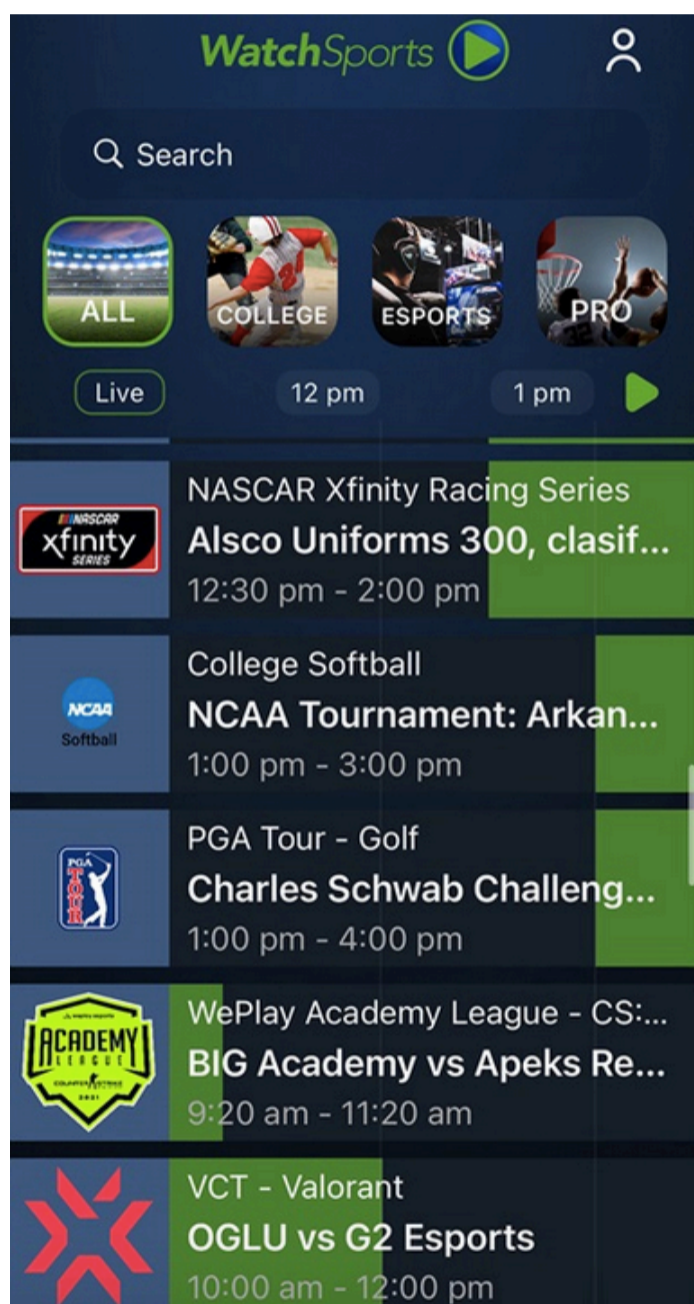


MEDIA

## WatchSports aims to be the TV Guide for sports and esports streaming

BY JASON WILSON

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Like many tech company founders, **Lydia Murphy**-Stephans discovered a problem she felt needed addressing. As the former president of the Pac-12 Networks, she already knew just how difficult it could be for some sports fans to find the game they wanted to watch between so many options: regional sports networks, Fox Sports, conference networks like hers, ESPN, and even sources from other countries.

But she got a taste of how much harder it could be to find an esports event when developing WatchSports, the first app from the Sports Bubble, the company she founded in 2018 after leaving Pac-12 Networks. It started as a solution to media discovery and fragmentation: a guide for as many sporting events that her team could track down in a 24-hour window, but its scope expanded soon after trying to watch her son compete in a Valorant Championship Series event.

"He was in the next room, and he sent a link to watch on Twitch. But I couldn't find it. I could hear him screaming and competing, and it made me, like any parent who wants to watch their kids, crazy," **Murphy**-Stephans said in a video call with Sports Business Journal. "How could I not find him?"

This was her eureka moment. "I realized that, clearly, that esports had similar issues with media fragmentation and discovery," she said.

That's when WatchSports expanded into esports.

### THE APP

WatchSports pulls in information from various APIs to assemble a 24-hour window into what's happening in sports and esports. Two years ago, **Murphy**-Stephans and her team built the prototype. It's built from Swift

for iOS, “with connections to our flexible and scalable database,” said co-founder Chris Fehring (who joined in 2020). It goes through available networks, premium apps like the Pac-12 Networks, Twitch, and YouTube and puts them into a familiar, TV Guide-like UI. It’s out now on iOS, with future releases on Android, connected TVs, the web, and game consoles in the works.

“Think of it as a portable remote control, a portable guide,” **Murphy-Stephans** said. “Instead of listing a limited number of sports and esports ... let’s do our best to list all the sports and esports, and make it easy to connect and watch.”

SportsBubble set up partnerships with other platforms and networks to make accessing content as seamless as possible from WatchSports, including broadcasts behind paywalls. It has deals with Pac-12 Now, so if you have a subscription, you can authenticate inside WatchSports and then pull up the UCLA-USC football game. And for broadcasts on Twitch and YouTube, you don’t even need to be logged in to watch.

Partners include the Pac-12 Conference and Networks, the National Women’s Soccer League, the LPGA, Athletes Unlimited, US Speed Skating, Premier Hockey Federation, and sports streaming app DAZN. SportsBubble monetizes through these partnerships, charging for listed events and prioritizing their listings. And if new customers sign up with a subscription service like Pac-12 Now, SportsBubble gets a referral fee or commission on that.

She said they’ve also had conversations with game publishers such as Activision Blizzard (the makers of esports games like [Call of Duty](#) and [Overwatch](#)) and [Riot Games](#) (the company behind League of Legends, [Wild Rift](#), and Valorant). The company’s goal is getting as many esports publishers as possible to participate in the app, so WatchSports’ listings can be as thorough as possible in addition to doing web scrapes, tapping APIs, and tapping into its own database.

Right now, **Murphy-Stephans** said WatchSports isn’t going to track individual streamers who may also be esports athletes — the focus will be on the events they compete in, not the content they make outside esports. “That’s a different type of search,” she said. “And I’m not saying we won’t do it some day. We may even learn we have to have one app unique for sports and one for esports. Right now, what we’re doing is the best first step.”

**Murphy-Stephans** said SportsBubble is self-funded and has taken early seed money, and the company is opening to angels and venture capital for a full seed stage.