

NBA's Utah Jazz Forward Gordon Hayward Signs With IGN's Professional Video Game League

Hayward to Participate in First Professional StarCraft II Gaming Tournament at Caesars Atlantic City October 6-9

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 7, 2011 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- NBA player and Utah Jazz forward Gordon Hayward is trying his hand at professional video gaming ("eSports") and has partnered with the IGN Pro League (IPL) -- the professional video game league presented by IGN Entertainment, the world's leading video games media company.

During this unique time in the NBA, in addition to his daily basketball training, Hayward is pursuing his passion outside of basketball -- video games -- and will compete in his first eSports event, IPL 3: Origins, taking place October 6-9th at Caesars Atlantic City. In his debut as professional basketball player-turned-video game player, Hayward will join top StarCraft II players from around the world to compete in the Atlantic City tournament.

"I've been playing video games for as long as I can remember. I'm a competitive guy, and I love the competitive nature of video games," says Gordon Hayward. "Pro-gamers are really sports stars themselves. The mental strategy that goes into planning your next move and what your opponent is going to do are skills you need to be successful playing basketball -- and playing StarCraft II. If you want to be good, you have to put a lot of time and effort into it, just like with other sports. I've got the best of both worlds. I spend time each day on the court taking my game to the next level, and I am pursuing my passion for eSports. I'm excited to join the IGN Pro League and see how I do at the tournament in Atlantic City."

In between his usual training for the NBA, Hayward is being prepared by the IGN Pro League coaches, some of the world's top StarCraft players. Hayward will be one of the primary participants at IPL 3: Origins and will challenge global StarCraft II stars, including IdrA, Select and WhiteRa.

Players and fans who attend the Caesars Atlantic City event will witness Hayward playing alongside 256 other qualifying players to compete for a \$100,000 prize pool.

"Gordon Hayward's participation in the IPL and the Atlantic City tournament confirms the growing popularity of competitive gaming in the U.S.," said David Ting, General Manager of eSports and Vice President of Research & Development at IGN Entertainment. "Video games will continue to be a dominant entertainment medium, and this event shows how professional gaming can become just as popular as mainstream sports."

Launched in April 2011, the IGN Pro League has attracted more than 1.2 million unique visitors and six million page views to its online tournaments. IPL 1 invited 16 of the top StarCraft II players in North America, and IPL 2 -- Across the Atlantic -- convened 32 of the U.S. and Europe's best StarCraft II players to its online competitions, vying for their part of a \$50,000 prize pot. The Caesars Atlantic City event marks the first time an IGN Pro League tournament will be held as a live event and the first competitive video gaming tournament to be held at Caesars. IPL 3: Origins in Atlantic City, as well as past IPL tournaments, can be accessed online exclusively at <http://www.ign.com/ipl> .

Competitive video gaming -- commonly known as "eSports" -- has gained a huge following in countries like Korea, where fans fill stadiums to watch the world's top players compete in StarCraft II video game tournaments. IGN believes that the time is ripe for eSports to become the next big spectator sport in North America, and with the IGN Pro League franchise, IGN's goal is to help make eSports a mainstream form of entertainment that can produce the next genre of celebrity in sports.

The partnership with IGN was developed with Conor Sammartin of Priority Sports & Entertainment, which represents Hayward.