

'League of Legends' champs win in legendary venue

October 5 2013, by Derrik J. Lang



Members of South Korea's SK Telecom T1 team celebrate after defeating China's Royal Club at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

When it comes to sports, the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles is usually home to award-winning basketball and hockey. However, the behemoth arena hosted a very different kind of competition this weekend: the sold-out season three championships of "League of Legends," a free-to-play video game that attracts more than 32 million

players a month.

It wasn't much of a contest though. South Korea's SK Telecom T1 completely dominated China's Royal Club on Friday night in the first three rounds of a best-of-five series. This earned team members Jung "Impact" Eon-yeong, Chae "Piglet" Gwang-jin, Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok, Lee "PoohManDu" Jeong-hyeon and Bae "bengi" Seong-ung the Summoner's Cup trophy and a \$1 million grand prize.

The virtual battle at the famous venue marked another milestone for e-sports.

The genre has yet to totally achieve mainstream success in North America, though it's basically a national pastime in places like South Korea. That's shifted over the past few years, as technology has evolved, Internet speeds have become more reliable and a generation of gamers have grown up watching competitive bouts on streaming video sites like Twitch and YouTube.

Unlike many games, "League of Legends" was created to be a sport. Each match features two teams of five players selecting superhero-like characters from a list of more than 100 champions, then attempting to slaughter each other and destroy their jungle arena bases. Riot Games mostly makes money from the free-to-play game by selling virtual items and characters.

"It's a huge honor and privilege for us to put this on at a storied venue like the Staples Center," said Marc Merrill, president and co-founder of "League of Legends" publisher Riot Games. "My partner and I grew up in LA, and we thought it would be appropriate to end season three at a fantastic arena where Kobe Bryant and the Lakers play and win world championships."



Members of South Korea's SK Telecom T1, below, compete in the third round at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final as a member of China's Royal Club team is seen above, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0 over Royal Club. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

Friday's festivities kicked off with a musical performance by the Crystal Method, who composed an original song for one of the game's champions. The electronic duo was joined by an orchestra, drummer Joe Letz, bassist Danny Lohner, cellist Tina Guo and former Limp Bizkit guitarist Wes Borland, who was clad in a white LED suit.

The Santa Monica, Calif.-based studio moved the championships to

Staples Center after holding last year's match-up at the University of Southern California's Galen Center. The Staples Center hosted more than 10,000 spectators Friday night—with millions more watching online. Last year's championship online broadcast attracted 1.1 million concurrent viewers at its peak.

Merrill said booking the Staples Center was less about making a statement to outsiders about the ever increasing popularity of "League of Legends" and e-sports and more about making die-hard fans proud of their favorite sport. He said the company hasn't decided if it will keep next year's championships at Staples Center or perhaps move to a new international location.

"We lose money with e-sports, but we think of it as an investment on delivering cool experiences that are memorable for our players," said Merrill. "We're also building an ecosystem and raising awareness about e-sports. As the sport continues to gain even more awareness and appreciation, we hope it will become more sustainable and not cause us to lose money."



The team of SK Telecom T1 competes in the second round at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. South Korea's SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0 over China's Royal Club. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



Fans walk in to Staples Center to watch the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. South Korea's SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0 over China's Royal Club. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



Fans cheer as the team of South Korea's SK Telecom T1 win the first round at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



Fans watch the opening ceremony at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final between South Korea's SK Telecom T1 and China's Royal Club, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



Members of Korea's SK Telecom T1 team celebrate with their trophy after defeating China's Royal Club at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



The teams of China's Royal Club, left, and South Korea's SK Telecom T1 compete at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



The winners' trophy sits on a pedestal at the League of Legends Season 3 World Championship Final between South Korea's SK Telecom T1 and China's Royal Club, Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, in Los Angeles. The SK Telecom T1 team won 3-0. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

More information: www.leagueoflegends.com

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