

# Weekend college tournament helps Atlantic City make strides in esports market

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It was Shaun Byrne's first trip to Atlantic City over the weekend, but he didn't come to gamble or relax on the beach.

Byrne, of Windsor, Ontario, traveled 1,000 miles to play "Fortnite," a multi-player online game.

Sitting in a row of college students, he tapped away at a controller, hoping his team would later place at the first esports tournament at Boardwalk Hall put on through a public-private partnership between the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and Ingame Esports.

Over the course of three days, 1,300 people strolled in and out of the historic building, and live streams of the Collegiate Starleague 2019 Grand Finals event had captured more than eight million views as of Sunday evening.

"I've never had a reason to come here before," said Byrne, who stayed at the Tropicana Atlantic City a few blocks away. "I've heard some bad things about Atlantic City, but now that I'm here and walking the Boardwalk, I'm like, 'This is kind of cool.'"

The tournament comes as officials look to position the resort as a hub for professional video gaming.

The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority last December [approved \\$700,000](#) to promote esports events at the Atlantic City Convention Center and Boardwalk Hall put on by INGAME, an esports consulting company. Last October, Continent 8 Technologies announced it would build a 6,000-square-foot data server inside the Convention Center, infrastructure needed for large tournaments.

There's still fear, though, that the resort could lose the chance to other major cities if it doesn't move quickly enough to attract competitions.

Last month, Comcast Spectacor said it plans to construct a \$50 million esports and entertainment venue in the Philadelphia sports complex. It would become the only large-scale arena dedicated to video gaming on the East Coast.

"There's definitely a sense of urgency about trying to not let the opportunity go by," said Michael Klein, interim executive director of Stockton's William L. Hughes Center for Public Policy, at an [esports summit last year](#).

On Sunday, hundreds of event attendees showed Atlantic City is making strides, and for now, is catering to aspiring, amateur players who are underserved and in need of spaces to play.

Two well-known esports announcers, Kyle and BSJ, sat on a small, elevated stage in one corner of the Adrian Philips Ballroom giving blaring play-by-plays. A giant screen showcased the main games as a handful of people watched from their seats.

The mid-size tournament featured 100 competitors who qualified from the college season. It was hosted by the largest esports collegiate league in the country in the Adrian Phillips Theater, which holds 3,200 people. Larger competitions could be held in the 14,000-seat arena.

Neil Duffy, Collegiate Starleague vice president, said the organization put about 150 staffers and players in rooms in the Tropicana. Some players took buses into New Jersey from Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York.

“Yesterday, this whole area was jam-packed,” he said.

Students from across New Jersey, and as far as Canada, strolled in and out of the high-tech arena to compete in the grand finals for the games “Fortnite,” “League of Legends,” “CS:GO” and “Dota 2.:

Justin Chiong, a 20-year-old student at Penn State University, came to the resort with two teammates he coaches after they reached the semifinals in the “Fortnite” competition.

The three drove to Atlantic City on Thursday. Each night, he said, they reviewed the games recorded on streaming site Twitch to see their mistakes.

“There (are) a lot of schools here,” he said. “I met people from all across the county. ... We’ve played people from California, from Georgia, so it’s cool to network with people you wouldn’t have met otherwise.”