

Game Developers Conference offers creators a sporting chance

March 3 2015, byDerrick J. Lang



In this Wednesday, March 19, 2014 file photo, attendees walk the exhibition floor at the Game Developers Conference 2014 in San Francisco. With millions of gamers now regularly spectating video games online and in arenas, game developers are angling to learn a few lessons from esports and possibly create the next "League of Legends" at this year's Game Developers Conference, the annual gathering of video game creators, kicking-off Monday, March 2, 2015, through Friday. A survey by GDC organizers of more than 200,000 developers found that 79 percent believe competitive gaming is now a sustainable business model. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

With tens of millions of gamers now regularly spectating video games online and in real-world arenas, game developers looking to create the next "StarCraft" or "League of Legends" might learn a few lessons at this year's Game Developers Conference.

For the first time, the annual gathering of game creators that's usually centered on polygons and artificial intelligence, was hosting a special summit Tuesday dedicated to competitive gaming—or esports (e-sports), as it's known. Influential esports figures were scheduled to give talks with such titles as "Legal Issues in Competitive Gaming" and "Building a Sport: The Design Philosophy of 'League of Legends.'"

"We've had a few individual esports talks in the past but nothing stand-alone," said Simon Carless, executive vice president at UBM Tech Game Network, which hosts GDC and other technology conferences. "This is an entire day dedicated to esports that covers an entire breadth of topics, from producing live esports events to including more women in esports."

Over the past 10 years, esports has evolved from a niche genre of gaming to a lucrative spectator sport capable of packing arenas like Los Angeles' Staples Center and Seoul's World Cup Stadium to capacity for championship bouts of "League of Legends," the arena battle game developed by Riot Games that's easy for most folks to play but difficult to master.

Carless said a survey by GDC organizers of more than 200,000 developers found 79 percent believe competitive gaming is a sustainable business model and 12 percent were currently working on an esports-style competitive multiplayer game. The rise of spectating games is already reshaping how many designers are approaching their latest creations from the outset.



In this May 11, 2014 file photo, fans watch the opening ceremony of the League of Legends season 4 World Championship Final between South Korea against China's Royal Club, in Paris. With millions of gamers now regularly spectating video games online and in arenas, game developers are angling to learn a few lessons from esports and possibly create the next "League of Legends" at this year's Game Developers Conference, the annual gathering of video game creators, kicking-off Monday, March 2, 2015, through Friday. A survey by GDC organizers of more than 200,000 developers found that 79 percent believe competitive gaming is now a sustainable business model. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon, File)

"There are a lot of people watching games and not playing them, so that's definitely a consideration for future projects," said Chris Ashton, design director at "Evolve" developer Turtle Rock Studios. "I don't know what that means for the industry. I never thought I would watch someone play through a [game](#), but I have done that on YouTube and enjoyed it."

Despite dedicating a day to esports, most attention at this year's GDC, which runs through Friday at San Francisco's Moscone Center, will likely be focused on virtual reality, as it was last year. VR technology utilizes a head-mounted display in concert with head-tracking capabilities to transport wearers' to virtual worlds. Oculus VR, which Facebook bought for \$2 billion last year, is returning to GDC with several talks about how developers can craft games for its VR platform.



In this March 19, 2014 file photo, attendees to the Game Developers Conference 2014 look at screens in the Unreal Engine booth in San Francisco. With millions of gamers now regularly spectating video games online and in arenas, game developers are angling to learn a few lessons from esports and possibly create the next "League of Legends" at this year's Game Developers Conference, the annual gathering of video game creators, kicking-off Monday, March 2, 2015, through Friday. A survey by GDC organizers of more than 200,000 developers found that 79 percent believe competitive gaming is now a sustainable business model. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

Sony, which unveiled a prototype VR headset at the 2014 conference called Project Morpheus, is expected to provide an update at an off-site, invite-only event Tuesday on its rendition of VR that works in tandem with the PlayStation 4 console. Thus far, both Oculus and Sony have only shown off prototypes at GDC and not revealed a price or release date.

After announcing their own VR headset on Sunday, HTC and Valve are expected to be on hand at GDC to demonstrate the device called Vive, which works with exterior base stations to track users' movements in spaces up to 15 feet by 15 feet. HTC said it plans to release a Vive prototype for developers this spring and a consumer edition sometime later this year.



In this Oct. 4, 2013 file photo, 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, in Los Angeles. With millions of gamers now regularly spectating video games online and in arenas, game developers are angling to learn a few lessons from esports and possibly create the next "League

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More information: www.gdconf.com

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