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TSM 'doubling budget for CS:GO' as ECS league co-ownership kicks into gear

By 
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FACEIT's Esports Championship Series has completed the sign-up process for CS:GO teams to become co-owners in the league, representing a huge step forward for player profitability in competitive gaming.

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The league, originally started as a collaboration between Twitch and online tournament organiser FACEIT, has now signed up more than half of the 20 teams in the league for a revenue share and governing stake in the venture.

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With a total of \$3.5million in prize money, the ECS is one of the largest leagues in eSports not owned by a publisher of the game. However now teams do not need to rely on prize money to be ensured sizeable payouts from competing in each season.

"Just because you have a winning team doesn't necessarily mean that you're making money, right?" says Andy Dinh, owner of American participants Team SoloMid. "One of the things to note about eSports is that most prizing if not all prizing goes to the players, so with our agreement with our players in 2015, 100% of our prizing went to the players so we were kind of stuck at an impasse where our players refused to do any sponsored deliverables and they also made all of the money."

The European squad left the organisation citing difficulties in resolving business disputes between timezones, and formed Astralis as a wholly player-owned enterprise soon after. Dinh looked in his own backyard to find a replacement, and now with the additional, dependable income from sharing ECS profits, he is able to improve player and team spending overall as a result.

"Going into 2017 we're looking at doubling our budget for CSGO to increase our overall infrastructure, provide better resources for players," Dinh says. "Last year, after losing our European squad, we decided to build from the ground up to just better understand the scene, to develop talent."

"We had some successes this last year, we did pretty well [by] my standards for the first season of ECS and we're struggling right now, but I'm still dedicated and still planning to stick with CSGO and also increase our budget there."

Revenue share is based on a number of factors and not equally split between teams. For instance, those who reach higher viewer engagement in their matches will be weighted more heavily in the share, incentivising teams to produce deliverables such as promotional content for the league.

CS:GO's viewership has dipped slightly throughout the summer, with widespread closure of gambling sites long thought to be a crutch of the competitive scene. However FACEIT and even players do not see the downward trend continuing.

"I've played competitively since 2004 and I've watched the game go through a lot of ups and downs and one of the things it always lacked was easy interaction from the fans," says Jordan 'n0thing' Gilbert, of Cloud9. "The big discussion was like 'did betting take away a lot of viewership?' and I think in a certain way it's good that we don't rely on that because I think we'll be able to replicate that whether it's with fantasy leagues or other things that create excitement."

FACEIT's co-founder and COO, Michele Attisani, believes the reduced viewership is already recovering now that ECS Season 2 is well underway. "We've definitely seen this summer a slowdown but we've seen in the last couple of weeks that the game is picking up again, is growing again and is now expanding," Attisani says. "I think we've seen a pretty similar effect on viewership numbers where maybe we had a little bit of a slowdown and now are accelerating again, viewership concurrencies for ECS is actually really good. We're happy to see the market expand again."

ECS Season 2 concludes December 10-11 in Anaheim, California, with the final teams still to be decided. As part of plans to further engage viewers, FACEIT are planning to offer free tickets to the venue for students who wish to attend.