

## iGNA 2016 – A RECAP

by Christopher Irwin

The iGaming North America Conference (iGNA), attended and co-produced by The Innovation Group, took place April 5-7, 2016. The conference itself took on many forms and covered a wide array of topics, most of which did not pertain specifically to iGaming. In fact, the headliners were Daily Fantasy Sports (DFS), eSports, and millennials.

eSports, whose championship matches had more viewers than Game 6 of the 2015 NBA finals, and DFS, more widely known for its large online companies of DraftKings and FanDuel, dominated the conference. eSports is a fast moving, fast growing industry that gained initial traction in Asia and has more recently become popular in the United States. The Innovation Group's Michael Vanaskie further explores the rise of eSports in his article, *The Rise of eSports: Does This Emerging Sport Offer an Opportunity for Gaming-Related Companies?* Major sports broadcasting and distributing companies such as ESPN and Yahoo have already launched eSports specific websites. Surpassed only by the World Cup and Super Bowl, it is already the third most watched sport, and sooner rather than later, it will be common to see odds on eSports matches at sports books all around Nevada. (This already exists in sports books elsewhere in the world.)

DFS, on the other hand, has hit a roadblock of sorts. The amount of money spent on advertising by the two giants grew the popularity astronomically, but also drew unwanted attention as the legality of the daily competitions has come into question. Some suggest it is sports betting and therefore illegal under the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA). Others say it violates the carve out from the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act that legalized fantasy sports. Though no consensus has been reached, everyone can agree that the answer to this question will be up to the courts in each state and could take years to sort out.

Though not a topic in and of itself, a major point of conversation was the "millennial" demographic. Millennials represent the largest generation since the baby boomers, but they are also the most gambling averse. The word was mentioned approximately 1,622,871 times (give or take) during the three day conference and though many people joke about it, it is a point of importance for the gaming industry. The key to success in the gaming industry moving forward lies in the hands of millennials as they are visiting casinos, but gambling is extremely low on their list of things to do while there. Millennials do not consider pulling levers and watching wheels spin to be the same form of entertainment as playing high definition video games, so it is up to casinos to find ways to make gambling more attractive to this demographic. So enter games of skill, a mix between pure skill-based competition (basketball, football, baseball, hockey, etc.) and games of pure luck (slot machines). Games of skill and millennials are often mentioned in the same sentence as a means of attracting young gamers. While companies have started to develop these types of games, it is still too early to tell if this will be the saving grace.

Our final takeaway from iGNA? The DFS issue is nowhere near being settled, eSports is going to become a bigger business than it already is, and millennials are the key to the future.