

Start-up Unikrn bets on e-sports wagering

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Start-up Unikrn is turning up the heat on tournament-level video games with an online platform for betting on who will be victorious.

In the booming trend known as "e-sports," video games are increasingly watched and played as spectator competitions.

Unikrn launched its e-sports [betting](#) arena in Australia about two months ago in a partnership with Tabcorp, a wagering specialty firm with global reach.

The Seattle-based startup expanded to Britain and Ireland in May, accepting bets on the outcomes of team combat in "League of Legends," "Dota 2" and "Counter-Strike: Global Offensive."

At the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) [video game](#) industry extravaganza that ends Thursday in Los Angeles, Unikrn co-founder Rahul Sood said he hoped to crack the US market.

"When you look at the way e-sports is going, there is a huge audience out there for it," Sood told AFP.

"We believe there is no better way to heighten the experience than through betting."

Betting on e-sports is not legal in the United States, but Sood and his team are eager for wagering to be pulled from the shadows and into the light where measures can be taken to keep it honest.

Unikrn is preparing a version of its service for the US market, where Sood predicted e-sports betting would be legal in two years or so.

"There is no better way to heighten interest than betting on the outcome," Sood said.

Minding player integrity

Unikrn's mission is to provide a safe, legal venue for betting on e-sports, Sood said.

Unikrn calculates odds and takes bets online and through an app for mobile devices. Game play is streamed at Unikrn using Twitch, and people can watch betting odds change in real-time.

Tabcorp manages risk and monitors for anomalies such as players intentionally losing.

"If there is a crazy skew, we can tell there is something up," said Unikrn vice president of business development Stephen Ellis, who was known as "Snoopeh" during his years as a professional "League of Legends" player.

"We can flag who we need to flag."

Unikrn received \$3 million from investors out of the gate and is in the midst of closing a second round of investment that Sood described as "significant."

Sood left an investing arm of Microsoft late last year to start the betting website with co-founder Karl Flores.

Sood is also the founder of Voodoo computer company, known for high-

performance machines coveted by hard-core gamers. Hewlett Packard bought Voodoo in 2006.

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