

CS:GO's new team-owned league points to a different future for esports

Flashpoint could mean a more sustainable pro gaming ecosystem

By [Andrew Webster](#) | Feb 5, 2020, 1:00pm EST



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Some of the biggest names in competitive gaming are teaming up to form a new kind of league. Today saw the announcement of Flashpoint, a new professional *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* league that differs from almost every other esports venture in one key way: it's owned and run by the teams. Big-name organizations like Cloud9, Gen.G, Dignitas, Overactive Media, and more have all paid \$2 million franchise fees in a big bet to build a more sustainable esports league. "Everyone benefits, and I think that is going to be the way of the future," says Gen.G co-founder Kent Wakeford.

The league, which kicks off open qualifiers starting tomorrow, says that it will "provide the highest revenue share potential to teams of any major esports league." Events will take place offline in a studio, with two seasons per year and a \$2 million prize pool. In addition to benefiting team owners, the league also says it will see players be much more involved compared to other competitions. "Players will receive the highest revenue share in esports, the largest revenue guarantee in *CS:GO*, and will have equal representation to the teams on the league's board of governors," the league says. Flashpoint will be operated by Facelt.

Here's a brief rundown of the somewhat complex season structure:

Flashpoint open qualifiers begin on February 6th across three regions: Europe, North America and South America. The top four teams per EU qualifier (16 total), top two per NA and SA qualifier (eight total per region) move to a regional closed qualifier. The regular season will

see the final two teams who emerge victorious from the regional closed qualifiers join the 10 Flashpoint founding teams for the regular season, where they'll be split into three GSL groups of four, drafted by the teams themselves.

Teams will then compete in the GSL group stage, where they earn points. There will then be a re-draft and the process is repeated. If teams are tied in points after the second group stage, tie-breaker matches will be played. The top eight point earners will qualify for the Finals, which will be an eight team double elimination bracket. More details on the location and format for the Flashpoint season final will be revealed soon.

What makes Flashpoint particularly interesting, though, is its team-owned structure, which is vastly different compared to the biggest esports in the world. In professional *Overwatch*, *League of Legends*, or *Call of Duty*, the leagues are run by the game's publisher, which gives them a great deal of control. According to Gen.G's Wakeford — whose organization also operates teams in the *Overwatch* League, the *NBA 2K* League, and *League of Legends* Champions Korea, among others — this can create an adversarial dynamic.

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"You have the leagues on one side, and then the teams and the players on the other side," he explains. "When they do their sponsorships or they do their media deals or they do their live events, the leagues are thinking about the leagues. How do we make money? How do we, as a league, make profits for our league? And then that goes into whatever black box they have, and sometimes the teams can make some value out of it. It sets up a structure where there's not alignment between the activities that the league does and what the teams and the players do."

He believes that the structure of Flashpoint creates a different dynamic since all of the teams are invested and working toward a similar goal. In fact, though it's still early, he says that he's already seen a large difference in how the Flashpoint team owners collaborate compared to owners in other leagues. "When the teams get together, we're thinking about how do we collectively make something that is great, something that is big, something that is impactful," Wakeford explains. "It is focused energy on how to be awesome. In other leagues, it's often the teams versus the league, and how do we carve

out a little bit of rights over here, over there. It's very tactical. It's not about greatness. That's the key difference."

Flashpoint is also looking to differentiate how its events and broadcasts look. The league has signed notable broadcast talent, including CS:GO veteran Duncan "Thorin" Shields and Christopher "MonteCristo" Mykles, one of the most public faces of the *Overwatch* League over its first two seasons. Whereas most current esports leagues have taken to [adopting the style and structure of traditional sports leagues](#), Flashpoint says it's going in a different direction, taking inspiration from the likes of MMA and the WWE. "Everyone wants to be the ESPN of esports," says Wakeford. "Well, who says that ESPN is what's right for gaming communities? We want to create an experience for the fans that's authentic, it's more raw, it's personality-driven."

Of course, the other major issue for Flashpoint is competition. Not only is it going up against behemoths like *League of Legends* and *Call of Duty*, but it's also not the only professional CS:GO circuit. Most notably, the ESL Pro League has been operating since 2015 and is currently home to the game's biggest teams, including Faze Clan, Team Liquid, and Fnatic. It's a tough market for any new venture, let alone one that's trying to do things differently. But Wakeford believes that Flashpoint will be so unique that there's little reason to be concerned. "If we do it right," he says, "I'm not worried about any other leagues."

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