ESPN will air 12 hours of esports including Rocket League, NBA 2K, and Madden

ESPN is set to air 12 hours of esports coverage on April 5th, turning to *NBA 2K*, *Madden NFL 20*, and *Rocket League* tournaments to fill the programming void left behind by traditional sports leagues going on hiatus.

"ESPN Esports Day" is a marathon of live events and taped esports coverage that aired on ESPN2 over the last year, according to a press release. The marathon will begin with three hours of previous *Madden NFL 20* content, including recaps of the *Madden* Classic, Club Championship, and Challenge tournaments.

The *Madden* block will be followed by the F1 Esports Virtual Grand Prix, a live race featuring F1 drivers behind the virtual wheel. *Rocket League* will follow with ESPN2 hosting the Season 8 World Championship Grand Finals, and lead into the heavily anticipated *NBA 2K* tournament, which brings 16 NBA players to participate in a 16-bracket event. ESPN's esports marathon will end with a repeat presentation of the EXP *Apex Legends* Pro-Am from last July.

The industry has seen a surge in interest over the last few weeks

Esports has grown considerably over the last few years, but the industry has seen a surge in interest over the last few weeks. Craig Levine, global chief strategy officer for the *CS:GO* ESL Pro League, previously told *The Verge* that "as other sports and entertainment have gone dark, we've probably inadvertently benefited."

Pro athletes unable to train are flocking to Twitch and YouTube to stream themselves playing virtual versions of the sports that made them famous. F1 driver Lando Norris took part in a virtual, and shorter, version of the Australian Grand Prix using *F1 2019* on March 22nd. The race pulled in 70,000 concurrent viewers on Norris' Twitch channel alone, with a total of around 175,000 people watching the race, which combined Norris' channel and others at one point.

Twitch, one of the main platforms for streaming, has seen an impressive growth as more people spend time at home. The platform went from 982 million hours watched in February to over 1.1 billion hours in March, according to livestreaming tools and services provider StreamElements. That's a 20 percent growth in viewership. Having pro athletes compete in virtual tournaments, and bringing their fans to sites like Twitch, is a win.

It's clear that ESPN wants in on that action. The network has for years, but with no other sports to counter-program against, this is esports' time to shine. The full schedule for ESPN2's esports marathon can be seen on the network's website.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/3/21207446/espn-esports-marathon-tournament-nba2k-madden-nfl-f1-racing-rocket-league