



Angel, receiving a leadership award last year

### Introduction

**Feel free to introduce yourself as if this is a TV interview and the audience at the other end of the remote control doesn't know you even slightly.**

My introduction would depend on the theme of the interview, but assuming a video games theme I would simply say, "Hi, my name is Angel Munoz, founder and former president of the Cyberathlete Professional League, also known as The CPL".

**Now even for those who are broadly familiar with you and your E-sports based activity, the past two years of your life have looked like a complete mystery. What have you been up to and where?**

After I signed the final agreement to sell the CPL assets in August 2008, I decided to spend some time focusing on my family and close friends, while trying to recover from extreme exhaustion. I also began to quietly study the unprecedented transformation in human social interaction taking place at a global scale.

This analysis was based on my premonition (and now certainty) that the larger opportunities of the near future will be seized by those that manage to correctly decipher the current flow of online interactions. In retrospect it's a bit shocking that this process of recuperation took almost two years. Oh, and I still live in Dallas, Texas.



CPL Founder and former President, Angel Munoz

**How come, after the whole CPL story, you didn't get sucked up into starting up another project in the industry, such as a team-based company?**

I strongly resisted the temptation of immediately jumping into something new. I guess because after eleven years of running the CPL I was left with pretty much an empty tank. I was honestly too exhausted to try something new and needed just to enjoy the simplicities of life.

### Angel vs. demon

**Your proverbial "E-sports baby", the CPL, is definitely something of important personal significance and one of those things which have, at the same time, shaped the history of the industry. Given all that's happened with it, would you call it a failure or an achievement?**

If you would have asked me this question a few years ago, I would have probably hesitated on the answer, but today I can unequivocally respond that the CPL was a huge trendsetting achievement on all levels. It is easy to sit back and cast disparaging judgements on what could only have been experienced in first person. Working on launching a new sport was both exhilarating and tiring, but seems to have had a lasting impact on e-sports and even on video gaming in general.

**You, along with your colleagues, can definitely be considered entrepreneurial pioneers of the industry. An exact reiteration of the project today would definitely not be as valuable as the way you guys first entered the market. Where was the concept inspired from?**

The initial spark that launched the whole venture was a persistent thought in my head about calling competitive gamers "cyberathletes". During that time I was reading the novel "Neuromancer" by William Gibson, in it the author describes a global computer network, linking all people and sources of information, which one could navigate as through a virtual landscape. He called it "cyberspace". It was quite obvious to me that gamers were competing in a similar virtual landscape with highly specialized skills, somewhat analogous to those displayed by professional athletes.

That's how the term "cyberathlete", a combination of the words "cyberspace" and "athlete", came about. It seemed so appropriate and defining to me. Soon after I contacted Stevie Case, a prominent female gamer that was creating a serious buzz after beating John Romero in a Quake deathmatch, to ask for her help. Stevie Case moved to Dallas and enthusiastically assisted me in hiring the right people to launch the CPL. The initial CPL staff were very focused on tournament events, as most of them had been leading organizers of the first two Quakecon events that took place in 1996-1997. And the rest is history.

A few days ago, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the word "Cyberathlete" is defined in Webster's Quotations, Facts and Phrases (page 156) as a "term coined by Angel Munoz on June 26, 1997 to first describe a competitive player of computer games".



A CPL event seven years ago

**In that sense, many consider you the "father of E sports". Do you agree?**

I suggest that the expression might be properly adjusted to "father of professional computer game competitions". E sports encompass a wider range of competitions, platforms, disciplines and practices that were not even remotely anticipated when we were hosting the first CPL events.

**Many people consider criticizing this part, but if it happened, I truly care to admire you, since I do think it's something ultimately impossible to achieve today: did ever you cash in on a 6 figures annual salary from E sports?**

It may seem as a play on semantics, but I did not generate a salary from being president of the CPL. My salary was derived from my primary duties as CEO of NewWorld, a management and investment firm, which I still run today. As not to appear that I'm playing a shell game with your readers, let's be clear. The CPL was the primary revenue base of NewWorld in that time period. Therefore it is absolutely true that my base salary was six figures during the period that I ran the CPL.

**CPL – shaped or destroyed E-sports?**

**I will ask you now to possibly outline the key moments of CPL's life cycle. How did the idea start and how did it actually materialize?**

I've already shared with you something about the birth of the CPL concept, but unknown to most is the fact that the CPL was not initially conceived as a league. In fact it was first called the "CyberAthlete" organization (yes initially the "A" was also capitalized). The ubiquitous CPL logo, which was created by Rex Mendoza on a Macaroni Grillpaper tablecloth in 1997, is in fact just a "C" and an "A" interlocked. There was no intention to represent a reversed "P" or an "L" in that original draft of the logo, but it

translated so well that a few months later when we officially became the CPL we decided to keep it.

Back to your question a key moment for us was the sudden transformation from a small gamer organization to a full-fledged professional sports league. That was a very pivotal point for us and focused the entire team in a clear direction, while also allowing us to define our plan of action.

**By the same token, when did the CPL hit its apex and of course when did it all start to go wrong?**

I think the apex was 2004, which was a great year for the league. Some of the best matches and events took place that year; the league was profitable and everyone loved us. Then 2005 came around. That was the year we launched the \$1,000,000 World Tour with ten stops around the world. That single tour strained the entire CPL staff to the point of complete exhaustion, staff attrition was destabilizing our operations and I somewhat realized that we had hit a ceiling for what could be accomplished by the CPL in professional gaming.

Then, mostly by marketing association and comparison, the World Tour spawned a great number of competitor leagues, all promising sponsors they could do much better than us.

It's no major secret that I was not a fan of our primary sponsor, mostly because of their attempts to forcibly control the league. When I officially declined their ultimatum to have one of their employees and a contractor run the CPL, they predictably bailed to greener pastures. That's when I started to lose my handle on the CPL. Extremely exhausted, with a small over-worked staff and a number of growing issues, I started to think that maybe it was time for me to exit the industry I had helped create.

I even lost interest in defending myself from the barrage of false accusations that were quietly promoted by some of our new competitors. I distanced myself more and more from the gamers. It became agonizing to show up at my own events, and finally I decided to sell the CPL and allow someone with a fresh view to expand on the original concept.



Psychedelic Angel

**What do you think made the CPL stand out from the crowd, in the past?**

Well arguably, our events were some of the best ever produced in e-sports. The CPL had a talented staff that could execute on the directive that all CPL events should always be realized at a higher standard, but once we peaked in 2005 that became impossible for us to accomplish.

**Do you find it fair that you've basically taken up the entire media hit for "CPL's failure"? I mean at the end of the day, it wasn't only you controlling the situation, or at least seeking to control it.**

That's part of the job: leaders take the credit, and if they are good they also take the blame. I do not think it's particularly unjust that people use comic book standards in their analysis of the CPL: Good vs. Evil - Good = the gamers and Bad = CPL or me.

Only if life were as simple...

I'm not advocating for complete absolution, as I know we made mistakes, but the extreme polarization of my character perpetuated by a motivated minority is ludicrous at best. On the other hand, the fact that some people spend so much time trying to define me, after two years of being absent from the scene, is actually a bit entertaining.

**I don't want to focus on the negatives, but it's impossible to avoid unravelling the controversy behind the CPL. Prize money is certainly a big part and although you've blogged in the past about this, the situation remains unclear to many. Briefly, who got paid and who didn't, for their tournament achievements?**

I don't have a blog, but I do on occasion answer general questions at Formspring. The question of the CPL prizes came up quite recently, and I gave a thorough answer. Your readers may want to read [my response](#).

Please note that in reading my response I did omit the possibility of error, which of course occurs in all human activities, but still the pervasive concept that the CPL (or me by consequence) deliberately did not pay cash prizes is absolutely untrue.

**Looking backwards, do you think those mind blowing event prize pots were simply too good to be true?**

No that's not at all true. The issues were a lot more complex and diverse. Some were quite unexpected, for example, that the process of professionalizing an online enthusiast market composed mostly of anonymous teenagers proved a lot more daunting than any of us at the CPL ever anticipated.

**Was it a mistake from your side to base a big amount of prize money on sponsors paying out? Is there any other better way to do it?**

No, that format was the best for us and it worked until some sponsors failed in their responsibility. I'm really not sure what's best for e-sports now.



Angel, ten years ago, with Mike Wardwell, CPL's first long-term Commissioner

**Do you consider you might have jumped ahead of the tide, in the sense that you've sought to move the industry quicker than it would have been self sustainable?**

Maybe, but I would have not done it any differently. The sport required a powerful jump-start and the growth could have been sustainable. The biggest issue that really impacted the CPL financially was the looming global recession, which I had prognosticated to friends a few years before it was recognized by the media.

A global recession is a shattering event for all businesses and while at first it did not seem to be that disastrous, marketing and branding activities from many sponsor corporations in our niche market would soon be severely reduced. A draining pool of sponsor resources that a growing number of competitors, teams and leagues were depending on for their own survival seemed to me like a sure recipe for disaster. When the CPL buyers first approached me I shared my concern about the impact of the global recession on the industry, and they explained that they were planning on waiting two years before launching the CPL to give the global markets a chance for recovery. That seems to have been a very wise decision.

**Either way, some mistakes were done. If you'd have a chance today, what would you choose to change in terms of your past actions?**

When you live as long as I have I'm sure there are many things people would change if given the opportunity – not only professionally, but also personally. While it's certainly nice to fantasize about a perfect world where no one ever makes mistakes, humanity by its very nature is plagued with frailty. I find the mental exercise of picking past events that I would wish to change as self defeating and pointless. I honestly never engage in that kind of thinking and embrace the past with all of its imperfections.

**Passing on to more recent times, I'm certain you're familiar with Tonya's recent allegations, launched through a series of blogs. What did you make of it, what are your comments?**

At first the statements seemed mean-spirited and more like personal attacks on her partners, but they were also quite revealing. It seems that some of her statements were based on the experiences that unbeknown to me, may have taken place behind the scenes during the initial acquisition discussions. Although by the time her opinion piece was made public the acquisition had been moved to an entity in Singapore, therefore it was not really applicable to what was actually going at that specific time.

**Catching up on some of the things she mentioned, how do you explain the Abu Dhabi investment company? What's your side of the story there?**

I only know what I was told: that the investors wanted to remain private and that the acquiring company would be incorporated in Seychelles, a tax haven. Nothing jumped out at me as particularly troubling, as I have been involved in international acquisitions before and there can be many corporate layers, and its common that some international investors prefer anonymity.

Anyway regardless of the published claims, after the acquisition process was taken over by WoLong Ventures the transaction was quickly completed with full transparency, efficiency and professionalism.



Tonya Welch (far left), Scott Valencia and Angel (right) in happier times (2004)

### **The 2010 transaction**

**Well given that CPL and CAL brands have recently been sold I can only assume that they've still been under your management the entire time?**

Yes and no. The brands were licensed to the buyers for their exclusive use, but the actual trademarks were not transferred and remained in escrow at the law firm of Storm LLC in Dallas, until the transaction was finalized on August 23, 2010.

**What made you close the deal with Ryan and WoLong?**

I never spoke to Ryan Schumacher. I negotiated exclusively with the Board of Directors (via a corporate liaison) and the Chairman of the Board Mr. Frank Yong, which I have known and respected for many years. I have remained in discussions with WoLong about the possibility of future cooperation and partnership in industries outside of e-sports.

**Was it something purely financial, since bad mouths say that you and Ryan used to not get along at all back in the days; how come you've now managed to shake hands on this then?**

I don't remember not liking Ryan, but it's certainly a possibility. We recently chatted on the phone and he was very pleasant and seemed to have a decent plan to move the CPL in a new direction. I told him he could call me anytime if he has questions, but that's really all we have ever discussed.

**Quoting from your recent press release "Neither NewWorld nor its shareholders have retained any interest or control in either property". What's New World's direction from here on, will it invest in other E-sports related projects or it seeks to explore other fields?**

NewWorld is no longer pursuing e-sports and has moved to its core-competency: content creation. A field that has proven challenging for many, but may hold some promise in the area of licensing and cross-platform expansion. On a personal level, I'm on the verge of launching another new venture. Although I can't disclose any details right now, I'm happy to share with your readers the first public release of our brand new logo:



**Who else is part of NewWorld and what other investments does the company actively hold at the moment?**

We are currently working on a growing network of podcasts:

[Avault Podcast](#)  
[Stevie FTW](#)  
[Evil Ed Podcast](#)  
[Game with Heart Podcast](#)  
[Walking Dead Podcast](#)  
[GTFQ.tv](#)

Also a few months ago we announced Joe Garagiola, Jr as our Chairman of the Board of Directors. Joe is also the Senior Vice President of baseball operations for Major League Baseball (MLB).

#### **Outro**

**E-sports, as it is today, sits at a stand-still. Do you think this is it? Has it reached its maximum potential?**

It would be unfair of me to comment on the current potential of e-sports, but my cursory glance at the sport seems to confirm that it's in a state of suspended animation. Did someone park the car and throw away the keys? It's concerning because pioneers like myself have already taken the arrows, its now up to the settlers to take the land.

**I suppose it's pointless to ask if you'd ever make a comeback in E-sports, or is it?**

Interestingly, I get offers from different organizations to lead or help them breakthrough into the industry. All of these nice offers have been politely declined. If I decide to make a comeback it will be with my own company, on my own terms and based on my own vision.

**The floor is all yours for any message or additions you'd like to send out!**

Just a heartfelt thank you to the inner circle of family and friends that have always remained loyal and helped me get through two years of exhaustion recovery. Thanks to [my Facebook friends](#) for making me laugh and sending me so many encouraging messages. Last but not least, thanks to the haters, because they keep the myth alive and motivate me to be a better person every day.