

South Korean gamer 'Faker' gets rock-star treatment at Asian Games

September 29 2023, by Jing Xuan TENG



A fan of Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok shows off her sign.

Wearing shirts adorned with his name and waving banners displaying his face, the frenzied crowd in Hangzhou was not waiting to catch a glimpse of a pop star—but rather a video gamer.

The softly spoken and bespectacled Lee Sang-hyeok, better known as "Faker", has developed a cult following at home in South Korea and abroad after climbing to the top of professional gaming.

ESports are making their debut as a medal event at the 19th Asian Games in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou—a key step that could lead to inclusion in the Olympics.

And fans are turning out in force to prove that gamers can have as much star power as top basketball or [football players](#)—or in Lee's case, perhaps even more.

When the 27-year-old landed in China he was met at the airport by a throng of [fans](#) and journalists, before being whisked away from the glare of publicity.

On Friday, in and outside the 4,500-seat Hangzhou Esports Center, spectators buzzed with excitement at the prospect of seeing their idol in action in the flesh.

South Korea defeated Taiwan in the final of League of Legends to earn Lee and his teammates gold—and with it a controversial exemption from military service.

Fans at the futuristic-looking venue exchanged homemade stickers and placards adorned with photos of Lee and the other players.

They chanted "Faker! Faker" as the South Korean team walked out for the medal ceremony.

Prior to the big [game](#), a forum dedicated to the South Korean superstar on social media site Weibo was filled with messages of support for him.

Fans also begged for spare tickets and others showed off prized autographs by their hero.

Lee started playing video games in [elementary school](#) and excelled at League of Legends—an online battle game introduced by Riot Games in 2009.

He dropped out of [high school](#) after being offered a job as a professional, making his debut in 2013 and thrashing top players one after another as he made his way to stardom.

"It's his understanding of the game and his operation of it," 24-year-old devotee Pu told AFP, explaining the gamer's strengths while holding up a "Faker" jersey.

Guagua, a 25-year-old fan, said she was drawn to the player's hardworking image and clean reputation.

"He's an example for so many people," Guagua said.

"Right now there's [negative news](#) about so many eSports athletes, but you can search far and wide and you will never see any negative news about Faker."

"As such a strong player, someone who can say he is number one, I think he's still very humble and he also loves to read," 22-year-old Su chimed in.

Others had more superficial reasons for obsessing over the slightly built gamer.

"Faker is so handsome in his new photo that I'm gonna faint," one fan wrote on Weibo.

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Citation: South Korean gamer 'Faker' gets rock-star treatment at Asian Games (2023, September 29) retrieved 13 May 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2023-09-south-korean-gamer-faker-rock-star.html>

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