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## Houston esports team hires president of business operations to grow brand locally

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The Houston Outlaws esports team hired a president to grow its brand locally.

The Outlaws, the local franchise in the Overwatch League from California-based gaming giant Blizzard Entertainment Inc., named Chris DeAppolonio president, according to an Aug. 7 press release. DeAppolonio previously served as executive vice president of partnerships at Frisco, Texas-based Infinite Esports & Entertainment. Infinite, the previous parent company of the Outlaws and OpTic Gaming, was acquired by Los Angeles-based Immortals Gaming Club in June.

In this role, DeAppolonio is charged with leading all business and competitive operations for the Outlaws, as well as growing the esports franchise's brand in Houston, Austin and San Antonio, per the release. The move comes in preparation for the Overwatch League's 2020 season, during which each franchise city will host at least two "homestand weekends" of competitive play. John Spiher, director of partnerships for the Outlaws, told the Houston Business Journal in July that the league was close to announcing exactly when and where the matches will be played in the Houston area.

Under its current format, most league matches are held at the Blizzard Arena Los Angeles in Burbank, California. Houston will see at least two weekends of play during the 2020 season and will host Overwatch League teams from Atlanta, Florida, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

"I'm thrilled to be leading one of the premier teams in the Overwatch League, especially as we look towards our 2020 home matches," DeAppolonio said in the Aug. 7 release. "Having previously worked on the Outlaws brand and with the players and staff, I have great relationships in place and know we have a very bright future."



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Chris DeAppolonio, president of the Houston Outlaws esports franchise

Ownership of the Outlaws franchise might change hands again soon. Houston real estate investor Lee Zieben, president of the Zieben Group, reportedly plans to purchase the Outlaws in a \$40 million deal that could close in late August. A sale had been planned since IGC acquired Infinite in June — IGC was required to sell the Outlaws because it also owns the Los Angeles Valiant, another team in the Overwatch League.

The Outlaws boast sponsorships with major brands like Bellevue, Washington-based T-Mobile U.S. Inc. (Nasdaq: TMUS), San Antonio-based grocer H-E-B and Grapevine, Texas-based video game retailer GameStop (NYSE: GME). Spiher told the HBJ in July that the Outlaws are looking to partner with other notable Texas brands. He said that companies like Whataburger and Buc-ee's jump to mind, but the Outlaws are generally interested in partnering with brands marketing to people between the ages of 18 and 25.

Blizzard Entertainment Inc. is a division of California-based Activision Blizzard Inc. (Nasdaq: ATVI).

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