

GAMES

Rocket League is NBC's test drive for esports

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Above: Dropshot is all about air control.

Image Credit: Psyonix

NBCUniversal is already making a big push into mobile games, and now it's launching its first esports tournament for the soccer-played-with-cars game Rocket League in partnership with the esports community platform Facelt.

NBC Sports Group will broadcast the tournament across all eight of its regional networks — such as Comcast SportsNet Bay Area and Comcast SportsNet New York — as well as in Europe and Telemundo Deportes, NBC's Spanish-language sports channel. It's a move that's likely trying to capitalize on the popularity of esports, as well as capture a group of viewers who have self-reported that they're more interested in esports than traditional sports. According to market analyst NewZoo, the esports industry is projected to reach \$696 million this year, with 41.3 percent year-on-year growth.

Psyonix's Rocket League shot to the top of the charts in 2016 as one of the most popular

the esports scene, hosting the third season of the Rocket League Championship Series this year, and its latest content upgrades are geared toward building it up as an esports, adding features like a quickview of info from the latest competitive matches.

“Our Rocket League esports ecosystem is thriving and we are excited to expand to the NBC Sports audience,” said Josh Watson, head of esports at Psyonix, in a press release. “Rocket League is an easy-to-understand game, which makes it the perfect introduction to esports for fans of all backgrounds and ages.”

Facelt will be providing the platform for NBC Sport’s new tournament, utilizing its matchmaking technology and tournament management infrastructure. It’s partnered in the past with the livestreaming platform Twitch for a Counter-Strike tournament, and it’s also the official platform for Turner’s esports league, ELeague. It reportedly hosts 12 million online game sessions every month and 7 million users playing matches, some for prize pools and others for the sake of competition.

NBC Sport’s Rocket League tournament will be 2-on-2 and kick off with online qualifiers on July 22, divided into regions that correspond with eight of the NBC Sports regional networks. The next phase will be on-site at the regional finals, which will be livestreamed via the NBC Sports and Telemundo En Vivo apps on two weekends, August 5 and August 6 and August 12 and August 13, with television coverage for the final hour.

NBC will livestream as well as broadcast the Grand Finals from August 26 and August 27 in the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Germany, and across Latin America. Sixteen teams will compete in the finals for the prize pool of \$100,000.

“The NBC Regional Sports Networks bring the best in local sports to our fans day in and day out, and we’re excited that the fast-growing world of esports are now a part of that mission,” said David Preschlack, president of NBC Sports Regional Networks, in a press release. “We look forward to engaging our fans in a whole new way that allows them to get in the esports game, and to bring a whole new generation of fans to our platforms as well.”



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