Blizzard bans pro Hearthstone gamer for statement supporting Hong Kong

Enlarge / Ng “Blitzchung” Wai Chung declares his support for Hong Kong while two announcers duck behind their desks.

reader comments

312 with 200 posters participating

Share this story

Blizzard has stripped a Hong Kong professional *Hearthstone* player of his tournament prize money and banned him from tournament play for a year after he expressed support for Hong Kong during the livestream of a *Hearthstone* game. Blizzard said that the actions of Ng “Blitzchung” Wai Chung violated Section 6.1 of the tournament’s rules, which prohibits players from doing anything that “offends a portion or group of the public.”

“Grandmasters is the highest tier of *Hearthstone* Esports and we take tournament rule violations very seriously,” Blizzard wrote. “While we stand by one’s right to express individual thoughts and opinions, players and other participants that elect to participate in our esports competitions must abide by the official competition rules.”

Blizzard has deleted the video from its video-on-demand service. But gaming news site Inven Global posted the offending portion to Twitter. According to Inven Global, Blitzchung shouted, in Chinese, “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our age!” He also donned a gas mask, a symbol of

the Hong Kong protestors.

Blitzchung appeared to be egged on by the two announcers on the livestream, who laughed and ducked behind their desk as he made his statement. Blizzard says it has fired the two announcers.

“There are serious protests in my country now,” Blitzchung said in a statement to Inven Global. “My call on stream was just another form of participation of the protest that I wish to grab more attention.”

“I put so much effort in that social movement in the past few months that I sometimes couldn’t focus on preparing my Grandmaster match,” he added. “I know what my action on stream means. It could cause me lot of trouble, even my personal safety in real life. But I think it’s my duty to say something about the issue.”

China uses its economic heft to censor Hong Kong supporters

The status of Hong Kong is a sore subject for the Chinese government. Hong Kong has been part of China since the 1997 handover from British control. But the Chinese government promised to maintain a policy of “one country, two systems,” respecting the greater freedoms enjoyed in Hong Kong until at least 2047.

But many Hong Kongers believe the mainland government hasn’t kept its promise. As a result, the territory has been convulsed by protests in recent months. Protests initially focused on legislation that would allow extraditions from Hong Kong to the mainland, but protestors’ demands have broadened over time. The protestors are now demanding democratic election of Hong Kong’s leaders. Currently, the island’s convoluted electoral process gives the mainland the

de facto ability to choose Hong Kong's leaders.

In recent days, China has been using its economic power to pressure Western companies into censoring pro-Hong Kong speech. Last Friday, Daryl Morey, general manager of the Houston Rockets (popular in China since it drafted Chinese star Yao Ming), tweeted the slogan "Fight for Freedom, Stand with Hong Kong."

The Chinese government reacted with fury. China's state broadcaster said it would suspend broadcasts of NBA preseason games played in China. The Rockets lost Chinese sponsorship deals. Morey quickly deleted his tweet. The NBA responded with a groveling statement recognizing that Morey's comments "deeply offended" people in China, stating that Morey's words don't reflect the views of the NBA or the Rockets and adding that the NBA had "great respect for the history and culture of China." (NBA commissioner Adam Silver later struck a more defiant tone, stating "we are not apologizing for Daryl exercising his freedom of expression.")

The lesson here is that any Western company making significant investments in China is potentially exposing itself to this kind of relationship. Some Western companies have stayed out of China due in part to human rights concerns. Google, for example, pulled out of the Chinese market in 2010. Earlier this year, the company officially canceled plans to launch a censored Chinese version of its search engine after protests inside and outside the company.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1581779