

Activision Blizzard wants eSports to be big league

November 4 2016, by Glenn Chapman



Activision Blizzard CEO, Bobby Kotick said the launch of a team-based shooter game called "Overwatch", aims to create greater prominence for eSports

Activision Blizzard is creating an eSports league of its own with competitive play of team-based shooter game "Overwatch," and a goal of building professional stars—possibly with big-league payouts.

The US [video game](#) giant on Friday announced the creation of an

Overwatch League, saying it will let teams share in money generated by the latest entry in the booming trend of computer game play as spectator sport.

Activision Blizzard chief executive Bobby Kotick said that the launch aims to create greater prominence for eSports.

"The thing we are doing that is unique is a league where owners actually have defined rights to revenues and there are operating principles super well-defined," he told AFP in an interview.

Some 292 million people globally will watch eSports this year, with that number expected to grow to 427 million people over the coming three years, according to Activision.

A strong focus of the Overwatch League is to provide competitive gamers with the kind of status typically given to professional athletes in traditional sports.

"We want them to have that kind of recognition for their achievements, and also financial rewards," Kotick said of eSports contenders.

Teams in the league will share in revenue from sources such as licensing, broadcast rights, and ticket sales, according to Activision.

Late last year, Activision Blizzard launched a division devoted to competitive gaming. It has since acquired live eSports event titan star Major League Gaming and launched Call of Duty World League based on a blockbuster shooter franchise.

Overwatch League's opening season was slated for next year.

The Blizzard Entertainment video game released about five months ago

already boasts more than 20 million players who have been vying against one another on an amateur level.

"Overwatch has such a special place for me; I honestly love every single thing about it," Kotick said.

Career opportunity

"Overwatch" was designed for eSports experiences, building in features such as international settings and characters representing a wide range of demographics, according the chief executive.

Blizzard entertainment chief Mike Morhaime said that the league is intended to be "a genuine career opportunity" for skilled players.

ESports will have the EGames in Pyeongchang, South Korea, in 2018, the main mover behind it, Chester King, told AFP in September.

The chief executive of the International EGames Group said his wish was for national pride to be at stake rather than it being based around prize money.

It is certainly a money-spinning industry, with global revenue in the hundreds of millions of dollars and growing, according to industry trackers.

Facebook this year got into the eSports game, jumping into the arena with rivals such as Amazon-owned Twitch and Google's YouTube Gaming.

The leading social network began letting players use Facebook accounts to log in to Blizzard Entertainment computer games such as "World of Warcraft."

The collaboration added social features to Blizzard games while highlighting Facebook as a platform for sharing, viewing and discussing play, the companies said.

It also brought the potential for streaming play of Blizzard games such as "Overwatch" at the Facebook Live real-time video service.

Yahoo meanwhile this year launched an online venue for live tournaments, commentary, features, interviews and more tailored for video game play audiences.

The rollout of YouTube Gaming in the middle of last year marked the public debut of an online spot where video game lovers can find commentary, live play, on-demand snippets and more.

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