Keeping the Score: Competitive Memory at a Game's End of Life

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Recommendation for the end-of-life code of conduct: when an online game with ranked or competitive play is shut down, the publisher should release, in an open format, the anonymised match history, the rules used to compute the ranking, and the final standings. This costs almost nothing, requires no server code or ongoing service, and lets any community carry the game's competitive history forward instead of starting from zero.

A short brief based on an open preprint with public code and data (doi:10.5281/zenodo.23875636).

The problem: servers can be revived, memory cannot

When a publisher ends an online game, player communities often bring the servers back. What they cannot bring back is the game's competitive memory: who beat whom, who held which title in which season. That record lives in one database run by one party, and it disappears with the operator.

The community of *Mount & Blade: Warband* (2010) has lived this cycle many times. Since 2010, community leagues and matchmaking projects have risen and closed, and each time the rankings and history were lost and players started again from zero. The most recent, Warband Premier, went silent in May 2026 after 1,725 recorded matches by 140 players, and relaunches on 1 December 2026.

The Commission's response to the *Stop Destroying Videogames* initiative (16 June 2026) leaves preservation to voluntary practice and to communities. A code of conduct that covers servers but not competitive data would still let this memory vanish.

The evidence: a ranking can outlive its operator

The study shows that once match history and rating rules are public, a ranking can be kept honest by a network of community servers, with no central authority. On the 1,435 real Warband Premier matches:

- **Lying servers are caught.** A community server that falsely reports wins for a favoured player is detected in 97–100% of simulated cases once it falsifies half of that player's losses. A conventional ranking lets the same player climb 10–20 places unnoticed.

- **Honesty is measured by comparison.** We prove that no system can tell whether a server is honest in absolute terms, only whether it treats a player differently from other servers. Rewriting one player's rating requires controlling most of *that player's* matches.
- **Fake accounts are contained.** A farm of fake accounts that would take 17% of rewards under naive rules takes at most 3.2% when trust flows from real players, and none of its accounts reaches the public ranking.

Every number above can be reproduced with one command from the public code and anonymised data.

The recommendation: three files at shutdown

At least 90 days before ending service for a game with ranked or competitive play, the publisher releases under an open licence:

File	Contents	Purpose
Match history	Every ranked match in order: teams or players, result, season, mode. Player identities replaced by random identifiers; no names, chat or personal data.	Lets anyone recompute and verify the ladder.
Rating rules	The formula and parameters used to compute rankings, with a reference implementation or worked example.	Lets a community continue the same ranking, not invent a new one.
Final standings	Each season's final ranking and titles, keyed by the same random identifiers, plus a way for players to claim their own identifier.	Lets players prove their history and carry it into the revived game.

The player-claim mechanism can be as simple as showing each player their own identifier in the account page before shutdown.

Cost and limits

The measure is a one-time data export, typically a few megabytes, from records the publisher already keeps.

- **It does not require** releasing server code, keeping servers running, transferring intellectual property, or supporting any community project.

- **Privacy** is handled by random identifiers and by leaving out names, chat and personal data. Where match history was already shown publicly, the export adds nothing new.
- **It does not guarantee** that a game is revived. It guarantees that, if a community revives it, the competitive history is not lost.

It also fits the Commission's preference for voluntary, proportionate practice: it addresses the copyright, cost and security concerns raised in the 16 June 2026 response, because it involves none of the publisher's code or infrastructure.

About and links

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- Paper: F. Francia, *Games That Don't Die: Operator-Independent Competitive Infrastructure for Abandoned Multiplayer Games*, preprint v0.2, Zenodo, 2026. doi:10.5281/zenodo.23875636
- Code and anonymised data: github.com/felixfrancia27/games-that-dont-die
- Live experiment: warbandpremier.com, relaunching 1 December 2026
- Context: European Commission response to the citizens' initiative, analysis by Lewis Silkin (June 2026)