

Brands in gaming from the mouth of players

By [Emily Stander](#)

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The conversation around brands connecting with esports teams and players has been a hot topic for a while now. Many have said that it is an important step for progress in esports, especially in South Africa.



Image supplied: Thabo Mloi

But how does it affect the players?

After winning a Fifa festival in 2018, Thabo Mloi signed to multi-gaming organisation (MGO) Goliath Gaming, which was the start of his competitive Fifa career. Since then, he has found incredible success and opportunities such as travelling to Dubai for Fifa qualifiers - the first time he had ever been on a plane and travelled outside of South Africa.

However, this wasn't the only time Mloi's career would change in a meaningful way.

"My life changed in a big way in 2020 when Red Bull signed me as their first esports player in Africa," he said. "I definitely feel a lot more confident, and mentally stronger – both in-game and in my personal life – because of my journey with Red Bull and their support."

Mloi said that his opportunity to spend time at the Red Bull Athlete Performance Centre equipped him with essential insight and knowledge about the right kind of nutrition and mental and physical focus.



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"In my opinion, it is essential for brands to work with up-and-coming esports athletes in terms of sponsorship as there is great mutual benefit for the brand and the esports athlete," Moloi said. "The esports athlete is afforded the opportunity to commit more of their time and effort into their craft and to improve and reach their full potential through brand sponsorship and support; and for the brand, the gaming and esports audience is an incredibly engaging and loyal audience."

What does this mean?

Essentially, brand presence in esports and gaming means more than sponsoring tournaments.

Connecting with an audience requires insight into what their needs are and how to meet those needs. As such, partnering with young and up-and-coming players such as Moloi gives players the opportunity to understand how to perform at their best.

Consequently, this also brings South African esports players to the forefront of international success - and the subsequent brand working with these players.

For example, Moloi has achieved multiple first places in tournaments like the VS Gaming Fifa Festival, Bravado Gaming Funky Fifa Festival, Orlando Pirates esports Fifa tournament, Nodwin Gaming Inkosi Super Cup and more during his career since joining Goliath Gaming and partnering with Red Bull as the first African continent esports athlete.



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However, being an esports athlete has its challenges beyond training to be the best. As a relatively costly sport, there are a lot of talented players who struggle to find opportunities because of financial restraints.

Moloi said that the support from brands enables teams and players to afford the gear they need to compete at their very best and focus their time and energy on competing "as opposed to having to worry about how they will pay the bills each month, which is an extra stress distracting them from keeping their head in the game".

As such, brands have a unique position to not only help players with these opportunities but also be a driving force in putting South Africa on the map internationally.

Esports is a continuously growing field around the world and in South Africa - and if players have the right resources, they have the opportunity to be placed amongst the best.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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