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Twitch, Facelt Launch eSports League Offering Teams Ownership Stakes



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COURTESY OF VALVE

The Esports Championship Series launches with 'Counter-Strike' tourney with \$3.5 million prize pool

Twitch and competitive-gaming platform startup Facelt are shaking up the eSports world, joining forces to form a professional league that is offering teams co-ownership positions.

The companies say their Esports Championship Series will be the first video-game league to offer teams an ownership stake in the venture, akin to traditional pro sports leagues like the NFL. The initiative's flagship league, "ECS – Counter-Strike," will kick off Wednesday with a prize pool of \$3.5 million, with players competing in Valve's "Counter-Strike: Global Offensive" first-person shooter game (pictured above).

With the ECS, Twitch and Facelt will be competing with Activision Blizzard's Major League Gaming and Electronic Sports League (ESL). It's also squaring off against ELeague, the joint venture of Turner Broadcasting and WME/IMG set to launch in May with a 10-week televised "Counter-Strike" tournament.

"A major part of Twitch's success is built around our relationship with the eSports community, from the players and organizations who have made it a leading form of entertainment, to our own staff with deep roots in the scene," said Stuart Saw, Twitch's director of eSports strategy. "We've listened to what the teams and players are looking for, which is to have a bigger voice in the movement, and it inspired us to partner with Facelt to launch the ECS."

The ECS league will comprise 20 teams, 10 from North America and 10 from Europe. The "Counter-Strike" competition launches Wednesday with a closed qualifying round, with a pre-show at 8:30 a.m. Pacific and game time at 9 a.m.

The Esports Championship Series will be presented exclusively on Twitch, with every match streaming on Facelt's Twitch channel. Twitch and Facelt also will pay for travel, accommodations, on-site concierge services, lounges, parties and other amenities for players.

"Players and teams are the heart of the eSports community and deserve the opportunity to reap the rewards of their hard work and dedication to grow esports into a mainstream phenomenon," said Michele Attisani, co-founder of Facelt.

Twitch and Facelt said all parties involved worked closely to determine a "strict code of conduct" for player treatment and payments. Teams and players will also be given seats on the league's governing committee to help decide and enforce key aspects of the league, including regulatory framework, integrity, players' welfare, holidays and best practices to ensure synergy among the league and its participants.

In addition, Facelt said it will create a development league that will feed new teams and players into the ECS league. The development league will kick off with the launch of season 2 of the ECS.

Amazon-owned Twitch has more than 100 million viewers, who watch and talk about video games broadcast by more than 1.7 million gamers.

U.K.-based Facelt, founded in 2012, says it has more than 4 million users logging in a total of over 6 million online game sessions per month. In January the company announced that it had raised \$15 million in venture-capital funding from Anthos Capital, Index Ventures and United Ventures.

According to research firm Newzoo, about 21% of all hours watched on Twitch from July to December 2015 was eSports content, representing an average of some 79 million hours per month.

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