NOW that the limelight has shifted from the Olympics and Paralympics, a third Australian team is about to do battle on the world stage. Nine Australians have been selected to compete in the finals of the world's biggest electronic games tournament, the World Cyber Games, which begin tomorrow in San Francisco.

The nine competitors are survivors of a fierce online battle waged between more than 1500 Australians.

Qualifying rounds took place in Australia in July and August, and 144 qualifiers from all states met two weeks ago at the Australian Technology Park in Sydney.

The team representing Australia against the rest of the world is made up of winners from five game categories – StarCraft: Brood War (Peter Neate, Queensland); Unreal Tournament 2004 (Ed Panther, Victoria); WarCraft III: Frozen Throne (Andor Pendor, Queensland) and Xbox Halo (Salesi Lavaka, ACT); and the team event Counter Strike: Condition Zero (Danny Rogers, Matthew Clews, Lee Jarman, Brad Holding and Michael Atkins, Western Australia).

In its fourth year, the World Cyber Games attracts more than a million game players from 62 countries, who compete for a place at the finals and a share of $US2.5 million ($3.5 million) in prizes.

The finalists have won their airline tickets and hotel accommodation for the finals.

"Gamers can expect to have their skills and strategic thinking challenged to even higher levels by competing against some of the best players in the world," event organiser Hank Jeong says.

It is the first time that the World Cyber Games are being held in the US. At the 2003 Games in Seoul, 562 players from 55 countries competed, Germany coming out on top with three gold and two silver medals.

Next year's event will be in Singapore.

Fans who did not make the finals still have a chance to face global competitors. Several hundred will meet at a grass square in front of San Francisco City Hall for around-the-clock play during the event.

Players will have to bring their own computers and hook up to the internet by plugging into a local area network provided by the organisers.

"Participants bring their own equipment (and caffeine) to the square," are the instructions from the organisers.

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