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# SportsBubble's New App Helps Fans Navigating Maze of Games

By Brian Steinberg ▾



All it took for [Lydia Murphy-Stephans](#) to start trying to solve one of the greatest problems confronting the sports industry was a plate of hot wings.

While watching an NBA Finals game in 2018, she left her living room to get the snacks ready in the kitchen – and set about a task that she felt should have been a lot simpler: trying to stream the match on her iPad.

“The game was on ABC, so I clicked on the ABC app and it was black. So I went to Google to the search for ‘Watch NBA Finals.’ My iPad had 200 million hits. I went to the Watch ESPN app, and opened it but – this was 2018 – the connectivity wasn’t what it was today. My provider is Comcast Xfinity, and I had to get off the ESPN app and go to Xfinity to authenticate, to get permission,” Murphy-Stephans recalls. “It took me eight minutes.” When she finally got through, she realized the game that was on in the living room was at least a minute ahead of what she was streaming on her tablet.

On Wednesday, the former ABC Sports programming executive and president of Pac-12 Networks, tries to make the process of finding sports easier for anyone who has ever felt flustered when working to find out which linear outlet or streaming service is offering a specific game and then navigating the particulars of getting there. Her company, [SportsBubble](#), is launching the WatchSports app, which helps users find professional and college sports as well as esports sessions at any time of day. The service is now available at Apple’s App Store, searchable under “WatchSports,” and it is expected to be available sooner at WatchSports.app and at Google Play for Android.

By forging new rights deals that put some games on traditional TV and others on streaming venues, “we have created this very complex situation,” says the entrepreneur. “It is becoming more and more difficult for fans to easily connect to what they wanted to watch, whether it’s free or behind a paywall.”

A new set of rights deals have splintered some of the biggest sports seasons, with traditional media companies foregoing some portion of traditional league play due to soaring costs and digital players wetting their beak on the remainders. Consider [Major League Baseball](#), which now has national games available on ESPN, Fox Sports and Turner Sports, with a Sunday-morning series launching on NBCU’s Peacock and a Friday-night package streaming on Apple TV+. The NFL’s

“Thursday Night Football” has moved to Amazon’s Prime Video. Local games can also be tough to find, between regional sports networks and some new twists, like Amazon taking over a package of Yankees games that once aired in the local New York City vicinity. Sprinkle in esports, which are found more readily in new-tech venues like Twitch or YouTube, and the project becomes even more daunting.

The hodgepodge of games and broadcasts points to growing demand for so-called “discovery engines” that help consumers find their way through a maze of options and venues, and also suggest other programming choices. “Sports is now moving into that,” says Chris Bevilacqua, the founder of CSTV who is now a sports-media entrepreneur and an advisor to SportsBubble.

Sports isn’t the only area of entertainment where the complexities of access have begun to affect the ease of enjoyment. Tracking down a movie can also become a quest on the order of the one undertaken in “Lord of the Rings.” Most streaming services are sealed off from their rivals, though Amazon’s Fire interface offers users the ability to search for any title, and then click their way to the service that offers it, while offering to pay a fee or take up a subscription.

The Watch Sports app aims to take some of the difficulty out of the search. Users can examine listings for college, professional and esports and a display of scheduled matches can connect fans to the platform where the game is playing. SportsBubble’s early partners include [DAZN](#), Pac-12 Conference and Networks, National Women’s Soccer League, Ladies Professional Golf Association, Athletes Unlimited, US Speed Skating and the Premier Hockey Federation.

“This app is not only a new way for fans to easily find and access live sports, but will serve as another great partnership for DAZN to continue to grow its subscriber base,” says Joe Markowski, executive vice president at DAZN Group.

The WatchSports will soon offer a SportsPassport” feature allowing its users to personalize their preferences, set up notifications for game alerts and receive special offers. Sports Passport will also enable in-app authentication so that users don’t have to leave the process to sign in elsewhere. Pay per view event purchases and connections to sports wagering will also be possible.

To generate revenue, Watch Sports will collect a “referral fee” from some subscription-based sports when new user signs up, says Murphy-Stephans. The “passport” tier will also come with a small fee attached.

Access to sports is something Murphy-Stephans has pushed for most of her career. The former Olympic speed-skater and coach networked her way into a job at ABC Sports, where she became the unit’s first female vice president and eventually oversaw its venerable “Wide World of Sports” showcase. She would eventually move on to senior roles at Oxygen and MSG Network before embarking on a six-year run at Pac-12.

Some early skeptics asked Murphy-Stephans why sports fans simply couldn’t use Google to find their favorite event, and her reply was, “How’s that working out for you?” She has met with executives at every major sports league and big sports-media operation, she says, and expects to do more with many of them in the months to come.

“I’m sure I’m not the first person who had this idea,” Murphy-Stephans says. “But I do have the resources and knowledge of how to tackle it.”