

With Bills-Jags from London, NFL experiments with streaming

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Buffalo Bills wide receiver Robert Woods, 10, makes a catch as he takes part in an NFL training session at the Grove Hotel in Chandler's Cross, England, Thursday, Oct. 22, 2015. The Buffalo Bills play the Jacksonville Jaguars at Wembley stadium in London on Sunday in a regular season NFL game. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

The NFL, already a \$10 billion a year business, keeps looking to grow even bigger.

Sunday's experiment in streaming a game from London is testing out some of those potential new revenue sources.

The matchup between the Buffalo Bills and Jacksonville Jaguars will be available only through Yahoo outside of the teams' home cities—not just within the United States but around the world. Kickoff is at 9:30 a.m. EDT, though the more relevant time zones may be locales such as Beijing and Moscow.

The game takes place in the afternoon in Western Europe and will be at least partly in prime time in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe and Asia. Outside the U.S. is where the NFL can still add huge numbers of fans and the profits that come with that.

Back in the U.S., it's safe to say that plenty of existing fans would watch an NFL game—even one between two teams with a combined postseason drought of 22 years—at any hour of the day or night. The occasional morning kickoff allows the league to create a new time slot to draw viewers in the U.S.

And now they'll watch the action in a new way. The NFL wants to figure out whether there's significant money to be made in distributing games "over the top"—streaming them directly to fans.

Yahoo and other tech companies such as Google and Apple could be future partners in how the league broadcasts the sport, to go along with its traditional deals with the television networks.

While the NFL is locked into long contracts for its Sunday games and "Monday Night Football," the current Thursday night package is on just a one-year agreement with CBS. That time slot could allow for more experimentation of different distribution options in the near future, NFL [senior vice president](#) Hans Schroeder acknowledged.

The league also has flexibility with a handful of games each year: the London matchups and possible late-season Saturday contests.

The digital platform offers advertisers a way to target potential customers that isn't possible now with TV. Schroeder uses this example: LeSean McCoy scores a touchdown for Buffalo on Sunday, and an ad to buy his jersey quickly appears. But there will also be fewer commercials than usual to make for a faster game.

The Bills-Jaguars broadcast will be produced by CBS and called by Kevin Harlan and Rich Gannon, but graphics will have an "NFL on Yahoo" logo. Viewers in Buffalo and Jacksonville will be able to watch on their local CBS stations.

Everywhere else, anyone with an Internet connection will be able to see it for free. The stream will be available on any device through various Yahoo properties, including Tumblr, and the NFL's website and app.

Fans will still be able to watch on their televisions if they own connected devices or sets. Adam Cahan, Yahoo's senior vice president for mobile and emerging products, said it was crucial to ensure that the quality of the feed would match what fans expect from regular telecasts.

The stream will be 60 frames per second, compared with 30 frames per second for much Internet video.

"The difference for live sports between 60 and 30 is noticeable," Cahan said. "You don't have the dropped frames."

The league will be interested to analyze whether viewers watch the stream differently than a televised game. Will some fans who otherwise might not see any of it catch some plays on their mobile device while multitasking?

"We're very curious to see how much incremental consumption we get," said Schroeder, who oversees media strategy, business development and sales for the NFL.

Sunday could be the start of a shift in how fans watch the NFL. Or a one-time experiment that proves the status quo is here to stay for a while.

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