NBC Sports partners with Yahoo for content deal

JAY COHEN - AP Sports Writers - Associated Press

NBC Sports and Yahoo are taking on the crowded sports media landscape with a partnership that fills in gaps for both companies.

NBC brings video and big-name broadcasters and Yahoo adds college coverage and fantasy games in the agreement announced Sunday. They hope their strengths will complement each other and attract more eyes to both as they vie with ESPN and other outlets for multimedia sports supremacy.

"It's just a natural fit," said Rick Cordella, senior vice president and general manager for digital media with NBC Sports Group.

Yahoo Sports and the NBC Sports Group will maintain separate websites and newsrooms, but will work together on news and events coverage online and on the air.

Yahoo has looked to expand its reach in the last couple of years with partnerships with TV networks. The company had done smaller deals with NBC Sports in the past, and in June it combined with another NBCUniversal property — CNBC — for financial news. Yahoo also has an agreement with ABC News, but Cordella didn't expect any significant conflicts when the worlds of news and sports collide as they frequently do.

For Yahoo, the deal gives the website a major boost in its ability to offer video, especially live sports. It will link to the NBC Sports Live Extra video player, where fans can watch live streams of the network's NFL game on Sunday night and the NHL game of the week, when the league resolves its labor dispute. Yahoo and NBC also will develop online video programs that will appear on both websites and include notable names from NBC's lineup such as announcer Bob Costas and former NFL coach Tony Dungy.

"There's a lot of yin and yang to it," Cordella said of how the two companies' fortes will mesh together.

For NBC, the agreement greatly expands its college and recruiting coverage for NBCSports.com and the NBC Sports Regional Networks through Yahoo's Rivals.com. Yahoo Sports also has drawn attention for its coverage of a handful of recent college sports scandals.

"We had a hole there," Cordella said. "We didn't necessarily cover colleges as well as Yahoo and some of our other peers."

And the deal can help drive Yahoo Sports' massive audience to NBCSports.com, a relative newcomer to the online sports arena.

The agreement also combines the fantasy news of NBC Sports' Rotoworld with Yahoo's extensive offerings of fantasy sports games.

"We think our users will love the result," said Ken Fuchs, vice president of Yahoo Global Media and head of Yahoo Sports and Games.

The deal for now does not include the Olympics, for which the two websites had competed for eyeballs in the past. Cordella said that as the two sides evaluate the success of this initial agreement, they might later add a partnership for other areas such as the Olympics and radio.

Yahoo stock has been languishing for years, but lately has been rising. Investors are betting its new CEO, Marissa Mayer, can engineer a turnaround. Mayer, a former Google executive hired in July, has vowed to fix up the Sunnyvale, Calif.-based company by improving online services and rolling out more products tailored for smartphones and tablet computers. Mayer is the fifth CEO of Yahoo in five years.

The company is one of the Internet's top destinations but it's been losing out to rivals like search leader Google and the social network Facebook Inc. in the competition for advertisers.

The company has made a handful of small deals under Mayer's leadership, mainly to acquire personnel from small tech companies. Yahoo has also been buying back more of its own stock since she took the helm.

NBC is owned by Comcast Corp., the nation's largest provider of cable TV and Internet services.

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Jay Cohen reported on this story from Chicago.

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