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# ECS 'CS:GO' League Went To Cancún Because Of The World Poker Tour



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FaZe Clan lift the ECS trophy in Cancun. CREDIT: JOE STEPHENS / FACEIT

At the end of last year the ECS *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* league, which has an annual prize pool of \$1.5 million, did something a little different. Instead of hiring a massive arena and putting on a big stage show for the finals of their league, as the team had done for each of the three

previous seasons, they decided to book out a ton of rooms at the Hard Rock Hotel in Cancún, Mexico and let the team compete for hundreds of thousands of dollars while enjoying a stay at a luxury resort.

Many questioned the decision, sure some smaller events had tried similar things, but nothing on this kind of scale. It also meant that there was no live crowd for the matches, which could reduce the excitement, and the relaxed atmosphere could mean that some teams were not in the right mindset. However, it turned out pretty well, with many saying it was the perfect end to the year of pro CS, and unsurprising all the players loved it.

It was certainly a risky move, but one that has worked out pretty well. However the inspiration to hold the finals in a location such as the Hard Rock Hotel in Cancún came from an unlikely source.

“I used to watch a lot of poker and there was, I think it was the first series of the World Poker Tour, I had it on DVD, and they would go to all these different stops around the world,” says James Bardolph, Creative Director at FACEIT, the company that runs ECS, and respected *CS:GO* caster. “And I remember, at the time, they had this host, Shana Hiatt, and she would introduce the beginning of the show in a fun way. If I remember correctly, they did one in Aruba, and the intro to the show, she was on a jet ski in a bikini and it was like, ‘Welcome to the World Poker Tour in Aruba’, and I thought that that was really cool.”

“It was kind of amusing, though, because they were playing on the balcony and it was really windy, which I don't know how they managed to do it,” adds Bardolph. “But the point was it was an awesome location, and it kind of gave me the idea to do something of that ilk for *Counter-Strike*, because it's fun and it's something for the players to enjoy as well. So that's how the idea for Cancún came along.”

While there was no crowd in attendance that didn't stop the team from making this feel like a massive event. The relaxed location and the fact that

the players couldn't leave the venue (or simply didn't want to) meant that the team could create a ton of content to air during the downtime. It didn't feel like a stadium event, but it was just as entertaining for everyone watching, and almost all the feedback was positive.

“Obviously, we did have some more fun with it,” says Bardolph when talking about how they made the event feel equal to that of a massive stadium event. “But I think it's also, considering every other event, it's like this big, polished event; you've got this crowd, you've got the camera on a jib, blah blah blah. It was like, just wanted to do something different to everything else, because we don't want to be generic. We don't want to pump out the same old stuff. So the event in Cancún was one way to do that.”

Neither Bardolph or FACEIT co-owner Michele Attisani would confirm if they will be taking the season 6 finals of ECS to a similar location, but after the success of Season 4 it certainly would not be a surprise to see another similar event. However, before all that can even be thought about the team has to put on the Season 5 finals, which will take place at Wembley Arena in London this June.

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