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FINNISH HOCKEY LEAGUE RESTARTS VIA E-SPORTS

 SPORT & FITNESS

The top Finnish Hockey League has decided to hold its playoffs as an e-sports competition

Spotted: For many sports fans, the suspension of almost all games during the COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge distress. Leagues around the world are working on ways to resume activity, some suggesting playing in stadiums without fans, and keeping the teams in strict quarantine so they have contact only with each other. However, the Finnish Hockey League has come up with a unique alternative.

The top-tier Finnish hockey league, Liiga, is restarting its playoff season – as an e-sport. They have teamed up with Finnish e-sports broadcaster Telia to set up a tournament that will be played using EA Sports' *NHL 20* video game. Each team will choose a representative to play throughout the playoffs for their team. Teams can choose either a real-life hockey player or a Finnish celebrity or hockey fan to represent the team.

The games will be broadcast on national TV, where professional commentators will give the broadcast a real-life feel. All ten Liiga teams that were slated to make the finals will take part in the online playoffs. The series will be played as a best three-out-of-five, and teams will be matched up based on their rankings in the league's regular season.

Finnish Hockey League marketing manager Aija Saha explained that the idea behind the e-sports playoff was to bring hockey fans something to look forward to, **saying** the league, "thought about whether we could bring something fun and entertaining for hockey fans. There were a lot of requests from the fans for the playoffs to be played unofficially virtually, and we started to create the concept together with Telia."

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were seeing a big rise in the professionalisation of e-sports. From the development of [varsity e-sports](#) leagues to [Formula 1 e-sport](#) series', virtual sports is firmly on the rise, with the pandemic accelerating the growth.

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Takeaway:

The Liiga's solution to holding the playoffs is more about entertainment than providing a serious sports match. But elsewhere, leagues are growing increasingly concerned about the lack of revenue caused by the wholesale cancellation of playoffs, games and entire seasons. A solution that includes e-sports may be one way to not only help keep up the spirits of sports fans, but could also help raise funds to keep the teams going.