

## Lead or follow? What sports properties are offering

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### MLB

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The most aggressive sports property on all matters digital, MLB is the only league that is truly agnostic when it comes to wireless, building applications on all major platforms and devices without offering exclusive content through any single carrier. Its most robust products come via Apple and the iPhone and iPod touch.

The MLB At Bat app is unchallenged as best in breed, with audio from both teams for every game, a live telecast of at least one game a day, and a pitch track system that is a stat geek's dream. All that comes for \$14.99 for the whole season, up from \$9.99 last year. A \$99 purchase of MLB.com's Web TV package gets you wireless delivery of every TV telecast (other than those blacked out in your market). MLB also makes scaled-down versions of At Bat for BlackBerry, Android and the mobile Web, though none offer the live video of the Apple products or as robust a gamecast.



### NBA

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The NBA rolled out the wireless version of its out-of-market TV package at the start of the season, a League Pass app operated by MobiTV available for iPhone and Android, with a version for BlackBerry expected. The NBA has managed to distance its content from its wireless sponsorship with T-Mobile — a good thing for the league, since T-Mobile's U.S. market share has slipped to less than 13 percent, meaning slim distribution potential.

The NBA has the widest variety of pay content available for mobile and a matching range of prices. A free NBA Game Time app offers a live scoreboard and in-game box scores; a \$3.99 app is similar, but can be customized with additional content from your favorite team; a \$9.99 app adds live radio broadcasts from every out-of-market game; and an ambitiously priced \$39.99 app delivers the League Pass out-of-market TV package. The league cut all those prices in half shortly before the All-Star break in conjunction with a free preview weekend for League Pass.

### NFL

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Not surprisingly, the NFL has managed to parlay its popularity into a mobile media strategy that delivers broad distribution for its lucrative out-of-market TV package while also offering benefits for its wireless sponsor, Sprint.

Courtesy of apps delivered by DirecTV, all NFL Sunday Ticket games are available on the iPhone and Palm Pre, as well as on some Android, BlackBerry and Windows Mobile devices. The service comes as part of DirecTV's Superfan package, which is priced as a \$100 add-on for Ticket subscribers.

For its part, Sprint gets enough exclusive goodies to market a strong app for its phones. There's live radio from every game and early access to highlights, along with a steady TV feed from the NFL Network, including the games that air on the network.

## NHL

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Long known for the most tech savvy fan base, the NHL has built out its Web site with more multimedia bells and whistles than all the other leagues combined, but it lags woefully on the mobile front. It wasn't until the turn of the new year, at the annual Winter Classic, that the NHL finally made leaguewide out-of-market audio available on wireless devices — and even then only those of its sponsor, Verizon. The NHL is the only one of the traditional Big Four leagues that isn't delivering out-of-market TV via mobile. While its executives won't say so publicly, it is easy to draw the connection between the league's lagging offerings and its deal with Verizon, which is locked in a steel-cage match with AT&T and the white-hot iPhone.



Still, the NHL is developing mobile software, working with Internet TV company NeuLion to build a spiffy iPhone app that soon will be released outside of North America. NHL On Ice parallels the Web software that NeuLion built for the NHL, allowing fans to toggle between live game telecasts, watch condensed games, and pluck in-game highlights through the same Ice Tracker feature the league uses on the Web.

Good news for fans in the U.S.: The league plans to make a similar app available on Verizon this year. While staying exclusive to Verizon means it will miss two-thirds of the U.S. wireless market, the development will get the NHL into the wireless TV game in a manner similar to what it employs in Canada, where live games already are available on mobile via Bell.

## NASCAR

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With a series sponsorship with wireless provider Sprint (and, before that, the pre-merged Nextel), NASCAR figured to be the leader in providing content for the phone. And when phones were mostly phones, it was. However, as video has become more of a part of the wireless equation, the NASCAR package on Sprint has failed to keep up, at least on that front.

To be fair, there's a dramatic difference in structure here. There is no out-of-market NASCAR TV package — the carrot that has created an immediate revenue opportunity for the other leagues. The rights hurdles are a bit more difficult to navigate. Still, there is attractive, supplementary content, such as in-car cameras, that would be attractive to fans — and you won't find it optimized for mobile.



With all that said, Sprint is in its third year of providing an app that delivers an impressive selection of content fans can't get on other mobile devices — such as in-car radio from every car and real-time stats and telemetry. There's also a live stream of Speed's coverage of qualifying and practice.

## GOLF

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Fans of the PGA Tour have access to both free and pay apps: a free one produced by the tour and Turner Interactive, a free one from the U.S. Open, and low-priced pay apps from the Masters and the PGA Championship. All but the tour app offered live video last season.

The PGA Tour app delivers real-time scoring from each event, customizable leaderboards and highlight videos. The three majors all delivered similar offerings. The Masters app included cameras on Amen Corner and holes 15 and 16. The PGA Championship put cameras on two marquee groups a day, plus cameras on all the par 3s. The U.S. Open had marquee group coverage, along with a camera on No. 17 on the final two days. All had slick flyover videos of every hole.

The PGA Tour app also includes live scoring, schedules and player profiles from the Nationwide and

Champions tours. There's no app for the LPGA Tour.

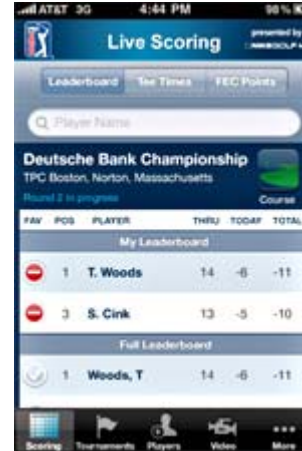
## TENNIS

While there's nothing available from the men's or women's tours, the two biggest events both rolled out free offerings last year.

The U.S. Open app was loaded with features such as live scoring, live streaming radio and video highlights. The Wimbledon app offered a similar menu, with one striking difference: no live audio.

## SOCCER

There's not much official content available in the U.S., but that will improve as the World Cup gets rolling this summer. ESPN has an app leading up to the tournament that features historical info on each nation and well-packaged news. It will be interesting to see what ESPN does, beyond the obvious gamecasts, once the tournament begins. For now, there's no audio or video.



— Compiled by Bill King