

# The Web: 'Reality TV' online for World Cup

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From online "reality TV" to sporting blogs to fantasy soccer games, the Internet is emerging as the new way that FIFA World Cup 2006 fans are keeping in touch with the doings on -- and off -- the field this soccer season, sources are telling United Press International's The Web column.

Online portal, Lycos.com, like other sites, around the globe, including sporting content producers are giving fans an inside look at the culture that suffuses the world soccer championship series. Lycos has launched a behind the scenes, reality-TV style show, at [worldcup.lycos.com](http://worldcup.lycos.com), dedicated to the ongoing event.

"The content we're presenting will appeal to everyone, whether you're following the World Cup or not, because it's all about the hysteria and mayhem associated with this internationally huge sporting event," said Alfred Tolle, chief executive officer of Lycos Inc., based in Waltham, Mass., but owned by a Korean publisher.

Most interestingly, Lycos TV is not reporting on the scores or what the players are up to. Rather, it has four videographers roaming around Europe, shooting the activities of the fans, the so-called community of craziness. But Lycos does aggregate content from soccer blogs and sports sites all over the globe, including Japan, China and Korea.

"Viewers have appetites for all kinds of content, and we want to move beyond showcasing only user-generated content," said Tolle. "And really focus on delivering a higher quality of pro-am content, that is very entertaining, unique and viral at the same time."

Major, traditional broadcasters are also involved in the effort, including Deutsche Welle, based in Germany, and TV stations in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Serbia, Mozambique, Ghana, Afghanistan and Egypt. Millions of viewers are tuning in online.

Other Internet service providers are also launching sites dedicated to coverage of the World Cup, the soccer world's premier sporting event, somewhat without an exact analogy in the American culture. Perhaps it is best described as an American Mardi Gras holiday, held during the World Series of baseball, and immediately followed up by a New Year's Eve celebration with a Super Bowl chaser.

For instance, Egyptian ISP LinkdotNet just produced a new section of its site, YallaKora.com, which is providing an array of content features, including minute-by-minute coverage of every soccer match in every region. There's also a fantasy football game, wherein all soccer fans can take the role of the team manager, and can then buy, sell and trade players. The "managers" then compete for points against others, based on the performance of their "teams."

The YallaKora.com site is the first fantasy football game, online, for the Egyptian, Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates markets, the developers tell The Web.

There's also a game at the site that enables Muslim fans to predict the outcome of various matches -- though they cannot gamble on the scores against others of their faith tradition.

Millions of Americans, who live in a different cultural context, are placing bets on the games at sites like Costa Rica's Bodog.com. "With the immense publicity that surrounds the U.S. players as they attempt to make an impact on soccer's biggest stage, we anticipate betting action for this year's World Cup will set a record," said Calvin Ayre, founder of

Bodog.com.

Experts tell the Web that four years ago, the United States -- then considered the sleeping giant of the global soccer scene -- arose. This year, the U.S. may well do it again, though they were placed in what many are calling the "Group of Death" -- also known as Group E -- with European powers like Italy and the Czech Republic. Bodog.com bookmakers have listed the U.S. at 4/1 odds to win Group E and odds of 5/2 to advance to the round of 16 teams. The Americans are seen as at 40/1 to win the overall tournament and bring home the nation's first World Cup title.

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