

CBS Sports to open fantasy platform to developers

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(AP) -- CBS Sports is opening its fantasy sports platform to third-party developers, allowing them to sell league-specific apps that will likely make this year's games a lot more competitive for millions of players and - developers hope - the \$800 million per year fantasy sports industry even more lucrative.

The deal was expected to be announced Tuesday at an industry meeting in Las Vegas. It will allow developers to create and sell just about any fantasy sports-related apps they can think of to users of CBSsports.com, one of the world's three largest fantasy sports websites.

Fantasy sports games have become a huge marketing hit for professional sports leagues including the NFL, [Major League Baseball](#) and the [NBA](#), because the seasonal games encourage fans to keep track of [players](#) throughout each sport and watch multiple games involving teams across the country each day. Roughly 34 million people in the United States and Canada participate in fantasy sports each year, according to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association. Many players gamble with friends on leagues made up of imagined teams of real-life athletes, with points scored according to those athletes' individual performances during games.

For players, the deal means tools to help with everything from draft advice to lineup analysis will be available right in the site, customizable for each specific fantasy league.

"It levels the playing field for an entire league to be more competitive,"

said Jim Lanzone, president of [CBS](#) Interactive.

Lanzone said right now, only the most dedicated fantasy players use tools that go beyond the site they use to pick players and keep track of their league. The vast majority of those tools are separate from leagues themselves. "Now, by bringing them all into the game, everyone's going to see them - everyone's going to have access to them," Lanzone said. "Even that guy who comes in seventh place every year who usually is dead money to your league is going to have access to these incredible tools that can help him do a lot better."

As those playing fantasy sports get more competitive, many turn to software, magazines and other tools for help focus their draft strategy, keep tabs on athletes and obscure statistics and win their leagues.

The move by CBS Sports to embrace those tools is a play to attract users of other top fantasy sites, including free sites run by Yahoo and ESPN. CBS Sports' site is different from the others because most of its players pay fees to use the site to run their leagues.

Lanzone said the open platform will give fantasy sports companies a significant lifeline: Direct access to its millions of players.

The site's platform will open to developers Jan. 31 with six partners and about eight apps available, said Jason Kint, senior vice president and general manager of CBSSports.com. Kint said the site will get 30 percent of all app sales.

Paul Charchian, president of the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, said smaller fantasy sports companies will be eager to market to CBS Sports' players because they pay for leagues and are more likely to spend money on the hobby.

"We're on it," said Charchian, the owner of LeagueSafe.com, a site that lets fantasy sports players manage league fees. "As soon as I first heard about it, we've been talking about it internally and plan to take advantage of it."

Charchian said he anticipates other fantasy sites may fully open their platforms in response to CBS Sports

CBS Sports officials said they hope opening the platform will lead developers to innovate in unanticipated ways, much like when Apple introduced its App Store and Facebook opened its platform.

MLB Advanced Media, for example, plans to tie CBS Sports leagues to its subscription MLB.tv service, letting users automatically jump between games to watch at-bats and pitches specifically by players on their roster.

Lanzone said he said he expects the apps to grow along with the entire industry.

"It's still growing leaps and bounds," he said. "I think it's because it's become less niche."

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