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The Sports Page: ESPN 360 Relaunches With Move

ESPN has relaunched their 360 online video player, and it's really pretty groundbreaking. Now powered by Move Networks, the player offers the first instance of live streaming using Move's technology, promising a better live video experience for fans than that currently offered by any other service.

OVW ESPN360 Player

The interface is simple, user-friendly, and extremely quick. Unlike the ABC player, the bitrate is not displayed, but on a slow wireless connection I was able to get a relatively good looking picture and more importantly, an entirely fluid stream. Similar to MLB's Mosaic, the player offers live video of other games in progress simultaneously in small windows along the bottom of the screen.

One of the most impressive features of the player is the tv-like speed of switching between games. The video is immediately available, ramping up in the first few seconds to the best quality possible for a given end user. And on a really high speed connection, I would imagine it looks pretty amazing in full screen.

OVW ESPN 360 Wide 16:9
Above: ESPN 360 Full Screen 16:9 Aspect

A shot from my full screen experience is above. Note the Verizon logo in the upper right corner, recognition of the local ISP, which in a relatively unique online monetization model is paying for the service. If I was getting internet from many other ISPs I would be locked out.

While the old 360 did not add enough value (and content) for most ISPs to license it, the number of live sporting events that ESPN / ABC Sports will carry in the new 360 may push consumers to demand it. The ESPN model is similar to that of cable networks using public interest to pressure MSOs for carriage agreements.

In addition to the live events player, ESPN Video now in beta offers increased sharing features, with direct links and send to friend options for every clip, and the embed code for many of them.

This is a big step toward reasserting ESPN's lead in online video content for sports. The trend toward pro sports leagues producing and strictly regulating their content has led ESPN to renegotiate for the rights they can get.

This year, that content will include the NBA, NASCAR, and lots of college sports. While ESPN may not be able to offer MLB or the NFL online, the technological lead Move Networks offers ESPN could return 360 to the online video forefront. Of course, more ISPs will need to get on board first.

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