

# Is competitive gaming in South Africa a thing?

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8 Jun 2017

Is competitive gaming in South Africa a thing? Well, at the moment, I think it's in the infancy of becoming a fully-fledged profession where someone would be able to leave their job to become a pro gamer.



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The fact is, internationally, there are teams and players making millions of dollars through sponsorship and salaries by means of professional gaming. In South Africa, until recently, there has only been one really large e-sports tournament organiser backed by Telkom and running the Telkom Digital Masters League. Here players would have a chance to play for a prize pool of R1m over two titles.

As amazing as that sounds, it still isn't nearly enough to make a career out of gaming, especially when compared to teams who are playing overseas for prize pools in excess of \$22m for one tournament.

## The biggest problem

The biggest problem the industry has to deal with locally is that it's not taken seriously. Over the last twenty years, I have been involved in e-sports, I have been overseas and have been a part of tournaments with really big prize pools. I have watched million dollar e-sport tournaments live, and I have seen e-sports - locally and internationally - grow beyond my expectations.

At the moment, there aren't a lot of really big tournaments in South Africa available for teams to compete in (without it being at a cost to the teams or the players themselves) and that is one of the key factors holding the sport, as a whole, back.

## Something worthwhile for investors

Companies need to feel like there is something worthwhile to invest in and that just isn't happening at the moment. The way conventional marketing works does not seem to fall into the same scope as what e-sports does. In order for sponsors and e-sports to bridge that gap, it needs to be packaged in a way that suits both parties.

Things are starting to change though. The company I am a part of, Mettlestate, recently hosted its first of many tournaments: the Samsung Galaxy CS:GO Championship with a R1m prize pool for a game called Counter Strike Global Offensive (CS:GO). We have a world-class e-sports studio (in JHB) with some of the best e-sports talent in South Africa involved.

This prize pool is the largest of its kind in South Africa. Over a span of two months, 24 teams battled it out to get themselves into the top eight teams that were flown to Johannesburg. The final eight teams walked away with no less than R50,000 each, and the top team took home more than R300,000.

## **More brands getting involved**

Locally, more and more brands are getting involved in the SA e-sports scene as they are realising its immense, untapped potential. As a result, more tournaments are being hosted, prize pools are increasing (two years ago teams were playing for an entire year for prizes totaling R220,000, split across four teams; and in 2017 that prize pool – for CS:GO tournaments – is already sitting at over R5m) and more South African teams are qualifying to compete in global gaming tournaments.

E-sports is one of the fastest-growing markets in the world, which draws more viewers globally than the NBA. It's currently growing at almost 12% per year with an estimated 180 million viewers expected worldwide in 2019. During the Mettlestate Samsung CS:GO Championship, over 150,000 people tuned in to stream the tournament – which shows there is a massive appetite for e-sports in South Africa.

Having said all of that, let's ask the question again: Is competitive gaming in South Africa a thing?

The answer, without hesitation, is *most definitely!*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Barry Louzada is the founder of Mettlestate - a local esports organisation.

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