

March Madness games no longer free online for all

February 16 2012, By RACHEL COHEN , AP Sports Writer

(AP) -- Some fans will no longer be able to watch every NCAA men's basketball tournament game online for free.

The model for streaming [March Madness](#) will change this year, Turner, CBS and the NCAA announced Thursday. Games aired on CBS will still be free through the network's website. Most, but not all, viewers who get TBS, TNT and truTV on their cable or [satellite systems](#) will be able to watch games aired on those channels online at no cost.

Fans can also pay \$3.99 to see every [game](#) on multiple platforms - online, mobile and tablet.

About 77 million [households](#) will be able to watch the Turner channels for free online through a process called authentication. That's out of the 100 million that get TBS and TNT, which are available in around 87 percent of American homes with televisions.

The way fans watch March Madness on TV changed drastically last season with the start of CBS and Turner's 14-year, \$10.8 billion deal with the NCAA. Instead of CBS showing regional coverage and switching among games, each contest aired nationally in its entirety on one of the four networks. The shift was a hit: Viewership was up 14 percent for the tournament's opening weekend.

As for the previous five years, fans could also see every game for free online. They watched 13.7 million hours of streaming video online and

through [mobile devices](#), a 17 percent increase from 2010.

Turner Sports [senior vice president](#) Matthew Hong said the company considered using authentication last year but wanted to wait until people adjusted to the new TV setup. Another factor was that the system was available to far fewer subscribers a year ago; he hopes that by 2013, all customers who get the Turner networks through their providers will be able to authenticate.

The "TV Everywhere" model has become popular with many networks as a way to allow viewers to watch programs on multiple devices while encouraging them to stick with cable and satellite providers. But authentication - proving you subscribe to a provider that offers the service - does require an extra step from past years for fans trying to access NCAA tournament games. Turner is working to make the process easier, such as linking it to customers' Facebook logins.

Some fans with the ability to authenticate may just decide it's easier to pay the \$3.99, Hong acknowledged.

"Obviously, a lot of thought and market research went into that price point," he said. "We wanted to make it a fair price and for people to get value at that price. Obviously, we didn't want to make it too high, but we didn't want to make it too low; we want to incent [authentication](#)."

March Madness on Demand was launched by CBS and the NCAA in 2003 and required a subscription, with an average price of \$15, for the first three years. In 2006, it converted to a free, ad-supported service. The new product will be known as March Madness Live and still include ads.

There was initially a charge for watching games on an iPhone, which became [free](#) for just last year. The app will be available on Android

phones for the first time during this season's tournament.

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