

Video Games & Multi-media News

Can Europe lead the race of E-Sports?

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A new generation embraces gaming as both a recreational and professional pursuit. As interest grows in competitive online gaming, governments across the continent are increasing funding for training programs and working to develop mainstream professional leagues

The International Olympic Committee has announced plans to examine establishing a dedicated Olympic event for esports. IOC President Thomas Bach revealed the proposal at the opening ceremony of the organisation's annual session in Mumbai, India a few days ago. Bach highlighted the huge popularity of esports globally, with an estimated 3 billion gamers worldwide and over 500 million interested specifically in competitive gaming. He noted the IOC had already trialled incorporating esports into the Olympics through the Olympic Virtual Series pilot program and Olympic Esports Week event in Singapore earlier this year. However, Bach stated these initiatives were "just a start" and more work was needed. He tasked the newly formed IOC Esports Commission with exploring the creation of standalone Olympic Esports Games. The Games would aim to further bring together the Olympics and esports communities on a larger scale.

As digital natives come of age and shape fan and commercial trends, the battle for eyeballs and wallets between e-sports and sports intensifies. The Olympic Esports Games will be separate from the traditional Summer and Winter Games. The IOC's new Esports Commission will study developing the event, aimed at engaging younger esports-interested audiences. However, top

competitive titles like League of Legends and CS: GO are unlikely to feature due to their violent content. The Olympics has taken a strict stance against including violent games. Titles would need to partner with sporting federations like shooting to satisfy the IOC's non-violence criteria. Fortnite was part of an adapted target-shooting mode for last year's Olympic Esports Series pilot event. But blockbuster esports titles primarily relied on combat elements. An IOC spokesperson said the Commission wants to balance innovating the Games with "staying true to our non-violent values". Launching a stand-alone Olympic Esports Games avoids potential clashes over game approvals. It remains to be seen whether any new or adapted titles could gain popularity sufficiently for the Games. The Commission also faces the challenge of maintaining the Olympic brand separately from the traditional Games. However, the IOC is aiming to engage younger fans with dedicated esports competitions.

European e-Sports booming

If the future belongs to hybrid experiences that blur once-rigid boundaries, then sports leagues should recognize the complementarity of popularity. And in Europe, they do: A new frontier in European sport was crossed last July as over 100 gamers from across the continent gathered in Poland for the landmark inaugural European Games Esports Championships. Hosted in Katowice from 30th-31st July alongside the main European Games, the event marked the first time that competitive gaming had been integrated into the multi-sport spectacular. It was also a first for the European Olympic Committee (EOC), which co-organized the championships with the Global Esports Federation (GEF) - signaling a growing acceptance of esports at the highest levels of the Olympic movement. Over the two days of competition, players went head to head across two titles - Rocket League and eFootball 2023. Fans from across the continent followed all the action streaming live on the EOC's online channels. While over 100 have competed at previous global esports events, this was the first chance for Europe's best gamers across 28 nations to do battle under a unified European banner. With plans already in place to repeat the championships in 2027, the tournament has undoubtedly cemented esports' arrival amongst mainstream European sports.

Bach's announcement comes as esports' popularity and revenues continue booming. From sold-out arenas to stadium-sized prize pools, esports has exploded into a global phenomenon in recent years. But it is Europe that reigns

supreme as the dominant force in competitive gaming. In the arcade halls and LAN cafes of the 1990s, gaming flourished as a grassroots hobby. However certain parts of Europe nurtured a thriving culture that would later prove formative. With a long tradition of PC and console gaming, Europe boasted a huge talent pool. Strong internet infrastructure meant fluid online play. Then governments and corporations started investing in esports academies, allowing raw skills to be polished.

According to Newzoo, Europe accounted for 28% of global esports revenue in 2022. Europe eSports Market Size was valued at USD 1.67 Bn in 2021, registering a CAGR of 21.1% during the forecast period (2023-2030), and the market is projected to be worth USD 9.35 Bn by 2030. Powerhouses like G2 Esports and Fnatic emerged to dominate games like League of Legends. They attracted major investments and sponsors, helping legitimize gaming as a credible career. Meanwhile, events like IEM and Intel Extreme Masters brought headlines Europe has since led the professionalization of esports, and Government agencies now collaborate with publishers on grassroots programs. National leagues like the LEC broadcast to millions of highly engaged fans weekly. Even the European Commission recognizes esports' socioeconomic value.

Saudi Arabia enters the race with accelerating speed

Saudi Arabia has announced plans to host the first-ever Esports World Cup in the summer of 2024. The kingdom will welcome some of the world's best gamers to compete for what's being billed as the largest prize pool in esports history. Exact title selections and financial details are still to be confirmed. A new organization, the Esports World Cup Foundation, has been established to oversee the international tournament. The non-profit foundation aims to promote sustainability and cooperation within the growing esports sector. In a statement, the Foundation's Chairman Hassan Al Thawadi said the tournament would be an "exciting new chapter for Saudi's blossoming games and esports industry."

Al Thawadi, who also headed up Qatar's successful bid for the 2022 football World Cup, said the event plans to celebrate "the passion and skills of esports athletes from every corner of the globe." Specific dates for the inaugural Esports World Cup are expected to be announced in early 2024, with Saudi Arabia positioning itself as the first nation to host a global championship of its kind for electronic sports. The tournament promises to throw a spotlight on the kingdom's ambitions to

build a domestic and international esports economy.

Asia is driving revenue from e-sports

The global esports industry is projected to experience enormous growth over the next eight years, according to a new report. Market research firm Cognitive Market Research estimated last April in a research that the total value of the esports market will rise to $4.47 billion by 2030. This represents a significant expansion from its current valuation of $1.42 billion in 2022. Live streaming of competitions is currently the most popular way for fans to engage with esports. Live streaming accounts for over 70% of total industry revenues. Gaming platform services dominate the market at around 69% of revenue. However, smartphones are the device of choice for most esports fans, with sponsorship deals generating the highest incomes for now.

The Asia-Pacific region leads the world in esports revenues, taken by countries like China and Vietnam where interest in competitive gaming is huge. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an unexpected boost as traditional sports shut down. This accelerated the adoption of online entertainment like esports. Improving connectivity and rising smartphone ownership worldwide are noted as big drivers behind the projected strong growth rate of nearly 18% annually to 2030. However, cybersecurity issues threaten esports if personal player data or platforms are compromised. Still, the outlook remains hugely positive for this emerging digital entertainment sector.

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The round of Europe with E-Sports

France: In 2022, the French government increased its funding for France Esports to €15 million per year. The federation now has over 250 training centres and has supported over 10,000 young talents.

Germany: The esports high school in Berlin is now in its second year and has over 400 students. The German government has also announced plans to invest an additional €10 million in esports education and training over the next five years.

Sweden: The Swedish Export Federation's talent program now identifies over 600 promising young players each year. The federation has also launched a new esports university program

in partnership with Malmö University.

United Kingdom: The UK national esports institute is now in its second year and has certified over 200 coaches. The institute has also launched a new esports academy program for young people aged 14-18.

Spain: La Liga's esports academy has now trained over 100 players. The academy has also expanded its reach to other countries, including Mexico and Argentina.

Poland: The Polish Esports Association's amateur league has now over 10,000 registered players. The association has also launched a new esports scholarship program for university students.

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The glossary of e-Sports

The key players operating in the Europe eSports market are Activision Blizzard, Inc., Electronic Arts Inc., Gameloft SE, HTC Corporation, Intel Corporation, Modern Times Group (MTG), Nintendo of America Inc., NVIDIA Corporation, Tencent Holding Limited, and Valve Corporation.

The market is segmented into streaming types - on-demand streaming and live streaming. Live streaming is the most popular segment and attracts a large audience, generating significant revenue.

Platforms refer to digital infrastructure like Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook Gaming for broadcasting and distributing eSports events.

Services refer to offerings like game development, event planning, and content production provided by the eSports industry.

Devices, smartphones, smart TVs, desktops, laptops, tablets, and gaming consoles like Xbox and PlayStation are used for playing and viewing esports.

- Interested in more facts and statistics about e-sports in Europe? eSports in Europe - statistics & facts

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