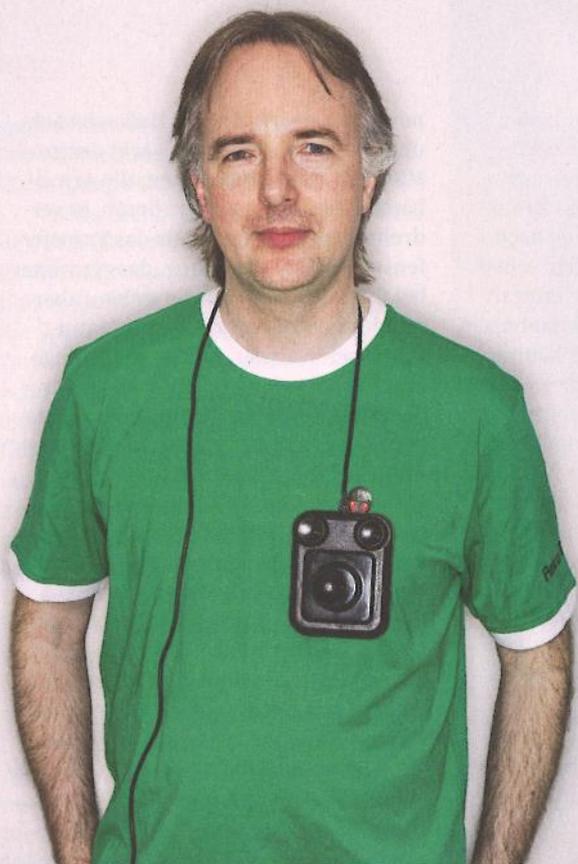




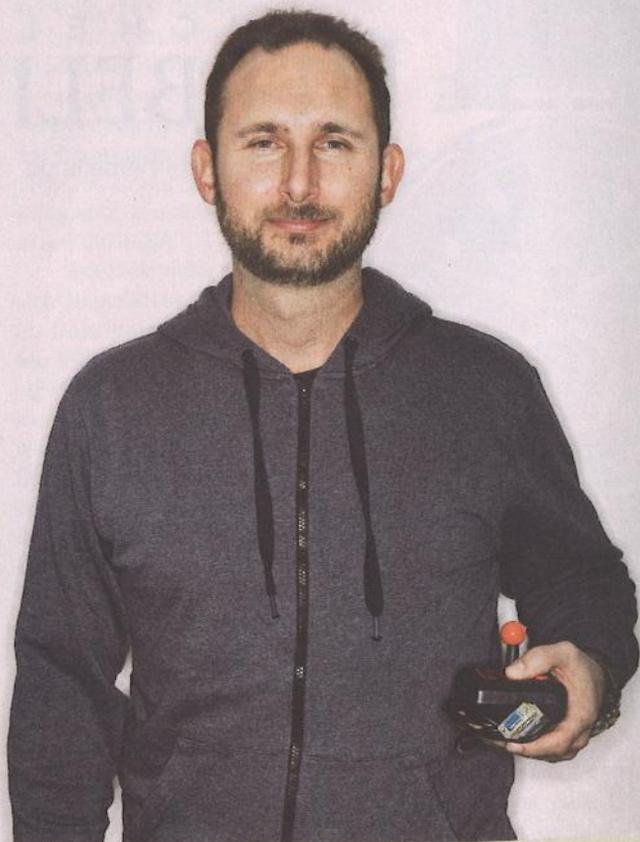
Steve Campbell  
from Great Britain



Oliver Stender  
from Germany



Glanni Torchio  
from Italy



Jørn Meinertz  
from Norway



# HEY, AMIGAS!

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When it comes to the topic “transfer rate” the record world champion can’t take a joke. “I don’t play on a LCD” says Gianni Torchio resolutely. The mid-forty from Milano looks disparagingly into the direction of the single one LCD TV in the room, before his facial features get back to their usual softness and he calmly starts with a spontaneous review about the technical problems that occur when one plays a 27 year old computer game on a modern TV. It’s all about the correct adapter, the 65000x65000 positions the ball can be in, serial and parallel interfaces and the obvious advantages of old tube monitors. “If the response time of a player is delayed you can forget the game. On this level here, the small differences decide.”, Torchio says, who has an 80’s-joystick hanging around his neck like a loose tie, and who quickly vanishes right after to one of the old TVs, where nothing of the response time gets lost. If you want to win your 5<sup>th</sup> title, everything must be perfect.

You can’t really tell when you see Torchio, but he definitely is one of a few people in the World, who can claim to belong to the world class in a certain discipline. On the other side that’s true for all the other attendees in this room, which smells of musk and coffee, in Landskrona, Sweden, simply due to the fact that this discipline is only played by manageable a number of people: These 32 men play for the World Championship of KickOff 2,

## **Every year people from all over the world fight for the title of World Champion at the 1990 released computer game “KickOff 2” On Amiga computers and with holy seriousness**

a football simulation that came out 1990 for Amiga and Atari. KickOff 2 was very popular after being released. Magazines of that time called it “a real World Champion” among the games. The pitch is shown from top, for shooting, passing and tackling one only needs a single button, and when you see that game the first time, 27 years after its release, it’s hard to recognize more than a couple of dashing pixels on a soccer-pitch-like background. So why does this video game, which at its time was just one of many football simulations, even 27 years after its release, still enjoy so much popularity that people from all over the world meet to find the next World Champion? Is it because there’s a statistic web site, which covers all - thousands - of official matches and calculates a ranking with a complex coefficient? Is it because a bunch of enthusiasts founded a “Kick Off Association”? Oliver Stender knows the answer. “The game physics”, he says. Stender, brown hair, 1,70m / 5”7, considered by experts, who are also his friends, as Germany’s best player – even if he would never say so.

This year he’s representing Georgia, just for fun, because he fell in love with this country during a holiday trip. Something, his friends make jokes about. But they all speak reverently about him. Stender likes making jokes himself, always repeating the punch line while laughing. But when talking about KickOff2 – and that he does a lot – he talks with holy seriousness and with finest football-player-speak. “The difference to other games is the fact, that the ball does not stick to the avatar’s foot, but does bounce off. And that creates an infinite amount of possibilities of how the game situation may develop. That’s why every match is different from all others before. This depth is found in no other computer game.”, Stender says and continues “You have to be fully mentally present the whole time.” He got his first Amiga as a Christmas present at the end of the eighties, meanwhile he has three. One of them is at his workplace, which may be the reason why Stender makes better decisions in those infinite number of game situations than his opponents. “I have a colleague at work, with whom I can play matches during lunch break or after work. Altogether 4 or 5 hours a week.” This regular training, which most of the other attendees here don’t have, due to the lack of a gaming partner, lead to the fact that “one has to reckon on me”, as Stender puts it. The fact that he, as an IT experts deals with state-of-the-art technology in his everyday life, but passionately plays a game of the nineties in his spare time, is no contradiction to him.

“A car fan can still love oldtimers.” Since 2005 he comes to the tournaments, yet the title was out of reach so far. His best position was the third place a couple of years ago, when he had to leave the room and cry a little. “Just like Franz Beckenbauer in Rome 1990, when he was walking on the pitch all by himself.”, says Stender and repeats “Just like Franz Beckenbauer.” while laughing.

Stender is one of those players, which take the tournament more serious than others. Before big matches he sometimes withdraws into a corner or abstains from lunch with the others to “stay focused”. For most of the others though, the World Cup is some kind of high school reunion.



Light reflections on the screen are a No-Go no matter how beautiful the view may be.

In the hotel lobby players from Italy, Spain, England hug each other with joy, and there's a common sorrow that the Greek players resigned from the trip to Sweden due to the economic situation. The love for this old video game brought the attendees together in the first place, with the help of an internet forum. During these World Cups, which take place every year since 2001, friendships have been made, that reach out further into life – apart from 8bit. The tournaments require a hell amount of work. Every year they take place in a different country, and the host is responsible for a proper location, hotel rooms for all the players, and basic organizational questions, like: Where can I get fifteen Amiga consoles and suitable TV sets?

The organization of this World Cup in Landskrona is in the hands of Jørn Flagdtvedt Meinertz. Meinertz lives in Denmark, works in Norway as a social worker, but could also prepare coffee



2 days of non-stop gaming eventually takes its toll.

in one of those expensive cafès in Berlin-Mitte, with his tattooed arms and accurately under-cut hair style. He is by far the opposite of what the cliché of a game nerd tells us, but he is definitely the heart of this event and the whole group. He prepared to host this World Cup for almost a year, alongside of his work, bought suitable TVs on ebay and with his co-host he managed to get this location: the club house of the Landskrona BoIS with a fantastic view over the soccer stadium of the local third division team – even if the reflections of light do bother some of the more ambitious players. And even when his wife started nagging, as more and more time was consumed for organizing, and he himself claims he won't do it again, one gets the feeling that he would do it again after all.

Every year I am looking forward to the WorldCup like a child waiting for christmas.", he says. He also talks very serious about this old video game, about advantages and disadvantages of the several joysticks available in different countries, his preferred tactical line-up (a player can choose among 4 different tactics),



Great: The good old Becker-Fist is also present in the KickOff scene, of course.



Despite the woman quota of a German management board: During the finals everyone's in a jolly mood.

and how it all started with his school friend "Gaming Knut", who was the only child in the neighborhood that owned an Amiga. For a while Meinertz even moderated a podcast about this topic. But above all, this 44 year old is so full of verve between matches, even though he has a hangover from the welcome party the night before . He presents results, informs about the scheduled events in the evening , jokes with other players and with his cool and charming attitude he is basically the glue between all the - partly very different - people that gathered here for the tournament.

Two guys from Bremen, Germany, came here to Landskrona with a trunk full of beer and dedicate themselves to that game with a similar seriousness like their friend Stender.

On the other side of the table sits Dagh Nielsen, a Danish math teacher, who is said to play KickOff like chess. And there's Thor Skaug, an exile Norwegian who travelled from Seattle just for this event.

Lorenzo Lozito from Italy, who learned the basic of electronic engineering just to build a 2kg joystick, what took him a year and a lot of energy, but fills him with a lot of pride - and that is hard to miss! Andy from England, Jaime from Spain, 4 teachers from Osnabrueck, Germany, who had an Amiga in their student apartment, and have become family fathers and steady jobs in the meantime - they all see the WorldCup as a chance to turn back the time once year, when they were students and celebrate without the daily boundaries.

Or take Steve Camber, who is the only player that has attended every single WorldCup since 2001.

He is a professional Game programmer and dedicates over 1000 hours in his spare time to expanding the KickOff 2 code,

to get rid of nasty bugs in the game, to display "WorldCup Landskrona 2017" on the pitch's boundaries, calculate and show statistics, like shots on goal, history of the match - all of which is analyzed by the players very eagerly.

"Today I can't watch real football matches anymore, 'cause they are so slow. I am getting furious cause everything takes so long." Camber says - but no one would really believe that this calm, melancholic 46-year-old, who is called "Hacker" by the others, is able to get furious at all.

"Once a year we are like kids for a weekend - that's great, isn't it?", and shakes his joystick madly as if to prove it.

He wants to attend as long as there are tournaments - that's for sure. But one could only guess how long that will be the case. The players are all in their forties, new and young ones aren't likely to show up - even if one or the other is introducing the game to

their kids - with limited success, of course. Oliver Stender is joking: "We are going to be pushed in wheel chairs to the World Cups. But before that happens, the Amigas will give up first. But then we will be playing on a regular computer, Steve Camber is working on a PC version of Kick Off. Even though we will miss the Amiga feeling, we wouldn't mind."

Jørn Meinertz, too, is wiping away the thought of "the end of the tournaments" like an annoying fly: "Just look at this", he says and points to the tunnel-shaped room, where 32 men are sitting, some accompanied by their wives, raising the Becker-Fist when they score a goal, scream when they receive one, and madly tear on their joystick like a wine bottle where the cork is jammed.

"I can visit any country in Europe and have good friends there. Not long ago I was in Italy spontaneously. One or two calls and I had a place to sleep, a KickOff tournament and a great weekend!"

A great weekend, Meinertz also had at this World Cup 2017, where he finished somewhere in the middle of the ranking, which in fact didn't seem to bother him much.

The Georgian-by-choice Stender made the 6th place, which he shortly comments "I gave the best I could." and enjoys his first beer of the tournament.

And also the record champion Gianni Torchio could not reach for the title. In an intense and very tight final he was defeated by the Danish chess player Nielsen, by just one goal difference. The transfer rate of the monitor, that much is clear, was not the reason.

