# New gadgets and gimmicks to keep us watching sport live on TV

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More tech on the way to keep us watching sport live on TV. Credit: CCat

Australia's love of sport appears to be more from in front of a TV screen than actually attending any event live, and that could be on the increase given some of the new technology heading our way.

Samsung has confirmed that its new Sports Live app – on display at this year's Consumer Electronic Show in the US – will be available in Australia later this year, but for which sport codes has still to be announced.

The app is part of its smart television range and provides on-screen

information – over and above that normally provided onscreen by the host broadcaster – relative to the particular sporting event being viewed.

This helps the viewer as they can continue to watch the broadcast and not be distracted by sourcing any further game information from other devices, such as their smart phone or tablet device.

But how will new technologies, such as Samsung's Sports Live, change the way we watch sport on television? This is particularly interesting in Australia where sport is a large part of our culture.

## We love it live … on TV

Despite reports of poor crowds at games – and empty seats seen at many sporting events – Australia's love for sport still remains, even if it is via watching it on TV screens. Sport broadcasts are among the highest rating programs in Australia.

The 2014 AFL and NRL grand finals were some of the largest television audiences for many years.

The AFL grand final was the most watched show on Australian television for 2014 while a week later the NRL grand final was the "highest-rating NRL game ever", since the OzTam ratings began in 2001.

In addition to the television audience, Australia's love of social media sees fans as one of the world's most "prolific tweeters" when it comes to interacting with sport.

## So why are we not attending the games more?

Arguably there are many factors, but one possible influence could be the increase and experimentation with broadcast technologies and techniques. Many of these attempt to add to the viewer's on screen experience and bring the viewer closer to the action.

Cricket has seen many technologies introduced, one of the first was the addition of microphones near the stumps during the 1980s, followed quickly by stump-cam.

Since then we have seen the introduction of Snickometer (1999), Hawkeye (2002) and HotSpot (2006), along with spider-cam, which has recently come under scrutiny.

The most recent additions by the Nine Network to its cricket broadcast has been Viz Libero, a realistic 3D analysis system which allows 360 degree replays.

A similar technology, FreeD technology, is used in the US for the NFL and Major League baseball. While these technologies are currently controlled by the broadcaster, there is great possibilities if access is open to the viewing audience to control from their own devices.

The Ten Network has also added its own additions to cricket television broadcasts during the KFC T20 Big Bash League. During the game the network has fielding players wear microphones, while cameras are attached to the helmets and caps of both batsman and umpires for a point-of-view perspective of the action.

The Ten Network was also fundamental in bringing a point-of-view perspective into broadcasts of AFL games, when it introduced goal post cameras in 2010.

Later came the addition of cameras on goal umpire's hats, which last

year during one game was criticised by the AFL. These technologies, like many discussed previously, are intended to be two-fold, benefiting both the players and viewers.

Despite the initiatives for cricket and AFL broadcasts in Australia, tennis television broadcasts appear not to have yet added many of these broadcast technologies, other than HawkEye.

The new format, Fast4 tennis would have been ideal for the trial of new broadcast technologies. Particularly as it is seen as a competitor to cricket's faster format Twenty20, which uses various additional broadcast technologies.

This lack of experimentation during Tennis TV broadcasts could be part of the viewers disappointment with the new "faster" format.

The FreeD technology has been used overseas for tennis, but despite the Nine Network using the similar technology (Viz Libero) for cricket broadcasts, it was not added for its Fast4 tennis broadcast.

## Some technologies come and go

The 3D television broadcast of sport is one of the biggest new technologies to have been largely discontinued, despite the initial interest.

One US study reported by Nielsen in 2010 found 65% of respondents wanted to see sport broadcast in 3D, the most popular genre ahead of nature and animal programs (62%), and action and adventure (60%).

This was the same year that 3D broadcasts of sport began in Australia, with the Nine Network broadcasts of State of Origin (Rugby League), and Foxtel and SBS broadcasting soccer games in 3D.

The ratings for these broadcasts were not known, as OzTam did not capture the information due to the broadcasts being part of a trial.

At the time it was reported that 2,000 3D televisions had been sold. Since the 2010 trial, Nine also broadcast replays of the 2012 London Olympic Games. Network Ten had no plans to broadcast the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in 3D "despite Olympic organisers committing to shooting it in 3D".

Important to note that by this time ESPN, "the largest and most important source of 3DTV content", had abandoned its dedicated 3D sports channel. Much of the dissatisfaction for viewers was having to wear the additional glasses.

## Is wearable technology the future for sports broadcast?

The dissatisfaction for wearing additional technologies (3D glasses) raises interesting questions for the future of sports broadcasts, as 2015 is argued to be the year of wearable technologies.

In Australia, Foxtel has already experimented with wearable technology and sports broadcasts, with its Alert Shirt. Described by the developers, Wearable Experiments (We:eX), as:

*[…] a fan jersey that uses wearable technology to take the experience into the physical world, allowing fans to feel what the players feel live as it happens during the game'.*

Not only can you watch the game, you can now feel it.

Much simpler examples of wearable technologies and sport include

Victoria Bitter's Live Cricket Watch. Launched as part of the 2014/15 summer of cricket in Australia. The watch links to a smart phone and provides the user with game updates direct to the watch face.

This year there will be some interesting developments, as wearable technologies become a more common part of our daily lives; as smart phones have.

For sports television broadcasts there are many possibilities based on the technologies currently available. The addition of wearable technologies and the accessibility of technologies like FreeD technology to the viewing audience, will only amplify the viewing experience.

The question yet to be answered though is whether this is what Australians want?

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