

Olympics video reflects Internet's tension with TV

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This image made from an NBC Sports website shows their live gymnastics coverage on Sunday, July 29, 2012. For the first time, NBC Sports is showing all competition and medal ceremonies live over the Internet in the U.S. (AP Photo)

(AP) — The progression of Olympics video online is a reflection of the Internet's battle with television.

Broadcast rights are lucrative for the International Olympic Committee. They are sold by region, posing a conflict with the [Internet's](#) global presence. Until 2004, the IOC simply banned all [video](#) online, except for two experiments under controlled settings.

The IOC eased those restrictions with improvements in technology to block visitors outside a given region. That's now typically done using the Internet Protocol address, a number assigned to each computer

connected to the Internet. That IP address is tied to an Internet service provider, and these days, it can even pinpoint a computer's location down to the city. Using this method, NBC can block out British IP addresses, while the BBC can block access to Americans.

In the U.S., NBC opted for additional authentication — an account with a cable TV service, for instance — to protect the lucrative fees it gets from cable and satellite distributors. If NBC made it easy for people to watch the Olympics without a subscription, people might drop their cable service, and NBC would get less in recurring fees in the long run.

Over the years, NBC also didn't want to make too much available online for fear of cutting into its television audiences.

That mentality changed this year, thanks in part to Comcast Corp. buying a controlling interest in NBCUniversal last year from General Electric Co. Longtime Olympics producer Dick Ebersol, one of the chief resisters of live online video, left in a contract dispute with Comcast. A group that included Comcast CEO Brian Roberts ultimately decided to make all events available live for the first time. Prime-time [TV](#) this year includes no live events given the time difference with Europe.

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