

Review: Super Bowl online decent, won't replace TV

January 31 2012, By ANICK JESDANUN , AP Technology Writer



This screen shot from a computer monitor shows pro-football game action without watching television. For the first time, U.S. football fans will be able to watch the Super Bowl live on a computer or on a phone. (AP Photo/NBC)

(AP) -- The television set won't be the only place to watch video of the New York Giants and the New England Patriots this Sunday. For the first time, U.S. football fans will be able to watch the Super Bowl live on a computer or on a phone.

You may be wondering whether anyone without super-strength [eyesight](#) would be able to follow the football on a tiny phone screen. And what about the ads? After all, many people tune in more for the commercials than for the game.

I got a chance to test the offering with a pair of playoff games and last

weekend's all-star Pro Bowl. Although it's impossible to say what will happen Sunday, I have found the experience decent so far, but no substitute for the big screen.

The phone offering is made possible through a collaboration involving the [National Football League](#), [Comcast Corp.](#)'s NBC and Verizon Wireless. The nation's largest wireless carrier had rights to carry NBC's Sunday night broadcasts live during the regular season, as well as some games from the NFL Network and [ESPN](#). The post-season games broadcast by NBC are an extension of that package.

That means you'll need service through [Verizon Wireless](#) to watch on an iPhone or an Android phone (The game won't be available on the [iPad](#)). You'll also need Verizon's V Cast [video service](#), which costs \$3 a day or \$10 a month on top of your regular phone bill. A generous data plan or a Wi-Fi connection will help you avoid additional charges.

If you don't have the right phone or wireless carrier, or if you have a super-cheap data plan with low caps, you can watch for free on a computer instead at [NBCSports.com](#). You can interact with the game more that way, but you won't get the same commercials.

To get started on the phone, you need to install the NFL [Mobile software](#). The app is free; it's the software's live video that requires V Cast. You can get the app on the phone through the Android Market or Apple's app store. Or you can go to <http://www.verizonwireless.com/nfl> and enter your cellphone number. A text message will be sent with a link to get your app. You can also call the NFL by hitting the star key twice and dialing 635. That will also get you a link via text.

The video is easy to find once you open the app.

You get the full NBC broadcast, including replays, announcers and on-

screen graphics. You also get the halftime show and national commercials. NBC's peacock logo came up when my local NBC station was showing ads for local merchants such as car dealers and banks.

As for the football, I was surprised how well I was able to follow it. I wasn't able to track the ball for some of the passes and field goal kicks, but I was able to follow it on runs. Sure, the ball is small, but your eyes are much closer to the screen. So proportionally, it's somewhat comparable to what you'd get standing several feet away from the TV.

The video quality was adequate over a cellular connection. Some of the players looked more like video game characters than real people, reminding me of the early days of Internet video. Quality improved with a Wi-Fi connection because more data can be sent without worrying about congestion or data charges.

Video on the phone lagged the TV broadcast by about 30 seconds, so don't fall for any instant bets your TV-watching friends try to make with you. If others are watching in the next room, be prepared for cheers and jeers before you see the action.

Also, for the first half-hour, the app will ask you a few times whether you are really there. The video stops if you don't confirm your presence. I found it disruptive, though Verizon says it's to ensure that people don't inadvertently run up data charges.

And if you were able to snag tickets to the [Super Bowl](#), don't expect to watch the game on the phone. Verizon will block the video in and around the stadium to avoid overrunning its network. Besides, if you made all that effort to be there in person, you should be watching the field, not your phone.

The experience on the computer is different. Online video lagged the TV

broadcast by a full minute - enough for an interception and touchdown.

As was the case with the playoffs and the Pro Bowl, online video ads will replace the ones shown on TV. However, NBC says it will make the television ads available on demand soon after they run, so you won't have to miss out on all the chatter about the best and worst Super Bowl commercials. It's also a place to go if you missed one on TV. The phone won't have commercials on demand.

Other extras on NBC's video player include multiple viewing angles. Besides the main television feed, you can watch from the end zone or the sideline or a camera that locks in on the "star" - typically whoever has the ball. You can watch two feeds at once - one in a smaller window within the larger one. You can also get Twitter updates, players' stats and more.

The Web player also lets you pause, rewind or start from the beginning, just like a digital [video](#) recorder. With the mobile app, you're stuck with the live feed.

And with a good broadband connection, you don't have to worry about data charges.

One of the games I tested over a cellular connection used up 425 megabytes of data, including the halftime show. Fortunately, I was able to keep an unlimited plan I had before Verizon started capping usage for new subscribers. If you're on the basic, \$30-a-month plan, one game will eat up a quarter of your monthly 2 gigabyte allocation. There's not much left for email, YouTube, Facebook and other mobile time sinks.

Hardcore [football fans](#) might be thinking: "Why would anyone want to watch the big game on a phone or a computer screen?"

I agree there's no replacing the experience on a thousand-inch flat screen, with a bowl of chips and other artery-cloggers within reach.

But I can think of a few scenarios where it could be useful. If you're en route to a Super Bowl party, you can have the game on in the car or bus (not if you're driving, please). You can follow along on your device as you walk to the door for your pizza delivery.

Or if you're with friends who couldn't care less about the game, you can have it on and still be with them - physically, at least.

More information: NFL Mobile:

<http://sponsorship.verizonwireless.com/nfl/nfl-mobile>

NBC: <http://nbcsports.com>

NFL: <http://www.nfl.com/superbowl>

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Citation: Review: Super Bowl online decent, won't replace TV (2012, January 31) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-01-super-bowl-online-decent-wont.html>

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