

Full-on tech, social media turn avoiding Olympic spoilers into a sport of its own

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NEW YORK (AP) -- Mandy Hauck turned 25 on Wednesday, but she's avoiding Facebook and her happy birthday messages to steer clear of Olympic spoilers about her favorite sport, fencing.

Hauck has also deleted her iPhone apps for CNN and ESPN, opting for news from the London Games the old-fashioned way, via TV coverage that's time-delayed by NBC for prime time.

The network is making live streams of the action available in real time online. Hauck's hanging tough, though, in favor of doing actual work during the day as the marketing communications manager for a software company in Atlanta, a job that requires her to stay on Twitter while she attempts to stay away from its main page and trending topics.

"I enjoy the experience of sitting with my family and friends in front of the television and cheering for the athletes as if they were competing live," said Hauck, a former college fencer who has been following two-time American gold medalist Mariel Zagunis in London. "It's much more entertaining and enjoyable that way!"

It's also incredibly difficult with social media in full flower. Olympic spoilers have people turning off phone alerts, hiding their iPads and shushing co-workers in search of simpler times, when screaming at the TV during nail-biting competition was a sport unto itself.

Pervasive spoilers even solicited an apology from NBC's Olympics executive producer, Jim Bell. He tweeted a mea culpa for a Monday night gaffe, when the network ran a "Today" show teaser with swimmer Missy Franklin showing off her gold medal - just before the network aired the race where she won it.

While angry tweeters have taken to - yes, Twitter - to grouse about spoilers, Paul Redfern at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania has entered what he calls "my Olympic dark period" on social media. That's not an easy thing when your job description includes overseeing social media engagement. He's also the dad of two young kids.

"Watching the prime-time broadcast is a family tradition," he said. "The Summer Olympics are almost always on for part of our vacation and we always gather as a family to watch each evening."

Redfern is leaving the tweeting on behalf of the college to another person in the office for the duration.

Lisa McTigue in Los Angeles is a former competitive swimmer who truly loves sitting down to soak up the Olympics on TV. Unfortunately, she's also an Internet marketing consultant who can't do her job without Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

"All the excitement I have felt for the Olympics in previous years is completely gone," she said. "In previous years, I felt inspired to get back in the pool. This year, that inspiration and excitement is - meh."

Despite complaints, NBC's corporate owners said Wednesday that they expect to break even on the London games after once predicting they'd take a \$200 million loss. On Tuesday night, 38.7 million people tuned in.

Count Rob Holliday among the Olympic traditionalists. He, too, has turned off push alerts and kept Twitter and Facebook use to a minimum. He's also avoiding major online news sites and turns off the radio and TV when anchors issue Olympic spoiler alerts.

"I thought it was a fairly airtight plan," he said. "After jumping through all those technological hoops, I walked in to my daughter's pediatrician's office only to hear a woman say, "`Guess what? Team USA won the gold in women's gymnastics!' Argh!!"

Graduate student Shraddha Sankhe, who's spending the summer in Washington, D.C., as a communications intern for a nonprofit, considers it mission impossible to avoid Olympic spoilers, so she's going with it.

She's been plugging in to social media big time to follow results and watching live feeds online. "It doesn't make sense to wait for the results to be `seen' on network television a few hours later," Sankhe said. "Internet more than makes up for a cable subscription these days for students like me."

Sankhe caught the opening ceremony live via BBC One using a link forwarded by friends on Twitter.

Olympic purist Jennifer Chang in Saratoga, Calif., can't afford to go dark online due to her communications job for a medical research foundation. But she's curating the Twitter feeds she follows. She's temporarily dumping the ones that are spilling news without spoiler warnings in favor of those using the broadest terms possible to announce results while providing links to details within a tweet.

That, she said, leaves it up to her to link for further news while staying in touch online. "I appreciate that greatly."

Some Twitter fanatics are taking full advantage of filters available on Tweetdeck and other tools used to organize feeds.

Beth Laughlin, a former competitive gymnast, has gone dark on news feeds of all

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kinds as she intensely follows the sport. But her husband, Will Laughlin, turned out to be the spoiler.

"Halfway through my first cup of coffee, a New York Times alert popped up on my iPad: U.S. women win team gold. The words fell out of my mouth before I knew what they meant or could gulp them back down," he said.

"My wife cocked her head sideways in disgust and said, `You just ruined it!' She still cheered and cried while watching the events unfold on TV, but it really wasn't the same."

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