



## Will This Startup Change How We Watch Sports?

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Published April 5, 2017

There's an age-old hierarchy in sports governing the way games are played and consumed. Players play, the media packages and relays the action and, from a safe distance, fans enjoy, either in a stadium or on a couch. If given the chance, though, could you go toe to toe with Jon Gruden on a *Monday Night Football* call? Or, would you prefer to play cameraman at the World Cup? Soon, thanks to a potential revolution in live video broadcasting, you'll be able to find out.

Much like the mid-20th-century transition from radio to regularly televised live events, sports media is approaching an inflection point. Today, second screens are increasingly used to enhance the viewing experience, and live video streaming is a proven avenue of content production and fan engagement for media personalities. No industry giant, though, had built a platform specifically for live sports. That will change next week with the public beta launch of SportsCastr.Live — a video-streaming platform that aims to empower users in the broadcasting process. With lightning-quick delivery, social customization and graphics found only in TV studios, SportsCastr allows fans to broadcast games and provide commentary on social media or choose their own professional broadcasters for customized viewing pleasure. Of course, uncertainty surrounds SportsCastr and the industry at large. Lawsuits with sports leagues and a copycat battle will inevitably follow. One thing is certain, though — SportsCastr.Live wants to change the way we watch sports.

Most fans might be surprised to learn that since retiring from his 30-year post as commissioner of the NBA, 74-year-old David Stern has leaped headfirst into an internet startup. Stern, who is widely credited with improving the public image and global popularity of the NBA, believes that SportsCastr is a necessary development in an increasingly distracted age. "Fans want what they want, on whatever device they want it, whenever they want it," Stern tells OZY. "SportsCastr gives fans another reason to watch games but on their own terms."

SportsCastr is led by CEO and founder Kevin April, a career entrepreneur who previously co-founded SportsBlog, a network of fan-generated blogs. "I've always been interested in building communities around topics that people are passionate about," April tells OZY. That interest first manifested itself in the early 1990s when April was a teenager in Montreal, regularly skipping school to work on an online community of Atari video game players. In the sports world, April found a similar opportunity to customize products for fanatics. Targeting a hungry consumer base, though, is easy for any entrepreneur. Building the

proper team is what really moves the needle. “Donald Schupak is one of the most ambitious businessmen I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with,” says April, when asked about his company chairman, the man who lured David Stern to SportsCastr.

Schupak, 74, is a New York attorney and investor who orchestrated what is widely considered the greatest deal in sports history. In 1976, he advised his clients Ozzie and Daniel Silna, owners of the American Basketball Association’s Spirits of St. Louis, to dissolve their franchise rather than join the NBA. In return, the Silnas received a portion of the NBA’s future TV rights and, prior to a rumored \$500 million settlement in 2014, received annual payments totaling \$300 million.

To hear Schupak tell it, he made “some simple projections” on the future of sports television programming. Ultimately, he was confident that a small percentage of future TV rights would far surpass the \$3 million deal that was offered. Simply put, it was a great bet. It also led to countless court battles over the years, fending off settlement offers and nullification attempts by Stern and the NBA. Now, Schupak is teaming with his former adversary to shake up the sports television market in which their names are so deeply ingrained. “You’ve got to know what you’re capable of doing on your own and when to collaborate with others,” Schupak tells OZY. “When Kevin and I sat down, the first person I called was David.” According to his old friend, Stern was sold from the start. “He took one look and said, ‘This is disruptive — I’m in.’”

Of the many sexy features — studio-quality graphics, real-time scoreboards, virtual reality integrations — the platform’s main differentiator will be fast delivery. SportsCastr boasts a two-second latency versus 10 to 30 seconds from competing platforms. This is of grave importance for broadcasting live events, but SportsCastr’s focus on adaptive bit-rate technology — the app’s ability to tune video quality based on signal strength — is reproducible. According to Anthony Pompliano, a former product manager at Facebook and current managing partner at venture capital firm Full Tilt Capital, early adoption is key for any young tech company. “Technology can be a differentiator,” Pompliano says. “But density of the user base will be the deciding factor. Can they build it fast enough, where a Facebook has to come buy them?”

In an effort to attract those early adopters, April and Schupak are building a roster of celebrity supporters. Stern has helped build relationships across the NBA, and the Washington Redskins’ Vernon Davis and Syracuse University basketball coach Jim Boeheim are official advisers. Eric Bechtel, president of marketing firm IdeaQuest and a SportsCastr investor and adviser, thinks amateur sports could be just as important as the pro games. “It could be huge at the youth level, from Little League to college,” he tells OZY. The idea is that SportsCastr would serve as a live streaming and free broadcast outlet for enthusiastic communities desperate for coverage.

We’ll know soon if SportsCastr has staying power, but live video streaming in sports is here to stay. Next time you visit a live event, take a look around and listen: If a large number of spectators are practicing their best Joe Buck impression, Kevin April might truly be in luck.