

# 'Overwatch' eSports league to debut in December

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The eSports league for "Overwatch" is set to make its debut in December, cashing in on a growing trend of video gaming as a spectator sport

Activision Blizzard announced Wednesday its "Overwatch" eSports league—cashing in on the rise of video gaming as a spectator sport—would make its debut in December.

The computer game giant also announced three additional franchises in

its freshly formed league, bringing the total to 12.

The first of a series of exhibition matches was slated for December 6 at Blizzard Arena Los Angeles, a custom-renovated live-event venue.

The inaugural season for the "Overwatch" league will official begin on January 10 of next year, with all matches held at Blizzard Arena, according to Activision.

"This is a huge milestone for the league," said Blizzard Entertainment chief executive Mike Morhaime.

This league is focused on competitive play of Activision's team-based shooter game "Overwatch," and a goal of building professional stars—possibly with big-league payouts.

Teams will share revenue generated by the latest entry in the hot trend of computer game play as spectator sport.

Teams have been bought in major US cities as well as in London, Shanghai and Seoul for what is being touted as the first eSports league to put an internet-Age spin on cultivating local teams the way it is typically done in [traditional sports](#).

"We made it our goal to have a presence in the cities where the densest concentrations of 'Overwatch' players live," said Pete Vlastelica, head of Major League Gaming, an eSports events company bought by Activision about two years ago.

Buyers of team rights in the Overwatch league include the NFL's New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft and baseball's New York Mets chief operating officer Jeff Wilpon.

Although millions of people watch eSports online and at global tournaments, backers of Overwatch say this approach is likely to draw in new audiences which can develop loyalty to their local players and attend community competitions.



The "Overwatch" eSports league making its debut amid growing interest in competitive video gaming such as this League of Legends College Championship Game in May 2017

## **London, Houston franchises**

Jack Etienne, founder and chief of Cloud9, expected by the second season to have matches taking place in London, where the well-known eSports organization has the Overwatch franchise.

"I have a massive metro population to draw on, to fill my stadium," Etienne told AFP.

"I am very bullish on being profitable out of the gate."

Etienne also saw the promise of live, local matches drawing a global audience as fans around the world tune in to streaming play online.

"I just can't wait to get this started," said Hector Rodriguez, owner and chief of OpTic Gaming, which bought an "Overwatch" franchise in the Texas city of Houston.

"We take a lot of pointers from traditional sports, but we try to re-invent as we go along."

Local teams devoted to hit Activision video game "Overwatch" could lead to some of the same treatment as traditional sports, with local matches held in real-world venues and trash-talk by fans wearing garb emblazoned with team logos.

Activision did not disclose the price of the franchises, but a source close to the matter confirmed reports that each cost about \$20 million.

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

"Overwatch" boasts more than 30 million players around the world, and hundreds of millions of people watch eSports.

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