Getting under the skin of esports for those who are more familiar with traditional sports. Is esports a friend, foe or an interested companion of sport?

Thank you to Gfinity for hosting Onside Law’s latest seminar and panellists Ryan Armstrong (The FA), Julian Tan (Formula 1), Andy Gray (Codemasters) and Kieran Holmes-Darby (excel Esports).

…and of course a big thank you to Tom Deacon, Stein Wilmann (Nordavind) and Wouter Sleijffers (Fnatic) for a thought provoking Q&A.

Key takeaways from the morning were:

- esports is the fastest growing entertainment format in the world with 380 million people regularly playing and watching competitive video games. That number is expected to rise to 800 million people by 2025.
- esports offers traditional sports a very targeted demographic (predominately males between the ages of 16 to 35) to seek to engage with.
- Traditional sports teams are seeing esports as a chance to expand their asset and fanbase through “a tidal wave” of associations with esports brands.
- Whilst sports like Formula 1 and football benefit from the gaming experience closely reflecting the real-life experience, other sports have to be more creative. Short form adapted versions of the sport in a video game is one option or partnering with a specific esports gaming community with a similar ethos is another.
- Using a high-profile traditional sports star playing an esports game is another compelling way of connecting to the relevant esports demographic.
- esports fans are representative of the younger generation of fans of sport and entertainment who consume sport differently with a focus on shorter, clip-based rights and behind-the-scenes footage. This is forcing rightsholders and traditional broadcasters to alter how they offer their sports content.
- Governance across titles in esports began with self-regulation and gentleman’s agreements. Game’s publishers have assumed the role of regulators/legislators for their own games aided by player and fan feedback. This governance includes rulebooks for each esports competition and adjudicating on in-game disputes and extends to ethics, doping and anti-corruption.
- Governance is now becoming more formalised through top-flight competitions such as Gfinity’s Elite Series.
- The goal for many esports teams is the creation of a “lifestyle brand” rather than just a team for fans to support and follow.
- Generally esports should be viewed as a “friend” helping tap into new demographics and ever-expanding markets.
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