

Activision expanding 'Call of Duty' e-sports competition

September 25 2015, byDerrick J. Lang



In this June 10, 2014 file photo, models dressed as characters from the video game "Call of Duty" stand at the Activision booth at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, in Los Angeles. Activision is expanding its "Call of Duty" e-sports competition from an annual tournament to a year-round season. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

Activision is widening the scope of e-sports competition for "Call of Duty" players.

The publisher of the hugely popular military shooter franchise is expanding its e-sports program next year from an annual tournament to year-round international leagues, as well as increasing the prize pool from \$1 million to \$3 million. The international leagues will be comprised of professional and amateur divisions, culminating in a championship at the end of the year.

"This is going to mark a new era of e-sports for 'Call of Duty,'" said Rob Kostich, [senior vice president](#) and general manager for "Call of Duty" at Activision. "It signals Activision stepping up our commitment to what we've been doing with e-sports. We're expanding our season to make it a fun, competitive year leading into the 'Call of Duty' Championship."

The Santa Monica, Calif.-based publisher is calling the revamped e-sports offering the "Call of Duty" World League. The competition will launch in early 2016 with leagues in North America, Europe and Australia and New Zealand. The three territories will each feature independent seasons concluding with 32 teams at the "Call of Duty" Championship in fall 2016.

"It felt like the right time to do it," said Kostich. "We've learned a lot over the past few years and talked a lot to our community. We think we have an agenda that's going to be really attractive to them, and we have a new game coming out, 'Call of Duty: Black Ops III,' that we couldn't be more excited about to lead us into this new era of e-sports."

Activision first hosted a \$1 million "Call of Duty" tournament in 2011 during an official "Call of Duty" fan convention and has organized the "Call of Duty" Championship since 2013. Kostich said next year's expanded e-sports program was devised to offer a deeper level of engagement with pro gamers while also encouraging casual fans and aspiring competitors.



In this June 12, 2014 file photo, people watch the "Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare" video game trailer at the Activision booth at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

"The pro division is really the cream of the crop, the top 150 guys who are actually going to make money from playing this game," said Sam Cooper, senior director of product management for "Call of Duty" at Activision. "One of the big things we wanted to do with the league was make it much more financially viable to be a pro player in our ecosystem."

Cooper noted that players from regions outside the three pro leagues could compete for a spot in the "Call of Duty" Championship through the amateur division, which will feature both online and in-person competitions. He said that each match in the pro division would be

broadcast but declined to specify how, outside of the "Blacks Ops III" live event viewer.

Kostich also refused to comment if Activision would drug-test players at its e-sports events. The Electronic Sports League began working with the World Anti-Doping Agency to administer e-sports' first random drug tests during its ESL One Cologne tournament in August. ESL said all players tested negative but did not specify how many players were tested.

ESL began the drug testing after a player said in a YouTube video posted in July that he and his team used the drug Adderall during an ESL tournament in March where players competed for \$250,000. Previously, ESL and several other e-sports organizations prohibited the use of drugs, alcohol and other performance enhancers but did not test for doping.

Over the past 10 years, e-sports has evolved from a niche genre of gaming to a lucrative sport that draws tens of millions of spectators online and in person. Activision said earlier this year during the "Call of Duty" Championship that more than 175 million copies of "Call of Duty" have been sold across all platforms since the series debuted over a decade ago.

More information: www.callofduty.com/esports

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Citation: Activision expanding 'Call of Duty' e-sports competition (2015, September 25) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-09-activision-duty-e-sports-competition.html>

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