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Esports irm wants to bring more tournaments to A.C.

AVALON ZOPPO Staff Writer Oct 19, 2018



Juhani 'Kantoraketti' Toivonen plays for PENTA Sports during the semi final round of the Rainbow Six Siege Pro League event in May at Harrah's Resort. Caesars Atlantic City hosted the city's first esports event in 2017.

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ATLANTIC CITY — An esports consulting company is working with the state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority to bring multiple video game tournaments to the city next year.

The competitions, which represent part of a billion-dollar industry, would be held in venues owned by the authority, said INGAME Esports President Anthony Gaud. He hopes the games start within the first few months of 2019 in either Boardwalk Hall or the convention center.

A number of esports leagues, teams and organizations have expressed interest in coming to Atlantic City, Gaud said, though he declined to name those involved.

"We're working with the city to ensure esports benefits everyone," Gaud said Thursday after Stockton University's first esports summit on the Atlantic City campus.

The city is no stranger to esports. Two Atlantic City casinos held tournaments last year. Harrah's Resort hosted the Rainbow Six Siege Pro League Finals in May, and Ocean Resort Casino has a convention planned this weekend.

By 2019, the industry is expected to be worth more than \$1.23 billion, according to a Super Data report. Esports has been touted as a way to attract millennials not drawn to slot machines and other forms of conventional gambling.

With that in mind, INGAME started its initiative to bring esports to Atlantic City in February during a meeting with the Atlantic County Economic Alliance, Gaud said.

In a presentation to the group, INGAME suggested Boardwalk Hall as a place to hold "major, minor and championship events on a quarterly and monthly basis." Boardwalk Hall has 14,770 seats and a theater with a capacity of 3,200.

Gaud said he later met with CRDA officials to discuss expanding esports beyond casinos and into a central location.

Marshall Spevak, deputy executive director of the CRDA, said the agency is in contact with INGAME about potential events.

Events held in the Atlantic City Convention Center and Boardwalk Hall must be approved by the authority.

"We've met with INGAME about bringing esports events to Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall, and we're excited about the possibilities they've spoken about," Spevak said.

"Having a permanent home would definitely be beneficial," Gaud added.

Caesars Atlantic City held the city's first major esports tournament last year. Hundreds of cheering fans attended the three-day event, which featured a prize pool of \$200,000. And in May 2017, Tropicana hosted a two-day "Super Smash Bros. Melee" competition.

Still, there's a "sense of urgency" about bringing esports to Atlantic City before other, larger East Coast cities tap into the market, said Michael Klein, interim executive director of Stockton's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.