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Sports on the World Wide Web

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About two years ago, after I created a web page that essentially amounted to a list of my favorite general research sites on the Internet, I was called upon to create a more comprehensive Intranet page for my employer. I'm a researcher at the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and my colleagues in the library felt we needed something that would categorize the most useful and reliable research sites on the web—sort of a "Yahoo with peer review," so to speak.

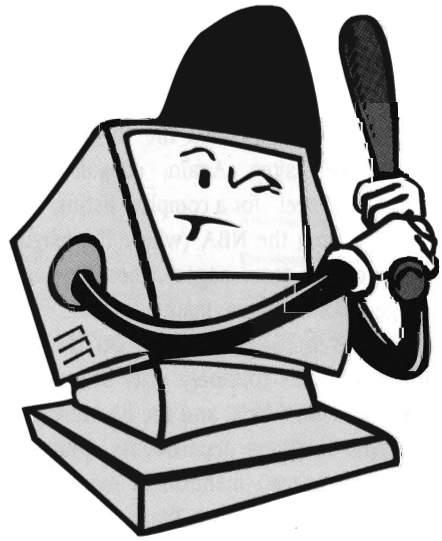
Each of the researchers in our library was assigned subjects of particular expertise for the Intranet page project. The charge was to continually review the sites in our assigned subjects, and determine whether or not they were "worthy" of our page. Because I am a sports buff, I naturally volunteered to review sports sites.

Since the beginning of the project, one of our most important responsibilities has been to keep the Intranet page from becoming unwieldy. Our library's clients are primarily news producers who don't have all kinds of time to be surfing the Internet. With that in mind, we try to limit each of our subjects to no more than a few dozen of the most useful sites.

I was able to do that with the sports category, but during my initial review process, I realized there were many more sports sites worthy of mention.

So, to come full circle, I decided to build my own index of sports sites, as an extension of the original web page I had created for myself. I call it "The Sports Hot Sheet," and it's located at http://www.wp.com/hotsheet/sports.html. Although this page is nothing more than a leisure pursuit, I do maintain it as if it were my job.

When you visit the page, it's obvious it was created by a librarian. It loads quickly (no graphics!), and has more than 600 sites neatly broken down into logical categories.



Best of all, you can count on the information you'll get from the sites indexed. That's because "The Sports Hot Sheet" does not attempt to rival Yahoo as a comprehensive directory of sports on the web—only official sites for the major spectator sports are included. "Joe's shrine to Michael Jordan" or "a tribute to the sport of curling" won't be found on this site.

Television Network Sites

Convincingly, the most up-to-date and comprehensive sources of sports news on the web can be found on the sites maintained by the television networks. Among these, the undisputed king is ESPN SportsZone. Actually, this site was created by a company called Starwave, and ESPN just bought into it and added content. News, columns, features, statistics, and audio are available for a smorgasbord of sports. The amount of information at ESPN SportsZone sometimes seems limitless, and most of it is free. If the free information doesn't satisfy your craving, even more is available for a monthly fee.

Though not quite there yet, other networks' sites have challenged ESPN's supremacy over the past year or two. CBS, CNN/SI, and Fox Sports all field rival sites. CBS Sportsline is the most similar to ESPN SportsZone. That's hardly surprising, because CBS also bought into a company that originally created the site (Sportsline), and also makes extra information available to paying subscribers. But unlike ESPN, CBS seems to have simply bought name recognition, because they add none of their own content. However, one nice thing that the CBS Sportsline, CNN/SI, and Fox Sports sites all have (that ESPN SportsZone does not) is a searchable archive of past stories. That can be very useful for a researcher.

MSNBC maintains a somewhat different sports web site. It seems to focus more on opinion than the others, using big-name columnists. It's also heavier on interactivity and multimedia. The die-hard fan will probably prefer ESPN SportsZone, CBS Sportsline, CNN/SI, or Fox Sports, but MSNBC Sports might be better for the casual fan who doesn't want to be overwhelmed with information.

Newspaper Sports Sections

Newspaper sports sections are another great source of sports news on the web. Most of the major daily newspapers have web sites that include their sports pages. Naturally, a metropolitan newspaper offers more in-depth information on the teams it covers than a nationwide television network does, because it can draw from its own beat writers, rather than just wire services. The *New York Times* has a great sports section that requires a free registration to browse. "The Sports Hot Sheet" lists most of the other major metros, as well. If you're looking for something more national

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in scope, you might try *USA Today's* site, but you'd be better advised to stick with the television network sites, because those are updated more frequently.

Other Sports News Sources

There are plenty of other sports news sources on the web that don't fall under either of the two categories described above. Some, such as Sports Extra and Total Sports, cover sports in general. Increasingly, however, these sites are sport specific.

Among the latter, one of the most impressive efforts is put forth by College Hoops Insider (CHI). Along with the wire stories that you'll find at most sports web sites, CHI also includes stories written by its own staff of writers. Additionally, CHI publishes regular columns written by nearly 200 college basketball coaches. Topping all that off is a live radio show that was a huge success during the NCAA tournament in March. Real Player software is needed for the radio show.

If European basketball is your thing, EuroBasket is another fantastic site. It covers pro hoops in thirty-nine countries and includes a comprehensive list of Americans playing abroad. EuroBasket has a tremendous amount of information that can't be found anywhere else on the web.

Other sport specific web sites worthy of mention include Fastball for baseball fans, Race Wire for auto racing aficionados, and Golf.com for golf buffs. "The Sports Hot Sheet" has a more complete list.

Live Audio

Perhaps the one site that has me most addicted to the web is Audionet Sports. As a boy, I often fell asleep to the sounds of a ballgame coming from some far away radio station. The only bad thing was, the distance of that station would frequently cause some pretty poor reception. No more. Via the magic of the Internet, Audionet Sports allows you to listen to games "crystal clear" through your own computer. Real Player or NetShow software is needed, of course. On rare occasions, the audio of a game is accompanied by live video too, although the picture is pretty small and choppy. Additionally, Audionet features sports news and talk programming. You might consider getting a dedicated line to accommodate an Audionet addiction. Otherwise, it can really tie up your phone.

League Sites, Team Sites, and Special Sites

All of the major professional sports leagues now have well-established web sites, chock full of the latest news and statistical information. Probably the most impressive of them is the one maintained by the National Basketball Association, which includes official team pages, and full profiles of all the league's players. If you're a college sports fan, the NCAA's site is really nice, too, not to mention the various conference web sites. Again, consult "The Sports Hot Sheet" for a complete listing.

Aside from the NBA (where the league maintains the team pages), most pro and college sports teams maintain their own separate web pages, as well. On the pro side, team sites routinely offer schedules, news, statistics, bios, and the like released by media relations departments. One site worthy of special mention is maintained by the Forsythe Racing Team. It features live in-car audio and a continously updated timing chart during practices, qualifying, and races. On the college side, site quality continues to improve, especially as more and more schools employ commercial services—such as FANSonly—to do the maintenance.

During certain times of the year, sports leagues and media entities also often maintain special sites in conjunction with major sporting events, such as the Super Bowl, or the NCAA basketball tournament. These sites normally receive heavy promotion at the time they are active.

In Search Of...

Of course, an important thing to keep in mind when visiting all these sports sites is that very few of them keep archival information. If you need up-to-date material, they're great, but if you need information from the past, online databases (e.g. NEXIS) and reference books are still superior.

Like all librarians, I'm constantly searching for more useful sites. If you have one that should be added to "The Sports Hot Sheet," let me know. Keep in mind...official sites only.

Sports on the World Wide Web

The following is a listing of the web addresses mentioned in the column. They are current as of May 1, 1998.

Audionet Sports
(http://drew.audionet.com/sports)

CBS Sportsline
(http://cbs.sportsline.com)

CNN/SI
(http://cnnsi.com)

College Hoops Insider
(http://www.collegeinsider.com/hoops)

ESPN SportsZone
(http://espn.sportszone.com)

EuroBasket
(http://www.eurobasket.com)

FANSonly
(http://www.fansonly.com/channels/site/network.html)

Fastball
(http://www.fastball.com)

Forsythe Racing Team
(http://www.forsythe-racing.com)

Fox Sports
(http://www.foxsports.com)

Golf.com
(http://golf.com)

MSNBC Sports
(http://www.msnbc.com/news/spt_front.asp)

National Basketball Association
(http://www.nba.com)

National Collegiate Athletic Association
(http://www.ncaa.org)

NCAA Basketball Tournament official site
(http://www.finalfour.net)

New York Times Sports
(http://www.nytimes.com/sports)

Racewire
(http://www.racewire.com)

Sports Extra
(http://web.sportsextra.com)

The Sports Hot Sheet
(http://www.wp.com/hotsheet/sports.html)

Super Bowl official site
(http://superbowl.com)

Total Sports
(http://www.totalsports.net)

USA Today Sports
(http://www.usatoday.com/sports/sfront.html)

Yahoo's index of sports sites
(http://www.yahoo.com/Recreation/Sports)