

eSports and MMA could be contenders to football's crown, states Parimatch

The sports industry continues to grow year on year with the popularity of televised events benefitting not just the sports themselves but the betting industry too. As the diversity of sports on offer in the CIS region combines with increased international betting opportunities the market is at an exciting crossroads, something which Sergey Portnov, Parimatch CEO believes heralds "untapped potential" within CIS and beyond. Ahead of this year's ICE London, at which the company will be attending to discuss opportunities in the CIS region and its North American objectives, Portnov discusses the growth of eSports and MMA, the importance of good broadcasting and why collaboration between betting and sports is the key to a bright future for both industries.

Looking ahead to 2019 in which territories do you see the big growth potential for your business and why?

We are focusing on consolidating and building on our market position in the CIS region. With the untapped potential within CIS, there remains a strong opportunity to further grow our revenues and brand within the region. Our aim is to reach 20percent market share in the region.

From an international perspective, we are investing in further developing our software to be able to scale internationally. At the same time, we will be growing our global reputation through a brand relaunch and targeted innovative marketing initiatives, and with partnerships such as our sponsorship of the UFC, to help attract potential partners in new markets. The U.S, of course, now provides also significant growth opportunity for the whole of the industry. We have ambitions of establishing operations there, which would be a significant achievement and milestone for our brand.

What sports are challenging football as the most popular with bettors?

There are several challengers to football, which can vary depending on the market and the season. At different times of the year, tennis, basketball, volleyball and hockey are the closest sports in the CIS region to football, in terms of number of bets placed. These sports are already established and get a lot exposure across the media in the region, they also importantly provide opportunities to bet 24-7 because of the large amount of competitions held internationally.

However, we believe the likely future challengers to football will be MMA and eSports. The popularity of these two sports is growing exponentially across the world and we believe they

represent opportunities for our industry. If we can reach and appeal to these new customers, we will be able to translate the sports' popularity and into betting volume. In July 2018 Parimatch became the official betting and wagering partner for the UFC in EMEA, while we are also investing targeted alternative marketing campaigns for the eSports community. We are ahead of the trend and well positioned to capitalise on these sports exciting betting potential.

What constitutes a good sport for the betting industry – is it the profile of a competition eg. the English Premier League is broadcast to 643m homes in 212 territories – or is it the structure of the game and the ability to offer a variety of different bets eg. cricket?

There are a lot of aspects that make a sport a good for the betting industry, but ultimately it comes down to the popularity and exposure of the sport. The support of teams and players creates the betting interest, but this must be completed by the chance for the fans to follow and watch the sport.

In tennis for example, 75percent of bets placed with Parimatch are live bets (next point, game, set etc.). Without the right broadcasting of the sport, we could lose this revenue. Whereas with basketball, which also has a large following, because NBA games are broadcasted at night in the CIS region we can't fully capitalise on its live betting potential.

Can the betting industry help build the profile of a sport – if so can you give some examples?

The betting industry has a great impact on sports. It is statistically proven that sports bettors watch more sports than non-bettors do. Therefore, it stands to reason that if more fans bet on a sport, it will increase its popularity and following. From an entertainment perspective, it simply complements the sport by creating an emotional connection. It develops a vested interest, which leads to fans following a sport or spectacle more closely.

Furthermore, a great deal of revenue from the betting industry is invested back into sports through broadcasters, as well as leagues and teams. In Britain, betting companies place between 20 and 30 percent of annual revenue (estimated to be £14+ billion for the industry) on advertising – hugely promoting and financially supporting the sports. At Parimatch we sponsor eight teams, and seven sporting federations. These are mutually beneficial for our brand and the sports and we look forward to growing the profile of both industries as we continue to expand as a company.

Parimatch will be heading to ICE London in February to develop its market position in the CIS region and promote its growing portfolio of daily sporting events, leagues and

championships, as well as games and entertainments. For more information on the features and services offered by Parimatch, visit: parimatch.com/en/live.html