

Last week's announcement of the location for the upcoming League of Legends World Championships was followed by the news that the US government was now issuing visas for visiting international players to work in the country. This is important, since most of the players in the tournament will be from other lands, in addition to demonstrating that pro gaming is making its mark. The topic of visas has sparked much debate outside of the pro-gaming community since it broke. Yet, this is a natural step for a worldwide competition that has an \$8 million global pool and 14 teams participating, eleven from outside North America. Let's also not forget that several players on North American teams are Canadian.

The international nature of the competition is no accident. In North America, eSports has been growing in both recognition and audience for some time. It's not limited to League of Legends, either. MLG has been around for over a decade, but it's only in the past couple of years that audiences have truly blown up and bigger deals struck. Whereas maybe a few years ago, you might have seen the rockstar treatment for pro gamers in places like Korea, now we're seeing it over here in North America. Like anything else, this did not happen overnight.

Yet some question why pro gamers and not say, students, are getting special visa permission to work in the country. And the current debates over immigration in general have caused some negative reactions to this news among general populations. If eSports is going to continue with its growth, the general population is the potential audience since those of us actively watching, playing, and discussing these issues are already in the net. We've been caught and trawled in. It's those guys you have to convince, eSports event organizers.

That's another good reason for choosing The Staples Center to hold the event. At E3, I spoke to Riot's Whalen Rozelle (Magus) about how their goal has been to create a global series that is centered around not just competition, but around relatable moments. Little did I know that not far away was the destination LoL fans would be centering their attention upon in the fall. Trying to extend that relatability is one of the goals and moving to a well-known sports arena is about as big of an arrival as you can get here in this country. Making the mainstream news for the location and the visa issue don't hurt either, despite the debate.

I've seen several people making the case for the visas by defending people like pro poker and billiards players, whose particular competitions are less physical and involve more mental skill. Yet, even pro gamers are subject to physical limitations, as well as changes to the game's meta. Those changes happen frequently, and keeping up is part of the challenge. I've seen some question what pro players contribute to society such that they deserve visas over students or scientists. But it's not a question of 'instead of', it's a matter of this category being open and these competitions rising to a level where their international nature requires this to happen.

To be fair, people argue that highly-paid basketball players contribute less than teachers and argue about relative pay often. But part of the reason behind questioning the visa grants for LoL players is, let's face it, the lingering perception of gaming as lazy, immature, and as 'just' playtime. That's one of the next hurdles to overcome when it comes to the mainstream audience. Yet that is a problem that

remains for gaming in general. With surveys consistently returning information that the average gamer is well into adulthood, there's still a disconnect between perception and reality among some.

To bring this back around to the selection of the Staples Center, the fact this is an arena that has seen mainstream physical sports championships is no accident. Bringing the eyes of millions worldwide to the arena in October might seem like a huge thing in itself, yet it's really a beginning.