

Interview with Miguel Lopez, journalist for “Games for Windows Magazine”

Angel Munoz is the founder and president of the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL). Since its founding in 1997, the Dallas-based organization has hosted 60 international main events with a total attendance of over 300,000 gamers, has sanctioned over 500 international qualifiers and awarded more than \$3 million in prizes.

This year the CPL announced a \$500,000 World Tour for F.E.A.R. on the Xbox 360 and World in Conflict on the PC. Its primary sponsor Sierra Entertainment, a division of Vivendi Games, creates and publishes innovative, high-quality interactive entertainment for personal computers, videogame systems and handheld gaming devices.

Are there any foolproof steps that developers can follow in order to ensure that their games are conducive to broadcast?

There are certainly some basic, and often ignored, features that could make a game a lot more conducive for professional tournaments and broadcast. In-game focus, visual queues, online broadcast features, skinnable character models, increasing action, properly designed maps, reasonable time limits, remote control in-game cameras, simple server controls, VOIP, etc., are some of the primary features that any game seeking to attract gaming league endorsements and be “broadcast ready” must definitely include.

What genres do you think are naturally best suited for broadcast? Which ones are the worst?

First Person Action games and Real Time Strategy games would be on top of my list. MMO’s and Casual games would be on the bottom of my list right now.

At this time, which individual game do you feel is best suited to broadcast?

The game has not been released yet, but I think that World in Conflict is a solid step in the right direction. Played in a familiar five-versus-five format, the game combines the best aspects of Real Time Strategy and Action games. The winners and losers will be determined by tactical strategies and not by those who can simply click the mouse faster or memorize mindless build orders. The game developers (Massive Entertainment) took 16 months to create the multiplayer aspect of the game before they started on the single player campaign, so there’s a lot of thought and testing that has gone into the competitive aspects of this game. I think this game will clearly become the Counter-Strike of RTS gaming.

What are the biggest challenges that broadcasters currently face when it comes to televising competitive gaming events?

Beyond the fact that videogame competitions are simply not interesting to the average television viewer, you have less and less people watching television anyway. In fact, this is television's worst spring in recent memory, a startling number of Americans drifted away from television the past two months: More than 2.5 million fewer people were watching ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox than at the same time last year, statistics show. This gradual but significant transformation will make it even more difficult for videogame competitions to make it as traditional televised shows.

Do you feel that developers of competitive games put enough effort into ensuring their games will broadcast well?

There is no obvious financial motivation for developers to make their games more broadcast friendly. The short-term mentality of the industry is characterized by fairly fast development cycles, quick product introductions and then moving on to the next game. In this environment, it is difficult for a developer to think in terms of extending market longevity of their game, creating solid social networking environments and creating tools that increase the broadcast quality of the game. These are issues that have been somewhat addressed by World in Conflict.

As the popularity of eSports continues to rise in North America, how important do you think will it be for competitive games to be designed with strong broadcast sensibilities?

Eventually, the industry will realize that a longer term view of the market could pay higher rewards down the road, in fact the CPL recently announced project "Severity," a multiplayer first person action videogame focusing on team-versus-team and one-versus-one play modes. Severity will offer unprecedented support for broadcasting and remote viewing of matches.

Do you think that North American broadcasters generally understand how to effectively broadcast competitive video games at this time?

Absolutely not. They insist in presenting videogame competitions as any other traditional sport, and it simply is not going to work that way. By its very nature videogames have a number of issues that make it difficult to follow for the average person, and then there's a serious disconnect between the on-screen action of a game and the apparent passivity of the participating gamers.

We have some ideas on how to reconcile those and make the sport a lot more interesting.

In your opinion, is the future of competitive gaming broadcasting tied to television, or will other mediums (such as internet video, online distribution systems, or the game clients themselves) eventually supplant TV?

Online television is the future, absolutely no doubt about it. In fact, today Joost, the Online TV founded by the creators of Skype, Janus Friis and Niklas Zennström announced a \$45 Million fund raising from investors including Index Ventures, Viacom, CBS Corporation, Sequoia Capital and the Chinese billionaire Li Ka-shing. This is just one more clear indication of where broadcasting is headed.