

# Ninja out: Gaming megastar leaves Twitch for Mixer

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Fortnite superstar Tyler "Ninja" Blevins has left Twitch and is taking his video game live streams to Microsoft's Mixer platform, a stunning switch that could have wide-ranging consequences for the rapidly growing industry.

Blevins announced his move Thursday , ending a hugely profitable partnership with Twitch, a live streaming giant owned by Amazon.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities Twitch has provided me," Blevins told The Associated Press. "But as I looked at the next step in my career, I wanted to be somewhere that empowered me to push the boundaries of gaming and achieve bigger goals within the industry. Mixer provides me with more ways to connect with my community."

Blevins has earned millions broadcasting himself playing Fortnite and other video games on Twitch and YouTube. He has over 14 million followers on Twitch, and the platform has hosted many of his pioneering esports moments, including a Fortnite event in March 2018 featuring rappers Drake and Travis Scott and football player JuJu Smith-Schuster that propelled the game into a full-blown cultural phenomenon.

Blevins will host his first Mixer live stream Friday from Lollapalooza, a four-day music festival in Chicago. The 28-year-old has publicly invited Kyle "Bugha" Giersdorf—the 16-year-old who earned \$3 million Sunday for winning the inaugural Fortnite World Cup—to join him. Blevins said he will not actively recruit other gamers to leave their current platform,

but if more streamers follow him to Mixer, it could become a legitimate competitor in a market dominated by Twitch.

"I want my friends to make their own decisions for what platforms they choose to play on," Blevins said. "With that being said, I will welcome anyone with open arms who wants to join me."

In a statement to the AP, Twitch said, "We've loved watching Ninja on Twitch over the years and are proud of all that he's accomplished for himself and his family, and the gaming community. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors."

Mixer launched in 2016 but hasn't nearly matched Twitch's popularity—Microsoft reported 10 million monthly users last year, compared to well over 100 million for Twitch, which launched in 2011. Mixer has been praised for its interface and its management of toxic players, though, and Blevins said he expects to connect to fans with "more interactivity and variety than before" because of Mixer's technological abilities—for example, streamers can share their controller with fans, and the chat function has a greater array of features. Blevins also anticipates the deal with Mixer will free him up to do more live events and other non-streaming content.

"I love what I do and will still be actively streaming and continuing to interact with my fans," he said. "With Mixer, I get to further engage with the tools on the platform, which I am excited about."

Within 40 minutes of the announcement, Mixer was the top trending topic on Twitter in the United States, and Ninja's Mixer page had over 28,000 subscribers.

Blevins first emerged in the streaming community eight years ago while playing Halo. After some competitive success with battle royale games

H1Z1 and PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, he broke into the mainstream as the face of Fortnite last year. He's the most followed gamer on Twitch, although his popularity has slowed. He ranked fourth in hours watched on the platform in June, about 6 million hours behind Turner "Tfue" Tenney, according to StreamElements.

Blevins routinely broadcasts with other pro gamers, including friends Ben "DrLupo" Lupo, Jack "CouRage" Dunlop and Tim "TimtheTatman" Betar. He's been criticized for not inviting more female players into his streams, and that intensified when he told Polygon last year that his concern was "if there's a hint of flirting, that is going to be taken and going to be put on every single video and be clickbait forever." Blevins married in 2017.

Blevins said that at Mixer, "I will do my part to ensure I am helping to create a fun and welcoming community," and that includes playing with female gamers.

"I will play with any gamer who loves gaming as much as I do," he said.

Blevins has famously had his wife, Jessica, manage his business during his gaming career, but he's expanded the operation by adding Loaded management group and law firm Loeb & Loeb. That team is banking that Blevins' immense fan base will follow him to a new platform. Mixer streams online and also via Microsoft's Xbox consoles, and Fortnite is popular on the Xbox, which should help. Loaded CEO Brandon Freytag believes Blevins' clout will bring fans to Mixer, calling him "the Michael Jordan of gaming."

"We are working toward Tyler being synonymous in every household, so if you know gaming, you know Tyler," Freytag said.

The move to Mixer is one of a few changes for Blevins this year. He's

also attempting to branch beyond the digital space, starting by authoring three books that will be published later this year, including a how-to on streaming video games and a graphic novel.

"It is the ability to achieve bigger goals in gaming and further expand my own personal brand within the industry," Blevins said.

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