The Rise of eSports Games:

A Competitive Gaming Revolution

# The Early Days of eSports Games

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Sports, short for electronic sports, has come a long way since its humble beginnings in the 1970s. The first recorded video game competition took place at Stanford University in 1972, where students competed in a Spacewar! tournament for a year's subscription to Rolling Stone magazine. Over the next few decades, competitive gaming gradually gained popularity, with events like the 1980 Space Invaders Championship, which attracted over 10 000 participants, showcasing the growing interest in video game competitions. In the 1990s and early 2000s, games like Doom, Quake, and Counter-Strike became popular in the eSports scene, with tournaments and leagues being organised around the world. The rise of the internet and online gaming platforms further fuelled the growth of eSports, making it easier for players to connect, compete, and follow their favourite gamester and teams.

# Professional eSports Players

Most people recognise the names Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, and Tom Brady, figures often seen as the faces of their respective sports. Names like Lee *Faker* Sang-Hyeok, Luka *Perkz* Perković, and Kim *Doinb* Tae-sang may not have quite the same recognition yet, but these athletes are also becoming global superstars.

Faker, Perkz, and Doinb are all professional players of the world's most popular computer-based video game: League of Legends. League is one of many games that host competitions of increasing fanfare and popularity, part of the rapidly expanding genre of electronic sports.



A Lee 'Faker' Sang-hyeok

# The eSports Industry Today

Today, eSports is a multi-billion-dollar industry with a global audience of millions. According to Emergen Research, the eSports market is expected to reach a size of USD 5.1 billion by 2028. The industry is dominated by a few key players, including:

Activision Blizzard: The company behind popular eSports titles like Call of Duty, Overwatch, and StarCraft.

Tencent: The Chinese tech giant owns a significant stake in many eSports companies and game developers, including Riot Games (League of Legends) and Supercell (Clash of Clans).

Electronic Arts (EA): The California-based video game company has been actively involved in the eSports scene, with titles like FIFA, Madden NFL, and Apex Legends.

Valve Corporation: Known for its digital distribution platform Steam and games like Counter-Strike, and Team Fortress 2, Valve has had a significant impact on the evolution of eSports.

Epic Games: The developer behind the massively popular battle royale game Fortnite, which has a thriving eSports scene.

# How eSports Competitions Work

eSports competitions typically involve teams or individual players competing against each other in a specific video game. The games can vary widely, from first-person shooters (FPS) like Counter-Strike and Call of Duty, to multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs) like League of Legends and, to battle royale games like Fortnite and Apex Legends. The competitions are usually organised by game publishers, eSports leagues, or tournament organisers.

They can take place online or in physical venues, with players competing in front of live audiences and millions of viewers online. The format of eSports competitions can vary, but they typically involve a series of matches or rounds, with the winner being determined by factors such as the number of wins, points scored, or objectives achieved within the game.

B Games

# Participating in eSports

To participate in eSports, players need to have a high level of skill and dedication to their chosen game. This often involves extensive practice, training, and participation in online tournaments and leagues.

Players may also need to meet certain requirements set by the game publishers or tournament organisers, such as age restrictions, residency requirements, or minimum skill levels.

In addition to individual players, eSports also involves teams, which can be organised by game publishers, eSports organisations, or independent groups. Team members work together to strategise, communicate, and execute their gameplay.

# Determining the Winner

The winner of an eSports competition is typically determined by the game's objective and the rules set by the tournament organisers. In some games, the winner is the team or player who scores the most points or eliminates the most opponents. In others, the winner is the first to reach a certain objective or complete a specific task within the game.

The judging process can involve a combination of factors, such as the game's built-in scoring system, the opinions of expert commentators or analysts, and the feedback from the audience. In some cases, the winner may be determined by a combination of online qualifiers and live finals, where the top teams or players compete in a physical venue.

The two games that emerged as the first real eSports were Starcraft (1998)/Starcraft II (2010) and DOTA 2[[1]](#footnote-1), developed by Activision Blizzard and Valve Corporation respectively. This gave rise to a robust network of small-scale tournaments. Over time this evolved into massive, privately organised competitions.

Of the two, the Starcrafts proved to be more popular in the Korean circuit. DOTA 2 remained immensely popular, and its international championship currently boasts the largest prize pool of any eSports event; five and a half times more than the second largest prize pool; the 2019 DOTA 2 International had a winner's prize pool of R13.5 million, out of a total prize pool of R30.8 million, more than even some traditional sports like golf and ultimate fighting.



C International competition prizes

# The Future of eSports

As the eSports industry continues to grow and evolve, it is likely that we will see even more innovation and development in the years to come. Some potential areas of growth and change include:

Increased investment and sponsorship: As the audience and viewership of eSports continue to grow, more companies and brands are likely to invest in the industry through sponsorships, partnerships, and advertising.

Expansion into new games and genres: While the current eSports landscape is dominated by a few key games, we may see the rise of new titles and genres in the future, as game developers and publishers look to capitalise on the growing popularity of competitive gaming.

Improved technology and infrastructure: As eSports continue to grow, there will likely be a greater focus on improving the technology and infrastructure that supports it, such as better streaming platforms, more advanced gaming hardware, and improved online matchmaking systems.

Increased professionalisation and regulation: As eSports become more mainstream, there may be a push for greater professionalisation and regulation of the industry, with the development of standardised rules, player contracts, and anti-doping policies.

Overall, the future of eSports looks bright, with the industry poised for continued growth and innovation in the years to come.

# The Development of eSports

The majority of eSports developers have yet to develop infrastructure for the African continent. Riot Games, for example, has decided for the past few years to not create an African server, mainly because they claim there is not enough demand to justify the cost of the servers.

Players in Africa can theoretically play eSports by connecting to the North American and European servers, but this prevents them from competing effectively. As of now, the largest eSports tournament on the continent is the Africa eSports Championship, which fielded competitive matches in FIFA 19 and Tekken 7, both by 'hands off' developers.

The African prize pool is also linked to North American and European competitions. The prize money will be divided between the continents.

The growth of eSports

2020s: A Multibillion-Dollar Industry

eSports has grown into a multibillion-dollar industry, with players, viewers and industry professionals worldwide.

**Budget for 2026**

**Tournament name\*Host of tournament\*Amount**

The International\*Mabunda, Gift\*23152

World Championship (Worlds)\*Mhlongo, Andries\*38872

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| CS: GO Major Championship | Pretorius, Bernard | 37417 |
| Evo Championship Series | Engelbrecht, Lindie | 45563 |
| FIFA eWorld Cup | Wilson, Bongiwe | 28563 |
| Formula 1 eSports Series | Martin, Riaan | 33421 |

1. Defense of the Ancients 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)