a governing body that makes decisions about how Pokémon should be played in the emulator that Smogon runs, Pokémon Showdown. Additionally, it acts as a community for people to meet and share their love of Pokémon. The website was notable for having a Pokémon battle simulator with a GUI, the

first widely available one on the internet (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”). Smogon changed the simulator they were using many times until settling on Pokémon Showdown in 2012, a battle simulator which was created for Smogon by one of the site administrators, Zarel (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”). The website sees itself as an authority on competitive Pokémon, providing rules for tournaments and strategic advice for everyone from new players to veterans. Smogon positions itself as a major authority on Pokémon, but in exerting that authority, it changes how Pokémon is played.

Smogon’s unique nature arises from its entangled relationship with the game that inspired it, and this relationship is captured in Pokémon Showdown. While Smogon does affect players’ opinions of how to play Pokémon as a knowledge community, it also quite literally rewrites the code that governs Pokémon. Smogon acts as a regulatory body for competitive Pokémon rules, holding votes and changing the rules for how the games are played. Smogon’s rules can apply to player versus player battles that take place using the main line of Pokémon games, but the place where the rules are most strictly enforced and most often used is in Smogon’s sister site, the battle simulator Pokémon Showdown. Pokémon Showdown is a fan-controlled emulator of the battle system in the main line of Pokémon games. Pokémon Showdown takes the code that is used for battles in the main line of Pokémon games and uses it to create a system for players to battle against each other online. Pokémon Showdown does an excellent job of accurately replicating the battle system, but the fact that it is not controlled by Nintendo means that there is room to modify, or mod, the original game. The mods put in place by Smogon tend towards minor changes to the rules; the majority of the system remains the same and Pokémon Showdown is still recognizable as a Pokémon game. Smogon’s stated purpose behind the changes are to keep the game both fun and fair for all players in a competitive situation. However, though the mods are meant to keep the game relatively the same, they still have a profound effect on what the game is and how it produces meaning. In order to properly understand the impact of Smogon’s rule changes to the game of Pokémon, it is necessary to analyze both the official Pokémon games and Smogon’s emulator, Pokémon Showdown, through the use of game studies theories. Chapter two will undertake this detailed comparison.

How Smogon Changes Pokémon

Despite ostensibly playing the same game, players of Pokémon Showdown have fundamentally different game experiences than those who play the original game. In order to understand how expert play is altered when playing Pokémon Showdown, it is integral to understand how the games themselves differ and how players and the games interact with each other. Though the specific mechanical difference between the two games will be covered in chapter two, there is a noticeable difference in the experience of the two games. This ranges from the moment-by-moment gameplay to the broader meaning of the experiences to the kinaesthetic feel of the games, or game feel (Swink xiii). The Pokémon games are designed to be relatively easy, and almost relaxing. They frequently place the player in an advantageous position over the other NPCs in battles, and if a battle is lost, the player loses some money and returns to the nearest Pokémon Center with their Pokémon fully healed¹. In contrast, battles in Pokémon Showdown give no advantages to either player. Each battle counts towards a player's ranking, and there are no rematches; a lost battle has consequences in the game. Just from a short description of the differences in these two interpretations of the same game, it is easy to see that they are very different experiences.

This difference can be analyzed using the MDA framework. The MDA framework states that a game exists between two points. At the core of a game, there is code and rules. At the end/consumer point, there is a player experience. The MDA framework refers to these two points as Mechanics and Aesthetics, respectively (Hunicke et al. 1). More specifically, mechanics are “the particular components of the game, at the level of data representation and algorithms,” and aesthetics are, “the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player, when she interacts with the game system” (Hunicke et al. 2). Connecting them, and describing what actually happens when the game is played, are the Dynamics of the game, which are “the run-time behaviour of the mechanics acting on player inputs at each others' outputs over time.” (Hunicke et al. 2). Dynamics, as the connection between the player and the game, are where meaning is made in games (Hocking 13:55). In Hocking's talk, “Dynamics: The State of the Art,” he claims that dynamics are influenced by three major elements of a game: mechanics, narrative, and player interaction (54:24). Rather than

¹ Losing money in Pokémon is less dire than in other RPGs, as getting your Pokémon fully healed at Pokémon Centers, which are analogous to inns, is provided for free.

pointing to mechanics as the only aspect of games that affects a game's dynamics, Hocking shows how both a game's narrative and other players can also affect a game's dynamics. By including these two other aspects of games, Hocking makes the MDA framework more complex, but also makes it more reflective of the various forces which can influence players' experience of a game. A game is communicated to the player through the dynamics of the game, but those dynamics are affected by a complex interplay between mechanics, narrative, and player interaction. The three aspects that affect dynamics are further affected by a wide number of variables, and each one can be integral to how a player will interact with a game. Though they do not necessarily affect the actions taken while playing a game, both narrative and player interaction affect the meaning that those actions have, and change the meaning of the game. A game's dynamics are its center of meaning creation, the place where a game's mechanics, narrative, and the interaction between players all come together to create a game's meaning. The act of creating meaning from a game is subject to numerous influences, and these influences are what this thesis will unpack in order to fully explore how Pokémon Showdown changes the gameplay of Pokémon as a highly competitive game.

Play does not exist in a void, however. The interactions between players may have meaning within the game, but no game, no matter how fantastic, is divorced from the real world we live in. How a game exists in relation to the real world is an important aspect of how players take part in it. The way in which Pokémon Showdown is situated in society can be approached through the idea of metagame, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and minor literature. Looking at Pokémon Showdown through the concept of minor literature helps to elevate its analysis from a series of moving parts with a human at either end to a way in which two people are sharing a narrative experience. Mukherjee's concept of games as minor literature claims that, while the playing of a game has an inherent intangibility to it, the paratextual responses that can come from playing a game is a part of the narrative of a game (61). One can play a game, but after the play is done there is no "game" left over. Even a screen capture of a game is missing the essential element of playing that game; in Hocking's terms, the instantiality of the game prevents it from being effectively translated into another medium. As for the connection between a games' paratext and its narrative, under the concept of minor literature, paratext and game flow into each other and defy direct categorization as being one thing or another. This point of view is useful in looking at how players of Pokémon Showdown experience paratext while playing Pokémon Showdown, a complex issue that will

be looked at in chapter three. The “disappearing” aspect of game narrative also highlights the importance of effective techniques in creating a good transcription and the shortfalls that transcription has compared to actually playing the game, a topic which is addressed later in this chapter (Mukherjee 61).

Another way of looking at how players interact with games is to see them as a conversation between the player and the game. While similar to Bogost’s description of the listen-think-speak framework (44), Gee’s understanding of games as a type of discourse analysis extends beyond simply the rhetoric that a game puts forward, and actually speaks to how players assign meaning to their interactions with games (7). By viewing games as a conversation where the player needs to listen to the events of the game, update their understanding of the game, and then react accordingly, we can see how games affect the player, and how those games change the person playing them. Indeed, Gee’s understanding of games is that they are performed by players through avatars (18). In order to effectively interact with the game, players must conceive of themselves and their identity in such a way that the game becomes meaningful to them. They must have the affordances, abilities, and connections to the game that makes the game meaningful. Players take on screen names to play Pokémon and Pokémon Showdown, learn and do things that are quite outside of their normal range of actions. When taking on their avatar to play Pokémon Showdown, players “do not just inherit their ways of acting and seeing, [players] inherit who they are.” (Gee 18). The new ways that players see the world and the new identity that they create for themselves is a reflection of the ways that they act in and play those games. In some ways, it may be less important to understand how players play games, but rather, how do games play us?

Rules and Fiction

The electronic rules and procedures that the game of Pokémon is based on reveal much of the meaning behind the game. Procedural rhetoric is especially effective at uncovering the deeper arguments that games make through their procedures (Bogost 28-29). Bogost’s procedural rhetoric is an effective way of looking at Pokémon Showdown’s rule changes to understand Smogon’s overarching goals, especially with regards to how Smogon affects expert play. While procedural rhetoric can be useful for looking at the underlying message conveyed to the player of a game, it does not directly take into account player experience. The MDA

framework helps to fill this gap, providing insight into how player experience, or aesthetic, is affected by the runtime action, or dynamic, of the game, and how that dynamic is in turn affected by the smallest of game mechanics (Hunicke et al. 1). The rules of games are one of the biggest ways in which games are altered, and are a central aspect of what Smogon does to change Pokémon, and how that changes expert play within Pokémon.

The way that Pokémon Showdown changes the rules and mechanics of Pokémon greatly affect the way that the gameplay unfolds, giving the game more appeal to the more serious player. Even small changes, for example, adding a rule that only one Pokémon can be asleep at a time in Pokémon Showdown, greatly changes the experience of the game. Bogost's assertion that reusing procedural rhetoric does not, in itself, create effective procedural rhetoric seems to discount the differences between the official Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown (50). However, Jesper Juul makes an effective point about how small changes in rules can cause major shifts in the gameplay experience of games with his observation that the relatively minor differences in rules between *Quake III* () and *CounterStrike* () compared to their wildly different gameplay experiences shows that even small changes in rules can change the overall tone of the game (88). To go a step further, even smaller changes, such as the difference between a casual player playing *Super Mario Bros.* compared to someone doing a speed run of the game, makes a massive difference in gameplay experience (). While most casual players will pick up power-ups at almost every chance they get, a popular speed running strategy is to go "mini-Mario" throughout the entire game, only picking up a minimal number of power-ups in order to save time. This comparison shows that a relatively small change in game rules, adding the stipulation that the game be beaten as quickly as possible, can create a major change in experience and meaning within the game. Similarly, the changes that are made to the rules of Pokémon in Pokémon Showdown change the goals and approaches that players take while playing the game. The way in which this changes how players play Pokémon will be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis.

While rules are the core of the Pokémon games, the way the fiction of the game plays into those rules also affects how players play the game. This is covered thoroughly in Jesper Juul's book *Half-Real*, where Juul states that "[t]o play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world" (1). This inherent paradox of games, to act both within a fictional world and within real rules, characterizes how narrative and mechanics

work together to affect the dynamics of a game. Juul's model does leave out player interaction, but as many games do not feature interaction between two or more players and still create meaning through their dynamics, the interplay between player, narrative, and mechanics is capable of creating meaning through their dynamics by themselves, without the addition of player interaction. Hocking echoes this sentiment, that narrative is influential in the meaning that games make (Hocking 38:20). Hocking uses Tetris as an example; he adds a fiction where, instead of stacking abstract blocks, the blocks represent families of Jewish people being loaded onto train cars at the edge of the Warsaw Ghetto (35:45). In this fiction, the question of how to play Tetris becomes much more fraught. In regular Tetris, the overall strategy and goal is simple, and does not change. With this fictional world applied to it, there are many strategies, and emotional responses, that come into being due to that world. As Hocking states, "by changing the fictional skin, the game has new potential meanings that Tetris didn't really have before" (Hocking 38:08). The fiction of the game directly affects the dynamic of the game by providing new space for mechanics to create meaning.

Players and Pokémon

Player interaction, the third element that influences dynamics, is what Pokémon Showdown is designed around, whereas it is an optional feature in the official Pokémon games. Every battle that takes place in Pokémon Showdown is a player-versus-player game, and how those players interact determines the outcome of the battle. More than that, Hocking points out that player interaction is a complex process, with what players believe to be true about the game affecting how they play (Hocking 39:44). In Hocking's model, player understanding of a game is modeled through synthesis, or what players believe about a game, rigour, or how hard players try to prove that their understanding of the game is correct, and is instancial, or each game between two players is unique and temporary (Hocking 47:42). The fact that players understand the game differently from each other, or have different synthesis and rigour, is part of what makes games so interesting, but also what can make them so frustrating. An opponent using a new strategy can lead to a player having a moment of epiphany, and learning something new about the game they are playing. In my own opinion, this can be one of the most amazing, exciting moments that a game has to offer, even if the player learning something ends up losing to this new strategy. Conversely, an opponent

employing a strategy that a player feels is unfair can lead to that player feeling frustrated, cheated, and angry at the opponent and even the game itself, which is certainly a less enjoyable experience overall. Rigour can be similarly fraught with issues, as players playing games “too seriously” or “not taking the game seriously” can cause major issues for both the more and less serious player. I have personally had issues with negotiating this mismatch between two player’s synthesis and rigour in how they play a game.

My partner and I both enjoy playing games, but we do so in different ways. This can cause some friction between us at times. One particularly noteworthy instance of this occurred while we were playing *Quadradius*, a computer version of checkers with various power-ups that pieces could collect. I like trying to push the boundaries of new games to find odd and interesting strategies. To that end, in one game we played, I attempted to capture every possible power-up I could with a single piece, a strategy which has many flaws. However, I was still trying my very hardest to execute it well. When I eventually managed to get a lucky set of power-ups which essentially ended the game in one move, my partner was upset at me. I was surprised at her reaction. If that had happened to me, I would have been both amazed at such an interesting strategy, and excited to learn about the game. However, my partner had a different understanding of the game than I did. She felt that the reason behind the game was to use the interesting rules put into place to have fun, and play back and forth with each other. Players’ conceptions about what a game is and how to play it can fundamentally change the meaning that they get out of a game, and that a mismatch in those conceptions can sour a game experience for both players.

Hocking also claims that player interaction is beyond the control of game designers (54:24), but he fails to take into account two important aspects of modern games, especially game communities like Smogon: paratext and metagame. Metagame is defined later in this chapter. Paratext is, as defined by Consalvo, those objects which refer to or are peripherally related to a game but are not the game itself. She writes that “[w]hat might have begun as the peripheral aspects of the game industry (magazines, strategy guides, and so on) can now be recognized as such a paratext quite easily” (Consalvo 21-22). The paratext surrounding games affects the synthetic and rigorous aspects of player interaction. While most of the paratext shared by Smogon does not directly affect the programming or procedural rhetoric of Pokémon Showdown, the influence of paratext can be seen in the battles that take place in Pokémon Showdown. This can be explained somewhat through both Consalvo (42) and

Fiadotau's (86) focus on paratext and the effect that it has on the game proper. Paratext helps with players' framing and understanding of the game, as well as providing players with a body of knowledge to draw from as they try to increase their own knowledge of the game (Fiadotau 87). However, compared to Consalvo's focus on paratext as a feature of single player games, whereas a single player game guide can be comprehensive and provide a correct answer to solve every challenge that the game throws at a player, Smogon's game guides are all relative. They provide tips, pointers, and general strategic advice as to how to succeed in Smogon, but they do not and cannot provide absolute solutions to the challenges that appear on Pokémon Showdown, simply due to the fact that those challenges have more variation than any one player could ever experience. However, just because the solutions that Smogon provides are not absolute does not mean that they are not influential. Simply by looking at the commonly seen Pokémon in Smogon's battles, it is possible to see that the community's opinion of Pokémon is taken seriously by players of Pokémon Showdown, and that it affects players' choices to such a degree that it changes the way the game at large exists. Chapter three will look more into the ways that Smogon affects the perceptions of competitive Pokémon as a whole.

Smogon's wealth of paratext affects player interaction, but also has some effect on both narrative and mechanics through various means. Consalvo makes an important point on the relationship between paratext and fiction, stating that "[w]hile use of the paratext can help a player make clear or uncover certain elements of a text/game, overuse of the paratext strips away too much of the game experience, revealing it as an exercise of mechanical components to be manipulated." (45) Smogon's use of paratext does run into this issue of revealing an excess of mechanical components and though this does certainly change the fiction of Pokémon Showdown, it does not stop it from existing. It has been shown by Bell et al. that "immersive features can be extra-textual" (17). This conclusion does show that elements which are not directly part of the game can positively affect the experience of a player playing the game. This does lend some credence to the idea that paratext used whilst playing a game can be beneficial to the player not only in terms of improving their gameplay, but also, by improving their immersion and experience of the game. While exploring such a concept falls outside of the purview of this thesis, it is certainly a rich area for research. Smogon's paratext further affects the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown through the methods that Smogon uses to make changes to the rules of Pokémon Showdown. Chapter

three will further explore how paratext is influential to the procedures of Pokémon Showdown.

Many modern games spawn huge online knowledge communities which greatly affect the play of the game they surround through the sharing game knowledge and gaming capital. Smogon is one such example. The practices that Smogon undertakes place it firmly into the realm of an online knowledge community, as described by Feng and Ye (342). Their study of the subject helps to illuminate some of the reasons that online knowledge communities function as they do, and why members of the community reciprocate (344). Bateman, Gray, and Butler use a different theoretical model to look at members' commitment, rather than their motivation, as to why they remain members of a community (842). Liu, Du, and Fan further expand on those findings, looking at what kind of usability and community atmosphere affect members' commitment (696). Smogon can also be seen as a type of affinity space, which as defined by Gee and Hayes, is a space, online or real, that a group of people come together in due to their shared interests (Gee and Hayes 5). It is useful to look at Smogon as an affinity space, as many people who use the site use it only as a kind of reference material. Looking at the site as an affinity space allows for the study of Smogon without worrying about each member's engagement, as in affinity spaces, "one of easiest and best ways to answer the question of "who belongs" is simply to say that whoever enters the space (the fan site) is in the group and belongs." (Gee and Hayes 6). Smogon's community atmosphere is particularly important, as Smogon has a rather unique atmosphere and ethos. Consalvo's work on cheating and fair play in games explores the ways that players use online forums to share game information through the medium of game walkthroughs (50). Many players may see using collected expert information on a game as a kind of cheating (Taylor, T. L. *Playing Between Worlds* 71). While the form of paratext that Consalvo describes differs from how the Smogon community shares paratext, the feeling of cheating Consalvo describes accurately reflects one popular opinion that some in the mainstream Pokémon community hold about Smogon. Newman and Ashton further expands on this work on paratext by looking at the ways that walkthroughs influence how players play, specifically how they codify playstyles and strategies, encourage new strategies, and regulate strategies ("Relations of Control"). The way in which Smogon shares information will be further covered in chapter three, as it is a fairly complex mix of encyclopedia-style articles, more general strategic articles, online forum discussion, and various other methods. This mixed approach to sharing

paratext requires a careful examination of the channels of communication created by the community.

Metagame

The term metagame is fraught. Richard Garfield's definition of metagame, as quoted by Boluk and LeMieux, outlines four aspects of a game that make up metagame: “‘what a player brings to a game’... ‘what a player takes away from a game’... ‘what happens between games’... and ‘what happens during the game other than the game itself’”(14). Metagame is the layer of meaning and human interaction that surrounds a game, but is not explicitly part of that game. Metagame itself is not a type of paratext, but it is where much of Pokémon Showdown's paratext comes from. It is not gameplay, but it exists wherever gameplay does. To add to the confusion surrounding the term, the academic meaning of the word metagame differs from the commonly used gamer meaning of the word, and both permeate the language of games, complicating any type of shared understanding. This thesis will make heavy use of the term metagame, and it is vital to be clear in the language used around the term. The Smogon community calls the different sets of rules that it creates *metagames*. This is obviously very confusing, as none of the meanings of “metagame” within game studies are “the rules of Pokémon battles based on player usage statistics.” The Smogon community’s usage of the term metagame is conceptually based on the general composition of a group of players’ strategies. For example, if a player entering a tournament knew that many of the players in that tournament liked to have Charizard on their teams, they might call it a “Charizard-heavy metagame.” The Smogon metagame is, ideally, a formalized expression of this way of using the term metagame. It is a rules change that takes into account the ways that Pokémon Showdown players tend to play based on statistical analysis of the Pokémon players use. In making it formalized and adding rules to a metagame which before was informal, however, it ceases to truly be a metagame and becomes an explicit addition to the game itself. Though Garfield’s definition is broad, Smogon’s metagames do not fall under it. Instead, Smogon’s “metagames” are actually part of the game itself, directly affecting the game at a mechanical level, rather than Garfield’s definition of “what happens at the game other than the game itself” (Boluk and LeMieux 14). Furthermore, Smogon’s metagame can sometimes be used interchangeably with the term *tier*, a common term in games which refers

to which characters in a game are perceived to be stronger or weaker. Tier lists are common within many types of games, and in general they “... exist in the fan community for any game with different types of characters” (Myers). For the clarity of this thesis, I will refer to what in Smogon’s terms would be a *metagame* or *tier* as a *metagame rule set*. In other words, Smogon’s “metagames” are actually specific rules by which to play the game of Pokémon. Smogon has many of these rule sets, and sometimes discussing the differences between these rule sets is necessary. Though these rule sets are not a part of the metagame, but rather an explicit inclusion in the game itself, they draw on a relevant usage of the term metagame, and are thus not entirely divorced from it.

Paratext is a highly influential product of metagame. Various types of paratext, such as walkthroughs, affect players’ perceptions of the game (Newman and Ashton “Relations of Control”). The three ways that paratext can affect a game explored by Newman and Ashton are through codifying and legitimizing different ways to play, inspiring new ways to play, and regulating ways to play (“Relations of Control”). More generally, players look at paratext in order to improve their own skills in regards to a game: “[i]n addition to the process of trial and error, players will use external resources to hasten their acquisition of mechanical expertise.” (Donaldson 433) The system by which Smogon’s paratext is produced is complex in itself, and heavily affects the ways that paratext changes the game. Of particular interest is how adding to the communal paratext of Smogon is regulated. How paratext is regulated affects the types of paratext produced, and thus the types of paratext that others can view, so by the very act of regulating the paratext that can be included in the different parts of Smogon, the community acts as gatekeepers and regulates the metagame of Pokémon Showdown. It is clear that other types of metagame activity, such as the viewing of professional play, can also affect amateur players’ play by “set[ting] standards for play” (Egliston “Playing Across Media” 13). Professional play, or to some of the same extent expert play, as Pokémon is much less lucrative as an eSport than MOBA games like DOTA 2 and League of Legends, has major effects on how players approach the game by affecting their perceptions of expert play.

Another way that players play in the metagame is by “theorycrafting”, or creating theoretical strategies with which to play the game (Gee 31). Theorycrafting is important, as it gives players the chance to “... influence a game’s design by reshaping how they play” (Paul). Theorycrafting is a major example of metagame activity which occurs entirely separate from

the game itself, yet is only meaningful with reference to the game. Smogon also takes part in theorycrafting, and many of the paratextual resources on the site are dedicated to it. Beyond showing that such behaviour exists beyond the Smogon community, this also shows that many players do actively engage in metagame behaviour entirely outside of the confines of the game itself. This type of player activity is not unprecedented; Boluk and LeMieux suggest it as a way of understanding the types of actions that occurred within the metagame of *EVE Online*, a way of studying the “game *without* a game” (68). Donaldson goes further with his argument, not simply saying that metagame is one way of approaching the game, but rather that:

“Whether it be the ability to analyze opponents, discuss strategy, and negotiate implicit rules, metagame expertise is a fundamental component of competitive effectiveness not only for League of Legends but also for similar strategically deep and constantly evolving, multiplayer video games.” (442)

Describing metagame expertise as fundamental to competition draws an even stronger connection between Smogon’s stated aims in regards to the pursuit of mastery over the system of Pokémon Showdown and the paratext and metagame discussion that Smogon creates. There is evidence that theorycraft specifically is tied to this improvement, that “[t]heorycraft is generally tied to a higher quality of play; increased understanding about the game and how it works; and as fun” (Paul). If metagame expertise is fundamental to play, and theorycrafting is tied to expert play, then the success of some of the most talented players in Smogon would not be possible without metagame knowledge and theorycrafting.

As a further example of the different metagames present within Smogon, it is possible to view the method by which Smogon creates its metagame rules sets as a metagame in and of itself. Doing so clarifies how players taking part in that practice view its connection to the game. Smogon has a variety of methods to change the actual gameplay rules of Pokémon Showdown, as will be discussed in chapter three. While the effects of these rule changes can be understood through other theories, how the system that makes these rule changes fits into the larger tapestry that is Pokémon Showdown and Smogon can only be understood by looking at it through a metagame perspective.

More broadly, the discussion of metagame also takes into account the way in which Pokémon Showdown exists in a societal context. Pokémon primarily exists in the world as a game aimed at a younger audience. Smogon itself even states that some believe that Pokémon

“is not a "serious" game, but rather a child's game” (“Smogon’s Philosophy”). As part of that larger social context, Pokémon Showdown is something of an anomaly. It takes seriously what the rest of the fandom sees as unimportant. This focus on victory is what sets Smogon apart from the rest of the fandom, and it is what differentiates its metagame from the general metagame of Pokémon. Using the idea of metagame as a lens to understand Pokémon Showdown and Smogon makes it immediately apparent how influential metagame is in terms of affecting how players play the game.

Competitive Expert Play in Non-Cooperative Games

Expert play is a well-covered concept in the study of games. T. L. Taylor’s ethnography of power gamers, players who frequently engage in types of expert play, shows how power gamers are seen by other members of the community to be playing the game the wrong way, a sentiment which has often been levelled against Smogon (*Playing Between Worlds* 71). At the same time, it is shown that these power gamers also are of great benefit to the community in that they refine and contribute to paratextual resources that many other players use to play their games (T. L. Taylor *Playing Between Worlds* 84). The way that expert play changes players has also been well documented. Players learn to see important parts of the game more clearly and block out unimportant visual cues (Gee 43, Taylor and Elam 253, Nicholas Taylor *Getting Good*). They learn to react almost automatically to game events in highly practiced ways (Taylor and Elam 245, Nicholas Taylor *Getting Good*, T. L. Taylor *Raising the Stakes* 91, Witkowski 369). They even learn how to play “mental games” within games against their opponents (T. L. Taylor *Raising the Stakes* 95-96). While these phenomena are indicative of expert play, they do not in themselves define something as expert play. It is certainly possible to see what the correct move in a game would be but fail to act on it, or to expertly execute a terrible plan. Expert play does not depend on any one of these skills or phenomena, but rather on the approach taken by the player to make these phenomena consistently achievable. A player enacting expert play must fulfill three requirements: the player must intimately know the rules of the game system, the player must be knowledgeable about the patterns of play that can exist within the game system, and the player must be effective at achieving the end outcome that they want and what intermediary goals they must achieve to arrive at that outcome. This thesis looks at a more specific form of expert play: competitive expert play in

non-cooperative games. The play is competitive in that each player is attempting to bring about some form of win condition as their main goal, and narrative or other concerns are minimal or absent. As well, the play is also non-cooperative in that the players are competing against each other and one player winning precludes the other from doing so. Though many types of games fall under these guidelines, it is important to distinguish the expert play that is being referred to in this thesis from other types of expert play.

Rose's account of how a DotA 2 AI was defeated can further illustrate how the qualifications for expert play manifest themselves in the actual play of a game ("I watched the pro-slating esports AI get defeated by everyday players"). This AI was significant in that it defeated a highly respected professional DotA 2 player, Dendi. Rose highlights three major ways that players were able to overcome this highly effective AI: through effective usage of in-game items, through using an alternative strategy called infinite creep pull, and by simply playing better than the AI. Each of these demonstrate the above principles in different ways. Players who were able to simply outplay the AI were able to very effectively achieve the goal they set out for themselves. It was a mixture of skills particular to that game that made it possible for them to overcome the AI. Players who used the in-game items made effective use of their knowledge of the system, knowing which kinds of items interact in certain ways. Players who instead went the route of using infinite creep pull leaned heavily on their knowledge of how the AI itself played the game in order to secure victory. Though each approach does exemplify one aspect of expert play more clearly than the others, each aspect of expert play is present in all of these approaches.

Expert play in Pokémon differs somewhat from many of the games that are commonly used to discuss expert play. One of the most immediately apparent is the fact that Pokémon is a turn-based game, and rapid reaction times are unnecessary to excel at the game. While the type of automation described in Nicholas Taylor and Elam's work may be useful in fast-paced first-person shooters or multiplayer online battle arena games, that kind of automatic reaction can be detrimental while playing Pokémon Showdown (250). Rather, Pokémon requires players to understand more of what is happening in the game as a primary way of improving their skill. In playing Pokémon the game itself intentionally resists the urge for simple tasks to become automatic and fully integrate with the machine. The reward for firing off a rapid, thoughtless attack is often a loss. However, there is one aspect of automation that still sees consistent use within Pokémon Showdown within the realm of

expert play, and is perhaps one of the most indicative of expert play within Pokémon Showdown, something that Nicholas Taylor and Elam refer to as “seeing into or past the representational elements of the game” (253). As players improve their skill in Pokémon Showdown, they may begin to understand small events in a more meaningful way. However, to improve, a player must not seek to develop an automatic response to that meaning, but instead to use that meaning to critically examine the situation at hand. This difference between the mechanics of many popular modern games and the mechanics of Pokémon changes the types of behaviours that are considered critical for expert play.

Gameplay Analysis

The way these previously discussed factors affect the Pokémon Showdown can be seen by analyzing the play of Pokémon Showdown, though getting a full understanding of how play is affected by a community and players’ understanding of expert play can be difficult. This thesis will conduct its analysis by looking at Twitch-style streaming recordings of people playing Pokémon Showdown. Streaming is a relatively novel form of media in which “[t]he broadcasters live record themselves while they play video games and simultaneously engage in video-mediated communication (VMC) with their viewers. The audience spectates the gameplay and uses chat messages to write to the broadcaster.” (Recktenwald 68) The analysis of these recordings will be conducted through the use of the transcription and analysis framework presented by Recktenwald (72-75). The reason to use this method, rather than the built-in replay function present in Pokémon Showdown, is threefold. First, it is easier to compare the reactions of the player with the events of the gameplay. Second, the use of streaming makes it possible to see how players use outside resources. And third, streamers sometimes explicitly explain the events of a game and their understanding of them, which is incredibly valuable. This is due to the perceived expertise of the player (Recktenwald 69). However, the use of streamers as a way of understanding the meaning made by Smogon is complicated by those streamers’ relationship to the paratext of which they may be a major influencer. Well-known players’ character choices and strategies are reflected in the overall usage of characters in the general populations of their game (Egliston “Playing Across Media” 10). Though the average Pokémon Showdown streamer does not have the same public gravitas or advertising as a professional DOTA 2 player, it remains likely that the

effect of streamers' decisions over the perceptions of an average player still exists across other games with a competitive scene. This effect will be taken into account and discussed. Essentially, this analysis will attempt to gather information from watching both the unfolding of gameplay as well as the actions taken by the player in relation to the game. It should allow for an understanding of not only the mechanics of the game, but also the narrative, player interaction, incorporation of paratext, and an interpretation of the aesthetic experienced by the player as well. Overall, the goal of this approach is to provide the most complete analysis of the gameplay that is reviewed. Through the use of this theoretical lens, this thesis will examine three streaming recordings of Pokémon Showdown battles and analyze them to show how Smogon changes the way players play Pokémon Showdown, and how it affects expert play.

It is important to note that none of the streamers chosen for this study were visibly persons of colour or women². There are relatively few active streamers for Pokémon Showdown, and most of them fall into the somewhat stereotypical young white male “gamer” group to varying degrees. There are a variety of possible structural reasons for this, varying from the hostility towards women that many “hardcore gamer” communities can show, as well as many underlying issues with how streaming can treat minorities. The hostility of the communities in some games contributes to marginalized players having difficulty gaining skill and confidence (Ratan et al. 456-457), and the elitist outlook of Smogon certainly falls into a category that would make it, at the very least, a non-nurturing affinity space (Gee and Hayes 31). Certainly, there are many instances of highly competitive organized play being exclusionary towards women and hyper-masculine (Nicholas Taylor “Play Globally, Act Locally” 229). These kinds of systemic issues make it difficult for women and other marginalized players to gain skill in the games of their choice, as well as making it more difficult to find them in very public community roles, such as that of a streamer, due to the abuse and vitriol that others direct at them. Suffice to say, though it would have been beneficial to this study to look at a group with more varied backgrounds, the difficulty in finding streamers with more varied backgrounds made it impossible.

² On streamer's recordings (Green's) does not have video. I do not make assumptions about his background and generally do not refer to him in this section.

Chapter Summaries

Research on Pokémon, the manner in which games are analyzed, and online knowledge communities are all invaluable for understanding Smogon. Though it can be compared to many competitive online game communities, Smogon is unique in that it is more directly involved in the design of the game the community surrounds. This direct presence makes it more complex to examine the effect that Smogon has on Pokémon Showdown, but it also affords more avenues of interrogation. To this end, there are a wide variety of theories that provide insight into this complex relationship. Using the theories described in this chapter, this thesis will attempt to identify how Smogon changes what expert play means within Pokémon Showdown.

Chapter two will deal with the official game of Pokémon, and how Smogon has changed the rules and mechanics of the game in order to create their emulator, Pokémon Showdown. It will closely interrogate the fictions, mechanics, and procedures of Pokémon Showdown through the various theories mentioned in this chapter. Chapter three will look at the community of Smogon and some of the most important paratext it creates. It will look at the ways that this paratext affects the dynamics of Pokémon Showdown through player interaction, mechanical changes, and the fiction of Pokémon Showdown, as well as how player interaction itself plays into Pokémon Showdown. Chapter four will use Recktenwald's Twitch transcription method to look at three different battles that take place on Pokémon Showdown, and analyze how the actual gameplay of Pokémon Showdown reveals the dynamics of the game.

The world of Pokémon is indeed a wide one, and there are any number of exciting topics to explore. As the review of Smogon's will show, Pokémon also has an astonishing amount of depth. Pokémon Showdown has a complex relationship with Smogon, and the changes between Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games heavily influence how players play the game. Before looking at the way that Smogon affects play, this thesis will explore the play that takes place in Pokémon Showdown.

Chapter 2: Pokémon and Pokémon Showdown

Smogon and the larger Pokémon community both care deeply about Pokémon, but they do so in very different ways. Nowhere is this difference more apparent than when looking at Smogon's sister site, Pokémon Showdown. Pokémon Showdown is a Pokémon battle simulator website that mimics the code of the battle system in the official Pokémon games. Smogon has a close relationship with Pokémon Showdown. The metagame rule sets that Smogon creates are implemented in Pokémon Showdown as mods that alter the rules of Pokémon battles from that of the main line of Pokémon games. In turn, when Smogon looks for statistics to justify further adaptations to the metagame rule sets put into practice in Pokémon Showdown, it collects those statistics from Pokémon Showdown. This creates a cycle where Smogon directly influences Pokémon Showdown which directly influences Smogon which directly influences Pokémon Showdown... and so on, in an endless circle of influence. Additionally, Suspect Test Ladders are run on Pokémon Showdown. Suspect Tests are one method that Smogon uses to change a Pokémon's membership from one of their metagame rule sets to another, and one of the important ways that players can directly engage in making rules for Pokémon Showdown. Suspect Tests, bans, and metagame rule sets will be further discussed in chapter three, but it is important to note that the statistics and justifications for these important processes are all drawn from Pokémon Showdown.

The differences between Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games can be subtle, but these differences have a significant effect on how players play them, and what expert play means in each of the games. The official Pokémon games have a main goal of overcoming obstacles through growth, whereas Pokémon Showdown focuses on overcoming obstacles through expert play and mastery of the variation that exists in Pokémon battles. Although Ian Bogost says in his book *Persuasive Games* that borrowing mechanics and procedures from other games and then mapping new arguments on to them is not an effective way to create new procedural rhetoric, I argue that the small changes that Smogon makes significantly affects the ways in which Pokémon battling is experienced in the official

Pokémon games (Bogost, 50). In making those changes, Smogon substantially changes the rhetoric that is put forward by the system. This changes Pokémon Showdown into a new Pokémon experience that aligns with the expert play experience that Smogon promotes. As Bogost states, both Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games can be understood as procedural systems (Bogost, 28-29). These procedures, when enacted, set forth a rhetoric in how they interact with the player and with themselves. The way in which smaller changes affect the overall game can also be examined through the MDA framework, showing that the changes to the low-level mechanics cause changes all the way up to the high-level aesthetics, or player experiences (Hunicke et al. 1). This chapter will look at the differences between the procedures and mechanics used by Pokémon Showdown and the main line of Pokémon games. By closely examining these procedures and mechanics, it will illuminate and compare the goals of Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games. These differences can be broadly categorized into several groups: the differences in the materiality of the two products, the differences in genre and overarching systems between the two games, differences in how players create teams of Pokémon, differences in how players can interact with Pokémon, the differences in visual representation within the battle systems, and procedural differences between the two battle systems.

Materiality

The first and most apparent difference between the official Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown is what the games are played on. The equipment that games are played on can have tremendous effects on that play (Taylor, Nicholas “Play Globally, Act Locally” 233-234). The official Pokémon games have always been made for Nintendo’s handheld consoles: the GameBoy Color, GameBoy Advance, Nintendo DS, and Nintendo 3DS. The newest additions to the main line of official Pokémon games, *Let’s Go! Pikachu*, *Let’s Go! Eevee* (), *Pokémon Sword* and *Pokémon Shield* (), are exclusive to the Nintendo Switch, Nintendo’s new convertible handheld and home console. Throughout most of its history, the Pokémon games were beholden to the less powerful hardware that the handheld consoles used, though this no longer holds true with the newer Pokémon games available on the Switch. This is especially apparent with the older games, as *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* had more in common aesthetically and gameplay-wise with the original *Final Fantasy*, a game released

almost a decade prior, than with Nintendo's contemporary releases on the Nintendo 64, such as the three-dimensional *Super Mario 64*. Initially, graphics and visual fidelity of Pokémon were not a major focus. However, subsequent generations added more and more animations to the game, leading to *Pokémon X* and *Y*, where the games are fully three-dimensionally rendered. This change in visuals puts a stronger emphasis on the visual spectacle of the game, and was enabled by the constantly improving hardware of the Nintendo handheld consoles. Pokémon's visual improvements are not the only beneficiaries of the improving technical specifications of the consoles. Arising from methods used to simplify code and conserve processing power, there are bugs present in the code of older Pokémon games. These bugs are numerous and well-documented, as mentioned by Ashton and Newman ("Relations of Control"). With the improved hardware of later generations, these bugs became more and more rare, and none gained the infamy of the glitches present in *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* ().

Though the technical specifications of the Pokémon games are certainly important, there is one other obvious fact about the games that sets them apart from Pokémon Showdown: their mobility. The official, main line Pokémon games have always been created for Nintendo's handheld console. They can be played anywhere. This feature allows for different social engagement while playing; I, personally, have spent many days playing Pokémon together with friends and loved ones. The Nintendo Link Cable, as well, speaks to how Pokémon is intended to have a real world social dimension. The Link Cable functioned by physically plugging into two Game Boy systems, and for Pokémon, it allowed players to both battle and trade with each other. Even the way Pokémon are made available in games speaks to the intention of a social dimension: in order to "Catch 'Em All," each version of the game would need to trade for Pokémon that are only available in the companion version³. This level of design towards a real world social dimension of the game is an intentional component to the official Pokémon games, and is not echoed in Pokémon Showdown.

Pokémon Showdown is an online web application. It plays in internet browsers, and its materiality makes for a very different experience in play from the main line Pokémon games. Pokémon Showdown has never had visual fidelity as a main focus of design. In contrast to the official Pokémon games, Pokémon Showdown never adopted full three-dimensional rendering. Instead, it uses animated two-dimensional sprites to represent

³ i.e *Pokémon Red's* companion version is *Pokémon Blue* (), *Pokémon Gold's* companion is *Pokémon Silver* (), and so on through the entire series of games.

Pokémon. Part of this may be to simplify coding and reduce the processing load to keep the app relatively lightweight, but another consideration is clarity. Games from *Pokémon X* and *Y* onward use a floating camera that changes angles in battle, showing off the Pokémon models and giving a more dynamic view of the battle (). In contrast, the sprites of Pokémon Showdown do not move on the screen, allowing players to immediately see which Pokémon is where when looking for reference. This additional emphasis on clarity over presentation is exactly in line with Pokémon Showdown's focus on competitive expert play in that it removes non-essential elements in favour of more focus on the mechanical happenings of the game itself. This is similar to the way that, as Juul mentions for *Quake III Arena* players, "The more experienced the player was, the less graphics mattered" (139).

While Pokémon Showdown can be played on any mobile device with a web browser, mobile support was not an original design consideration and is relatively new. In contrast to the official Pokémon games, Pokémon Showdown has little intentional design focused on being mobile and social in real life. Players of Pokémon Showdown are often not playing their friends, but rather playing a stranger with which they have had no prior relationship with. On the other hand, Pokémon Showdown does have many features which are designed to enhance the online social aspect of playing Pokémon, such as the chat feature and Pokémon Showdown's close ties to the Smogon community. The two games' material aspects both promote sociality, but both in a different manner. The official Pokémon games promote it through real life interaction and presence, and Pokémon Showdown through the connection to a large online Pokémon community.

Genre and Overarching Systems

Both the official Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown are made up of a variety of systems. Both iterations of Pokémon share the Pokémon battle system, but it is only one part of both of the games; one system amongst many. How these collections of systems combine to facilitate play differs between the official Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown, both in the resulting aesthetic, or player experience, and in the procedural rhetoric presented by the game. As stated in an earlier chapter, the Pokémon battle system is, in the fiction of the game, a conflict where two trainers directly compete to try and knock out the other's Pokémon. But how battles fit into the two games are very different: the official Pokémon games have all the

trappings of a classic RPG, or role playing game, whereas Pokémon Showdown uses a rating system to determine players' relative skill and track progress, much like a chess rating system. Essentially, the official Pokémon games incorporate Pokémon battles into the story, and Pokémon Showdown treats battles as a series of matches within an ongoing competition. The genre and overarching structure of these games help to form the ideas and goals which are at the core of each of the games, and are also what give battles their context.

The official Pokémon games are structured as role playing games, and as such, they focus on immersion and storytelling. RPGs tend to have a heavy emphasis on story, and Pokémon is no different. The core themes of the Pokémon games are the ideas of growth, exploration, and discovery. All of the main game stories center around a Pokémon trainer traveling the region, meeting new people and Pokémon, and battling some of the strongest trainers in the region with the ultimate goal of becoming the champion of the region. It is easy to see from this description that, while battles are a central mechanic within the game, they are not the only one. Traveling is a major aspect of the game, and a lot of time is spent in the overworld map. This map is a symbolic representation of the world, with houses, stores, hospitals, and everything one would expect to see in an RPG with a modern setting. The player controls a sprite avatar which can walk around and interact with the world through contextual button commands, generally taking the form of "press the A button to interact." The overworld is used for traveling, interacting with other characters, and having your Pokémon interact with the world. These mechanics are demonstrative of how the game's rules and fiction interact. All of the official Pokémon games require specific interactions in the overworld in order to finish the game, and there are a number of obstacles that must be overcome through overworld interaction. A large Pokémon napping in the road is a well-known example of the problem solving that occurs outside of battle. To overcome this obstacle, the player has to find a specific item, the Poké Flute, to wake the Pokémon up in order to clear the route to the next area. HM moves, or Hidden Machine moves, are another mechanic that players can use to interact with the overworld map. HMs are items which a player can use to teach their Pokémon a specific move. HM moves have applications in the overworld as well as battle. For example, Cut can be used to cut down trees, and Surf can be used to travel over water. Every game until *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* have included their own set of HM moves and challenges. HM moves put emphasis on balancing ideal battling with interacting with the overworld as the moves are frequently lackluster in battle and take up one

of a Pokémon's four move slots. Even Pokémon gyms, Pokémon's implementation of bosses and some of the most difficult battle-based obstacles in the game, require players to solve an overworld puzzle in order to complete them. Challenges that focus on the overworld put more of an emphasis on both the theme of journeying as well as situating battling within a physical space, turning it into one of many ways of interacting with the world. There is a wealth of different experiences present in the official Pokémon games. The themes of journeying and being part of a large world serve the overall purpose of storytelling and immersion well, and the storytelling present in the game provides players with a feeling of narrative advancement as well as procedural advancement. In that way, Pokémon is a game that focuses on a single-player experience of growth and discovery, not just victory through battling. This story and the procedural rhetoric that generates it speaks more to overcoming a myriad of different obstacles, growing in order to become the best trainer you can be, and doing so by working together with your Pokémon.

Pokémon Showdown is structured as a series of player-versus-player games, with emphasis on winning each battle and improving ranking. The overall structure is more akin to a chess ladder than an RPG. Players first create teams using the Teambuilder feature, which will be further explored later in this chapter. Then, players choose which type of battle they would like to have from one of Smogon's many sets of rules, and can jump right into a matched battle with another player on Pokémon Showdown. This matching system is based on a player's rating; more wins equates to a higher rating. After the battle, both players' ratings are adjusted based on the results. And that, essentially, is all there is to Pokémon Showdown. In terms of depth and mechanics as a game, Pokémon Showdown is simple outside of the battle system. There is only one way to track progress within the game: the matchmaking rating. Every battle is essentially the same other than the opponent and both teams of Pokémon. Gameplay in Pokémon Showdown follows a very simple cycle: prepare for battle, battle, use any knowledge gained through that battle for strategy revision. This sequence of gameplay creates a stark contrast with that of the official Pokémon games. There is certainly much less variety in gameplay, fewer mechanics, and a much stronger emphasis on winning battles in order to progress. This lines up well with the idea of expert play that Smogon supports, however. Players' focus is less split between multiple systems, so it allows players to focus entirely on the more complex aspects of the battle system and how best to use it. As the gameplay is somewhat repetitive, players are more easily able to recognize and

understand the types of play patterns that their opponents use. And as the only way to advance is through winning battles, players are heavily motivated to improve their own abilities, as that is the only thing that will allow them to advance within the larger structure of the game. This leads to a rhetoric that focuses on improvement through optimization. Rather than looking to improve their characters' abilities within the game to improve, players learn how to more effectively participate in expert play. The differences between the games can be summed up as the difference between seeking a broad variety of experiences or working towards mastery over one thing.

“Gotta Catch ‘Em All!”: Creating Pokémon Teams

Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games approach building teams of Pokémon very differently, but it is a central concern to both games. The importance of team building cannot be overstated. Even the slogan of Pokémon, “Gotta Catch ‘Em All!” refers to the goal of players to capture Pokémon and add them to their team. And while the structures of these games defines their obstacles, how players add Pokémon to their teams shapes how they overcome these obstacles. In the official games, players catch wild Pokémon to add to their team and take time to train them and make them stronger. In Pokémon Showdown, players use the Teambuilder feature to quickly customize their teams. The strategy and process of building one's team differs between the official Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown. The challenges present in the official games differ from the challenges found in Pokémon Showdown. The availability of Pokémon in the world, the presence of challenges which heavily favor certain types, the level-up system, the greater focus on bonding between player and Pokémon, and the overall aesthetic in the official games makes for a very different process in creating a team in the official games than in Pokémon Showdown.

Adding Pokémon to a team in the official Pokémon games is designed to make the player invested in their Pokémon and create emotional attachment. In the official Pokémon games, building a team is an ongoing process which spans the entire game. At the beginning of the game players are given one Pokémon, almost always chosen out of three starter Pokémon, and have to battle and catch other Pokémon in the wild to add to their team. The species of Pokémon available vary from area to area, so a major consideration as to which Pokémon a player can have on their team is which Pokémon they have encountered. Also, if

that was not enough, some Pokémon can be frustratingly difficult to catch, creating a further challenge to adding them to a team, with the reward of a rare Pokémon. All of these different mechanical considerations represent obstacles in the way of creating an ideal team for the player. However, in overcoming these obstacles when creating a team, the player finds more value and emotional attachment to their Pokémon due to the difficulty in adding them to their team. The Pokémon on the team become part of the larger journey narrative that the main line Pokémon games tell. The player grows by capturing more Pokémon in order to overcome obstacles, and overcoming obstacles allows the player to grow and improve their team.

In contrast, the Teambuilder in Pokémon Showdown is designed holding the idea of easily controlling and manipulating the nuances in Pokémon battling as paramount. It allows players to add any Pokémon in the official games to their team with only a few short clicks. There are a few restrictions, however. Players are restricted from choosing Pokémon that break the rules of the metagame they are playing in. If a player attempts to start a game with an illegal Pokémon on their team, the game shows a pop-up error message and prevents the player from starting the battle. Additionally, teams cannot break any of the underlying rules that are present in the Pokémon battle system, meaning that Pokémon are limited by the rules that are put into place by Nintendo in the first place. The Teambuilder prevents players from using Pokémon that have no moves, something that cannot happen in the official Pokémon games without taking advantage of a bug, and also prevents them from using items that cannot be obtained in the generation they are playing in. The rules present in Pokémon Showdown's Teambuilder are meant to simulate the ideal conditions of Pokémon that could exist in the games, making it as easy as possible for players to create teams that are full of both powerful and rare Pokémon, but still possible to attain in the official Pokémon games. The way that the Pokémon are sorted in the Teambuilder feature, by the metagames that they belong to, also plays into the goal of having players choose the most powerful Pokémon, as those Pokémon are the first options that they see upon starting to build a team. Essentially, the Teambuilder achieves its goal of helping players create the most powerful teams they can by providing the easiest access to the moves and Pokémon. There are virtually no obstacles put in the players' way to creating their team, making the creation of a team less of an accomplishment in itself. It also changes the way that Pokémon are used to be more like a player using a tool as opposed to the partnership and emotional attachment that is created by catching a Pokémon. Comparatively, in the official Pokémon games, the emphasis is firmly

placed on the journey, growth, and emotional attachment between Pokémon and the player. The differences in how Pokémon are added to players' teams fundamentally changes the emotional connection between players and their Pokémon, which is a core theme of Pokémon.

Player-Pokémon Interaction

A common theme through much of Pokémon is positive interaction between the Pokémon and humans. This theme is present throughout much of the anime and many of the feature films. In almost every episode and movie, the main character Ash and his friends are shown to work as a team with their Pokémon, improving each other and pushing each other to greater heights. One of the most memorable of these moments is in the fifth episode of the anime where Ash pushes a water wheel in order to make Pikachu stronger, both of them pushing themselves to their limits in order to overcome an enemy that they are both too stubborn to give up on beating (“Showdown in Pewter City”). This type of partnership exemplifies the type of cooperative work Porcher and Estebanez point to as the basis for relationships between humans and animals (15). This type of interaction gives Pokémon much more agency within the narrative, and represents a much more equitable way of treating them. This agency is stripped away from Pokémon in the games. In the official line of Pokémon games, Pokémon cannot disobey the player unless the player has not earned enough badges and the Pokémon was traded from another game. Within Pokémon Showdown, Pokémon cannot disobey the player for any reason whatsoever. This, along with several other mechanical changes in the games, shows how the different incarnations of the Pokémon world afford different levels of agency to Pokémon.

Within the mechanics of the games, the theme of positive interaction between Pokémon and humans is less well supported, but still present. It was arguably started through the Contests feature in *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*, and recently has been focused on again through the presence of the Pokémon Amie system in *Pokémon X* and *Y* and *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire*. Pokémon Amie allowed players to interact with their Pokémon in a more nuanced way by loading a model of their Pokémon into a 3d space and allowing the trainer to pet, play with, and feed their Pokémon in order to build a relationship with them. This relationship could then benefit the trainer in battle. In the more recent installments of the

games, *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon* and their sequels *Pokémon Ultra Sun* and *Ultra Moon*, this focus on the connection between Pokémon and their trainers and how that connection can grow through battling has been made even more prevalent with the new Pokémon Refresh system, which is an extension of the original Pokémon Amie system. Essentially, Pokémon Refresh allows players to interact with their Pokémon who have been injured or roughed up after a battle by healing them or cleaning them up. In some ways, this is also an extension of the hit point and status system which has existed unchanged as long as Pokémon has. In the official Pokémon games, players need to go to the Pokémon Centers located around the overworld to heal their Pokémon after they are injured in a battle. The Pokémon Refresh procedure requires using the stylus on the Nintendo DS touch screen to clean off dirt or to carefully rub medicine on the Pokémon's injuries, an action that can heal a minor amount of hit points or cure a Pokémon's status condition. After taking care of the Pokémon's injuries or messiness, the system switches back into the same system as Pokémon Amie, allowing players to feed and pet their Pokémon in order to build up an affection score with them. This affection then also translates directly into bonuses for battling. The entire system uses the Nintendo DS touch screen to let players "physically" interact with Pokémon, and the rules of the system revolve around how to properly interact with Pokémon in order to make them happy. The goal of the procedural rhetoric of this system is to have the player feel more connected with their Pokémon, and to show that a player's connection with their Pokémon affects how hard Pokémon will work for their trainer. Additionally, it also shows clear consequences to battles, and lets the player connect more clearly with the battle as a real event within the game. Overall, the effect seems to be aimed at getting players to invest more in the idea of Pokémon as actual characters and the experiences that they go through.

In comparison with Pokémon Amie and Pokémon Refresh, as well as the multitude of other ways of interacting with Pokémon in the official Pokémon games, Pokémon Showdown has nothing. However, this void is instructive as to Pokémon Showdown's rhetoric as well. In Pokémon Showdown, there are really only two things that can be done with Pokémon: battle with them, and prepare them for battle. Even the way that Pokémon are healed after battles is different between the main line Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown: in Pokémon Showdown, Pokémon are fully healed in between each battle without requiring input from or showing the player. This is an important departure from how injury to Pokémon is handled in the main line Pokémon games, where Pokémon injured in battle stay that way until the player

takes them to a Pokémon Center to be healed. As referenced above, this creates more of a sense of continuity with the Pokémon in the official games, and makes Pokémon feel more like real companions within the game, as opposed to tools. Pokémon Showdown's system removes any consequences to battling, as players' Pokémon are immediately healed. This removes much of the emotional connection that players have with their Pokémon.

Another aspect that removes the connection between Pokémon and player is the way in which players are able to alter their Pokémon within the Teambuilder. While in the official Pokémon games, "... Pokémon do not rest at their trainer's feet in domestic resignation, but act alongside them. In this scene of human and animal interrelation, it is not only the animal that is changed," the complexity of this relationship is circumvented by Pokémon Showdown (Wallin 161). Rather than forcing the human to change their strategies and actions to better utilize the qualities of any individual Pokémon, Pokémon's stats which are unchangeable in the main line of Pokémon games can be altered at the stroke of a key. These statistics are fully alterable within the Teambuilder, allowing players to assert their will over their Pokémon with no regards to that Pokémon's disposition. This intrusion onto a Pokémon's nature is in no way symbiotic, but an exploitation of the Pokémon in question for the benefit of the player, to allow them to use the Pokémon to the player's best outcome. However, these features of Teambuilder are perfectly in line with the idea of competitive expert play. Using a strategy that is objectively less effective at winning than another strategy is anathema to the competitive aspect of competitive expert play. That is not to say that every Pokémon always has to have the highest possible stats; there are several strategies that rely on Pokémon being the weakest version of themselves in order to succeed. Regardless of what the Pokémon's stats actually are, the fact that they are manipulated for the player's gain means that within Pokémon Showdown, the presence of working together with Pokémon has all but disappeared, unless the act of choosing strategy for a Pokémon in a battle can be seen as a kind of productive work. This removal of the teamwork that can be present within Pokémon further distances Pokémon Showdown from both the growth and journey themes present in the official Pokémon games, and further reinforces the use of expert play and mastery of the Pokémon battle system.

Visual Representation in the Pokémon Battle System

One of the biggest differences between the battle systems of Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games is the way in which battles are visually represented. Though the core mechanics of the Pokémon battle system are shared between the main line of Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown, there are some subtle differences between the two systems. One of the most immediately apparent differences is the visual representation of the Pokémon battle system. The procedural rhetoric of representation is important to players' understanding of a game system, as shown in Bogost's explanation of the listen-think-speak system that procedural systems follow (44). Even though much of the underlying system remains the same between Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games, the differences between what the player is shown of the system reflects the differing goals of each game.

The official Pokémon games use their visual representation to make battling as accessible, immersive, and entertaining as possible for players. They do this by obscuring a number of the more complicated battle mechanics. For example, players are not shown the ability and stats of opposing Pokémon and, in the older games, players were not even shown the typing of opposing Pokémon. This last point has changed with *Pokémon Sun* and *Moon*. This omitted information means that battling became a journey of discovery; players need to test things in order to see if certain strategies or moves work against certain Pokémon. Battling is less of a known quantity with this approach; learning is a goal of battling, as opposed to being a goal in order to battle. One of the methods used to teach players is learning through their mistakes. For example, in *Pokémon Red*, players can learn that Normal and Fighting-type moves do nothing to Ghost-type Pokémon by either attacking a Ghost-type Pokémon with one of those types of moves when the player comes across one, or by talking to an NPC. The mistake of wasting a turn by using an ineffective attack is not game-ending for the player; it is treated as a fairly minor misstep and learning experience. Players are also introduced to new mechanics in less difficult battles, so mistakes usually have even more minor consequences. This process supports the simplicity of the battle interface by giving players another avenue through which to learn aspects of the battle system. However, this type of learning is incompatible with expert play. In order to practice expert play, a player must already understand the vagaries of the system in which they are playing. This is not to

say that learning through one's mistakes is not an effective method of learning, only that demonstrating expert play requires a player to have already learned those lessons. Another design decision that supports this goal of simplicity can be seen when the player is battling a trainer. In the official Pokémon games, the Pokémon each player has are shown symbolically by their Pokéballs. The system shows a trainer's Pokémon in one of three states: healthy, has a negative status condition, or fainted. The system does not, however, make it easy to distinguish which Pokémon is which, the species of Pokémon the other trainer has, or any other information about them. The focus on learning and discovering the unknown further emphasizes the underlying themes of journey and growth in the official Pokémon games. Players have to use the game to learn all of the nuances in a Pokémon battle, as the information is not made clear to them ahead of time. Conversely, players are not required to understand every piece of the battle system in order to win, as the consequences for making small mistakes are not usually irreparably bad.

In contrast to the official Pokémon games, Pokémon Showdown makes a major effort to show all relevant information about a battle to both players. Pokémon Showdown uses several systems that provide a wealth of information about each player's Pokémon. Players can hover over the Pokémon in the battle to see a number of statistics, such as their potential range of speed and abilities of opponents' Pokémon and the actual speed and ability of their own. This information is very important, as knowing a Pokémon's speed can make the difference between a win and a loss. A major difference between the two battle systems is that Pokémon Showdown has a very detailed way of presenting Pokémon who are not on the field. Instead of having Pokémon represented by only their Pokéballs, there is actually a small sprite for each of the Pokémon in the battle. If a Pokémon is knocked out, the sprite changes from full colour to faded, showing in a similar way to the official Pokémon games how many Pokémon both players have remaining. By using their mouse to hover over the Pokémon, however, a variety of information becomes available to the player. They can see the Pokémon's name, typing, and species, as well as if the Pokémon has a status ailment, and what that status ailment is, a feature that is not available in the official Pokémon games. As well, players can see the exact percentage of hit points remaining that non-active Pokémon have. All of this additional information is important and can have a huge impact on the strategy of players. The presence of this additional information leaves less question as to the outcome of particular choices and puts the onus more onto the player to make correct

decisions based on the information that is given to them. It does, however, remove some of the knowledge requirements of battling, as players need less background knowledge of Pokémon in order to make informed choices because the knowledge is provided to them by the system. The way in which information is made visible to the player supports expert play by allowing players the ability to more easily reference the state of the game to make effective decisions and giving players the chance to learn specifics about aspects of the system which it makes visible. The differences between the availability of information and the severity of mistakes is the difference between growing and adventuring through a wide, mysterious world, as presented by the official Pokémon games, and Pokémon Showdown's goal of exercising mastery over a known system.

While representational changes can support the differing goals of the two games, these changes can also reflect the differences in how players play the game. One example of this is the visibility of boosted or dropped stats of Pokémon. Since the first Pokémon games, there have been moves that could increase or decrease the stats of Pokémon for the duration of the time they are active in a battle. Until as recently as *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire*, these stat changes were not displayed anywhere in the official games and were up to the player to keep track of. In the most recent games, there is a menu available each turn prior to choosing moves that shows which stats have been raised or lowered. This is a significantly less obvious representation than Pokémon Showdown gives stat boosts.

Pokémon Showdown puts much more significance on boosted or dropped stats. Pokémon Showdown shows all of a Pokémon's stat changes directly below their hit points, marking stat changes as vitally important and almost as valuable as a Pokémon's hit points itself. This is partially due to a difference in the way the Pokémon Showdown is played in comparison to the official Pokémon games, as much more value is placed on powerful boosting moves in Pokémon Showdown. One strategy in Pokémon Showdown is, after slightly weakening an enemy team, to try and get a free turn in order to boost a Pokémon's stats. Then, that Pokémon can be used to defeat the entire enemy team without giving the opponent a chance to respond. Once this boost is made, immediate actions need to be taken by the other player, or else they are in danger of losing the battle. This strategy in Pokémon Showdown is prevalent enough that it actually changes the degree of importance put on it by the designers of the game, making stat changes much more important, and therefore more visible, to Pokémon Showdown players than players of the official Pokémon games. This is a

very visible example of a game's metagame actually causing the designers to change the game in order to better serve and align with a subset of the players of the game. Of course, this also works in the opposite direction as well. Stat-boosting moves being that much more visible means that players are that much more likely to notice them being influential. Anecdotally, I always found stat-boosting and stat-lowering moves and abilities to be rather lackluster before I played Pokémon Showdown. After losing a few games against Pokémon with stat-boosting moves, I could see their value. Visual changes to the battle system can have a profound effect on how players perceive the system as a whole. However, though the visual changes to the battle system are the most... well... visible, they are not the only changes that Smogon has put into place.

Procedural Differences in the Battle System

The procedural differences in the battle systems of Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games are the most direct way that Smogon has changed the game to support the community's differing goals. Pokémon Showdown's battle simulator changes the rules of Pokémon. These rule changes, called mods by Smogon, are made on the mechanical level, according to the MDA framework (Hunicke et al. 2). They are meant to make the game more fair, skill intensive, and interesting. These mods may either add new rules, such as the Sleep Clause, where only one Pokémon per team is allowed to be sleeping at a time, or be restriction-based mods, such as the Swagger clause, where Pokémon cannot have the move Swagger. These mods are relatively small in scope, and most of the battle system remains the same between Pokémon Showdown and the official Pokémon games, but these small changes have a profound effect on the way that gameplay happens. This is due to the fact that rules do not have a one-to-one relationship with the actual gameplay of a game, that, "... gameplay is not a mirror of the rules of a game, but a consequence of the game rules and the dispositions of the game players" (Juil, 88). Though each of these changes are small individually, they have a much greater aggregate impact. The gameplay changes combined with the differences in players and how they approach the game is what makes the experience of playing Pokémon Showdown so different from the main line Pokémon games.

Conclusion

Despite using a similar battle system, the main line Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown are different in terms of goals and themes. Pokémon Showdown makes a number of changes to the battle system of the main line Pokémon games, but each of these changes are in service to the goal that Smogon has when it comes to Pokémon battling: to be the very best, like no one ever was. All of the changes made by Smogon serve the goal of achieving and practicing expert play in Pokémon Showdown and making it as straightforward as possible to improve battling skill through practice. However, this is not without trade-offs. Smogon sacrifices many of the mechanics and much of the procedural rhetoric that makes the official Pokémon games feel real and immersive. It loses the theme of growth, substituting it instead with improvement shown only by ladder ranking. It loses the theme of players connecting with their Pokémon, instead focusing only on how players and Pokémon battle. Pokémon Showdown loses many of the emotional themes and depth of Pokémon, all with the goal of pushing players to be the best battlers they can be.

Chapter 3: The Paratext of Smogon

Pokémon Showdown and Smogon have a mutually reinforcing relationship. Players use their experience with Pokémon Showdown to create content for Smogon, and the Smogon community influences how players choose to play and experience Pokémon Showdown (Consalvo 9). Smogon's paratext is so prevalent in Pokémon Showdown because all players are assumed to be deeply familiar with it. This communal understanding of Smogon's paratext and metagame provide an important dimension to how players interact, deeply affecting how expert play is conducted on Pokémon Showdown. Smogon's paratext also affects both the mechanical and narrative dimensions of Pokémon Showdown's dynamics. The way that Smogon affects players of Pokémon Showdown is both pervasive and varied. The Smogon community analyzes and describes the metagame of Pokémon Showdown, and this freely accessible information shapes how players view the game. One of the fastest and easiest ways for players to learn about Pokémon and in particular the differences between Pokémon Showdown and the main line Pokémon games is through the information that is freely available on Smogon. The play that takes place in Pokémon Showdown can take on additional significance when players are well-acquainted with the paratext produced in Smogon and the metagame studied there. Players who do not have any familiarity with the Smogon community and the paratext that it produces understand Pokémon Showdown in an entirely different way than those who do. The paratext around Smogon also affects the narrative of Pokémon Showdown. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Pokémon Showdown removes many of the RPG narrative of the main line Pokémon games. Smogon's paratext further decreases the importance of any narrative trappings by laying bare the mechanics underneath, so that players may have a stronger command of them in their pursuit of higher rankings on the competitive ladder (Consalvo 45). In essence, Pokémon Showdown acts to assist players' X-ray vision, as envisioned by Gee (41). It further assists players in "[s]eeing into or past the representational elements of the game" (Taylor and Elam 253). The mechanics of Pokémon Showdown are also affected by Smogon's paratext through the rules that Smogon creates for Pokémon Showdown. These rules usually take the form of metagame rule sets and bans on which Pokémon, abilities, moves, and items can be used. Smogon affects how players interact with the metagame of Pokémon Showdown, how they see

themselves in relation to the game, and even what is or is not part of the game. The effects of the paratext that Smogon creates are far-reaching, and directly shape what expert play looks like in Pokémon Showdown. Pokémon Showdown is altered by the paratext created by Smogon, and the full picture of what expert play is in Pokémon Showdown cannot be understood without having some understanding of Smogon and its influence.

Much of the Smogon community functions under an unspoken belief that understanding Smogon's paratext is key to improving their understanding of the meaning created by Pokémon Showdown, and thus their aptitude with the game. The reason that this highly paratext-focused model works is because, similar to the GameFAQs online guides that Consalvo writes about, Smogon's information is freely written and freely given (177). Smogon both supports and demands a thorough understanding of the metagame, and one of the most effective paths to that understanding is through the paratext that the Smogon community itself produces. As all players are presumed to understand the game of Pokémon and Smogon's paratext at a high level, many actions in Pokémon Showdown can take on a deeper meaning than what is directly shown to the player. Familiarity with Smogon allows players to understand the game of Pokémon Showdown in a way which is supported by Smogon itself, an understanding which is focused on success in Pokémon Showdown.

The presence of Smogon affects the dynamics of Pokémon Showdown in many varied ways. The two most prevalent forms of paratext on Smogon are the Smogon message boards and the Strategy Pokédex. The Smogon message boards offer specific advice to players and provide a place for players to interact. The message boards also organize the creation of other types of paratext including the Strategy Pokédex and the metagame rule set and ban system that Smogon uses. Both of these will be discussed in this chapter. The importance of the message boards cannot be overstated; they are at the very heart of almost everything that happens within Smogon. The Strategy Pokédex echoes an item that exists in the fiction of the Pokémon universe: the Pokédex, a constantly evolving encyclopedia of Pokémon that is created and used by the trainers and professors of the Pokémon world. Part of every official Pokémon game involves the professor in that game asking the player to complete the Pokédex by finding and catching every Pokémon. This goal is where the tagline "Gotta Catch 'Em All!" comes from. The Strategy Pokédex has something of a parallel goal: instead of catching and cataloguing every Pokémon, it seeks to catalogue the best and most common ways of using them on Pokémon Showdown. The Strategy Pokédex is crowd-sourced and

openly available to all players, making it not only a valuable resource, but one that actually influences the game of Pokémon Showdown. Both of these different sources of paratext influence the dynamics of Pokémon Showdown heavily, but both do so in different ways.

The History of Smogon

The Smogon message boards were the result of a community of Pokémon players who came together due to their shared love of Pokémon and pursuit of excellence in the games. The Smogon website was first opened to the public on December 18th, 2004 (“The Smog Interviews chaos - Smogon University”). Smogon was by no means the first competitive Pokémon-related website, but it stood out through its focus on content for competitive players, comprehensive analyses of Pokémon, and consistent emphasis on having the best online Pokémon emulator. Several elements were integral parts of the creation of Smogon: Smogon’s frequent Pokémon tournaments, the concerted effort put forward by the Smogon community to improve paratext, and Smogon’s policy of always having a closely paired, or at least endorsed, Pokémon battle emulator. This last point is probably the most significant factor in shaping Smogon’s success. (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”). Smogon was founded by one of the creators of Pokémon NetBattle, the only working battle simulator with a graphic user interface at the time of its founding (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”). This made Smogon a good choice for battlers of all stripes, and Smogon capitalized on that popularity through their tournaments and other content. Though there have been gaps where Smogon had no official simulator, and Smogon’s simulator of choice has changed several times over the life of the website, most of Smogon’s existence has seen it working closely with a simulator (“Smogon (Website) - TV Tropes”).

Smogon’s tournaments were important for a variety of reasons for competitive players, especially considering when Smogon was founded. Smogon came into being in 2004, five years before the first Pokémon World Championships were held by Play! Pokémon, the official Pokémon video game organization (“World Championships - Bulbapedia, the community-driven Pokémon encyclopedia”). Smogon found itself in a unique position to bolster the fledgling competitive battle scene with its own unofficial tournaments. These allowed players to compete in tournaments before any official tournaments existed. These tournaments, along with the paratext that Smogon was producing

at the time, made Smogon an absolutely invaluable resource for any competitive player of the Pokémon games.

Though many Pokémon websites offered opinions about how best to battle friends, Smogon was one of the first to make a concerted effort to turn the website into “something awesome” (“Archived Analyses | Smogon Forums”). They did this by creating their own paratext through the early members’ expertise on Pokémon, as well as incorporating paratext gathered from various other websites into their own. One particular type of borrowed paratext that would eventually grow into a major aspect of Smogon is the threat list. Early in competitive Pokémon, before Smogon created the much more authoritative Smogondex, the precursor to the Strategy Pokédex, the most common way of learning about competitive battling and the variety of Pokémon used in it was through threat lists. These lists had descriptions of the most common and powerful Pokémon and the ways that they would be used in battle. These threat lists were not as rigorously edited as the Strategy Pokédex, and often gave incomplete information about a Pokémon, as well as only focusing on a small subset of commonly used Pokémon. They also were not made as searchable or accessible as the Strategy Pokédex, which is user-friendly enough to be accessed in the midst of a battle. The Smogondex is also notable in that it was one of the most ambitious early efforts to create a historical record of Pokémon's metagame. Though Smogon’s aim with the Strategy Pokédex was not strictly historical preservation, but rather utility for competitive players, it does still act as a form of archive for previous ways of playing the game. Though the threat list is where the Strategy Pokédex started, both it and Smogon itself have come a long way since.

The Smogon Message Boards

The Smogon message boards are the main site of paratextual production for Smogon. While the Strategy Pokédex may be more accessible, the message boards host discussions about creating the Strategy Pokédex. As well, the message boards are used to facilitate the Suspect Tests and voting that control Pokémon Showdown’s rules. Much of Smogon’s paratext begins as discussions on the message boards, and virtually all of the paratext is discussed on the message boards at some point. There are a variety of different types of threads on the Smogon message boards, and all of them except for the Socialization boards are dedicated in

some way to the discussion of Pokémon and the surrounding paratext. A thriving conversation exists on these boards, as there are thousands of threads and they are commented on constantly. Though there are a wide variety of different topics on the Smogon message boards, ranging from discussion of the ideal makeup of Pokémon teams to sharing Pokémon-based art, all of these can affect how players interact and how players understand how expert play is conducted on Pokémon Showdown. The Smogon message boards are divided by topic. Discussions of each metagame rule set are separated into sections, and it is against the community standards to post something in the wrong forum (“Global Forum Rules | Smogon Forums”). The potential punishment for breaking this rule is not particularly severe, so accidentally posting a thread about the UnderUsed metagame rule set in the OverUsed metagame rule set board does not merit a ban, but the rule still is present. The Smogon message boards allow players to directly exchange ideas and affect each others’ ideas about the game while not being mediated by the game itself, affecting Pokémon Showdown’s metagame outside of its connection to the game itself. The message boards can be an effective pedagogical tool for teaching players about the game. Asking a question on the message boards will let experienced players explain something about the game, and reveal some of the deeper mechanics of Pokémon Showdown, allowing a new player to understand the immediate situation that they ask about as well as helping them understand more of the system. This kind of behaviour is common on the Smogon message boards, as evidenced by the Rate My Team sub-board, wherein one player asks the community for feedback about a team of Pokémon that they have put together. A more complex use of the message boards is when players cooperate to synthesize new paratext, as occurs in Theorycrafting threads. Theorycrafting is a concept that has been explored by Gee, amongst others (Gee 30-31; Paul). Players will suggest new ideas, usually about new Pokémon immediately prior to a new game coming out, and then cooperate with other members of the community on the thread to create new knowledge based on their shared expertise. These kinds of threads are an important part of the Smogon community, and are one of the ways that players can create new paratext for Pokémon Showdown, leading to new ideas and meaning within the game.

Though each of these instances of metagame activity can be looked at individually, together they form a complex tapestry of a metagame that extends far beyond the game and begins to create its own space. Though members of the Smogon community may not intend

to have this effect, the presence of a huge community of players discussing the game, as well as a huge repertoire of paratextual information, drastically changes Pokémon Showdown's metagame. Such a valuable and easily accessible resource motivates players to use it, as it allows them to improve at the game by increasing their game knowledge. This changes the metagame of Pokémon Showdown further promoting expert play through increased emphasis on both game and metagame knowledge, but it further changes the metagame by influencing that metagame knowledge in several ways. Though the message boards are an important site of metagame discussion, there is a more formalized paratextual document in Smogon, one that has a more profound effect on the way that players approach Pokémon Showdown. That document is the Strategy Pokédex.

The Strategy Pokédex

The Strategy Pokédex is a formalized repository of paratext. It allows contributors' work to become part of an authoritative resource, something that can profoundly affect the way members of Smogon think about any particular Pokémon. It allows members of Smogon to create meaningful and influential paratext in a way that is not wholly dependent on their own credentials as a member of the community, or on their own ability to attract attention to their ideas. Members of Smogon can contribute directly to a resource that is one of the central sources for how they talk about expert play in Pokémon, giving contributors a powerful channel to affect Pokémon Showdown.

As stated previously, the Strategy Pokédex derives its name from the Pokédex, a digital encyclopedia of Pokémon from the fictional world of Pokémon. The Strategy Pokédex organizes this information into articles; one article exists for each Pokémon. The general breakdown of a Strategy Pokédex article is consistent for every Pokémon. Every article has an introduction which includes a description of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the Pokémon, what kind of roles it can fill on a team, and what unique properties it has that other similar Pokémon do not. Then they tend to follow this with several specific stats and move sets, and some analysis and explanation for their choices on why a Pokémon could be effective with those moves. Then, on the more developed articles, they provide an in-depth analysis of which other Pokémon would be effective on a team with that Pokémon, and finally, what Pokémon and strategies are effective against that Pokémon. As well, each article

starts with a listing of the Pokémon's stats, abilities, and type, and ends with the Pokémon's full move pool. These two bookends of the Pokémon's stats and moves are automatically generated for their page, so each page in the Strategy Pokédex always has at least that much information on it, even if no community contributors have written about it yet. In some ways, the Strategy Pokédex is the culmination of the ideals that Smogon holds about Pokémon: it lists Pokémon by metagame rule set, it categorizes and breaks down the best builds for each Pokémon, and it gives players of Smogon a database to look at when trying to make their decisions in battles. It removes the elements of chance and surprise from battles, as it narrows down the possible sets of abilities and stats that a Pokémon might have, and gives players one or two most likely options. To add to the influence of the Strategy Pokédex, it is user-friendly enough that it can be used during a battle, a practice that will be further explored in chapter four. While the knowledge provided by the Strategy Pokédex can help players learn about the game, it also has some other effects on how players approach Pokémon Showdown.

The Strategy Pokédex influences players by providing high-quality paratextual information which can be integral to how players construct their interpretations of expert play in Pokémon Showdown. It is one of Smogon's most well-used and valuable features, and has perhaps the widest sphere of influence. The Strategy Pokédex is a crowdsourced wiki that has the goal of containing all of the most effective builds and strategies that can be used by each Pokémon. Though all of the articles come from members of the community at large, the quality of the Pokédex is maintained through an editorial system, where each article requires three editors to give their approval before it is published to the Pokédex. This system is a formalized example of the type of paratextual regulation that is talked about by Newman and Ashton ("Relations of Control"). This type of control allows the Smogon community to reinforce its own beliefs and create a space where the same types of messages are repeated. The elitist attitude that it holds echoes what Gee's interrogation of the website *Elitist Jerks* found: visitors of the site can either abide by their rules or leave (31). The Smogon community is able to, through the editorial process, declare what is and is not acceptable gameplay. The Strategy Pokédex brings this regulatory and authoritative aspect of paratext and walkthroughs to a further extreme, as by its association with the narrative Pokédex that exists within the anime and games, it positions itself as the ultimate authoritative source on Pokémon. This aspect of Smogon gives it immense control over the metagame expression of Pokémon Showdown. The fact that the Strategy Pokédex is so valuable and well-used means

that the inclusion or exclusion of a particular analysis of a Pokémon can have a major effect not only on what players discuss in the metagame space of the Smogon message boards, but also on what players experience and expect to experience while playing Pokémon Showdown.

By using the Strategy Pokédex, players are able to use more effectively the information given to them, especially in regards to understanding both the system they are playing in and the play patterns present within that system, two core elements to expert play. While the Strategy Pokédex can provide valuable information to players, it also pushes players to use it by giving all players easy access to in-depth strategic knowledge. Because this knowledge is both very useful and easily available, it is used by a large number of players, and players who ignore that knowledge are at a competitive disadvantage. As no player has the entire game of Pokémon memorized, the Strategy Pokédex becomes an important tool to make the best game decisions. A specific Pokémon with a specific move means something immediately to players when using the Strategy Pokédex as a guide. The Strategy Pokédex helps players to create meaning in a way that is highly contextual, as well; for example, an Aron means something different in the OverUsed metagame rule set than it does in the Little Cup (“Aron | BW | Smogon Strategy Pokédex”). The Strategy Pokédex is an incredibly valuable tool in helping to create this meaning, as it allows players to understand the dynamics of the game beyond what they have experienced firsthand. This means that, if both players are familiar with and using the Strategy Pokédex, players are able to make similar meanings out of a game, allowing them to participate in the kind of synthesis described by Hocking from a more equal starting point. Players can understand the reasoning behind the choices their opponent makes, and communicate more clearly about the events of the game because they share many ideas and opinions about Pokémon. The Strategy Pokédex provides some of the context necessary for players to engage in expert play with each other on an equal footing. The fact that its strategic value makes the Strategy Pokédex so common means that many players are fluent in it, and are able to communicate meaningfully about the game. Pokémon Showdown needs to be considered with the Strategy Pokédex as indispensable context.

Changing the Game: Suspect Tests

Smogon controls the process that makes changes to Pokémon Showdown's rules. The main way that the Smogon community participates in changing Pokémon Showdown's mechanics is through the metagame rule set system. As referenced earlier, within Smogon the use of the term *metagame* means a set of rules by which the game of Pokémon is played on Pokémon Showdown, and for clarity this thesis is referring to Smogon's usage of *metagame* as a *metagame rule set*. Smogon has a procedure they follow in order to create their metagame rule sets. Essentially, they start by allowing players to use any Pokémon they wish, with the exception of some which are quick banned, a process described below. After some time, the most frequently used Pokémon are put into the OverUsed metagame rule set, or OU for short. The frequency used for this calculation is weighted by a player's ranking as well, so more successful players have more influence on a Pokémon's usage than less successful ones. Pokémon with usage under a certain threshold become part of the Underused, or UU metagame rule set. Smogon does not make any restrictions about using Pokémon from a lower metagame rule set in a higher metagame rule set, though there is a general ethos and practice of pointing out that it is often to a player's disadvantage to use a Pokémon from a lower metagame rule set, and that there are better options within the higher metagame rule set. The frequency test process repeats again, creating the Underused, Rarelyused, and Neverused metagame rule sets, UU, RU, and NU, respectively. All of these primary passes on metagame rule sets are based on weighted usage statistics; if enough people play enough games with a certain Pokémon in one metagame rule set, it becomes part of that metagame rule set. The influence that paratext has on this particular system of mechanic adjudication is relatively clear: the more positive paratext surrounding a Pokémon, the more likely that Pokémon is to see play and be placed in a higher metagame rule set. Paratext has an undeniable effect on the metagame rule set process, as that process is influenced by player perception, which paratext can alter.

Several metagame rule sets are exceptions to Smogon's standard process for creating metagames. One of the more popular and notable is the Little Cup. The premise for the Little Cup comes from the Petit Cup in the N64 game *Pokémon Stadium*, where it is a tournament where only Pokémon who can evolve but have not yet are allowed. This causes a major

change in the pool of Pokémon for the format, as most Pokémon become significantly stronger through evolution, and are thus more often used. Smogon's Little Cup follows the spirit of the N64 game's rules, allowing only those Pokémon that can evolve but have not yet. This sets it apart from the majority of Smogon's metagame rule sets, as most of the Pokémon that make an impact in those metagame rule sets are banned in Little Cup. Little Cup does its own Suspect Tests and rule-making independent of the rest of the ladder, so it has an entirely different set of bans, and is different even from the Petit Cup rules in Pokémon Stadium.

The bans that Smogon uses to further refine the rules of Pokémon Showdown are another point of community interaction, and thus another chance for paratext to change the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown. The ban process begins with several well-respected Smogon members suggesting bans for Pokémon that they believe are detrimental to their vision of expert play within a metagame rule set. Bans can take several forms, and Smogon has made a number of different systems to allow bans and partial bans. Pokémon, moves, abilities, and even combinations of different moves on Pokémon on the same team can be the target of bans. These bans can be controversial, and many generate involved discussions within the community. There are two processes for banning in Smogon: the quick ban and the Suspect Test ban. Quick bans are the more unilateral of the two processes. In a quick ban, there is no deliberation on whether or not a ban should take place by the community, but rather, the ban is decided upon and enacted by a tier council, a group of well-respected Smogon community members responsible for a metagame rule set. These bans happen regularly after the release of a new generation of Pokémon, such as after the release of *Pokémon Sword and Shield*. The Suspect Test is the more robust course of action for a banning or unbanning. A tier council will announce that it will do a Suspect Test focusing on one or two different things that they are considering banning from or reintroducing into a metagame rule set. They will then create a Suspect Test ladder, which is a separate ranking system with the ruleset of the metagame they are testing for with all of the suspect Pokémon, abilities, moves, and other aspects of the game in question allowed. Players are meant to play on the ladder in such a way as to take the most advantage possible of the things being tested. Any member of the Smogon community can use the message boards to post their opinion on the Suspect Test, but community members who are able to earn a high enough ranking on the Suspect Test ladder are also able to publicly vote on the message boards and give their opinions on whether or not the changes should go through. A majority vote determines the

outcome of the Suspect Test. While this process is certainly a way to involve the community, it is still difficult to actually gain the ability to vote in Suspect Tests (“The Suspect Test - Smogon University”). More experienced members and members of the Smogon elite still hold a strong sway over the outcome of Suspect Tests and bans. Involved members of the community are still able to influence the way rules are made for Pokémon Showdown in a major way. Any player who is able to cast a vote in the Smogon Suspect Tests is likely involved in the community and paratext to such a degree that they are more likely to agree with the way that Smogon views Pokémon Showdown and the type of play that should be encompassed in expert play. This type of practice is a metagame layer surrounding the game itself. Participating in the Suspect Test ladder and voting are ways that players can play a “game without a game” (Newman and Ashton *Metagaming* 68). This clearly demonstrates that what players think directly affects the game, and the game directly affects what players think. The knowledge that a player can be part of a democratic action to change the game changes how that player thinks about that game as a whole. It gives them license to believe that something should be banned or that the game could always be improved or changed to be more to their liking. This control over the game allows players to not only affect what play is, but what play should be.

The fact that involved community members are instrumental in choosing what is and is not banned means that Smogon’s paratext is profoundly influential to the rules made for Pokémon Showdown, and that the metagame of Pokémon Showdown can directly affect the game mechanics. Committed community members are well-versed in the Smogon’s paratext, as it is a core aspect of the community. Paratext such as analyses of the current best strategies and the history of past bans and rule changes are well-known to most community members, and the precedent that is set by those can become difficult to overcome. Many opinions held by community members can become entrenched in the ethos of Smogon, influencing the decisions of many choices to come and allowing the metagame to influence mechanics. One such example of this is the Aegislash ban in the *Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* OU. Aegislash was considered to be a strong Pokémon by almost all metrics, but the reason that it was eventually banned is not that it was mathematically superior to too many other Pokémon. Rather, Aegislash was banned because it caused too many guessing games to take place. The existence of Aegislash ran contrary to Smogon’s goal to create a game more based on skill than luck, and as such, the community decision reflected those beliefs of the community and

resulted in Aegislash being banned. This is similar to how Newman and Ashton describe the regulatory aspect of paratext, but rather than using paratextual means to dissuade players from playing a particular way, Smogon's influence over the metagame outright prevents them from doing so by changing the very rules of the game ("Relations of Control"). In this way, much of the paratext created by Smogon changes the way in which players make their decisions for banning Pokémon, directly impacting the actual mechanics of Pokémon Showdown. This has undeniable changes on the dynamics of the game, changing the aesthetic experience of the player. In the case of Pokémon Showdown and Smogon, paratext influences mechanics and meaning through the players that legislate those mechanics.

Smogon's Paratext

Smogon's paratext changes the way that players interact on Pokémon Showdown by giving the community a common language and base of knowledge to draw from. Many games, whether by design or accident, have a community that creates and consumes this kind of formalized paratextual content, especially games with a high propensity for expert play. For example, chess players learn openings and go players learn shapes as a kind of paratext to further understand and communicate about the game. Similarly, in order to further understand Pokémon Showdown, players can turn to the Strategy Pokédex or the Smogon forums. The way that players approach play in Pokémon Showdown varies based on their familiarity with different Pokémon paratexts.

Smogon's paratext fractures and minimizes any kind of narrative that Pokémon Showdown would have. The way in which Pokémon Showdown's design minimizes the narrative of Pokémon was covered somewhat in the previous chapter, but Mia Consalvo also links this loss of narrative to how paratext is used. Consalvo's opinion of paratext is that it acts as something of a double-edged sword, and that "[w]hile use of the paratext can help a player make clear or uncover certain elements of a text/game, overuse of the paratext strips away too much of the game experience, revealing it as an exercise of mechanical components to be manipulated" (45). As stated earlier in this chapter, Smogon encourages the use of paratext, which certainly leads to players losing much of the narrative experience of Pokémon in favour of seeing it as "an exercise of mechanical components to be manipulated" (Consalvo 45). However, this is not necessarily as damaging to the game experience as

Consalvo makes it out to be. While it does dissuade players from engaging in the fictional world in a certain way, the way that the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown changes Pokémon from a coherent world to an incoherent world shows that direct, representational connection is not the goal of Pokémon Showdown (Juul 131). Rather than being reduced by its heavy use of paratextual information, Pokémon Showdown fully embraces what Gee calls “going mindfully meta” (30). While Gee admits that “in some cases a meta stance towards games... can spoil the pleasure of just being lost in play, acting, and interacting,” he sees the value that can be gained from looking at a game as a system, that sometimes “gaming can become too hard or too routine if we don’t go mindfully meta” (30). The mechanical changes of Pokémon Showdown are intended to lay the mechanics bare for the player, allowing players to “go mindfully meta” by making the system easier to understand and manipulate (Gee 30). This, again, does line up with the goal of Smogon: to promote expert play and help its members reach mastery in Pokémon battling through knowledge. In my own experience, this paratext-heavy, reduced-narrative expert play of Pokémon has still been enjoyable; the experience is akin to an abstract game where each is trying to out-think the other. Certainly, there is less of a narrative dimension to it, and the paratext has a direct hand in causing this, but the overall aesthetic is still enjoyable. While Consalvo is accurate in her assessment that an abundance of paratext may “[reveal the game] as an exercise of mechanical components to be manipulated”, it does not necessarily “strip away too much of the game experience.” Instead, it changes the game experience into something less focused on narrative, and more focused on mechanical choices and their systemic interplay, which is a central aspect of the kind of expert play that Smogon promotes within Pokémon Showdown (45). In some ways Consalvo is right: the traditional narrative of Pokémon is destroyed, and Nintendo’s originally intended game avatar is made obsolete or, as Juul might conceptualize it, becomes a coherent character in an incoherent world (131). However, this does not destroy the game; rather, a new way of approaching the game, one that takes into consideration the further, paratextual qualities of the game into consideration must be created. While using this approach, the player must not only be capable of commanding Pokémon in battle, but also capable of various other metagame tasks.

How Smogon Redefines Expert Play

In many ways, it is a given that members of the Smogon community are knowledgeable about the types of play that occur within Pokémon Showdown. The presence of several types of paratext attest to that. However, while players may know and understand a large number of the strategies present in high-level play within Pokémon Showdown, that does not mean that they agree with all of those play patterns. The control that Smogon has over the rules of Pokémon Showdown means that members of the community are able to look at play patterns that they do not agree with and ban those play patterns from the game. Essentially, members of the Smogon community are able to use their knowledge of what kinds of play patterns are effective within expert play and then, by changing the rules of the game, alter those patterns to more closely fit what they believe is the ideal state of expert play within the Pokémon Showdown. In doing this, expert play becomes less of a description of how best to play a game and more of a prescriptive tool that tells players how the game is meant to be played. This type of designing to push players towards what a designer believes is the right way to play a game is not uncommon in games. Egliston discusses how the changes made to a talent within the game *World of Warcraft* reduces the options that players have to play the game with so that players will play the way Blizzard intends (*Play to Win* 76). Much of Egliston's assertion that the removal of options for players reduces the overall variety of ways to play the game is based on the fact that the type of game he is describing does not feature direct conflict. High level raiding in WoW is a group activity where players are not placed in direct, antagonistic conflict with each other, though there may be a competitive aspect to which guild can achieve a faster time on a particular raid. Still, the fact remains that the strategies to choose from when facing a particular raid does not limit any other strategies. Even if one strategy is significantly more effective than another, it does not prevent the less effective strategy from achieving the goal of completing the raid.

The same cannot be said of Pokémon Showdown. As players are in direct conflict with each other, less effective strategies are crowded out by highly effective strategies. If one Pokémon is unbeatable except for a very specific counter, a player's two choices become to use that counter or lose whenever their opponent uses that Pokémon. This means that if one strategy is too dominant, the game loses much of its variety. This problem is known within

Smogon as “overcentralization,” and is understood as a single strategy becoming so prevalent within the metagame that the only ways of pursuing expert play is to either use that strategy or use a strategy which directly counters it (“Categorizing Tiering Bans | Smogon Forums”). Smogon considers this situation to be a viable reason to ban a Pokémon or strategy, as it reduces the variety within the game. In terms of expert play, a fully overcentralized metagame with only one strategy or a counter strategy essentially removes an aspects of expert play: the requirement of understanding the many play patterns that players use within the system. As only two play patterns are used, there are minimal play patterns to consider within the system. This means that the expert play within the system loses one of its essential aspects, something that can be seen as making it a less easily defined form of expert play. Similar conclusions can be drawn about other reasons that Smogon puts forward for its bans: strategies which are heavily chance-based reduce the impact of effective play, reducing the impact of expert play, and are thus a target for banning by Smogon. However, while banning strategies that are overcentralizing can actually increase the number of strategies that are viable within expert play, banning chance-focused strategies directly decreases the number of strategies that are viable. In this instance, Smogon is only enforcing its view of what expert play must be, much in the way that Blizzard enforces its view on what types of expert play are acceptable within World of Warcraft raids (Egliston *Play to Win* 76-77). It is clear that the Smogon community’s focus is not about whether or not a metagame allows players the broadest possible selection of strategies, but rather whether a metagame is most conducive to inspiring expert play as they define it.

Conclusion

The Smogon community exerts incredible influence over Pokémon Showdown. It is a major influence on the Pokémon Showdown metagame, as well as affecting all three of the aspects that make up game dynamics, as identified by Hocking. Smogon affects how players interact in the game, but it also affects both the narrative and, through the process of Suspect Tests and bans, even the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown. Smogon’s paratext changes how players understand what expert play is, and the way that players believe expert play should be conducted affects the rules of Pokémon Showdown. The Strategy Pokédex is arguably the most influential source of paratext on Smogon, as its very existence changes the way that

players approach playing Pokémon Showdown. Knowledge of the game becomes a question of effectively using the Strategy Pokédex, and all players are expected to have strong background knowledge of the game. This changes the meaning that comes out of every battle. The Smogon message boards are also instrumental in the central role that Smogon plays, as most of the paratext Smogon creates is either created or mediated on those message boards, and they are one of the central sites of metagame interaction. The presence of these paratexts affect how players interact with each other. These paratexts give players a dictionary for the common language of Pokémon battling. The narrative of Pokémon Showdown is affected by the paratext surrounding the game, as the paratextual focus on the mechanical elements of the game causes the narrative to fade into the background. The mechanics of Pokémon Showdown themselves are also affected by paratext, as the different methods that Smogon uses to govern the rules of Pokémon Showdown are highly susceptible to being changed by the paratext present in Smogon. Looking at the effect of Smogon on Pokémon Showdown through the lens of minor literature, there is no clear distinction between a player and what one could loosely call a designer. The Suspect Test allows paratext to seep into the actual play of the game, and play into paratext. Consalvo's assertion that the overuse of paratext can lead to "revealing mechanics as a system to be manipulated" is not seen as a negative by the Smogon community (45). It is seen as a requirement in order to meaningfully interact with the game that is Pokémon Showdown, as a precondition to expert play. Pokémon Showdown and Smogon, when both are engaged with, are mutually dependent on each other to create a meaning which is different from the meaning created by either. It is impossible to truly understand Pokémon Showdown without understanding Smogon, as Smogon affects every element of Pokémon Showdown.

Chapter 4: Battle Analyses

A game of Pokémon is not much of a game without players. Though games which put into practice automated play exist, Pokémon Showdown requires two players in order to be played, be those players human or AI (Fizek 7). This chapter will look at three different streamers playing Pokémon Showdown, each at a different skill level. Each of these streamers will be referred to by their screen name throughout this chapter. Red is a relatively new player to Pokémon Showdown, though he does evidently have prior experience with Pokémon. He is a good example of a Pokémon player who is unfamiliar with Smogon, and he makes for a good counterpoint to the two other streamers examined in this chapter. Blue is a longtime Pokémon streamer and, while not a champion in his own right, has a lot of experience when it comes to Pokémon. He is familiar with Smogon, and is a middling player in terms of skill. Green is the most skilled battler out of the three. He is a winner of the Smogon Tour and an expert in Pokémon battling, and the way he plays the game is an example to which many players in Smogon aspire. This chapter will consist of an analysis of one battle from each of these three players. It will look at how their gameplay comes to be and how their play is affected by the greater Smogon community.

As streamers are not truly representative of the general player population of any game, the performative aspect of streaming must be addressed in order to understand how streamers may differ from the average player. Streamers are performers as well as players. The way that they perform for their audience impacts the way in which they express and share their experience. However, there are few good alternatives to using streamers as a window into Pokémon Showdown's play experience. One possible alternative would be to use the Battle Replay function within Pokémon Showdown. While this would allow a much wider variety of battles, it is missing one key component to this analysis: the reactions of the players. The community would be left asking the question: if an Exeggutor falls in a Random Battle, does the trainer care? Presumably yes, they do, but there is no way of directly knowing the player's response unless they are recording themselves. While player reactions can be somewhat inferred by their choices in battle and the messages that they send in chat, it is much more informative to look at their vocal and physical responses in order to see what meaning they make from the battle. Another alternative would have been to do recordings

and interviews of test subjects, but while it would have taken the aspect of performativity out of the equation, it would have been nearly impossible to find the breadth of skill that players have in this study. While a less experienced player like Red would not have been difficult to find, and even a more well-versed player like Blue would have been possible, it would have been nearly impossible to find a player as decorated and skilled as Green, not to mention one as well-versed in the paratext that Smogon offers. Not only that, but the question of performance would still be there, albeit in a research context instead of a streaming one. In some ways looking at streamers could even be somewhat beneficial to the study of aesthetic experience, as streamers are more likely to explain and express their experience as it happens. Though this expression may be exaggerated, it is much more informative than having no expression of aesthetic experience at all. While the performance inherent in streaming is certainly a challenge to negotiate in regards to how players express their experience, it is a surmountable challenge, and it is the least problematic of the options present.

The Smogon community is incredibly influential to Pokémon Showdown. Finding players who are knowledgeable about Smogon and members of the community to varying degrees made it possible to investigate how knowledge of Smogon affects expert play. As this chapter will reveal, Red's unfamiliarity with Smogon's paratext is one reason why he plays Pokémon Showdown in the manner he does, and Green's immersion in Smogon's paratext heavily influences how he conducts expert play. Finding players who have varying familiarity with Smogon is another benefit of using streamers, and gives more insight into how players' familiarity with Smogon affects the way that they play Pokémon Showdown.

Transcription

To make sense of a game experience outside of playing it requires some manner of translation from the game to another medium. This thesis will use Recktenwald's transcription theory which works well with Pokémon Showdown in order to create a transcription which is both appropriate for the type of analysis being done and effective at communicating the original intent of the source (Recktenwald 72-73). Transcription is a useful and varied tool that has been used across many disciplines, and it would be difficult to track all of the uses of transcription in an academic setting. However, the modern study of the theory of transcription, which came into being due partially to more effective recording

devices, gives good insight into the way that transcription is used in this thesis (Have, 3). This thesis mainly uses transcription as a method to perform a detailed reading of the players' gameplay experiences. The goal is to better understand how a community such as Smogon affects the way that players conceive of and practice expert play. To that end, the transcription guideline of using the lexical spellings of words, as exemplified by Recktenwald, will be used as a method of clearly representing meaning (73). This is done as opposed to accurately reproducing the phonetic sounds of the recordings that they came from, an alternative suggested by Bucholtz, as that level of detail does not add to the analysis this thesis is performing (1454). While maintaining the phonetics of how words are spoken in a transcript can be beneficial in terms of understanding phenomena such as early childhood linguistic development, it does not add to the meaning of this analysis of how players play games, and as such, using lexical spelling allows for a clearer examination of the meaning of players' utterances.

This chapter will make heavy use of Recktenwald's transcription method in order to transform the videos into a more easily studied form. Recktenwald uses separate columns to separate different types of information being communicated by the stream: one for timestamps, one for important in-game events, one for streamer actions and speech, and one for chat messages. This thesis makes a small modification to this methodology by adding a column to record the battle log provided by Pokémon Showdown, which is a very detailed record of every event and action that takes place in a battle whether the player considers it important or not. This will allow for a detailed examination of parts of the battle in which, while no individual event may be significant to the player, is still potentially important to how the overall battle is conducted. Its inclusion is meant to provide a more complete transcript, which is made possible due to the turn-based gameplay of Pokémon Showdown with its discrete actions. The additional information allows for further analysis of the battles by giving other scholars a more complete record of them. While the gameplay transcript is not a perfect transcript of the events that occurred in the battle, it does have the additional weight of being produced by the game itself. It is, in some ways, how Pokémon Showdown represents itself.

Of particular note is the decision to keep the description of the streamer's video in the same column as the streamer's verbal transcript. This is an effective transcription method as, due to the many streams of information present in each of the battles, the transcripts benefit

from simplicity wherever possible, making the combination of two related streams of information very desirable. The exception to the choice to make one column contain the entirety of the verbal transcription occurs in Red's battle. Red has multiple voices on voice chat in his stream, many of which frequently overlap throughout the battle. Red's speech and action is given its own column, and the speech and action of all other voices are given another, separate column. This does add another column to an already crowded transcript, but it is necessary as there would be an overwhelming amount of information in a single column if both were combined. As an added complication to this choice, the separation and ordering of columns can cause readers to favor one speaker over the other. However, in the case of this study, one speaker is actually being favored over the other, namely Red. It is his experience of meaning that is of primary interest to this thesis, with the other voices being important insofar as they contribute to his experience of meaning. The issue that Ochs speaks of, that a further leftward placement may add authority and importance to a speaker, actually works in the service of the goal of the analysis in this case (49-50). This deviation from the format of the other two transcripts is required for clarity and serves the goals of the analysis.

Though this method of transcription is meant to be as transparent and true to the original game as possible, there is one important part of the transcription which is affected by the transcriber's understanding of the subject; namely, the "Game Events" column. This column describes only the most important events that occur in the game, compared to the longer and more thorough "Game Transcription" column. What does or does not count as an important event is essentially up to the transcriber. In my transcription, I made sure to include any event which caused a Pokémon to faint or switch. A Pokémon fainting is one of the major ways of keeping track of who is winning in a Pokémon battle, as a battle is completed when all of one side's Pokémon are knocked out. Though the side with more Pokémon remaining may not always be at an advantage, it is clear that a Pokémon being knocked out is a major event within the game. Keeping track of Pokémon switching is less vitally important to keeping track of who is winning, but very important to retaining clarity within the transcription itself. It would be incredibly confusing to hear about Mega Lopunny knocking out a Tapu Fini when the reader still thinks that Landorus-T and Zapdos are out. Other than that, I relied on my own game knowledge to determine what events merited inclusion, as well as the reactions and game knowledge of the streamer. I included things like attacks that did large amounts of damage, failed predictions of an opponent's move, and other relevant and

meaningful details, at least according to my understanding of Pokémon Showdown. I also included any events that the streamer felt were important enough to comment on in detail or events that drew a strong reaction from the streamer. All of these events are included as a way of summarizing the events for the transcript reader in a way that makes it clear what happens in the battle and shows the most important swings of the battle in an easy to read fashion.

Though each of the recorded streams are available freely to the public, out of respect for the streamers, I have opted to use pseudonyms to protect the identities of those involved with the creation of the streams. Within the transcripts, I have used square brackets to denote where I changed names to pseudonyms. There is some minor loss of meaning from the change of players' and spectators' names. The only two highly impactful moments are when Green makes a comment about his opponent's name (Green id78) and when Blue uses shortened names to refer to spectators that he knows well and has an ongoing relationship with (Blue id43-50). The privacy of the streamers who may not have realized that their work would be scrutinized in an academic setting is important, as is the continued trust between gaming communities and the academic community that studies them, so the loss of this meaning from the transcript is well worth it.

This modified Recktenwald method of transcription allows for a thorough analysis of the recorded streams. These transcriptions will be useful in pointing out specific instances where expert play is being practiced in Pokémon Showdown, especially instances where that play is dependent on expert knowledge about Pokémon. How the expert play is practiced and understood in relation to the Smogon community can be determined by analyzing the games through the player commentary and reactions, as well as analyzing in-game decisions alongside any major events. The importance of paratext to expert play can also be investigated by looking at how a player's understanding and use of paratext, or the lack thereof, directly influences gameplay. The metagame rule sets put forward by the Smogon community can also be examined by analyzing these transcriptions, though the underlying systems which influenced how those rules were made cannot. Furthermore, the influence of both the community at large as well as a more general understanding of expert knowledge can be better understood by looking at the transcription of the stream chat. The chat transcription is of particular importance to Recktenwald, and his idea of pivot points will be integral in looking at how the streamer interacts with the people in the chat, as well as how

the chat influences the game. Overall, the transcription methodology proposed should provide an effective summary of the game as it occurs, effective communication of game events, and a thorough representation of the streamers' experiences as they play through Pokémon Showdown.

Pokémon Battle Case Studies

Red

Red is the least well-versed in Pokémon and the least in touch with the Smogon metagame, possessing only a novice understanding Pokémon Showdown compared to either Blue or Green. He is the player that least exemplifies the concept of expert play, let alone the expert play promoted by Smogon. This is seen when he says, “I don't know anything about the new P[okémon]- (gasps)” (Red id41). Red understands Pokémon Showdown as an outsider, a player who is fairly familiar with Pokémon, but not with Smogon. This is different from both Blue who shows his experience with Smogon by, “[doing] the classic thing of bringing up the Pokémon Battle Calculator⁴” (Blue id301), and Green, who is so well-versed with the paratext that surrounds Pokémon Showdown that he can look at his opponent's Zygarde's attack and know that his Crawdaunt will, “obviously live it pretty easily,” even though the Crawdaunt survives with only the thin margin of two percent of his health remaining (Green id56-57). Red's understanding of how to play Pokémon is independent of the paratext, community, and metagame of Smogon, and as such, is only influenced by the dynamics that are directly involved in Pokémon Showdown. This allows for some interesting contrast to both Blue and Green, as Red's approach to play differs from both of them. Red is the least familiar with the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown, as well as the mechanics of Pokémon as a whole, which leads him to understand the dynamics of Pokémon Showdown in a significantly different way. Red does have some narrative understanding of both Pokémon and the Pokémon games, and this does inform his understanding of Pokémon Showdown as well. In terms of how rigorous Red is in his approach to winning, it is apparent that he is playing to win, but also that his main goals are to entertain and have fun above all else. Red is an interesting counterpoint to both Blue and Green as a case study, as his lack of experience

⁴ I believe that this is in reference to the “Pokémon Damage Calculator” website, and was likely just misspoken by Blue.

with Smogon is indicative of the types of play that players undertake in Pokémon Showdown without interacting with Smogon.

Format and Metagame

A major difference between Red and the other case studies on a mechanical level is that Red is not playing in the same format as both Blue and Green. While both Blue and Green are playing on the competitive ladder, Red is playing Random Battles. This has a few different effects on the gameplay. While Blue and Green created their teams by themselves or by copying a post in the Smogon forums, both Red and his opponent have their teams randomly generated by Pokémon Showdown from a list of Pokémon created specifically for Random Battles. They have no control over their teams, and must play with what they are given. This means that Red does not actually know what Pokémon are on his team at the beginning of the match, and must come up with a strategy on the fly. This renders moot much of the higher-level strategic metagame thought put into the game, eliminating much of the metagame thinking that exists in both the Strategy Pokédex and the message boards of Smogon. This impacts expert play in a not insignificant way. Not being able to choose the team to take into the game quite effectively limits what metagame knowledge players can bring with them into the game, meaning that a players' understanding of the play patterns that are present within a game cannot be tested in their pre-game metagame preparation, but instead are tested solely within the game itself. In many ways, this actually makes Red's introduction into Pokémon Showdown easier. Random Battles excludes the team building aspect of strategy and puts each player on equal footing, allowing players with less experience building teams a better chance to win a battle. Instead of having a team which supports a coherent strategy that has one or several defined ways to win, Random Battles are more about effectively reacting to the opponent and making use of the resources available to the player. Metagame becomes less important, and variance higher; for example, an expert with all Water-type Pokémon could lose to a new player who got a team of all Grass-types simply due to major type disadvantage. This kind of variance is beneficial to newer players, as it tends to push win rates closer to a fifty percent coin flip. Though it precludes looking at Red's understanding of the Pokémon Showdown ladder metagame, Random Battle is certainly the easiest way for Red to play the game with less metagame knowledge.

Understanding of Pokémon Showdown

Knowledge of the mechanics of a game is central to expert play, as is knowledge of the ways that people play that game. It is clear throughout his battle that Red is not fully aware of all of the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown, which changes how Red plays. The most obvious example of this is when Red is unsure of Shedinja's typing, and unsure of how to use Pokémon Showdown to check it. When Misty asks, "What type is it?" Red could check this information by hovering his mouse over Shedinja's sprite (Red id116). He does not know this, however, until Brock and Misty tell him to "Hover over the Pokémon, it'll tell you what type he is" (Red id120). Red also misses out on using a very important feature of Pokémon Showdown, especially considering the format he is battling in: when hovering his mouse over a Pokémon, as if to switch, a player can see that Pokémon and all of its details. Red does not take advantage of this feature, as evidenced when he switches to his Sceptile for the first time. "[Ash]?/ My Sceptile knows- it has mega evolution on {covers face with hands}/ And it knows outrage/ {removes hands from face} Mega Sceptile" (Red id42-id45). All of Sceptile's moves are visible while hovering ones' mouse over it, as is the item Sceptilite, which indicates that Sceptile can mega evolve. This shows that Red, in addition to being unaware of much of Smogon's paratext and metagame, is also unfamiliar with the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown itself. This has a major effect on Red's play, and essentially prevents him from practicing expert play in any form. For example, when Red was unsure about what kinds of attacks can affect Shedinja, it nearly resulted in a turnaround for his opponent. Red does, however, show some level of understanding of Shedinja's abilities. He knows that Shedinja can only be affected by some kinds of attacks, but he does not know offhand what kinds. This creates a scenario which parallels the scenarios present in the official Pokémon games, as discussed in chapter two. Red uses the process of elimination in order to figure out which of his moves might affect Shedinja, much like a player might in the official games. As previously discussed, this type of play is antithetical to expert play. Red's experimentation gives the other player several turns to set up, something that could have been the difference between a win and a loss if things had played out differently. Red recognizes that Shedinja presents a huge problem for him as well: "If [Jessie] ends up winning because he has Shedinja" (Red id115). Another major example, one that shows that Red's unfamiliarity with some of the newer Pokémon definitely affects his ability to practice expert play, is when he

uses “keymon” for the first time (Red id83). Kelfki, a Pokémon that looks like a keyring, is at first derided by Red by the name “keymon” when he chooses it (Red id83). Its attack, Play Rough, is also derided for its somewhat silly sounding name (Red id86). However, Red’s opinion quickly changes once Play Rough knocks out Phemerosa in a single hit, with him saying, “I won’t make fun of that attack for Pokémon anymore” (Red id88-id91). However, in the estimation of the Strategy Pokédex, Klefki is both a strong and fairly popular Pokémon and Play Rough is one of the strongest Fairy-type attacks (“Fairy | SM | Smogon Strategy Pokédex”). In many ways, these moments show the difference between Red and the other two players analyzed here. Where Red is unsure of how to defeat Shedinja or even how to find out how to defeat Shedinja, both other players show either a huge depth of knowledge about the game or the ability to easily reference that knowledge. Where Red underestimates Klefki, both other players would know that Klefki can be a serious threat or the key to victory⁵, as Blue shows. In essence, Red is playing in a game filled with unknowns, whereas both other players, for the most part, know what they do not know.

Red’s Gameplay

The idea of coming up with a strategy on the fly characterizes much of Red’s battle. While both Blue (Blue id258-id259) and Green (Green id106) are able to look at the opponent’s remaining Pokémon and try to understand what strategy they need to use to maneuver themselves into a winning position, Red appears to only think about what the best move on any given turn might be. This can be seen immediately from turn one, where Red looks only at the matchup between the two Pokémon, and not whether or not it would be advantageous to possibly sacrifice a Pokémon in order to set up a more effective strategy (Red id5-id6). Of course, part of this focus on the current turn of the battle is due to the format that Red is playing, as Random Battles do not display the Pokémon that the opponent has until they send them out for the first time, which is detrimental to planning. Regardless, it is clear that Red is not focusing on planning ahead in the battle, as he is surprised when his opponent still has a Pokémon remaining near the end of the battle, saying, “No, he’s still- oh, he’s still got Celebi left?” (Red id132). This surprise is telling of both Red’s attention to the game and his familiarity with the interface, as a player’s remaining Pokémon are fully visible to the side of the main battle window. This is a huge difference in how battles are seen by players of

⁵ I am so, so sorry.

different skill sets, and another point that shows that Red is not conducting expert play in his battle, as he is unable to choose the intervening goals that will most effectively lead him to victory. The emphasis that Red puts on both the current turn and the active Pokémon, as opposed to looking at how he can win the whole battle, can be attributed to several things. As someone less familiar with the Strategy Pokédex and the Pokémon Showdown metagame as a whole, it is difficult to see what kinds of attacks are strong enough to easily knock out other Pokémon. This prevents Red from creating a situation like either Blue or Green creates, where they have a Pokémon fast and powerful enough to knock out the opponent's entire remaining team without reprisal⁶. Compare Red's understanding to Blue's, who chooses to sacrifice his Klefki in order to set up two levels of Spikes so that he can later knock out his opponent's Durant, a plan that he creates without Durant even being on the field: "I can get two layers of spikes up guaranteed here/which might be enough to bring it down to the point where I can kill off the Durant" (Blue id349-id350). The lack of future planning by Red shows that he and Blue are playing the game in entirely different ways.

Summary

While Red's play is different, it would be unfair to call it less important than the play of the other players in this analysis. Certainly, by Smogon's estimation, the play that Red exhibits would not be up to the community's exacting standards, but that is only one metric by which to measure. By the metric prescribed by the official Pokémon games, Red was exceptional: he chose attacks that were frequently super-effective, experimented when faced with a difficult challenge, and eventually won the battle. While Red's play may be without understanding some of the more subtle mechanics present in Pokémon Showdown, it is still valid, and shows that there is a way to play Pokémon Showdown outside of what is prescribed by Smogon.

Blue

Blue is between Red and Green in terms of experience and understanding of Pokémon Showdown. While he has a strong command of Pokémon Showdown as well as a good grasp of the paratext surrounding it, Blue does not have the same depth of understanding of Pokémon Showdown as Green. This does not mean that Blue is a mediocre battler, or that he

⁶ In Smogon's terminology, this is called a "sweeper," and it is a fairly common strategy.

is exactly between Red and Green in terms of battling skill. Blue's play much closer resembles Green than Red. Rather than looking at each turn individually, Blue plans ahead, his understanding of Pokémon Showdown and its metagame giving him the ability to look at where the current situation will lead. Rather than guessing about what the best move might be, Blue knows what that move is, or at least knows where to go to check, and he does so. Usually.

Format and Metagame

Blue is playing on the UU ladder, a competitive ladder on Pokémon Showdown which excludes the most popular and powerful Pokémon. Whereas Red uses Random Battle to get a random team, and Green is very clear that he created his own team, Blue actually does something quite interesting in order to get his team for this battle. He goes to the Rate My Team threads in Smogon and chooses a team that another community member posted (Blue id35). This shows Blue's familiarity and comfort with Smogon, as well as his understanding of the Pokémon Showdown metagame. Blue does a rundown of all of the Pokémon on his team and what their capabilities are. He does not know everything about the team, for example, why Latias has Thunder instead of Thunderbolt, but he does do a thorough job of explaining his strategy before going into the first battle (Blue id81-id85). The way that Blue chooses his team is an example of the second way that Newman and Ashton claim that walkthroughs can affect the play of games by inspiring new ways to play ("Relations of Control"). In using the paratext he finds on the "random RMT", Blue is exposed to a new way of playing Pokémon (Blue id35). While this particular team may be new to him, it is apparent Blue does have previous metagame knowledge of playing with a similar team, a marker of his ability to engage in expert play. Based on Blue's opening analysis of the team's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the ability he displays while playing, it can be inferred that the type of walkthrough Blue used may have inspired a new way of playing, but it only did so in the context of Blue's pre-existing metagame knowledge.

Understanding of Pokémon Showdown

Blue is a very accomplished battler and he draws a lot of meaning from the mechanical happenings of the battle. There are numerous moments throughout the battle where this is evident: from his correct assumption that Durant is Choice Banded after seeing the amount of

damage it does (Blue id210) to his knowledge that Spore does not affect Grass-type Pokémon⁷ (Blue id175). Blue's metagame knowledge is also frequently shown throughout the match, such as when he is able to predict that Typhlosion's item is "probably specs he's not scarf" (Blue id351), his correct assumption that when faced with his opponent's Durant, "i mean hippowdon you should be able to handle that" (Blue id203), and his knowledge of paratextual resources and how they can be used effectively to give him the upper hand in the battle (Blue id301). Each of these show that, through Blue's depth of knowledge in regards to Pokémon Showdown, the surrounding community, and its paratext, he is able to more clearly understand the happenings of the battle and practice expert play throughout. Though this understanding of a particular aspect of the battle may not necessarily be valuable in its own right, something like knowing that a Durant is using a Choice Band and has Hustle as an ability gives Blue more meaningful information to work with (Blue id216). This piece of information is clearly demonstrative of a deep understanding of the system of Pokémon Showdown, as well as an understanding of some of the play patterns that players often use within Pokémon Showdown, two components of expert play. In the example of Durant with Hustle and a Choice Band, Blue knows that because Durant is locked into reusing a single move due to the Choice Band ("Choice Band | SM | Smogon Strategy Pokédex"), and that Hustle gives all attacks a twenty percent chance to miss ("Hustle | SM | Smogon Strategy Pokédex"), he can safely leave his Hippowdon in even with low health, and a miss will allow him to use Stealth Rocks to slowly weaken the enemy team (Blue id230). His knowledge that, even when a Pokémon takes a surprising amount of damage, it is still able to stay in the fight, highlights Blue's expertise in Pokémon Showdown. It allows him to know when it is best to play safe and when he can be "cheeky" (Blue id218). This "cheeky" play is another strong example of effective play that leads towards the intermediary goal of weakening James' Pokémon. This type of effective intermediary goal setting is another strong example of expert play, and is integral to the way that Blue approaches playing Pokémon Showdown.

Blue's Gameplay

One thing that Blue lacks, as evidenced by his surprise several times throughout the battle, is thorough knowledge of other players' common play patterns. He makes several mistakes and

⁷ Though this does not stop him from using Spore on a Grass-type Pokémon, he is clear that mistake was not due to ignorance of the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown, but rather that he "expected him to switch there" (Blue id177)

is surprised several times due to strategies that he does not see coming, and does not correctly predict from his knowledge of the metagame. This is by no means a major fault: many players can be surprised by an unorthodox strategy that just happens to counter what their team wants to do, but players who possess stronger metagame knowledge would likely not be surprised as often or as badly as Blue is. This is apparent immediately at the start of the battle, when Blue loses two Pokémon to his opponent's Decidueye, not realizing that Decidueye had an Assault Vest, an item which makes Decidueye more resilient than normal. However, as one of his viewers points out to Blue later, "In the Monotype tier AV [Assault Vest] Deci [Decidueye] is very common for removing hazards on Grass, it's one of very few Foggers/Spinners for Grass. Not too sure about the UU tier" (Blue id217). Blue may have a lot of experience with the mechanics, enough to realize that Decidueye has an Assault Vest after seeing the damage it took (Blue id169), but is unable to use metagame knowledge to predict Decidueye's stats and item. This particular instance points to a deficiency in Blue's pursuit of expert play: in this instance, he was unable to use his knowledge of play patterns to realize what the appropriate response to his opponent was, and it resulted in a disastrous series of turns for him. This sequence of play should be seen as a temporary departure from expert play, as one of the requirements for expert play was not fulfilled. A player may fall in and out of expert play over the course of a session; the determining factor is not whether or not they are winning, nor whether or not they ultimately succeed, but rather if they are acting with reasonably complete knowledge in a manner that will allow them to achieve their aims.

While Blue may not know everything about other players' metagame preferences, he does know to look for information when he does not know something. One useful tool Blue is aware of is the Pokémon Damage Calculator, a tool that can help players figure out if one Pokémon can knock out another. The Pokémon Damage Calculator works on a series of assumptions, and uses commonly chosen stats for Pokémon which may not match the set that the opponent is using, so it is not infallible, but Blue uses it to great effect when looking at if Sharpedo can knock out Crobat without mega evolving (Blue id301). The decision that Blue makes with the information from the Pokémon Damage Calculator allows Blue to knock out the rest of his opponent's team with Sharpedo later on; his win would not have been possible without it. To some, using outside information like that would be considered cheating, and certainly not a "classic thing", as Blue describes it (Blue id301). The official Play! Pokémon rules forbid players from using outside notes ("Play! Pokémon Video Game Rules, Formats

& Penalty Guidelines” 5). However, Blue’s chat does not react negatively to his use of the Damage Calculator, some even encouraging him to do it earlier in the match (Blue id248). This is an example of how Smogon believes is the best way to practice expert play, and how that differs from the larger Pokémon community. For Smogon, using resources like this is seen as a valid way to win, and also acts as a way to learn more about the game. The goal of using these tools is to understand enough to be able to play without them, something that Green exhibits in his battle. Regardless, Blue’s use of the Damage Calculator shows another way that Smogon’s paratext can affect how players practice expert play in Pokémon Showdown; a close judgement call is turned into a sure thing, in this case.

Chat Interaction

Out of all three streamers that this thesis examines, Blue is, by far, the streamer who most focuses on the chat. He interacts with the chat frequently, and those interactions often take the form of quick conversations about the strategy of Pokémon and the battle currently taking place. Far from the “roar of the crowd” that Recktenwald mentions as being characteristic of some larger streams, Blue’s stream is much more relaxed, though the conversation is still lively (69). It is more like the atmosphere of a busy restaurant than a sports stadium. That is, if everyone in the restaurant was deeply interested in Pokémon. The strategy-centric nature of the chat ranges from insightful comments about why Latias has Thunder instead of Thunderbolt: “<[Spectator62]> It prob gets the guaranteed kill on certain mons” (Blue id83) to... well, somewhat less useful comments: “<[Spectator70][Moderator]> [Blue], you suck at Pokémon” (Blue id149). Blue is very active in responding to the chat, even in responding to the less serious messages (Blue id154). He is frequently creating moments that Recktenwald identifies as “pivots” (69) by directly responding to the chat (Blue id141). This practice shows how players are able to share the meaning made from the paratexts of Smogon and through the experience players have from Pokémon Showdown. This communication about subjects like common sets seen on Pokémon (Blue id217) and ways to position to win the battle (Blue id204) shows that there is, in fact, a common knowledge present within Pokémon Showdown, one that is mediated by the paratext put out by the Smogon community. It also shows that this paratext directly influences expert play.

Summary

Overall, Blue shows that he is well-versed in both Pokémon Showdown and Smogon's paratext. He obviously has a strong understanding of the mechanical aspect of Pokémon Showdown, and knows enough about the game to successfully identify different items that Pokémon are using. As well, he has a strong command of much of the paratext that Smogon creates, enough to use a team from Smogon and to use resources like the Damage Calculator in the midst of battle. Blue's frequent and detailed interaction with the chat further informs the depth of knowledge that players are able to use as a resource when participating in expert play, as he frequently explains his decision-making and answers questions about it for the chat. While Blue may not have the same experience with the metagame that players like Green do, he certainly has many of the other tools which are representative of his skill in the game. From Blue's battle and how he makes sense of that battle, we can see that he sees Pokémon not as a series of disconnected decisions to make from turn to turn, as Red's may understand the meaning that Pokémon Showdown creates, but instead as a series of interconnected, ever-branching paths.

Green

Green is an expert battler and a winner of the Smogon Tour, one of the most competitive tournaments available through Smogon. His understanding of mechanics and knowledge of Pokémon are among the best. When playing at such a high level, the emphasis of the game is no longer trying to figure out what needs to be done to win, as it was with Blue. It is not even about figuring out the opponent's strategy and how best to counter it. The game becomes a mental duel in which both players try to second-guess each other, and put themselves in a position where their opponent is unable to effectively defend against an attack they know is coming.

Format and Metagame

Green approaches choosing his team from a very different place than either Blue or Red. Red's team was randomly created, a feature of the format that he was playing in. Blue took his team from a Rate My Team thread on the Smogon message boards, essentially copying the team another player had been using (Blue id35). Green created his own team. While this

may seem to be one of the most straightforward ways to choose a team to play with, there is a considerable expertise that goes into creating a strong team, especially one that has to perform at Green's high level of play. Green refers to his team at the start of the video as his "OG Crawdaunt team," referring to the most unusual Pokémon on his team, Crawdaunt, who is actually in the UU metagame rule set, not the OU metagame rule set in which Green is playing. The rules of Pokémon Showdown allow players to use Pokémon from a lower metagame rule set in their teams, so Green must believe that the less popular Crawdaunt holds a special position in how it interacts with the other Pokémon in the metagame rule set. This reveals an interesting result of the metagame rule set system that Pokémon Showdown uses: due to the fact that Crawdaunt is not within the OU metagame rule set, its visibility within the Teambuilder of Pokémon Showdown is reduced, and its reputation within the Smogon community is likewise less well thought of. It is significantly less likely for players to frequently see Crawdaunt on a team, something which allows Green to take advantage of opponents who underestimate either how much damage it can do or its ability to survive particular attacks. Building Pokémon teams from scratch is a pursuit that Smogon puts a lot of effort into teaching and theorizing, considering everything from type makeup to how the team will interact with the rest of the metagame. I will not hazard to guess Green's thought process for creating his team, but it likely took a great amount of expertise and experimentation.

Understanding of Pokémon Showdown

Mechanically, Green has an incredibly strong understanding of the game. He is so confident in his ability to know how much damage attacks do and what Pokémon can survive that he makes a decision, without checking the Damage Calculator, to keep his Crawdaunt in the battle for an attack which it survives with only two percent of its hit points remaining (Green id56-id58). This knowledge of Pokémon changes how Green views the game. Similar to Blue's use of the Damage Calculator to remove the uncertainty surrounding a specific attack, Green's knowledge of Pokémon allows him to effectively predict the damage that one Pokémon will do to another. Green does not need to resort to an outside tool to do so. He is able to understand so much more when looking at a battle than any other player that this thesis examines. Being able to accurately gauge matchups at a single glance changes the game entirely; it removes much of the chance aspect out of the game. A player who has this

depth of knowledge about Pokémon knows whether an attack will or will not knock out the opponent's Pokémon; the entire choice-making aspect of the game becomes about predicting the opponent's move and countering it. Suffice to say, Green's understanding of the system of Pokémon Showdown allows him to easily enact expert play.

Green's Gameplay

Predictions take on a more central role in a game at Green's competitive level. While Blue does talk about his own predictions (Blue id160), Green is more frequently trying to predict his opponent's moves in order to gain the upper hand (Green id15). Earlier in the video, Green talks about his ability to predict "leads," the first Pokémon that a player sends into battle. He does not predict his opponent's lead for this battle, but much of Green's speech is concerned with what his opponent will likely do next turn, and what he can do to get ahead of that. Being able to predict an opponent's move starts to become more and more the focus of the game, changing the main focus of the game again, and changing the metagame from a knowledge arms race to a psychological duel, where players attempt to second guess each other's next move in order to gain small advantages. At the level of play that Green is at, it is not simply enough to understand what each Pokémon on his opponents team is going to do in order to have a strong understanding of play patterns, but rather, one must know exactly how and when that Pokémon will do it. Having a thorough understanding of these play patterns allows for a player to amass small advantages throughout the battle. That is why Green mentions things like, "good ass chip," as being important (Green id17). In this instance, "chip" refers to a small amount of damage being dealt to a Pokémon; not enough to knock it out, but enough that a stronger attack later in the battle may knock it out instead of leaving it with only a few hit points remaining. This kind of intermediary goal setting is, again, very much in line with expert play. Green plays at a level where minor advantages gained through effective predictions eventually add up to victories.

One specific action that shows Green's expertise in Pokémon occurs when he believes his opponent will switch out their Pokémon. When Green predicts that his opponents will switch to a particular Pokémon, Green switches to a Pokémon that is advantageous to what he predicts his opponent will switch to, leaving him in an advantageous position going into the next turn. It is important to note that this switch is not based on any information that Green is getting through the mechanics of Pokémon Showdown, at least not directly. Green is

guessing, based on the two Pokémon that are currently active, that his opponent will switch, and then reacting to that prediction on the same turn it happens. The first time he does this is on turn three, when he switches his Blacephalon in at the same time his opponent switches to Jirachi, a match-up clearly advantageous to Green (Green id20). The interesting thing is that, had Giovanni not switched, Green would have been changing into a terrible match-up: the type advantage between Green's Blacephalon and Giovanni's Tapu Fini would have been strongly in Giovanni's favor. This level of effective prediction characterizes much of Green's battling, and it is indicative of the meaning that he is able to draw from Pokémon Showdown. Green even characterizes the prediction as "too easy," though this may be influenced by the general air of bravado that Green puts on, possibly as an aspect of his performance for the stream (Green id21). At any rate, it is clear that Green is able to understand a great deal from Pokémon Showdown, and is able to parlay that meaning into effective action in the game. The certainty to make choices that Red would think are ridiculous, and then have those choices work out, is an ability that is born of a totally different understanding of Pokémon Showdown than what new players have, and shows that expert play has very different considerations than non-expert play.

Summary

Green's understanding of Pokémon Showdown allows him to play the game at a level far beyond Red or even Blue. While less experienced players may be playing Pokémon as a game of chance to some degree, hoping that their Pokémon are tough enough to withstand hits and strong enough to knock other Pokémon out, Green is playing a game of open information. While some aspects of a Pokémon may be hidden, such as their item and stat allocation, Green's knowledge of the metagame allows him to accurately predict what many Pokémon's stats and items are regardless. While the information that Green uses may be assumed and not completely known, it can still be used to great effect, as Green's predictions show. The combination of experience and the application of accurate predictions allows for Green to play Pokémon Showdown on a higher level, looking not only at his own path to victory, but also at how best to counter his opponent's strategy, and seemingly how to counter his opponent's every action. The game no longer becomes a clash of who is able to execute their strategy best, but who is able to think ahead the right amount: enough that they

stay one step ahead of their opponent, but not so much that they are second-guessing themselves.

Overall Discussion

A players' conception of expert play is predicated on their knowledge and experience with a game. The less experience a player has, the less able they are to participate in expert play and the discussions surrounding it. This stratifies players into different groups, with much more experienced players' discussions having almost no crossover with less experienced players'. Crossover can occur if a more experienced player is intentionally taking on a pedagogical role, for example, in Smogon's mentor program. It is possible, though beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate, that this disconnect with how players of different experience levels understand the game is a contributing factor to old players harassing new ones; the "noob" problem, in a nutshell. There are many contributing factors to this difference between players' experiences with a game. Players' understanding of mechanics deeply affects their experience with a game, as shown in Red's experience with Pokémon Showdown. As well, players' experience with the game and overall game knowledge is one of the most influential aspects of how they see the game, affecting every aspect of it. A player's rigor and how they pursue victory also affects their understanding of the game. Each of these aspects by themselves is influential, but all of them combine in the runtime, the dynamics of the game, to create something much more than their constituent parts.

Red and Blue both have very active chats, but the way in which they interact with their chat while playing Pokémon Showdown differs quite a bit. It should be noted that Green does not have a chat for his video, and as such, is somewhat of a different situation. Red does not appear to focus much on the chat. This could be due to his unfamiliarity with Pokémon Showdown taking much of his attention, forcing him to focus less on chat interaction. Certainly, during more intense moments in Blue's battle, Blue is much less vocal with his chat. However, it could also be that Red does not feel that he has anything of particular importance to talk to his chat about. When Red talks to the other players on voice chat with him, he frequently brings up things that he finds ridiculous about the game, like having a Sceptile with Outrage and a mega evolution (Red id41-id45). The surface-level conversation of the battle makes it appear that Red is not actively thinking about the more complex aspects

of the battle. Blue, on the other hand, is consistently talking with his chat about many of the options that he has in his battle, as well as talking through his thought process for each of the moves he makes. This creates some of the important audience interaction points that Recktenwald refers to as pivots, and showcases the aesthetic experience that Blue has while playing (Blue id254-id259) Red's transcript also holds an interesting case in regards to pivots, where Red mentions that he is "confused," referring to his active Pokémon's status (Red id59). This makes perfect sense as a pivot to his streaming audience: Red's Sceptile has the confused status effect. However, one of Red's voice chat companions thinks that Red is saying that he himself is confused, and what follows reads like a passage taken from an Abbott and Costello skit⁸ (Red id58-id71). This clearly demonstrates Recktenwald's assertion that pivots and game events are interconnected and do not make sense when one is removed from the other, as well as showing the communicative power of pivots (77). Chat interaction is, however, only one aspect of how the streamers perform for their audience.

While streamers are performing, that performance is also part of the metagame. The ways they perform are all expressions of the metagame and the ideas that a streamer has about what their audience wants to see affects how they play and how they view expert play. For instance, when Blue is told by his chat to "forfeit", he laughs it off, not treating it as a serious option (Blue id178, Blue id185). Conversely, many of the battles that Green plays that were not included in the transcript ended in quick surrenders where both players still had several Pokémon left, meaning that either player was still some moves away from losing outright. This difference in the choice to surrender can be seen as both streamers playing to what they believe their audience wants. Blue believes his audience wants to see exciting battles that play to their conclusion, so he battles to the end. Green believes his audience wants to see him teaching the most efficient way to climb the ladder, which involves surrendering battles which are at a severe disadvantage. Green's approach to playing, similar to many players who ascribe to Smogon's philosophy, is directed towards allowing players to post excellent ladder results. If Blue had, instead of sticking out an eleven minute, thirty-five turn game filled with calculations and difficult choices, played several other, shorter games, he could likely have made much more progress on the ladder. However, high ladder results are not the only way to conceive of expert play in Pokémon Showdown. There are many other reasons that players play. Blue could have quit immediately after losing two Pokémon

⁸ Who's that Pokémon on First?

in quick succession, but the hard-fought victory that he managed, as well as knowing that he played the game as well as he could, is the goal that he was trying to achieve, or the entertainment that he wanted his audience to see. Both of these streamers are influenced by a metagame peculiar to streamers, one that requires them to think about and act according to what they believe their audience wants to see. This is one of the biggest differences between a streamer and the average player; a streamer's play is affected by their audience, and a non-streamer has no such preoccupations.

One of the main things that differs between players of different skill levels is their ability to look ahead. The forethought that Blue puts into how best to use his team is telling of the gap in skill between him and Red, but Blue's lack of consideration about what his opponent's plan might be shows the gap in skill between him and Green. As mentioned previously, both planning a way to win and predicting the opponent's moves are major aspects of Pokémon Showdown's strategy, and creating intermediary goals and knowledge of play patterns are essential to expert play. These skills require an extensive knowledge of Pokémon, something that can be achieved through using Smogon's paratextual tools to learn more about the game. The biggest thing that these skills do for players is allow them to understand more and more about the game as they play it. Eventually, as a player grows in skill and understands more and more about the game, this meaning begins to knit into something larger: a narrative.

Though Pokémon Showdown does not have any official narrative within the game, Blue and Green both show examples of emergent narrative within their own battles. Blue compliments his Sharpedo, saying that it was "bulkier than [he] thought" (Blue id393). Green, the most well-versed in Smogon's paratext, actually makes an endearing statement of connection to his Lopunny, calling it his "son" (Green id63-id64). Blue is well versed in the emergent narrative that Pokémon Showdown has, and is able to understand the ebb and flow of a battle: what moments are tense, what is "early" or "late" in the battle and story, and what is important and noteworthy within the battle. This goes beyond simple understanding of hit point totals, and builds further on Blue's knowledge of Pokémon Showdown. Though there is no exhaustive narrative to Pokémon Showdown, the way that a battle unfolds creates something of an emergent narrative arc: there is something of a beginning, middle, and end to

the battle⁹. Blue is very clearly able to understand these phases of the battle. He sees that the first initial back and forth sets him at a major disadvantage; “immediately rekt,” as one of his viewers says (Blue id135). From there, the majority of the battle plays out with Blue attempting to set up Sharpedo, his best chance for victory. The climax of the battle is Blue’s Sharpedo surviving a Vacuum Wave from James’ Infernape, and then the battle is all but won. The shape of this battle, the meaning present in the narrative that it weaves, is clear to both Blue, as shown by his anticipation of his Sharpedo strategy, his excitement once it works (Blue id399-id409), as well as the excitement of his chat (Blue id401-412). Part of the reason that both Green and Blue show this kind of behavior is because they understand the game on the level of expert play: they know what kinds of things may happen from any given situation because they have a strong understanding of the play patterns that may come out of a situation. Red certainly reacts to the highs and lows of the battle as they happen, but he shows no deeper tension at the beginning of the battle than near the end of it. His understanding of the game is heavily focused on the here and now, trying to make the best choice he can for the current turn and no other. In the same way, the ups and downs that Red has are heavily focused on what happens in the current turn. The rest of the battle does not knit together into the same narrative that it does for Green and Blue. In many ways, this narrative is the emergent meaning that comes from engaging in expert play in Pokémon Showdown. The players’ understanding of expert play allows them to put together seemingly disparate events in the battle into a coherent narrative, one which can only be understood with a deep understanding of the game of Pokémon Showdown.

While synthesis is certainly one of the largest differences in how players of different skill levels play Pokémon Showdown, it is not the only one. The rigor that players show, their dedication to winning, differs in several ways. The three players that this thesis examines are all different in terms of how they pursue victory, and what exactly victory means to them. This is a vitally important distinction, as what players’ goals are is central to how they construct expert play. Blue’s goals are possibly the simplest to understand: he is using every skill he has in order to win the battle at hand. His tenacity towards winning is such that, even when he finds himself at a huge disadvantage early on in the battle, and his chat encourages him to forfeit, he continues to do his best to win (Blue id178). Red is somewhat similar,

⁹ This is not technically true of endless battles, which can be achieved through a very specific set of conditions and Pokémon, but Smogon banned those anyway, so let us just ignore that as best we can.

though he does not use the same kinds of tools or go to the same measures in order to win that Blue does. Red uses only what he knows and is willing to experiment within the game to the detriment of his chances to win. This could be due to a number of reasons: Red may not know of any way to learn about Pokémon Showdown outside of the game itself, he may be trying to keep the stream as interesting as possible for his audience and not want to slow down the action of battling, or he may want to win using only his own knowledge and skills. Regardless, Red does not use any of the valuable assets that a member of Smogon would know about and use. While one would expect Green to be the most rigorous in terms of striving to win, he is actually the most likely to concede a battle out of the three players studied here. There are several reasons for this. Green, being the most experienced player, is the most able to tell when he is too far behind in a battle to turn it into a comeback, so there would be no point in playing it out. There is also evidence to suggest that Green is the most likely to quit in frustration. But it is also possible that Green's concessions are actually part of a larger strategy: the more quickly Green concedes a battle he is losing, the more quickly he can start a new battle where he has an even shot of winning. The strategy of conceding quickly allows for Green to more quickly climb Smogon's ladder, which Green sees as the real goal of his battling. In this instance, Green is not seeing victory in a battle as his ultimate goal, but rather, only as an intermediary goal. Green's ultimate goal is to post the highest possible result he can on Smogon's ladder, a goal which engages even more closely with the system of Pokémon Showdown. Each of the three players is rigorous, but each players' rigor is a reflection of how they see the main goal of the game: a fun, simple game for Red; a battle where each player tries their best to win for Blue; and a series of battles leading to a high showing on the ladder for Green.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the ways that even small changes to a game can change how players play it. The changes made to Pokémon in Pokémon Showdown, as well as the relationship between Pokémon Showdown and Smogon, make playing Pokémon Showdown a very different experience than the official Pokémon games. This thesis has explored the changes made to Pokémon Showdown by Smogon, how those changes are made, and what the effects of those changes are. It has delved deep into the relationship between Pokémon Showdown

and Smogon, looked at how the paratext available on Smogon affects players and the Pokémon Showdown metagame, and looked at how the systems Smogon has created affects Pokémon Showdown itself. Then, by using a panel of three different Pokémon streamers, this thesis has explored how players play the game of Pokémon Showdown, what expert play is in the context of Pokémon Showdown, and how that play is affected by the mechanical changes that Smogon has made and the paratext that Smogon creates. Smogon has an undeniable influence on the way that players play Pokémon Showdown, and that influence is traceable to a wide variety of sources.

Skill level changes how players experience games. A player who is highly skilled experiences play through the lens of expert play, a type of play that can be entirely removed from the experience of less practiced players. All three streamers examined in this thesis had different skill levels, and they all experienced Pokémon Showdown in different ways. As mentioned above, skill level also coincides with knowledge of paratext, at least in the case of Pokémon Showdown. The streamers' ability to participate in expert play was also predicated on their knowledge of the Smogon community and their familiarity of its paratext. With a game that has such a close relationship to an affinity space like Smogon, it becomes integral to a players' improvement and progress towards consistent expert play for that player to become well-versed in the knowledge that that community produces. A player is heavily influenced by the community of Smogon whenever they play Pokémon Showdown, either in their own play or by the play of their opponents.

The mechanical changes to Pokémon Showdown are both subtle and pervasive. Each change to a system that is made in Pokémon Showdown, be it the procedural system of the battle or the representation of that battle, makes players see the game in a different way. There are many undeniable differences between the main line of Pokémon games and Pokémon Showdown, and those differences are indicative of the differences in how players play the two games. Though this thesis examines the differences between these systems, many of those systems, for example Pokémon Refresh, have interesting questions regarding player immersion and investment to explore. The idea of comparing player-versus-player and player-versus-environment implementations of a game could be transposed onto another game and further explored, as many other games have both of those aspects. The differences between player-versus-player and player-versus-environment approaches to playing the game could be compared to this thesis to see if there is any kind of unifying trend between

competitive and single player versions of a game, or if the differences between those versions are as unique as the games themselves. The differences between these systems also show that expert players of a particular game may look towards the variation within a system to create their interest, rather than a variety of systems.

Communities, especially communities with a strong emphasis on paratext like Smogon, affect what players think about the game and how they play it. Players who do not know the paratext or metagame discussion surrounding a game can understand a game in an entirely different way. The paratextual aspect of games changes how players experience games and communicate about how they experience games. As well, this thesis uncovered that, in Smogon, skill level, paratextual familiarity, and metagame knowledge are intertwined. This may be true for many other competitive games, and is a potentially rich area for research. The approach used to understand Smogon's paratext and metagame could be applied to various other player-versus-player online game communities. Alternatively, it could be used to contrast with the paratext of a single-player game community. The insights into Smogon are central to the argument of this thesis; the way that paratext influences the meaning of Pokémon Showdown allows players who know the paratext to play Pokémon Showdown in an entirely different way. However, that paratext has not been exhaustively explored. Of particular further interest is how the Strategy Pokédex mirrors the Pokédex present in the fiction of the games, and how that in-universe/real life crossover might exist in paratextual resources present for other games. Paratext, especially online paratext, is now an ever-present force in game communities, and it deserves critical attention.

Though this thesis uses streamers as a way of exploring the dynamics that players experience while playing, there is much more room for exploration of streamers as a subject in their own right. Streaming is a constantly evolving phenomenon, and there is much more that could be understood about streaming. Streaming is obviously different from just playing games by oneself, but looking at how they are different, specifically at how streamers play games in different ways from non-streaming players, would be beneficial to many game studies scholars. Similarly, Recktenwald's ideas of pivots could be more broadly explored in streamers, and the different ways that streamers interact with their audiences could be expanded upon and refined. Streaming is a broad, popular form of media, and it influences much more than just this thesis.

One theory that this thesis has made much use of is Hocking's interpretation of the MDA theory. By approaching the dynamics, where meaning is created for players, from all three of the mechanical, narrative, and player interaction aspects, it is possible to more fully understand how players create meaning through their dynamics. The implementation of Hocking's interpretation of how the MDA framework functions allows for a further exploration of how both narrative and player interaction affect the dynamics of a game, and could easily be applied to other games. The expanded MDA framework would especially be useful for a game that heavily features both narrative and player interaction, as it would allow for a fuller understanding of how meaning is created than simply looking at the mechanics of the game world.

Recktenwald's transcription methodology was incredibly effective for the analysis of the Pokémon battles in this thesis. The Recktenwald methodology does allow for the close study of pivot points, but it is a flexible transcription approach that allows for much more than just that. Recktenwald's methodology allows for a close examination of how streamers play and understand games. The adaptation of the Recktenwald methodology to a turn-based game adds a more nuanced way to analyze a gameplay experience, as more information can be communicated in a way that meshes well with the format of the transcript. Though Recktenwald's transcription methodology was originally used to transcribe real-time games, it is even more effective at describing turn-based games.

On the topic of real-time games, there are many differences between Pokémon and real-time games which require more interrogation. The types of embodiment and autoplay that are hallmarks of real-time games are absent in Pokémon, but the game still requires great skill to play at the highest level. This removal of the embodiment that is seen as a requirement to many types of expert play raises some interesting questions. Is it possible that autoplay is not a requirement for expert play? Is it possible that some analog, turn-based games have more in common with videogames than previously considered? These questions are all of value as game studies move forward, and it may also yield valuable insight to videogames by looking at some of their oldest relatives.

The way in which players play games is a complex issue. The interplay between player and game has magic to it, and there are moments and feelings in games that cannot be fully explained. However, it is clear that Smogon has an undeniable influence on how players play Pokémon Showdown through many, many channels. It may just be you and your team in

a Pokémon battle, but it is impossible to ignore the roar of the community that surrounds you in Pokémon Showdown.

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Appendix A

ID	Time-stamp	Game Events	Game Transcript	Streamer	Other Speaker	Chat
1	40:41	[Jessie] sent out Celebi, [Red] sent out Gorebyss		Okay, and boom! Let's see if this person's paying attention		<[Spectator1]> Hey [Red] im [Spectator1] battle me we can do gen 1 i bet i will crush you
2	40:44			Uh, okay, okay		<[Spectator2]> zeraora is an ultra beast and its electric type
3	40:46					<[Spectator3]> How is zeraora in this game but not the real?
4	40:47					<[Spectator4]> fight me i'm [Spectator4]
5	40:49			This is not good, that setup here		
6	40:53			I'm gonna go with this guy		
7	40:54	[Red] switches to Chandelure	Turn 1: [Red] withdrew Gorebyss! [Red] sent out Chandelure! The opposing Celebi used Leaf Storm! It's not very effective... The opposing Celebi's Special Attack fell harshly! Chandelure			

			lost 43% of its health!			
8	40:56					<[Spectator5]> THATS THE RAREST POKEMON IN ULTRA SUN OR MOON
9	40:57			Aw, this person's actually actively playing		
10	40:59			Good, good		
11	41:00			Alright, well may the best one win, [Jessie]		
12	41:03			May the best player win		
13	41:05			Why don't you try a little fire blast on for your Celebi, though, pal		
14	41:07					<[Spectator2]> ribombee is fairy and bug
15	41:08					<[Spectator6]> He's a special event pokemon if i recall correctly
16	41:11			Yeah		
17	41:12	[Jessie] switches to Nidoking	Turn 2: [Jessie] withdrew Celebi! [Jessie] sent out Nidoking! Chandelure used Fire Blast! The opposing Nidoking lost	Getting real crazy out here		

			67% of its health!			
18	41:16				[Ash]: Ah, man	
19	41:17			Stream, will I be able to win this fan battle?		
20	41:20			Man, we'll have to find out		
21	41:23			They		
22	41:24	Chandelure knocks out Nidoking (6-5)	Turn 3: Chandelure used Fire Blast! The opposing Nidoking lost 33% of its health! Nidoking fainted!		[Brock]: I think so	<[Spectator7]> lol that fan was definitely gonna stall so he could stream snipe
23	41:24.5			Well, they switched up the Nidoking		
24	41:25			and then luckily fire blast killed it	[Misty]: Nah I don't think	<[Spectator8]> @[Spectator9] Why is the Pokemon that created the universe a mythical...
25	41:27			{looks down and then back up}	[Ash]: Ah, man	
26	41:28			Yes, there we go, alright {scratches face and head}		
27	41:30			Way to go, Chandelure		
28	41:32			Uh		
29	41:35					<[Spectator10]> [Jessie] will rek u
30	41:36			oh		

31	41:37			Who will they throw out next?		<[Spectator11] > [Jessie] go
32	41:39	[Jessie] switches to Drampa	footballmgod sent out Drampa!			
33	41:40			Drampa, yeah		
34	41:42				[Ash]: (laughs) What? You don't remember Drampa?	
35	41:43	Drampa knocks out Chandelure (5-5)	Turn 4: Chandelure used Fire Blast! It's not very effective... The opposing Drampa lost 24% of its health! The opposing Drampa used Draco Meteor! Chandelure lost 56% of its health! The opposing Drampa's Special Attack fell harshly! Chandelure fainted!			
36	41:45					<[Spectator12] > come on [Jessie]
37	41:48			{gaze shifts to center monitor}		
38	41:50			No, not Draco Meteor, the attack		
39	41:52			{gaze shifts to right monitor}		<[Spectator9]> @[Spectator8] That's Arceus TwT

40	41:53			Anything but that		
41	41:55	[Red] switches to Sceptile	Go! Sceptile!	(laughs) I don't know anything about the new P- (gasps)		
42	41:57					<[Spectator13] > go [Jessie]
43	42:01			[Ash]?		
44	42:02			My Sceptile knows- it has mega evolution on {covers face with hands}	[Ash]: Yeah?	<[Spectator14] > send out a mega mEwtWo <[Spectator11] > Go fan
45	42:06			And it knows outrage		
46	42:07	Sceptile knocks out Drampa (5-4)	Turn 5: Sceptile's Sceptilite is reacting to the Key Stone! Sceptile has Mega Evolved into Mega Sceptile! Mega Sceptile used Outrage! It's super effective! Drampa lost 66% of its health! Drampa fainted!	{removes hands from face} Mega Sceptile	[Ash]: Ah, man	
47	42:10			Oh, man, he one-shotted him with outrage		
48	42:12					<[Spectator15] > Stream sniperinos <[Spectator9]> Drampa, Dragon/Normal

49	42:15			A Mega Sceptile with outrage		<[Spectator16]> > If you don't beat [Red] ur actually trash, like legit
50	42:18			That is gonna probably be game over for, for this guy		<[Spectator2]> drampa is dragon and normal
51	42:24	[Jessie] switches to Celebi	[Jessie] sent out Celebi!			
52	42:25			Nice, switched out to Celebi, okay		
53	42:29		Turn 6: Sceptile used Outrage! The opposing Celebi lost 41% of its health! The opposing Celebi used Earth Power! It's not very effective... Sceptile lost 19% of its health!			[Spectator8]@[Spectator9] Ik but why he mythical
54	42:30			Give outrage a cha- oh, 41 percent, okay		<[Spectator17]> > Another fan battle
55	42:32			That's not bad		<[Spectator10]> > Fairy type incoming
56	42:35			Okay		
57	42:37	Sceptile becomes confused after using Outrage	Turn 7: Sceptile used Outrage! The opposing Celebi lost 41% of its health! Sceptile	Keep it up, Mega Sceptile		

			became confused due to fatigue! The opposing Celebi used Earth Power! It's not very effective... Sceptile lost 19% of its health!			
58	42:40			Oh, no		
59	42:41			I'm confused now		<[Spectator18]> > Check his type
60	42:43			Don't wanna be confused ever		
61	42:46					<[Spectator19]> > drampa is from alola
62	42:47			{looks quickly down and back up}	[Brock]: What are you confused about?	
63	42:48				[Brock]: Maybe I can help you out	
64	42:50					<[Spectator6]> @[Spectator8] Arceus? He's not though, he's a legendary.
65	42:51			No, not me, the Pokemon's confused, [Brock]		
66	42:53	[Jessie] switches to Gardevoir	Turn 8: [Jessie] withdrew Celebi! [Jessie] sent out Gardevoir! The opposing Gardevoir traced Sceptile's		[Brock]: You just said "I'm confused, I don't like to be confused."	

			Lightning Rod! Sceptile is confused! Sceptile used Leaf Blade! The opposing Gardevoir lost 53% of its health!			
67	42:56			I didn't literally mean me, I meant the Pokemon was		<[Spectator11] > [Red] won cause of outrage <[Spectator20] > that was just outrages
68	43:00				[Brock]: Then you should've specified. (laughs)	
69	43:03			You right-you're right, [Brock] {gaze shifts to center and then back to right}		
70	43:05				[Brock]: I know I'm right	
71	43:06			How could I have gone so wrong? {turns left and then gaze returns to right monitor}		<[Spectator21] > this is not an .io game and its not new at all
72	43:07	Sceptile knocks out Gardevoir (5-3)	Turn 9: Sceptile is confused! Sceptile used Leaf Blade! The opposing Gardevoir lost 47% of its health! The opposing Gardevoir fainted!		[Brock]: I don't-I don't know	

73	43:09			{turns head back to the left to look behind him then gaze returns to right monitor}		
74	43:11			And...Gardevoir is taken out		
75	43:14			It's a good battle so far against [Jessie] {scratches head}		
76	43:16	[Jessie] switches to Pheromosa	[Jessie] sent out Pheromosa!	it's a very good battle, my friend		
77	43:18			Uh, what is this?		
78	43:21			Alright, alright		<[Spectator22] > mege sceptile is a double edge sword
79	43:25	Pheromosa knocks out Sceptile (4-3)	Turn 10: Sceptile snapped out of its confusion. Sceptile used Swords Dance! Sceptile's Attack rose sharply! The opposing Pheromosa used Ice Beam! It's super effective! Sceptile lost 62% of its health! Sceptile fainted! The opposing Pheromosa's Speed fell!			

80	43:27			Well, I did swords dance		
81	43:30			Oh, geez, and then I died, though, in the same turn		<[Spectator2]> celebi is psychic and grass
82	43:33			Uh, okay, well let's do- Yes!		
83	43:36	[Red] switches to Klefki	Go! Klefki!	Thank God I have Keymon!		
84	43:39				[Brock]: Oh, Keymon, he's your ace	
85	43:41				[Ash]: No, way	
86	43:44			Ugh, good, he knows play rough		
87	43:45			That's his only damaging attack, good		<[Spectator8]> @[Spectator6] no he is in fact mythical
88	43:47	Klefki knocks out Pheromosa in a single hit (4-2)	Turn 11: The opposing Pheromosa used Bug Buzz! It's not very effective... Klefki lost 13% of its health! Klefki used Play Rough! It's super effective! The opposing Pheromosa lost 100% of its health! The opposing Pheromosa fainted!			

89	43:50					<[Spectator23] > That is an ultra beast
90	43:52			{scratches nose, visibly surprised} Oh, it turned out to be super effective at one-shotting him, okay		
91	43:54			I won't make fun of that attack for Pokemon anymore {gaze shifts to center}		
92	43:56			{gaze shifts to right}	[Misty]:(laughs) Keymon?	
93	43:59			Keymon is actually {gaze shifts left and back} very strong		
94	44:02	[Jessie] switches to Shedinja	[Jessie] sent out Shedinja	(gasps) No, not Shedinja, I don't wanna deal with this guy		
95	44:04					<[Spectator24] > KKEEEMMM OOOONNN <[Spectator25] >“New” .io game
96	44:05	Klefki uses an attack that doesn't affect Shedinja	Turn 12: The opposing Shedinja used Shadow Sneak! Klefki lost 18% of its health! Klefki used Play Rough! It doesn't affect			<[Spectator10] > OH GOD ITS KEY POKEMON

			the opposing Shedinja!			
97	44:06			I don't even know what types of attacks-does play rough work?		
98	44:09			No, of course play rough did not work		<[Spectator26] > hover over their pokemon or well help you
99	44:11			Um		
100	44:13			Five turns, user and his party members take		<[Spectator27] > thats a ultra beast
101	44:14					<[Spectator28] > oH No KeE y MoN
102	44:16	Klefki uses Light Screen, making its team more resistant to special attacks	Turn 13: Klefki used Light Screen! Light Screen made your team stronger against special moves! The opposing Shedinja used Shadow Sneak! Klefki lost 20% of its health!	45 percent less dam- alright, we'll do light screen then {scratches beard}		<[Spectator29] > THE LEGENDARY KEYMON OH BUDDY
103	44:19			And then, we'll throw up reflect		<[Spectator6]> @[Spectator8] as of what gen is he considered mythical? as far as i recall he's legendary.
104	44:20					<[Spectator30] > KEY MON

105	44:22	Klefki uses Reflect, making its team more resistant to physical attacks	Turn 14: Klefki used Reflect! Reflect made your team stronger against physical moves! The opposing Shedinja used Shadow Sneak! Klefki lost 9% of its health!	Okay, so Keymon has a double barrier built up now		
106	44:26			Will water work? Or ice?		<[Spectator10] > U lost XDXDXD
107	44:28	[Red] switches to Empoleon	Turn 15: Klefki, come back! Go, Empoleon! Empoleon floats in the air with its Air Balloon! The opposing Shedinja used Shadow Sneak! Empoleon lost 9% of its health! Empoleon's Air Balloon popped!	Wha-what works against Shedinja?		<[Spectator31] > wat game is this called
108	44:32			{hand drops away from face}	[Brock]: Nothing.	
109	44:32.5			Thanks, [Brock].	[Brock]: Uh huh	<[Spectator9]> Phermosa is literally a glass cannon
110	44:34					<[Spectator32] > pheramosa is very frail

111	44:38			Do you think- let's try water		<[Spectator33] > Shedninja. RIP
112	44:39			{scratches nose and beard}		<[Spectator 34]> that a ultra beast
113	44:41			scald		
114	44:43			Of course		
115	44:44			If he ends up winning because he has Shedinja		<[Spectator27] > [Red] is jalf noob at pokemon
116	44:45				[Misty]: What type is Shenin- Shedinja?	
117	44:48	Empoleon uses an attack that doesn't affect Shedinja	Turn 16: Empoleon used Scald! It doesn't affect the opposing Shedinja... The opposing Shedinja used Swords Dance! The opposing Shedinja's Attack rose sharply!			<[Spectator35] > keymon is now the best pokemon.
118	44:54			I don't know. I think ghost? Grass, maybe?		
119	44:56				[Brock]: just hover overtop the Pokemon	<[Spectator36] > Chat if I was a Pokémon would you say that I would be a legendary
120	44:57				[Misty]: If you can hover over the Pokemon, it'll tell you what type he is	<[Spectator37] > @[Spectator6] wich pokemon?

121	44:59			Oh, he's bug ghost {hand drops away from face}		<[Spectator10] > Ice Fire Rock Dark Ghost
122	45:01					<[Spectator38] > use a ghost type move
123	45:02					<[Spectator39] > toxic!
124	45:03					<[Spectator40] > anything that has a status <[Spectator9]> Dark, Ghost, Flying, and Fire should work on Shedinja, [Red] <[Spectator41]r > Scald <[Spectator42] > ice
125	45:04					<[Spectator43] > Fire <[Spectator8]> @[Spectator6] I have no idea but on the official wiki it's mythical
126	45:06		Turn 17: Empoleon used Toxic! The opposing Shedinja was badly poisoned! The opposing Shedinja used Swords Dance! The opposing Shedinja's Attack rose sharply! The opposing	Can toxic work?		<[Spectator44] > you need fire, fl

			Shedinja was hurt by the poison! The opposing Shedinja lost 100% of its health! The opposing Shedinja fainted!			
127	45:07	Shedinja is poisoned		Oh, well, that worked		<[Spectator26] > fire ice
128	45:09			Can he take status damage?		<[Spectator45] > use toxic <[Spectator42] > ice
129	45:10	Shedinja takes poison damage and is knocked out (4-1)		He can {claps hands}		<[Spectator46] > Use toxic! <[Spectator47] > poison it you fool
130	45:12			That was the breakthrough, was toxic		<[Spectator42] > ice
131	45:14			And I think that's the end of the battle, yes?		<[Spectator38] > dummy
132	45:16	[Jessie] sends out Celebi	[Jessie] sent out Celebi!	No, he's still- oh, he's still got Celebi left?		<[Spectator48] > toxic
133	45:17					<[Spectator49] > toxic [Red] toxic
134	45:18			Ruh-roh		<[Spectator42] > ice <[Spectator50] > Use TOXIC!
135	45:19					<[Spectator10] > TOXIC <[Spectator39] > TOXIC!

136	45:20		Turn 18: The opposing Celebi used Leaf Storm! Empoleon lost 31% of its health! The opposing Celebi's Special Attack fell harshly! Empoleon used Scald! It's not very effective... The opposing Celebi lost 14% of its health!	Let's use scald on him		<[Spectator6]> Okay so why are some pokemon suddenly mythical and legendary?
137	45:21			He's got two percent		<[Spectator46] > Fire, ice or toxic!!
138	45:26	Empoleon knocks out Celebi (4-0)	Turn 19: The opposing Celebi used Leaf Storm! Empoleon lost 16% of its health! The opposing Celebi's Special Attack fell harshly! Empoleon used Scald! It's not very effective... The opposing Celebi lost 2% of its health! The opposing Celebi fainted!	Oh, he's gotta-he's not gonna survive this		<[Spectator10] >GG
139	45:29					
140	45:31			And...there's the last Pokemon		<[Spectator38] >fire/ghost <[Spectator41]r > gg

141	45:34		[Red] won the battle!	Cha-ching {raises left fist in victory}		
142	45:36			And that's gonna do it, everybody		
143	45:37			That's all we have time for today		<[Spectator35] > @[Spectator51] stream delay, he's is probably already ended.
144	45:38			but thank you so much for watching		<[Spectator52] > use fire ice or ghost. it has wondergaurd so only super effective moves work <[Spectator53] > gg
145	45:39			we hope you had fun		

Table 1 Red's Transcript

Appendix B

ID	Time-stamp	Game Events	Game Transcript	Streamer	Chat
1	00:01	Teambuilder is showing Sharpedo		alright let's see	
2	00:05			hopefully the stream should start	
3	00:09			du du du let's see if this works	
4	00:13			there we go okay	
5	00:14			{gaze shifts to right monitor}	
6	00:15			alright let me just post that to discord	
7	00:17			hopefully this is going to work	
8	00:19			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
9	00:21			oh it's been a while since I've done this	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> The what-now?
10	00:22			{gaze shifts to right monitor}	
11	00:23			let me just adjust the music down	
12	00:26			hopefully that's not to [Spectator31]	<[Spectator55]> Hii
13	00:27			haha hey mike how's it going	
14	00:29			let me see	
15	00:32			ah that's the way	
16	00:33			okay, that's a little bit better for me	
17	00:34			let me now what you guys think about the background music with that	

18	00:36				<[Spectator56]> the comebackkkk
19	00:39			I'm just having a bit of a fiddle around it's been a while	<[Spectator57]> Wait ur alive wtf
20	00:41			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
21	00:41.5			hey gasto how's it going and [Spectator56]	
22	00:44			I wouldn't say necessarily say comeback	
23	00:45			it's just I've just got back from japan yesterday	
24	00:50			and I'm pretty pretty jetlagged	<[Spectator58]> hello [Blue]
25	00:51			{rubs hands on face}	
26	00:51.5			and I thought there's no better way to really keep myself awake (laughs)	<[Spectator 59]> Yes I finally got to join you live!!
27	00:57			than to do a bit of a stream	<[Spectator57]> How u doing [Blue]
28	01:00			so I apologize in advance if I'm a little bit lower energy	
29	01:02			cause what time it's six o'clock now so what time is it in japan	
30	01:04				<[Spectator60]> It's been a hot minute
31	01:06				<[Spectator61]> Yoooo a stream
32	01:09			it's eight hours ahead so yeah it's	<[Spectator62]> Huh
33	01:12			it's pretty late (laughs)	

34	01:13			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator63]> Hey [Blue], Long time no see man. How's it been?
35	01:14			but anyway I just grabbed a random RMT	<[Spectator62]> Wtf is this
36	01:15				<[Spectator64]> we
37	01:17			and we got like a Mega Sharpedo team	
38	01:19			I haven't played Pokemon in months I think	
39	01:23			so this is going to be interesting	
40	01:25			I think the last time I played was probably the last stream	
41	01:27			so uh yeah it's going to be interesting	
42	01:30			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
43	1:30.5			so we've got [Spectator63]	
44	01:31			[Spectator64]	
45	01:32			[Spectator62]	
46	1:32.5			[Spectator61]	<[Spectator57]> The gangs back together [nose blowing emoji]
47	01:34			[Spectator65]	
48	1:34.5			[Spectator57] good to see you	
49	01:36			[Spectator 59]	
50	01:37			[Spectator58]	
51	01:38			thank you guys all for coming out	

52	01:40			and yeah it's just a bit of a chill stream	<[Spectator64]> adamant sharp.... i like this
53	01:43			we'll just see how it goes	
54	01:44			I'm still in the process	
55	01:45			ok there we go	
56	01:46			got all that set up right	
57	01:48			put that down	
58	01:51			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
59	01:51			ah yeah we got adamant sharpedo	
60	01:52			I think it'll be interesting	
61	01:54			so we've got protect ice fang psychic fang and crunch	
62	01:59	Teambuilder changes to Latias		um then we've got the latias	<[Spectator63]>Want some help testing out teams? @[Blue]
63	02:00			{gaze shifts to right monitor}	
64	02:01			and I think this is going to be like a sort of wallbreaker	<[Spectator56]>shockerr
65	02:03			just a minute I'm still trying to sort out this music	
66	02:05			because it's really loud in my ears	
67	02:08			so I'm going to bring that right down and I'll bring that right up	
68	02:10			so hopefully that's okay for you guys but	

69	02:13			so I can actually hear myself talk then	
70	02:14				<[Spectator62]> Adamant is better tbh, it really helps with the kills Sharpedo can get
71	02:16			okay now I got it now I got it okay	
72	02:18			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator54][Moderator]>Thunder
73	02:21				<[Spectator57]> Dont play tiers anymore why thunder over tbolt
74	02:22			exactly get lots of kills with sharpedo	
75	02:25			we've got z-thunder which I think is going to be quite interesting	
76	2:25.5			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
77	02:27			I guess the thoughts of that is that mega sharpedo kind of struggles with bulky waters	
78	02:29	Teambuilder changes to Sharpedo			
79	02:33	Teambuilder changes to Latias		so having a way to just nuke	<[Spectator66]> Must be a weird feeling to be a washed up Poke-Streamer/Tuber at the height you hit 7k viewers but now.... [Blue] "the GOAT of Poke-Tubers/Streamers" is a shell of

					his former glory. *weeps*
80	02:34			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
81	02:36			don't play tiers anymore why thunder over t-bolt	
82	02:39			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
83	2:39.5			I don't know i guess it's just the extra power	<[Spectator62]> It prob gets the guaranteed kill on certain mons
84	02:40			but we're going to go for it	
85	02:42			you know I always hit my thunders (laughs)	
86	02:44				<[Spectator67]> goat
87	02:45	Teambuilder changes to Amoonguss		then we've got a physically defensive amoongus	
88	02:47	Teambuilder changes to Hippowdon		which pairs quite well with a hipowdon	
89	02:50			little bit of an ice weak team I must admit	
90	02:52	Teambuilder changes to Klefki		but I guess klefki kind of makes up for it	
91	02:55	Teambuilder changes to Gliscor		and then we've got swords dance gliscor	<[Spectator66]> *weeps*
92	02:56			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
93	2:56.5			so uh let's see	
94	02:59			must be a weird thing to be a washed up poketuber	

95	03:02			at the hieght you hit seven k viewers but now	
96	03:05			[Blue] the GOAT of poketubers streamers is a shell of his former glory	
97	03:08			I am definitely a shell of my former glory (laughs)	
98	03:08			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
99	03:10				<[Spectator56]> nostalgia
100	03:12			but anyway what we're gonna do	
101	03:14			we've got (laughs)	
102	03:16			nice comments from people	
103	03:19			we're gonna go and just play around	
104	03:20	Battle! Button pressed		{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
105	03:22			as i said it's been a while a really really long time	
106	03:23			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator57]> lol
107	03:24	Screen loads showing both teams	[Blue]'s team: Sharpedo/Latias/Amoonguss/Hippowdon/Klefki/Gliscor [James]'s team: Typhlosion/Crobat/Latias/Infernape/Durant/Decidueye	well you guys have seen how often i've been uploading	
108	03:26			i have not really been playing pokemon since then	
109	03:31			alright let's see	<[Spectator57]> haha

110	03:32			most likely maybe like an infernape lead or something like that	
111	03:35				<[Spectator66]> *weeps*
112	03:37			what do we want to do about that	
113	03:38			i kind of like the latias lead	
114	03:41			we have a fairly good matchup against most things	
115	03:43				<[Spectator68]> whoop whoop, first time watching your live. i do a lot of competitive pokemon brick bronze on yt. Want to do more showdown
116	03:44			and we can pressure it	
117	03:46	[James] sends out Typhlosion, [Blue] sends out Latias	Battle between [James] and [Blue] started! [James] sent out Typhlosion! Go! Latias!	typhlosion yeah that's pretty good	<[Spectator57]> What a warm welcome back from ur fans
118	03:48				<[Spectator56]> why not pelipepper pride?
119	03:50			are we going to be cheeky	
120	03:51			are we going to go for like the first turn calm mind	
121	04:00			i'm feeling greedy	
122	04:02	[James] switches to Decidueye	Turn 1: [James] withdrew Typhlosion! [James] sent out Decidueye!	decidueye okay	

			Latias used Calm Mind! Latias' Special Attack rose! Latias' Special Defense rose!		
123	04:03			well i think i might be able to take that one depending on the set	
124	04:07			i'm going for an ice beam i'm going for it	
125	04:09	Latias does little damage with a super effective attack	Turn 2: Latias used Ice Beam! It's super effective! The opposing Decidueye lost 47% of its health! The opposing Decidueye used Spirit Shackle! It's super effective! Latias lost 96.3% of its health! Latias can no longer escape!	oh wow okay that was spe def okay	
126	04:13	Decidueye takes off most of Latias' health with a super effective attack and traps Latias in		and that did way more than i wanted	<[Spectator56]> probably scarfed
127	04:16				<[Spectator57]> Pelipepper no longer gives him pride
128	04:17			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
129	04:17			fun fun fun	

130	04:18			a warm welcome back from my fans yep (laughs)	
131	04:20			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
132	04:21			now the question is will this do more than eh	<[Spectator57]> lol
133	04:25			that decidueye really tanked that ice beam	
134	04:27				<[Spectator57]> GG.
135	04:29	Decidueye knocks out Latias (5-6)	Turn 3: The opposing Decidueye used Sucker Punch! It's super effective! Latias lost 3.7% of its health! Latias fainted!		<[Spectator69]> immediately rekt
136	04:30			and he's got sucker punch oh well	
137	04:32			i messed up	
138	04:34			because that was actually really good against it	<[Spectator56]> psyshock that
139	4:34.5			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
140	04:35			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
141	4:35.5			immediately rekt, exactly	
142	04:38			but against his team gliscor kind of handles it	
143	04:39				<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Get a crit
144	04:40			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
145	04:41			maybe i should have psyshocked yeah	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Oh nvm

146	04:43			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator58]> he has sucker punch
147	04:47				<[Spectator56]> lol
148	04:48			oh well	
149	04:53			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator70][Moderator]> [Blue] you suck at Pokémon
150	04:56			so gliscor looks pretty good late game	
151	04:58			but i kind of want to weaken a few different things first	
152	05:00				<[Spectator56]> amoongus
153	05:01			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
154	5:01.5			i do suck at pokemon it's been a very long time	
155	05:02			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
156	05:06				<[Spectator56]> best bet
157	5:06.5				<[Spectator68]> sharpedo
158	05:07			let's go on to our amoongus i don't think he can really touch us	
159	05:08	[Blue] sends out Amoonguss	Go! Amoonguss!		<[Spectator57]> Is that av how does + ice beam do that little
160	05:10			and i'm gonna throw out a cheeky spore expecting him to switch	

161	05:14	Decidueye deals damage to Amoonguss and traps her	Turn 4: The opposing Decidueye used Spirit Shackle! Amoonguss lost 29.5% of its health! Amoonguss can no longer escape! Amoonguss used Spore! It doesn't affect the opposing Decidueye... Amoonguss restored a little HP using its Black Sludge!	and he stays in great	
162	05:15	Amoonguss uses an attack that Decidueye is immune to		oh well we'll handle it	
163	05:19			already a beautiful start	
164	05:20			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator57]> unless its max sp.def or something idk
165	05:23			is that av	
166	05:24		Turn 5: The opposing Decidueye used Brave Bird! It's super effective! Amoonguss lost 60.8% of its health! The opposing Decidueye is damaged by the recoil! Amoonguss used Hidden Power! It's super effective! The opposing		<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Sp.def

			Decidueye lost 16% of its health! Amoonguss restored a little HP using its Black Sludge!		
167	05:25	Decidueye takes off most of Amoonguss' remaining health		oh wow	
168	05:27			this decidueye is not good for my team	
169	05:29			and that does yeah he's av he must be av	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> I'd imagine?
170	05:30	Amoonguss does very little damage			<[Spectator72]> Try out a belly drum SNORLAX with iappa berry and gluttony ability!! Then add earthquake Ice punch and return
171	05:32				<[Spectator68]> its immune
172	05:33		Turn 6: The opposing Decidueye used Brave Bird! It's super effective! Amoonguss lost 21.8% of its health! The opposing Decidueye is damaged by the recoil! Amoonguss fainted!	ah that really sucks	
173	05:36	Decidueye knocks out Amoonguss and is left with 1 hit point (4-6)		i've never seen an av decidueye	

174	05:38			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
175	05:40			i do know that it's immune to uh	
176	05:42			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
177	05:43			i was expecting him to switch there	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Could be AV, actually
178	05:46			anyway we can go into gliscor and we can just go for eq	<[Spectator68]> forfeit
179	05:48			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
180	05:49			I'm just gonna go for that	
181	05:50	[Blue] sends out Gliscor	Go! Gliscor!		<[Spectator57]> AV Decidueye the god
182	05:51			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
183	5:51.5			we should outspeed	
184	05:53			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
185	05:54			(laughs) forfeit	<[Spectator68]> save face now
186	05:55			av decidueye i did not expect av decidueye i must admit	
187	05:57			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator61]> Memes = skillz
188	05:59				<[Spectator56]> whats Av?
189	06:00			he's on one hp	
190	06:04			he's still got	
191	06:05			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
192	06:05			what's av so av is assault vest so	

193	06:08	Decidueye does some minor damage before being knocked out by Gliscor (4-5)	Turn 7: <[James]>: 1hp rip The opposing Decidueye used Sucker Punch! Gliscor lost 17.6% of its health! Gliscor used Earthquake! It's not very effective... A critical hit! The opposing Decidueye lost 1% of its health! The opposing Decidueye fainted! Gliscor was badly poisoned by the Toxic Orb!	{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
194	06:09			we could have gone for the cheeky sd there but that's fine	
195	06:12				<[Spectator55]> Assault vest
196	06:13			now we get our toxic so that's fine	
197	06:16			if he goes into latias he probably has the ice beam	
198	06:18				<[Spectator56]> ohh
199	06:19			but we can switch out on that that's fine	
200	06:22			but this is actually looking like a team later on	
201	06:23	[James] sends out Durant	[James] sent out Durant!		<[Spectator73]> Your back
202	06:24			durant	

203	06:26			i mean hippowdon you should be able to handle that	
204	06:30			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator57]> Kill Durant and Pedo wins tbf
205	06:32			I am back [Spectator73] for a little bit we'll see how it goes	
206	06:34				<[Spectator68]> sharpedo now
207	06:36	[Blue] switches Gliscor to Hippowdon	Turn 8: Gliscor, come back! Go! Hippowdon! [Hippowdon's Sand Stream] A sandstorm kicked up! The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon lost 50% of its health! The sandstorm is raging. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	as i said it was just a try and handle the whatchamacallit a bit more	<[Spectator73]> What their is it
208	06:38				<[Spectator57]> stay in and attack
209	06:40			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
210	06:41	Durant takes off half of Hippowdon's health in one attack		oh god that is banded	
211	06:44				<[Spectator57]> attack

212	06:45		Turn 9: The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon lost 53.6% of its health! Hippowdon used Slack Off! Hippowdon restored its HP. The sandstorm is raging. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	are we just going to be cheeky and just keep slacking off	
213	06:47			I think we're going to be cheeky and just keep slacking	
214	06:49			oh god that damage	<[Spectator66]> Cuando fui ma's(cant type accents :/) joven vi [Blue] "el demonio" en medio de Poke-Tubers/Streamers pero ahora lloro
215	6:49.5				<[Spectator57]> ffs
216	06:57	Durant misses an attack on Hippowdon	Turn 10: The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon avoided the attack! Hippowdon used Slack Off! Hippowdon restored its HP. The sandstorm is raging.	that's what we needed okay	
217	06:59				<[Spectator63]> @[Blue] In the Monotype tier AV Deci is very

					common for removing hazards on Grass, it's one of very few Foggers/Spinners for Grass. Not too sure about the UU tier.
218	07:00			we can be cheeky	
219	07:01				<[Spectator74]> what theme team is this
220	07:02			and I'm going to	
221	07:05				<[Spectator68]> gliscor
222	07:06			we're going to take	
223	07:08			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
224	07:09			what theme team is this	
225	07:11			it's not really a theme team it's just an RMT that I grabbed	
226	07:12			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
227	07:13				<[Spectator66]> not sure about the last word im not good at spanish ;/
228	07:16				<[Spectator56]> klefki switch after
229	07:17			I guess klefki (sighs)	
230	07:21		Turn 11: The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon lost 51.7% of its health! Hippowdon used Stealth Rock! Pointed stones	I'm just going to set up my rocks here	

			float in the air around the enemy team! The sandstorm is raging. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers!		
231	07:23			so we can take another one	
232	07:26	Hippowdon puts up Stealth Rocks		def almost definitely	
233	07:28			looking at the min max there	
234	07:29			so I'm just going to do the whole slack off shenanigans	
235	07:31		Turn 12: The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon lost 51.9% of its health! Hippowdon used Slack Off! Hippowdon restored its HP. The sandstorm subsided. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	as long as he doesn't crit me	
236	07:33			he's got more chance of missing again than he does of critting me	
237	07:37			and then I could just whirlwind him out	<[Spectator73]> You doing viewer battles
238	07:39			I could go klefki at this point but I don't know	<[Spectator72]> what's ur favorite team?

239	07:40				<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Seeing all these people again is quite nostalgic
240	07:42		Turn 13: The opposing Durant used X-Scissor! Hippowdon lost 51.0% of its health! Hippowdon used Slack Off! Hippowdon restored its HP. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	banded durant might be a little bit iffy	
241	07:46			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
242	07:47			seeing all these people again is quite nostalgic	
243	07:49			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator57]> just attack he could hone claws
244	07:50			it is nice to uh bring back the squads	
245	07:52	[James] switches Durant for Crobat	Turn 14: [James] withdrew Durant! [James] sent out Crobat! Pointed stones dug into the opposing Crobat! Hippowdon used Slack Off! Hippowdon restored its HP. The opposing Crobat restored a little HP using its Leftovers!		
246	07:54			out goes the crobat	<[Spectator74]> yo [Spectator54]

247	07:58			I'm just gonna throw out a whirlwind just in case he doesn't have defog	
248	08:01	Crobat badly poisons Hippowdon	Turn 15: The opposing Crobat used Toxic! Hippowdon was badly poisoned! Hippowdon used Whirlwind! Typhlosion was dragged out! Pointed stones dug into the opposing Typhlosion! Hippowdon was hurt by the poison!	and he goes for like a u-turn or	<[Spectator56]> calc it
249	08:02			oh toxic that's fine	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Although we've had this "Nostalgic stream moment" happen multiple times now XD
250	08:04			I'm just gonna whirlwind him out	
251	08:06	Hippowdon whirlwinds Crobat out and Typhlosion into the battle		out comes typhlosion	
252	08:11			this is is this more of a spe def or	
253	08:14	[Blue] goes back to the Teambuilder to look at Hippowdon's stat page		eh it's mixed wall	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> As you've been dead more than once, and then come back for one stream

254	08:16	[Blue] returns to the battle page	Turn 16: The opposing Typhlosion used Eruption! Hippowdon lost 67.1% of its health! Hippowdon used Whirlwind! Latias was dragged out! Pointed stones dug into the opposing Latias! Hippowdon restored a little HP using its Leftovers! Hippowdon was hurt by the poison!	so I think I'm just going to whirlwind	
255	08:21	Typhlosion takes of most of Hippowdon's health		I know I'm letting him power them down	
256	08:23	Hippowdon whirlwinds Typhlosion out and Latias into the battle		but I just need a bit of chip on most things	
257	08:29			and I'm going to go for stealth rock here in case he decides to defog	<[Spectator57]> lol
258	08:34			cause he's getting close to the point now where I think	
259	08:37			we can get a sharpedo sweep	
260	08:41			unless he's got mach punch on infernape	
261	08:42			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator75]> What country are you most surprised has it's own

					language? To me, it's Malta.
262	08:43				<[Spectator66]> "Nostalgic stream" < "Normal stream with 5k watchers" *weeps*
263	08:45			although we've had this nostalgic stream moment multiple times now	
264	08:48			that's true	
265	08:51			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
266	08:52	[Blue] switches Hippowdon for Klefki	Turn 17: Hippowdon, come back! Go! Klefki! The opposing Latias used Psyshock! It's not very effective... Klefki lost 19.8% of its health! Klefki restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	eh I'm just going to go klefki it's my safest play	
267	08:55			he has the psyshock okay that's fine	
268	08:57				<[Spectator56]> *still weeps*
269	09:02			I'm going to throw out a t-wave because pretty much everything on his team does not appreciate a t-wave	

270	09:04		Turn 18: [James] withdrew Latias! [James] sent out Crobat! Pointed stones dug into the opposing Crobat! Klefki used Thunder Wave! The opposing Crobat is paralyzed! It may be unable to move! Klefki restored a little HP using its Leftovers! The opposing Crobat restored a little HP using its Leftovers!		<[Spectator66]> where is malta?
271	09:08	[James] switches Latias for Crobat		especially Crobat	
272	09:12	Klefki paralyzes Crobat			<[Spectator57]> Any time Durant is in just attack it u just need it weakened to where Pede cleans
273	09:16			and then	
274	09:20			I mean Gliscor's looking pretty sweet then	
275	09:22				<[Spectator66]> i'm trying to speak as much spanish in random converstaion as possible
276	09:23		Turn 19: Klefki, come back! Go! Gliscor! The opposing Crobat is paralyzed! It can't move! The opposing Crobat restored a little	I'm gonna pop into Gliscor	

			HP using its Leftovers! [Gliscor's poison heal!] Gliscor restored its HP.		
277	09:26	[Blue] switches Klefki for Gliscor		okay nice	<[Spectator72]> favorite pokémon set up?
278	09:28			I don't think our facade is going to kill	
279	09:31			but I'm still going to throw out a facade in case he decides to go into a Latias or something	
280	09:34		Turn 20: Gliscor used Facade! The opposing Crobat lost 31% of its health! The opposing Crobat used Defog! Gliscor's evasiveness fell! The pointed stones disappeared from around the opposing team! The opposing Crobat restored a little HP using its Leftovers! [Gliscor's Poison Heal!] Gliscor restored its HP.		<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Malta's like... In the Mediterranean somewhere, right? XD
281	09:35	Crobat removes Stealth Rock		oh that does a lot less than I wanted	
282	09:42			I'm going to SD here	

283	09:45	Gliscor uses Swords Dance to boost its attack	Turn 21: Gliscor used Swords Dance! Gliscor's attack rose sharply! Crobat used U-Turn! It's not very effective... Gliscor lost 5.4% of its health! The opposing Crobat went back to [James]! [James] sent out Typhlosion! [Gliscor's Poison Heal!] Gliscor restored its HP.		
284	09:47			does go for the u-turn	
285	09:48			if he goes straight Latias we can just go back into klefki	
286	09:52				<[Spectator56]> defog
287	09:54	Crobat uses U-Turn to switch into Typhlosion		goes into typhlosion	
288	09:59			well we don't really have a switch	
289	10:02			I'm just going to go for EQ	
290	10:03		Turn 22: The opposing Typhlosion used Eruption! Gliscor lost 100% of its health! Gliscor fainted!	I think we can take this	
291	10:05	Typhlosion knocks out Gliscor in one hit from full health (3-5)		woah okay that's specs	<[Spectator75]> @[Spectator54] Yes, but it's also a very small island with English

					writing on half the signs.
292	10:07			I was expecting scarf there on his team	<[Spectator70]> [Blue] coming back to do a stream.. What will the next miracle be? The Return of [Gold]?
293	10:14			okay	
294	10:21	[Blue] sends out Sharpedo	Go! Sharpedo!	we're going to have to go Sharpedo	<[Spectator56]> the
295	10:24			we're just going to protect here	
296	10:27				<[Spectator66]> el
297	10:28	[James] switches Typhlosion for Crobat	Turn 23: [James] withdrew Typhlosion! [James] sent out Crobat! Sharpedo used Protect! But it failed! The opposing Crobat restored a little HP using its Leftovers! [Sharpedo's Speed Boost!] Sharpedo's Speed rose!	as long as that Infernape does not have Mach Punch I think we're good	<[Spectator57]> press f to pay respects
298	10:33				<[Spectator60]> [Gold] returning would be wild
299	10:33.5				<[Spectator61]> [Gold] vs [Blue] stream when
300	10:37			now I don't really want to mega up here so	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> I'm not the best with my Geography
301	10:41			we're going to do the classic thing of bringing up the damage calculator	

302	10:41.5			{gaze shifts to offcenter window}	
303	10:45			cause I want to see how much a psychic fangs	
304	10:46			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	<[Spectator57]> dont mega get moxie
305	10:49			[Blue] coming back to do a stream what will the next miracle be the return of [Gold]	
306	10:53			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
307	10:54			oh I don't know about that (laughs)	<[Spectator75]> I've heard that even Cornwall has it's own language.
308	10:55			{typing}	
309	10:56			Sharpedo cleaner that's	
310	11:00				<[Spectator56]> So must nostalgia.
311	11:02				<[Spectator74]> psychic fangs
312	11:04			psychic fangs versus Crobat	
313	11:07				<[Spectator74]> that's a move?
314	11:09				<[Spectator63]> @[Blue]
315					<[Spectator56]> *much
316	11:12			so	<[Spectator63]> It kills
317	11:12.5				<[Spectator63]> Lol
318	11:14			we should do about	
319	11:16			yeah we should kill	<[Spectator60]> It is indeed

320	11:17			so I'm just going to go for psychic fangs	
321	11:19			I'm not going to mega up yet because	
322	11:20	Sharpedo knocks out Crobat (3-4)	Turn 24: Sharpedo used Psychic Fangs! It's super effective! The opposing Crobat lost 51% of its health! The opposing Crobat fainted! [Sharpedo's Speed Boost!] Sharpedo's Speed rose!	just because I want to be able to use this later on	<[Spectator63]> From this range, it kills
323	11:23			okay good	
324	11:26				<[Spectator72]> why some names blue?
325	11:26.5				<[Spectator74]> is that an ultra sun/moon thing
326	11:27				<[Spectator66]> presione f a paga respectos
327	11:28			let's see what he decides to do	
328	11:32	[James] sends our Durant	[James] sent out Durant!	okay goes into durant	
329	11:33			well I'm just going to protect here	
330	11:35			there's no harm in me protecting	
331	11:36			and I can see exactly what this Durant is going to do	<[Spectator57]> [Spectator74] still stuck in 2016 lol

332	11:40		Turn 25: Sharpedo used Protect! Sharpedo protected itself! Durant used Superpower! Sharpedo protected itself! [Sharpedo's Speed Boost!] Sharpedo's Speed rose!		
333	11:42			superpower okay	
334	11:51			so I need I need some spikes up really	<[Spectator54][Moderator]> He hasn't played much of Gen 7 XD
335	11:52				<[Spectator74]> I barely remember gen 7 mechanics
336	11:53				<[Spectator66]> never got into sun and moon
337	11:54			cause once I get a couple layers of spikes up I think I can take him on	
338	11:58	[Blue] switches Sharpedo for Hippowdon	Turn 26: Sharpedo, come back! Go! Hippowdon! [Hippowdon's Sand Stream] A sandstorm kicked up! The opposing Durant used Superpower! Hippowdon avoided the attack! The sandstorm is raging. Hippowdon restored a little HP using its	so I'm going to sac off hippo here	

			Leftovers! Hippowdon was hurt by the poison.		
339	12:06	Durant misses Hippowdon		okay if he misses another one that's great	
340	12:07			because then I can get rocks up	
341	12:08			come on come on miss one	
342	12:10				<[Spectator57]> Sack hippo and foul play with Klefki
343	12:13	Durant knocks out Hippowdon (2-4)	Turn 27: The opposing Durant used Superpower! Hippowdon lost 20.5% of its health! The opposing Durant's attack fell! The opposing Durant's defense fell! Hippowdon fainted! The sandstorm is raging.	ah sad times	
344	12:15			okay well that's fine	
345	12:17			I've lost my chat	
346	12:21			there you go got it	
347	12:24	[Blue] sends out Klefki	Go! Klefki!		
348	12:28				<[Spectator76]> Hi guys

349	12:30	Klefki puts up Spikes (1 layer)	<p>Turn 28: [James] withdrew Durant! [James] sent out Typhlosion! Klefki used Spikes! Spikes were scattered on the ground all around the opposing team! The sandstorm is raging. The opposing Typhlosion is buffeted by the sandstorm! Klefki restored a little HP using its Leftovers!</p>	I can get two layers of spikes up guaranteed here	<[Spectator77]> Hold up, am I seeing a [Blue] stream in 2018?
350	12:34			which might be enough to bring it down to the point where I can kill off the Durant	
351	12:42	Klefki puts up Spikes (2 layers)	<p>Turn 29: Klefki used Spikes! Spikes were scattered on the ground all around the opposing team! The opposing Typhlosion used Fire Blast! It's super effective! Klefki lost 98.1% of its health! Klefki fainted! The sandstorm is raging. The opposing Typhlosion is buffeted by the sandstorm!</p>	and we know he's probably specs he's not scarf	<[Spectator60]> Indeed - crazy, right?

352	12:46	Typhlosion knocks out Klefki in one hit (1-4)		okay that's fine	
353	12:52	[Blue] sends out Sharpedo	Go! Sharpedo!		<[Spectator77]> Absolute insanity
354	12:54			now I'm going to protect we're not going to mega up	
355	12:58		Turn 30: Sharpedo used Protect! Sharpedo protected itself! The opposing Typhlosion used Fire Blast! Sharpedo protected itself! The sandstorm subsided. [Sharpedo's Speed Boost!] Sharpedo's Speed rose!	we'll see if this works	
356	13:04			so we're gonna mega up uh do I	<[Spectator78]> why didnt you t-wave to weaken the thyphlosion?
357	13:08			{gaze shifts to offcenter window}	
358	13:08.5			would a crunch kill a typhlosion from that range	
359	13:10			{typing}	
360	13:12			without having to mega up	
361	13:13			because I really don't want to have to mega up	
362	13:17			yeah I'm gonna have to mega up	
363	13:19			oh no no no wait we're adamant	

364	13:22			fifty five to six oh no I can't I can't do that I've got to mega up	<[Spectator79]> because speed boost
365	13:24				<[Spectator63]> I don't think it will, Mac
366	13:29			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
367	13:32			uh why didn't I t-wave because I think I need the second layer of spikes to be able to take on the Durant	<[Spectator66]> ?Vois si gustai's mi espanol ?
368	13:32.5				<[Spectator57]> it wont
369	13:37			um to get enough chip	
370	13:39			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	
371	13:40			so I think we're gonna have to mega up here	
372	13:41			we're gonna have to hope the infernape is not scarf	
373	13:44			but I have a feeling it probably is	
374	13:47			but it's our only way to be able to uh	
375	13:50			unless we go for	
376	13:53			the ten percent chance of flinch um	
377	13:56			or the double protect	
378	14:00				<[Spectator80]> Don't mega

379	14:02	Sharpedo Mega Evolves and knocks out Typhlosion (1-3)	Turn 31: Sharpedo's Sharpedonite is reacting to the Key Stone! Sharpedo has Mega Evolved into Mega Sharpedo! Mega Sharpedo used Crunch! The opposing Typhlosion lost 63% of its health! The opposing Typhlosion fainted!	no let's go for it	
380	14:07				<[Spectator80]> Locked into fire blast
381	14:07.5				<[Spectator57]> ice fang
382	14:09				<[Spectator57]> do it
383	14:11			hopefully	
384	14:13	[James] sends out Infernape (1-3)	[James] sent out Infernape! Infernape is hurt by the spikes!	nah he's scarf he's definitely scarf	<[Spectator74]> go for the crit
385	14:16				<[Spectator57]> ass
386	14:18			there's no harm in me protecting here	
387	14:20		Turn 32: Mega Sharpedo used Protect! Mega Sharpedo protected itself! Infernape used Vacuum Wave! Mega Sharpedo protected itself!		
388	14:23			oh he's got vacuum wave	

389	14:24			I don't know if oh no we're definitely	<[Spectator66]> *weeps*
390	14:29			{typing}	
391	14:32		Turn 33: The opposing Infernape used Vacuum Wave! It's super effective! Mega Sharpedo lost 57.7% of its health! Sharpedo used Psychic Fangs! It's super effective! The opposing Infernape lost 84% of its health! The opposing Infernape fainted!	there's one way to find out	
392	14:33	Infernape doesn't knock out Sharpedo with a super effective attack		oh	
393	14:34	Sharpedo knocks out Infernape (1-2)		Sharpedo you're bulkier than I thought	
394	14:37				<[Spectator80]> Oh nvm
395	14:38			okay okay I'll take that	
396	14:40	[James] sends out Durant	[James] sent out Durant! The opposing Durant is hurt by the spikes!		<[Spectator56]> yikes
397	14:43			for durant we'll go for the crunch	
398	14:46	Sharpedo knocks out Durant (1-1)	Turn 34: Mega Sharpedo used Crunch! The opposing Durant		

			lost 84% of its health! The opposing Durant fainted!		
399	14:48			{raises hands over head}	<[Spectator57]> alright u made the right play lol
400	14:48.5			yes Sharpedo (laughs)	<[Spectator80]> Mega shark has bulk
401	14:52	[James] sends out Latias	[James] sent out Latias!	Sharpedo is a boss	<[Spectator55]> YIKKEESSS
402	14:52.3				<[Spectator77]> Mega Sharpedo has that BULK
403	14:52.6				<[Spectator54][Moderator]> He woudda killed had he gotten the Fire Blast off
404	14:55			and we'll just go for another crunch	
405	14:58	Sharpedo knocks out Latias (1-0)	Turn 35: Mega Sharpedo used Crunch! It's super effective! The opposing Latias lost 88% of it's health! The opposing Latias fainted!	{claps}	
406	14:59			that is excellent okay	
407	15:01		[Blue] won the battle!	that is a great way great first game	
408	15:02				<[Spectator54][Moderator]> Clutch
409	15:03			after completely losing most of my team at the start	
410	15:05				<[Spectator66]> "Bulky-Boi"- DISCOVERED

411	15:06			{gaze shifts to center monitor}	
412	15:07				<[Spectator60]> Sharpedo? More like SharpeGOAT
413	15:09				<[Spectator56]> Sharpedo da mvp boi
414	15:11			bulky boi discovered	
415	15:13			Sharpedo more like sharpGOAT	<[Spectator70]> [Blue] still got it!
416	15:15			{gaze shifts to left monitor}	<[Spectator80]> Yeah thought for sure nape would be scarfed
417	15:15.5			let's go do another game	

Table 2 Blue's Transcript

Appendix C

ID	Time-stamp	Game Events	Game Transcript	Streamer
1	16:00	Battle! Button pressed		
2	16:04	Game Starts	[Green] room's team: Lopunny/Blacephalon/Landorus -Therian/Magearna/Ferrothorn/ Crawdaunt [Giovanni]'s team: Lopunny/Tapu Fini/Greninja/Jirachi/Zygarde/Z apdos	oh, I get to play this pussy
3	16:05			this guy whined when he, when I, uh, played him because I got like un- unlucky
4	16:09			like I lucked him but it wasn't luck at all and then he haxxed the fuck out of me
5	16:13			and, uh, he was like, "ha ha."
6	16:15			him and his boyfriend were like jerking each other off and it really made me mad
7	16:18			I hate that kind of stuff
8	16:19			When I'm just like ch- playing and oh my god,
9	16:21			pussies are just like talking in my battle, and just like, "ha ha ha ha."
10	16:25			shut the fuck up
11	16:26			Oh my God, there, there is some pet peeves, and it's that

12	16:29		Battle between [Giovanni] and [Green] room started! [Giovanni] sent out Tapu Fini! Go! Landorus-Therian! [Landorus-Therian's Intimidate!] The opposing Tapu Fini's Attack fell! [Opposing Tapu Fini's Misty Surge!] Mist swirls around the battlefield!	
13	16:30			Holy shit
14	16:31			He leads off with his Tapu Fini
15	16:32			On some, I want a Nature's Madness turn one bullshit
16	16:34	[Green] room switches to Ferrothorn	Turn 1: Landorus-Therian, come back! Go! Ferrothorn! The opposing Tapu Fini used Nature's Madness! Ferrothorn lost 49.9% of its health! Ferrothorn restored a little HP using Leftovers!	So I'm, gonna go into my Ferrothorn turn one
17	16:38		Turn 2: The opposing Tapu Fini used Taunt! Ferrothorn fell for the taunt! Ferrothorn used Gyro Ball! The opposing Tapu Fini lost 43% of its health! The opposing Tapu Fini restored a little HP using its Leftovers! Ferrothorn restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	and I'll just Gyro the next turn, and get some good ass chip
18	16:40			Okay
19	16:41			I can go into this thing on the Zap
20	16:44	[Giovanni] switches to Jirach and [Green] room switches to Blacephalon	Turn 3: [Giovanni] withdrew Tapu Fini! [Giovanni] sent out Jirachi! Ferrothorn, come back! Go! Blacephalon!	and then
21	16:45			he goes into Jirachi, yeah, too easy
22	16:47			umm
23	16:49			I could just shadow, but, it's not gonna kill, but it'll do

				enough to where, like,
24	16:50	Blacephalon almost knocks out Jirachi in one hit, Jirachi sets up Stealth Rocks	Turn 4: Blacephalon used Shadow Ball! It's super effective! The opposing Jirachi lost 86% of it health! The opposing Jirachi used Stealth Rock! Pointed stones float in the air around your team! The opposing Jirachi restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	
25	16:54			it did the damage I need too, so I can't care less
26	16:56		Turn 5: The opposing Jirachi used Protect! The opposing Jirachi protected itself! Blacephalon used Shadow Ball! The opposing Jirachi protected itself! The opposing Jirach restored a little HP using its Leftovers! The mist disappeared from the battlefield.	
27	16:58			To be honest, I shoulda mind blown
28	17:00			I knew I shoulda mind blown too
29	17:01			Oh, he had a Lopunny
30	17:02	[Giovanni] switches to Lopunny, which isn't effected by Blacephalon's Ghost-type attack	Turn 6: [Giovanni] withdrew Jirachi! [Giovanni] sent out Lopunny! Blacephalon used Shadow Ball! It doesn't affect the opposing Lopunny...	I didn't even see that shit
31	17:04			Fuck, I lost
32	17:06			Okay
33	17:07			I got to get up rocks soon
34	17:09			I didn't even know he had a Lopunny, that's pretty bad actually

35	17:12	[Green] room switches to Ferrothorn	Turn 7: Blacephalon, come back! Go! Ferrothorn! Pointed stones dug into Ferrothorn! The opposing Lopunny's Lopunnite is reacting to the Key Stone! The opposing Lopunny has Mega Evolved into Mega Lopunny! The opposing Lopunny used Fake Out! It's not very effective... Ferrothorn lost 8.5% of its health! [Ferrothorn's Iron Barbs] The opposing Lopunny was hurt! Ferrothorn restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	Like, it's actually really bad
36	17:14			Fakes out there, pretty obvious read
37	17:16			He's gonna like, not predict, protect here
38	17:20			What'd he predict, protect? I don't even know.
39	17:22	[Green] room switches to Landorus-Therian	Turn 8: Ferrothorn, come back! Go! Landorus-Therian! Pointed stones dug into Landorus-Therian! [Landorus-Therian's Intimidate!] The opposing Lopunny's attack fell! The opposing Lopunny used Power-Up Punch! It's not very effective... Landorus-Therian lost 8.8% of its health! The opposing Lopunny's Attack rose!	
40	17:23			Power-up punches on the switch
41	17:24			I can just explode here
42	17:26			If he predicts that good on him, if not, bad on him
43	17:28			I don't know what to say

44	17:30			Like, I need this too much to sac, which is the problem
45	17:33	[Giovanni] switches to Zapdos. Landorus-Therian uses Explosion, sacrificing itself and deal a good chunk of damage to Zapdos. (5-6)	Turn 9: [Giovanni] withdrew Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)! [Giovanni] sent out Zapdos! Landorus-Therian used Explosion! The opposing Zapdos lost 68% of its health! Landorus-Therian fainted! The opposing Zapdos restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	but he sacs the Zap instead
46	17:35			It doesn't actually sac it 'cause it lived really easily but
47	17:38	[Green] room sends out Blacephalon	Go! Blacephalon! Pointed stones dug into Blacephalon!	you get what I'm trying to say
48	17:39			Um, just gonna, fucking flamethrower I guess
49	17:46	[Giovanni] switches to Greninja. Blacephalon deals a lot of damage and Greninja is burned.	Turn 10: [Giovanni] withdrew Zapdos! [Giovanni] sent out Greninja! Blacephalon used Flamethrower! It's not very effective... The opposing Greninja lost 62% of its health! The opposing Greninja was burned! The opposing Greninja was hurt by the burn!	As it goes hard in the Gren, and I burn it, which is pretty nice
50	17:49			Doesn't really change too much though
51	01:51			I just throw a Crawdaunt on the dark pulse, or whatever
52	17:56	[Giovanni] switches to Zygarde. [Green] room switches to Crawdaunt.	Turn 11: [Giovanni] withdrew Greninja! [Giovanni] sent out Zygarde! [Opposing Zygarde's Aura Break!] The opposing Zygarde reversed all other Pokemon's auras! Blacephalon, come back! Go! Crawdaunt! Pointed stones dug into Crawdaunt!	Fuck, I shoulda mind blown, but I wasn't sure

53	17:58			Anyway, he has to outrage to kill me I'm pretty sure
54	18:00			So, I'm afraid I just knock
55	18:04			It he outrages he's gonna die to Z Fleur
56	18:05	Zygarde takes Crawdaunt down to 2% health. Crawdaunt takes Zygarde down to 16% health and knocks off its item.	Turn 12: The opposing Zygarde used Thousand Arrows! Crawdaunt lost 85.8% of its health! Crawdaunt used Knock Off! The opposing Zygarde lost 84% of its health! Crawdaunt knocked off the opposing Zygarde's Choice Band!	
57	18:06			As he thousand arrows, and obviously I live it pretty easily
58	18:10			cause this thing is fucking fat
59	18:12			I wonder if he'll e-speed or thousand
60	18:14	Zygarde knocks out Crawdaunt (4-6)	Turn 13: The opposing Zygarde used Thousand Arrows! Crawdaunt lost 1.9% of its health! Crawdaunt fainted!	All right, he goes for a thousand
61	18:16			Umm
62	18:18	[Green] room switches to Lopunny	Go! Lopunny! Pointed stones dug into Lopunny!	
63	18:20			I'm going to my son and I just fake out here
64	18:23			My son being, Lopunny. You know, that's who he is, my s- my child
65	18:27			Um, I should just hi jump kick, but I feel like you do not risk it here

66	18:32	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out Zygarde (4-5)	Turn 14: Lopunny's Lopunnite is reacting to the Key Stone! Lopunny has Mega Evolved into Mega Lopunny! Lopunny used Fake Out! The opposing Zygarde lost 16% of its health! The opposing Zygarde fainted!	like, that'd be a wack play
67	18:34			The Jirachi has protect, as we saw
68	18:36			so he might even just to go Jirachi and try playing some stupid games with me
69	18:40			or he might even go into his own Lopunny and just be like, "Fuck it, let's get it."
70	18:43			And if he does that, I'm just gonna do it too
71	18:45			Like, I ain't no bitch
72	18:47			I ain't no bitch
73	18:48			but I feel like he's just gonna go into his Tapu Fini
74	18:51			and like scald or some shit
75	18:54			I don't know
76	18:55			Hurry up, [Giovanni]
77	18:56	[Giovanni] switches to Tapu Fini	[Giovanni] sent out Tapu Fini! [Opposing Tapu Fini's Misty Surge!] Mist swirls around the battlefield!	
78	18:58			Ah, [Giovanni] (laughs)
79	19:01			I'll use frustrate here. I mean, he's gonna stay in, but I can't do anything

80	19:03	[Giovanni] switches to Lopunny	Turn 15: [Giovanni] withdrew Tapu Fini! [Giovanni] sent out Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)! Lopunny used Frustration! The opposing Lopunny lost 66% of its health!	
81	19:04			Oh, so bad (laughs)
82	19:07			So bad
83	19:07. 5			umm
84	19:12	[Green] room switches to Ferrothorn. [Giovanni]'s Lopunny knocks out Ferrothorn (3-5)	Turn 16: Lopunny, come back! Go! Ferrothorn! Pointed stones dug into Ferrothorn! The opposing Lopunny used High Jump Kick! It's super effective! Ferrothorn lost 47.6% of its health! [Ferrothorn's Iron Barbs!] The opposing Lopunny was hurt! Ferrothorn fainted!	he hi jump kicks there, but I had to make that play
85	19:13	[Green] room switches to Lopunny	Go! Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)! Pointed stones dug into Lopunny!	
86	19:14			Like, I gotta high jump kick myself
87	19:16			I mean, I shouldn't of High Jump Kicked if I was gonna predict the switch
88	19:18			It's a pretty shit play, but I gotta fake out here so it's like
89	19:21			would you stay in or would you just sac your Jirachi?
90	19:23	[Giovanni] switches to Zapdos	Turn 17: [Giovanni] withdrew Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)! [Giovanni] sent out Zapdos! Lopunny used High Jump Kick! It's not very effective... The opposing Zapdos lost 26% of its health! The opposing Zapdos restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	

91	19:24			So, I'll sac the zap and pray for p- haxx
92	19:27			I like that play too
93	19:29			I've seen that one before
94	19:30	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out Zapdos (3-4)	Turn 18: Lopunny used Ice Punch! It's super effective The opposing Zapdos lost 18% of its health! The opposing Zapdos fainted!	It's a pretty decent play
95	19:32			doesn't get it though 'cause Misty's up
96	19:33			obviously, so that's pretty nice
97	19:35			umm
98	19:37			from here though
99	19:38			it looks like
100	19:40			I can lose to Jirachi
101	19:41			but I can also win with Mag potentially
102	19:45			but it looks like I'm gonna lose to Jirachi if he doesn't sac it
103	19:48			and I need him to sac that thing, like ASAP
104	19:51	[Giovanni] switches to Tapu Fini	[Giovanni] sent out Tapu Fini!	
105	19:53			He goes into Tapu Fini here
106	19:55			I could win from this position, if he kills my thing with his Tapu Fini
107	20:01		Turn 19: Lopunny used Frustration! The opposing Tapu Fini lost 46% of its health! The opposing Tapu Fini used Surf! Lopunny lost 38.7% of its health! The opposing Tapu Fini restored a little HP using its	I can win from the current position probably

			Leftovers! The mist disappeared from the battlefield.	
108	20:04			Wow, that did jack. Fucking. Shit
109	20:07			Okay. Um
110	20:13	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out Tapu Fini (3-3)	Turn 20: Lopunny used Frustration! The opposing Tapu Fini lost 23% of its health! The opposing Tapu Fini fainted!	ye- yes, sir, frustration, pretty cool attack
111	20:15			Uh
112	20:16			I mean, if he's Water Shuriken, I think I frickin' win this game
113	20:19			Like, I'm pretty sure I'll win this game
114	20:24	[Giovanni] sends out Greninja	[Giovanni] sent out Greninja!	Once he brings in his Lopunny, what do I do?
115	20:26			Just stay in?
116	20:26.5			Oh, he goes into this for some Ash-Grenj
117	20:28			like, Water Shuriken and shit
118	20:30			Like he really wants to hit those
119	20:32			and I don't know if I should let that happen
120	20:34			but like, I don't think I have a choice to be honest
121	20:35			Like
122	20:38	[Giovanni] switches to Jirachi	Turn 21: [Giovanni] withdrew Greninja! [Giovanni] sent out Jirachi! Lopunny used Frustration! It's not very effective... The opposing Jirachi lost 23% of its health! The opposing Jirachi restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	

123	20:39			As he just goes back into his Jirachi
124	20:41			expecting my Mag to come out
125	20:42			but bro, I'm not even gonna switch
126	20:43		Turn 22: The opposing Jirachi used Protect! The opposing Jirachi protected himself! Lopunny used Frustration! The opposing Jirachi protected himself! The opposing Jirachi restored a little HP using its Leftovers!	
127	20:46			Um
128	20:47			like I can't do that, my things not AV
129	20:49	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out Jirachi (3-2)	Turn 23: Lopunny used Frustration! It's not very effective... The opposing Jirachi lost 15% of its health! The opposing Jirachi fainted!	He's making some big ass predicts, but like
130	20:52			they're predicts I can't even like defend against
131	20:55			and now he loses one hundred percent, cause everything dies to fake out
132	20:57	[Giovanni] switches to Greninja	[Giovanni] sent out Greninja!	so it's cool
133	20:59	[Green] room switches to Blacephalon. Greninja knocks out Blacephalon and transforms (2-2).	Turn 24: Lopunny, come back! Go! Blacephalon! Pointed stones dug into Blacephalon! The opposing Greninja used Water Shuriken! It's super effective! Blacephalon lost 32.4% of its health! The It's super effective! Blacephalon lost 18.2% of its health! Hit 2 times! Blacephalon fainted! [Opposing Greninja's Battle Bond!] The opposing Greninja became fully charged due to its	

			bond with its trainer! The opposing Greninja became Ash-Greninja! The opposing Greninja was hurt by its burn!	
134	21:00	[Green] room sends out Lopunny	Go! Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)!	
135	21:01			All right, cool, good win
136	21:03			solid win pretty close game
137	21:04			but fortunately, you know
138	21:06			after my first game with this guy
139	21:07	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out Greninja (2-1)	Turn 25: Lopunny used Fake Out! The opposing Greninja lost 26% of its health! The opposing Greninja fainted!	
140	21:08			I'm able to defeat him
141	21:10	[Giovanni] switches to Lopunny	[Giovanni] sent out Lopunny! (Lopunny-Mega)!	Shit talkin' pussy
142	21:11	[Green] room switches to Magearna	Turn 26: Lopunny, come back! Go! Magearna! Pointed stones dug into Magearna! The opposing Lopunny used Power-Up Punch! Magearna lost 19.8% of its health! The opposing Lopunny's attack rose!	All right
143	21:12			let me sac my Mag
144	21:15			Power-up punches on the switch
145	21:16			All right, cool
146	21:17			As long as you can't break the game and fake out, I should be fine
147	21:18	[Giovanni]'s Lopunny knocks out Magearna (1-1)	Turn 27: The opposing Lopunny used High Jump Kick! Magearna lost 74.2% of its health! Magearna fainted!	
148	21:19	[Green] room switches to Lopunny	Go! Lopunny (Lopunny-Mega)!	

149	21:22			I don't think he can do that, so that's a GG
150	21:24	[Green] room's Lopunny knocks out [Giovanni]'s Lopunny (1-0)	Turn 28: Lopunny used Fake Out! The opposing Lopunny lost 9% of its health! The opposing Lopunny fainted!	
151	21:25	[Green] room navigates away from the battle before the results appear on the screen		Freebie, fuck that guy
152	21:26			Fuck that guy, after he was talkin' that loud, bro
153	21:28			That last game, oh man

Table 3 Green's Transcript