

# Fantasy time for the sports fanatics

*Online sport is a booming area with newspapers and broadcasters joining the fanatics in providing endless information and statistics to satisfy the armchair athletes*

**S**ports fanatics must love the Internet. It gives access to information, statistics and details that simply aren't available anywhere else, and much of it for free.

Think of a sport, any sport, and you will find it online. Newspaper websites or television and radio stations online have links to sports. Indeed, some of the most popular sites are affiliated with publishers or broadcasters simply because they have the necessary resources to cover what is a huge area. Network Nine's site, [www.wideworldofsports.ninemsn.com.au](http://www.wideworldofsports.ninemsn.com.au), is a good example.

Most search engines or Internet Service Providers also offer at least one link to a sporting resource. Those with a local link such

as Yahoo! ([www.yahoo.com.au](http://www.yahoo.com.au)) or Ozemail ([www.ozemail.com.au](http://www.ozemail.com.au)) have greater local content and sports more likely to attract interest in Australia (NRL, AFL and rugby union, for example). Most of the overseas providers (try Excite, InfoSeek, Lycos, HotBot and Altavista) tend to focus on what is of interest to US fanatics.

Under its Sports and Recreation directory, the generic Yahoo! service ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) has separate categories for the American NFL, NHL and NBA, as well as NASCAR, world soccer, cricket, golf and tennis. They are sourced from a variety of printed and broadcast media including *The Sporting News*, broadcast.com, CBS, CNN, ESPN, Fox Sports, the *Los Angeles Times*, MSNBC Sports, *USA Today* and the *Washington Post*.

Some of the more unusual sites cover baton twirling (six sites on Yahoo!), throwing the boomerang (13), camel racing (three), cock-fighting (10), lacrosse (191) and a site for paintball fanatics. Being a US-based service, the most popular category of sport on Yahoo! is basketball. This offers 3,994 sites in total out of the more than 26,500 listed on the server.

HotBot offers ultimate frisbee and a long list encompassing gambling (classified as a sport on many of the servers) and sports medicine.

Much of what is on offer is very similar though there are attempts to stimulate wider interest with online polls, links to related reading material from online bookstores such as Amazon.com, and live chat rooms where you can ask questions of your favourite sportsmen and women.

Australian service provider Ozemail has a SportsWatch section on its homepage which details breaking news, debate on hot issues, scoreboards, separate links for cricket, tennis, golf, basketball, AFL and NRL, and action shots of the latest games or competitions from Australian Associated Press which can be downloaded.

Individual sites in particular sports often satisfy the armchair fanatics. Yachties can watch the

## Some "Fantasy" sports websites

What follows is by no means a conclusive list. Each Internet Service Provider and Search Engine offers its own list of sports. Fantasy sites are reasonably common.

- A good place to start is Yahoo Australia ([www.yahoo.com.au](http://www.yahoo.com.au)). Doubleclick on its Recreation and Sport hyperlink and it will present a list of sports, among them a link for "Fantasy". Of the Fantasy sports available, Yahoo! includes autoracing, baseball, basketball, bowling, cricket, football, golf, hockey, rugby, soccer and wrestling.
- Autoracing - of the seven sites available, one of them offers you the chance to manage your own Formula 1 team ([www.j.f.knowles.clara.net/](http://www.j.f.knowles.clara.net/)); or you can join one of NASCAR's 14 sites, perhaps the autoracing club ([www.nascargame.com](http://www.nascargame.com)).
- Baseball - the 20 game websites are run by a host of organisations and offer the chance to form your own All Star team or play major league baseball with Sports Illustrated. Baseball Manager is a website that allows you to play fantasy baseball with a handpicked team, "real statistics, players and ulcers" ([www.baseballmanager.com](http://www.baseballmanager.com)). There are 69 league sites and 21 sites offering news and media links.
- Cricket - the Fantasy Cricket Page lets you manage a team to compete in the Challenge Cup ([www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Field/4006/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Field/4006/index.html)) or the International Test Cricket page (US\$20 fee) is a registered version (<http://shareit1.element-5.de/programs.html?nr=100594>).
- Rugby - the AirUK Five Nations Fantasy Rugby site encourages you to purchase Scottish Rugby picks in a bid to win a free flight on Air UK out of a Scottish airport. Or Crunch Time Fantasy Rugby League offers fantasy rugby players and matches ([www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Arena/8327/](http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Arena/8327/)).

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trials and tribulations of sailors in the Aroundalone race on the Quokka Sports-hosted website ([www.around-alone.com](http://www.around-alone.com)), even take part in a virtual race around the world, using the weather and tide information to plot a course and log in daily virtual positions to a "control room". Some of the virtual racers have done better than the real sailors.

Cricket fanatics can visit the "Cricinfo" site ([www-aus.cricnet.org](http://www-aus.cricnet.org)). Maintained almost exclusively by volunteers, it carries advertising, editorials by "recognised" sports writers and is constantly updated and, say its followers, always accurate. It offers its supporters the strangely satisfying experience of being able to "watch" a test match live via a constantly updated scorecard and run-

ning (written) commentary. Watching a scorecard might seem boring but to cricket fans, many of whom fall into the obsessive category, Cricinfo is the perfect experience. Sites like this tend to be more interactive, with multiple chat rooms, smarter surveys, more of the kind of trivia that appeals to the sport-obsessed, and generally better analysis of the subject than the major sites. A measure of Cricinfo's success is the fact that despite stiff competition from many large news organisations, it remains the most popular cricket site on the Web. Cricket fanatic Miguel D'Souza of magazine Internet.au, suggests that as well as the way it is organised, the mildly obsessive and anti-corporate nature of Cricinfo attracts the sort of viewer that cricket as a sport has in large numbers!

One area of online sports which has developed particularly well has been

fantasy sports. In the UK, this has centred around football (soccer). You pay a joining fee, usually US\$10-20, and join a fantasy football league, forming your own team with players from anywhere in the European leagues. You can play daily tournaments based upon real teams and players in the leagues, the results depending on how they perform in the real world. A match-winning goal from Manchester United's David Beckham, for instance, would favourably influence your team's place in the league, but a trio of real red cards would herald disaster. At the end of the season, the winner of the virtual league wins a portion of the fees paid by each contributing player.

Karen Winton

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## From The Archives

### Playing field: level for whom?

The latest buzz phrase in telecommunications is definitely the "level playing field". At last month's Australian Telecommunications Users group conference, ATUG 89, this metaphor was called upon by almost everyone who spoke about the impact of the new telecommunications legislation.

The phrase is normally used to mean the removal of every obstacle to the free play of market forces, though there are those who find its use ironic in an area where the main field remains a lot more level for some players than for others. Some in the industry would like to see the level section extended inside the boundaries which currently enclose the major carriers. And as Adam Smith of the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations says, consumers too might be justified in feel-

ing that the playing field is less than totally smooth as far as they are concerned.

AUSTEL chair designate Robin Davey said in his address on the first day of the conference:

*"AUSTEL will be, so to speak, running the boundary between the monopoly and competition. But it is more than just a linesman (or boundary umpire, depending on which code you follow). Indeed, it is perhaps the groundsman because it is AUSTEL's role to ensure that there is a level playing field in those areas where competition is allowed. And let me assure you that there will be a level playing field."*

Minister Ros Kelly...showed she had been quick to learn the jargon. Although many felt too little time had been allowed for the consultative processes on the exposure draft of the Bill, she claimed that the consultation

had led to a significant strengthening of pro-competitive safeguards and AUSTEL's powers. She went on:

*"...the proverbial playing field has been levelled. It is now up to the players, and of course AUSTEL as the umpire, to play the game and achieve a better, more efficient telecommunications industry which is responsive to consumers and delivers what the consumer demands."*

Kelly also used the expression in her Second Reading speech on the Bill, referring specifically to the requirement on the carriers to provide a level playing field for competition in value-added services.

If consumers are to be the spectators at whatever games ensue from the levelling process, it is to be hoped that from their point of view the competition is worth the entrance fee.

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