



# THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR COMPETITIVE GAMING

BY TAMMY LEYTHAM

The HyperX Esports Arena in Las Vegas  
at the Luxor Hotel and Casino.



## VIDEO GAMING IS BIG BUSINESS, WITH THE *WALL STREET JOURNAL* PROJECTING ESPORTS REVENUE TO BE \$1.5 BILLION BY 2020. THIS IS A LIGHT-YEARS FLASH FORWARD FROM *ASTEROIDS* AT THE VIDEO ARCADE.

Major sports franchises are investing in professional teams. The International Olympics Committee is discussing including Esports in future Olympic Games. Colleges offer scholarships to Esports players. There are even high school and pee-wee leagues.

Games have storylines, outstanding visual effects and allow players to achieve total immersion into the game. They are played across cultures by men and women.

The sky's the limit for Esports with each new slate of games that hit the market.

"This is perhaps the most rapidly growing sector within the sports event industry that we have ever seen," said Wes Hall, executive director of the Hampton Roads Sports Commission in Virginia. "The future of this industry sector will not be as a niche sport but rather an industry staple with significant impact."

Currently, 7 Cities Gaming League hosts local youth and adult tournaments, and is planning an Esports festival in Norfolk, which would be the largest Esports event in Virginia, Hall said.

"As with many regions, we remain on the cusp of this rapidly developing industry," he said. "However, a strong foundation is being built that will support our goal of being a stop on a major world tour, like Tekken or Capcom."

The sport is growing so quickly, in fact, that the Virginia Sports Summit ([vasportssummit.com](http://vasportssummit.com)) on Feb. 5 and 6 will have a breakout session on Esports. The discussion on the evolution, growth and future of Esports will be led by Mike Glover, director of web services and Esports athletic director at East Coast Polytechnic (ECPI) University in Virginia Beach.

Global viewership of Esports hit 380 million viewers in 2018 and had a \$905.6 million economic impact, up 38 percent over 2017, according to Newzoo. Sponsorship and advertising makes up 77

percent or \$694 million of that amount.

The top-ranking team has earned \$25.4 million. Livestream interactive fundraising platforms raise millions for nonprofits such as St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and Make-A-Wish.

"There is no central hub for data on Esports yet," Glover said. "There are plenty of websites that list data but few are maintained on an ongoing basis. Worldwide, there are probably well over 1,000 professional teams and that number is growing exponentially."

Glover said streaming services such as Twitch.tv are exploding with growth as professional teams, players and event organizers scramble to get their tournaments viewed by eager fans.

Major media outlets such as TBS, ESPN and Disney broadcast live stadium "sell-out" events on TV and are sinking millions of dollars into set production and broadcasting very similar to NFL or World Cup events, Glover said.

The League of Legends championship

last Fall, for example, drew 27 million viewers, putting it just behind viewership for top events like the Super Bowl and World Cup.

"With that, colleges and universities are now scrambling to build Esports programs and eager to compete," Glover said. "I expect in the next 12 to 18 months to see the list of varsity Esports programs triple (or more) in growth, and college scholarships and recruiting for Esports to become very similar to that of more traditional sports."

Almost all of the approximately 50 colleges that have a varsity Esports program offer scholarships on some level, he said, though "only about 10 percent of the schools are offering 'full ride' scholarships and the bottom 10 percent are offering less than \$3,000."

ECPI University offers anywhere from \$3,000 to a full-tuition scholarship, based on player ability and ranking. Additionally, every player who makes the ECPI Rams team is a scholarship player. ►



Players at ECPI University compete in league play.

Playing for a college team gives players a common goal. Gamers who grew up playing video games feel they have a use for those skills – one that earns them a chance to earn a college degree.

There are opportunities beyond the college campus, too. Esports Amateur Competitor’s League offers the opportunity for gamers to earn cash prizes, as well as earn college scholarships. Gamers pay an annual registration fee, then compete for cash prizes – up to \$2.5 million each month. Being a part of the

league gives gamers the opportunity to hone their skills on the road to going pro.

“We are already seeing professional teams getting large, pre-IPO-style funding and using that money to build Esports training facilities worldwide,” Glover said.

Professional athletes and professional sports teams owners from the traditional sports areas are also investing heavily in Esports.

“Within the next five years, I would say we will probably start to see dedicated arenas being built solely for the purpose

of hosting large Esports events,” Glover said. “Cities and major metropolitan areas will be competing on a national and global level to have arenas built within their city.”

The future is bright for Hampton Roads, said Hall, noting the Esports program at ECPI and a second in development at Bryant & Stratton College, both in the region. “Coupled with the advancement and promotions of Esports by 7 Cities Gaming and local venues with the ability and desire to host, the socio-economic impact will be significant,” he said. ■

## Esports Arena Built For Gaming & Entertainment

The first dedicated Esports venue on the Las Vegas strip, the HyperX Esports Arena at the Luxor Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, opened in March 2018. The arena is under a multiyear agreement with Allied Esports and HyperX.

The arena is a popular destination for players, fans, teams and others who find the technically-driven space with production facilities, food, telescopic stadium seating, two bars, private VIP lounges and a buyout capacity of 1,000, to provide a unique offering.

With 30,000 square feet in the two-level arena, a 1,400-square foot stage, a 50-foot LED video wall and broadcasting and production studios, groups can brand the monitors, walls and backgrounds with colors, logos, images, video or stream media remotely.

The venue offers a full entertainment package with lighting, color-changing LED elements, video production, playback/recording systems, audio facilities, a master control room, robotic cameras and a professional staff dedicated to assist or produce the entire show.

“The arena is state-of-the-art and is a world-class championship destination and content production facility for tournaments and high-stakes matchups, but more importantly for our corporate clients, it is a fantastic modular expansive space that can be configured for high-profile gatherings, meetings and presentations,” said Denise



The Esports Arena includes state-of-the-art production facilities.

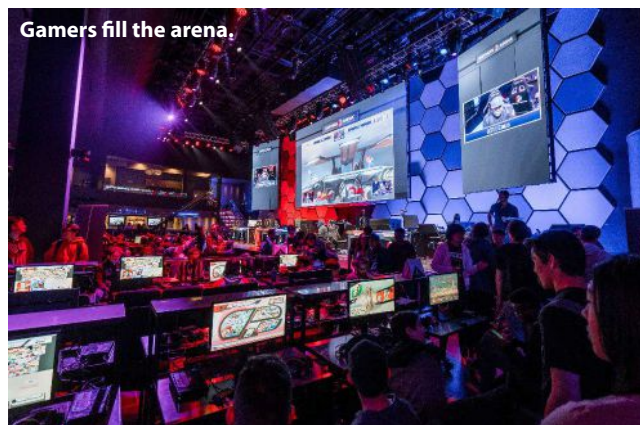
De Jesus, catering sales manager. “The production assets and capabilities are not only built for esports, but more importantly built for entertainment.”

With nightly tournaments including Friday Frags and Saturday Night Speedway, the arena is the hub of video gaming in the city, according to De Jesus. The HyperX Esports Arena also has a classic video game bar with arcade-style games and classic console-games.

For more information, visit [wwesportsarenalasegas.com](http://wwesportsarenalasegas.com). ■



An overview of the main arena.



Gamers fill the arena.