

Legends blaze toward World finals

BY IAN VAN ORDEN
NEWS AND OPINION EDITOR

Hopes are shattered and dreams come to fruition as the League of Legends World Championship continues. It has been over a month since the first teams hit Summoner's Rift, and it has been a long road for the remaining teams.

As professional League stands as one of the most popular esports in the world, expectations are always high for the teams that make it to Worlds. The primary international tournament held throughout the year, Worlds offers an opportunity for teams to prove that they can dominate outside of their home region, against teams that may play substantially differently than what they are used to.

Split into three distinct stages, Worlds began on Sept. 25 with the Play-In stage. New to the 2017 tournament, this stage offered additional opportunities for teams from emerging regions. As League esports is typically dominated by five different regions, including North America, Europe, Korea, China and Taiwan, it has been difficult for smaller regions to break into international tournaments. The Play-In stage offered a chance for those regions to compete on the world's stage at the same level as the larger regions.

With the exception of the Korean teams, whose previous international success granted them the opportunity to avoid the Play-In, this stage was made up of the third-place teams, or third seeds, from the major regions, and the first seeds from the smaller regions. These 12 teams were then split into groups of three, and proceeded to play each team in their group twice in a best-of-one format. This led into the Play-In knockout stage, where the top two teams in each group played against a member from a different group for the privilege of moving to the group stage.

The Play-In stage proceeded nearly exactly how analysts predicted, with the only potential upset in Group D, when 1907 Fenerbahçe eSports, the Turkish representatives, emerged as the group's first seed over Hong Kong Attitude, the Taiwanese LMS's third seed. The Play-In knockouts were also completed without any major upsets and the four remaining teams, including NA's Cloud 9 and EU's Fnatic, moved onto the group stage.

Groups, which in previous years had been the first stage of Worlds, introduced the major region's first and second seeds. With the addition of the victors from the Play-In stage, 16 teams, split into four groups of four, clashed, fighting for the opportunity to represent their regions in the final knockout



SK Telecom T1 clash with Royal Never Give Up as they push into their base in an attempt to close out game four of the semifinals, tying the series 2-2. They would later come out victorious in game five, securing their spot in the finals.

stage. Moving back to the best-of-one format, groups saw tragedy for North America, when Team Solo Mid and Immortals, NA's first and second seeds, were both eliminated in significant upsets. NA's final hope, Cloud 9, pushed through, though, barely securing their second place spot. NA wasn't the only region to suffer, though, as both the remaining Taiwanese teams also faced elimination.

Europe fared much better during groups, with only G2 Esports, Europe's first seed, failing to secure a place in knockouts. In a world's first, one of the EU's best-known teams, Fnatic, managed to secure second in their group after a 0-3 record during the first week of groups. Fnatic's journey was not an easy one, though, facing a three way tie on their group's final day of group stage games against NA's Immortals and Vietnam's GIGABYTE Marines. Despite their week one performance, Fnatic accomplished the impossible by winning all but their first game in week two, proving they deserved their spot in knockouts.

During a post-game interview, Fnatic's rookie mid-laner, Rasmus "Caps" Winther spoke about the team's incredible journey from their failings in week one, to their ultimate victory in week two. "It's definitely still sinking in. I really hope I can just finally,

finally calm down."

After eight grueling days of games, the eight remaining teams regrouped for the final stage of Worlds, knockouts. Transitioning back to best-of-fives, day one of knockouts, the quarterfinals, saw the greatest upset of Worlds thus far when Samsung Galaxy, Korea's third seed, smashed Korea's first seed, Longzhu Gaming, 3-0.

Unfortunately, the quarterfinals also saw the end of both NA and EU's run at Worlds. Cloud 9 fell to the Chinese Team WE in a close 3-2 match. Before game three of the series, a clip of Zachary "Sneaky" Scuderi, the team's ADC, or attack damage carry, described his hopes for the series. "I hope I can make it passed [quarterfinals] just to prove the point that I am a very solid player." Scuderi, who in the past has been a consistent player but hadn't been a major playmaker on the team, had been written off by most, with the majority of the focus placed on Nicolaj "Jensen" Jensen, the team's mid laner. Though the team did not come out victorious, Sneaky as an individual player shined bright during the best-of-five, setting a new record for DPM, or damage-per-minute, at worlds during game three.

Semifinals, which took place on Oct. 28 and 29, was a showdown between League's two most dominant regions, China and Korea.

During the first game, the three-time world champions SK Telecom T1 from Korea was pitted against China's Royal Never Give Up. Throughout the series, each team fought with all of their might, RNG looking to take down what many consider to be the world's best team. Almost every game was close, most coming down to a single team fight, but SKT proved their strength in the final game of the series by demolishing RNG, ending the game 10 kills to one.

Following SKT's victory, a second showdown between the regions commenced between China's Team WE and Samsung Galaxy. Though Team WE easily took game one of the series, the Korean representatives returned with a vengeance, blazing through the next three games and securing their spot in the finals. During a post-game interview, Jo "Core JJ" Yong-in, Samsung Galaxy's support and the player of the series, spoke about the team's chances during the finals, where they will fight SKT, the team that knocked them out of the finals last year. "At least we became strong enough that nobody will know until we collide with SKT, which one will survive," he said.

Now, only finals remain. One question is left to be answered: Can Samsung Galaxy overcome SK Telecom T1's dynasty and walk away with a victory?

FINALS WILL AIR ON NOVEMBER 4 AT MIDNIGHT. THE EVENT WILL BE STREAMED LIVE VIA TWITCH AND YOUTUBE.