

From Michael Jordan to Drake: The athletes and celebs who invested millions in esports in 2018

[Tom Huddleston Jr.](#) 21 Hours Ago



In case you missed it, esports are big business now and competitive gamers spent 2018 continuing to capture the attention (and the money) of the traditional sports world.

The esports industry is on pace to bring in more than \$900 million in revenue this year, and that number could reach as high as \$2.4 billion by 2020, [according](#) to gaming research firm Newzoo. Competitive gaming has taken such a leap into the mainstream in recent years that even Wall Street giant Goldman Sachs is following the industry's growth, with the firm recently predicting that, by 2022, the audience for esports [will grow to 276 million people](#), putting it on par with the

most popular traditional sports, including the NFL.

Unsurprisingly, the rapid growth of esports, and the vast amounts of money and exposure at stake, has attracted a great amount of interest from investors who want to get in on the action. Even before this year, several big names were already investing in esports companies and teams, including celebrities and athletes from traditional sports.

Among them: Mark Cuban, NBA Hall of Famer Shaquille O'Neal, former MLB star Alex Rodriguez, high-profile NFL owners Robert Kraft and Jerry Jones, and celebrities like Ashton Kutcher, Tony Robbins, and Jennifer Lopez.

Those athletes, team owners and celebrities helped pave the way for more big names to join the ranks of esports investors in 2018, when everyone from Michael Jordan to Drake was looking to pump more money into the industry.

Here's a look at some of the biggest athletes and celebrities who invested in esports in 2018:

Michael Jordan



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Jordan is a basketball legend and the current principal owner of the NBA's Charlotte Hornets. With a fortune that [Forbes](#) estimates is worth nearly \$1.7 billion, Jordan is an active investor in the worlds of sports and technology. He owns a [minority stake](#) in the MLB's Miami Marlins and, in the past two years, he's [invested in tech startups](#) like smart headphones company Muzik and [Gigster](#), the online platform for freelance web designers.

In October, Jordan took his first leap into the world of esports by leading a group of investors that put [\\$26 million](#) into the competitive gaming company aXiomatic Gaming, which owns the [popular esports organization Team Liquid](#). (Jordan isn't even aXiomatic's only NBA connection, as the company's co-executive chairman is Ted Leonsis, owner of the Washington Wizards, one of the teams Jordan played for during his NBA career.)

Jordan called esports "a fast-growing, international industry" in a

[statement](#) at the time of his investment.

Drake

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The Canadian rapper (whose real name is Aubrey Graham) is not only a Grammy-winning and charts-topping recording artist, he's now also the co-owner of an esports team. [In October](#), Drake teamed up with Scooter Braun (the Hollywood manager who represents stars like Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande) to [invest an undisclosed amount](#) of money in the esports organization 100 Thieves. With their investment, Drake and Braun also became co-owners of 100 Thieves, which fields esports teams that compete in games like "Call of Duty" and "League of Legends."

Drake is no stranger to the gaming community, either. The rapper made waves in March, when he played "Fortnite" online with the

massively popular gaming streamer [Tyler "Ninja" Blevins](#) — a live-streamed pairing that attracted more than [635,000 concurrent viewers](#) on the Amazon-owned video game streaming platform Twitch.

Stephen Curry and Andre Iguodala



Scott Cunningham | NBAE via Getty Images

Golden State Warriors teammates Stephen Curry (L) and Andre Iguodala (R) high-five during a December 2018 game.

Curry might be a two-time NBA MVP, but his Golden State Warriors teammate, Andre Iguodala, is the team's star when it comes to investing in startups. Iguodala, who [Fast Company](#) referred to as "the NBA's ambassador to Silicon Valley," has invested in tech startups like direct-to-consumer mattress company Casper while introducing his teammates to Silicon Valley bigwigs like Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff and venture capitalist Mary Meeker.

So, it's no surprise that Iguodala and Curry both got involved in esports together for the first time in 2018. In July, the pair was part of

a group that [invested \\$37 million](#) in the esports organization TSM, which was founded by 26-year-old gamer Andy Dinh and fields competitive gaming teams for games like "League of Legends" and "Fortnite."

Steve Young



Leon Halip | Getty Images

Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young.

NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young was also in on the \$37 million TSM investment alongside Curry and Iguodala. ([TSM said](#) part of the funding it raised in July will go toward building a new 15,000-to-20,000-square-foot esports facility in Los Angeles.) Young is a prolific investor among ex-athletes, as the former 49ers star is a managing director of private equity firm HGGC, which oversees over \$4 billion in investments.

Sean "Diddy" Combs



Getty Images

Sean Combs is a rapper, known variously as Puff Daddy, P. Diddy, Diddy, Puff and Puffy. He was born in Harlem and raised by his mother, a schoolteacher living in public housing. , and the family relocated to Mount Vernon, just outside of the Bronx. Combs attended Howard University in Washington , D.C, while simultaneously interning at Uptown Records in New York City. The internship won out, and he dropped out of college to focus on Uptown, where he was instrumental in developing such R&B artists

The rapper formerly known as Puff Daddy and P. Diddy jumped aboard the esports trend in November, when Combs joined a group of investors that provided [\\$30.5 million](#) in funding to PlayVS. Based in Los Angeles, PlayVS is an esports league that [partners with high schools](#) around the US to create an infrastructure that allows high school students to represent their schools in esports competitions while trying to land some of the growing number of [collegiate scholarships](#) now available for competitive gamers. Combs served as an angel investor in the funding round for PlayVS.

The November fundraising round actually came on the heels of a [\\$15 million investment](#) in PlayVS that the esports league picked up in June

from a group of investors that included the San Francisco 49ers, Twitch co-founder Kevin Lin, and professional athletes such as former NBA player Baron Davis and Los Angeles Chargers player Russell Okung.

Kevin Durant



Gregory Shamus via Getty

Kevin Durant #35 of the Golden State Warriors

Much like some of his Golden State Warriors teammates (Curry and Iguodala, above), Durant is an active investor in Silicon Valley startups. In fact, when Durant left Oklahoma City to sign with the Warriors in 2016, [he also launched the Durant Company](#), his own personal startup for managing [his tech industry investments](#), which include scooter company Lime and Postmates.

In February, Durant added an esports venture to his growing investment portfolio when he joined a group that invested \$38 million in Vision Esports, an esports investment fund and management

company co-founded by former NBA player and actor Rick Fox, MGM Resorts executive Chris Nordling, and the NHL's San Jose Sharks minority owner Stratton Scavos. Vision Esports owns the esports team Echo Fox as well as esports content creator Vision Entertainment and the video game record-tracking site Twin Galaxies. Other investors in Vision Esports include the New York Yankees, the St. Louis Cardinals, and Durant's business partner, Rich Kleiman.

Odell Beckham Jr.



Getty Images

Odell Beckham Jr. of the New York Giants

The All-Pro New York Giants wide receiver also joined Durant in contributing to the \$38 million fundraising round for Vision Esports in February. Beckham, who signed a [record-breaking \\$95 million deal](#) with the Giants in August, says he has been [an avid gamer](#) since childhood, and he even [faced off](#) against rapper A\$AP Rocky in a marketing stunt for EA Sports' "Fifa 19" recently.

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