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How the ECS CS:GO league is doubling player salary

With co-ownership benefits, FACEIT's league is looking to transform how teams support their players.

FACEIT wants to change the face of eSports © FACEIT/ECS

By Chris Higgins on 28 November 2016

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive's meteoric rise has led to a lot of opportunities for great players, but also teething problems for organisers. Many of the issues associated with rapid growth in eSports are beginning to be addressed by smart initiatives from both sides of the industry.

Aiming to bridge the gap between these two sides is the ECS, the first co-ownership league, which offers teams and players the chance to share in the success of the competitions they compete in. As one of the largest leagues outside of the publisher-owned tables, providing a way for teams to earn a split of their hard-work outside of prize pools goes a long way to achieving the holy grail of any eSports scene: stability.

To find out how they're hoping to continue improving eSports for both teams and players, we spoke to **FACEIT's Michele Attisani** and chief strategy officer **Kurt Packendorf** ahead of the Season 2 finals in Anaheim, California this December.

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How does co-ownership work in the ECS, and how does it differ from just taking part in another competitive league?
Kurt Packendorf: The teams all have the opportunity to be members of the league, and by that we mean they can take up equity in the league. We set aside 40 percent of the league, split between the 20 teams [13 are currently signed as co-owners, with discussions involving a further three ongoing]. The difference between not being a member, not having equity in the league, is you don't share in a profit share with the league. So the payout that we have for each season is split between prize money, so whoever wins gets their prize money according to their ranking, regardless of whether you are a member or not.

But then for members we have participation fees, which is distributed according to the recommendations of the governing committee of the league. That's allocated according to parameters that we think are relevant for that season – for example, social engagement, success in the league, viewership, how many folks are watching when you are playing, and so on.

What was the main aim of founding a league where teams share in all the successes?
Michele Attisani: It gives them the stability they need to have security and certainty on the events they will participate in for the years to come, which has always been a big issue in eSports. If you know that today you have a tournament, but you don't know if next year you'll be there again or not, it makes it pretty hard for teams to plan and commercialise their brand with some sponsor deals that require that level of certainty.

On top of that we provide an additional revenue stream, which comes from the league itself, and that allows them to make additional investments in player salaries, into facilities for them, coaches and so on. What we've seen is that since we started negotiating and closing ECS deals, the player salaries have been increased quite dramatically, and in some cases even doubled.

ECS Season 1 champions G2 celebrate their win © FACEIT/ECS

How do you see this affecting the scene in the past year of setting up co-ownership benefits?
Packendorf: Teams have begun investing more into their long-term strategies around CS:GO, which is something that was lacking in the game, especially compared to other games like LoL, where they know the LCS isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Then it gives them the opportunity to also market themselves better to sponsors and so on, because we help them share information on viewership, exposure, sharing content they can use with sponsors, and automatically being able to say they're going to be part of this circuit as members for years to come, give them the additional credibility to tap into sponsorship money.

What sort of player feedback have you already taken aboard for the way the league is run?
Attisani: Quite a lot of things, starting with the format change from season one to two, and from a best-of-three format to a best-of-one home and away system. One of the main feedbacks from players was they wanted maps played back-to-back in the home and away system. From a content and commercial perspective, maybe it would be more valuable to split the matches, but we understand that it would be harder for teams to schedule, especially this year with saturation in CS:GO. So we decided to go with the suggestion of the players and incorporated what they asked for.

Another example is having player booths at LAN finals. Players were pretty vocal about their willingness to have player booths, and while a lot of events are dropping those, the players still feel that to have the best possible playing experience they want those. So we provided them for the finals at Wembley and we'll provide at Anaheim, too.

Also, providing boot camp facilities that are accessible 24/7 at the event was a request we received from the players, and we'll fulfil that at Anaheim. The last one is having the same coach rules as the major, following Valve's ruling on coaches and adapting to a system that they asked us to use in order to play in the same environment as they will have to for the next official Valve major.

As the ECS has been a hit with players and teams within CS:GO as well as fans, are there plans to expand to other eSports titles?
Attisani: It's working really well for us, so we're looking at expanding this to other games. Obviously each game has a different ecosystem so we want to be conscious of that. We can't just stick the same exact model on the different scenes, but we're definitely looking at the opportunity of using a very similar structure to expand into other eSports.